



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

July 2007

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RARITY FOCUSThe E-bulletin rarity for June was a Plain-capped Starthroat found at Roy P. Drachman Agua Caliente Park in Tucson on 5 June. (For field-guide details on this species, see pp. 274-274 in the latest National Geographic guide, or the "big" Sibley, p. 293).

This hummingbird, a species found in arid habitats and riparian areas from southern Sonora, Mexico, to northwestern Costa Rica, has been reported in southern Arizona over 20 times since the first verified record in 1969. Although the species has occurred in U.S. from May to November, most records have been in late summer.

The starthroat at Agua Caliente Park was frequently found feeding in the park's salvia, or else perched on some nearby dead tree-branches. (Hummingbird fans should note that there are no feeders in the park; Pima County Parks has a rule against feeding animals, including, apparently, hummingbirds.)

On many days, the Plain-capped Starthroat was very difficult to find or else was missing entirely. It was reported, usually in the mornings, at least until 20 June, to the delight of those birders who were able to see it feeding at flowers or resting on bare tree-branches.

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KIRTLAND'S WARBLER NESTS IN WISCONSIN

The first confirmed Wisconsin nesting of the Federally Endangered Kirtland's Warbler occurred in central

The first confirmed Wisconsin nesting of the Federally Endangered Kirtland's Warbler occurred in central Wisconsin this year. This is a species currently found breeding only in Michigan until the recent Wisconsin breeding confirmation. Singing males (but no nests) have been observed in appropriate Jack Pine habitat in the past, but no positive breeding confirmation was obtained until this year.

Due to the sensitive nature of this nesting discovery, on private land, the exact site has not been disclosed. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been working with the landowner, the Plum Creek Timber Company, about management and monitoring of the warblers in Wisconsin.

For further information on the Kirtland's Warbler, see the State of Michigan web page:
http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10370_12145_12202-32591--,00.html

Also see this USFWS press release on the Wisconsin nesting record:
<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/News/Release07-59.html>

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HAWAIIAN PTERADROMA ON THE REBOUND

A previously little-known population of a Federally Endangered seabird, the Hawaiian Petrel (*Pterodroma sandwichensis*), has been steadily increasing on the forested slopes of the island of Lanai, Hawaii.

A team of researchers, headed by the University of Hawaii Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit, recently reported that the population of the burrow-nesting seabird is larger than anyone had previously expected.

"Absolutely everyone in this research community is amazed at how many birds there are there. It's one of the remarkable discoveries of this century," said Jay Penniman, an ornithologist with the Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit who is coordinating research on the Lanai birds. "Nobody dreamed in their wildest dreams that there was this sort of thing," added state wildlife biologist, Fern Duvall.

One of the conclusions of the new findings relates to the importance of the restoration of the habitat on Lanai, dating back to 1982 when feral goats were eradicated. When the last goats were removed from island, the uluhe fern (false staghorn) habitat began recovering, and the birds responded. Another factor is Lanai's minimal level of urbanization and the absence of light pollution.

There also are no mongooses, no pigs, and no goats on Lanai. There are a lot of deer, but the deer do not range on the steep-sloped cloud forests of Lanai where the nesting Hawaiian Petrels were found.

Another major discovery is that Hawaiian Petrels will feed thousands of miles north of Hawaii, in waters around the Aleutian Islands. Using U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) tracking equipment on several breeding birds on Lanai, researchers learned that the petrels are flying all the way to the Aleutian Islands and back to feed their chicks, 9,000 to 13,000 kilometers on a round-trip feeding run.

Researchers said that the Lanai population might be even larger than the estimated 1,200 petrels that nest in Haleakala Crater on the island of Maui (Haleakala National Park), the other major nesting site for the birds. "We haven't figured a way yet to assess the size of the [Lanai] population. There are more birds than we've seen anywhere. It is a larger population than we have seen on the island of Maui," Duvall said.

The research team acknowledged that support from landowner Castle & Cooke was essential to the study, as well as to the revival of the population. Castle & Cooke has led the effort to eradicate goats and set up fencing to protect the habitat from browsing deer.

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NEW FROM NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY: "COMMON BIRDS IN DECLINE"

Last month the National Audubon Society released "Common Birds in Decline," a report which combines results of the 40 years of the Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) and the USGS-backed Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) to provide a snapshot of the state of some of North America's "common" birds. The report was a collaborative effort, with input from state NAS offices and a select group of Important Bird Areas (IBA) coordinators.

"Common Birds in Decline" presents a distressing picture of what is happening to some of our most familiar birds. The review and its associated outreach activities are intended to build public awareness over the fate of such common species as Northern Pintail, Greater Scaup, Northern Bobwhite, Common Tern, Eastern Meadowlark, and Evening Grosbeak - all species which were found to have experienced nationwide population declines of greater than 70 percent over four decades.

The report does not suggest that these birds should become the focus of any new or special conservation efforts, but simply that their condition highlights important conservation concerns affecting a wider environment.

As such, the mantra of "keeping common species common" resonates clearly in this report.

the safety and manner of keeping common species common. Resources clearly in the report.

Details of "Common Birds in Decline" along with information on the methodology used can be found online at: <http://stateofthebirds.audubon.org/cbid/>

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YELLOW-BILLED LOON: THREATENED OR ENDANGERED?

Early last month the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced a 90-day finding to consider listing the Yellow-billed Loon as a Threatened or Endangered Species, under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. The data suggests that the action may be warranted.

The loon breeds in wet tundra along the coast of Alaska, Canada, and Russia. The USFWS estimates that there are only 16,500 loons in existence, with less than 5,000 in the U.S. Three-quarters of all Yellow-billed Loons in the U.S. may nest in areas within the Alaskan National Petroleum Reserve.

USFWS and petition details can be found at:

<http://alaska.fws.gov/mbsp/mbm/loons/species/Yellow-billed-loon.htm>

Comments and information must be submitted to the USFWS by 6 August 2007.

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EAGLE AND ESA SUCCESS

Touted by the media at the end of last month was the announcement by Secretary of the Interior, Dirk Kempthorne, that the Bald Eagle has been removed from the list of Threatened and Endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). After nearly disappearing from most of the U.S. decades ago, today the species flourishes across most of the nation and is deemed to no longer need the protection of the ESA.

For our March E-bulletin coverage on delisting see:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/marSBC07.html#TOC03>

and

<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/march07.html>

<<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/march07.html>>

This most recent move is evidence that the Endangered Species Act works, and that the recovery and delisting of species is possible.

Moreover, it is fitting that the delisting takes place on the heels of the May Centennial of the birth of Rachel Carson, the visionary eco-witness whose seminal work on pesticides actually made the salvation of the Bald Eagle possible.

The strictest remaining protection for the species continues under the Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940. Beside the killing of eagles, that law also prohibits "disturbing" Bald Eagles while they are nesting. Earlier in June, the USFWS clarified regulations implementing the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and published a set of National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines. Under these clarifications, "disturbing" now includes any human activity that would have the eagles move away from their nests. Developers whose operations drive the birds away will now fit the definition of "disturbing" and will be subject to legal sanctions.

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BIRDING TRENDS

Last month, the preliminary findings of the USFWS survey, "2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation" were released.

In the category of Wildlife Watching (where birding is the lion's share, by the way), the trends were all headed upward. From 2001 to 2006, the increase in both around home and away-from-home wildlife watching rose,

respectively, 8% and 5%. Of the 71 million people who enjoyed wildlife watching in 2006, almost a third (32%) took trips more than a mile away from home. Overall expenditures related to wildlife watching for the period increased a modest 2%, with trip-related spending up significantly, to an increase of 40%.

You can find the preliminary findings here:

http://library.fws.gov/nat_survey2006.pdf

Be aware that some minor findings may change slightly before the final report is released (due in November). Also be aware that the popular Forest-Service's National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) should also be released in the next few months. Comparisons between the two national surveys should be instructive.

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"SOCCER OWL" ON THE AIR

In early June, during a televised soccer match between Finland and Belgium, and after about 15 minutes of the start of the game, a huge Eagle Owl flew onto the field and landed on one of the goal posts. The game was stopped for seven minutes because the owl was sitting on the field and eventually on both goal posts. It also gently cruised around the field, as you can see on the posted video-clip. Apparently, the owl had a nest somewhere in the stadium. The video is in Finnish, and the audience is heard shouting, "Huuhkaja! Huuhkaja," meaning "Eagle Owl, Eagle Owl," as the owl is sitting on the crossbars goal. Check it out: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dMBFOiYxT0>

This remarkable sports-and-birds combination brought back at least one memory. It reminded us of a Monday Night Football game in the mid-1990s, when a migrant Sora landed on the edge of the field and was eventually broadcast to a vast TV audience.

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BOOK REVIEW: LARIDOMANIA

Modern birders have been treated to another new mega-treatise on gulls and their identification. Prior to this, however, there was Jonathan Dwight's pioneer work in 1925, followed in the 1980s by two editions of Peter Grant's "modern" gull identification guide. Then in 2004 gull aficionados were graced with a comprehensive European guide by K.M. Olsen and H. Larsson. And now we have, a new first in the Peterson Reference Guide series (Houghton Mifflin), GULLS OF THE AMERICAS by S.N.G.Howell and J. Dunn (2007).

Unlike Grant who used sketches and black-and-white photos to illustrate his subjects, and Olsen and Larsson who used color plates and color photographs, GULLS OF THE AMERICAS uses color photographs throughout the book, in its attempt to cover every gull plumage variation and molt, and even hybrids. This hefty new guide of 516-page guide also provides fully annotated species accounts.

If you are someone who likes a high quality photo format with lots of accompanying detail, you will unequivocally find this most recent guide to the larid literature to be an extremely valuable contribution.

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SENATE POISED TO SHORTCHANGE BIRD CONSERVATION

In the June E-bulletin, we reported on the House Appropriations Interior Subcommittee and its hopeful mark-up for natural resource issues. Since then, the corresponding Senate Appropriations Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee has met to make its funding recommendations.

Without going into minute detail, it is sufficient to say that the initial Senate numbers don't match those from the House in regard to bird-conservation issues. Most of the announced Senate figures (e.g., Neotrop Act, State Wildlife Grants, Refuge System Operations & Maintenance) are below those from the House that we outlined last month:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/junSBC07.html#TOC10>

and

<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/june07.html>

Senators can still be reminded that they have time to match their colleagues in the House when it comes to these important bird-conservation funding issues.

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BUY YOUR MIGRATORY BIRD STAMP NOW

Finally, a reminder: The 2007-2008 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, commonly known as the "Duck Stamp," is now on sale across the country at a cost of \$15.

The First Day of Sale was actually on 22 June, at a ceremony at Bass Pro Shops in Columbia, Missouri, as well as at other stores throughout the country.

Since the 1930s, more than \$700 million has been raised from stamp sales. The funding has been used to secure over 5.2 million acres of valuable wetland and grassland habitat for the Refuge System. Approximately \$25 million a year is currently collected through annual stamp sales.

In addition, the stamp is a conservation bargain, since approximately 98 percent of the revenue from the stamp goes to the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to purchase refuge wetlands and grasslands. Importantly for frugal birders, the stamp can be used from July 2007 through June 2008 to gain free admission to any National

Wildlife Refuge in the country that charges an entry fee.

You can buy a stamp at most large Post Offices, National Wildlife Refuges with Visitor Centers, Bass Pro Shops, Wal-Mart, K-Mart, and various other sporting-goods stores.

Our suggestion: Don't just buy a stamp, display it when you're in the field!

For information on some creative ways to display the stamp on binoculars and field gear, see our coverage of the subject from earlier this year:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/aprSBC07.html#TOC09>

and

<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/april07.html>

For general information on the stamp program and on birders and the stamp see:

<http://duckstamps.fws.gov/Info/Stamps/stampinfo.htm>

and

<http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps/Info/Constituents/birder.htm>

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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.