



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

March 2006

The Birding Community E-bulletin is being distributed as a service for 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 the website of the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA).

We are now distributing this E-bulletin to over 1,000 birders and conservationists. We would be happy to have that number grow. If you have colleagues who would be interested in getting this monthly E-bulletin, contact either of your editors, using the details found at the end of this E-bulletin.

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RARITY FOCUS

On 4 February, two Pink-footed Geese were discovered on the Connecticut River at Enfield, Connecticut. They were in a large flock of a thousand or more Canada Geese.

The species nests in Greenland, Iceland, and northern Norway (Spitsbergen). A migratory species, Pink-footed Geese winter in the British Isles and in northwestern Europe. There are about 15 records for Pink-footed Goose in the U.S. and Canada, mostly within the last 15 years. The first records were from the 1980s, and the most have been during spring and fall migration from Newfoundland and Quebec, although there are records from as far south as Pennsylvania and Delaware.

The two birds found last month in Connecticut were preceded by the first sighting in the state in 1998. That year, a Pink-footed Goose showed up at the Stearns Farm in Mansfield, where it remained from 21-25 March.

As with so many potentially vagrant waterfowl, the question of origin (wild vs. escaped captive) arose with the appearance of the 1998 bird. At that time, the overwhelming evidence suggested that the bird was of wild origin. The most compelling evidence was that the fact that the species was very rarely kept in captivity (with

only about 30 known individuals to be in captivity throughout North America at the time).

The overall case for the wild origin of Pink-footed Geese occurring in North America is boosted by information available through the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). That organization claims that in the 1960s there were only 50,000 Pink-footed Geese wintering in the UK; now there are more than 200,000.

The two Pink-footed Geese in Suffield and Enfield, Connecticut stayed for about a week entertaining a number of local and visiting birders from far and wide.

You can view photos of the birds [here](#), taken by James P. Smith.

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BARNACLE GOOSE CONSIDERATIONS

On a similar theme, Barnacle Geese continue to be seen with increasing frequency in recent years, primarily in fall and winter from Atlantic Canada south to the northeastern U.S. Last fall, for example, a Barnacle Goose appeared in Connecticut, and another bird showed up in January on Long Island, New York. As was described for Pink-footed Goose, the issue of "origin" arises whenever Barnacle Geese are found in North America.

Recent information, however, delivered through the Ontario Bird Records Committee would seem to shed some light on the possible origin of at least some of these birds. A Barnacle Goose shot by a hunter last fall near Hawkesbury, Ontario, (east of Ottawa along the Ottawa River) was positively a wild bird since it was originally banded in Scotland. Steve Percival of Durham in the United Kingdom reported the banding details to Jean-Francois Giroux of the University of Quebec in Montreal. Percival wrote, "Excellent to hear from you and particularly regarding this exciting recovery. It was a bird that we ringed on Islay on 9 November 2004 as a juvenile (i.e., 1st winter) male, on the RSPB reserve at Loch Gruinart on Islay, Scotland (55.83 degrees N, 6.34 degrees W). Of the many thousand that have now been ringed in this population [in Scotland] I think that this is the first to have been recovered in Canada (and I think anywhere in N America)."

In addition to this most recent band recovery, one of two Barnacle Geese shot at Ladle Cove, Newfoundland in the fall of 1981 was bearing a band placed on its leg in July 1977 on Spitsbergen, Norway!

These two banding records clearly support the notion that not all Barnacle Geese in North America can be escapes!

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TORONTO GLASS-AND-LIGHT BREAKTHROUGH

Another breakthrough in Canada came when the Toronto (Ontario) City Council unanimously adopted a resolution on 31 January that will help protect migratory birds from colliding with glass windows. This action resulted in the improved control of the lighting on buildings, to increased public education, and even bird rescue efforts. The resolution specifies that for all new buildings in Toronto, "the needs of migratory birds be incorporated into the Site Plan Review process with respect to facilities for lighting, including floodlighting, glass and other bird-friendly design features."

The Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP), a Toronto-based charitable organization, has been working to address the issue of bird collisions with structures since 1993. It was the first organization of its kind in the world; similar organizations have since sprung up in Chicago and New York.

FLAP, the City of Toronto, and several other entities have formed a partnership known as Lights Out Toronto. This April, in time for spring migration, the Lights Out Toronto partnership will launch its public awareness campaign on how Torontonians can prevent the deaths of thousands of migratory birds by simple acts, such as turning lights off. (This will also greatly reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions and save millions of dollars each year.) Mayor David Miller and the entire Toronto City Council should be congratulated for their leadership role in migratory bird conservation.

To view the full report on the part of the Council's Planning and Transportation Committee, see this [site](#).

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IVORY-BILLED NEWS AND VIEWS

On 10 February, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology announced that there have been "about six possible visual encounters" of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in the Big Woods of Arkansas and "another 10 instances" of the bird's double-knock and "kent" calls since teams began searching in November 2005. The possible encounters were reported by team members, birders, hunters, and refuge staff. In one case it was thought that there might have been two birds observed in flight. The report said that "a nice series of 'kent' calls" was picked up by an automatic recording device strapped to a tree.

None of these "possible encounters" conclusively confirm the existence of the woodpecker, of course. However, when these various encounters are taken together, "there is a very interesting pattern - there has been a flurry

of encounters from a couple of key areas," according to Ken Rosenberg, the director of Conservation Science of the Lab and member of the Recovery Team. The search team is using this recent information to further guide its work in the Big Woods.

You can read the full Cornell Lab announcement [here](#).

Practically concurrent with these recent "possible encounters," a critical account of recent Ivory-billed Woodpecker reports was published in the January issue of THE AUK, journal of the American Ornithologists' Union. The article, written by noted woodpecker authority, Jerome Jackson, raises some interesting questions about the recent sightings, and attempts to address them. You can read [the article](#) for yourself.

In the meantime, the search, the hope, and the dialogue continue.

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TREASURE TROVE OF NEW SPECIES FOUND

An amazing discovery was announced last month, when it was reported that a 'Lost World' of wildlife species was found in Indonesia, in western New Guinea. The announcement described an expedition to one of Asia's most isolated jungles that found several dozen new species of frogs, butterflies, flowers and birds.

Bruce Beehler, a Conservation International ornithologist who led the spectacular expedition, reported simply that "The first bird we saw at our camp was a new species." The 11-member team of U.S., Indonesian, and Australian scientists entered the Foja Mountains in December. The isolated area covers more than two million acres of old-growth tropical forest.

Besides discovering a new species of honeyeater, other amazing discoveries included the first photos of a male Berlepsch's Six-Wired Bird of Paradise and the first photos of the Golden-fronted Bowerbird. Equally astounding was what may be the largest rhododendron flower on record - almost six inches across - along with more than 20 new frogs and four new butterfly species.

Beehler said there did not appear to be any immediate conservation threat to the area, which actually enjoys the status of a wildlife sanctuary. "No logging permits are given to this area, there is no transport system - not a single road," Beehler added.

For lots more details, see [this summary](#) from BirdLife International.

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BOBOLINKS IN BOLIVIA

There still are some exciting discoveries to be made, sometimes involving fairly common bird species.

Closer to home, disturbing population declines for Bobolinks in North America have been observed. These are certainly due in part to changes in land use on the breeding grounds, yet threats on the Neotropical wintering grounds are virtually unknown. It is known, however, that Bobolink roosts occur in tall grasses or rice fields; they always roost in areas inundated with water.

Rosalind Renfrew and a team of other researchers currently working in an area near Trinidad, Bolivia believe that they may have discovered the largest single winter concentration of Bobolinks ever recorded. The roost was originally thought to contain 15-20,000 Bobolinks, but a more systematic effort revealed that the roost size was probably closer to 60,000.

These initial findings in Bolivia may lead to a full-scale study to learn more about Bobolink wintering ecology. Farmers in eastern Bolivia have known about the Bobolinks for some time. (Indeed, reports indicate the birds are so abundant that they are considered pests by rice growers.) Still, previous to this discovery, few ornithologists even thought that Bobolinks wintered in Bolivia.

See [here](#) for more background from the Vermont Institute of Natural Science.

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NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM AWARDS

The National Wildlife Refuge Association and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation will honor National Wildlife Refuge System supporters and employees later this month with the presentation of the 2006 National Wildlife Refuge System Awards.

These awards recognize exceptional contributions made by refuge volunteers and employees in protecting the Refuge System. The official presentation will take place in conjunction with the 71st North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, running from 22 March through 25 March in Columbus, Ohio.

The awards and recipients will be: Paul Kroegel Refuge Manager of the Year Award goes to Glenn Carowan, Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, MD/VA. Refuge System Employee of the Year goes to John Schomaker, Division of Conservation Planning, Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region, Minnesota. Volunteer of the Year Award goes to Tim Anderson, Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge, California. Friends Group of the Year

Award goes to Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, New Jersey.

To learn more about the awards and the work of each of the worthy recipients, start [here](#).

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REFUGE PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON

The 2005 Refuge Photo Contest entries closed at midnight 15 December 2005. Well over 1,400 refuge images were submitted, undeniable evidence that refuges are great places to visit and that a great many photographers and other outdoor enthusiasts are out there experiencing our country's varied wildlife heritage.

The four judges - Shawn Carey, Maria Cecil, Karen Hollingsworth, and Clay Taylor - picked out over 220 of the best images and are finalizing the top choices as this is being written. Right now, you can examine the thumbnails of 220+ eye-catching semi-finalist entries that will be included in the NWRA Refuge Image Library. (The NWRA Refuge Image Library is designed to be an online searchable gallery of images - available for free public use - taken at National Wildlife Refuges.) Click [here](#) to access the semi-finalist thumbnails.

The winners will be announced on 14 March 2006, the 103rd anniversary of the establishment of the first National Wildlife Refuge. (Top prizes include some fine Swarovski Optik products, Technologies TrekPod, and a number of Houghton Mifflin field guides.) You can check back at the site after 14 March for the names of the winners and to view their images.

We will announce when the next refuge-photo contest is launched for 2006!

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WETLANDS LOAN ACT (WLA) AND STAMP EFFORTS

In late February, there was a meeting of over 40 conservationists at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge to discuss the joint effort to pass a new Wetlands Loan Act and promotion of the sale of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp.

The proposed Wetlands Loan Act, H.R. 4315, is modeled after the original 1961 Act. It would authorize an advance in Stamp revenues to acquire new National Wildlife Refuge fee-title properties and easements amounting to \$400 million over the next 10 years. For the WLA to be truly successful, ways will have to be devised to sell more Stamps to those not currently buying them. Waterfowl hunters have been doing all of the heavy lifting in this regard for over 70 years; the group gathered at Minnesota Valley NWR discussed how the burden might be shared and how the WLA could make a real difference in bird and wetland conservation.

We have discussed this before, in the [September](#) and [October](#) 2005 E-bulletins.

We also promise to touch on this subject again in future E-bulletins.

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SAEMANGEUM DEVELOPMENTS

The movement against the Saemangeum project - a 33-kilometer seawall and "reclamation" effort in South Korea - became a national effort in 1998 when environmental groups and religious leaders became fully aware of the destruction it would cause to not only the environment, but also the 25,000 people whose economic livelihoods depend on the estuary for fish and aquaculture. Bird conservationists have joined to stop the reclamation of 40,100 hectares of tidal flats and shallows that are vitally important for an estimated 500,000 waterbirds annually. The Saemangeum estuary supports 30 waterbird species in internationally important concentrations, including the globally-threatened Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Spotted Greenshank, Black-faced Spoonbill, and Saunders's Gull.

The project is already \$400 million over-budget and will require at least another \$4.3 billion to complete. The project was recently allowed to move forward when the Seoul administration's effort to halt the project was overturned on appeal. The Korean Supreme Court began hearing the Saemangeum case in mid-February.

This is perhaps the biggest environmental case in Korea's history. Timing is crucial, given that all but 2.7 of the 33-kilometer seawall has already been built. The Ministry of Agriculture wants to complete the initial seawall in April, which will severely impact bird populations migrating along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

For updates in English on the Saemangeum project and the numerous globally threatened bird species it will affect, you can visit the sites of the [Korean Federation for Environmental Movement-FoE Korea](#) and [Birds Korea](#).

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THE PRAIRIE POTHOLE JOINT VENTURE (PPJV) IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AVAILABLE

The Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV), established in 1987 as one of the original six priority Joint Ventures

under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, is one of the Joint Ventures that has served as a model of a successfully integrated bird-conservation partnership. The region covers parts of Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa. The PPJV unveiled its new website last year. Its Implementation Plan now contains ambitious sub-plans for not only waterfowl, but also for shorebirds, waterbirds, and landbirds. Every concerned bird conservationist should at least [take a look](#).

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