



## THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

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May 2010

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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.

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[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html)

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### RARITY FOCUS

There were some wonderful birds in April that might have fit as our monthly rarity, but none seemed to stay long enough to qualify as a super crowd pleaser. Examples included a Taiga Bean Goose in Minnesota, a Fork-tailed Flycatcher and a Masked Duck in Texas, a Thick-billed Vireo in Florida, a Garganey in Nova Scotia, and a Northern Lapwing and a small flock of European Golden-Plovers in Newfoundland.

Nonetheless, two short-duration visitors still deserve special mention.

The first was a Black-vented Oriole photographed bathing at the Eagle Scout water feature at the South Padre Island Convention Center in South Padre Island, Texas, by Scarlet Colley on 11 April. The Black-vented Oriole was in a flock of Orchard Orioles. It was observed intermittently until dark, both at the water feature and at the nearby Gabriel's Garden. The bird was reported to be very skittish.

If you are unfamiliar with the species check the National Geographic guide, (fifth edition, pp. 452-453). The species is resident from n. Mexico (c. Sonora and s. Nuevo León) to n. Nicaragua. Since the 1960s there have been approximately four previous records for Texas and one for Arizona in 1991.

You can view Scarlet Colley's photographs from South Padre Island here:  
<http://spinaturecenter.com/blog/>

There were no sightings of the Black-vented Oriole after 11 April, although the bird was also apparently photographed by an observer on 10 April.

The second species of note was Whooping Crane. Because this lovely bird can be seen wintering in individual family groups at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and nearby locales, it's not considered a rarity in the sense of being rare anywhere across North America. However, it is very special to be observed during migration. Accordingly, when 76 Whooping Cranes were found on 1 April at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in Kansas, it was a real treat. The cranes were in their northward migration, and only lingered at Quivira NWR for one day.

### **BP/TRANSOCEAN SPILL CONTINUES THREAT**

As this issue of the E-bulletin is edited, the massive "Deepwater Horizon" oil spill off the Gulf Coast of the U.S. is raising many questions and lots of conservation concern. The spill, caused by the worst rig explosion in decades, continues to spread across the Gulf of Mexico, threatening coastal beaches, marshes, and estuaries. As we send out the E-bulletin, the oil spill from the sunken drilling platform has not yet reached land. Reports indicate that it could reach vital areas in Louisiana, but it also threatens sites in Mississippi, Alabama, and even Florida very soon, depending on winds and currents.

Breton National Wildlife Refuge - the second-oldest refuge in the Refuge System - off the Louisiana coast was boomed off early - among the first 52 miles of boom barriers - as initial protection from the oil. This site, as well as Delta NWR, Gulf Islands National Seashore, Dauphin Island, Fort Morgan State Park, and Bon Secour NWR are bird locales in immediate threat.

There is a good map available on threatened bird sites - with accompanying background - from the American Bird Conservancy:

[www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/100430.html](http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/100430.html)

Updates on the impact that the oil spill is having on Gulf Coast National Wildlife Refuges can also be viewed at: [www.refugeassociation.org/new-issues/delta.html](http://www.refugeassociation.org/new-issues/delta.html)

Much coastal breeding and feeding habitat for birds and other wildlife is in serious jeopardy from the approaching oil. The Louisiana oyster harvest area has already been closed. Blue crab and shrimp sources are now are severely threatened.

Not surprisingly, serious questions are being raised about the safety procedures and environmental response plans of BP and TransOcean. In the meantime, the well continues to gush, with the daily estimate a mere guess (perhaps 5,000 barrels a day, or 210,000 gallons). The attempts to cap the wellhead have been so far unsuccessful.

This event called into question President Obama's original 31 March decision to open up large parts of the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Alaskan coastlines to offshore drilling. Fortunately, that decision is now on official hold.

Ironically, May is "American Wetlands Month," a theme sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This marks the 20th anniversary of the event, a time when the EPA and its partners focus on the vital importance of wetlands to our ecological, economic, and social health. One can only hope that more Americans than ever will pay special attention to the meaning of the month's activities and lessons:

[www.epa.gov/wetlands/awm/](http://www.epa.gov/wetlands/awm/)

Finally, we had hoped to cover "the other" coasted energy issue in this E-bulletin, the Cape Wind Project off Nantucket Sound (Massachusetts). That will wait until next month, when we will also have more information on the Gulf Coast situation.

### **OPEN FIELDS: OPEN QUESTION**

The "Open Fields" portion of the Farm Bill passed in late 2008 was a small, economical, and novel element in an otherwise huge and almost overwhelming piece of legislation. The "Open Fields" portion of the bill accounts for \$50 million over four years (2009-2012), and it could have real significance for birders and others in the outdoor-oriented public. It is designed to help states enroll private land in programs for public access involving wildlife-dependent recreation. We have previously written in the E-bulletin about this Open Fields effort, now called the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program. To see our coverage from last June, see:

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/junSBC09.html#TOC05](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/junSBC09.html#TOC05)

Open Fields has been driven mainly by the hunting and fishing communities, but the benefits to birders, wildlife photographers, and hikers is clear. While there are already about two dozen states that have modest public access programs related to wildlife-associated recreation on private lands, the Open Fields \$50 million could be used to enhance these existing programs or establish programs in states without public access programs.

The Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Administration (FSA), was expected to publish regulation and standards on this issue sometime in early 2009, after which time there would be a 60-day comment period. Unfortunately this has not happened.

Delay by the FSA in releasing regulations and funding for Open Fields is disappointing, if not unreasonable. Tom Franklin, director of policy and government relations for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP), stressed the point, stating that "Congress can assure expanded public access for all sorts of outdoor wildlife-associated activities by encouraging the speedy implementation of this important new program."

### **TIP OF THE MONTH: TICKS!**

The "tick season" generally occurs during the warmer months and, depending on latitude and region, can help make any outdoor activity, including birding, a risk. Being prepared can help you reduce possible health risks associated with tick bites.

Two common tick-borne diseases include Lyme Disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. These infections typically

Two common tick-borne diseases include Lyme Disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted fever. These infections typically begin with a low-grade fever, headache, feeling of malaise, and sometimes a rash. Left untreated, the symptoms may progress to serious and even life-threatening conditions.

We are not giving medical advice here; we are simply offering suggestions on how to avoid the little pests in the first place.

Among these suggestions is to wear fairly light-colored clothing so ticks can be readily detected; wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, socks, and a brimmed hat in areas of heavy tick activity, and try to walk in the center of trails and avoid brushy or grassy areas in heavily infested areas. Also, the trusted tucking-the-pant-legs-in-the-socks method can be effective.

Check yourself thoroughly for ticks either before or after you get home. Once home, you may want to change your clothes right away since ticks may take awhile to make their way to your skin. A quick shower isn't a bad idea either.

Although this advice is also valid for chiggers, that's a longer and more painful subject for another time.

### **BOOK NOTES: WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T RUN**

Although not a brand new title and not exclusively about birds, *WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T RUN* (The Lyons Press, 2008) is an entertaining and sometimes poignant collection of encounters and experiences of an Australian safari guide working Botswana, Peter Allison.

Whether readers been fortunate enough to travel to southern Africa or not, they can hardly fail to be amused and enlightened by the behind the scenes accounts this world-class safari guide. A quick read, but while worth the time spent. You don't have to be an experienced world-traveler to appreciate the stories.

### **HAWAIIAN BIRDS: AN ON-LINE ACHIEVEMENT**

Robert L. (Bob) Pyle spent over half a century accumulating data to document the occurrence and distribution of birds in Hawaii. Upon developing macular degeneration, he lost clear vision in the early 2000s, at which time he recruited his family to help him complete what was planned to be a scientific monograph on the subject. His son Peter assisted Bob with the text and layout while his daughter Ellen, son Richard, and wife Leilani helped in gathering information and in other technical matters. The B.P. Bishop Museum sponsored the completion of the project.

When Bob passed away in July 2007, Peter took over the project. In March, the decision was made that a website instead of a published monograph would be in the spirit of Bob's desire to have information free and easily accessible to all. Peter completed Version 1 of the website entitled "Birds of the Hawaiian Islands." This version will remain unchanged (apart from the correction of typographical errors and such) until an updated Version 2 is completed sometime in 2011-2013. An annotated checklist of the birds of Hawaii, based on information in Version 1, will also be created later this year, and will soon be available from the B.P. Bishop Museum Press along with a DVD of the website.

This on-line publication represents a major contribution to the knowledge of the birds of Hawaii. It could also serve as a model for future such publications. You can access Version 1 of "Birds of the Hawaiian Islands: Occurrence, History, Distribution, and Status" by Robert L. Pyle and Peter Pyle here:  
<http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rlp-monograph/Default.htm>

For comments, errors, typos, bad links, updated information, and any other suggestions, contact Peter Pyle:  
[ppyle@bishopmuseum.org](mailto:ppyle@bishopmuseum.org).

### **IBA NEWS: SMALL VICTORIES, ACCUMULATED LESSONS**

We regularly witness or hear about Important Bird Area (IBA) successes throughout North America and around the world. Some of these represent great accomplishments, while others are small. All are significant, however. For this issue of the E-bulletin we draw your attention to one of the smaller success stories, this one from Connecticut, the fourth most densely populated state in the U.S.

The small, but ecologically valuable former Griswold Airport, adjacent to coastal Hammonasset Beach State Park, has been a site under contention for years. It comprises 42 acres of open grasslands, a stand of mature coastal forest, and a number of acres of salt marsh habitat. For some time the only option open to local residents has been whether the area would be converted to colonial homes or condominiums. Most recently, it looked like there would be 127 units of housing built on the site. Fortunately, however, the Trust for Public Lands along with many individuals and local groups pulled off a major victory for people, birds, and other wildlife.

What made saving the property possible was a remarkable bi-partisan coalition of state elected officials, town selectmen, citizen advocates, and, most importantly, the people of the community of Madison, Connecticut, who chose to preserve this unique site as a coastal park. The decision occurred when Madison voters chose to protect the lands in a community vote (3,347 yes to 2,371 no) to acquire and refurbish the site as a new coastal park, with athletic fields, walking trails, and wildlife viewing areas.

You can see details about this site and the adjacent Hammonasset Beach State Park (a Globally Significant Important Bird Area) at:  
<http://bit.ly/cv2D2W>

This newly secured property provides an essential buffer to safeguard the health of the Hammonasset tidal marsh which is home to a globally significant nesting population of Saltmarsh Sparrows among many other species of birds.

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/](http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/)

Projects like the one on the Connecticut coast could not succeed without a network of partners, a reality which leads to our next news item.

### **IMBD: THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP**

As was mentioned in January, the theme for this year's International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is the "Power of Partnership."

Insofar as IMBD is usually celebrated in May, we thought a reminder about this theme would be relevant, especially since it corresponds to this year's 20th anniversary of Partners in Flight. Partnerships in bird conservation are the key to success; generally, no single conservation project can be accomplished without the cooperation of many people or other groups.

The IMBD 2010 32-image downloadable PowerPoint show (with space to add additional partnership examples) is an excellent tool for illustrating and celebrating this theme. For more details and additional educational materials, see:  
[www.birdday.org/](http://www.birdday.org/)

### **THIS MONTH'S QUIZ FOR A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC BIRD BOOK**

Readers who choose to enter our quick-and-easy contest have the chance to win a fine National Geographic publication. Each monthly quiz question either relates to one of our news items for the previous month, or it will pertain to an event or experience that is scheduled to occur during the current month.

For more on NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC publications books, see:  
[www.shopng.com/birdbooks](http://www.shopng.com/birdbooks)

This month, we will give away five books to E-bulletin readers whose names are picked at random from among those submitting correct answers. Due to shipping constraints only folks residing in the U.S. or Canada are eligible to win.

Last month's question: In recognition of Earth Day, our multi-part question for April was the following: Can you tell us the year of the first Earth Day, the U.S. Senator behind the original effort, and the woman bird enthusiast whose work in the 1950s and 1960s inspired the spirit of Earth Day?

The answers for last month:

- The First Earth Day was in 1970.
- The U.S. Senator behind the original effort was Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin.
- The bird enthusiast was Rachel Carson.

(Had we told you that last month was actually the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, then, well, you could have done the math and answered part 1 without effort!)

Last month's winners of National Geographic's A FIELD GUIDE TO FIELDS were Tamie Bulow of Colorado Springs, CO, Erin Estell of Glenshaw, PA, Craig Fischer of Phoenix, AZ, J. Patrick Gallagher of Salem, OR, James C. Nelson of Bethesda, MD, and Laimons Osis of Seal Rock, OR. Congratulations to these winners!

The prize for May will be a copy of ILLUSTRATED BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA (the folio edition):

For more on this book, see the news item in the December E-bulletin. It can be found at:  
[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/febSBC10.html#TOC09](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/febSBC10.html#TOC09)

Also, see:

<http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/ngs/browse/productDetail.jsp?productId=6200525>

This month's question is linked to spring migration: The historic predecessor of International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) was initiated in 1894 as "Bird Day" by the superintendent of schools for Oil City, Pennsylvania. What was the superintendent's name?

Please send your answer by 15 May to:

[birdingbulletin1@verizon.net](mailto:birdingbulletin1@verizon.net)

(Note: this is a different address from the one used for the past two months.)

Make the subject line "QUIZ! " and please include your full name and mailing address along with your answer so that we can mail you a book should you be a fortunate winner. We will also provide the correct answer next month.

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You can access past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website:

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html](http://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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