



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

February 2006

The Birding Community E-bulletin is being distributed as a service for 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).

We are now distributing this E-bulletin to over 1,000 birders and conservationists. We would be happy to have that number grow. If you have colleagues who would be interested in getting this monthly E-bulletin, contact either of your editors, using the details found at the end of this E-bulletin.

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RARITY FOCUS

Our rarity of the month is Yellow Grosbeak, a bird being seen in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This is a species which normally ranges from western Mexico (north to central Sonora) to Guatemala. If you don't have a Mexican bird guide, check out a National Geographic field guide or page 427-428 for details on this species. We

Mexican bird-guide, check out a National Geographic field guide on page 427-428 for details on this species. We picked the Yellow Grosbeak as our rarity this month for at least three reasons:

1. There are only about 15 U.S. records for this mostly Mexican bird, predominantly for short periods of time and almost entirely in summer and in southeastern Arizona.
2. The location - in central New Mexico - and the time of year may raise questions over the bird's origin. (Could it be an escape from the Mexican bird-trade?) In one past case, for example, an unseasonable and relatively docile bird in Tucson in October 1987 was considered suspect.
3. This is a feeder-bird, visiting residential feeders, and it has recently been accessible to a number of viewers.

The Yellow Grosbeak, apparently in the area since early December, has only recently attracted serious attention. It is frequenting feeders in a neighborhood in northwest Albuquerque, often in the vicinity of 805 or 412 Pueblo Solano Road NW. The bird seems to circulate over a fairly large area, but a canvas of the neighborhood suggests that the best stocked feeders are along this road.

Photos of this Yellow Grosbeak by photographer Laurel Ladwig can be viewed [here](#).

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NATIONAL BIRD-FEEDING MONTH

In 1994, Illinois 10th District Congressman John Porter read a resolution into the Congressional Record, designating February as "National Bird-Feeding Month." A dozen years and millions of bird-feeding enthusiasts later, February is still celebrated as the month to introduce a family friend or neighbor to the enjoyments of backyard bird-feeding.

"During this month, individuals are encouraged to provide food, water and shelter to help wild birds survive. This assistance benefits the environment by supplementing wild bird's natural diet of weed seeds and insects,"

according to a portion of the original resolution presented by Congressman Porter. According to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's study, "Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis" (2001), this activity translates into almost \$3 billion spent annually by Americans on bird food and related products. And those numbers continue to increase, according to George Petrides, Sr., of the Wild Bird Centers of America. "More people are discovering the benefits of backyard bird-feeding. It's beneficial to the birds, and to their own enjoyment." So far, recent concerns about the Avian Influenza, West Nile Virus, and other health issues have not negatively impacted bird-feeding. "Wild birds accustomed to finding their favorite food at the feeder should not be disappointed. Fill your feeders and birdbaths. Keep them clean, keep the feed dry, and wash your hands after handling feeders," said Dick Hebert of D&D Commodities Ltd.

These tips are frequently repeated throughout the bird-feeding industry, and are included in the "6 Steps to turn your yard into a Sanctuary for Birds" promotion sponsored by the Wild Bird-Feeding Industry (WBFI). The "6 Steps" are available [here](#).

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BIRD-FEEDING PREFERENCES

Also connected to National Bird Feeding Month is a related call for bird-feeding assistance. The Wild Bird Feeding Industry's Research Foundation is searching for volunteers to participate in a study of food and feeder preferences of wild birds.

"Project Wildbird" was initiated in the fall of 2005 and will continue through the fall of 2008. There are five questions raised in the study:

1. What are the seed preferences of birds in the United States and Canada that use feeders?
2. Are seed preferences of birds identical in different regions of the United States and Canada?
3. Are seed preferences the same at different times of the year?
4. What are the feeder preferences of birds in the United States and Canada?
5. Is there an interaction between seed preferences and feeder preferences (e.g., When a particular type of seed is available, do birds go to feeders they normally would not visit)?

If you are interested in learning more, visit the [WBFI website](#). And, if you enjoy watching your feeder, there's a great opportunity to connect with "Project FeederWatch," the ongoing effort to gather information about birds at feeders that is coordinated by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada. For more information about Feeder Watch, click [here](#).

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WILL FRITTED GLASS DO THE JOB?

You may remember that last year's International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) theme had to do with birds and collisions. One especially well-known bird-collision source is glass. While you're maintaining your backyard bird-

feeders, there is occasionally the possibility of hearing the "thump" of a bird striking a nearby window.

How many birds in North America die through collisions with glass, either at feeders, or during migration and the nesting-season? Is it 100 million? A billion? Whatever the number, it's a big one! Regardless of the number, reliable anti-collision solutions are hard to find. Ornithologist Daniel Klem, however, has suggested one approach that deserves serious inspection. Klem, a professor at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, has been studying the issue for decades.

Julie Hagelin, a colleague at Swarthmore College - also in eastern Pennsylvania - got her college to consider solutions presented by Klem when Swarthmore was planning to build a \$71-million science center, using the center to test a different kind of glass that might ward off oncoming birds. The center, built in the late-90s, was to feature a three-story meeting room made out of clear glass - a potential "avian slaughterhouse," according to Klem.

Klem's arguments to the college's building committee led Swarthmore to agree to invest in bird-friendly glass, if Klem and Carr Everbach, a member of Swarthmore's engineering faculty, could come up with an appropriate design. The challenge was to find glass that birds could see upon approach and that people could still see through.

Klem warned that "If you are going to come up with a solution to this problem, you are going to have to come up with one that doesn't muck up the way people look out their windows. You start doing that and people are going to be unsympathetic." Klem and Everbach suggested using so-called "fritted" glass. This is tempered glass with a ceramic-based paint permanently bonded onto the glass during the tempering process. The ceramic edge 'frit' prevents UV rays from penetrating the glass. Upon inspection, the glass appears to be etched with closely spaced rows of small circles. When standing up close, the glass is hard to see through, but from a slight distance, the dots don't obscure vision that much.

The science center turned out to be a working experiment, with 60 percent of panes fritted in the dotted pattern and 40 percent totally transparent. Two of the fritted panes were even installed unconventionally, with the fritting on the exterior, to test effectiveness and durability.

To find out whether the fritted glass is really bird-friendly, some of the windows have been equipped with video sensors, called "thumpers." The thumpers have recorded just two bird hits since the center was finished about five years ago. While this doesn't prove anything conclusively - the sensors aren't attached to every window - it's suggestive that the fritted glass is working.

Perhaps some day soon a glass manufacturer will start marketing bird-friendly glass, just as the fishing industry now sells cans of "dolphin-safe" tuna, or as an increasing number of coffee companies are promoting "bird-compatible" shade-grown coffee.

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IVORY-BILLED CELEBRATION

The Call of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker Celebration" will be held at the Brinkley, Arkansas, Convention Center on 23, 24, and 25 February. Public presentations will be offered by those who have actually seen the megararity, including Gene Sparling, Tim Gallagher, and Bobby Harrison. Leaders of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker Recovery Team from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, The Nature Conservancy, and Audubon Arkansas will be speaking. Visitors may attend talks by Pete Dunne of the Cape May Bird Observatory in New Jersey, wildlife photographer Marie Read, and others. The Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, Arkansas Game & Fish Commission and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will also present programs and be aiding participants throughout the celebration.

A complete itinerary with times, fees, and advance registration can be found on the [Celebration's web site](#).

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RED KNOT EFFORTS IN VIRGINIA

A number of organizations, including New Jersey Audubon, Defenders of Wildlife, and National Audubon have been pursuing the possibility of having the "rufa" subspecies of the Red Knot protected under the Endangered

Species Act. As many readers of the E-bulletin probably know, Red Knot populations have declined globally in recent decades and the North American subspecies in particular has been declining dramatically. The over-harvest of Horseshoe Crabs for use as bait in conch and eel pots has been linked to a decline in the numbers of Red Knots, primarily because the knots depend on the eggs of these crabs at key migratory stopover sites during the birds' long migration northward in spring.

Last month, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service denied an emergency request to list the Red Knot as endangered, however a final determination is still pending.

In the meantime, the issue of a crab-harvesting moratorium has arisen in Virginia. (This is particularly important, since Virginia has so far been the least-responsive state among the Mid-Atlantic States to control the harvest of Horseshoe Crabs.)

Currently the Virginia State legislature is considering action that would help prevent this lovely shorebird from possibly becoming extinct. The primary sponsor of the bill is Delegate H. Morgan Griffith (R), the Majority Leader of the House of Delegates. His bill would declare a moratorium on landings or importation of Horseshoe Crabs in Virginia, at least until the Red Knot (*rufa* subspecies) reaches its target population of 240,000 birds. House speaker Bill Howell (R) is also leaning toward supporting this legislation.

For more details about this topic, see [the following](#) from the American Bird Conservancy.

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WETLANDS CASE TO BE HEARD BY SUPREME COURT

It has been estimated that the U.S. has lost more than half of its original wetlands and continues to lose more than 100,000 wetland acres every year. With this reality in mind, it is important to appreciate that the U.S. Supreme Court will hear a case this month that could dramatically impact the future of more than half the 100 million acres of wetlands remaining in this country.

In January, a number of organizations united in filing an amicus brief addressing whether the Clean Water Act protects wetlands adjacent to small tributaries that flow into larger bodies of water. The brief describes for the court how these wetlands and small tributaries serve to enhance the future of fish and wildlife conservation, as well as the millions of hunters, anglers and wildlife-watchers who spend an estimated \$108 billion annually in the U.S. pursuing their outdoors passions.

For more than 30 years, the Clean Water Act protected these kinds of wetlands and the fish and wildlife that depend upon them. The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that these adjacent wetlands are protected by the Clean Water Act, but that ruling could potentially be overturned by the Supreme Court.

The organizations united behind the amicus brief are the American Fisheries Society, American Sportfishing Association, Bass Pro Shops, Boone & Crockett Club, Ducks Unlimited, Izaak Walton League, Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Orvis, National Wildlife Federation, Pheasants Forever, The Wildlife Society, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Trout Unlimited, and the Wildlife Management Institute.

Jim Murphy, wetlands counsel for the National Wildlife Federation, summarized the scene: "The lower court properly recognized that the Clean Water Act was intended by Congress to broadly protect America's waters," he said. "If the Supreme Court reverses the lower court findings, we risk reversing three decades of progress in cleaning up our nation's waters and slowing losses of wetlands."

The Supreme Court case actually combines two cases, *Carabell v. United States* and *United States v. Rapanos*, which are presently on appeal from the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. The lower court upheld Clean Water Act protection of headwater wetlands and streams. An Army Corps of Engineers official has independently

estimated that if the lower court ruling is not upheld, well over half of the remaining U.S. wetlands and streams would lose protection under the Clean Water Act.

The coalition filing the brief is supporting the Bush Administration's position that Congress intended to protect headwater wetlands and tributaries under the Clean Water Act when the law was originally passed in 1972.

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KEY ALASKAN WILDLIFE HABITAT OPENED TO OIL INDUSTRY

While Congress in December rejected a proposal to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration, another pro-drilling move was announced in January that will impact important Arctic habitat just 110 miles to the west of the refuge.

Ignoring vocal opposition from Alaska Natives, scientists, birders, and sportsmen, the Bush Administration opened all of the internationally significant Teshekpuk Lake Special Area within the Northeast Planning Area of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A). The Administration's decision eliminated long-established wildlife and environmental protections first put in place by the Reagan Administration's Interior Secretary James Watt.

The 4.6 million-acre area of the NPR-A is immediately west of the massive Prudhoe Bay oil field in far northern Alaska bordering the Beaufort Sea, and it provides vital habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, caribou, and other wildlife, as well as being an important subsistence hunting and fishing area. In 1980, Congress authorized leasing and development in the 23.5 -million-acre NPR-A, but directed the Department of the Interior to minimize ecological disturbances. Since then, the area has been the object of a series of leasing openings and compromises, the most important of which was settled in 1998, when then-Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt established an oil-and-gas leasing plan for the Northeastern Planning Area within the Reserve that would keep much of the sensitive habitat around Teshekpuk Lake off limits to both leasing and permanent infrastructure. The compromise plan in 1998 was intended to balance energy development and natural considerations, opening up for drilling some 87 percent of 4.6 million acres in the Northeast portion of the NPR-A.

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"Apparently 87 percent wasn't enough for the oil companies," stated Eleanor Hummes, Alaska Regional Director of The Wilderness Society. "This decision ignores the voices of leading scientists, sportsmen from across the nation, and the Alaska Native people who depend on the wildlife and subsistence resources of the region." Stan Senner, executive director of Audubon Alaska added, "This [current] plan is utterly unbalanced: even the Reagan Administration protected the waterfowl habitat around Teshekpuk Lake because of its world-class ecological and cultural value."

The Teshekpuk Lake Special Area encompasses a vital and productive wetland complex. For example, 30 percent of all Pacific Brant, tens of thousands of Greater White-fronted Geese, and lesser numbers of Spectacled, Steller's, and King Eiders, loons, other waterfowl, and shorebirds habitually use this area.

The issue of Teshekpuk Lake has appeared in this E-bulletin before (e.g., July 2004 and February 2005.) In June 2004, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released a revised development plan for the Northeast portion of the NPR-A, a plan which would open 96 percent of the Northeast Planning Area and 387,000 acres around Teshekpuk Lake previously closed to drillers in the 1998 compromise. Concerns were immediately raised among government biologists and angered even the Native villagers who rely on oil for income.

Early last year, the Administration's management plan was finalized and signed, but the Administration tinkered with the plan for almost a year before unveiling its final version early last month. The revised final plan now opens all of the Northeast Reserve to leasing. (Some structures are banned in specific areas, ostensibly to protect geese and caribou, but according to Stan Senner of Audubon, "No one should be fooled by the window dressing in this document; this plan makes every last acre available for oil development." For example, the "no surface occupancy" [NSO] zones are still open to pipelines and are available for leasing.)

Efforts to open the Teshekpuk Lake area to drilling have consistently drawn fire from a variety of groups, besides those already mentioned, including the California Waterfowl Association, Ducks Unlimited, the Pacific Flyway Council, the Wildlife Management Institute, The Wildlife Society, and The Nature Conservancy. In addition, hundreds of ornithologists and other wildlife professionals, as well as a bipartisan group of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus called for the Teshekpuk Lake area protections to remain in place.

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JOCOTOCO BIRDATHON

We ordinarily don't cover "birdathons" in this E-bulletin, despite the mixture of birding fun and serious conservation that usually mark these events. However, the recent announcement of the novel "Jocoto Birdathon" caught our attention.

The American Bird Conservancy (ABC), the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative (WBCI), and the Jocotoco Foundation (based in Ecuador) recently announced this event, designed to raise money to save habitat for Ecuador's rarest birds while helping two Important Bird Areas battle for the title of "Birdiest Reserve".

The Jocoto Birdathon will take place at two Jocotoco Foundation Reserves. The first is the Buenaventura Reserve, located in southwestern Ecuador, which protects a critically important tract of humid cloud forest in the otherwise arid west-slope foothills of the Andes. This reserve provides habitat for 300 species of birds, nine of which are classified as globally threatened, including the El Oro Parakeet and El Oro Tapaculo.

The second location is the Tapichalaca Reserve, located in southern Ecuador, protecting an area of very wet temperate-zone forest on the east slope of the Andes. This is the only known location for the critically endangered Jocotoco Antpitta. The reserve also provides habitat for additional rarities including Golden-plumed Parakeet, Masked Saltator and Bearded Guan.

Both protected areas, of course, also provide important wintering habitat for a variety of Neotropical migrants. The birdathon is scheduled for 8-17 September 2006. Cost is \$1,365 (not including airfare), plus a \$500 donation to the Jocotoco Foundation. The proceeds will be donated to the Jocotoco Foundation to purchase habitat for endangered birds in Ecuador.

For more information contact: Craig Thompson, (608) 785-1277 or Craig.Thompson@dnr.state.wi.us.

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EXCEPTIONAL COFFEE FILM

The issue of shade-grown and sustainable coffee is a fundamental one for those concerned with bird conservation, since shade-grown coffee farms have been shown to support a robust variety of bird species (including many Neotropical migrants) in large parts of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Last month, an engaging new documentary film premiered, entitled "Birdsong & Coffee: A Wake-Up Call." This two-part documentary (56 min./two 28-min. segments) specifically endorses fair trade, shade-grown, organic, and bird-compatible coffee. The video features experts and students, coffee enthusiasts and bird enthusiasts and - perhaps most importantly - coffee farmers and coffee workers themselves.

In the first half of the film, viewers learn about the connections between traditional shade-based coffee, the broader coffee market system, agro-ecology, and the opportunities for bird conservation.

In the second half of the film, viewers are informed how they can help, since they hold in their hands the fate of farm families and their communities, migrant and resident birds, and the related ecosystems found in coffee-growing regions. A fascinating mix of biological background and social-justice issues, "Birdsong & Coffee: A Wake-Up Call" is a call to develop bird-conscious consumerism. It also includes an excellent short discussion-guide. The DVD and VHS versions of the film are available for \$30 through [Old Dog Documentaries](#).

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"ADOPT" A NICARAGUAN BIRD

There is a creative initiative intended to assist in the creation of a Spanish-language Nicaraguan guide to birds. This is specifically an effort to illustrate all the birds from Nicaragua through the first "Field Guide to the Birds of Nicaragua," a combined project of a number of hard-working Nicaraguan birders and ornithologists. The illustrations are the work of Augusto Silva, who has worked with the project from the start. The ambitious goal is to publish the guide in 2006. The adoption-plan consists of financing individual bird-drawings with a \$25-dollar contribution for each species. If you wish, you can even pick out the species! In exchange, you will receive a final copy of the original sponsored drawing.

If you want to "adopt" a bird you should contact and send a \$25-contribution to:

Alejandra Martinez
Directora de Promocion y Mercadeo de ALAS
De la Iglesia Catedral, 175 varas al sur, casa # 217
Apartado Postal # 91
Granada
Nicaragua
alejandra@avesnicaragua.org

More details (in Spanish) and a list of species already 'taken' by contributors can be found [here](#).

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MORE MURRELET MUDDLE

In late January, an Oregon county, along with a libertarian legal group, sued the Bush Administration in an effort to force the removal of the Pacific Northwest's Marbled Murrelet from coverage under the Endangered Species Act. The Pacific Legal Foundation filed the suit on behalf of Coos County, which maintains that it has lost economic opportunities because of the listing. The case is in the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon.

The suit is centered on the idea that the 17,000 to 20,000 remaining Marbled Murrelets living off Washington, Oregon, and California are not distinct from the nearly 1 million other individuals living off the coasts of British Columbia and Alaska.

This has long been an issue of dispute among environmentalists and the Bush Administration, as well as between the regional U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service office and D.C.-based officials. In 2004, a team of 16 international scientists assembled under contract to the USFWS stated that the Marbled Murrelet was still declining in North America. They warned that the species was likely to disappear from the Pacific Northwest by the end of this century, particularly if more nesting trees were harvested.

The Service's official announcements have recently been that the birds do not meet the standard for listing as a distinct population segment. Service officials announced in late October last year that the agency would propose removing bird's status under the ESA. That announcement came one day after the Coos County Board of Commissioners threatened suit.

We described earlier developments in this controversy in the October 2004 and November 2005 issue of this E-bulletin.

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BOREAL BIRD NEWS AND SCREENSAVER

The Boreal Forest of North America is one of the largest forests on earth. Indeed, it may account for a quarter of the remaining intact forests left on the planet. This critical ecosystem provides breeding grounds for perhaps three billion birds. To get regular news on the birds of the Boreal Forest, and for a wonderful screen saver with boreal birds (from ducks to terns to warblers), click [here](#).

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ANOTHER JV WEBSITE

We've been announcing the unveiling of new Migratory Bird Joint Venture websites as they appear, especially since JVs are so important in delivering on-the-ground bird conservation in increasing areas of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The [Black Duck Joint Venture website](#) has been around for about a year. It also deserves

attention since it is based on a species-emphasis, not simply geographic priorities.

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RECENT NABCI BULLETIN SOURCE

Another good source of current bird conservation information came out in January, the most recent issue of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative [ALL BIRD BULLETIN](#). This issue includes important news on the Partners in Flight updated Species Assessment Database, Iowa's network of Bird Conservation Areas, the new Canadian Intermountain Joint Venture, and ongoing efforts to link range-wide bird conservation to community actions.

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AVIAN FLU LINKS

We've monitored the issue of avian flu in past issues of this E-bulletin. Some scientists are saying that there is evidence that wild birds are spreading the H5N1 strain of the virus. Others are saying that governments are being far too hasty in blaming the spread of avian flu on wild birds, emphasizing, instead, that the trade in birds and the movement of poultry products is a far more important source.

For a review of websites and statements on avian flu, you can check out this set of [informative links](#) put together by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN).

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CORRECTION

While discussing Brown Pelican coverage under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in our last issue of the E-bulletin, we wrote that "Only the California subspecies and populations breeding in Louisiana and Texas are currently covered under the ESA." We neglected to mention the Caribbean Brown Pelican. That subspecies is not doing well, and indications are that its fortunes continue to be in decline. Among the most serious man-induced threats to the Caribbean subspecies are poaching of eggs, human disturbance, entanglement in fishing gear, and loss or degradation of mangrove habitat. Pesticide residues, the primary cause of the decline of Brown Pelicans elsewhere, are not currently thought to be high enough in the Caribbean to be considered hazardous.

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