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About

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Programs

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## SWAROVSKI BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE NORTH AMERICAN SWAROVSKI BIRDING COMMUNITY

**\*Information, communication, and inspiration on birds, wildlife, and nature\***

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January 2005

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Table of Contents:

- [THE START OF A NEW YEAR](#)
- [RARITY FOCUS](#)
- [NEW YORK CITY RED-TAILED HAWKS EVICTED AND RE-SETTLED](#)
- [GLASS, BIRDS, AND THE FUTURE COLLIDE](#)
- [ANWR STILL IN THE NEWS](#)
- [MORE YOUNG FLYING CONDORS](#)
- [FIRST NORTHERN BOBWHITE CONSERVATION AWARD ANNOUNCED](#)
- [OWL VISITORS FROM AFAR](#)

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### **THE START OF A NEW YEAR**

Welcome to the ninth of our "Swarovski Birding E-bulletins" for North America, and the first issue for 2005. This communication is appearing every month, and it is intended to keep friends and associates informed about ongoing developments in the world of birds, birding, and bird conservation.

As 2004 was closing, a friend reminded us that three weeks previously the major concern confronting the Sri Lanka Ministry of Health was the possible presence of avian flu on the island. That's very much "old news" now. The tragedy of the post-Christmas tsunami event along multiple coastlines of the Indian Ocean and in Southeast Asia cannot be fully grasped by most of us. This catastrophe illustrates, among so many other things, the fragility of our lives and of this planet.

We hope that as we get into 2005 we can all recommit ourselves to taking care of our fellow human beings and the precious world we all share. We surely need an appropriate balance of material well-being and spiritual comfort. As John Muir said a century ago, "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul."

We also begin this year with a new partner in producing and distributing this E-bulletin, the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA). There will be more about that relationship and its implications as the year goes on.

In the meantime, we welcome your distribution of all or parts of this E-bulletin, only requesting mention of the material's origins. If you have a friend who wants to get onto this E-bulletin mailing list, that person can contact either of us: Wayne Petersen 781/293-9730, [wayne.petersen@swarovskibirding.com](mailto:wayne.petersen@swarovskibirding.com) OR Paul Baicich 410/992-9736, [paul.baicich@swarovskibirding.com](mailto:paul.baicich@swarovskibirding.com)

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **RARITY FOCUS**

The mega-rarity of the month was a Redwing (a thrush from Eurasia, not our blackbird) discovered by Gene Revelas on December 20th in Olympia, Washington. Most mornings and some afternoons through the end of the month, the bird could be found accompanying American Robins feeding in holly and in other vegetation in a mainly residential area of town often near 4th and Decatur or 5th and Rodgers. The Redwing's whereabouts mid-day is frustratingly unknown, despite area searching by many bands of desperate birders. With American Robins flying from point to point in the neighborhood, groups of birders are often spread out afar in hopes of encountering the Redwing.

The species, smaller than a robin and not unlike one of our native brown thrushes, has been found in North America fewer than a dozen times, mainly in Newfoundland or elsewhere in Atlantic Canada. The species normally ranges from Iceland across Western Europe to Russia and eastern Siberia. Bright eye and cheek stripes are obvious in this individual, and at most angles so are the whitish underparts, with rusty along the flanks and under the wing. In flight, the bird exhibits an odd twisting motion, very unlike the accompanying robins.

Two aspects of this rarity experience are particularly noteworthy: first, the neighbors in this residential quarter are welcoming and gracious, now well aware of the notoriety of their local avian visitor; second, searching birders are regularly and effectively using FRS radios to stay in communications throughout the neighborhood, utilizing channel 11, subcode 22.

As is sometimes the case with rarities, at least a few local residents are "sure" that the Redwing has been in the neighborhood "for months." More to the point and as always seems to be the case with these claims, it's hard to establish if they are true!

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **NEW YORK CITY RED-TAILED HAWKS EVICTED AND RE-SETTLED**

The real avian mega-celebrities of the month were, clearly Pale Male and Lola, the adult Red-tailed Hawks nesting on 927 Fifth Avenue, across the street from Central Park in New York City. This was a bird story that captured the imagination of millions last month. If you missed it, perhaps you were out of the country or maybe on another planet in December.

In short, the nest of Pale Male and his current female mate, Lola, were removed from the elegant cornice of a posh 12-story building on 7 December. Clearly, the building residents' board thought that the disposal of the unsightly nest would be easily accomplished, despite the fact that the nest had been lovingly monitored since 1993, with each of the 25 young watched closely by admiring New York birders.

The resulting uproar was expected as well as heartening. Regular coverage of protests on the national nightly news and CNN were soon followed by print coverage in THE NEW YORK TIME, BUSINESS WEEK, and elsewhere. Eventually, the story was picked up by the media from Paris to Sydney. Obviously, the building's board had a major public relations disaster on its hands. (Internal strife within the building was also obvious, with residents like Mary Tyler Moore taking the side of the Red-tailed hawks and the birds' supporting demonstrators.)

Everyone from the New York City Parks Commissioner, the city Department of Environmental Protection, the USFWS, and the National Audubon Society were called into service. There were heavies and heroes, villains and cameo roles in this hawk-drama. Clearly, however, it was the local steward of the nest-site who had to be regarded. Nothing short of the re-establishment of the nest site would do.

The entire drama was a fine reminder of how different people actually make connections with nature and that even in bustling New York City the need to associate with the natural world is an indispensable constant. It also illustrated the ongoing debate over differing concepts about public space versus private needs.

After more than two weeks of strife, a resolution was reached just before Christmas. Rather than simply replacing the "pigeon spikes" which served to anchor the old nest, an entire molded platform and rail-guard was designed and put in place. (Ostensibly, this will serve to "safeguard residents and passers-by" and also makes possible the temporary removal for facade inspection and maintenance without disturbing a single twig of the nest.)

Within the first day of available occupancy, both Pale Male and Lola were visiting the site. Given the expected tempo of Red-tailed Hawk nesting, the serious rebuilding of the nest could begin by the end of this month.

E-bulletin readers may be interested in knowing that Swarovski Optik of North America contributed a scope (model ATS 80, 20-60x) and tripod to the birder-stewards who have been watching and documenting the nest for years and who spoke out on behalf of Pale Male and Lola after their eviction. We hope the equipment will be used and enjoyed by numerous hawk admirers for years to come.

If you want more information and photos on the progress of the situation try visiting these sites for starters:

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<http://www.palemale.com/>  
<http://www.mariewinn.com/disc.htm>

(By the way, in nearby Central Park, a Boreal Owl, extremely rare for the area and never before seen in the park, was sighted during the Christmas Bird Count on 19 December. It was perched in an evergreen by the entrance to the Tavern on the Green restaurant, a major tourist attraction. Ever since its discovery, the Boreal Owl has been roosting in the same area and attracting crowds of courteous visitors.)

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **GLASS, BIRDS, AND THE FUTURE COLLIDE**

In March, there will be a unique one-day conference in Chicago on the subject of birds, buildings, and glass. The conference, "Birds and Buildings: Creating a Safe Environment," will be held on 11 March 2005. The event is being organized by the Chicago Department of the Environment, the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, and the Chicago Ornithological Society, among others.

Over a billion birds are estimated to strike windows in the U.S. every year. The goal of this conference is to initiate a serious dialogue between bird advocates and the architectural industry and to come up with meaningful, bird-compatible, design solutions to the collision problem.

You can find details here: <http://www.birdsandbuildings.org/index1024.htm>.

On a related note, this effort parallels this year's International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) theme for 2005 - collisions and birds. (More on that in a future E-bulletin.)

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **ANWR STILL IN THE NEWS**

The debate over whether to open the 1.5 million-acre coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to energy development is expected to reappear once again in the 109th Congress. The increased number of members in Congress who favor drilling could give pro-drilling forces a crucial edge this year. Approval, however, is far from assured. Drilling advocates still do not have the 60 votes needed to overcome a filibuster. Still, they could try to attach language opening drilling at ANWR through a budget reconciliation measure, a procedure which would require only a simple majority vote (51) for passage. In 2003, moves to allow drilling at ANWR narrowly lost 52-48 on a vote for an amendment to strip drilling language from the budget.

In the meantime, for some creative and bird-oriented activity on ANWR (especially dealing with shorebirds), see the work being conducted by the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences:

<http://www.shorebirdworld.org/template.php?q=5&c=39>

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **MORE YOUNG FLYING CONDORS**

Last month we brought attention to the first young California Condor to fledge in 22 years in California. (This was near the Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in Ventura County, California, a 2,417-acre refuge established in 1974 to protect the officially Endangered California Condor.)

Unfortunately, we neglected to mention the latest two young California Condors to fly in the Arizona experimental flock. That event happened at the end of November, at Thanksgiving time.

Biologists, volunteers, and condor supporters in Arizona were holding their breath during November, waiting for two wild-hatched chicks to stretch their wings and take their risky inaugural flights. By Thursday afternoon, 25 November 2004, both chicks, just over six months old, successfully fledged, one at the Vermilion Cliffs, the other at the Grand Canyon.

Find more details here: [http://www.peregrinefund.org/press\\_full.asp?id=89&category=California %20Condor](http://www.peregrinefund.org/press_full.asp?id=89&category=California%20Condor)

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### **FIRST NORTHERN BOBWHITE CONSERVATION AWARD ANNOUNCED**

Northern Bobwhite is a species in trouble. Many birders probably do not realize that since 1980 Northern Bobwhite populations have declined by 65% throughout the entire range of the species. While many factors have contributed to this decline in quail numbers, the primary cause has been landscape level changes in habitat quality. Fortunately, there have been some significant recovery efforts initiated, and these can now be

recognized.

In cooperation with the Southeast Quail Study Group (SEQSG), Quail Unlimited recently announced the first annual Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative Group Achievement Award. The award - accepting nominations now - will recognize outstanding action and involvement by an agency, organization, or group in implementing and promoting the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative.

Nominations for the award should include contact information for the nominated agency, organization, or group nominee, along with background history, a concise summary of NBCI-related activities that justifies the nomination, and nominator contact information. Submissions should not exceed four double-spaced pages. Nominations must be submitted in Word format to [bobwhite@psci.net](mailto:bobwhite@psci.net) or faxed to 812-536-3159, and must be received by 15 January 2005. For any additional information, call 812-536-2272.

The inaugural award will be presented at the 70th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference on Friday, 18 March 2005 at the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Arlington, Virginia.

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **OWL VISITORS FROM AFAR**

We end with a quick note from Minnesota. Yes, it's a fine "owl year" with lots of excitement. For example, there were 1,300 Great Gray Owls counted as of the last week of December! Many birders have been afield enjoying the experience, and many of them are coming from afar. Minnesota Audubon has been collecting information, via e-mail birding list appeals, on birders who have traveled to Minnesota to view this owl event. Twenty-seven states are represented so far. Nice!

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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*If you have a friend who wants to get future copies of the North American Swarovski Birding E-bulletin, have them contact:*

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