



## THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

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July 2009

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This Birding Community E-bulletin is being distributed through the generous support of Steiner Binoculars as a service 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 [on the birding pages of the National Wildlife Refuge Association \(NWRA\) website](#) OR on [the birding webpages for Steiner Binoculars](#).

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### RARITY FOCUS

The monthly rarity was difficult to pick this month. We generally like to select a bird that is a species rare across North America and one that is seen by multiple observers over at least a several day period.

Some rarities on the fringes of Alaska (e.g. Eye-browed Thrush, Hawfinch, and Rustic Bunting) or in Florida (Zenaida Dove on Key Largo) were either present for too short a duration, or else were not immediately accessible for other birders to enjoy.

The only bird - a great find - that came close to our preferred standards was a Gray-collared Becard (*Pachyrhamphus major*) found on 5 June by Jillian Johnston, Anne Pellegrini, and Ryan Davis at the South Fork Zoological and Botanical Area, near the Southwestern Research Station (Portal area in the Chiricahua Mountains) in Arizona.

Although P.D. Hulce, Bob Weaver, and Chris West relocated the bird later the same day and took numerous photographs, other observers had difficulty relocating the bird. Here are Chris West's photos: <http://community.webshots.com/album/572865969AtXaSw>

Gray-collared Becard is a widespread, but uncommon, species in Mexico that ranges south to El Salvador and Nicaragua. It mainly occurs in lowland and foothill woodlands. The species is reported to be apparently expanding its range northward.

Interestingly, a little over a decade ago the Gray-collared Becard appeared in a mini-series article in BIRDING (Dec '98) titled, "Next New Birds for the ABA Area." The species was picked as the first runner-up - after a core half-dozen species - chosen by an expert panel to someday be discovered someplace in the Arizona/New-Mexico region.

The becard was originally found along the first two miles of gravel road leading into South Fork. Later, it, or possibly even a second individual, was found at the Sunny Flat Campground.

Despite continual searches, the Gray-collared Becard(s?) was seen by only about a dozen observers through 19 June. Regardless of whether one or two birds were involved, this event constitutes the first occurrence of the species north of Mexico.

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## **TERN/PLOVER QUANDRY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

Gull-billed Tern (subspecies: *Gelochelidon nilotica vanrossemi*) has only two breeding sites in the western United States: in southern California at San Diego Bay and the Salton Sea. Both sites are on National Wildlife Refuges (San Diego Bay NWR and Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR). At San Diego Bay NWR, Gull-billed Terns face a Fish and Wildlife Service proposal to control their population by destroying their eggs. Why?

Egg destruction is intended to hopefully protect two Endangered birds in the area, the western Snowy Plover and the California Least Tern. Unfortunately Gull-billed Terns are known to prey on the young and possibly the eggs of the two Endangered species. While adding of 43 percent of the Gull-billed Tern eggs at San Diego Bay NWR may do the trick for the Snowy Plovers and/or Least Terns, it may also jeopardize the Gull-billed Tern. The 43 percent figure was chosen, however, to stabilize, not decrease, the Gull-billed Tern population. The issue is complicated by the fact that the western population of Gull-billed Tern is considered a Fish and Wildlife Service Bird of Conservation Concern, and a California Bird Species of Special Concern. The challenge is to manage Least Terns, Snowy Plovers, and Gull-billed Terns in such a way that will reverse the current downward trend in the fledgling success of the Least Terns and Snowy Plovers, while at the same time avoiding significant adverse effects on the Gull-billed Tern population.

Other strategies such as hazing, trans-locating adult Gull-billed Terns, or cross-fostering eggs into the Salton Sea population are not favored by the Service. Broader management issues for all three species include habitat loss (e.g., housing and commercial development), human recreational disturbance, and wildlife predation from feral cats and wild predators. Addressing these issues, some critics claim, is more important to consider than Gull-billed Tern predation on the terns and plovers.

Some critics even wish to include the western Gull-billed Tern as Endangered under the Endangered Species Act, without having much insight into how such a move might actually resolve the dilemma.

Although the numbers involved are not that large (e.g., the immediate San Diego Bay populations are about 50 pairs of Gull-billed Terns, 80 pairs of Least Terns, and 2 pairs of Snowy Plovers), the implications are much larger. The foraging range of the Gull-billed Terns is wide and includes other more distant colonies of Least Terns and nesting areas of Snowy Plovers. This issue clearly illustrates some of the very difficult choices facing bird conservationists and land managers today.

While the project was ultimately suspended for the 2009 nesting season, additional information is being sought in expectation of some action in 2010.

For the draft Environmental Assessment on managing the Gull-billed Terns at San Diego Bay, see:  
[http://www.fws.gov/sandiegorefuges/new/FinaldraftEA4\\_21\\_09.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/sandiegorefuges/new/FinaldraftEA4_21_09.pdf)

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## **RECORDING RECOGNITION**

Every year the Librarian of Congress selects a number of "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant," sound recordings each at least a decade old - to be included in the National Recording Registry. These selections are made under the terms of the National Recording Preservation Act of 2000. For example, this year's selected 25 recordings, announced in early June, include Etta James' "At Last!," The Who's "My Generation," the original cast recording of "West Side Story", the "Gang Busters" radio program, and Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner in their 2000-year-old man routine.

The latest selection, announced in June, includes a 1935 recording of a pair of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, made by Arthur Allen and Peter Paul Kellogg of Cornell University at the old-growth Louisiana bottomland forest known as the Singer Tract.

With the latest additions, the archives will total a collection of 275 contributions. A summary of the latest 25 recordings is found here:  
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/record/nrpb/nrpb-2008reg.html>

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### **MARBLED MURRELET ASSESSMENT RELEASED**

We have previously discussed the ongoing controversy over the Endangered Species Act listing of Marbled Murrelet, most recently in November 2008:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/novSBC08.html#TOC05>

In mid-June, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a report concluding that continued protection of Marbled Murrelets in Washington, Oregon, and California (listed as Threatened under the ESA since 1992) should be maintained. This five-year review replaces a flawed 2004 report in which political influence trumped scientific and legal conclusions to try to eliminate protections for the species.

The new report finds that the tri-state murrelet population is distinct and separate from other populations in Canada and Alaska and that the species' decline has been largely caused by extensive removal of late-successional and old-growth coastal forest which serve as nesting habitat for the murrelet. This announcement comes as current administration officials reconsider logging standards in old-growth forests in the region. Protection for the Marbled Murrelet, as well as for salmon and Northern Spotted Owl are involved. Changes in food sources and dangers from fishing gear are other threats to the murrelet cited in the report.

This most recent report documents a serious 34 percent decline in the Washington, Oregon, and California Marbled Murrelet population between 2001 and 2008. It also indicates that the central California population has declined by 75 percent since 2003.

The timber industry has filed multiple lawsuits in an attempt to remove protection for the Marbled Murrelet. To date, however, those lawsuits have been unsuccessful. With the recent report confirming the disturbing status of murrelets, the Fish and Wildlife Service has at last moved to dismiss the last of these pending cases.

You can find a copy of the review at:

[http://www.fws.gov/westwafwo/pdf/Mamu2009\\_5yr\\_review%20FINAL%2061209.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/westwafwo/pdf/Mamu2009_5yr_review%20FINAL%2061209.pdf)

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### **BARBADOS SWAMP SHOOTING RANGE BECOMES SANCTUARY**

"Swamp shooting" has been taking place on Barbados for generations. It is nothing like waterfowling in the U.S. or Canada today; it's more like a throwback to the mass bird-shootings and market gunning that was so prevalent in the latter part of the 19th century in the United States. Because of their social and racial status - most are well-to-do Caucasians - the shooters on Barbados have significant economic and political influence on the island.

On Barbados, tens of thousands of southbound migrating shorebirds are annually shot on artificial lakes and salt lagoons using lures, caged birds, and amplified birdcalls to attract the migrants. As many as 30,000 to 45,000 Lesser Yellowlegs, Greater Yellowlegs, Whimbrels, Stilt Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpipers, American Golden-Plovers, and lesser numbers of other shorebirds are shot annually. (In particular, observers have charged that remarkably high numbers of American Golden-Plovers are being shot in Barbados every year.)

We wrote about this situation in September 2007:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/sepSBC07.html#TOC08>

Fortunately, there has recently been some hopeful news from the island. Packers Conservation Wetland, a 10-acre swamp with six ponds and four acres of mixed swamp-forest, was operated as a shooting swamp from 1982-2004. Two former shooters have now leased the land and are financing restoration of the area.

Bird Studies Canada and BirdLife Caribbean have contributed additional funds to support the future management of this sanctuary. Assuming there is enough rainfall and runoff, the wetland should be poised for use as a shorebird sanctuary in time for the regular 15 July beginning of the shooting season.

See news from Bird Studies Canada here:

<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/organization/newsarchive/6-05-09.html>

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### **TIP OF THE MONTH AND BOOK NOTE: TIME TO STUDY YOUR SHOREBIRDS**

On a similar shorebird theme, we have combined our usual tip of the month and our book note for this month. It's time to bone up on your shorebirds. Many shorebirds are already starting to leave their Arctic nesting areas and are beginning to migrate southward.

Both of your two editors have a special affinity for shorebirds, and we strongly endorse both their appreciation

and their conservation. We encourage you to look at your field guide ; study the videos; review those fascinating shorebird vocalizations; and share the experience with a new birder.

There are some great shorebird books out there, a few which we have previously mentioned in the E-bulletin. Some of our favorites (in chronological order) include:

SHOREBIRDS OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, Dennis Paulson (Univ. of Washington, 1998)  
SHOREBIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, Dennis Paulson (Princeton University Press, 2005)  
SHOREBIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, EUROPE, AND ASIA, Stephen Message and Don Taylor (Princeton University Press, 2005)  
THE SHOREBIRD GUIDE, Michael O'Brien, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Karlson (Houghton Mifflin, 2006)  
SHOREBIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, EUROPE, AND ASIA: A Photographic Guide, Richard Chandler (Princeton University Press, 2009)

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## **TIME TO BUY YOUR MIGRATORY BIRD STAMP**

July is the month to buy your new Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp at your local Post Office, National Wildlife Refuge, or various sporting outlets. Some 98 percent of the proceeds go to secure National Refuge System wetland and grassland habitat, and the Stamp also serves as a pass for refuges that charge for entry.

To highlight this fact, we draw your attention to a new, revised listing of Migratory Bird Conservation Fund amounts (MBCF is sustained by Stamp dollars plus other funding - some import duties, permits, fines, etc.) as percentages of the funding used to acquire individual refuges in the past:

[http://www.fws.gov/realty/pdf\\_files/MBCF\\_acres\\_per\\_Refuge.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/realty/pdf_files/MBCF_acres_per_Refuge.pdf)

The list is very revealing. For example, here are some of those percentages for a small selection of popular and much-birded refuges:

Parker River in Massachusetts	99.3%
Bosque del Apache in New Mexico	99.2%
Pea Island in North Carolina	99.2%
Quivira in Kansas	99.1%
Horicon in Wisconsin	98.7%
Bombay Hook in Delaware	95.1%
Santa Ana in Texas	94.9%
Okefenokee in Georgia	88.2%
Laguna Atascosa in Texas	86.0%
Edwin B. Forsythe in New Jersey	84.3%
Blackwater in Maryland	77.6%

These past investments and the continual use of Stamp funds for refuge habitat are outstanding examples of reasons to buy a Stamp.

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## **STAMP COST INCREASE ON THE BACK-BURNER?**

In the meantime, the old argument that "there is already too much land in federal ownership" has impacted recent efforts to update the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp. In early June, the proposed legislation (H.R. 1916) to increase the price of the Stamp from \$15 to \$25 in 2010 was pulled back by committee supporters at the last minute due to a number of amendments filed by Republicans.

At least seven amendments were submitted, amendments mainly aimed at limiting the amount of land acquisition authorized under the program. GOP members are apparently concerned that the funds can only be spent on land acquisition and not for other beneficial expenditures or purposes.

This may sound reasonable, but the issue of other purposes was what drove the original 1958 revisions to the Stamp Act in the first place - to protect and direct the Stamp dollars into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund for habitat acquisition. President Eisenhower's Secretary of the Interior - "Generous Doug" McKay had actually been blatantly using the Stamp funds for other purposes, and in some years 80-90 percent of the Stamp proceeds were shunted to other activities. At that time the conservation community insisted on seeing the funds go to habitat acquisition, and that's where we have been ever since, with 98 percent going to secure wetlands and grasslands for the Refuge System.

For now, the fate of H.R. 1916 remains unclear, but the effort may reappear when clear passage looks more certain.

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## **IBA NEWS: GREAT SALT LAKE, SELENIUM, AND BIRDS**

Great Salt Lake in Utah is sufficiently significant as a focus for Important Bird Area status that no less than five major bays on the lake (i.e., Farmington, Ogden, Bear River, Gilbert [or South Arm] and Gunnison [or North Arm]) are considered IBAs unto themselves.

Consequently, ongoing developments pertaining to selenium limits at the lake deserve notice.

Selenium is a naturally occurring mineral which also turns up in sewage discharge and industrial operations; at high enough levels it can cause deformities among birds. When the State of Utah formed an advisory panel to develop a limit to the amount of selenium in Great Salt Lake, they settled on a regulation for a selenium level that kills about 10 percent of Mallard embryos.

This position was not acceptable to some members of the advisory panel, but the waste water dischargers and Kennecott Copper pushed for higher discharge levels, and they persuaded others on the panel to accept a tolerably toxic solution.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has now sent a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency asking that EPA

reject the new selenium regulatory level, because the destruction of these Mallard eggs is in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act - a taking or killing prohibited by the MBTA. This unusual situation may actually represent the first time that the Fish and Wildlife Service has invoked the MBTA to fight water discharge regulations.

Moreover, there is little data to indicate whether the new standard might jeopardize other migratory species that depend on the vast lake, species even more sensitive to selenium than Mallards.

It is now up to the EPA whether or not to deny the Utah selenium standard and force the state to adopt a stricter standard to protect all birds.

For more on Utah IBAs, see:

<http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/utah/>

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:

<http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/>

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## **FIELD GUIDE TO THE FARM BILL**

Do you find the Farm Bill confusing, especially when it comes to the varied conservation-and-bird elements? Does the alphabet-soup of CRP, WRP, GRP, EQIP, FRPP, and CSP have your head spinning?

This publication - prepared by the U.S. NABCI Committee and the Intermountain West Joint Venture - should help clarify the situation for you. It is a 42-page downloadable booklet written by Randy Gray, an expert with over three decades of farm-conservation experience.

The guide covers historic Farm Bill evolution, administration, maximizing benefits, performance measures, and much more. An emphasis on bird conservation is particularly appreciated. You can download your own copy here:

<http://www.fishwildlife.org/pdfs/FarmBillGuide.pdf>

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## **CAP-AND-TRADE: BIRDS-AND-WILDLIFE**

As June was coming to an end, the U.S. House of Representatives in a close vote (219-212) passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act. This cap-and-trade system is intended to limit the effects of climate change by putting a cap on greenhouse gas emissions while investing in significant energy efficiencies and technologies. The bill also establishes a Natural Resources Climate Change Adaptation Fund, to assist federal and state agencies in protecting wildlife. (The fund, starting with a market set-aside of 1% could increase to 4% or 5% by 2040.) The bill also charges the U.S. Department of Agriculture with implementing agriculture and forestry carbon offset projects, including conservation programs.

The Senate has yet to act on this, but it did reject a similar piece of legislation last June. See our coverage here:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/julSBC08.html#TOC03>

We will surely revisit this issue in future issues of the E-bulletin.

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## **SHAMELESS VANITY**

As the Birding Community E-bulletin enters its sixth year of publication and distribution, we are continuing to share some remarks from some of our readers. As previously noted, we will include one or two comments each month this year. These will be placed at the very end of each E-bulletin so you can simply stop reading right now if you'd like!

"These days it's challenging to keep up with all the information that comes at us. When I see the Birding Community E-bulletin in my inbox, I open it eagerly, knowing that the information it contains has been sifted down, by two knowledgeable and skillful birders, to what's most important, useful, and interesting."

-Lisa White, Director of Guidebooks, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company

"I always enjoy the E-bulletin. It is one of the very few electronic newsletters that I read end to end!"

- Alan Wentz, Senior Group Manager of Conservation, Ducks Unlimited

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If you wish to distribute all or parts of any of the E-bulletins, we request that you mention the source of any material used. (Include the URL for the E-Bulletin archives if possible).

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](mailto:wpetersen@massaudubon.org) OR
- Paul Baicich 410/992-9736, [paul.baicich@verizon.net](mailto: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.