



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

November 2008

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

In our monthly "Rarity Focus" we try to inform readers about interesting rare birds in the U.S. or Canada that appeared long enough in the previous month to entertain numerous observers. With these limitations in mind, we tend to exclude rare birds that only appeared for one day ("one-day wonders"), those that were seen on pelagic trips, and those that were found in really remote locations (e.g., Alaskan "outposts") where multiple observers could not reasonably pursue the rarity over multiple days.

This month's rarity is a bird that marginally fits this definition. .

On the morning of 16 October, Oscar Johnson found a Dusky Warbler at Antonelli Pond in Santa Cruz, California. The bird was foraging among willows by the edge of the pond, along with a group of Yellow-rumped Warblers. Once Johnson and Ryan Terrill were able to obtain definitive looks, they sent out the word to other birders.

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 have been about a dozen previous reports of this species from Alaska since 1977, most of them in the fall. There are also about 10 previous reports from California since 1980, most of them occurring between late September and early November, and almost all from coastal locations. There are also two records from Baja

California, Mexico.

Curiously, in 1997 a Dusky Warbler was discovered in the very same area as last month's bird!

This month's bird continued to be seen until 18 October, during which time it was observed by many delighted birders. It spent most of its time skulking in the branches overhanging the water within about a foot or two of the water. Unfortunately, 18 October was the last day it was seen.

You can view photos of the bird taken by Brian Sullivan here:

http://briansullivanphotography.com/Galleries/Dusky_Warbler_10-18-2008/index.html

And there are also some group pictures of gratified visiting birders taken by Cindy Cummings:

<http://www.baymoon.com/~birds/duskywarbler.html>

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ONE-DAY, ONE-OBSERVER WONDER: POSSIBLE JACK SNIPE

In the category of "one-day wonders," and a reminder that anything is possible, consider this shorebird found by Mike Patterson on 18 October just east of Astoria, Oregon.

In a field full of many Wilson's Snipes and a few Pectoral Sandpipers; Patterson came across a smaller snipe, about 20% smaller, with an all-dark crown and other field marks that suggested that it was a Jack Snipe. The bird was observed in direct comparison to Wilson's Snipes with which it was associating. (For identification comparisons, see a National Geographic guide, page 190-1.)

Jack Snipe is a Eurasian species that breeds in Scandinavia and n. Siberia and winters mainly from the British Isles and nw. Europe to c. Africa and the Indian subcontinent. It is an extreme rarity along both the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts of the United States, with only about half a dozen reports from North America (i.e., Newfoundland, Alaska, California, Oregon, and Washington). Curiously, two of these reports were also from Oregon - one in October 2004 and one in November 2007.

Unsuccessful searches -were made for several days following the original sighting. Unfortunately the snipe was not photographed, but Patterson made this intriguing sketch:

<http://home.pacifier.com/~neawanna/temp/snipe20081017d%20001.jpg>

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WHAT IS THE RAREST BIRD IN THE BAHAMAS, AND CAN IT BE SAVED?

Arguably, the Brown-headed Nuthatch might be considered the rarest nesting bird in the Bahamas. The nuthatch occurs only in the Caribbean pine forests of Grand Bahama Island.

James Bond, the famous ornithologist and actual namesake for Ian Fleming's spy character, first described this bird in the 1930s, and considered it to be a subspecies ("insularis") of the Brown-headed Nuthatch of the United States. Grand Bahama Island is the only place outside the U.S. where Brown-headed Nuthatches occur.

Recent studies of this bird on Grand Bahama by Prof. William Hayes of Loma Linda University, California, and Prof. Gary Slater of the Ecostudies Institute, Mount Vernon, Washington, suggest that the bird may be a full species, distinguished from its continental relatives by its longer bill, shorter wings, whiter belly, and distinctive voice.

Unfortunately, the bird is threatened with extinction, with only 1,000 individuals thought to exist on Grand Bahama. The nuthatches are at risk from accelerated human development, predation by invasive species (e.g., snakes, cats, and raccoons), and storm damage.

For more details see:

<http://tinyurl.com/4q799o>

and

http://www.ecoinst.org/files/bahama_nuthatch_paper.pdf

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KIRTLAND'S WARBLER DOING WELL ON BREEDING GROUNDS

And while we are on the subject of the Bahamas, Kirtland's Warblers that nested in Michigan earlier this year have by this season migrated to the Bahamas. And this year there will be more of them than usual!

The Kirtland's Warbler is a tremendous success story that has benefitted from the Endangered Species Act. Even though the species' breeding success is dependent on northern Michigan's jack pine ecosystem, ongoing habitat management continues to aid in the species' recovery. Michigan's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recently released the findings from last season's nestling survey. The 2008 nesting population actually

(DNR) recently released the findings from last season's warbler surveys. The 2008 nesting population actually exceeded the goal for de-listing that was previously set forth in the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Plan. The singing males counted in Michigan in the 2008 nesting season were 1,791 during the official survey period, up from 1,697 in 2007. The lowest numbers ever recorded were in 1974 and 1987, when only 167 singing males were found.

Amazingly, and for the second consecutive year, singing males were also found outside of Michigan - nine in Wisconsin and one in Ontario.

Although the news is good, the species is by no means "out of the woods" yet.

For details on the 2008 survey, see this summary from the Michigan DNR:
<http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153--200899--,00.html>

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MOVES TO PUSH MARBLED MURRELET OFF THE ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST

The California, Oregon, and Washington populations of Marbled Murrelet have been listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act since 1992. This status is based on the assumption that birds nesting in these states represent a distinct population (a term that means the population is genetically or otherwise biologically distinct from other Marbled Murrelet populations, and that it represents a disjunct distribution that is otherwise separate from other populations).

About six years ago, two timber groups filed a lawsuit to compel the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct a five-year review of the status of the species. The Department of the Interior settled the case by agreeing to do the status review. In 2004, the Service completed its review, stating that the Marbled Murrelets in these three states did not comprise a distinct population segment. However, at that time the Service did not de-list the species.

The same timber groups filed a petition in May of this year to compel the Service to de-list the murrelet. In response, the USFWS announced in early October that it finds that the petition may be warranted, and it is initiating another status review. The 90-day review will examine the range-wide status of the species, soliciting as much relevant scientific and commercial data as possible. At the conclusion of the status review, the Service will issue a 12-month finding on the recent petition.

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A CLOSER LOOK AT "OPEN FIELDS"

One element in the recently-passed Farm Bill, particularly a feature that has been under the proverbial radar, is the "Open Fields" portion of the legislation. It may have been ignored mainly because it was such a small part of the multi-billion-dollar Farm Bill.

This portion of the bill was "only" \$50 million over four years (2009-2012), yet it could have real significance for birders and other members of the outdoor-oriented public. The Open Fields effort, now awkwardly called the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program, is designed to help states enroll private land in programs for public access involving wildlife-dependent recreation.

This puts a potential additional layer on the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), to provide public access on private lands. There are already 21 states that have modest public access programs related to wildlife-associated recreation on these private lands. The \$50 million could be used to enhance these existing programs or establish programs in states without public access programs.

If the public is paying for conservation (i.e., CRP) on private lands, the reasoning goes, shouldn't the public also have some access? For birders, this could mean increased birding opportunities.

The current pending questions are: How can states fully take advantage of this new resource? Who is at the table to make sure that access really takes place?

The Farm Service Administration (FSA) is expected to publish a rule on this issue sometime near the first of the year, after which there will be a 60-day comment period.

So far, it is the hunting and fishing communities that have been pressing for Open Fields, not organized birders. Birders could surely benefit from legislation, but currently as sideline observers only.

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BOOK NOTES: MEXICAN RTP GUIDE

Although we may have seemingly over-reported on Roger Tory Peterson lately, it is his centennial year after all, and there is one additional recent Peterson book development that deserves your attention this month.

In June 2006 we discussed *The Peterson Field Guide, AVES DE MEXICO*, by R. T. Peterson and E. L. Chalif, originally published in 1989. This was a fascinating composite field guide, using illustrations by Peterson from several of his previous field guides and describing all the species of Mexico in Spanish.

While it was a valuable tool in the field for Spanish speakers, the prohibitive cover price of \$40 made it difficult to keep in print.

In an attempt to get a more affordable edition of the guide produced, publishers at Houghton Mifflin asked birders for information about the virtues of this field guide and whether it was worthwhile to reprint it.

The upshot is that Diana Publishing in Mexico has, indeed, reprinted this unique guide. The price is reported to be less expensive than in the original edition, particularly for Mexicans. (It may be about \$26.)

The guide is not perfect, with somewhat dated taxonomy and plate reproductions which are not of the best quality; however, it's the only guide in Spanish with essentially all the birds of Mexico (and parts of Central America) described and illustrated. Look for it very soon. This reprinting is another valuable contribution in the increasing flurry of new Neotropical field guides.

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MEXICAN BAN ON PARROT TRADE

A bill to ban the capture and export of Mexican wild parrots was introduced one year ago by the Environment Commission of the Deputy Chamber. It was passed in the Mexican Senate on 22 April, 2008 with near unanimous support and recently signed by President Felipe Calderon. The bill will go into effect once it is published in the official Congressional diary.

Mexico has 22 species of parrots and macaws, and roughly 90 percent of all them are in some category of risk. The latest Mexican classification (yet to be published) lists 11 species as endangered, five as threatened, four requiring special protection, and two as yet unclassified.

"In 2007, only six species of parrots in Mexico were listed as endangered. This new classification almost doubles that number," said Juan Carlos Cantu Guzman, director of Mexican programs for Defenders of Wildlife. "It is readily apparent that unless we immediately halt the capture and trade in all parrots and macaws, we could lose these species entirely."

An estimated 65,000-78,500 wild parrots and macaws are captured illegally each year, with more than 75 percent of them dying before ever reaching a purchaser. Approximately 50,000 to 60,000 parrots die this way each year in Mexico.

Mexico only allows the sale of parrots via legal channels, with 3,000 to 4,000 parrots allocated for capture each year, according to government quotas. Unfortunately there is no system to differentiate between legally and illegally captured birds.

While this bill marks a victory for parrot conservation, much has yet to be done. Enforcing this legislation is the critical next step.

See here for more details:

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/10/0801002-parrot-trade.html>

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IBA NEWS: NYC MARKS NINTH URBAN TREATY

Last month, New York City became the ninth city in the nation to sign an Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds. This Treaty is a partnership among The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, New York City Parks and Recreation, Audubon New York, and New York City Audubon. The partners commit to restore, conserve, and protect valuable bird habitat within New York City's urban environment and to develop an informed public through education and training programs.

What does this have to do with Important Bird Areas?

As part of the Treaty, the partners will work together to improve New York City's bird habitat by increasing stewardship, providing restoration of key areas, and ensuring proper monitoring in all New York City natural areas, including the City's IBAs, Forever Wild sites, and other critical habitats. The City will also increase and improve protected natural areas, restore, and protect existing nesting areas such as North Brother Island and the Rockaway Beach Endangered Species Nesting Area, and develop a green-collar workforce through the Green Apple Corps program.

Partners will also work to heighten public awareness of birds and the importance of open space to bird conservation through public programs and events, including education programs for school children and citizen scientists.

This is the kind of effort which deepens the IBA approach, broadening stewardship and education.

The Urban Conservation Treaty Program started in 1999, when New Orleans became the first Urban Conservation Treaty. Other cities in the program are Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, Portland (OR), St. Louis, Nashville, and Anchorage.

For information on IBA sites in New York, see:

http://ny.audubon.org/BirdSci_IBAs.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:

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

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TIP OF THE MONTH: PITY THE ELECTED BUREAUCRAT

An election year is a time when Americans have an opportunity to make decisions that impact the country, the state, and the county and town where you live. No matter who is elected to fill various political positions, we can be pretty sure that he or she under-appreciates the value of birds and other natural resources. It's just reality.

For our tip of the month, we suggest that you make an effort to track down newly elected (or re-elected) officials where you live. Let them know that not only are birds and their habitats important to you, but that you would be delighted to share and show them to the official or his/her staff at a local park, refuge, forest, and/or nature center.

Don't underestimate the impact of a personal bird-and-habitat experience for an otherwise often oblivious elected official or staff member. It makes the issue "real," and there is no substitute for such an experience.

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MIGRATORY BIRD STAMP ART CHOSEN

In mid-October, in Bloomington, Minnesota, a panel of five judges chose the artwork which will grace the 2009 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (aka, the "Duck Stamp"). The winning artwork depicting Long-tailed Duck, was by Joshua Spies of Watertown, South Dakota. The image will appear on the new 2009-2010 Stamp, and will be available on 1 July.

Proceeds for the \$15-stamp go to support securing grassland and wetlands for the National Wildlife Refuge System, to the tune of about \$23 million collected per year.

You can find more information and an image of the upcoming artwork here:

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

In the meantime, Congress has not acted to increase the cost of the individual stamp, which has remained at \$15 since 1991, the longest fixed rate in the Stamp's 75-year history.

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REFUGE SYSTEM AWARDS: LOOKING FOR NOMINATIONS

The 2009 National Wildlife Refuge System Awards are sponsored by the National Wildlife Refuge Association and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The awards honor outstanding accomplishments by Refuge Managers, Refuge System Employees, Volunteers, and Friends Groups. A number of award-winners from previous years have been particularly bird-focused.

Award recipients will receive a monetary award (\$1000 for Refuge Manager, Employee and Volunteer awards, \$2000 for Friends Group), and paid travel expenses to the award presentation in the Washington DC area next February and March.

Nominations are still open, due no later than 15 November 2008. For details and to download the required nominations form, visit:

<http://www.refugeassociation.org/new-events/callfornom2008.html>

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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.