



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

April 2008

This Birding Community E-bulletin is being distributed through the generous support of Steiner Binoculars as a service to active and concerned birders, those dedicated to the joys of birding and the protection of birds and their habitats.

This issue marks the 48th E-bulletin we have produced, four years of sharing bird, birding, and bird conservation information. You can access an archive of past E-bulletins on [on the birding pages of the National Wildlife Refuge Association \(NWRA\) website](#) OR on [the birding webpages for Steiner Binoculars](#).

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RARITY FOCUS

On 6 March a Common Crane was found near Kearney, Nebraska not far from the Rowe Sanctuary along the Platte River. It was found by a group of about 10 birders, mostly from the Minneapolis area, including Stan Tekiela, Sharon Stiteler, and Amber Burnette. The Common Crane was accompanying a flock of Sandhill Cranes.

Common Crane is an Old World species, a vagrant to Canada and United States, usually found with migrating Sandhill Cranes. It can be distinguished by its blackish head and neck, prominently marked by a broad white stripe. (See page 152 of the latest National Geographic Guide for more details.) There are about 15 previous reports of this species in North America (some certainly representing multiple sightings of the same individuals) from Alberta, Alaska, Indiana, Nebraska, Québec, and Saskatchewan, all since 1957. Most reports have occurred in September-October or March-April. It is assumed that some of the these birds become "attached" to Sandhill Crane groups in Siberia, then follow them east and then southward to North America during migration.

The Common Crane near Kearney was seen off and on through the evening of 9 March, always in the company of Sandhill Cranes. The Platte River is a major concentration point for Sandhill Cranes, with perhaps half a million birds gathering in mid-to-late March, prior to migrating northward. This staging area represents a breathtaking natural spectacle each spring, and is a major avitourism draw to central Nebraska, from Grand

Island to Kearney. Local Nebraskans have come to appreciate both the birds and the avitourists attracted to the phenomenon.

While the Common Crane was not relocated among the Sandhill Cranes after 9 March, there was an interesting sighting later in the month on 23 March about 200 miles to the south. At about 6:30pm on 23 March, a Common Crane was seen and photographed by Michael Anderson at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in central Kansas. The crane was going to roost with about 1,000 Sandhill Cranes near the Big Salt Marsh at the refuge. The crane was never found there again, despite multiple searches.

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MEXICAN GOVERNMENT DESIGNATES 45 NEW WETLANDS UNDER RAMSAR

Our friends at the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) have brought to our attention recent efforts by the Government of Mexico to designate 45 New Wetlands of International Importance under provisions of the Ramsar Convention.

This laudatory action that took place in early February is a world record for the most new Ramsar sites ever designated in one day, breaking Mexico's own record of designating 34 sites in a single day in 2004. By designating these new sites, Mexico is helping to safeguard another 2.7 million hectares of habitat important for a number of migratory birds, including waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, terns, herons, egrets, and wetland-associated songbirds. Mexico is currently in second place worldwide with its 112 designated Ramsar sites.

The announcement was made by conservation leaders from the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), National Commission for Natural Protected Areas (CONANP), and the Government of Sinaloa, in conjunction with the State's celebrations honoring "World Wetlands Day."

For more information (in Spanish), visit: http://ramsar.org/wwd/8/wwd2008_rpts_mexico_semarnat.htm

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MARBLED MURRELET CRITICAL HABITAT MAINTAINED

The Marbled Murrelet was listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in October 1992. This alcid spends most of its time at sea, nests in tall trees in old-growth conifer forests, sometimes as far as 50 miles inland.

Critical Marbled Murrelet breeding habitat covering almost 3.6 million acres was designated on 24 May 1996. In mid-September 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed to revise the designated critical habitat for the Marbled Murrelet in Washington, Oregon, and California, potentially downgrading approximately 94% of the designated critical habitat from final designation.

Last month, however, the Service presented added findings pursuant to the ESA. Due to uncertainties regarding plan revisions in western Oregon, the Service determined that it is not appropriate to revise the designation of critical habitat for the Marbled Murrelet at this time. (The USFWS will continue to consider whether revisions of critical habitat for this species might be appropriate at some future time.) Accordingly, the 24 May 1996, final rule designating critical habitat for the Marbled Murrelet stands. This represents an important victory for this enigmatic little alcid.

For some of our previous coverage on Marbled Murrelet (October 2006) see: <http://www.refugenet.org/birding/octSBC06.html#TOC07> and <http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/oct06.html>

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NATIONAL AVIARY BULLETIN

The Department of Conservation & Field Research at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was created to study and address the impacts of human population and resource consumption on birds and the environment. Their projects are founded on the belief that field research, conservation, and community education are intertwined and are best done in concert. To get a feel for this approach, check out their Spring 2008 newsletter, FLIGHT PATH, downloaded here (free subscriptions also available through this page): <http://www.aviary.org/nlet/birdcalls.php>

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AMBER-ENCASED "FEATHERS" ANALYZED

In mid-March, scientists reported that seven dinosaur-era feathers, or proto-feathers, recently found preserved in amber in western France may highlight a crucial stage in feather evolution. The hundred-million-year-old

...amber in recent years, highlighting a crucial stage in feather evolution. The feathers, which are plumage, about 50 million years younger than the first known flying bird, Archaeopteryx, has features of both feather-like fibers found with some two-legged dinosaurs known as theropods, and those of modern bird feathers.

These fossils could fill a key gap in the puzzle of how dinosaurs gave rise to birds, according to a team led by Vincent Perrichot of the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin, Germany. The find provides a clear example of the transition between primitive filamentous down and the modern feather.

Although the study team isn't sure yet whether the feathers belonged to a dino or a bird, the feathers' central shafts, or rachises, are primitive and most closely resemble down feathers.

The feather filaments, or barbs, had not become fully fused at the base, and they lacked the hooklets, known as barbules, needed to hold the filaments together. The research team asserted that today's birds could not fly with such feathers.

Paleontologists at the University of Rennes found the tiny feathers encased in a lump of amber (fossilized tree resin) in a quarry in the Poitou-Charentes region of France in 2000. More samples from the fossil record will be needed to settle the issue of ancestry and function of these structures.

You can find more details and photos here: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/03/080311-amber-feathers.html>

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FARM BILL EXTENSION HAS EVERYONE GUESSING

A 15 March Farm Bill deadline has come and gone, and a new Farm Bill has yet to be passed by Congress. A short-term extension of the old bill has reset the clock, however, and is now ticking towards a new deadline of 18 April.

The rewrite of the five-year multi-billion-dollar Farm Bill overseeing farm, conservation, energy and even nutrition programs has been gridlocked, as the House and Senate have tried to trim the reauthorizations and find offsets for new spending from the bill they passed last year. The conservation title of the Farm Bill represents the single largest federal investment to conservation on private land in this country, and is crucial for bird conservation (especially considering the well-known CRP and WRP elements).

While there is a tentative agreement to work toward a bill that would spend \$10 billion over the current bill's baseline for the next 10 years - much less than the House or Senate had included in their respective bills - there has yet to be an agreement on the breadth of the required cuts and the revenue-raisers that could offset new funding.

Significant bird conservation efforts could suffer if the delay continues and if a new Farm Bill is not passed by the approaching deadline.

We have discussed this issue recently, including August, 2007:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/augSBC07.html#TOC13> and <http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/aug07.html>

And we have covered it also in January, 2008: <http://www.refugenet.org/birding/janSBC08.html#TOC05> and <http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/jan08.html>

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TRANSLOCATED BERMUDA PETRELS RETURN TO BERMUDA ISLET

Three rare and endangered Bermuda Petrels (also known as Cahows), translocated to Nonsuch Island before fledging in 2005, have returned to the small island (15.5 acres), where they have been observed entering artificial nesting burrows constructed for them.

Bermuda Petrels were thought to be extinct for almost three centuries. In 1951, however, 18 pairs were

rediscovered breeding on sub-optimal rocky islets in Castle Harbour, Bermuda. Incorporating conservation measures that would restrict the size of burrows (using "baffles" to exclude larger tropicbirds) and providing concrete burrows at nesting sites, the petrel population has recovered gradually, doubling approximately every 20 years.

Returning sub-adult Bermuda Petrels gravitate to their natal colonies, so regardless of the "appropriateness" of the sites on Nonsuch, the island remained uncolonized. Because Hurricane Fabian caused the flooding and partial collapse of traditional nesting sites in 2003, young Bermuda Petrels were moved to Nonsuch Island, in the entrance to Castle Harbour. The idea was to imprint the translocated chicks to the new site, hoping that the chicks would eventually return to this new natal site once they were mature in about 3-4 years.

In the last four years, a total of 81 chicks have been translocated, of which 70 have fledged successfully. The

In the last four years, a total of 81 chicks have been translocated, of which 79 have fledged successfully. The Nonsuch Island Nature Reserve provides nesting habitat which is elevated enough to be safe from hurricane flooding and erosion. The present nesting islets actually total less than 2.5 acres.

Removal of invasive rats and Cane Toads from Nonsuch was mandatory before effective translocation and potential return could be attempted.

As avid North American birders know, Bermuda Petrels have occasionally been observed on North Carolina birding pelagic trips. One hopes that with more Bermuda Petrels returning (like the recent three returns) and nesting at multiple sites, the future of the species will become more secure.

For more information: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2008/03/Bermuda_Petrel.html

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BOOK REVIEW: YOUNG BIRDER'S FIELD GUIDE (EAST)

Bill Thompson, III, editor of BIRD WATCHER'S DIGEST, asked his 11-year-old daughter, Phoebe, and her school class for some advice on what would make a birding guide most helpful for kids in the field. The upshot is THE YOUNG BIRDER'S GUIDE TO BIRDS OF EASTERN NORTH AMERICA (Houghton Mifflin 2008). This is a book that youngsters can use on their own, without assistance from adults. It is part of the popular "Peterson Field Guide Series."

Each of the 200 species included in the book provides a color photograph on a page brimming with added information and written in an appropriate style for young people. Field marks are clear; range maps are easy to read, and there is even a space for young birders to check off birds they have identified along with the date the species was originally seen. Accompanying black-and-white line drawings by Julie Zickefoose illustrate interesting bird behaviors or characteristics.

If you know young birders who live in the East and are curious about birds, definitely get this book into their hands.

TIP OF THE MONTH: NESTWATCH IS WAITING FOR YOU

The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology has just launched its newest citizen-science program in collaboration with the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and funded by the National Science Foundation.

It's called NestWatch, and it entails volunteers collecting information on nesting birds: location, habitat, eggs, incubation, etc. Participation is free, and potential volunteers should begin to get ready as nest-building begins

this spring. Volunteers are strongly encouraged to follow the Nest Monitor's Code of Conduct and Protocol (both available on the program's website).

The Cornell Lab will also be folding its Birdhouse Network project (already with 70,000 submissions) into NestWatch. Now, anyone who has been keeping nest records on their own will have a way to put this important information to use through NestWatch. The Lab will be able to accept data from as far back as 1900! The database will also incorporate more than 300,000 records from the historic Cornell Nest Record Program, dating back to 1965.

For more information and to sign up with NestWatch, see: www.nestwatch.org

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If you have friends or co-workers who want to get onto the monthly E-bulletin mailing list, have them contact either:

- Wayne R. Peterson, Director, Massachusetts Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program, Mass Audubon, 718/534-2046, wpetersen@massaudubon.org OR
- Paul Baicich 410/992-9736, paul.baicich@verizon.net

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