



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

July 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 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC and the wonderful bird and birding books they make available: www.shopng.com/birdbooks

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

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RARITY FOCUS

Our rarity this month is Berylline Hummingbird, and it's not just a single bird - it's multiple individuals.

The first sighting of this species this season was on 10 May at the Beatty's Miller Canyon Guest Ranch in the Upper Miller Canyon of the Huachuca Mountains in Southeast Arizona. A couple days later, a female Berylline Hummingbird was observed carrying nesting materials. Although both male and female hummingbirds were present, only the female made regular visits to the feeders. Sightings continued through the end of June. You can find a photo taken by Charles Melton here:

www.azfo.org/gallery/2010/html2/BEHU_Miller_Melton_15_May_2010.html

Meanwhile, on 21 May, in Madera Canyon in Arizona's Santa Rita Mountains, a female Berylline Hummingbird was photographed at the feeders at Madera Kubo B&B. This individual continued at least through 27 June. And lastly, a male Berylline Hummingbird appeared at the nearby Chuparosa Inn in Madera Canyon on 9 June.

Berylline Hummingbird is a bird of southern and western Mexican foothills and highlands (southward into Honduras), only seen in southeastern Arizona as a stray in pine-oak woodlands and sycamore streamside forests in the region's mountain canyons. The species also occasionally breed there.

If you are unfamiliar with this species look in the National Geographic guide (fifth edition - pp. 272-273), Kenn Kaufman's Focus Guide (pp. 218-219) or the "Big" Sibley (p. 295) for descriptions and illustrations.

First found north of Mexico in 1964, this hummingbird species has been reported at least a few dozen times in Southeast Arizona, and it is now found almost annually. There are also sightings for New Mexico and the Big Bend region of Texas.

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While the much sought after Berylline Hummingbird is among the rarer southeastern Arizona hummingbird strays, it has almost become regular in summer. This raises the question: Are more individuals moving north, or are there more astute observers and more hummingbird feeders in the region?

WESTERN HUMMINGBIRD PARTNERSHIP UNVEILED

While on the subject of hummingbirds, it should be noted that in early June, an Action Plan for the Western Hummingbird Partnership (WHP) was released.

The WHP is a developing network of partners cooperating to build an effective and sustainable hummingbird conservation program through monitoring, research, restoration, and education. Hummingbirds occur only in the Americas, so the goal of the WHP is to address conservation issues for the entire family with an initial focus on Western North America.

The intent of the Action Plan is to:

- summarize the background and creation of the WHP
- identify key conservation issues facing hummingbirds
- recommend priority actions to address these issues
- define an organizational structure for sustaining WHP activities
- list WHP projects that have begun addressing the priority actions
- identify the North American hummingbird species that will receive initial focus

You can review the Action Plan here:

www.hummonnet.org/pdf/201006whp_actionplan.pdf

The next meeting of the WHP will be in Santa Fe, New Mexico from 13-18 August. Interested parties can contact the WHP coordinator, Susan Wethington (swething@dakotacom.net) with questions, ideas, or suggestions pertaining to activities or future involvement. Comments and further partnerships are encouraged.

A LONG-EXPECTED DISCOVERY

On the late afternoon of 31 May, Marcus and Tracy Ponce were walking on the south trail in Maritime Hammock (Brevard Co. Parks and Recreation), just south of Melbourne Beach, Florida. The location is right on the coast. As the Ponces were rounding their last leg of the south part of the trail, they noticed a gray bird hopping on the leafy trail just ahead of them.

"Ah, it's probably just a catbird," remarked Marcus Ponce to his wife. When he lifted his binoculars to verify his impression, he noticed that the bird had red legs and a red eye-ring. He didn't immediately recognize it, but he was able to take about 15 or so photos of the bird. It was not shy and allowed him to approach to within about 25 feet. He was able to get pictures from front, side, and back.

Some of the photos taken by Marcus Ponce can be found here:

<http://listserv.admin.usf.edu/listserv/wa.exe?A2=ind1006&L=brdbrain&D=1&T=0&O=D&P=3600>

When he got home, Marcus was able to verify that the bird was a Red-legged Thrush (*Turdus plumbeus*), and he immediately posted the sighting on the "SpaceCoastAudubon" message board, thus starting a flood of postings and emails from active birders across the state.

A search for the thrush began the next morning, but no further sign of the bird could be found. More birders also combed the area on subsequent days, with no positive results.

This species has been expected to occur in Florida for many years. It occurs throughout much of the Caribbean, and the plumage of the Maritime Hammock individual was consistent with the Bahamas race. One old, but unverified, report in late March 1960 in Miami-Dade County was presumed – perhaps unnecessarily – to be an escaped bird. The species even appeared optimistically in the fourth and fifth editions of Roger Tory Peterson's eastern guide .

The Red-legged Thrush found at Maritime Hammock potentially represents a North American first record, and the information has been submitted by Marcus Ponce to the Florida Ornithological Society for their consideration.

OTHER NEWS FROM THE GULF COAST

Readers of the E-bulletin hardly need to be reminded that the catastrophe on the Gulf continues. The oil leak from under the cap persists – perhaps at a rate of 60,000 barrels per day. Unfortunately, a relief well is still weeks from completion, sea-life is increasingly at risk, oil-impacted waterbirds are flying into the marshes to die, tar balls the size of dinner plates are accumulating on some beaches, and there is no end in sight. Who knows what could happen once we get deeper into the hurricane season!

With this in mind, it's time to relate two side-stories from the Gulf.

First, there is the conflict between federal officials and the State of Louisiana, with everyone trying to do good, but many running at cross-purposes.

In late June the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers decided to halt the State of Louisiana's dredging operations near the Breton National Wildlife Refuge off Louisiana's coast. This refuge, most of which is a federally designated Wilderness Area, is located on the Chandeleur Islands, home to tens of thousands of nesting birds, including Brown Pelicans, Piping Plovers, and Least Terns.

The Interior Department and Corps of Engineers expedited the federal permit process to allow Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal to direct the dredging of sand to construct protective berms offshore. This was despite the concerns of federal and

independent scientists that expensive dredging could do more harm than good for the fragile wetlands of Louisiana's coast.

The original dredging permits allowed for dredging three miles off the coast, yet Jindal defied the permits' restrictions and commenced dredging close to the Chandeleurs, eventually leading to the decision to shut down the operation. "The Fish and Wildlife Service and the Corps of Engineers went to great lengths to get Gov. Jindal the permits he needed to build the berms, yet he flouted the rules and did as he pleased," said Evan Hirsche, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. "It's disingenuous for him now to blame the government for his own transgressions." Hirsche continued, saying that the governor "had an obligation to abide by the terms of his state's agreement with the federal government."

Second is the strange story of the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Department and BP guards getting testy over the presence of the American Birding Association's Gulf Coast representative, Drew Wheelan, who went to BP's Louisiana headquarters in Houma, Louisiana, on 18 June, to obtain some film footage. Although Wheelan was not on BP property, it was still "strongly suggest[ed]" that he leave, since "BP doesn't want people filming." Wheelan's volunteer service badge was confiscated by a chief of BP security, and he was interrogated for 20 minutes, after which he was followed for 20 miles by unmarked security cars. More details here:

<http://motherjones.com/rights-stuff/2010/06/BP-louisiana-police-stop-activist>

BOREAL FOREST LOGGING SUSPENSION

In late May, nine leading environmental groups and 21 forestry companies came together to announce one of the largest conservation agreements in Canadian history. The International Boreal Conservation Campaign led efforts to bring the parties together. Their agreement includes the suspension of logging on 72 million acres of vital caribou habitat and the conversion of more than 170 million acres of to-be-logged Boreal forest into sustainable forest management zones.

The implementation process for the agreement will occur over the next three years, and it includes features to bring government and native groups on board. Boycott campaigns by Canopy, Forest Ethics and Greenpeace will be suspended while the agreement is being implemented. While there are skeptics viewing the arrangement, the approach may reflect a new commitment to a common goal among traditional adversaries.

For details and obligations involved in the agreement, see:

www.canadianborealforestagreement.com/index.php/en/the-canadian-boreal-agreement/

Many millions of Boreal birds could benefit from the success of this historic agreement. For a bird-oriented analysis, see the Boreal Songbird Initiative:

www.borealbirds.org/blog/?p=473

TAMARISK TANGLE

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has attempted to discreetly stop a program to eradicate the highly invasive tamarisk (often called "salt-cedar") in 13 states, mostly in the West. This five-year-old program involved releasing an equally alien species, the saltcedar leaf beetle, which devours tamarisk.

The reason to stop the program has to do with the Endangered Willow Flycatcher of the Southwest (subspecies: *extimus*). This small flycatcher is a riparian-obligate species, historically dependent on streamside willows. But since the 1990s, a substantial number – up to a quarter – of these flycatchers in the southwestern United States have been found breeding in habitat dominated by the exotic tamarisk. Studies to determine if tamarisk-dominated sites are sub-optimal for the flycatcher thus far have suggested that this is not the case, but broader studies are warranted throughout the bird's western range.

Will stopping the beetle's release actually help the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher? Was the program – begun in 2005 without an environmental review – wise in the first place? Are different eradication strategies appropriate for different states or regions? Does eliminating tamarisk really give an automatic advantage to riparian willow growth and the flycatcher at all locations?

The issue is not that simple, and neither are the answers to these questions.

In the meantime, the entire effort is in an ecological and legal limbo, until "endangered species issues are resolved," according to a USDA memo on the subject.

For a report and associated links on the program from THE NEW YORK TIMES, see:

www.nytimes.com/2010/06/23/us/23beetle.html

and from CBS News, see:

www.cbsnews.com/8301-501465_162-20008435-501465.html

BOOK NOTES: LEGACY FOR WHOSE LAND?

Written by Audrey and Frank Peterman, a dynamic black couple, *LEGACY ON THE LAND* (Earthwise Publications, 2009) first reveals how the couple discovered the wonders of the outdoors in the mid-1990s during a cross-country trip, followed by a description of how and why they made the promotion of natural and historic wonders their life's work.

The book starts with wonderful stories and ends with serious lessons learned. Their travel-adventure across the country stressed to them that America's people of color should not be "absentee landlords" of the public lands, and that these communities should "discover and take ownership of the incredible national treasury that is our heritage." The Petermans' follow-up effort to save the Everglades system and engage people of color in that goal is packed with lessons. Moreover, the barriers and roadblocks to racial inclusion revealed by the Petermans, particularly toward the end of the book, are object lessons for anyone concerned with reaching minorities.

Yes, the Petermans are birders, but the birds are only part of the story. It's the people and the importance of creating vital connections to nature that rest at the center of this book

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IBA NEWS: PLUM ISLAND OPPORTUNITY

For the past few months, there has been ongoing interest and sometimes intense activities over the future of Plum Island, an 840-acre pork-chop-shaped island off the north fork of Long Island, New York. For decades this was the site of a top-secret germ-warfare and animal disease research lab. The Department of Homeland Security is now preparing to sell the island, and build a new high-security lab in Kansas to study animal diseases. Accordingly, the General Services Administration (GSA) is studying the options, with a draft expected by the end of the summer, followed by public hearings.

Plum Island, only 100 miles east of Manhattan, is also a designated Important Bird Area (IBA). Simply because Plum Island is an IBA doesn't mean it has automatic protection, and environmental groups want to preserve the natural integrity of the site, advocating status as an official preserve, sanctuary, or National Wildlife Refuge. Complicating the future status of the site for any activity are vast amounts of waste and contaminants on Plum Island.

You can read more on the subject here:

www.theday.com/article/20100521/NWS01/305219932/1018

And get details on the Island's IBA status here:

<http://longislandsoundstudy.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/OPPI-IBA-Fact-Sheet-FINAL.pdf>

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/

TIP OF THE MONTH: RECYCLE YOUR BIRD-AND-NATURE MAGAZINES

Recycling your bird-and-nature magazines can be so much more than simply using those paper-recycling bins once or twice a week.

You can make sure that those wonderful magazines do not disappear, underappreciated. We know people who will keep every single copy of BIRD WATCHER'S DIGEST, WILDBIRD, BIRDER'S WORLD, BIRDING, LIVING BIRD, and every local or regional bird publication that they get. But we also know people who make sure that these magazines will have a second life in somebody else's hands.

You can give the magazine to a friend or neighbor who is modestly curious in birds. How about your doctor's or dentist's office, or a school library?

Remember: a good bird magazine is a great way to reach all sorts of people with a message about the wonder of birds and nature.

MBCC APPROVES STAMP-FUNDED ACQUISITIONS

In mid-June, the Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, announced that the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC) approved a total \$5.3 million in Federal Duck Stamp funds to add more than 1,849 wetland acres to six units of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

These acquisitions have been funded with proceeds from sales of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, otherwise known as the Federal Duck Stamp. These acquisitions include:

- Cache River National Wildlife Refuge (Arkansas) - 180 acres of bottomland wetlands,
- Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (California) - 110 acres of the last remaining riparian habitat along South Stone Lake, as well as associated wetlands and uplands,
- Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge (New Jersey) - 243 acres of wetlands and upland fringes, the last natural open space on the northern portion of Barnegat Bay,
- Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (New Hampshire) - 162 acres of northern forest wetland
- Lower Hatchie National Wildlife Refuge (Tennessee) - 866 acres of wetland and associated habitat,
- San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge (Texas) - 288 acres for the protection of a wetland complex.

For every dollar spent on Federal Duck Stamps, ninety-eight cents goes directly to secure vital habitat in the National Wildlife Refuge System. To date, more than 5.3 million acres of wetlands have been purchased using more than \$750 million in Stamp revenue.

The most recent Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (2010-2011) was released on 26 June. Birders and conservationists can get their Stamps at Post Offices and NWRs across the country.

THIS MONTH'S QUIZ FOR A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC BIRD BOOK

To celebrate National Geographic's recent connection with the E-bulletin, we have more fine National Geographic books to distribute to E-bulletin readers. Readers who choose to enter our quick-and-easy contest have the chance to win one of these books. Our little contest and quiz questions will run for the next couple of months. Each monthly quiz question will either relate to one of our news items from the previous month, or it will relate to some event or experience that is due to occur during the current month.

For more on the excellent NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC books, see:

www.shopng.com/birdbooks

There will undoubtedly be multiple readers who answer our monthly question correctly, so we will only be able to distribute five copies to readers whose names are picked at random from all those submitting correct answers. Because of shipping constraints, only folks residing in the U.S. or Canada are eligible.

Last month's question concerned Kirtland's Warbler: This warbler has restrictive habitat requirements characterized by what species of tree?

The answer: Jack Pine

Last month's winners for their choice of either the Eastern or Western National Geographic Field Guides were:

Peter R. Bono (Yarmouthport, MA), Melanie Feddersen (Littleton, CO), David Govatski (Jefferson, NH), Carol Horner (Toronto, ON), Connie Madia (Fernandina Beach, FL), Patricia A. Morton (East Troy, WI), Peggy Murphy (Dripping Springs, TX), Dorothy Robbins (High Springs, FL), David Williams (Reading, MA), and Max Wilson (Kensington, MD).

The prize for July will be a copy of the standard Fifth Edition of the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA. We have five copies to distribute this month.

For more on this book, see here:

<http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/ngs/browse/productDetail.jsp?productId=55314C>

This month's question: After whom was the Bonaparte's Gull named?

Please send your answer by the close of business on 14 July, Bastille Day, to:

birdingbulletin1@verizon.net

Make the subject line "QUIZ! " and please include your full name and mailing address along with your answer so that we can send you a book in the mail should you be a fortunate winner. We will also provide readers the correct answer next month.

You can access past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html

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

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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