



## THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

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January 2011

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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](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html)

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### RARITY FOCUS

On the morning of 21 November, Matt VanWallene found and photographed a Tufted Flycatcher at Big Bend National Park, Texas. The bird was found at the park's Rio Grande Village, about halfway between the RV-hookup campground and Daniels Ranch at the west end of Rio Grande Village. The bird was perched atop a tree on the border of mowed grass and riverbank growth.

This flycatcher species is mostly resident from northern Mexico to central South America, but is accidental in the southwestern United States, with fewer than a half-dozen records, mostly from Texas or Arizona (and in 2005 from Nevada). Curiously, one of these previous records occurred at Big Bend from 3 November 1991 to 17 January 1992.

In case you are unfamiliar with this handsome little flycatcher, you can either check an appropriate Latin American field guide or the fifth edition of the National Geographic guide (p. 302-3). To view photos taken by VanWallene at Big Bend, see:

[www.narba.org/default.aspx?menuitemid=208](http://www.narba.org/default.aspx?menuitemid=208)

The Tufted Flycatcher was seen most days between late November and at least 20 December by most birders willing to journey to this relatively remote location. After 20 December it was seen sporadically through the end of the month.

### SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSSES: U.S. PACIFIC NESTS

The Short-tailed Albatross was once the most abundant of the North Pacific albatross species, numbering more than a million individuals. . By the beginning of the 20th century the species had been nearly devastated by feather hunting and by the late 1940s was thought to be extinct. In the early 1950s, ten pairs were discovered breeding on the volcanic island of Torishima, Japan. Since then the world population has reached an estimated 3,000 individuals, with most on Torishima, with others on the Senkaku Islands in Japan.

The species is currently listed as Endangered throughout its range under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Outside the breeding season, Short-tailed Albatrosses ranges along the coasts of eastern Russia, Korea, China, Taiwan, the Aleutian and the Hawaiian Islands, and, rarely, the Pacific Coast of North America south to California. Pelagic birders from Alaska to California are constantly on the lookout for the species.

As far back as the 1930s, Short-tailed Albatrosses have on occasion mingled, but never nested, among Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses at Midway Atoll, including nest-building by females and infertile eggs laid in the 1990s. Accordinalv. the recent discoverv of a nest on Kure Atoll. and another on Midwav Atoll National Wildlife Refuee in

November could mark a potential turning point for this rare seabird species.

A Short-tailed Albatross nest with two eggs was reported on 213-acre Kure Atoll, apparently being tended by two females, raising doubt about whether the eggs were fertile. On Midway Atoll, however, a mated pair has been incubating a single egg on Eastern Island. This pair has been regularly sharing incubation duties. The adult male of the pair was banded as a fledgling on Torishima Island in 1987, and the female was similarly banded in 2003. The current nest is in a plot of model Short-tailed Albatross decoys placed to attract the species and is being monitored daily by a remote video camera.

If successful, hatching will be in mid-to-late January.

Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge is home to millions of seabirds as well as many historically important structures dating back to World War II. Both Midway and Kure Atolls are part of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument designated by President George W. Bush in 2006.

You can find more details about the nesting albatrosses here:

[www.acap.aq/latest-news/another-acap-exclusive-and-another-short-tailed-albatross-nest-in-hawaii](http://www.acap.aq/latest-news/another-acap-exclusive-and-another-short-tailed-albatross-nest-in-hawaii)

### **IBA NEWS: GEORGIA-PACIFIC POLICY SHIFT FAVORS IBAs**

Five areas in South Carolina, Virginia, and North Carolina designated as U.S. Important Bird Areas (IBAs) will benefit from a new Georgia-Pacific forest policy shift.

This giant wood and paper products manufacturer announced recently that it will no longer buy wood fiber from Southeastern areas identified as environmentally sensitive, or from land where slow-growing hardwood forests have been cleared in order to plant quick-growing pine.

Georgia-Pacific worked with scientists and environmental groups including the Rainforest Action Network, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Dogwood Alliance to identify 11 of these sensitive sites. Five of these 11 areas are either parts of designated IBAs or adjacent to designated IBAs: Francis Marion National Forest (SC-8,000 acres), Congaree Swamp (SC-26,000 acres), Alligator River Region (NC-213,000 acres), Great Dismal Swamp (VA-180,000 acres), and Croatan National Forest (NC-40,000 acres).

You can find more information here:

[www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/101214.html](http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/101214.html)

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

[www.audubon.org/bird/iba/](http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/)

### **PROPOPOSAL TO PROTECT TWO MILLION ACRES OF GRASSLAND**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering spending \$600 million or more over the next couple of decades in a major effort to protect 2 million acres of prime grassland bird habitat across the Dakotas. This proposed "Dakotas Grassland Conservation Area" currently contains millions of glacier-formed, water-filled depressions ("potholes") and broad swaths of prairie that wetland and grassland birds need for breeding habitat.

The proposal has initially identified 1.7 million acres of grassland and 240,000 acres of wetland for conservation. Additional efforts will still be needed in order to save 10 million acres of valuable grassland and 1.8 million acres of important wetland across the area.

As a grassland corollary to the Service's Small Wetlands Acquisition Program, the plan could become an easement-driven delivery system for prairie conservation, something which is currently a major bird-conservation need. This is particularly important since grassland birds have experienced faster and more disturbing declines than any other group of North American birds, and also because the region under consideration constitutes the major "duck factory" for North America.

Under the proposal, the Service would hold perpetual conservation easements for willing landowners to use as "working landscapes" (usually functioning ranches) with funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

The entire proposal is under consideration, and initial comments have been extended through 14 January. See here for more details:

[www.fws.gov/audubon/grasslands/dgca\\_lpp\\_fact\\_sheet\\_web.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/audubon/grasslands/dgca_lpp_fact_sheet_web.pdf)

and

[www.devilslakejournal.com/newsnow/x2012969472/Feds-propose-protecting-2M-acres-of-native-prairie](http://www.devilslakejournal.com/newsnow/x2012969472/Feds-propose-protecting-2M-acres-of-native-prairie)

### **TIP OF THE MONTH: GET INTO GULLS**

Birders across North America have an opportunity to begin the New Year by studying an often maligned avian family – the Laridae, better known as gulls. Winter is often the best time to look through large flocks of gulls, especially on beaches, at dumps, or at power-plant outflows, particularly when searching for those much-desired rarer or specialty species among the more common gull species.

Some birders are intimidated or frustrated by gulls and their highly variable seasonal and sub-adult plumages, but winter is often the very best time of year to work on your gull ID skills, since gulls at this time of year often allow long and detailed studies, frequently at close range.

Even though this month's rarity was a Mexican flycatcher in Texas, there were other rarities among the contenders, many of which were gulls seen either in the U.S. or Canada (e.g., Ross's Gull [MI, SD-NE], Black-tailed Gull [NL], Yellow-legged Gull [NL] and Slaty-backed Gull [IL-IN, MN, NL, ON]). Depending upon the location, birders are also searching for species such as Little, Black-headed, Lesser Black-backed, Iceland, or Glaucous Gulls.

Central to this story is that winter offers a fine time to carefully study the field marks of gulls before you leave home. And learn to be patient; begin by learning the ID specifics of the gull species common to your area first. If you decide to go more deeply into the finer points of gull identification, we strongly suggest you consult GULLS OF THE AMERICAS by S.N.G.Howell and J. Dunn (2007):

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/julSBC07.html#TOC09](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/julSBC07.html#TOC09)

## **BOOK NOTES: ALL ABOUT NIAGARA BIRDS**

While we're on the subject of gulls, there is a fine new book out on birds of the Niagara region of Canada, a place where gulls actually attract many birders in winter. But Ontario's Niagara region offers much, much more than gulls, as this new book attests.

Some regional bird books contain essays of outstanding birding experiences and encounters; some are filled with detailed species accounts; some are studded with spectacular photo collections; and some are bird finding guides. NIAGARA BIRDS by John E. Black and Kayo J. Roy is all of these things, packed into 700 pages. The information is insightful, and the photos simply delicious.

The book starts with a broad geographical, historical, and ornithological orientation of the Niagara region. This is followed by 19 engaging and sometimes unconventional seasonal highlights written by a number of knowledgeable contributors, 368 thoughtful species accounts (with an emphasis on records between 1966 and 2006), and a fine series of useful details about hotspots and daytrip destinations in the region. Our only minor criticism of this otherwise stellar book is that this final bird finding section could have used a few more maps.

The book is a team effort led by Black and Roy, but supported by over three dozen additional contributors. The result is a highly satisfying book, both in design and in overall execution. As a consequence, this book could become a North American paragon for what a regional bird book should look like. We highly recommend it.

Finally, since this is a self-published book, you may have trouble finding it from the usual sources - either in regular stores or online - so you may want to view the volume's website:

[www.niagarabirds.ca/Niagara\\_Birds\\_home.html](http://www.niagarabirds.ca/Niagara_Birds_home.html)

## **AND THAT OTHER BOOK...**

A new record for the world's most expensive printed book was set last month. A four-volume copy of John James Audubon's elephantine BIRDS OF AMERICA was bought for \$11.6 million at auction at Sotheby's in London. The price went far beyond the expectations of \$6 million to \$9 million, and exceeded the \$8.8 million paid a decade ago for another copy of the work. (Only 119 copies still exist, so we urge readers to move quickly if they really want a set!)

Audubon (1785-1851) the self-taught ornithologist, naturalist, and painter struggled for almost a dozen years creating what we now view as a masterpiece.

Michael Tollemache, a London art dealer, bird enthusiast, and the book's new owner, remarked, "I think it's priceless, don't you?"

You can find more fine details here:

[www.thefiscaltimes.com/Issues/The-Economy/2010/12/08/Audubon-Bird-Sells-for-11-6-M.aspx](http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Issues/The-Economy/2010/12/08/Audubon-Bird-Sells-for-11-6-M.aspx)

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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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