



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

February 2007

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RARITY FOCUS

On 6 January, two Pink-footed Geese were found by the beach at Fort Adams State Park in Rhode Island. By 9 January they began to be reported at the nearby Newport Country Club golf course, across from the well-marked Hammersmith Farm.

Curiously, last February two Pink-footed Geese appeared in the Connecticut River at Enfield, Connecticut. They stayed for about a week and we profiled these birds in the March E-bulletin Rarity Focus feature: [march 06.html](#)

There has been speculation that this year's Rhode-Island birds might be the same pair, returning to southern New England for a second winter.

Pink-footed Geese nest in Greenland, Iceland, and northern Norway (Spitsbergen), wintering normally in the British Isles and northwestern Europe. There have been about 16 records of the species in the U.S. and Canada, mostly within the past decade and a half.

This year's Rhode Island pair stayed much longer than last year's Connecticut duo, continuing to delight many birders from near and far. (The geese continued to be seen in the vicinity of the country club and farm as your editors readied this E-bulletin.)

As an added bonus, visiting birders have begun identifying other rare geese in the same general area - a classic example of the Patagonia Picnic-table Effect. Among the other rare geese present in the area are Cackling Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, and Barnacle Goose.

Here are some photos by Paul L'Etoile, from the day after the original discovery of the Pink-footed Geese:
http://www.intergate.com/~pletoile/misc_2007

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KITTLITZ'S MURRELET: "OUR OWN POLAR BEAR?"COL

In late December Secretary of the Interior, Dirk Kempthorne, proposed listing the Polar Bear as a Threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The rapid loss of the bear's Arctic sea-ice habitat threatens the very existence of this magnificent species. Considering the Polar Bear as Threatened species marks a turn by the Bush administration in its stance on global warming, and, if finalized, might lead to policy that could work toward ensuring the bear's future existence.

What many people don't realize is that the Polar Bear is not the only species whose survival is dependent on ice. There is at least one other emblematic ice-dependent species in North America, the Kittlitz's Murrelet.

The Kittlitz's Murrelet, an enigmatic alcid of the icy north, is sometimes referred to as the "Glacier Murrelet." The species forages during the short Arctic summer almost entirely at the face of tidewater glaciers, or near the outflow of glacier streams, and nests in remote alpine areas on bare patches of ground amid the ice and snow. This close association with glaciers is unique among seabirds. Moreover, the Kittlitz's Murrelet is distinguished from its closely related congener, the Marbled Murrelet, by its highly specific glacial- dependent habitat requirements.

Over the last decade and a half, Kittlitz's Murrelet surveys conducted in glacial zones embracing the majority of the species' population in Alaska, have shown that the alcids have declined by more than 80 or 90 percent. This corresponds to the rapid recession of glaciers and ice fields throughout Alaska, most likely the result of global warming.

In the words of researchers John Piatt (USGS) and Kathy Kuletz (USFWS), "The fate of the Kittlitz's Murrelet may hinge on the fate of Alaska's glaciers, and therefore Kittlitz's may be among the world's first avian species to succumb to the effects of rising global temperatures." For a look at the threat to Kittlitz's Murrelet, see a summary written by Piatt/Kuletz in 2005 for the Alaska Bird Observatory (ABO). The piece is called "Farewell to the Glacier Murrelet?": <http://www.alaskabird.org/>

Although there have been attempts over a number of years to safeguard Kittlitz's Murrelet under the Endangered Species Act, the bird has remained in the limbo of "candidate species" since early 2004. This category precludes the species from being subject to the regulatory protections of the Act. If Polar Bears deserve protection, then why not the Kittlitz's Murrelet?

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WETLANDS LOAN ACT REINTRODUCED

In early January, Senator Norm Coleman (R- MN) reintroduced the Wetlands Loan Act (S.272). This bill is similar to the one presented in the 109th Congress by Reps. M. Kennedy (R-MN) and M. Thompson (D-CA).

See our previous E-bulletin coverage here: [sep 05.html](#) and [mar 06.html](#)

The proposed Wetlands Loan Act could provide a \$400-million advance on funds made available for wetlands and grassland conservation. through the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp during the next decade. The idea is to secure currently available habitat (easements and fee-title from willing sellers) for the refuge system (i.e., properties that may not be on the market for long and /or properties that may be unavailable at affordable prices in the future.)

According to the draft bill, the cost of the loan would be offset by an incremental increase in the price of the annual Stamp.

The birds that would benefit from this funding would include waterfowl, shorebirds, marshbirds, raptors, as well as beleaguered wetland-and-grassland songbirds.

See more details on the current effort here: <http://www.pheasantsforever.org/press/release.php?releaseID=350> and <http://www.ducks.org/news/1064/WetlandsLoanActisRei.html>

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EU BANS WILD BIRD IMPORTS

The European Union (EU) has had a temporary ban on the importation of wild birds since October 2005. The ban, as part of a strategy to fight avian influenza, has been renewed several times and was due to expire next month. Instead, it was extended until June, and a permanent ban will take effect on 1 July.

Bird conservationists are praising this announcement made last month. This would allow only captive-bred birds into the EU, and it is expected to help conserve numerous species that have been threatened in recent decades by the international bird trade. The list of countries approved to export live captive birds into the EU would be limited to those already approved to export live poultry to EU markets: Australia, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Israel,

limited to those already approved to export live poultry to EU markets: Australia, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Israel, New Zealand, the U.S., and certain states in Brazil.

Europe has been the major market for the pet bird trade that negatively impacts a number of species. For example, between 2000 and 2003, more than 2.7 million birds listed by CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna) were imported into the EU - 93 percent of the global imports for these species.

For more information see the [BirdLife summary](#).

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LINKED FATES: ENDEMIC GRANADA DOVE AND SMALL PARK

The endemic Grenada Dove (*Leptotila wellsi*), National Bird of Grenada, faces a troubled future on that tiny Caribbean island. A small park, the 154-hectare Mount Hartman National Park, has long served as a core habitat and a stronghold for the dove. Since the establishment of the park in 1996, the numbers of Grenada Doves have increased to the point where they have re-populated adjacent lands, marginally adequate but significantly inferior in quality to Mount Hartman. It is likely that the protection of the National Park allowed the Grenada Dove population to survive the destruction of Hurricane Ivan in September 2004. More than half of all the remaining Grenada Doves on the island were in Mt. Hartman Estate and immediately surrounding forest when that storm hit Grenada.

Unfortunately a force more serious than a passing hurricane currently threatens the Grenada Dove. The proposed sale of the National Park for the development of a Four Seasons Hotel and luxury resort (golf course, condos, etc.) could lead to the destruction of the last primary home of this rare species.

Mount Hartman National Park cannot withstand the proposed development and still provide habitat for the Grenada Dove, as well as the threatened Grenada Hook-billed Kite (*Chondrohierax uncinatus uncinatus*), and several other uncommon species.

Go to the website for the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds for more details: http://www.scscb.org/news/Latest_News.htm and http://www.scscb.org/news/Take_action.htm

There have been a number of organizational sign-on letters recently and also a website entirely devoted to the international campaign of support for the dove: <http://www.grenadadovecampaign.com>

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IBA NEWS: PUERTO RICAN NIGHTJAR AT ADDITIONAL RISK

While on the subject of Caribbean birds, it might be instructive to consider the plight of the Puerto Rican Nightjar (*Caprimulgus noctitherus*) and the Important Bird Area (IBA) Program on that island. Although we usually focus on IBAs in the United States, there is a special connection to Puerto Rico because it is a U.S. territory and the administration of U.S. laws covers Puerto Rico and its birds.

Specifically a wind farm proposal slated for the Karso del Sur (south karst) region of Puerto Rico, directly intersects an IBA and merits special attention. Located in the southern part of the island, Karso del Sur is characterized by drained limestone-based dry forest. For a look at this unique area you may want to study the following work: <http://www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/2864>

In addition, the Karso del Sur IBA is the most significant remaining stronghold for the Puerto Rican Nightjar, a species reduced to a global population of 700 to 1,000 pairs. The wind project could jeopardize five percent of the global population of this critically endangered species, and according to Luis Silvestre, spokesman for the Puerto Rican Ornithological Society (SOPI), land displacement could impact 40 of 46 identified territories of this ground nesting species. It is unknown what additional damage could result to the remaining nightjars from nightly use of the wind-turbines.

Some groups have proposed that the impacted lands be acquired by the Commonwealth's Department of Natural and Environmental Resources and become part of a co-management plan with the nearby biosphere reserve/forest of Guanica.

For more information on this situation you can contact Luis Silvestre luissilv2000@gmail.com or see: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/01/puerto_rico_windfarms.html

For additional general information about the ongoing IBA Program in the United States, see: <http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/index.html>

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SPANISH-VERSION COMPANION AVAILABLE FOR DISTRIBUTION

As we mentioned in the November 2006 E-bulletin, Birders' Exchange, a program of the American Birding Association, recently finished its Spanish-language translation of the highly acclaimed book, *A NEOTROPICAL COMPANION* by John Kricher. This project was a cumulative effort involving dozens of volunteer translators

CONTRIBUTION, by JOHN KREMER. This project was a cumulative effort involving dozens of volunteer translators.

See our previous coverage here for details on the book and involved parties for this version: [nov 06.html](#).

Birders' Exchange plans to distribute copies of the book at no cost to conservation-oriented individuals and organizations throughout Spanish-speaking Latin America and the Caribbean. Volunteer couriers traveling throughout the Neotropics are already distributing copies of the book.

For information on how to help distribute copies, please contact: [Betty Petersen bpetersen@aba.org](mailto:Betty.Petersen@aba.org) or [Elissa LaVoie elavoie@aba.org](mailto:Elissa.LaVoie@aba.org)

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MIDWAY NWR VISITOR-AND-CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

The USFWS and NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) have issued a draft plan for allowing a regularly scheduled visitor program to resume on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. The previous visitor program was closed in January 2002. This new plan proposes a small-scale visitor program for the remote atoll, primarily for wildlife viewing, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. (It would allow up to 30 overnight guests on Midway at any one time during 2007, and possibly higher numbers in the future, depending on lodging and transportation.)

The plan also outlines such items as boat limitations, activity restrictions, visitor fees, permit requirements and staffing. Comments on the draft plan will be accepted through 6 February. Details are available at: <http://www.fws.gov/midway/VSP/MidwayVSPindex.html>

Midway Atoll NWR is embedded in the newly established Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument, and is potentially the most-accessible island within the Monument. When the Monument's creation was covered in the July E-bulletin, it was stressed that Congress needs to follow up the establishment with appropriate funding. For more details see: [jul 06.html](#).

Linked to that funding is the condition of breeding birds on the atoll. Circumstances on Midway, home to the world's largest breeding colony of globally vulnerable Laysan Albatrosses, present a danger to the birds. Lead poisoning from the peeling paint on historic Midway buildings is killing birds. Albatross nestlings that have been raised within a few yards of decaying buildings exhibit deadly "droopwing," a condition caused by lead ingestion. The situation has the potential to kill tens of thousands of these magnificent albatrosses in the next decade.

The cost of removing the lead paint from the buildings is an estimated \$5.6 million, but the Department of the Interior claims that the funds are not currently available. See details from the American Bird Conservancy here: <http://www.albatrossaction.org/>

This situation illustrates an ongoing problem at various NWRs, where the transfer of military-installation-to-refuge has not been accompanied by sufficient funding to "clean up" existing toxic wastes. Some problems are obvious, while others are not unearthed for decades, whether they be on the remote Aleutians, on Midway, at Mountain Longleaf NWR (Alabama), or at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (just 10 minutes outside downtown Denver). Clearly, additional Department of Defense (DoD) funding needs to be made available here, even if it means covering retroactive transfers, rather than dipping into currently shrinking Interior or Refuge coffers.

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NWRA/NFWF HONORING REFUGE STANDOUTS

The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) will honor refuge supporters and employees in March with the presentation of the 2007 National Wildlife Refuge System Awards.

The 2007 Refuge Volunteer, Friends Group, Manager, and Employee of the Year awards recognize exceptional contributions made by refuge employees and volunteers toward protecting the Refuge System. Two awards will be presented in conjunction with the 2007 Refuge Friends "Beyond the Boundaries" workshop in early March in Washington, DC. Two awards will also be presented in conjunction with the 72nd North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference scheduled for late March in Portland, Oregon.

The Volunteer of the Year Award will go to Marion Sansing, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Mississippi. The Friends Group of the Year Award will go to Friends of San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges, Colorado. The Paul Kroegel Refuge Manager of the Year Award will go to Don Hultman, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, Minnesota. The Refuge System Employee of the Year Award will go to William Giese, Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, Maryland.

To learn more about the Refuge System Awards and the remarkable conservation and service work performed by those honored, see the most recent [press release](#).

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

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

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