



## THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

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November 2007

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This Birding Community E-bulletin is being distributed through the generous support of Steiner Binoculars as a service to 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 [on the birding pages of the National Wildlife Refuge Association \(NWRA\) website](#) OR on [the birding webpages for Steiner Binoculars](#).

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### RARITY FOCUS

On the afternoon of 6 October, Hugh Ransom discovered a Dusky Warbler at Elings Park, Santa Barbara, California. The park, called Las Positas Park by most locals, is perched atop one of Santa Barbara's tallest hills. The Dusky Warbler was found foraging between 2 and 5 feet in mixed shrubbery along with various other birds, including Magnolia and Yellow Warblers.

The Dusky Warbler is a vagrant from Asia. It breeds in Siberia and northern and central China, and typically winters from southern China and the north Indian subcontinent throughout much of southeast Asia. (For identification details, see your National Geographic guide, page 348-9, or in the "big" Sibley, page 395.)

There are about 10 previous reports of this species from Alaska since 1977, most of them in the fall. California also has nearly as many reports since 1980, most of them occurring between late September and early

also has nearly as many reports since 1960, most of them occurring between late September and early November, and almost all from coastal locations. There are also two reports from Baja California, in Mexico.

The Dusky Warbler at Elings Park was still present on 7 October, but could not be found the next day.

You can view photos of this bird taken by Wes Fritz on 6 October at:

<http://fog.ccsf.edu/~jmorlan/duwa100607.htm>

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## **WANDERING FLAMINGOS**

Louisiana's first documented Greater Flamingo occurrence was a surprise discovery. The flamingo was documented on the weekend of 29-30 September near the Calcasieu Ship Channel, southwest of Lake Charles, Louisiana.

Incredibly, there were actually two flamingos, the same "mismatched" pair that had previously been associating with one another at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Gulf Coast of Texas, starting in December 2006. The amazing thing about these birds is that both flamingos had been originally identified by leg-band numbers - one a wild Greater Flamingo that had been banded in 2005 as a flightless juvenile at the Ria Lagartos Reserve, in the northern Yucatan, and the other an African flamingo that had escaped from the Sedgwick County Zoo in Wichita, Kansas, in late June 2005! Apparently, the two flamingos simply traveled together up the coast from Texas to Louisiana.

The big puzzle: How did these two flamingos, species cousins - one a wanderer from the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, the other on the lam from a zoo in Kansas - ever got together in the first place?

These two birds had actually been seen by locals for about three weeks in the Calcasieu Ship Channel area before they were reported to birders. You can find more details and photos about this remarkable event here: <http://www.losbird.org/bulletin/flamingos.html>

After the weekend of 29-30 September, the two flamingos could not be relocated, except that two flamingos spotted in flight over the town of Cameron, Louisiana, on 9 October had to be the "Odd Couple."

Given the circumstances, this curious twosome could appear almost anywhere in Southeast in the days and weeks ahead!

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## **SCAUP ON THE MOVE**

We introduced our E-bulletin readers to the "Scaup Tracker" in May 2006

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/maySBC06.html#TOC14>

and

<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/may06.html>

Once again this season, the Long Point Waterfowl & Wetlands Research Fund (LPWWRF), a study coordinated by Bird Studies Canada, is tracking migrating scaup. The monitoring of scaup migration through the use of satellite transmitters is a major component of this ongoing project.

Many scaup begin their tracked migration in Alaska and northern Canada. By late October, many Lesser Scaup have already arrived at major staging areas in southern Manitoba. Greater Scaup have moved from areas in the Northwest Territories and northern Québec to areas around the Great Lakes. To obtain more information about scaup movements check out the "Scaup Tracker" on the LPWWRF tracking page for continued updates on fall scaup migration:

<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/Website/scaup/viewer.jsp>

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## **CANADIAN WILD SPECIES REPORT (2005) NOW AVAILABLE**

Also out of Canada, the "Wild Species Reports" are released every five years through the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council. The latest report, "Wild Species 2005," has just been released and can be downloaded in English or French from their website. The report provides general status assessments for over 1,600 wild species in Canada, using results from provincial, territorial, and federal monitoring efforts. Status reports about various species of birds can be accessed from this page:

<http://www.wildspecies.ca/wildspecies2005/index.cfm?lang=e&sec=52>

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## **BIRDING CONTEST FOR SCHOOLS**

The National Biodiversity Parks (NBP) has recently launched the National Schoolyard Birding Challenge. The event is part of the NBP's Fledging Birders Program. The contest has been designed to promote awareness of local bird life for youth through the use of an interactive format.

The Challenge is a monthly birding contest open to students in all public and private schools in the contiguous United States. Student participants will work together to observe, identify, and record various species found on their school grounds. The main objective is to get more young people outside and exploring nature through a birding portal.

Sharing birds with youth is an invaluable service to the birding community, and, hopefully, an investment for the future of birds in North America.

For more information, visit:

[www.fledgingbirders.org/challenge.html](http://www.fledgingbirders.org/challenge.html)

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### **THIRD NWRA REFUGE PHOTO CONTEST ANNOUNCED**

The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) announced its third annual digital photo contest, showcasing America's Refuge System. Entries for the 2008 Refuge Photo Contest may be submitted until 15 December 2007. Results will be announced in March 2008 in connection with the 105th anniversary of the establishment of the first national wildlife refuge. Images submitted for the photo contest may be of birds, mammals, insects, fish, and other animals, as well as plants, people, or simply shots of scenery. The images must be from taken on Refuge System property.

This year, Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A. has donated the grand prize: a 2008 Toyota Highlander Hybrid. Other prizes include a class at the Art Wolfe Digital Photography Center, a Canon EOS 40D Camera, Steiner 8x42 Peregrine Binoculars, a TrekPod, and offerings from Barbara's Bakery, Wild Bird Centers of America, and Houghton Mifflin.

At least 200 images will be selected for inclusion in the NWRA Refuge Image Library, and every photographer submitting an entry will receive a one-year membership in the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

For photo contest details, submission categories, requirements, and procedures, visit:

<http://www.refugenet.org/contest/2008ContestHome.html>

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### **75th STAMP ARTWORK CHOSEN**

Last month, the new image for the 75th "Duck Stamp" was chosen.

Judging for the art contest took place on 12-13 October at the Big Arts Cultural Center in Sanibel, Florida, not far from the Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge. The qualifying images for this contest were Green-winged Teal, Harlequin Duck, Northern Pintail, and Canvasback. There were 247 original submissions illustrating the waterfowl.

For the first time in history, there was a three-way tie for first place, which necessitated an additional round of judging. Once the tie was broken, the winner proved to be Joe Hautman.

Hautman has actually won twice before, once for the 1992-3 stamp with his Spectacled Eider, and then again for 2003-3 with a Black Scoter. Joe Hautman obviously comes from a talented family, since his two brothers have also won previously, James three times and Robert twice. Between them, they have now won eight Federal Duck Stamp contests. Kudos to Joe Hautman for this impressive accomplishment.

For details, including the winning and runner-up images, see:

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

The "Duck Stamp," officially called the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp since 1977, has been a great conservation success story. Over \$700 million has been collected through the sale of the Stamp since 1934, and over 5.2 million acres of Refuge System land secured. (Ninety-eight percent of the proceeds from the \$15-Stamp go to the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, which supports the acquisition of wetlands and grasslands for inclusion into the National Wildlife Refuge System.)

Purchase of the Stamp is required by all waterfowl hunters - 16 years of age and older - but the "Duck Stamp" also serves as a "pass" for all refuges that charge an entry fee.

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## **POTHOLES ON THE ROAD TO USFWS HABITAT GOALS**

As readers of the E-bulletin may know, about half of the annual distribution of the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (made up mainly of "Duck Stamp" revenue) goes to secure wetland and grassland habitat in the Prairie Pothole Region. This is money well spent. It's not "just for ducks"; it's for a broad sweep of wetland and grassland birds that benefit.

On this very subject, there was a powerful Government Accounting Office (GAO) report, released in the last days of September, concerning habitat protection in the Prairie Pothole Region. Its lengthy title was, "Prairie Pothole Region: At the Current Pace of Acquisitions, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Is Unlikely to Achieve Its Habitat Protection Goals for Migratory Birds."

The full document can be found here:

<http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1093>

or a one-page highlight at:

<http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d071093high.pdf>

As the 40+-page GAO study illustrates, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) has purchased outright 700,000 acres and acquired easements on 2.3+ million acres of wetlands and grasslands in the region since 1959. At this pace, to reach the desired goal of 12 million acres saved in the Prairie Pothole Region, it could take the USFWS another 150 years!

Reasonable solutions to help address this crucial acquisition backlog include investing more of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) from offshore oil and gas revenue, creating a new Wetlands Loan Act (WLA), and increasing the "Duck Stamp" price. Unfortunately, there was no discussion in the report on possible efforts to increase the sales of the Stamp. Regular readers of this E-bulletin will recall that we have covered all these important proposed options - one at a time - within the last year.

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## **STEINER/NWRA STAMP OFFER**

And finally on the Duck Stamp, Steiner Binoculars has entered into a unique agreement with the National Wildlife Refuge Association, NWRA, wherein Steiner customers can get a Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp and a one-year membership in NWRA upon purchase a Steiner Peregrine or Merlin Binocular. This may be the first time that any corporate organization has actually bought Duck Stamps for its customers, a thoughtful and creative conservation contribution. The NWRA participation also makes this a unique partnership.

For more information on this generous offer, see:

<http://www.steiner-binoculars.com/special/documents/SteinerNWRADuckStampPromotion.pdf>

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## **IBA NEWS: MORE CARIBBEAN SITES ANNOUNCED**

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) for six Caribbean islands/countries were released online in mid-October. These new additions are for the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, St Lucia, Montserrat, Barbados, and Anguilla. These additions build on the IBAs posted in July from Bermuda, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Kitts and Nevis. All of these IBAs can be accessed from this page, where you can select a location from the island/country list:

<http://caribbean.birdlife.org>

You can find more information about IBAs in the U.S. through the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Area website:

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

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## **NEOTROPICAL BIRDING**

The Neotropical Bird Club, designed to promote bird research and to increase awareness of conservation in Latin America and the Caribbean, has recently published the second issue of its birding magazine, NEOTROPICAL BIRDING.

It is hoped that the magazine will fill a niche among bird publications, with articles of practical use for those birding the Caribbean, South, and Central America. The publication is seeking to commission future articles. If you have an idea for a feature on Neotropical birds, want to share your Neotropical birding experiences, want to share with other birders details on great birding sites, wish to discuss bird identification issues, or any other related issues, contact the editor, James Lowen:

[neotropical.birdina@neotropicalbirdclub.org](mailto:neotropical.birdina@neotropicalbirdclub.org)

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Club members will receive NEOTROPICAL BIRDING annually, and COTINGA (the complementary ornithological journal) biannually. For more information visit the Club's website:

[www.neotropicalbirdclub.org](http://www.neotropicalbirdclub.org)

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## **RESULTS OF CALIFORNIA LEAD-BAN EFFORT**

Last month, we described the efforts in California (and Arizona) to get the lead out of hunting bullets to help protect California Condors that were ingesting deadly lead fragments:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/octSBC07.html#TOC12>

and

<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/oct07.html>

Thirteen October was a busy day for Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger because he signed 101 bills and vetoed 58. Among those he signed was AB821, the Ridley-Tree Condor Conservation Act, creating a non-lead-bullet area for big-game hunting in California.

Despite considerable pressure to veto the legislation, particularly from gun interests, the governor responded positively to the overwhelming evidence that indicates that lead from bullets left in carcasses can be deadly to California Condors if ingested.

The president and executive director of the state's Fish & Game Commission had even asked the Governor to veto the bill, maintaining that a narrower regulatory ban would be an improvement. The California Department of Fish and Game had also recommended that the state commission prohibit the use of lead ammunition, but only in those areas where California Condors are now flying free.

With Schwarzenegger's signing of the bill, big-game hunters will be required to use non-toxic bullets in a broad zone in California, covering not only the coastal areas where California Condors currently range, but also in additional sections of the state that represent portions of the condor's historic range. See sample map here:

<http://www.venturacountystar.com/photos/2007/oct/12/21175/>

The ban will go into effect in July 2008, and the Fish and Game Commission will have to consider how to modify hunting regulations to make that possible. To the extent that funding will permit, big game hunters within this broad zone in California will get coupons to acquire non-lead ammunition at a reduced rate, or possibly at no charge at all.

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## **CALIFORNIA WINDPOWER GUIDELINES RELEASED**

Also from California, in late September the California Energy Commission voted unanimously to adopt voluntary windpower guidelines. The 80-page "Guidelines to Reduce Impacts of Windpower on Birds and Bats" is a joint product of the Commission and the California Department of Fish and Game. Regionally, Audubon California, the Golden Gate and Los Angeles Audubon chapters, Defenders of Wildlife, and Sierra Club all strongly supported the guidelines.

Starting in 2006, key players from both the windpower industry and wildlife conservation groups met to discuss possible solutions to windpower problems. These initial discussions ultimately led to the 80-page set of guidelines.

The guidelines can be downloaded at:

<http://www.energy.ca.gov/2007publications/CEC-700-2007-008/CEC-700-2007-008-CTF-MINUS-APF.PDF>

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## **SHEDDING LIGHT ON OFFSHORE OIL PLATFORMS**

Also on the subject of potential barriers to bird flight, there is a recent case of illuminated offshore oil platforms in Europe. Each year, millions of birds migrate across the North Sea; under certain weather conditions, they encounter and potentially become attracted to illuminated offshore oil platforms. At these sites, the birds can sometimes become disoriented, circling the platforms until they become too exhausted to reach the coast.

Royal Philips Electronics and Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij (NAM) have experimented with 380 floodlights on one platform by using a new type of green light. Preliminary results suggest that birds may be less disoriented by the green lights than they are by standard lighting.

The platform has been monitored through fall migration, and if observers conclude that the new green lights contribute to a significant decline in bird deaths, then the lighting could be changed on all the platforms.

(Already, the initial experience for this fall is positive, showing an improvement of over 90%. Other potential contributing factors will still have to be evaluated, but so far these results are encouraging.)

For a description from Philips/NAM, see:

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### **"BOW TRAPS" CLOSE TO EXPIRING IN EUROPE**

Bow traps for capturing birds are efficient, simple, and ancient. The traps date back to the Bronze Age and could still be found across Europe well into modern times. A small stick and a cord will keep the bow - traditionally a hazel branch - under tension. Birds will be attracted by berries to the perch, and at the slightest touch the bow will fly apart. Almost instantly, the bird is hanging upside-down with its legs trapped in the device. Almost all the birds caught are songbirds: mostly European Robins, but also Song Thrushes, Winter Wrens, Goldcrests, Chaffinches, and Bramblings - mere morsels for the human table.

Astonishingly effective, the bow traps have been part of European cultural history for centuries. But, fortunately, they are also now mostly part of the European past. In Germany, they were banned in the 19th Century, yet they persisted until about a hundred years ago. In Italy, the traps were banned in the 1950s, but are nonetheless still used in a few regions. One pocket of continued activity for these "archetti" has been the northern Italian province of Brescia, in Lombardy, an area in the mountains between Lakes Garda and Iseo. There, into the 1990s, an estimated 150,000 bow traps were set in the autumn season, a period traditionally lasting from mid-September to mid-December.

In 2001, some 12,000-bow traps were shut down. In 2002, the number had been reduced to 9,500. In 2006, the figure was 1,436, an encouraging number and probably the result of deterrence due to poachers being arrested by the police. Still, the use of bow traps continues, with about 1,100 bow traps already collected this year, as of the last days of October.

It is possible to monitor daily updates from the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) from their migrant bird-protection camp in Brescia. Updates will be posted on their web site until the beginning of December. You can see how many traps and nets have been located and removed, how many poachers have been caught, and how many live bird decoys released:

<http://www.komitee.de/en/index.php?campdiary2007>

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### **REVIEWERS ASSAIL SPOTTED OWL PLAN**

A USFWS draft recovery for the Pacific Northwest's harried Northern Spotted Owl has come under withering criticism lately. According to FWS-ordered and independent peer reviews, the plan "failed to make use of the best-available science," and "selectively cited from the best-available science to justify a reduction in habitat protection."

One review was jointly written by the Society for Conservation Biology and the American Ornithologists' Union; another was from The Wildlife Society. Both identified similar flaws in the recovery plan's selection and use of scientific data, concluding that the proposed plan might actually result in the need to up-list the species' official status from Threatened to Endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The proposed plan deviates significantly from current management - the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) - by recommending the reduction of available Spotted Owl habitat.

In addition, the draft plan rests heavily on the proposed control of another owl - the Barred Owl - that apparently out-competes its threatened cousin and appears to be increasing in historic Spotted Owl habitats. But the Society for Conservation Biology and the AOU, as well as additional owl experts, all felt that this emphasis was peculiar (a "red herring," if you will). They claim that habitat loss due to logging is clearly the major cause for the Spotted Owl's decline.

The plan's striking diversion from the current NWFP's provisions has swelled the conservation community's criticisms of the Department of the Interior's (DOI's) record of political interference in recent ESA implementation.

In recent testimony before Congress, Dominick DellaSala, from the National Center for Conservation Science and Policy and a member of the USFWS Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Team stated that, "The apparent misuse and 'cherry-picking' of scientific research represented in the present draft of the recovery plan is particularly disturbing considering that the Northern Spotted Owl is one of the most studied species ever listed under the Endangered Species Act,"

To view the 2007 Draft Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl and its peer review, go to:

<http://www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/endangered/recovery/NSORRecoveryPlanning.htm>

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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:

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- Paul Baicich 410/992-9736, [paul.baicich@verizon.net](mailto: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.