



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

August 2011

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.

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

Our rarity for July is Little Stint. This is a shorebird that breeds along the northern coast of Eurasia, from Scandinavia east to north-central Siberia. The species winters from the Mediterranean region and Africa to India. There have been about 90 accepted reports for North America since the first Little Stint was recorded here in 1961. About half of all reports have been from Alaska, the rest nearly equally split between Atlantic and Pacific coasts, but also a few from interior locations.

If you are unfamiliar with the species, which is often difficult to distinguish from another rarity, the Red-necked Stint, either check a European field guide or a North American guide, such as National Geographic (page 182-3), the "Big" Sibley (page 188), Stokes (page 261) or Crossley (page 179).

This past month, four Little Stints drew the attention of birders, all on the West Coast. Three were in California; one was in British Columbia.

On 6 July Lucas Brug found a breeding plumaged individual (initially identified as Red-necked Stint) at the Alexandre Dairy, north of Crescent City in Del Norte County, California. The bird was observed for two days. Here are photos taken by Alan Barron:

www.westernfieldornithologists.org/gallery/displayimage.php?pos=-397

and

John Sterling:

http://sterlingbirds.smuqmuq.com/California-Birds-1/Recent-Photos/12219377_phGMY#1374990685_qT4b58f

Then on 15 July, another Little Stint, brighter plumaged than the Del Norte County bird, was found in early afternoon at the Davis Wetlands, a water treatment plant in Yolo County. This bird was seen by numerous observers until the

afternoon of 17 July.

Next, on 18 July Peter Hamel and Margo Hearne reported an adult Little Stint in breeding plumage at Sandspit, Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands), British Columbia.

Finally, on 23 July, Kimball Garrett and Kathy Molina found a brightly-colored adult Little Stint at Piute Ponds (Los Angeles County) in the South (Ducks Unlimited) Ponds on Edwards Air Force Base. The shorebird was also reported for the following two days.

The fact that three of these four rare birds were located in California is interesting, since the state boasts only about 10 previously accepted records, the first in 1983.

A few comments about the access issues associated for the California birds may also be instructive. For the first Little Stint, birders were told to ask for permission from the Alexandre Dairy office to gain access if they wished to walk the edge of the pond. At the Davis Wetlands, the Public Works Department of Davis regularly allows access from 7am to 1pm through a closed, but not latched, gate. Access to the Piute Ponds on Edwards Air Force Base requires a letter of permission, although a visitor with a letter is allowed to bring in three other visitors in the same vehicle.

California birders are fortunate to have access to such areas, since this is often not the case in many other situations.

BIRD-CONSERVATION CUTTERS: THEY'RE BAAACK!

On 12 July, the U.S. House Appropriations Committee passed a fiscal year 2012 (FY12) Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill (H.R. 2584) that included devastating cuts to agency spending and key bird conservation programs, along with calling for policy riders restricting environmental protection. It reached the House where some changes were made, but resolving the bill was then delayed, a byproduct of the debate over the debt ceiling. Regardless, the trend is becoming disturbingly routine, with an apparent frenzy to slash spending.

A quick review of some of the programs proposed for cutting is warranted. Comparisons here are not with the current year's budget (FY11), which we covered in the April issue, but instead are compared with those of FY10. (Again, there were some changes, once the bill reached the House floor, and those are indicated below.) The FY12/FY10 comparisons are shocking, especially for those programs that have proven their worth year after year:

- North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)
\$20 million, compared to \$47.6 million in FY10
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
Started at \$66.8 million, but pushed up to \$81.8 million from the House floor, compared to \$266 million in FY10
- State Wildlife Grants
\$22 million, compared to \$90 million in FY10
- Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act
Zero – yes, \$0 - compared to \$5 million in FY10

In addition, the Fish and Wildlife Service had initially been forbidden from listing new species or any new critical habitat, but this was removed by action from the floor. Still, among other remaining restrictions, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would be prevented from finalizing guidance to clarify Clean Water Act protection for some wetlands and streams, would discontinue rule-making on mountaintop mining, and would stop the agency from using the Clean Air Act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change mitigation and adaptation activities within the Interior Department and the EPA would be cut 22 percent.

In the specific area of National Wildlife Refuges, H.R. 2584, if passed as currently amended, might very well necessitate the closure of 140 NWRs.

Lest you think that volunteers might be encouraged to step in to make up for some of the losses, the Appropriations Committee would cut the brand new, and very economical, National Wildlife Refuge Volunteer program that coordinates the activities of local volunteers, nonprofit organizations, and others. That budget would be reduced to a mere \$1.7 million, a 15 percent cut from this current year. (We couldn't compare numbers to FY10, because the new program didn't exist then.)

The onslaught continues, and the bill may make a House reappearance in some form in September.

LWCF FUNDING WIDELY SUPPORTED BY THE PUBLIC

There is some good bird-conservation news, at least on the public-opinion front.

In mid-July, two polling firms - one Democratic, one Republican - partnered to complete a national survey of voters to measure public support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF, using a portion of revenue from offshore oil and gas drilling fees, has traditionally been used to conserve land for parks, wildlife refuges, forests, rivers, trails, and other important federal, state, and local public lands, many of which are vital bird habitats.

The July polling showed overwhelming support for LWCF, support that cuts across party and demographic lines, despite deep voter anxiety about the economy and federal budget. Here are some findings of note:

- 85% of Americans support full funding (\$900 million per year) for LWCF.
 - 88% of Americans oppose future diversions of funding that has been committed to LWCF.
 - 60% of Americans agree that money diverted from LWCF in the past should be repaid over time.
- Among those in support of continued funding were:
- 93% of Democrats, 87% of Independents, and 83% of Republicans.
 - 95% of Latinos. 88% of Whites. and 85% of African Americans.

For more details, see:

<http://lwcfcoalition.org/files/LWCF%20Press%20Release%20National%20Poll.pdf>

MORE URBAN TREATY FUNDING

Since there is still some bird funding available in this year's budget, in mid-July it was announced that \$650,000 would be going to ten locales for Urban Conservation Treaties for Migratory Birds.

The cities of Phoenix (Arizona), Kennedale (Texas), Minneapolis and St. Paul (Minnesota), Indianapolis (Indiana), Opelika (Alabama), Hartford (Connecticut), Ogden (Utah), Lewistown (Montana), San Francisco (California), and Washington, D.C. each will receive up to \$70,000 in challenge grants. These cities and their partners will specifically work to increase awareness of the value of migratory birds and their habitats, especially their intrinsic, ecological, recreational, and economic significance.

In addition, existing Urban Bird Treaty in Chicago (Illinois), Houston (Texas), Portland (Oregon), St. Louis (Missouri), Nashville (Tennessee), Anchorage (Alaska), Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), and New York (New York) will receive a grant of \$10,000.00.

For more information, see here:

www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/Partnerships/UrbanTreaty/UrbanTreaty.html

BIRD-SAFE BUILDINGS IN SAN FRANCISCO

Here's a related development in the area of urban birds. In mid-July, the San Francisco Planning Commission approved new Bird Safe Building Standards which will greatly reduce bird deaths and injuries resulting from collisions with buildings in the city. The 38-page standards manual passed by a 5-1 vote. These measures provide provisions for safer windows, better night lighting, and safer construction of wind turbines in urban environments.

The guidelines divide parts of San Francisco into "Blue" and "Green" zones, depending on the degree of risk that projects in those areas might pose to birds. In the Blue Zone, compliance with the guidelines will be mandatory. (These would be areas located near bird nesting and feeding sites, in fog-prone areas, along migration paths and resting areas, or in districts that are zoned to allow tall buildings.) In lower-risk Green Zones, the guidelines only call for voluntary compliance for reducing risks to birds.

Taken together, these efforts could prevent hundreds of thousands of manmade bird deaths and could contribute to making San Francisco a leader in the effort to reverse trends of increasing bird mortality.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors will consider the complete proposal during its late summer meeting.

For more details, see the press release by Golden Gate Audubon and the American Bird Conservancy:

www.goldengateaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/110715-Planning-Commission-Approves-New-Bird.pdf

To access the guidelines themselves, see here:

www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=2506

ACCESS MATTERS: VIEWING KIRTLAND'S WARBLERS

We mentioned birder access in the rarity of the month account above, but a notable experience that ended for the season last month warrants special consideration.

From mid-May to early July, Kirtland's Warbler viewing in central Michigan has been facilitated through a long-term partnership. As a result, visitors can safely observe this rare and Endangered species under ideal circumstances. Last month, the guided Kirtland's Warbler tour-season run cooperatively by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and Michigan Audubon Society, closed on the Fourth of July weekend, having guided over 800 observers through the season. These breeding-season guided trips were extraordinarily successful in showing participants singing male Kirtland's Warblers on territory.

The popular tours have been run by the Forest Service since 1966 (even before the Endangered Species Act) and by the Fish and Wildlife Service since 1974. The USFWS and Michigan Audubon run two tours a day out of Grayling, Michigan; the Forest Service runs one a day out of Mio, Michigan. The yearly visitation over the last decade has averaged 1,050 visitors.

These programs are ideally suited to welcome visitors, to educate them about the habitat and management needs of this rare songbird, and to make accommodation available to both dedicated birders and the curious public alike. Instead of keeping people away from an Endangered Species (a reality for some species and at some other sites), people are welcomed and encouraged to view Kirtland's Warblers in their Jack pine habitat.

The public, both local and visiting, has been won over by this effort, and the regional economy, including local commerce and forestry-oriented, benefit by working to save the Kirtland's Warbler.

Controlled visitation is the key to balanced and responsible management and conservation.

It's a win-win-win-win situation – for the warblers, for visitors, for habitat managers, and for locals.

Land-and-wildlife managers and birders alike would do well to carefully consider the Kirtland's Warbler access

experience, the cumulative lessons entailed and the public's response. It's one way that controlled access leads to other benefits. A review of this policy is especially important in these times of shrinking budgets, since the value of these types of tours are, if anything, underappreciated.

Finally, indications are that Kirtland's Warblers had another fine nesting season in 2011. Preliminary numbers suggest that it was a record year, with singing males probably approaching 1,850 birds. We'll report on the official numbers once they are released.

IOWA DNR PROHIBITS LEAD SHOT IN DOVE HUNTING

We've followed the lead issue in many issues of the E-bulletin, including most recently in May when it concerned California Condors:
www.refugeassociation.org/birding/maysbc11.html#TOC02

Now there are new developments. In mid-July, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) approved the first dove-hunting season in the state since 1918, but at the same time prohibited the use of lead ammunition for this activity.

The dove season from 1 September to 9 November will allow for the harvest of 15 doves per day - either Mourning Doves or Eurasian Collared-Doves. The commissioners added the requirement that hunters use only non-toxic shot while hunting doves anywhere in the state.

As noted in previous issues of the E-bulletin, lead is highly toxic and dangerous to wildlife, even at low levels. Exposure, often through ingestion of pellets, can result in loss of coordination, nerve damage, acute poisoning, and death. Long-term impacts in birds and other wildlife may also include mental impairment, reduced reproduction, and damage to neurological development.

IBA NEWS: STELLWAGEN BANK IN THE NEWS

NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS) off the coast of Massachusetts and the Government of Bermuda have recently pledged cooperation on scientific and educational programs to better protect the endangered North Atlantic humpback whale population. This is good news for whale conservation since Bermuda is strategically situated between SBNMS and its sister sanctuary in the Dominican Republic. SBNMS encompasses 842 square miles of ocean, stretching between Cape Ann and Cape Cod and is one of the few totally marine IBAs in North America. Renowned for its remarkable productivity, more than 53 species of seabirds utilize the sanctuary, resulting in its designation as an official Massachusetts IBA.

Beginning this summer, regular seabird monitoring using trained volunteers posted aboard both public whale-watching boats and periodic dedicated survey cruises is being implemented to gather baseline seabird data to augment similar information gathered in the 1990s. In light of anticipated changes in ocean temperature and other characteristics due to

climate change, this monitoring effort is aimed at proving valuable baseline data against which to measure future changes in avian distribution and abundance.

To learn more about Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, see:

<http://stellwagen.noaa.gov>

and

www.massaudubon.org/Birds_and_Birding/IBAs/site_summary.php?getsite=64

For additional information about IBA programs worldwide, including those across the U.S., check the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Area program web site at:

www.audubon.org/bird/iba/

TIP OF THE MONTH: KEEP IT QUIET

Picture this: You hear about a rare hummingbird in your area - say a Calliope Hummingbird if you live in the East, or a Violet-crowned Hummingbird anywhere away from the Southwest - and you arrive at the backyard of an amiable feeder-host where the hummer regularly visits. By the time you show up in mid-morning, you join a small group of early birders who were fortunate enough to have seen the bird just a few minutes before you got there. You walk up just in time to see them exchanging high-fives and comparing notes on their views or photographs. You are all on the patio, not far from the set of feeders where more common hummingbirds still visit to feed. But as time goes by, those luckier birders ahead of you seem to lose concentration and start animated discussions about the experiences they had last week while shorebirding, or the best places locally to pick up a good lunch sandwich. It's bad enough that they are no longer paying attention - indeed, they don't seem to notice that the other hummingbirds are coming in with less frequency, yet the volume of their conversation is increasing and is distressing.

Under such circumstances, it is important to keep quiet, to tone down verbal exchanges, or perhaps even put a lid on verbal dialogue, if for no other reason than to increase the odds that the bird in question might actually find it safe to re-appear. Indeed, those who have seen the bird should keep quiet or simply consider moving on. In fact, an ideal spot in view of the feeders might serve another birder better, especially if you were fortunate enough to have already had fine view of the bird in question. This is birding etiquette at its best.

BOOK NOTES: SOME SHORT STORIES

A self-published book usually suggests one that is less than worthy, one that a "normal" publisher would not want to touch. Not so, especially in today's economy and the cost of book-publishing. And also not so when considering Harriet

Davidson's MY LIFE AS A BIRDER, which came out in April of this year.

This book of about 200 pages is a charming collection of birding memories, 41 in all, that cover places characterized by the book's subtitle, "from Attu to Zambia." They are all short stories; the longest is seven pages, and most are about four pages in length. These are mostly accounts of life-listing with charm and an eye toward adventure and enjoyment. But they are not simply a recounting of birds added to a list; they are more a look into a life's worth of openness to new experiences. The book's not perfect – there are a few mistakes in dates, names, and titles – but this is beside the point. When you finish this little volume of adventures shared by Harriet Davidson and her late husband, Bill, you will probably smile and wish that it had included a few more little stories. The good news is that with a little searching, at Amazon and elsewhere, you can easily track down this self-published book.

CARBON OFFSET AND BIRDING

Some folks have commented that birding is bad for birds. Really! The argument is that as we travel pursuing birds, we are also burning fossil fuels that contribute to greenhouse emissions impacting bird habitats and even migratory patterns.

Instead of any guilt-ridden apologizing for birding, we might actually do something to address the issue.

A new Carbon Offset Bird Project (COBP) is an experimental effort that could allow birders to voluntarily offset their birding-related carbon emissions, those that come from traveling-while-birding activities. The attendees at the Midwest Birding Symposium – September 15-18 at Lakeside, Ohio – will have the opportunity to do just that. We usually do not highlight upcoming birding and nature festivals in the E-bulletin - not that they are not worthy, but because there are so many of them. In this case, the Midwest Birding Symposium is an exception, if only because its carbon-offset effort is so creative. The collected offset funds will be used to secure nearby quality bird habitat. In this case, it's a public nature preserve, Meadowbrook Marsh, owned and operated by the Danbury Township Board of Trustees.

This COBP project is modeled loosely after other carbon offset programs involving air or vehicle travel, but is the very first, as far as we know, specifically tailored to birders and birds at a U.S. birding event.

You can find more details on the project here, under Special Activities on the MBS site:

<https://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/mwb2011/events2011.php#cobp>

and here:

www.birdwatchersdigest.com/mwb2011/docs/COBP-MBS2011.pdf

ONE MORE ONE-DAY WONDER AND YET ANOTHER LESSON

In the category of late-but-significant news, consider this. On 4 May, David and Jan Hanson, of Baytown, Texas, observed an interesting raptor at Houston Audubon's Boy Scout Woods at High Island. David Hanson took some photos.

Because of the bird's flight pattern, they assumed that it was a Cooper's Hawk, at least until another birder, Jim Stevenson, took a look at the photos. That was in late June, and here are photos of what has been identified as a Double-toothed Kite (*Harpagus bidentatus*):

http://hansonnaturephotography.smugmug.com/Nature/Texas-Birds/17293655_vKBNQB#1352562325_vLdkzWN

The kite appears to be in transition from immature to adult plumage. The double "tooth" is visible on the upper mandible. If confirmed, this would be a first for north of Mexico.

The species is normally found no closer to Texas than the lowland forest of Veracruz. It is not known to engage in any vagrancy within the Neotropics, ranging as it normally does from southern Mexico to Brazil and Bolivia.

Lessons? Take a close look and share those photos of dubious birds, if you're lucky enough to have photos!

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

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html

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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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