



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

June 2006

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RARITY FOCUS

On 7 May, a European Golden-Plover (sometimes called Eurasian or Greater Golden-Plover) was found at Cape Bonavista, Newfoundland. The species, a vagrant from the Old World, breeds from Greenland to western Siberia. It is slightly larger and chubbier than the American Golden-Plover, with white undertail coverts. The species was first discovered as a vagrant in North America when several hundred appeared in late April in Newfoundland in 1961. Since then, individuals have appeared sporadically as spring vagrants or irregular migrants to Newfoundland, Labrador, and Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, sometimes in substantial numbers (e.g., 1978, 1988, 1992, 1994, and 1995). These incursions have historically occurred between mid-April and mid-May, with a few individuals sometimes lingering later in the spring. Records for the Lower-48 are virtually nonexistent.

This year, there was at least one European Golden-Plover at Cape Bonavista, along Dungeon Road in the fields across from what is locally called "Viking Rock." The bird continued at least through the middle of May.

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RED KNOT REPORT

The Red Knot continues to attract increasing attention this season. As you know, this shorebird makes a remarkable 18,000-mile round-trip annual migration from its Arctic breeding grounds to the tip of South America every year. Each spring, Red Knots, along with great numbers of Ruddy Turnstones, Semipalmated Sandpipers, and Sanderlings stop on their marathon flight to "refuel" on the beaches of Delaware Bay, specifically to devour the eggs of the world's largest breeding aggregation of Horseshoe Crabs.

Recently, however, the over-harvesting of the crabs has contributed to a disturbing decline in the North American population of the Red Knot. A drastic increase in the take of Horseshoe Crabs for use as bait in conch pots and eel traps in the mid-1990s significantly diminished their numbers in Delaware Bay, an activity that also resulted in a diminution of the birds' food supply. Without the fat-rich diet of Horseshoe Crab eggs at this major stopover site, the Red Knot's ability to complete its long-distance migration to the Arctic is severely compromised. Red Knot numbers in the Delaware Bay dropped from a high of perhaps 150,000 at the end of the 1980s to about 13,000 in 2004, which some authorities suggest could be just barely above the number needed to maintain a viable population.

Within the last year, the USFWS denied an emergency request to list the North American race of the Red Knot as Endangered, and the final "90-day decision" determination is now overdue.

Last month, at the meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), the Horseshoe Crab Management Board voted against imposing a moratorium on Horseshoe Crab take in Delaware Bay. This was actually against the wishes of Delaware and New Jersey, which both sought the moratorium. Instead, the Board decided to adopt something called Addendum IV to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Horseshoe Crabs, which would reduce permit each state's take from 150,000 to 100,000 crabs and limited the harvest to male crabs. The moratorium would have been an important step toward securing the survival of the species.

Although the Board decision reduced Horseshoe Crab landings for each state, New Jersey has wisely imposed its own moratorium, meaning that no crabs will be taken in that state. Delaware has not decided whether it will implement a full moratorium, but unfortunately Virginia continues to advocate for the highest possible take of Horseshoe Crabs. At the moment, Virginia is the largest obstacle to a moratorium. [More information on the situation.](#)

In the meantime, other conservation efforts continue along Delaware Bay. An effort at Mispillion Harbor in Delaware on the western shore of the Delaware Bay is arguably the most important current project at a single location for the survival of the Red Knot. The harbor, which includes a mile of Delaware Bay shoreline, is situated between the Milford Neck Wildlife Area and the Mispillion River. In recent years, over eighty percent of the remaining Red Knot population on Delaware Bay has been recorded at this location.

The Conservation Fund and others are preserving the Mispillion Harbor property – deemed a top state goal for years. TCF will transfer the property to the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife as a bird-and-crab sanctuary. [More details.](#)

Finally, as we write this E-bulletin, the counting of Red Knots at Delaware Bay is underway. We will try to present an update with our July issue.

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HORICON WINDS: STOP WORK ORDER

Apparently, all wind farms in Wisconsin have recently received a "stop work order" because of a new Homeland Security and Department of Defense policy. A recent Defense Department requirement to study the effects of wind farms on military readiness has evolved into an open-ended, stop-work order on projects in Wisconsin. The Defense Department is interested in studying the potential impact of radar signals bouncing off the spinning blades at wind farms, as well as associated mitigation measures for remedying interference from windmills. The stop work policy will be in effect until the study is finished, projected to be in October at the earliest. Among the projects now on hold is Forward Wind Energy's 133-turbine Horicon Marsh wind farm, a highly controversial project deemed by many to be too close to Horicon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge and an adjacent State Wildlife Area.

This study, while preventing wind projects from proceeding, has nothing to do with the potential impact of wind power on flying birds and bats.

At the same time, Horicon Marsh Systems Advocates (HMSA) has filed a notice with the District Court of Appeals in Madison to appeal the decision made by Judge John R. Storck in late March on the wind power project near Horicon Marsh. HMSA is asking for the wind turbines to be built no closer than four or five miles from Horicon Marsh and for a three-year in-depth study of the impact of wind turbines on migratory birds in the project area. The Public Service Commission approved a two-mile buffer last July.

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PROJECT PREVENT COLLISION

The facts about window-bird collisions are startling. If, on average, every building in the United States creates 1-10 fatal bird collisions per year, then there may be between 100 million and 1 billion birds deaths due to collisions with windows each year.

Window-bird collisions occur because birds do not recognize clear and reflective windows as barriers. The windows either reflect the outside environment or they create a see-through effect whereby birds see through two clear windows parallel to one another and attempt to fly through them to the other side. In either case, many birds are lost to collisions with windows. While window-bird collisions represent a significant source of

avian mortality, our understanding is limited regarding the relative risk of certain building or construction characteristics and how they influence the number of birds killed by window collisions each year.

"Project Prevent Collision" is attempting to investigate the issue. An effort sponsored by the Wild Bird Centers of America, the effort aims to collect some important information. [More details.](#)

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FAVORITE BIRDING BLIND?

Do you have a favorite birding or photography blind? Is there a particular design that you favor?

To meet the growing demands for birding and nature photography services, Deborah Richie Oberbillig is working with the Colorado Division of Wildlife to produce a guide to wildlife viewing and photography blinds (with a special emphasis on states in the West). The guide is intended to assist those in the wildlife-viewing and interpretive fields who are seeking ideas and guidance on the planning, construction, and placement of such viewing enhancements.

Currently, there is no central place to find comprehensive bird-blind information. Viewing blinds of all shapes, sizes, and costs exist, but searching for alternative designs is time-consuming. The guide should save time and expense, with no more reinventing the wheel.

If you have a favorite blind or ideal design, you can help by filling out a survey in the next couple of weeks. Contact Deborah: debrichi@montana.com

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MEXICAN FIELD GUIDE POSSIBILITIES

And we have another possible questionnaire for at least some of you. The Peterson Field Guide, AVES DE MEXICO, by R. T. Peterson and E. L. Chalif was originally published in 1989. While it was a valuable tool in the field for Spanish speakers, the prohibitive cover price of \$40 made it difficult to keep in print. In an attempt to get a more affordable edition of the guide produced, the folks at Houghton Mifflin are attempting to gather some information. If you have experience - good or bad - using this field guide, there are a few simple questions that Lisa White at Houghton Mifflin (lisa_white@hmco.com) would like to send you. These should not take more than a few moments to answer.

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BIRD STAMP EFFORTS

The latest Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps (aka "the Duck Stamp") are available as of 1 June. The stamp is good from 1 Jul 2006 to 30 June 2007. The cost is \$15 for a stamp; this year's image is Ross's Goose by Sherrie Russell Meline.

The Stamp, an institution since the 1930s, is a de-facto federal water fowling license, as well as a valuable "pass" for any refuges that charge for entry. The proceeds from Stamp sales (about \$25 million per year) go to habitat acquisition for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

We discussed the Stamp previously, including last [September](#) and [October](#).

An interesting editorial in the May/June issue of WILDBIRD called for better dialogue between birders and hunters, based, in part at least, on the Stamp. You can check out the editorial, titled "Stamp Out the Divide" [here](#).

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MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL IN CERULEAN HABITAT RESISTED

In early 2004, a number of conservation organizations signed a letter concerning mountaintop removal/valley fill coal mining in Appalachia. Unfortunately, the granting of permits to strip another 380,000 acres of mature Appalachian deciduous forests persists, along with the resulting dumping of stripped rock and dirt in valleys. This dumping could degrade or destroy up to 1,000 miles of freshwater streams. Perhaps nowhere else on the North American continent is such massive land-and-water degradation happening.

There are now renewed efforts to stop the issuance of an Army Corps of Engineers permit under the Clean Water Act that would allow 2,278 acres of mountaintop trees to be destroyed and would allow for the dumping of the fill along nearly six miles of stream valleys for one new mine, Spruce No. 1 mine, near Blair, Logan County, West Virginia.

Substantial repercussions to high-quality Cerulean Warbler habitat are in the balance. (This warbler has been petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act and is also on the USFWS National List of Birds of Conservation Concern.) In addition, the cumulative mountaintop mining could have a massive and permanent impact on other such forest birds in the region as Louisiana Waterthrush, Worm-eating Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Wood Thrush, Yellow-throated Vireo, and Acadian Flycatcher. Further explanation of the situation can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

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BIRDLIFE ASSESSMENT

In early May, BirdLife International announced its annual evaluation of the status of the world's birds. The evaluation shows that the total number of species currently "threatened" with extinction is now at 1,210. When combined with the number of "near threatened" species, the total is 2,005 species that are in trouble. This is more than a fifth of the Earth's estimated 10,000 bird species. Of the birds most at risk, 181 are now categorized as "critically endangered," the highest level of threat. While the report is not all bad news, it is nonetheless sobering. [Details](#).

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NEOTROP ACT MOVEMENT

In mid-May, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Improvement Act of 2006 (HR 518). This Act reauthorizes and improves the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 2000, which expired last year. The Act provides grants to groups throughout the Americas for the conservation of Neotropical migratory birds that winter south of the border and summer in North America.

The new House bill raises the funding ceiling for competitive Neotropical grants to \$6.5 million annually over a four-year period. This is an increase of \$1.5 million over its current authorization, but still \$1.5 million short of what had originally been expected and significantly less than the \$15 million top-end that bird-conservation groups had hoped for. The actual amount available for Neotropical migratory bird conservation will, of course, depend on the yearly Congressional budget appropriations process. In addition to improved funding, the Neotrop Act reduces the ratio of matching funds that recipients must raise from 3:1 to 1:1, thus making funding far more accessible. Projects in Canada are now also eligible for funding for the first time.

Unfortunately, instead of pursuing its own improved version of the bill, the Senate is expected to simply act on the House product. Still, the expected results should provide some modest steps forward.

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HOUSE VOTES TO OPEN ARCTIC NWR

If the status of the Neotrop Act was good news from the House, there is bad news, too.

By a vote of 225 to 201, the U.S. House of Representatives voted in late May to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. The refuge's coastal plain, of course, is a breeding ground for caribou, home to polar bears, and a site for countless nesting and migratory birds, especially waterfowl and shorebirds. This is the 12th time the House has voted to open the Arctic NWR since 1995. Instead of coming up with some real energy solutions, the House once again perpetuated the myth that drilling in the Arctic is a prescription for energy independence. As one Republican Congressman stated, "this Congress hasn't voted on a single conservation measure since gasoline hit \$3 a gallon."

The issue will next move to the Senate where it could be attached to an Energy Bill, or even fuel efficiency standards. The threat of a Senate filibuster is still possible. We may have more information next month.

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CONGRESSIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE CAUCUS LAUNCHED

As you may know, 60 percent of the "globally significant" Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the U.S. are on Federal properties, and 54 percent of these are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. What this means is that about a third of all globally important IBAs in the U.S. are National Wildlife Refuges. At the same time, while refuges are absolutely vital for bird conservation, two hundred of our 545 refuges have no staff whatsoever and half of them lack a staff biologist.

This is only a part of the ongoing financial crisis facing the Refuge System. Funding shortages are forcing refuges to take drastic steps to try to fulfill their overall conservation goals and mission.

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Fortunately, long-time refuge supporters Ron Kind (D-WI) and Jim Saxton (R-NJ), along with Michael Castle (R-DE) and Mike Thompson (D-CA), are leading a bipartisan effort in the House of Representatives to launch a new Wildlife Refuge Caucus.

Yes, now we can report on some good news from the House of Representatives!

Since migratory bird conservation was the genesis of the Refuge System, and it continues to be a top concern for the USFWS, the new Wildlife Refuge Caucus in Washington D.C. can only help strengthen the relationship.

The purposes of the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus will be to help:

- Raise awareness of our National Wildlife Refuge System;
- Create a clear voice for the Refuge System in Congress; - Support adequate Refuge System budgets;
- Support the six priority activities outlined in the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and environmental interpretation);
- Support strategic growth of the Refuge System.

The more members the new Wildlife Refuge Caucus has, especially on both sides of the aisle, the more influential it can be. The co-chairs of the new Wildlife Refuge Caucus, Reps. Kind and Saxton, have circulated a "Dear Colleague" letter urging their fellow members of the House to join them as founding members.

You might ask your own House member if he or she has responded favorably to that letter. (About 20 members of the House have already responded favorably.)

For more details, see [this alert](#) on the website for the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

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IBA NEWS: THE NJ APPROACH

In line with our monthly focus on highlights from various Important Bird Area (IBA) Programs around the country, this month we look at the New Jersey effort.

What do Cape May, Forsythe (Brigantine) NWR, Sandy Hook, Great Swamp NWR, Wharton State Forest, and Barnegat Bay all have in common? Yes, they are all good for birds and birding.

Building on the IBA experience in other states, the independent New Jersey Audubon Society, working closely with the state's Endangered and Non-game Species Program (ENSP) and the National Audubon Society, is working on what it is calling its "Important Bird and Birding Area" (IBBA) program. The NJ IBBA program is intended to identify sites that are essential for sustaining native bird populations (Important Bird Areas), as well as areas that are exceptional for birding (Important Birding Areas). After all, where do the two categories begin and end?

Part of the IBBA process is engaging in site-based ecotourism planning to promote and improve birding in New Jersey. The intent is to build upon the successful models already established in states like Texas and Virginia by using extensive public and media outreach to raise awareness of the value of birding and the possible economic opportunities these present for local stakeholders and stewards.

[More information on the breath of IBBA potential in New Jersey.](#)
[Additional information about the ongoing IBA program in the United States.](#)

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BRONX PETREL?

This wonderful appellation given to the Rock Pigeon is but one of a plethora of "Dunneisms" awaiting the reader between the covers of one of the newest field guides to roll off the presses: PETE DUNNE'S ESSENTIAL FIELD GUIDE COMPANION: A COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCE FOR IDENTIFYING NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS (2006, Houghton Mifflin). As we mentioned last month, we don't usually review books in the E-bulletin, but mention of this new volume is irresistible. Unique in every way, Dunne's most recent literary effort supercedes anything that birders have seen in the already crowded marketplace of new field guides. The Essential Field Guide is unusual in a number of ways, foremost being that it has NO illustrations. Indeed, the weighty volume (710 pages!) is truly intended to only be A SUPPLEMENT to other North American bird guides. An amazing compendium of field identification information about North American birds, the reader is left to him/herself to determine whether Dunne's new treatment is useful or successful. Regardless of your impression, we urge you to have a look, since we don't think you'll be disappointed! (In the interest of full disclosure, one of your co-editors, Wayne Petersen, had the opportunity to review a final draft of the volume.)

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BIRDER TO TREASURY

Finally, Henry "Hank" Paulson of the Wall Street firm of Goldman Sachs and chairman of the Board of The Nature Conservancy has been nominated as the new Secretary of the Treasury by President Bush. Paulson is an avid birder and conservationist with a long-term love of nature. (Paulson is also the past chairman of the board

at The Peregrine Fund.) While expected to be approved by the Senate, he has opposition from some self-described free-marketeers who insist that he will be too pro-environment. [More details.](#)

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The Birding Community E-bulletin is growing by word of mouth and Internet buzz virtually every day. Hundreds of bird enthusiasts have already gotten on board. 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.