



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

August 2009

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. 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 16 July, Dave Jasper and the youthful participants at Camp Chiricahua discovered a Brown-backed Solitaire (*Myadestes occidentalis*) in Miller Canyon, Huachuca Mountains in southeast Arizona. The bird was photographed and recorded by camp members, including Brian Magnier, Benjamin Van Doren, and Jimmy Warren. You can see the photos here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/40538429@N05/>

This species normally occurs in highland pine-oak and lowland evergreen forests from northern Mexico south to Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras. In the nearby state of Sonora, Mexico, it may breed as close as 70 miles from the U.S. border.

There is at least one confirmed previous report of Brown-backed Solitaire from Arizona - a bird photographed in early October 1996 in lower Madera Canyon. This species has not previously been accepted onto the official state and U.S. lists because of the uncertainty of the species' origin. No doubt due to its musical song, the Brown-backed Solitaire is one of the most common cage birds in parts of Mexico.

Manuel Grosselet, who closely follows the Mexican bird trade, confirmed that the occurrence of this species among Mexican cage birds, especially in the center of the country, remains very common. Nonetheless, the timing and location of this report is consistent with what might be expected of a post-breeding solitaire, so this occurrence poses something of a conundrum.

By 18 July, this Brown-backed Solitaire, or, almost as likely, another bird, was found in nearby Ramsey Canyon. Throughout the rest of the month the bird (or birds) could be found or heard almost daily in one canyon or another. On 31 July, a number of birders saw a female Aztec Thrush while searching for the Brown-backed Solitaire in Ramsey Canyon.

For those who may not know, Camp Chiricahua offers an opportunity for young birders to share an enthusiasm for birds in a fine natural history location, southeast Arizona. The camp, run by Victor Emanuel Nature Tours and co-sponsored by the American Birding Association, is designed for teen boys and girls.

Finally, a three-minute NPR "Weekend Edition" report on Saturday, 25 July, featured Dave Jasper, the group from Camp Chiricahua, and the Brown-backed Solitaire:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=107006767>

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BIRDING: DEMOGRAPHICS AND ECONOMICS

Last month, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released "Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis." The report gleans the birding information available from the larger 2006 "National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation" (FHWAR).

This invaluable birding survey includes numbers of birders, their age distribution, income, education, gender, race, regional distribution, and birder expenditures.

The survey indicates that around-the-home birders in the U.S. number 42 million and away-from-home birders 20 million. The most significant trend in the area of avidity since 2001 is the increase in the number of away-from-home birders - an increase of 8 percent.

In general there are large numbers of birders who are well-educated, almost equally balanced in gender, fairly well off financially, not particularly young (slightly more than half are older than 45), and spend oodles of money on our pastime. Get all the details here:

http://library.fws.gov/Pubs/birding_natsurvey06.pdf

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IBA NEWS: LWCF ASSESSMENT RELEASED

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has been key to securing many locations designated as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the U.S. LWCF funding for Federal and State land acquisition that comes into the U.S. Treasury from offshore oil and gas revenues. At its peak in 1977, this "conservation royalty" account amounted to \$900 million. Adjusted for inflation, that translates to \$3.2 billion per year in today's economy. Unfortunately, the fiscal year Federal appropriation for the Land and Water Conservation Fund in 2008 was only slightly better than \$255 million. Beginning in 2000, a portion of LWCF monies was also diverted to other programs.

We have covered the workings of LWCF a number of times in the E-bulletin, including twice in 2007:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/janSBC07.html#TOC13>

and

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/sepSBC07.html#TOC07>

Clearly, there is a substantial lack of funding allocated to the LWCF, and the authorization legislation for the Fund is due to expire in 2015. Bird conservationists, especially IBA advocates, should thoughtfully consider the future of the LWCF.

Last month, a panel of 17 conservation and outdoor recreation leaders released "Great Outdoors America Report of the Outdoor Resources Review Group." One of the recommendations in the report is to permanently fund the LWCF, starting at the highest historically authorized level and adjusted for inflation (\$3.2 billion in today's dollars). Additional royalties and fees from renewable and nonrenewable energy development are identified as potential sources of revenue for the LWCF. The coordinated use of geospatial planning tools is advanced, as are increased private-public partnerships. One recommendation is to improve planning and cooperation across agencies, with the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission identified as a model for enhanced coordination.

Readers of the E-bulletin will appreciate that the growth of birding is recognized in the report, and among the many policy recommendations in the report is the need to emphasize the promotion of nature education.

To download the panel's 56-page report:

http://www.orrgroup.org/documents/July2009_Great-Outdoors-America-report.pdf

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:

<http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/>

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SPOTTED OWL PLAN REDUX

In May we wrote of the current Administration's move away from the Western Oregon Plan Revisions (WOPR) impacting the Northern Spotted Owl:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/maySBC09.html#TOC04>

Last month, the Interior Department made it official: Because the Bush Administration failed to follow established administrative procedure (Section 7 Consultations under the Endangered Species Act) before leaving office, the plan to intensify logging in western Oregon (WOPR) is viewed as legally indefensible. According to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, the plan must be withdrawn. "[It] cannot stand up in court and, if defended, could lead to years of fruitless litigation and inaction." A new plan must now be developed.

For more details, see, for example, releases by the Interior Department and ABC:

<http://www.fws.gov/home/feature/2009/pdf/07-16-09FINALNorthwestForestPlanAnnouncement.pdf>

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MOUNTAIN PLOVER PLAN RELEASED

The tenth in an ongoing series of individual shorebird plans, a 52-page plan for Mountain Plover has recently been released. Co-authored by Brad Andres and Kelli Stone, it summarizes what is known about the bird's ecology, status and population, habitat needs, threats, and important sites. Also identified are immediate conservation actions needed to stop or reverse the Mountain Plover's population decline over the long term. You can view the plan here:

http://www.whsrn.org/sites/default/files/MountainPlover_ConservationPlan_09-05-28a.pdf

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UK PEREGRINES HAVING A HARD TIME

Like their counterparts in North America, Peregrine Falcons in the United Kingdom were devastated by the use of organochlorine pesticides (e.g. DDT) in the middle of the 20th Century. By 1963, their numbers in the UK were reduced to 360 pairs. Today their numbers are over 1,400 pairs. Despite this recovery, 2009 has been one of the worst years on record in the UK for persecution of these magnificent birds of prey.

Incidents of poisoning, shooting, trapping, and nest robbing are already approaching the estimated total of 85 incidents reported for the whole of last year. Mark Thomas, investigations officer for the Royal Society or the Protection of Birds (RSPB) remarked that "Peregrines have taken 30 years to recover from the devastating effects of pesticide poisoning, and still we find them targeted by people who hold a grudge against them."

Culprits have included rogue elements within the pigeon racing community and the game shooting community who blame Peregrine Falcons for the loss of their birds. There are also people intent on taking eggs and chicks for falconry.

Further protection and criminal investigations are being requested by the RSPB.

You can find more information on the recent UK Peregrine situation here:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/jul/01/peregrine-falcons-persecution>

and

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/news/details.asp?id=tcm:9-220187>

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UTILITY CORPORATION PAYS TO PROTECT EAGLES

In early July, PacifiCorp, one of the largest electric utilities in the West, pleaded guilty to unlawfully killing Golden Eagles, and other raptors and migratory birds in Wyoming. The company (aka Rocky Mountain Power) was ordered to pay over \$10.5 million for killing these protected birds. The company was ordered to spend \$9.1 million to repair or retrofit its equipment to protect birds from electrocution, and it must pay a \$510,000 criminal fine and an additional \$900,000 in restitution to support research and conservation projects for eagles and other birds of prey in the West.

The plea agreement responded to charges that PacifiCorp killed 232 eagles in Wyoming from January 2007 to the present. Until recently, PacifiCorp failed to take readily available measures to avoid avian electrocutions in Wyoming, measures that could have saved numerous eagles and other birds from electrocution.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service led the investigation to enforce the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which makes it illegal for anyone to kill a protected bird without first obtaining a permit.

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This represents a continuation of the Service's longstanding efforts to reduce avian electrocutions caused by electric power infrastructure. Elsewhere, the Service and the electric power industry have cooperated for years to reduce the impact of powerlines on eagles, cranes, and other birds – an effort formalized by the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee - APLIC. The activities of the APLIC were covered in the E-bulletin as recently as March, 2007:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/marSBC07.html#TOC10>

"Electrocutions drop when companies step up and meet their responsibilities for protecting eagles and other birds," commented Emily Jo Williams, who oversees management of the Migratory Bird Program for the USFWS Mountain-Prairie Region.

For more details on the case, see this USFWS release:

<http://www.fws.gov/home/feature/2009/pdf/0947PacificCorppressrelease.pdf>

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HOMELAND SECURITY VS. THE NATIONAL SYMBOL

Just when you thought that the most obvious conflict between birds and the Department of Homeland Security was taking place at the U.S. "border wall" along the Mexican border, another incident has surfaced.

The Bald Eagle may be the symbol of the USA, but it's also nesting at a Washington DC site that is the newly planned Department of Homeland Security headquarters. An access road planned for that headquarters is very close to a nest where Bald Eagles have raised young for about nine years, the only Bald Eagles nesting in the District of Columbia. The road is not scheduled to be built until 2014, but the awkwardness of the potential eviction is obvious. After all, the Department of Homeland Security has a Bald Eagle on its official seal!

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TIDAL FLATS AT SONG DO: SO LONG?

In the first half of this month, the Songdo International Business District (IBD), just a 15-minute drive from Korea's Incheon International Airport, will open. This \$30-billion designated Free Economic Zone is designed to be Korea's latest effort at a public-private partnership in business development that will hopefully attract Korean and international corporations. Already, it touts its sustainability awards, LEED certification, recycled/natural materials, and general green growth.

So, what's the problem?

The issue is that important tidal flats are threatened under current plans for further development. Already, the nearby Incheon Free Economic Zone (IFEZ) has destroyed most of the region's rich tidal flats. An estimated 4,000 hectares are already gone. Only about 1,000 hectares of the Song Do tidal flats remain.

Saunders's Gull and Nordmann's Greenshank are among the key species dependent upon the Song Do area. Relict Gull and Chinese Egret are already in dangerous declines due to previous reclamations in the area. Also, highly endangered Black-faced Spoonbills nest nearby.

Unfortunately, Korea's record of wetland destruction is among the most disappointing of all the developed and near-developed nations in the world. For past E-bulletin coverage see, for example, this item from March 2006: <http://www.refugenet.org/birding/marSBC06.html#TOC10>

Especially disturbing is the fact that American companies and about a dozen prestigious American universities are involved in gobbling up this space.

Fortunately, some international conservationists have been working to save the habitat, in an effort to preserve the entirety of what remains of the Song Do Tidal Flats. The conservationists maintain that careful planning around retention ponds, an artificial island, the local creek flow, and the ebb and flow of the estuary can combine to blend in with public appreciation and appropriate development. In the words of Derek Schubert, president of SAVE International, a Berkeley-based organization that has been working to save the Black-faced Spoonbill from extinction for the past 14 years, "Bird habitat is not a barrier for city development, but an opportunity to build a real green city and provide residents and visitors with the opportunity to enjoy nature."

For more information on SAVE and Song Do tidal preservation efforts, see:

<http://www.earthislandprojects.org/project/viewProject.cfm?subSiteID=25>

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BOOK NOTES: A LISTENING HYBRID

Don Kroodsmas new BIRDSONG BY THE SEASONS (2009 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) is not only a book or a set of CDs, it's both. The text follows 24 broad localities over a calendar year; the two accompanying CDs provide the essential and intimate audio accompaniment. In fact, Kroodsmas makes the suggestion that users listen to the CDs first and actually start reading on page 227, appendix 1, with its 32 pages containing brief descriptions of the audio content experience. As you cover track by track, month by month, the listening becomes increasingly valuable.

The reader should also go through the experience a second time, through the "actual" text, 24 chapters and twelve months narrated in thorough detail. Moreover, those birders and naturalists who have been intimidated by sonograms in the past will be soothed by Kroodsmas's user-friendly exposition of the tool.

This is more than a book and set of CDs; it's a unique experience that offers both the cues and the opportunity to really listen with greater understanding.

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TIP OF THE MONTH: STOP BY THE OFFICE

Wherever you go birding this month – a park, a refuge, a state forest, whatever – you should take the time to stop by the agency's office. Sometimes the visitor center or office isn't open when you arrive in the morning, but it's usually open when you are ready to leave. Perhaps you already picked up a map and checklist from an outdoor kiosk, but a brief visit is still recommended.

The staff should know that you're birding there; they should be made aware if you had a good time, and you should consider leaving some of your bird sightings if they have an observations clipboard.

If you don't tell them you're birding there, they will never know that you came. We all need to reinforce the message: Birders use the location and the staff should respond to birder needs.

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STAMP COST INCREASE GETS THROUGH HOUSE COMMITTEE

Last month we wrote about the June delay for the effort to update the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp. H.R. 1916 was pulled back by committee supporters at the last minute due to a number of amendments filed by Republicans:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/julSBC09.html#TOC08>

In late July, H.R. 1916, the Migratory Bird Habitat Investment and Enhancement Act, passed the House Committee on Natural Resources, rid of the most troublesome amendments:

http://resourcescommittee.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=592&Itemid=27

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BAREFACED SELF-PROMOTION

As the Birding Community E-bulletin enters its sixth year of publication and distribution, we are continuing to share some remarks from some of our readers. As previously noted, we will include a comment or two each month this year. These will be placed at the very end of each E-bulletin so you can simply stop reading at this point if you'd like!

"I've read the Birding Community E-Bulletin since its launch and value it for the unique combination of recreational and conservation news that it provides in an easy to access format. I especially appreciate the care that the two editors take to ensure scientific accuracy and relevance of information to the bird conservation community."

-Tom Franklin, President, The Wildlife Society

"Every time I see a new Birding Community E-bulletin in my mailbox, I skip my other messages and go straight to it. Nowhere else do I find this combination of important birding news, including reports of rarities from all over, with cutting-edge conservation information. As someone who loves both the sport of birding and the birds themselves, I treasure this monthly gem."

-Laura Erickson, author, "101 Ways to Help Birds"

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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 for the E-Bulletin archives if possible).

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*

If you DON'T wish to receive these E-bulletins, contact either of us, and we will take you off our mailing list IMMEDIATELY.