



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

April 2010

This Birding Community E-bulletin is being distributed to active and concerned birders, those dedicated to the joys of birding and the protection of birds and their habitats.

This issue is sponsored by NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC and the wonderful bird and birding books they make available: www.shopng.com/birdbooks

You can access an archive of past E-bulletins on the website of the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA): www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html

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RARITY FOCUS

Traditionally our monthly rarity highlights a single species that is rare just about anywhere in North America and it is typically a bird that remains long enough so that numerous birders can take a trip to see it if they are so inclined.

Accordingly, this tends to exclude birds that may be common in Texas or Arizona, for example, but might happen to appear in New England as vagrants. Similarly our rarity focus eliminates most pelagic species, since in most cases duplicating a pelagic encounter at sea is likely to be impossible, or a rarity found at "the edges" of Alaska is not likely to be "chaseable" for the average birder.

This month we had a special problem, however. We had a couple of wonderful rarities to mention, but neither stayed in place long enough to entertain multiple observers. The birds deserve mention just the same.

The best contender was a Thick-billed Vireo found on 23 March by Carl Goodrich at Indigenous Park in Key West, Florida. This is a resident species in the Caribbean, occurring as close to Florida as the Bahamas and Cuba. There are approximately a half dozen previous Florida records, all since 1989 and mostly in Southeast Florida and the Keys. Although common and widespread in the Bahamas, this species is considered "critically endangered" in Cuba. Many previous reports of this species in Florida have proven to be misidentified White-eyed Vireos. If you are not familiar with this rare visitor, see the National Geographic field guide (fifth edition, pp. 314-315).

The vireo visiting Indigenous Park was shy, unobtrusive, and very difficult to find. It was reported through the morning 26 March, although many birders were unable to find the bird even after hours or days spent searching.

The second contender for the rarity of the month was a Common Crane found on 18 March close to Muckrat Bay WMA in

The second contender for the rarity of the month was a Common Crane found on 18 March close to Muskrat Run WMA in Lincoln Co., Nebraska. The next day Thomas (T.J.) Walker, District Manager, Wildlife Division, Partners Section Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, received word that a bird of this species had been observed and photographed at noon the day before. Walker relocated the rare Siberian visitor on 19 March among a flock of nearly 10,000 Sandhill Cranes. Other searches yielded no further reports until 24 March when a group of birders from Massachusetts and Vermont relocated the crane a couple miles from where it had been seen on 19 March. (For more on the Nebraska crane phenomenon, see the last news item in this E-bulletin).

There have been almost 20 reports of Common Crane in the U.S. and Canada, since 1957 and with numerous mid-continent sightings, including Alberta, Alaska, Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Québec, and Saskatchewan. If you are unfamiliar with this species or how to differentiate it from a Sandhill Crane, see the National Geographic guide (pp. 152-153).

RAREST BIRDS PHOTO PROJECT

A new international photo competition has recently been launched covering the world's 623 most-threatened birds. THE WORLD'S RAREST BIRDS will attempt to cover 362 species categorized as "endangered," 65 that are "data deficient," 192 deemed "critically endangered," and 4 species that are "extinct in the wild" yet still extant in captivity.

Any winning photos submitted for this sumptuous volume will be eligible for prizes. The book is expected to be an informative directory of the world's most threatened bird species and will include feature articles on the key bird conservation issues for each of the world's bioregions.

The closing date for photo submissions is 31 August 2010.

Proceeds from sales of the book will go to BirdLife International's "Preventing Extinctions" program. Project editor, Erik Hirschfeld, says "Our prime concern continues to be helping to prevent the extinction of the most threatened birds in the world by raising funds and promoting awareness."

For more information on the proposed book, the photo competition, and a list of the sought-after-species photographs, visit:

www.theworldsrarest.com

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER PLAN AVAILABLE

A new 113-page document, summarizing what is known about Buff-breasted Sandpiper conservation, has recently been released. The ecology, status, population, habitat needs, threats, and most important concentration sites across the hemisphere are outlined for the species. The plan also identifies and prioritizes actions needed to halt or reverse this species' long-term population decline.

An introductory summary may be found at:

www.whsrn.org/news/article/new-whsrn-species-conservation-plan-available-buff-breasted-sandpiper

The full plan can be downloaded at:

[www.whsrn.org/sites/default/files/file/Conservation Plan for the Buff-breasted Sandpiper 10 01-13.pdf](http://www.whsrn.org/sites/default/files/file/Conservation%20Plan%20for%20the%20Buff-breasted%20Sandpiper%2010%2001-13.pdf)

WILL THIS BILL HIT A WALL?

In early March, Congressman Mike Quigley (D-IL) introduced a bill that could help prevent the deaths of millions of birds that annually collide with buildings at thousands of federal facilities across the country. The proposed piece of legislation, HR 4797, calls for the General Services Administration (GSA) to incorporate bird-safe building materials and design features into all public buildings constructed, altered, or acquired by the GSA.

The terms "bird-safe building materials and design features" are defined by several publications and recent practices addressing these issues. These features would be implemented "to the maximum extent feasible."

The legislation proposed by Congressman Quigley is similar to legislation he sponsored in 2008 when he was Illinois Cook County Commissioner, legislation approved unanimously by the Cook County Board of Commissioners.

"I am proud to build upon the work we did in Cook County to promote bird-safe building and spearhead an initiative at the national level that will make sure our tall buildings are not safety hazards. This bill will not only save millions of birds' lives, but it is also completely cost neutral," said Congressman Quigley.

HR 4797, applying only to federal buildings, has been referred to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. While the majority of bills and resolutions never make it out of committee, this bill has the capacity to raise the birds-building-and-glass issue, lead to more widespread applications of bird-safe designs elsewhere, and be a source for greater nationwide implementation of "Lights Out" campaigns.

We have discussed bird-safe building design and "Lights Out" efforts multiple times in the E-bulletin, including in October 2008 and December 2009:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/octSBC08.html#TOC06

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/decSBC09.html#TOC07

BUDGET WOES PLAGUE NWRS

The Obama Administration has proposed a \$2.3 billion funding decrease for the National Wildlife Refuge System for next

The Obama Administration has proposed a \$3.3 million funding decrease for the National Wildlife Refuge System for next year (FY11). This may not seem like a big hit, but because the Refuge System needs at least a \$15-million increase each year to address the accumulating costs associated with managing 150 million acres of refuge lands, the budget request actually represents a cut of \$18.3 million.

In addition, a recent report, "Restoring America's Wildlife Refuges 2010," by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) warns that unless Congress acts to restore funding for the Refuge System, proper management of the lands, waters, birds, and other wildlife, and recreation/appreciation opportunities provided across the country's 150-million-acre Refuge System could be in jeopardy.

The report emphasized that refuges face a \$3.7 billion backlog in deferred maintenance and operations funding. Washed-out trails, leaking building roofs, closed roads, and broken equipment are just a few of the more than 11,000 problems currently waiting to be addressed on refuges nationwide. Refuges are also fighting a constant battle against invasive plants and animals, requiring at least \$25 million per year to treat just one-third of its infested plant acreage and begin low-level control of invasive animals. Furthermore, with the recent addition of more than 50 million acres of marine monuments in the Pacific Ocean, the Refuge System faces increased management, coordination, restoration, and law enforcement challenges, collectively carrying a price tag of between \$18 and \$35 million annually.

Refuges don't simply draw funds from the U.S. Treasury; they produce economic growth. According to the 2006 "Banking on Nature" economic analysis report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 87 percent of the \$1.7 billion in annual refuge-related revenues is spent by visitors from outside the communities where refuges are located. This spending created almost 27,000 jobs and generated approximately \$543 million in employment income. "National Wildlife Refuges bring in over 41 million visitors a year and pour nearly two billion dollars a year into local economies," says Evan Hirsche, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association and Chair of the CARE coalition. "Every dollar invested in the Refuge System returns, on average, \$4 to local communities."

CARE, a coalition of 22 groups, has urged in "Restoring America's Wildlife Refuges 2010," that Congress should actually increase refuge operations and maintenance funding to \$578 million for FY 2011. To access this report see: www.fundrefuges.org/new-pdf-files/2010CAREreport.pdf

SAGE-GROUSE SOLUTIONS: KICK THE CAN?

The Greater Sage-Grouse, an impressive and iconic western grouse species, has probably declined 80 to 90 percent from its historic numbers and its distribution has dwindled to about half its historic range.

These grouse are very susceptible to disturbance on their breeding leks, and they are increasingly being impacted by grazing and agriculture, western oil and gas development, a burgeoning wind-power industry, range fires escalated by invasive vegetation such as cheatgrass, the threat of mosquito-borne West Nile virus, and collisions with barb-wire fences. We have written about the Greater Sage Grouse and its related management issues multiple times in the E-bulletin, including twice in late 2008:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/augSBC08.html#TOC12
www.refugeassociation.org/birding/decSBC08.html#TOC03

In early March, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that it will not currently list the Greater Sage-Grouse as Endangered or Threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) but will classify the bird among species that are candidates for federal protection.

The announcement is good news for the wind-energy and oil and gas industries, which will still have to face project siting scrutiny in sage-grouse habitat, but will have more flexibility than if the sage-grouse were listed under the ESA. The finding also validates years of effort by a number of Western states to map the birds' sagebrush habitat and take other steps to prevent sage-grouse listing. The decision allows states to continue to manage sage-grouse populations, including managed hunting where appropriate.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said that listing is "warranted but precluded" by higher priorities - other species that are believed to be in greater danger. (The decision to list sage-grouse as a candidate species came five years after the USFWS determined that the species was not warranted for listing under the ESA. The USFWS was immediately faced with litigation that ultimately required a complete review of the listing decision.) The USFWS stated that the potential risk for extinction is low, assigning the species a listing priority number of 8 (on a scale of 1 to 12, with 1 being most at risk for extinction). This is a relatively low priority when compared with most of the other species on the candidate list.

Critics of the decision from habitat-wary environmentalists to concerned sportsmen have called the "precluded" category of "candidate" species a "limbo" and a "black hole" from which few species ever emerge. Critics charge that the current administration is delaying the inevitable, emphasizing that continuing with "business as usual" won't work. In the words of North American Grouse Partnership Executive Director, Ralph Rogers, "Where the sage-grouse have disappeared, the land is not functioning properly."

Approximately seventy percent of the species' habitat is now on state and federal public lands (especially BLM land on the federal side), yet the recent decision "essentially admits that inadequate regulatory mechanisms are in place to sustain existing numbers," according to Steve Belinda, a former BLM biologist and the current Energy Policy Manager for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

Current plans for protecting sage-grouse vary markedly, and that's a big part of the problem. All concerned parties and agencies need to create a set of unified management decisions that would halt sage-grouse population declines while accommodating appropriate energy-development needs. At the American Bird Conservancy, President George Fenwick summarized the issue for many by saying: "We feel that listing the Greater Sage-Grouse on the Endangered Species List is the best way to reverse the bird's decline and ensure its survival. However, if the USFWS can use [the Candidate Species decision] to establish a 'no net loss of sage habitat' standard and a comprehensive conservation plan, then we are all for it."

BOOK NOTES: RTP REDUX

A pair of Roger Tory Peterson field guides was recently reissued by Houghton Mifflin. These include the sixth edition of the Eastern guide and the fourth edition of the Western guide.

The best-selling field guides of all time have a life beyond Roger Tory Peterson (1908 – 1996). The presentations in these two volumes are coherent and user-friendly, the artwork endearing, and the results comforting. Species recently recorded in North America with multiple sightings – e.g., Fea's Petrel, Black-tailed Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Long-billed Murrelet, and LaSagra's Flycatcher – are included in the set. The editorial team assigned the task of reorganizing these volumes did a very fine job, a job they could never have accomplished had they not stood on the shoulders of a giant.

The two field guides also have a set of 30 video podcasts, accessible to everyone at:
www.petersonfieldguides.com

Those who learned birding using a Peterson bird guide would do well to revisit the two new editions. Those who have learned birds using other field guides would still benefit by picking up the RTP books. After all, since we luxuriate in a plethora of bird guides these days, there is no need to cling to just one.

NEW "STATE OF THE BIRDS"

Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, announced the release of the "State of the Birds 2010" report at a press conference in Austin, Texas, on 11 March. The publication follows a comprehensive report published a year ago indicating that nearly a third of the 800 bird species of the U.S. are endangered, threatened, or in significant decline. This latest report concludes that climate change further threatens to imperil hundreds of species of migratory birds already under stress from habitat loss, invasive species, and other environmental threats.

The publication is the product of a cooperative effort among federal and state wildlife agencies, scientific groups, and conservation organizations. You can download a copy here:
www.stateofthebirds.org/pdf_files/State%20of%20the%20Birds_FINAL.pdf

FIRST WHSRN SITE IN CARIBBEAN

The designation of the Cabo Rojo Saltflats (Salinas de Cabo Rojo) as a reserve under the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) is great news. The site which is part of the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge, is the first WHSRN site in the Caribbean.

The Puerto Rican Ornithological Society (SOPI, by its Spanish acronym) nominated the site with the Service's support. The saltflats section of the refuge qualifies as a WHSRN Site of Regional Importance by supporting 5.3% (80 individuals) of the world's population of the tenuirostris subspecies of Snowy Plover and 2.5% (151 individuals) of the world

population of Wilson's Plover. The location hosts a total of 28 shorebird species. This site, which is a very special place for avian and human visitors alike, is also an Important Bird Area.

For more information on the designation, see:
www.birdlife.org/news/news/2010/03/puerto_rico_iba.html
www.whsrn.org/news/article/four-new-whsrn-sites-designated

IBA NEWS: CALIFORNIA IBA SITES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Related to the latest State of the Birds report and the status of an IBA site in Puerto Rico, there is a report on how California birds might fare in the context of potential temperature and climate change. This recent report specifically concerns the future productivity of California Important Bird Areas.

Future climate change poses potential bird losses in California and questions about where and how lands can be managed now in order to help bird species later. Some of the answers are addressed by an analysis of future climate change models, showing that most California IBAs can provide essential habitat for birds and protect sensitive bird species against the effects of climate change.

Audubon California identified 25 sensitive bird species present at IBAs and concluded that 16 of the 25 will persist at these sites through the year 2100. Moreover, 89 of the 145 IBAs in the state should enable half or more of these sensitive species to persist.

This is good news for such species as Northern Harrier, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Snowy Plover, Loggerhead Shrike, and Sage Sparrow, and equally good news for certain coastal regions and the Central Valley. It is not good news, however, for Greater Sage-Grouse and Grasshopper Sparrow, among other species, nor for areas such as the Sonoran and Mojave Deserts of the southeast.

Researchers indicate that this work is only part of an initial study and that more investigation is warranted.

A fact sheet on the subject is available at:
<http://ca.audubon.org/globalWarmingIBAs.php>

For additional information about worldwide IBA programs, and those across the U.S., check the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Area program web site at:
www.audubon.org/bird/iba/

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding

TIP OF THE MONTH: HAVE A "BIRDBOX" READY

Over a decade ago, Mike Mulligan of Calgary, Alberta, wrote an article in BIRDING on the use of a BirdBox while birding by car. The piece, appearing in late December 1999, described the genesis of his birding utility box over the years. It started as a cast-off cardboard box in which to store his favorite field guide or two, bird tapes (note the ancient reference), flashlight, spare batteries, road atlas, bird-finding guide, bug-spray, and coffee mug. Later, it evolved into a heavy-duty milk crate which also held FRS-GMRS radios, family-group field guides, trash bags, water bottle, and lumbar support.

The potential content has evolved and so has the box. Mass merchants stores now supply a variety of solid plastic organizer boxes (even with lids and handles!) that can serve to form the foundation of your own BirdBox.

Many birders have these sorts of supply-holders for their vehicles, although the containers may no longer be called BirdBoxes by the owners. Whatever you call them, they should be part of every birder's field equipment. Mike Mulligan suggested that "[l]ittle actual thought is required, as [the BirdBox] will gradually evolve to fit your needs." He added: "Load it in advance with stuff that you most often forget at 4AM." Regardless of what you call it, think about the concept and create a "BirdBox" before spring migration is fully upon you.

P.S. Last month in the "Tip of the Month," we suggested biking and birding as a healthy and creative way to go afield:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/marSBC10.html#TOC09

About a week later, Google must have read our suggestion and posted their new Google-map-biking feature:

www.maps.google.com/biking

OK, OK, maybe it didn't happen exactly that way, but we can at least point to the coincidence!

APRIL'S QUIZ FOR A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC BOOK

To celebrate National Geographic's recent connection with the E-bulletin, we again have some fine National Geographic books to distribute to E-bulletin readers. Readers who choose to enter our quick-and-easy contest have the chance to win one of these books. Our little contest and quiz questions will continue to run for the next few months. (Each monthly quiz question will either relate to one of our news items for the previous month, or it will relate to some event or experience that is due to occur during the current month.)

For more on the excellent NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC books, see:

www.shopng.com/birdbooks

There will undoubtedly be multiple readers who answer our monthly question correctly, so we will only be able to distribute six copies to readers whose names are picked at random from all those submitting correct answers. Because of shipping constraints, only folks residing in the U.S. or Canada are eligible.

Last month's question was two-part: "What major North American bird migration spectacle will peak in this month in the central U.S., an event that annually attracts thousands of observers and photographers (i.e., what is the event and where does it take place)?"

The answer: The migration of Sandhill Cranes (and some folks thoughtfully added "and waterfowl") in central Nebraska along the Platte River."

Last month's winners - of BIRD COLORATION by Geoffrey Hill - were: Stan Buman of Carroll, IA, Mary Deinlein of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, Washington, DC, Mike Edgington of Akron, OH, Gregg Gorton of Narberth, PA, Andrew Keaveney of Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada, and Bill Sheehan of Woodland, ME.

The prize this month will be a copy of THE FIELD GUIDE TO FIELDS by Bill Laws, a book released earlier this year.

This handsome little volume describes how different landscapes, climates, and cultures have generated different field types, including some of the plants and animals occurring in each. It describes fascinating zones ranging from human-altered landscapes to truly natural wild areas.

For more on this book, see:

<http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/ngs/browse/productDetail.jsp?productId=6200508>

In recognition of Earth Day this month, here is our multi-part question for April: Can you tell us the year of the first Earth Day, the U.S. Senator behind the original effort, and the woman bird enthusiast whose work in the 1950s and 1960s inspired the spirit of Earth Day?

Please send your three-part answer by 15 April (tax day!) to:

birdingbulletin@verizon.net

Make the subject line "QUIZ! " and include your full name and shipping address along with your answers so that we can send you a book in the mail should you be a fortunate winner. We will provide the correct answer next month.

You can access past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html

If you wish to distribute all or parts of any of the monthly Birding Community E-bulletins, we simply request that you mention the source of any material used. (Include a URL for the E-bulletin archives, if possible.)

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

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