



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

March 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

The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas does it again, producing yet another amazing rarity: Roadside Hawk.

On 24 January Jeff Lewis and Joan Kutulas from North Carolina found a Roadside Hawk at the popular Frontera Audubon Thicket in Weslaco. Off and on into February, this tropical raptor was difficult to find. Nonetheless, a few lucky birders managed to see it until about 5 February when it disappeared, possibly the victim of a predator.

Remarkably, also on 5 February, an immature Roadside Hawk was seen and photographed many miles upriver at Falcon State Park by Frank Yulling and Carolyn Young. This bird was encountered along the park road between the butterfly garden and the shelter area and also by the boat ramp, where, apparently, it remained through the end of the month.

The Roadside Hawk is a small tropical buteo that is a common resident in woodland borders, clearings, and roadsides from southern Tamaulipas, Mexico, to South America. It is a real rarity in the U.S., however, with only about eight records for Texas. The first was in 1901, but the second occurrence was not until 1979, more than three-quarters of a century later. Since then, there have been multiple sightings - in 1983, 2000, and 2005 - nearly all in the winter.

Does this mean that Roadside Hawks are increasing? Are there more skilled observers? Is there less suitable habitat in nearby Mexico? Is the species responding to climate change? You choose.

If you are unfamiliar with the Roadside Hawk, check any Mexican field guide or the latest National Geographic field guide (fifth edition: pp. 128-129) for an illustration and more information.

The Roadside Hawk at Falcon State Park has been photographed numerous times. including by Carlos Escamilla. whose

The Hawaiian monk seal (brown state) has been photographed numerous times; including by Carlos Escamilla, whose images can be found here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/carlosmescamilla/sets/72157623504209716/>

CHIPPING AWAY AT LAYSAN ALBATROSSES

There have been recent renewed calls to clean up 70 deadly lead paint-contaminated buildings on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge which are believed to be responsible for the deaths of many thousands of Laysan Albatross chicks since jurisdiction of Midway was transferred from the Navy to the Department of the Interior (DOI) in 1996.

Apparently, albatross chicks have been ingesting lead-based paint chips from the buildings, causing a variety of painful ailments and ultimately, slow deaths. After eating the chips, the chicks on Midway exhibit a condition called "droopwing," which leaves them incapable of lifting their wings. Unable to fly, many eventually die of starvation and dehydration.

In 2006, the area encompassing Midway and its surrounding waters was included in President George Bush's designation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Despite Midway's previous designation as a National Wildlife Refuge and its location within the marine national monument, an estimated 10,000 of these seabirds die there each year.

About 70 percent of the world's population of Laysan Albatrosses nests on Midway.

In a paper to be released in the scientific journal, ANIMAL CONSERVATION, Dr. Myra Finkelstein of the University of California-Santa Cruz and her co-authors, including scientists and managers from the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, concluded that the death of Laysan Albatross chicks from lead exposure on Midway has long-term consequences for the albatross population. By 2060, there could literally be 190,000 fewer albatrosses due to lead poisoning. By contrast, removing lead-based paint at this time could increase the population by up to 360,000 by 2060. These are significant figures for long-lived birds like albatrosses.

It has been estimated that \$5.6 million would need to be invested to clean up the toxic lead paint on Midway Atoll. Approximately 70 of the buildings would have to be stripped of all lead-based paint, and the sand surrounding these old buildings would require sifting to remove the paint chips.

A number of wildlife and conservation groups (e.g., the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), the Conservation Council for Hawaii, and the Hawaii Audubon Society) have called on Congress to direct sufficient funding to Midway to address this problem. You can find more information at:

www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/100202.html

MURRE/EAGLE QUANDARY ON THE OREGON COAST

And here is another seabird issue. Every spring, an estimated half million Common Murres come to nest on far-flung rocks off the Oregon coast at the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex. This has taken place for as long as humans have recorded the event.

Ironically, however, as Bald Eagle numbers have increased in recent years, increasing eagle predation is beginning to impact the nesting success of the murres. The situation is sufficiently acute that recently Common Murres are returning to many colonies only to fail year after year, with a number of breeding sites now being totally abandoned.

Some murres have relocated farther south; others simply crowd or over-crowd successful nesting sites.

Regardless, the ongoing situation involving Bald Eagles was completely unpredictable.

Currently, the Refuge staff has no plans to "remove" predating Bald Eagles, a species recently delisted from the Endangered Species List, but the staff will simply document the changes instead.

The full story is contained in a nine-minute episode of the "Oregon Field Guide" that ran in early February on Oregon Public Broadcasting. Filmed last spring and summer, you can view the fascinating story here:

www.opb.org/programs/ofg/segments/view/1735

WORLD SEABIRD CONFERENCE

Since we are on the subject of seabirds, readers might be interested in learning about the First World Seabird Conference to be held later this year.

The Pacific Seabird Group and two dozen other professional seabird and research organizations from around the world, are working on this inaugural conference focused on seabirds. The event will take place in Victoria, British Columbia, 7-11 September 2010.

Seabirds, as you may know, have become threatened on a global scale and at an alarming rate. The goal of this conference will be to put seabird management and conservation into a worldwide perspective. Among many issues addressed will be the impact of climate change on the world's oceans, seabird/fisheries interactions, challenges facing marine protected areas, and the ecology and restoration of seabird islands.

For more information, see:

www.worldseabirdconference.com

MORE SOBERING EVIDENCE OF THREATS TO PRAIRIE POTHOLE REGION

Last month we reported on the potential corn-based ethanol threat to birds and bird habitat in the Prairie Pothole Region: www.refugenet.org/birding/febSBC10.html#TOC07

Now there is even more to consider for the region.

In the February edition of BIOSCIENCE, a team of 11 researchers reported on the fragile Prairie Pothole Region of North America, indicating that a 2 to 4 degree Celsius change (or 4 to 8 degree Fahrenheit change) between 2050 and 2100 could have a devastating effect on wetland bird and wildlife populations. The study focused on waterfowl since, in the words of Carter Johnson, a professor of wetland ecology at South Dakota State University who has been studying climate change for 40 years, "We tend to use ducks as our currency because everyone knows ducks. The major challenge is how to maintain enough of these wetlands, since so many organisms depend on them." An estimated 177 bird species use the Prairie Pothole Region of North America for breeding, with another 130 depending upon it for resting and feeding during migration.

The study is summarized here:

www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=2398

And it is reported on (from the Sioux Falls, SD, ARGUS HERALD) here:

www.argusleader.com/article/20100212/NEWS/2120322/1001/news

YEAR OF THE BIRDS: NORTH CAROLINA

Although the original story nearly slipped by us, it is still worthy of notice. The North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation has proclaimed 2010 as "The Year of the Birds."

The state's Division of Parks and Wildlife is scheduling special programs and activities in state parks throughout North Carolina this year to highlight the role birds play in our environment. This effort is being carried out in partnership with Audubon North Carolina.

While we know that many readers of this E-bulletin regard virtually EVERY year as "The Year of the Birds," a state-wide public acknowledgment of the importance of birds is heartening.

Wouldn't it be grand if other States and Provinces would do likewise, emphasizing a year-long celebration on the environmental, educational, and recreational aspects of birds in our lives?

You can find a story North Carolina's "Year of the Birds" here:

www.citizen-times.com/article/20100215/NEWS01/302150033/1009

BOOK NOTES: GLORIOUS WATERBIRDS

This month's recommended book is a 344-page weighty volume, and a coffee-table wonder. The subject is simply covered by the book's title, WATERBIRDS (2009, Norton). The book chronicles a 40-year photographic journey by the author-photographer, Theodore Cross, a man who passed away at the end of February.

The book opens with seven photo-enhanced essays, ranging from encounters with migrating Red Knots at Delaware Bay to a pursuit of nesting Ross's Gulls in Arctic Siberia. From here, the book features 257 pages of delicious photos and accompanying short vignettes of all sorts of birds associated with water, be they geese, albatrosses, boobies, herons, shorebirds, gulls, terns, alcids, and even raptors.

Cross presents these water-loving species through his exquisite photographs, each of which clearly reflects his contagious affection for birds. "It's like a disease, I suppose," said the recently deceased 86-year-old Cross. "Except for my family and friends, there are few things I care more about."

IBA NEWS: PUERTO RICAN VICTORY

In the February 2007 E-bulletin we brought your attention to a wind farm proposal slated for the Karso del Sur region of Puerto Rico. This is a region characterized by drained limestone-based dry forest. This proposal would directly impact an Important Bird Area (IBA) which sustains the most significant remaining stronghold of the Puerto Rican Nightjar. The wind project could jeopardize a significant portion of the global population of this critically endangered species. For our previous summary, see:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/febSBC07.html#TOC06

In a recent development, the governmental and bipartisan Planning Board of Puerto Rico has rejected and suspended the siting permit for the wind farm. At the same time, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed development is being legally disputed.

The Sociedad Ornitológica Puertorriqueña, Inc. (SOPI, BirdLife in Puerto Rico) and other organizations have applauded the decision. You can find more details here:

www.birdlife.org/news/news/2010/02/pr_windfarm.html

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: TRY BIRDING BY BIKE

As we assessed a couple of recent rarities of the month which appeared at Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park, (i.e., Bare-throated Tiger-Heron in January and a close runner-up for this past month, Aztec Thrush), we were reminded of an important birding tip: bicycling.

At "Bentsen," a bicycle is one the best ways to get around while birding. It's a great way to get some exercise, as well as to see birds. There are many other examples of such opportunities. Three National Wildlife Refuges come to mind where birding and bicycling mix well: Ding Darling NWR (FL), Don Edwards/SF Bay NWR (CA), and Chincoteague NWR (VA), all of which encourage biking. And don't forget the World Series of Birding (Cape May, NJ) where teams have been known to bird while biking. Ergo: that competition's "Carbon Footprint Cup" is awarded for the highest number of species found while on foot, bike or rowed boat, or any other non-motorized form of transportation.

On the extreme end of this approach was the effort made by Malkolm Boothroyd, who undertook a year-long, fossil-fuel-free search of birds ending in June 2008. Boothroyd cycled a total of 13,133 miles, identified 548 bird species of birds, and raised more than \$25,000 for bird conservation. See details of this birding and biking epic at: <http://birdyear.blogspot.com/>

You don't have to take your biking as efforts as far as Malkolm, but biking and birding together is certainly a healthy, fun, and "green" approach! As spring gets closer, why not consider birding and biking?

WANT A WONDERFUL BOOK? SHOW US WHAT YOU KNOW!

If you happen to be a particularly careful reader, you may have noticed that on the top of this E-bulletin we indicated that we have a new sponsor, National Geographic.

Americans everywhere are aware of the historic legacy of the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC magazine, collections of which represent the solid cornerstone of garages across America. Birders in particular are reminded of National Geographic's enormous contribution in the area of birds and bird appreciation. National Geographic books, most notably the National Geographic FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, are nothing short of wonderful. If you need a reminder, see here: www.shopng.com/birdbooks

To celebrate National Geographic's recent connection with the E-bulletin, the fine folks at National Geographic have contributed a number of their publications for us to distribute to E-bulletin readers. While we don't have 2,500 copies to give away, we have enough that we will happily give them away to readers who choose to enter a quick-and-easy contest in the hope of winning one of these publications. Our little contest and quiz questions will run for the next six months.

Each monthly quiz question will either relate to one of our news items for the previous month, or it will relate to some event or experience that is due to occur during the month of the quiz question.

There will undoubtedly be multiple winners who answer our question correctly, so we will only be able to distribute copies to five of those monthly whose names are picked at random from all the correct answers.

The prize this month will be a copy of the luscious BIRD COLORATION by Geoffrey E. Hill. This 256-page book, being released mid-March, explores both the spectacle and the science of bird coloration. It has just the right mix of wonderful photos and artwork that you have come to expect from a National Geographic publication on birds. The text explains it all. For more on this book, see here: <http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/nqs/browse/productDetail.jsp?productId=6200571&code=MR20380>

So, here's this month's question: What major North American bird migration spectacle will peak in this month in the central U.S., an event that annually attracts thousands of observers and photographers (i.e., what is the event and where does it take place)?

Please send your answer by 15 March to: birdingbulletin@verizon.net

Make the subject line "QUIZ! " and 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 provide 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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