



**SWAROVSKI BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN
DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE NORTH AMERICAN SWAROVSKI BIRDING
COMMUNITY**

Information, communication, and inspiration on birds, wildlife, and nature

April 2005

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INSIDER INFORMATION?

Just last month, a friend of ours told us that receiving this E-bulletin is like getting "birding insider information." That may be a flattering comparison, but there's one major difference: You can't invest illegally on the content! Thank goodness.

However, you can be better informed, possibly act on a few issues, and be secure in the knowledge that you are sharing information with those of like mind. In that spirit, we thank all of you who faithfully pass along to us useful tidbits of information for use in the E-bulletin. Your information helps make the E-bulletin what it is!

We welcome all of you who are new to this, the twelfth of our "Swarovski Birding E-bulletins" for North America. This monthly communication has now been in circulation for a full year, and it is intended to keep friends and associates informed about birds, birding, and bird conservation.

The E-bulletin is distributed as a joint effort between Swarovski Optik of North America (SONA) and the [National Wildlife Refuge Association](#) (NWRA). You can access an [archive of past E-bulletins](#) on the NWRA site.

If you wish to distribute all or parts of any of the E-bulletins, we request that you mention the source of any material used. (Include the URL and the E-bulletin archive if possible.) Most importantly, if you have friends who want to get onto the E-bulletin mailing list, have them contact either:

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RARITY FOCUS

For a few days in February, a Northern Lapwing appeared in some farm fields just north of Creagerstown, Maryland. (That's not far from Camp David, by the way.) After a few days, the bird disappeared, much to the disappointment of many. Then last month, on 2 March, the fancy shorebird reappeared in the same vicinity, along Graceham Road, just north of Creagerstown.

Northern Lapwings have occurred episodically in North America, mostly in Atlantic Canada and the northeastern US, since their first appearance on Long Island, New York in 1883. Very often they have shown up in plowed farm fields, not unlike habitat frequented by their smaller American cousin, the Killdeer.

The Maryland Northern Lapwing stayed around until the afternoon of 6 March, and it may have been seen again as late as 12 March. Many visitors (from almost 20 states, by one count) traveled to see this bird. This event was particularly significant for two reasons. First, it represented the first record for the state of Maryland. Second, it generated a considerable public relation stir over the issues of birder access and visitation.

Some local residents were very proud of their rare avian visitor and even joined with clusters of visiting birders to admire the Northern Lapwing. (Stories about the bird appeared in the local paper and in THE WASHINGTON POST.) Other locals were less than thrilled with the hordes of human visitors, who crowded narrow road-shoulders, turned around in local driveways, and parked in inconvenient locations. The sheriff's department ultimately became involved, threatening arrests if birders continued to park illegally along the roads.

Following some careful diplomacy and delicate dialogue, gracious locals made some of their properties available for birder-parking, and birder access to the Northern Lapwing was finally facilitated. It was a birding event with a happy ending, although many birders wished the bird had stayed a bit longer!

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CBBT BIRDER-OBJECTIONS KEEP SITUATION UNDER STUDY

And speaking of access, another access issue developed last month, this time having to do with the ever-popular Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel (CBBT). The bridge-tunnel has been a wonderful birding location for 41 years, providing birders with special permission virtual at-sea access to the northern three artificial "islands" of the CBBT. The CBBT extends from the crowded Hampton Roads area to Cape Charles, Virginia. The southernmost island of the bridge-tunnel has general access while the last is a natural island and part of the restricted Fisherman's Island National Wildlife Refuge.

Citing security considerations, the bridge commission nearly shut down access to the three artificial islands, all fine birding locations famous for observing Harlequin Ducks, King Eiders, Great Cormorants, and Purple Sandpipers, as well as a host of rarities year-round. Vagrants have included hurricane-blown Herald Petrels to gulls like a returning Black-tailed Gull, and surprises such as Rock Wren, Bachman's Sparrow, and Gray Kingbird. Nearly 350 species of birds have been recorded on these man-made "islands," sometimes in record-high numbers for the region.

Birders wishing to gain access to the bridge-tunnel islands have been able to obtain a permit through the mail and must identify themselves when entering the CBBT toll plaza, where driver's licenses and vehicle registrations are copied, just as is the case on military bases and nuclear plants elsewhere in the state. The CBBT commission proposed a recent ban, however, a ban that was nearly instituted.

The proposed birding ban generated considerable response among birders who insisted on some accommodation to the suggested policy change. Over 500 faxes, letters, and e-mails arrived at the CBBT offices on this issue, all in support of birder access. Fortunately, there is a minority of the 11-member commission who favors continued birder access to the CBBT. The results of last commission's 8 March meeting on this subject were inconclusive, although the outcome constitutes at least a temporary reprieve. Birders can continue to visit the CBBT islands at least through 31 May. (To obtain access permission one can write to CBBT, Dept 001, P.O. Box 111, Cape Charles, VA 23310-0111.)

More importantly, however, a task force to consider options has been created, and the first meeting between the commission and the birding and conservation groups will happen relatively soon. Ideas on how best to preserve the privilege of birding the northern three islands are being considered. Participants accept that the CBBT has security issues, and the point of the working group is to propose feasible scenarios that can, at the very least, allay genuine concerns about the presence of people on the islands. Sensible alternatives will be presented, ranging from incorporating birders as part of a "Crime Watch" scenario, to tightening the "application" process prior to receiving a visitation permit.

You are invited to send your ideas directly to Ned Brinkley, editor of NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS and resident of Cape Charles at phoebetria@aol.com. Ned requests that suggestions be relatively terse and clear. Ideas from those with expertise in vetting people (e.g., civilians) into a sensitive site (e.g., military facility or power plant), would be particularly welcome. (Note that a new security fence is now in play, about mid-way down each island, with car access possible by using a keycard to open an electric fence; cameras will also be mounted all around the islands, a part of \$1.3 million Homeland Security grant.)

Without some serious considerations, the CBBT Commissioners could vote on this matter as soon as 11 May, and there is still the possibility that birders will be stripped of this access privilege.

For information on the CBBT see [this site](#).

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MORE AVIAN DISEASE OUTBREAKS

Last month we wrote about outbreaks of avian disease (salmonella and E. coli) that had been noted in the West (northern California and Alaska), often among bird feeder-visitors. Since last month, we have received additional reports of salmonella outbreaks across Minnesota, coinciding with a Common Redpoll irruption in that region. Similar avian die-offs have been reported in other locations in the East (e.g., from Quebec to New York, Virginia, and North Carolina). Reports of dead Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches were also recorded. Despite such mortality, the overall redpoll population should be secure since birds that survive such an outbreak have greater resistance than their fallen flockmates and because they will scatter throughout the Arctic when they migrate northward again.

Keeping cats indoors (they can get sick if they eat birds suffering from salmonella) and cleaning feeders are some recommendations being made to alleviate the consequences of the salmonella outbreak.

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KEEP YOUR CAT INDOORS DAY

Speaking of keeping your cat indoors, be aware that "National Keep Your Cat Indoors Day" is 14 May. Now is an excellent time to plan for the event, and there are several effective and fun ways you can publicize the day and the Cats Indoors! campaign in your community or state.

Among the opportunities for publicity is a children's poster competition. This competition can occur at the local or state level. For example, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Non-game Wildlife Program sponsored a statewide competition for the past two years, and awarded prizes to 45 regional and state winners.

For a sample competition announcement and press release, [look here](#).

Top posters sent to the American Bird Conservancy by 27 May will be enrolled in a competition to determine three national winners. Winning posters will appear on the ABC's web site.

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IMBD COMING UP

International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is also coming soon. Officially celebrated on the second Saturday of May (also 14 May this year), the celebration has become a movable event, one which is often recognized during any one of a number of days during spring migration. The event is designed to celebrate the wonder of birds and migration. This year's theme is "Collisions: Clear the Way for Birds." Towers, glass, power cables, and other structures can create a veritable obstacle course for birds, especially during migration. Communities, industries, and scientists are working on ways to reduce these potential hazards. Look for an IMBD celebration taking place at a local nature center, park, National Wildlife Refuge, school, or library near you.

For more information, see [this site](#).

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EPIPHYTES, BIRDS, AND COFFEE FARMS

Epiphytes are "air-plants," such as tropical orchids, that grow on other plants. They depend on other plants for mechanical support but not for nutrients. Epiphytes are characteristic elements of complex tropical forest ecosystems. In a unique experimental assessment of the relationship between epiphytes and birds in rustic coffee farms, Adrea Cruz-Angon and Russ Greenberg compared coffee-growing locations in Coatepec, Veracruz (Mexico). Findings were announced in the most recent JOURNAL OF APPLIED ECOLOGY (2005, 42:150-159). By examining two sets of study plots, one group where epiphytes were removed and the other group comprised of control plots, the investigators concluded that shade-coffee sites with epiphytes will maintain a higher abundance and diversity of birds than those without epiphytes.

When epiphytes were removed, canopy cover, foraging substrates, nest sites, and nest materials were eliminated and microclimatic conditions changed. Eighteen forest bird species were significantly more abundant in plots with epiphytes. Three non-forest species were more common in plots without epiphytes. Resident bird

in plots with epiphytes, while non-forest species were more common in plots without epiphytes. Resident and species that used epiphytes for nesting material were significantly more abundant in plots with epiphytes.

FOXES, GRASSES, SEABIRDS, AND THE ALEUTIANS

In another recent report last month, the impact of non-native Arctic Foxes in the Aleutian Islands was examined in *SCIENCE*. This investigation, by D. A. Croll, J. L. Maron, J. A. Estes, E. M. Danner, and G. V. Byrd, disclosed some fascinating results.

After the introduction of Arctic Foxes by the Russians on more than 400 Aleutian Islands in the 1700s, the foxes nearly drove Cackling "Aleutian" Geese to extinction. The elimination of the geese would have seemingly been a boon for island grasses upon which the geese fed, except for the fact that the Arctic Foxes also feasted on the eggs and hatchlings of puffins, auklets, and over 20 other ocean-feeding seabird species that bred in large numbers on the islands. Some islands lost almost all bird species except those that nested on cliffs. As ground-nesting birds disappeared, so did their nutrient-rich excrement, or guano, once a natural fertilizer for island grasses and other vegetation.

What eventually developed were islands without much grass and plenty of foxes, and islands with grass and no foxes. The research left little doubt that the Arctic Foxes introduced to the Aleutians had driven down the grasses by a process of indirect guano deprivation. By preying on seabirds, Arctic Foxes had reduced nutrient transport from ocean to land, impacting soil fertility, and transforming island grassland to dwarf shrub/forb-dominated ecosystems.

The birds and grasses are now beginning to rebound on a number of islands. For several years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been eradicating foxes with traps set along Aleutian shores in late winter and spring when the hungry foxes forage along the shore for crustaceans and other edibles and the birds are away from their summer nesting grounds. Several thousand Arctic Foxes have now been eliminated, and about 40 islands within the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge have been cleared.

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MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETS, INVESTS

Since 1929, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission has convened to invest in conservation and wetland issues directly related to birds. For example, the commission considers refuge areas recommended by the Secretary of the Interior for acquisition by the USFWS, through revenue received from the sale of Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps, commonly known as Duck Stamps. The Commission also approves project funding provided by the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). Government officials - including two Senators and two members of the House of Representatives - sit on the Commission.

The Commission met last month and approved nearly \$16 million for habitat conservation in the United States and Mexico to benefit migratory birds. (These were 16 NAWCA projects adding up to \$13.1 million in 11 States and \$2.4 million for 15 NAWCA projects in Mexico.)

At the same time, the Commission also approved the acquisition of nearly 1,200 acres of important bird habitat (costing more than \$535,000) to be added to the National Wildlife Refuge System in Louisiana, New Hampshire, and Texas:

- Louisiana - Acquisition of 615 acres to provide habitat for waterfowl within the boundaries of Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Ouachita Parish. (The acquisition cost \$1,041,000, with \$150,000 coming from Stamp funds.)
- New Hampshire - Acquisition of 516 acres at a cost of \$304,000 to protect wetlands within the boundaries of Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge in Coos County.
- Texas - Acquisition of 98 acres at a cost of \$81,200 to provide breeding, wintering, and migratory habitat for waterfowl within the boundaries of Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge in Liberty County.

For more details on the functioning of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, see [these pages](#).

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CHIMNEY SWIFT WATCH

Interested in tracking the arrival of Chimney Swifts this spring? You may want to check out [this site](#), dedicated to the conservation and promotion of Chimney Swifts and the creation of new nesting sites for the species. Most interesting is the [tracking of springtime arrivals](#), an activity in which you can participate.

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TRANSPORTATION DOLLARS FOR BIRDS?

Years ago, the Federal Farm Bill began to grow in ways to produce important conservation benefits. That effort

years ago, the Federal Farm Bill began to grow in ways to produce important conservation benefits that effort continues. Today, the multi-billion-dollar Transportation Bill (Transportation Equity Act) has also started to reveal some creative conservation aspects. The ability to carve out sections of the Transportation Bill to benefit conservation and nature-appreciation is particularly valuable to bird conservationists. The process is not simple, but there is continuing progress.

Two transportation programs, Scenic Byways and Transportation Enhancements, benefit acquisition of scenic land easements, vistas, and landscapes, construction of turnouts and overlooks, visitor centers and viewing areas, designation signs and markers, conversion of rail-to-trail facilities, environmental mitigation, provision of wildlife connectivity, and nearby river cleanups. All these can be coupled with bird conservation and appreciation, from habitat preservation along roadways and related mitigation areas to the creation of significant and popular birding trails.

The Refuge Roads Program is a third important Transportation Bill benefit, supporting the National Wildlife Refuge System's road, bridge, and trail infrastructure that is critical to providing safe and adequate public access to our nation's wildlife refuges, and also to realizing the economic benefits that refuges can provide to local communities. In this case, according to a study by the Federal Highway Administration, the backlog of current transportation infrastructure needs in the Refuge System totals a staggering \$2.1 billion.

The Senate's recent proposals for \$26.7 million per year for Refuge Roads has been higher than the House's figure, yet it would still take 78 years at \$26.7 million per year to address the Refuge System's backlog. A \$69-million funding-target recommended by the Department of the Interior would be a significant improvement and allow the USFWS to address the backlog over a 30-year period.

Reaching your Senators now on these three important transportation elements would be a good way to press for building a constructive "conservation corner" for the Transportation Bill.

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SWAROVSKI ASSISTS IN PROTECTING ENDANGERED COLOMBIAN HUMMINGBIRD

A grant from Swarovski is enabling the American Bird Conservancy and ProAves Colombia to create a new reserve for the critically endangered Colorful Puffleg (*Eriocnemis mirabilis*) in the Cauca region of Colombia. The Colorful Puffleg is one of the hemisphere's most threatened hummingbirds; the World Conservation Union (IUCN) considers the species' situation as dire. An extreme habitat specialist, found only in wet montane forests on the Pacific slope of the west Andes, it is already very scarce (with a population is estimated at 50-250 individuals). The bird is further threatened by logging, grazing, habitat-clearing for crops, and other threats.

ProAves is in the process of negotiating the purchase of 5,000 acres of land that would protect core population centers for the Colorful Puffleg and other endangered bird and other species. Surveys on site have uncovered 16 other threatened bird species, two endangered frog species, and high levels of endemism in other flora and fauna. A five-year management plan for the site has been developed, and accommodations for visitors are in place. ProAves Colombia is expected to restore, manage, and protect the site while the Colorful Puffleg population is studied and monitored, hopefully to bring this species back from the edge of extinction.

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INCOME TAX RUSH?

If you've been waiting to file your state income taxes between now and 15 April, we offer a reminder to many of you: Don't forget wildlife when filing!

Many states have an income tax refund check-off program to help fund and benefit wildlife (usually focused on non-game species), wildlife conservation, research, and habitat conservation projects through state wildlife agencies. According to an International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' report done a few years ago, donations from individual state tax refunds provide an average of six percent of states' wildlife diversity funding. Every bit helps!

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FAMOUS HAWKS AWAITING STORK

Pale Male and Lola, celebrity residents of a Fifth Avenue co-op on the Upper East Side of New York City, are expecting. Over the past month, the two Red-tailed Hawks have been overseeing a clutch of eggs, incubating, and otherwise housekeeping their posh 74th-Street digs. Their nest sits directly beneath a huge and ornately-carved cornice along the building's 12th-floor roofline.

For more information on the expected blessed event see [this site](#).

Finally, a new edition of the story of these famous residents, RED-TAILS IN LOVE, by Marie Winn (with a new essay covering events of the past five years), has just been released.

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Remember, if you have a friend or co-worker who wants to get future copies of this North American Swarovski Birding Community E-bulletin, that person can contact either of us:

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