



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

May 2009

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RARITY FOCUS

Readers might remember the Loggerhead Kingbird found by Carl Goodrich and Ron Hamburger in early March 2007 at Fort Zachary Taylor State Park, at the southern end of Key West, Florida. This was the first verifiable record for the U.S., a bird presumably from Cuba. For more details on that sighting see our coverage here: <http://www.refugenet.org/birding/aprSBC07.html#TOC01>

As if to prove that lightning actually strikes twice in the same place, on 12 April, Carl Goodrich found another Loggerhead Kingbird at the same Fort Zachary Taylor State Park in Key West, at the fountain area near the parking lot. For a number of days (at least until 23 April) it was found either at the original site or at the nearby Sonny McCoy Indigenous Park. Because of its extended stay, many observers from far and wide had an opportunity to see this Caribbean rarity.

opportunity to see this Caribbean rarity.

This Loggerhead Kingbird – a unique leucistic individual - will undoubtedly become the third record for the U.S. The second record occurred at the Dry Tortugas for about a week in March 2008.

We were all set to profile the Loggerhead Kingbird as the “Rarity of the Month,” but lightning kept striking.

On the morning of 17 April, Goodrich found a rare Bahama Mockingbird at the local Botanical Gardens, a bird that also was reported for several days either at the gardens or at an assisted living facility adjacent to the gardens.

Then on the afternoon of 20 April, Larry Manfredi found an adult male Yellow-faced Grassquit back at Fort Zachary Taylor State Park. The bird was located along the nature trail not too far from the parking lot. The grassquit was found, off-and-on, at various locations in the state park through 29 April.

But the lightning– or the magic – at Fort Zachary Taylor State Park (and nearby locations) was continuing. Rarities persisted, and the “Rarity of the Month” became the “Rarity Location of the Month.”

On 25 April Bob Wallace found a Fork-tailed Flycatcher near the dumpster at the state park. The next day, the flycatcher was relocated near the fountain area.

Then on the afternoon of 28 April, Cindy Cummings and Ruth Kerr saw a Western Spindalis at the same Fort Zachary Taylor State Park. The next day, birders found the bird in the general area of the water fountain in the park. A second Western Spindalis was then found by the High Lonesome Bird Tour group at Sonny McCoy Indigenous Park.

Thus, Key West (with an emphasis on Fort Zachary Taylor State Park) was clearly the place to be birding last month!

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CUBAN BLACK-HAWK IN GEORGIA: A CURIOUS ONE-DAY WONDER

On 10 April, a very dark and large buteo-like raptor was reported at Callaway Gardens - a vacation lodge, golf course, and spa resort outside of Pine Mountain, Georgia, only about an hour's drive southwest of Atlanta. The raptor appeared at the resort's birdfeeder area at the Callaway Gardens Discovery Center. Photos of the bird were obtained, and within a couple of days, the raptor was identified as a Cuban Black-Hawk (*Buteogallus gundlachii*). The species is normally only found in the mangroves and coastal swamps of Cuba.

This bird was not seen after 10 April.

While the identity of the black-hawk is generally agreed upon, its origin is not. The debate over human-aided vs. natural-origins is to be expected. For fascinating details and photos by three photographers, see here: <http://www.qos.org/sightings/19-hawks/cubh.html>

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SPOONBILL SANDPIPER NUMBERS CONTINUE TO FALL

Among mega-rarities in North America is the Spoonbill Sandpiper, a tundra-breeder from extreme northeastern Siberia which winters in isolated locations in Southeast Asia. There are only a handful of North American records, mostly from remote coastal areas of Alaska. (If you are unfamiliar with this species, see the most recent National Geographic guide, pp 184-185.)

This enigmatic shorebird is rare almost everywhere, and recent winter surveys have not been encouraging. A pair of surveys this past winter illustrates the plight of this unusual sandpiper. A survey on the coast of Burma (Myanmar) found a new wintering site for the Spoonbill Sandpiper, but numbers overall were down from the previous year. In the Red River delta of Vietnam, where more than 27 Spoonbill Sandpipers were recorded in the mid-1990s, not a single individual was reported last winter.

For a summary of the two recent winter surveys, see: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/03/sbs_surveys.html

To see the species account from RAREBIRD YEARBOOK 2009, see: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/03/RBYB2009_Spoon-billed_sandpiper.pdf

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ANOTHER LOOK AT THE SPOTTED OWL PLAN

On 31 March, the Obama administration filed a motion in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., indicating that it would not defend the Bush administration's decision to decrease Northern Spotted Owl protection. This will essentially negate any mitigation of the proposed plan and critical habitat designation proposed by the Bush

essentially require a re-visitation of the recovery plan and critical habitat designation released by the Bush administration.

The new administration in Washington is concerned that a former Interior Department official may have tainted the recovery plan, an opinion based on an Inspector General's report late last year that determined political interference by Julie MacDonald, a former Deputy Assistant Interior Secretary who played a major role in framing the owl protection.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated the Northern Spotted Owl as Threatened in 1990. Lawsuits over owl protection by environmental groups prompted the creation of the Northwest Forest Plan, which reduced logging on federal lands by 80 percent.

The Bush administration opposed this plan. It preferred a policy known as the Western Oregon Plan Revisions, or WOPR, which would nearly triple timber harvests on 2.6 million acres in western Oregon. The WOPR plan was finalized weeks before President George W. Bush left office.

Interior Department lawyers have indicated that they will try to negotiate with the timber industry and conservation groups over 30 days to set the terms for reconsidering the owl's protections while trying to resolve pending litigation.

It is unclear how much of the Western Oregon Plan Revision will be scrapped, how much of the Northwest Forest Plan will be revived, or how all the parties involved will react.

What is clear is that another round of charges and counter-charges on Northern Spotted Owl protection is in the works.

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BOOK NOTES: NEW PHOTO GUIDE AND REFERENCE

At 744 pages, this book is somewhere between a hefty field guide or a small reference book. In either case, the AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA (2009, DK: Dorling Kindersley) with Francois Vuilleumier as editor-in-chief, is worth a look. Vuilleumier, a world-renowned ornithologist and Curator Emeritus of the Department of Ornithology at the museum, has assembled a book profiling more than 650 species of our birds. A full page is devoted to each species, including a large photograph as well as several smaller photos highlighting the species. These photos are presented creatively and artfully.

Each species profile includes information on behavior, nesting, and habitat along with the expected range-map covering North America.

Though the book is not intended to be a field guide, each species account includes ID information. The volume is more like a field guide supplement, and as such it should be appreciated.

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NEW BIRDING TRAILS

It is not always easy keeping track of all the newly emerging birding trails launched and improved across the continent. Two recent developments deserve mention, however.

The first is the Makoke Birding Trail in central Iowa which features some 22 key sites, including Saylorville Lake, Red Rock Lake, and Neal Smith NWR, all within a 40-minute drive from Des Moines. (Makoke means "bird" in the Ioway tribal language and was chosen to honor the native people once inhabiting much of central Iowa.) The trail guide may be unique in using aerial photographs as the basis for maps of each site described on the trail. A guide may be downloaded here:

http://www.iowabirds.org/places/documents/Makoke_Trail.pdf

The second birding trail development is the newly released route of the Great Washington State Birding Trail, the Sun and Sage Loop, and the fifth loop for the trail. This loop has 52 stops in South-central Washington in

the Tri-cities area, located in the heart of Washington's wine country. The sites include Big Flat Habitat Management Unit (USACE), Cowiche Canyon (BLM), Johnson Park, Ft. Simcoe State Park, and McNary, Umatilla, and Toppenish NWRs. In the first month upon release, birders purchased more than 500 loop maps. For access to the site locations, see:

http://wa.audubon.org/BirdingTrailMaps/TM_index.html

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OBSOLETE LOGBOOKS?

Are old-time bird-sighting logbooks and sighting clipboards at park and refuge visitor centers becoming a thing

of the past? Are these worn pages with their rain-splattered edges and pencil-marked submissions, simply remnants of 20th-century birding?

Perhaps.

Witness the Cornell-developed "eBird Trail Trackers" that have been slowly finding their way to parks and refuges as the next-new-thing in bird record-keeping at public locations. Not only are the Trail Trackers a way to record bird sightings on location, they also includes photos, audio, video and life history information for the birds observed at a particular site. One tough model of the podium-like units is even totally weather-resistant and vandal-proof, so that it can withstand rugged outdoor use..

These may signal a new way to share sightings and information at public visitation birding locations. To get more information on how the Trail Trackers work, see:

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/is/ett/>

There are now at about half a dozen National Wildlife Refuges with e-Bird Trail Trackers at their Visitor Centers; others are located at state parks and Audubon centers. Here are the ways that two National Wildlife Refuges and one Texas State Park are beginning to share eBird Trail Tracker sightings online (from Bosque del Apache NWR in New Mexico, Santa Ana NWR in Texas, and Estero Llano Grande State Park in Texas):

<http://www.friendsofthebosque.org/Friendsindex.html>

<http://www.friendsofsouthtexasrefuges.org/default.asp?id=296>

<http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org/sites/weslaco/>

These developing eBird Trail Trackers are not likely to be the last word in how sightings will be recorded and shared in the future, but they are currently the first word.

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EVERGLADES DEAL BEING READJUSTED... AGAIN

Florida's celebrated \$1.34 billion deal to buy 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar Corporation land to help restore the Everglades is being scaled back by more than half. Governor Charlie Crist announced last month that the state simply can't afford the original deal.

The reduction means that the state will now buy 72,500 acres of land for \$533 million, but will retain a 10-year option to buy the remainder. The decision means the original bold deal will be far less ambitious than planned, although the long-term outcome may end up at about the same place.

In June, Crist announced the \$1.75 billion deal that included U.S. Sugar's assets, such as its mill, railroad, and citrus processing plant. In November, a revised \$1.34 billion deal was announced that didn't include those assets.

We reported on the implications of both of these moves in July

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/julSBC08.html#TOC02>

and in December:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/decSBC08.html#TOC10>

The South Florida Water Management District has planned to borrow money through bonds for the deal and intends to pay off the debt with property taxes (from a 16-county region stretching from Orlando to the Keys). However, property values dropped 12 percent last year. Florida, moreover, is now facing about a \$6 billion budget gap between anticipated revenues and expenses.

The vision behind the U.S. Sugar deal is to re-establish a natural water flow from Lake Okeechobee through the broad Everglades "River of Grass" to Florida Bay, a cleaner and more reliable flow. Among other things, this water restoration is crucial for Florida's legendary waterbirds. Over the decades, the Everglades, long known for its abundant bird life, has seen its wading bird populations squeezed out of vital habitats.

Even if the deal ends up "at the same place" as originally envisioned over the next decade, some observers are concerned about the wait and the damage accumulated in the interim.

The adjusted deal still represents the largest single purchase of land in Florida's history. The Governor said, "Even though it's scaled down, it's still the biggest ever."

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IBA NEWS: NEW WHSRN SITES

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) recently announced the addition of three new sites to the Network and the first ever Landscape of Hemispheric Importance for inclusion in the Network.

WHSRN sites often overlap with IBA sites, in the U.S. and elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere.

These new WHSRN sites include three wetland locations in Latin America (in Chile, Colombia, and Mexico) and one in the U.S. Two of the sites – in Chile and Colombia – are the firsts for their nations. The WHSRN Hemispheric Council approved the four nominations to designate these important areas at its meeting in Santa Marta, Colombia, earlier this year. The new U.S. Landscape of Hemispheric Importance is the Rainwater Basin area of Nebraska. With these additions, including two new-country firsts, the Network is now 74 sites strong in a dozen countries, with partners conserving and managing a total of 29 million acres of habitat for shorebirds.

For more information on WHSRN sites, see:
<http://www.whsrn.org/>

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:
<http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/>

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TIP OF THE MONTH: IT'S SPRING MIGRATION, DON'T KEEP IT TO YOURSELF

For many birders, May is the month they most look forward to all year. It's a time to appreciate migration at its glorious best. (Admittedly, late April may be that special time for birders on the southern edge of U.S., and early June may be the equivalent at the northern extremes in Canada and Alaska.)

Enjoy it! Revel in it. Be sure to go birding as much as you can.

But don't do it alone. Spend some time taking out some neighbor, some child, some friend who needs to connect to the wonder of nature through birds. There may be no better time to get their attention.

Besides, sometimes it's just fun to watch others as they "discover" their first tanagers, orioles, thrushes, and warblers.

Don't keep this miracle to yourself.

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE MOVES TOWARD LEAD PHASE-OUT

In the past couple of months, the National Park Service (NPS) has indicated that it would begin a phase-out the use of lead ammunition and fishing sinkers on its lands. The reason for the move is the harm to birds and other wildlife caused by the ingestion of spent lead shot, bullets, or sinkers and the danger of dissolved lead contaminating groundwater. For example, a single lead shot or fishing sinker is enough to kill a large swan.

Non-toxic substitutes for lead bullets are now available including those made from tungsten or copper. And several alternatives to lead fishing sinkers are available or under development including sinkers made of stainless steel, tin, tungsten, brass, and zinc.

The call to make all parks lead free by the end of 2010 was announced by Acting Park Service Director Dan Wenk, who said, "We want to take a leadership role in removing lead from the environment." The move may have relatively little impact on hunters, more though on fishing activity. (Hunting is currently permitted in about 60 NPS units, and fishing is widely allowed across the system.)

The Park Service eased off the bold 2010 claim slightly with a clarification that it would "look at the potential for transitioning to non-lead ammunition and non-lead fishing tackle for recreational use by working with our policy office and appropriate stakeholders/groups, [which] will require public involvement, comment, and review."

Still, the actual phase-out of lead is in play, and 2010 remains the NPS ideal goal.

In 1991 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service banned lead shot nationwide in waterfowl hunting. Lead is also outlawed in Yellowstone National Park (which has one of the few remnant populations of natural Trumpeter Swans left in the lower 48 states). In November 2007, we reported on the lead bullet ban in much of California, designed to protect California Condors and other wildlife. See here:
<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/novSBC07.html#TOC12>

A number of states beyond California have at least partial restrictions on the use of traditional lead bullets or sinkers (e.g., Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Massachusetts). Nevertheless, the U.S. as a whole continues to lag behind Canada and several European countries on the issue. Britain banned all small lead fishing weights in 1987. Denmark did so in 2002. In 1997 Canada banned lead fishing gear in all its National Parks and Wildlife Areas.

Proponents of a lead ban have tried to stress that their efforts are not anti-gun, anti-hunting, or anti-fishing. As Michael Frye of the American Bird Conservancy remarked on this very issue, "[I]t is pro-wildlife and pro-

human... [a cause] we should all embrace for the sake of future generations who will inherit the environment we leave behind."

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OHIOAN WINS JR, DUCK STAMP CONTEST

The Federal Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program is a creative arts curriculum that helps teach wetlands and waterfowl conservation to students in kindergarten through high school. On Earth Day last month, the national art competition was held in Washington D.C. There, 16-year-old Lily Spang of Toledo, Ohio, took first place. Her winning image was of a male Wood Duck, a regular species favorite.

Participation in the program nationwide included more than 28,000 students entering state art contests this year. You can get more details on this year's winners here:

<http://www.fws.gov/juniorduck/>

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ESA SECTION SEVEN RULE REVOKED

On 28 April, Secretaries Ken Salazar (Interior) and Gary Locke (Commerce) announced that the Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation rule issued at the tail end of the Bush Administration has been revoked. We wrote about this issue and its implications in the April E-bulletin:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/aprSBC09.html#TOC04>

The Obama Administration was able to bypass an otherwise expected lengthy rule-chaining process only because of Congressional action. The recent Omnibus Appropriations Act, Congress gave Interior and Commerce 60 days to revoke this rule, and that's what happened. Here is the press release on rescinding the rule:

http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2009/20090428_esa.html

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CAHOW RETURNS TO NONSUCH ISLAND AFTER ALMOST 400 YEARS

In April, 2008, we reported on the investigation of nesting sites by Bermuda Petrels (also known as Cahows) on a small Bermuda islet:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/aprSBC08.html#TOC07>

Only about 300 of the birds exist on Bermuda, breeding nowhere else in the world. Most of their recent nesting sites are beset by habitat approaching "full occupancy."

Last year, as many as four of the extremely rare Bermuda Petrels investigated Nonsuch Island, a small islet at the entrance of Castle Harbor, Bermuda, for potential nesting. The birds successfully returned to where they had been translocated as nestlings in an experiment to repopulate Nonsuch Island with nesting petrels.

The islet had been made a potential nesting area following the removal of rats and domestic animals.

This year, Cahows began preparing burrows on Nonsuch, with activity from at least seven pairs of the translocated chicks (from birds released in 2005 and 2006). The birds usually do not produce their first chicks until they have nested for about two years. Still, last month it was announced that one pair of the petrels on Nonsuch had produced a chick.

This remarkable event represents the first Cahow chick to be hatched on Nonsuch Island since 1620. It is expected that other Bermuda Petrels will fill in appropriate nesting habitat in seasons to come.

Here is a local story with details:

<http://www.bermudasun.bm/main.asp?SectionID=24&SubSectionID=270&ArticleID=41168&TM=42367.79>

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WHOOPIING CRANE NUMBERS DROP

Last month we reported that the Whooping Cranes on the Texas coast had witnessed the first drop in their numbers since 2001:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/aprSBC09.html#TOC02>

We now have some more details to share with you on this Endangered species.

According to Tom Stehn, Whooping Crane coordinator with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2008-2009 was the worst winter on record for the Texas group. The wintering cranes centered at Aransas National Wildlife

the worst winter on record for the Texas group. The wintering cranes, centered at Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge near Rockport, Texas, will spend their summers at Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada.

Stehn reported that with 21 Whooping Cranes lost during the winter and 34 birds that left Texas in spring 2008 and failed to return, 20 percent of the flock has been lost during the last 12 months. This marks the first year crane numbers have declined since 2001.

Winter losses have been attributed to poor habitat conditions in wintering grounds on the middle Texas coast. Low rainfall last year resulted in saltier bays and fewer blue crabs, the prime food source for the wintering cranes. Several emaciated Whooping Crane carcasses were found. (The virus IBD - infectious bursal disease - was even found in one of the juveniles). Refuge staff even took the unusual step of providing supplemental feeding over last winter in addition to burning upland areas to make acorns more available.

Further details can be found here:

http://www.birdrockport.com/tom_stehn_whooping_crane_report.htm

and here:

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/newsmedia/releases/?req=20090331a>

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WHITE HOUSE ROBINS HATCH

Associated Press photographer Ron Edmonds found nesting American Robins in a bush just outside the White House press briefing room late last month. Here are details, in case you missed the story and the photos:

http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090425/ap_on_go_pr_wh/white_house_robin_s_nest

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SHAMELESS SELF-PROMOTION

As the Birding Community E-bulletin begins its sixth year, we have decided to share a few remarks from among our valued readers. Their comments are reproduced below.

In place of "Letters to the Editors" we will perhaps include one or two comments most months this year. We are placing these statements at the very end of the monthly E-bulletin so if you wish you can simply stop reading now!

"I enjoy and rely upon your Birding Community E-bulletin to keep me informed and in touch with events and issues of interest and importance to me. I get all the magazines. They sit on the coffee table waiting to be read. I field a blizzard of calls and emails that have already transmuted events into issues and concerns. Thanks for cutting out the middlemen and giving me the skinny."

- Pete Dunne, author and director of the Cape May Bird Observatory

"The E-bulletin is a hugely valued source of information both for my work as a conservation professional and for my enjoyment as a birder. It manages to distill the essence of stories of interest as can only be done by thoughtful editors who have a killer sense of what's crucial and of what's fluff. No other source comes close."

- Charles D. Duncan, Director, Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, Executive Office

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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.

