



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

January 2010

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. This issue is sponsored by the [Wild Bird Centers of America](#) and the [National Bird-Feeding Society](#). You can access an archive of past E-bulletins in our newsletter [archives](#).

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RARITY FOCUS

In the late afternoon of 21 December, birders Rick Snider and Rick Nirschl discovered a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron (*Tigrisoma mexicanum*), in the Lower Rio Grande Valley near the levee at the entrance to Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, not far from McAllen, Texas. The bird was studied for nearly an hour, and was observed by about a dozen other birders.

If this report is accepted this would be a first occurrence for North America. Ordinarily the Bare-throated Tiger-Heron ranges from southern Tamaulipas and southern Sonora in Mexico, south through Central America into northwestern Colombia. The species occurs in a variety of coastal and fresh water situations, typically characterized as forest-edged aquatic habitats. Usually a solitary species, this tiger-heron tends to forage alone, primarily at dusk or after dark.

The Bare-throated Tiger-Heron is not pictured in any North American field guide; however, it is depicted in a number of Mexican or Central American guides. Snider and Nirschl actually got some fine photographs on the day they discovered the tiger-heron which may be seen at:

<http://marybirds.blogspot.com/2009/12/bare-throated-tiger-heron-hidalgo.html>

For the rest of December, it was seen virtually every day from the levee, but mostly in the late afternoon or early evening, sometimes in the early morning, often flying over the site. Some birders had long and frustrating waits.

For a local news report on the bird (from 27 December), see here:

www.spislandbreeze.com/articles/snider-8453-started-rick.htm

The many birders who came to the area seeking a glimpse of the bird appreciated the thoughtfulness of the staff at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park (i.e., their World Birding Center) for making special arrangements to accommodate them, including allowing visitor access to a portion of the park not usually open to the public. The park staff even provided guided walks during normal business hours to the pond area on the south side of the levee where the Bare-throated Tiger-Heron was thought to be spending some of its time.

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ANOTHER GREAT RARITY

A bird which nearly made the December E-bulletin and this month's E-bulletin "rarity of the month," but was trumped by Pink-footed Geese in the Northeast for November and by the tiger-heron for December, was a spectacular and cooperative Ivory Gull in Cape May harbor, New Jersey.

Discovered by Jim Dowdell the day after Thanksgiving, the immature Ivory Gull delighted many visiting birders for days. It was at the Bree-Zee Lee Marina, where the management was most tolerant of the hordes of visiting birders who came to see the bird. This was the first Ivory Gull ever recorded in Cape May County and the first of its kind to be seen in New Jersey in almost a quarter century.

Like the two Ivory Gulls that entertained gleeful birders in Massachusetts in January of 2009, the Cape May gull was exceedingly cooperative. See here for our coverage of the Massachusetts experience:
www.refugeassociation.org/birding/febSBC09.html#TOC02

To see some photos from Cape May taken by Scott Whittle and Karl Lukens, see the following:
www.scottwhittleevents.com/Nature/Ivory-Gull-Day-2/10473019_NRdGw/1/726618935_wRS0x#726619020_ZO27V
<http://home.comcast.net/~iklukens/GoodBirds2009/Pages/IvoryGull11-28-09.htm>
And from the Press of Atlantic City (1 December), 19 great photos can be seen at:
<http://pressofac.mycapture.com/mycapture/enlarge.asp?image=26979019&event=900232&CategoryID=7628>

Ivory Gulls are birds of the High Arctic; however, as many as 50 or more were found in Canada's Atlantic Provinces last winter, mostly in Newfoundland and Labrador, and about evenly divided between adults and first-year birds. Their presence in such large numbers last year was attributed to a lack of sea ice and strong northeasterly winds last winter. Perhaps those same actors will prove to exist this year.

The Cape May Ivory Gull was definitely seen daily from 27 November to 9 December, but not with certainty since then.

According to the folks at the Cape May Bird Observatory, "well over 1,000 people" came to see the bird. That's a lot of enthusiastic avitourists!

CAPE HATTERAS SEASHORE DECISION PENDING?

Cape Hatteras National Seashore (U.S. National Park Service) in North Carolina is currently developing alternatives for the regulation of off-road vehicle (ORV) use on the seashore's 67 miles of ocean beach. The ORV regulations will determine how natural resources (e.g., shorebirds, waterbirds, and sea turtles) will be protected. This could also set a precedent for standards being developed for Cape Lookout National Seashore (also in North Carolina), and possibly other National Seashores as well.

To see a letter being sent to the National Park Service by scientists and wildlife professionals, along with other documents related to the issue (e.g., USGS Protocols for Cape Hatteras National Seashore, population trends for nesting birds and sea turtles, conservation and recovery plans, literature review) check:
<http://nc.audubon.org/birds-science-education/995786>

One would hope that the National Seashore will be managed in a way that will ensure the well-being of birds and other natural resources along with measured seasonal and habitat restrictions on ORV access. Not only would this be crucial for nesting birds, it would also be vital for migrating and wintering birds, shorebirds and terns in particular. This is not a matter of being "anti-ORV use," but rather "appropriate-ORV use."

COSEWIC: MORE BIRDS IN TROUBLE

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) met in Ottawa in late November to assess risks facing Canadian wildlife species. The Birds Specialist Subcommittee upgraded two species to a higher category of risk.

The first, Chestnut-collared Longspur, was designated Threatened. Monitoring has shown that serious population declines for this species since the 1960s are still continuing, (albeit at a slower rate. This prairie grassland specialist is particularly threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation resulting from road development associated with the energy sector.

The second, Bicknell's Thrush, previously considered a species of Special Concern, was raised to a designation of Threatened. Data from the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project and the High Elevation Landbird Program were instrumental in this consideration, documenting declines in their respective areas over the last three generations. While reasons for the decline are unclear, habitat loss on the wintering grounds, management practices such as pre-commercial forest thinning in regenerating forests, and climate change are all suspected of reducing suitable high-elevation habitat.

More information on the meeting and these two species can be found on the COSEWIC website:
www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct5/index_e.cfm

PARTNERS IN FLIGHT: TWO DECADES OF BIRD CONSERVATION

In 2010, Partners in Flight (PIF) will be celebrating 20 years of bird conservation activity. Launched in 1990, PIF arose in response to concerns over disturbing declines among Neotropical migrant landbirds - those which breed in North America and winter in Latin America and the Caribbean. PIF's main message has been that the resources of public and private organizations in this hemisphere have to be combined, coordinated, and increased in order to conserve our shared bird population resource.

There will be events and products throughout the year to highlight the PIF anniversary. For example, PIF will share the spotlight in the IMBD theme, "The Power of Partnerships." For details see: www.birdday.org

Another celebratory event already scheduled is a Special Session at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Milwaukee on 22-27 March 2010: www.wildlifemanagementinstitute.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=43&Itemid=120

For more details on PIF and the 20th Anniversary, see: www.partnersinflight.org/

NEW COFFEE REPORT FROM SMBC

Last month, the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (SMBC) released a report on "The Global Market" for their certified "Bird Friendly" coffee.

The SMBC's stringent standards require that its "Bird Friendly" coffee be both organically grown and meet specific shade-grown criteria. Its seal is considered by many to be the "Gold Standard" in shade-coffee certification. You can access the nine-page marketing report at:

http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Coffee/Bird_Friendly/global_market.cfm

BOOK NOTES: INVASIVES?

Yes, this is another "non-bird" book. The title is BRINGING NATURE HOME by Douglas Tallamy (2007, Timber Press).

We probably should have drawn attention to this volume months ago, but somehow this book managed to fly under our radar. After all, a book about the importance of native plants, hungry native insects, the biological consequences of the historic American quest for suburban tranquility, and the overuse of alien ornamentals couldn't be about birds, could it? Wrong. Tallamy's main message about the plant/insect connection is intimately related to the survival of birds, their reproductive success, their food, and their ultimate future.

Tallamy graphically illustrates the mantra of how everything in nature is connected to everything else, beginning in our very own backyards. The book is well illustrated and accompanied by superb captions. Indeed, Tallamy brings to the reader, in plain yet well-crafted American English, an essential defense of native plants as crucial to our biological balance and the future of "reconciliation ecology."

RED KNOT WORKING GROUP HAS FIRST MEETING

Almost three dozen participants from seven countries came together in November in coastal Georgia for the first-ever meeting of the Red Knot Working Group. Convened by Larry Niles (Conserve Wildlife Foundation) and Charles Duncan (Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences/WHSRN), the group focused on the development of a "business plan" for recovering the "rufa" subspecies of the Red Knot. The recovery effort focused specifically on strategies for stopover sites and Red Knot wintering grounds.

Hopefully, this Working Group will meet annually. You can find details on the international meeting at: www.whsrn.org/news/article/1st-meeting-red-knot-calidris-canutus-working-group

L.A. COURT RULING AGAINST FERAL CAT COLONIES

Six bird and conservation groups won an important lawsuit in early December against the City of Los Angeles and its Department of Animal Services to stop the practice of encouraging feral cat colonies until the legally required environmental impact reviews have been performed.

The Los Angeles Superior Court found that the City of Los Angeles had been "secretly and unofficially" promoting "Trap-Neuter-Return" (TNR), a controversial program allowing feral cats to run free, even while the Department of Animal Services promised to conduct an environmental review of the program.

In June 2005, the L.A. Board of Animal Services Commissioners adopted TNR as the "preferred method of dealing with feral cat populations as its official policy." The Department issued coupons for free or discounted spay/neuter procedures for feral cats being returned to neighborhoods and open spaces and encouraged and assisted in establishing new feral cat colonies at city-owned properties, including parks and wildlife areas. The Department also began refusing to accept trapped feral cats, or to issue permits to city residents to trap feral cats.

The plaintiffs in this case wished to ensure that the controversial TNR program along with the maintenance of feral cat colonies would not be allowed until a complete public environmental analysis (under the California Environmental Quality Act - CEQA) has been finished.

The City must now halt its TNR program. Further proposals to implement such a program must undergo objective scientific review as part of the CEQA process. This process has been designed to allow for public comment and for an assessment of significant impacts on parks, wildlife, water quality, and human health.

The American Bird Conservancy, one of the plaintiffs in the case, summarized the court finding here: www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/stories/091208.html

IBA NEWS: FULL FUNDING FOR LWCF?

The importance of a meaningful Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has appeared numerous times in this E-bulletin, most recently in August 2009 where a new assessment of LWCF was described:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/auqSBC09.html#TOC03

The LWCF, a "conservation royalty account" from offshore oil and gas lease revenue going into the U.S. Treasury, has been critical in securing many locations designated as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the U.S. The LWCF is a funding vehicle that has been responsible for the creation and development of more than 40,000 national, state, and local parks, refuges, forests, and recreation areas in all fifty states, and 98% of all U.S. counties. Many birding hotspots have been preserved or enhanced through the LWCF.

Created in 1965, the LWCF reached its highest authorized level in 1977. At that point, the conservation royalty account reached \$900 million allowable per year, half for federal acquisition and half for state and local projects: \$450 million federal and \$450 million stateside. Adjusted for inflation, that would translate to \$3.2 billion per year in today's economy.

But just because the \$900 million per year is made available, it doesn't mean that it is ever appropriated by Congress. In fact, for a period beginning in 2000, a portion of LWCF monies was also shamelessly diverted to other programs. Only once in the history of LWCF has all the designated money been used for the original intent. Even this year, when the LWCF received over \$300 million – its greatest allocation in many years – it is still only a third of what it is supposed to be. In the meantime, there is a backlog of more than \$30 billion worth of lands that federal agencies would like to protect and a list of state and local land-based projects that go wanting.

There is some good news, however. U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Max Baucus (D-MT) introduced the Land and Water Conservation Authorization and Funding Act (S. 2747) two months ago that would permanently provide \$900 million annually to the LWCF. In addition, a provision within the House Resource Committee by Chairman Nick Rahall's (D-WV) Consolidated Land, Energy, and Aquatic Resources (CLEAR) Act (HR 3534) would also provide dedicated LWCF funding.

If these proposals move, the LWCF could continue to expand land acquisition at some of America's most famous and bird-filled federal locations, including national wildlife refuges, national parks, national forests, as well as increasing the size of various state and local parks.

LWCF expansion could be crucial to broadening a growing and vibrant IBA effort.

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:
www.audubon.org/bird/iba/

HOG ISLAND TO REOPEN

The natural history camp at Hog Island in Muscongus Bay, Maine, first opened in 1936, at which time Roger Tory Peterson was its first bird instructor and Allan D. Cruickshank was his assistant. Hog Island was acquired the year before by the National Association of Audubon Societies, the predecessor of today's National Audubon. Hog Island became well known within America's conservation and birding communities as a distinguished and beautiful place for learning and enjoyment. The 330-acre spruce-covered island retained its respected status as a center for nature education for decades.

Known to thousands as the Audubon Camp in Maine, Hog Island was closed during the summer of 2009 in order to plan for the future. Fortunately, this summer legendary Hog Island will reopen. Directed by Steve Kress, National Audubon's VP for Bird Conservation and "Father of Project Puffin," Steve will be joined by some of the country's top bird instructors, including Greg Budney, Pete Dunne, Lang Elliott, Kenn Kaufman, Kim Kaufman, and Scott Weidensaul.

Five sessions are currently planned. More will surely follow. For details, see:
www.projectpuffin.org/OrnithCamps.html

TIP OF THE MONTH: LAUNCH A BIRD-FILLED NEW YEAR

It's a new year – 2010. And it's time to resolve once again to make the most of enjoying a year filled with birds and nature. But making that resolution only for yourself is insufficient. That would be self-indulgent!

Sure, enjoy the year. Fill it with birds, with nature, with travel, and with enjoyment. But also try to fill it with other kindred souls.

For example, re-read the previous note about Hog Island. Every one of Hog Island's instructors will SHARE the joys and wonder of birds, bird ID, bird sounds, and bird conservation with others. Yet they could probably just as easily spend that time doing something for themselves.

No, you may not be a Lang, or a Pete, or a Kenn, or a Kim, but you can be YOU, and you can just as easily share the excitement of birds and nature with others, regardless of whether they are old non-birding friends, new acquaintances, young children, or even your city councilman!

You'll feel better about your birding enjoyment in 2010, and so will they.

You can access past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website:
www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html

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