



SWAROVSKI BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE NORTH AMERICAN SWAROVSKI BIRDING COMMUNITY

Information, communication, and inspiration on birds, wildlife, and nature

June 2005

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AFTER SPRING MIGRATION

Migration has slowed down and nesting has begun. It's also time for another Swarovski E-bulletin, bringing you news of birds, birding, and bird conservation.

This E-bulletin is distributed as a joint effort between Swarovski Optik of North America (SONA) and the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA). You can access [an archive of past E-bulletins](#) on the NWRA site.

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RARITY FOCUS

A pair of Flame-colored Tanagers at Madera Canyon, southeast Arizona, appeared in mid-April, and the birds have been reported there off and on since.

Flame-colored Tanagers have been found in the U.S. more than a dozen times since the first report in 1985 in Cave Creek Canyon, in the Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona. The species normally ranges from northern Mexico to Panama. Since the mid-1980s time, individuals and pairs have been found in varied canyons of the "sky islands" in southeast Arizona, including the Santa Ritas and the Huachucas.

In the spring of 2003, a male Flame-colored Tanager was observed periodically along the road near the Madera Kubo Bed and Breakfast in Madera Canyon, in the Santa Rita Mountains. The next year, a pair nested in an oak just across the way from the Madera Kubo. And this year, the tanagers are usually observed high above the cabins in the sycamores across the road from the Madera Kubo Gift Shop.

The occurrence of Flame-colored Tanagers in the United States is complicated by the tendency of lone male Flame-colored Tanagers to pair with female Western (and even Hepatic) Tanagers, producing a vexing situation with the potential of hybrid individuals. There have been at least three known such cases.

with the potential of hybrid individuals - there have been at least three known such cases.

The current status of Flame-colored Tanagers is described in the most recent issue of LIVING BIRD (Spring 2005) in an article by Paul Zimmerman. You can also find a nice review of the hybrid situation well on [the Southeast Arizona Bird Observatory website](#).

And speaking of hybrids, don't miss the current issue of BIRDING, dedicated to the fascinating and complex field- identification of hybrids among birds.

This year's tanager pair at Madera Canyon was still being reported feeding at least one young bird as recently as the end of May.

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HIGHWAY BILL PASSES SENATE; CONSERVATION CORNERS INTACT

Congress passes an enormous Transportation Bill about every six years, chock-a-block full of largess for the states and the transportation industry for road and bridge building and other associated construction. In the past, the bill has been viewed, with no small justification, as a mega-pork delivery mechanism.

Recently, however, transportation legislation has included some important conservation elements, not unlike the earlier evolution of the Farm Bill, with conservation elements existing alongside subsidies.

In April, as the transportation bill was being considered, a number of bird-oriented groups wrote letters to key Senators requesting support for important conservation elements in the Senate version of the bill - for Transportation Enhancements, Scenic Byways, and Refuge Roads in particular. These groups, mostly operating through the Bird Conservation Alliance, included, among others, the American Bird Conservancy, the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, New Jersey Audubon Society, Illinois Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife, Tennessee Ornithological Society, Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, and the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

Then, on 17 May, the Senate passed H.R. 3, the Safe Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2005 (SAFETEA), also known as the Highway Bill. The legislation includes significant provisions for transportation enhancements (including rails-to-trails and birding-trail support), scenic byways, refuge roads (vital to address a \$2.1-billion backlog), and other creative elements, including funding for the elimination of non-native invasive plants along roadways.

Differences between the Senate and House bills still must be resolved, and the issue of spending goals must be addressed. (President Bush has threatened a veto if the spending goes over \$284 billion.) The results surely deserve watching.

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SEND KAUFMAN'S BOOK TO LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

We announced in March that Kenn Kaufman's "Focus" guide (Houghton Mifflin) to North American birds would be released in a Spanish-language version, GUIA DE CAMPO A LAS AVES DE NORTEAMERICA. This book is destined to be an invaluable tool for Spanish-speakers both in Latin America and here in the U.S.

In fact, ABA Sales has devised an economical way for you to buy a copy to give to a birding leader or research counterpart in Latin America or the Caribbean. This offer is especially valuable for teachers and researchers in nearby Mexico and the northern Caribbean where the range overlap of the book is the greatest.

The next time you shop at ABA Sales (1-800-634-7736) just tell them that you are willing to buy an extra Kaufman GUIA for only \$10.95. The sales staff will charge you that amount and then expedite your book as a contribution to Birders' Exchange. (You'll also be sent a receipt for tax purposes.) It's an amazingly simple way to help get the Kaufman book donated to Birder's Exchange and into the hands of Latin American and Caribbean colleagues who may need it most.

And while we're on the subject of Kenn Kaufman's book, you may want to check out [Kenn's recent and thoughtful interview with GRIST](#), an environmental on-line web-magazine, early last month.

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GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE QUANDRY

In a potential model case for the West, Colorado state wildlife officials are seeking landowner agreement programs to protect the Gunnison Sage-Grouse before the species ends up on the federal Endangered Species List. At the same time, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is under a court order to propose a rule in September aimed at protecting the species. The USFWS then has a year to solicit comments and make a final ruling whether or not to list the species as Endangered or Threatened.

Since 2000, the Gunnison Sage-Grouse has been recognized as a separate species from the Greater Sage-Grouse. The Gunnison Sage-Grouse is found in only 10 counties in the southwestern part of Colorado and a few areas of Utah. We have previously written about the situation concerning both sage-grouse species in 2004 -

June, July, October, and December - and in February 2005.

Currently, state and federal wildlife officials are attempting to secure plans that would make the listing of Gunnison Sage-Grouse unnecessary. Its numbers in Colorado are currently estimated at 3,200. Over the past century, its habitat, which once included New Mexico, Arizona, and larger parts of Utah and Colorado, has been greatly altered by agriculture, suburbanization, mineral extraction, fire, water diversion, and various other means.

"From a biological point of view, this bird warrants being listed," said Jessica Young, an associate professor of biology at Western State College in Gunnison. "It is a globally red-listed bird, meaning it is endangered." "But", Young added, "there are significant social and economic considerations that go into the decision." Those considerations were part of the message sent to landowners by the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW), to prepare for six meetings held in May to explain why the federal government is considering listing the grouse, what it might mean for property owners, and how a voluntary habitat protection plan might work.

The key points of this voluntary program are:

- The Colorado Division of Wildlife would evaluate the property to determine its suitability for Gunnison Sage-Grouse habitat.
- If the property contains suitable habitat, then the DOW would write a management plan and would make recommendations about what parts of the property should remain unchanged and where improvements should be made. (Improvements would not be at the property owner's expense.)
- Property owners who agree to the plan would sign a 20-year contract and, in return, the owner would be assured that no other regulations would be imposed on the property if the Gunnison Sage-Grouse is later listed as a threatened or endangered species.

What this plan would do is to allow the landowner to engage in a way that would protect sage-grouse habitat while being allowed to continue ranching or farming. One can only hope that this approach works. For more details see, [click here](#).

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POSSIBLE EL YUNQUE WILDERNESS IN PUERTO RICO

The House Forests and Forest Health Subcommittee held a hearing on 11 May on Resident Commissioner Fortuno's bill to designate 10,000 acres of the 29,000-acre Caribbean ("El Yunque") National Forest as a "Wilderness Area."

The Caribbean National Forest Act of 2005 (H.R. 539) was approved by the House Resources Committee a week later.

A companion bill (S. 272) introduced by Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Chares Schumer, both from New York, has already been approved by the Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Although all of the House testimony was favorable, and though the measure has passed through two committees, this is the ninth year that Puerto Rico resident commissioners have attempted to get the bill approved. It has never passed both houses of Congress in previous attempts.

Protective status for the overall forest dates back to 1824 under a royal Spanish proclamation. The forest has more species of trees than any other forest in the U.S. National Forest System - 240. The forest's watersheds provide water to more than 800,000 Puerto Ricans, and the area receives almost one million visitors a year. The island legislature established a greenbelt of agricultural lands to surround the Caribbean National Forest almost 30 years ago, but the buffer is being chipped away. Wilderness status of 10,000 acres is intended to protect core biodiversity of El Yunque. The area is also known to birders as home to the endangered Puerto Rican Parrot and the endemic Elfin Woods Warbler.

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ANILCA: THIS SUMMER'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY

June is probably the most popular time to go birding in Alaska, and that gives us the opportunity to recall WHY we have so many great places to bird in the state. In many cases it has to do with the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA).

Next month, former President Jimmy Carter will join many others for a major celebration for the 25th anniversary of ANILCA. This celebration, which will be held on 6-7 July in Anchorage, will commemorate the Act, signed in 1980 by President Carter and protecting federal lands in Alaska. ANILCA doubled the land in the nation's national wildlife refuge and park systems and tripled the amount of land designated as Wilderness.

Because of ANILCA, we have 104.3 million acres of National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, and other protected units in Alaska. We now enjoy such wonders as Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (the nation's largest national park), Gates of the Arctic National Park, and Selawick, Koyukuk, Nowitna, Innoko, Tetlin, and Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuges, among others. In addition ANILCA substantially enlarged areas for such places as Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (increased by about 9 million acres), Denali National Park, and the Tongass National Forest. ANILCA designated Wilderness in the Tongass National Forest, Wild and Scenic Rivers. the Steese National Conservation Area and the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

...the Alaska Conservation Foundation, the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge Association, and the United States National Wildlife Refuge Association.

Visit the [web site of the Alaska Conservation Foundation](#) to learn more and to register for the ANILCA celebration.

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BIRD & WETLAND NEWSLINK

If you don't already read the "Migratory Bird & Wetland NewsLink," produced on a bimonthly basis, you may want to take a look at [the June issue](#).

The NewsLink covers "wetter" themes than our E-bulletin, and concentrates more internationally. NewsLink is sponsored by the Association of State Wetland Managers, the U.S. National Ramsar Committee, and the USFWS.

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You can also get other excellent bird-oriented "All about birds" information through an Internet project between Swarovski and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology here: <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/>

If you have a friend who wants to get future copies of this North American Swarovski Birding Community E-bulletin, that person can contact either of us:

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