



**THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN**

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October 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](#).

Table of Contents:

- [RARITY FOCUS](#)
- [GAMBELL DELIGHTS](#)
- [AND NOW FOR THE LONGEST NON-STOP MIGRATION](#)
- [RARE-BIRD GOOGLE GADGET LAUNCHED BY eBIRD](#)
- [WINTER FINCH FORECAST: ONTARIO AND BEYOND](#)
- [WHOOPING CRANES ON THEIR WAY](#)
- [2008 REFUGE SYSTEM AWARDS](#)
- [10 YEARS OLD: REFUGE IMPROVEMENT ACT](#)
- [STAMP DOLLARS AT WORK](#)
- [IMPORTANT BIRD AREA \(IBA\) NEWS: AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES](#)
- [PUT A CORK IN IT!](#)
- [LEAD AMMUNITION WEIGHED IN CALIFORNIA](#)
- [FOR BIRDERS WITH PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS](#)
- [BOOK REVIEW: BIRDER'S CONSERVATION HANDBOOK](#)
- [BIRDLIFE'S WORLD BIRD FESTIVAL FOCUSES ON AQUATIC BIRDS](#)
- ["NO CHILD LEFT INSIDE" BILLS IN CONGRESS](#)

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**RARITY FOCUS**

On the morning of September 7, an Arctic Warbler was found at the Silver Saddle Resort at Galileo Hill in Kern County, in Southern California. It was visiting a number of trees near the west end of the area's fairly large lake. The next day, with birders scouring the area, a second Arctic Warbler was found, this one located close to the petting zoo.

For those not familiar with the Arctic Warbler, you can check it out in your field guide (e.g., National Geo, page 348-9; the "Big" Sibley, p. 395; Kaufman, p. 304-5). Arctic Warblers are fairly common breeders in moist willow thickets in northern and western Alaska. Since the species is relatively common in parts of Alaska, one might question why we should highlight the species as our rarity of the month?

The simple answer is that this species has no business being in Southern California. Arctic Warblers from Alaska are typically engaged in fall migration by mid-August, winning their way toward the Philippines or southeast

are typically engaged in fall migration by mid-August, winging their way toward the Philippines or Southeast Asia - basically in the "other" direction!

With this in mind, Arctic Warblers are extremely rare birds in California, where there are four previous records (e.g., September 1995 in Monterey Co. and September 2005 on Southeast Farallon Island), all between 13 September and 1 October. To have one Arctic Warbler show up in California is most interesting, but to have two show up at the same location on the same date out in the desert of Kern County is simply amazing!

You will note that for this section of the E-bulletin we like to focus on a species enjoyed by a number of birders, usually seen on multiple days - not just a bird seen by a few birders on a pelagic trip, or by a group at, say, a remote Alaska location. (For the latter, case, however, see our Gambell [St. Lawrence Island] profile below!)

At least one of the Arctic Warblers was observed by a number of birders through 10 September, and possibly on 11 September as well.

Photos of the Kern County Arctic Warblers by Doug Aguillard can be found here:

[http://sdbirds.basilink.com/arctic\\_warbler.htm](http://sdbirds.basilink.com/arctic_warbler.htm)

Or others taken by Bob Steele on 7 September:

[http://www.bobsteelephoto.com/Species/arwa\\_gh.html](http://www.bobsteelephoto.com/Species/arwa_gh.html)

To top off the original discovery, yet another Arctic Warbler was reported on 12 September by a number of observers in Long Beach at DeForest Park in Los Angeles County.

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **GAMBELL DELIGHTS**

For those birders fortunate enough to visit Gambell, on remote St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea in late August and September 2007 witnessed a memorable fall migration. Groups of birders ably led by a number of

tour companies (i.e., WINGS, Wilderness Birding Adventures, and High Lonesome BirdTours) were amply rewarded.

The spectacular September was punctuated by such wonders as Lesser Sand-Plovers, Willow and Dusky Warblers, Red-throated and Pechora Pipits, Little and Pallas's Buntings, Siberian Accentor, Common Rosefinch, and what will probably be first North American records for Yellow-browed Bunting (*Emberiza chrysophrys*) and Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*). These birds were mostly found at the two village "boneyards," the edge of Troutman Lake, or on the nearby mountainside.

September 2007 will surely be one for the record books on St. Lawrence Island!

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **AND NOW FOR THE LONGEST NON-STOP MIGRATION**

Since we're talking about Alaskan birds, it's time to mention the recent confirmation of what is almost certainly North America's longest non-stop migrant.

It's official! The Bar-tailed Godwit probably makes the longest non-stop migratory flight in the world. At least one godwit has been tracked from its Southern Hemisphere "winter" residence in New Zealand to its breeding ground in western Alaska's Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge - and back again. A female Bar-tailed Godwit, known as E7, was one of 13 satellite-tagged birds that left New Zealand at the start of this year.

E7 set her first record on the way north, when she flew non-stop for 6,340 miles to Yalu Jiang in China. She then flew an additional 3,000 miles to breeding grounds in Alaska. On the way back to New Zealand, with her tag still working, E7 set another record 7,145 miles. She landed there in early September. This marks a complete record of the most amazing annual migration cycle for any shorebird.

Unlike seabirds, which are able to feed and rest on the water during their long journeys, godwits apparently just keep going.

The New Zealand godwit tracking effort is part of the broader Pacific Shorebird Migration Program, a joint initiative between the US Geological Survey and PRBO (Point Reyes Bird Observatory) Conservation Science.

For more on this fantastic journey, visit the USGS website that provides an excellent overview:

<http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/barg.html>

or this report from the Yukon Delta NWR:

<http://www.fws.gov/arsnew/regmap.cfm?arskey=22331>

Map images of E7's journey and that of her cohort are also instructive:

[http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/barg\\_updates.html](http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/barg_updates.html)

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **RARE-BIRD GOOGLE GADGET LAUNCHED BY eBIRD**

The eBird Team at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has come up with a fascinating computer-desktop device to track rare birds in the U.S. It's the "eBird Rare Bird Gadget." Basically, any record submitted to eBird that requires a "rare species" indication will automatically appear on the rare bird gadget.

All information about rare birds seen in the U.S. and submitted to eBird during the previous week will appear on the gadget. Details provided include date, location, and observer, as well as a very useful Google Map link to view the bird's location. The sightings are even color coded: yellow = not yet reviewed; green = reviewed and accepted.

Users can view any U.S. state desired; a version to cover Canada is in the works. Indeed, this is still a work in progress, and feedback on its use is requested.

Even at this stage, the results of the Google Gadget are impressive, but the ultimate utility of the device is completely dependent on the willingness of observers to submit their observations on eBird in the first place. We strongly recommend that readers explore this link and begin using the system.

Look here for all the details from the eBird Team, including the quick and easy way to load the free gadget:  
[http://ebird.org/content/ebird/news/Google\\_Gadget.html](http://ebird.org/content/ebird/news/Google_Gadget.html)

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **WINTER FINCH FORECAST: ONTARIO AND BEYOND**

Ron Pittaway, of the Ontario Field Ornithologists has once again gathered information for his annual Winter Finch Forecast. Cooperation on the part of the staff of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) and the observations of regional birders allow Pittaway to make his annual predictions about finches. These predictions should be of interest to both field birders and feeder-watchers in the East.

Pittaway's report begins by describing conditions in the northern boreal forests and his forecast for the occurrence of "winter finches" in southern Ontario. The report contains some excellent tidbits about food tree preferences of the various finch species, and forest conditions overall. It may also help you assess your feeder-visitation and field possibilities this coming season, too, at least in the East.

According to the report, most coniferous and deciduous trees have had very poor seed crops in much of Ontario and western Quebec. Pittaway predicts that White-winged and Red crossbills and Pine Siskins will not be irrupting south out of Ontario as they do in some flight years, because most have already gone east and/or west. However, other winter finches such as Pine Grosbeaks, Evening Grosbeaks, Purple Finches and redpolls are already irrupting, or will irrupt, southward out of northern Ontario.

It will be interesting to see if this pattern unfolds as predicted.

The full report can be found here:  
<http://www.ofo.ca/2007-8winterfinchforecast.htm>

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **WHOOPING CRANES ON THEIR WAY**

Last month we reported on the Seadrift Ranch plans for development close to Whooping Crane habitat near the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/sepSBC07.html#TOC10>  
and  
<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/sept07.html>

Apparently, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was inundated with comments opposing the development, and the Corps is expected to call upon the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to determine if the birds would be harmed. The whole process will likely take months, and we will keep you informed as this story unfolds.

In the meantime, during this past summer there were record numbers of Whooping Crane chicks hatched at Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Canada. An aerial survey of the breeding grounds found 65 nests and 84 new chicks. The new Whooping Crane chicks include 28 sets of twins. This year's offspring come after last year's encouraging numbers of 76 new chicks - including 24 sets of twins.

By the end of September, the cranes will have left for their 2,500-mile flight south to the Aransas National Wildlife Range in Texas. By gliding and soaring, family groups of cranes can pick up wind currents and stay aloft for 10 hours a day, at times covering up to 470 miles at a stretch.

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As Whooping Cranes increase their numbers, one can only hope that they will have sufficient coastal wintering habitat in the years to come.

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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## **2008 REFUGE SYSTEM AWARDS**

Have you ever admired the dedication and talent of a Refuge worker or coworker? Have you ever wanted to recognize a colleague for outstanding work on a refuge? Here's your chance!

National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) are accepting nominations for the 2008 National Wildlife Refuge System Awards. Think back over the past year, consider what has been accomplished for the Refuge System, and take this opportunity to recognize the dedicated individuals and groups whose achievements were instrumental in strengthening our national wildlife refuges.

There are four award categories: refuge manager, employee, volunteer, and Friends Group.

Nominations are due no later than 15 November 2007. Forms and other award details can be found on the NWRA website at:

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

For more information you can also contact Claire Stoker at:

[cstoker@refugenet.org](mailto:cstoker@refugenet.org)

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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## **10 YEARS OLD: REFUGE IMPROVEMENT ACT**

Signed by President Clinton on 9 October 1997, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 finally provided the Refuge System with an "organic act" - the clarification of a single, overarching mission of conservation and uniform procedures for its management. This mission provides for "wildlife first," with the "big six" of wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation, having official status. (Our readers should note that the largest portion of "wildlife observation" recognized by the USFWS is understood to be bird watching.)

A summary of the Improvement Act can be found here:

<http://www.fws.gov/refuges/policymakers/mandates/hr1420/>

The full act can be read here:

<http://www.refugenet.org/new-pdf-files/NWRS%20Improvement%20Act.pdf>

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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## **STAMP DOLLARS AT WORK**

In mid-September, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC) met and approved refuge acquisitions and easements to secure over 4,200 acres of wetland and grassland habitat at eight National Wildlife Refuges located in six states. The funding came from revenue collected from the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp as well as from import duties, fines, and other sources.

Among the refuges benefiting were Assabet River (MA), Lake Umbagog (NH), Cache River (AR), and Trinity River (TX) National Wildlife Refuges.

See more details here:

<http://www.fws.gov/home/feature/2007/Doc3.pdf>

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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## **IMPORTANT BIRD AREA (IBA) NEWS: AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES**

The National Audubon Society has recently released some valuable waterbird conservation information following a review of Important Bird Area (IBA) data. The information is contained in a document titled „New Resources for Waterbird Conservation on Agricultural Lands.%”

Operating on the premise that agricultural landscapes have implications for birds and wildlife, National Audubon has been engaging agricultural stakeholders in developing conservation practices compiling information that will benefit the future stewardship of birds using heavily agricultural environments.

To see this report, including a special section on IBAs, check:  
<http://www.audubon.org/bird/waterbirds/downloads.html>

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **PUT A CORK IN IT!**

The British have had a modest campaign (sponsored by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds - RSPB) for a number of years to favor Iberian cork for wine bottles. The reason is simple: sustaining unique cork/oak forests will protect special birds and other wildlife. (Spanish and Portuguese cork plantations will often harbor Black-winged Kites, Booted Eagles, Hoopoes, Short-toed Creepers, Golden Orioles, and Hawfinches, for example.)

The cork campaign has opposed a shift to plastic stoppers used in wines. Now the effort has spread to our side of "The Pond," with a similar effort being promoted by the Rainforest Alliance, the Forest Stewardship Council, and at least one winery in Oregon, Willamette Valley Vineyards.

You can find fine details from Rainforest Alliance here:

[http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/news/2005/cork\\_new.html](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/news/2005/cork_new.html)

You can read why cork is renewable and reliable:

[http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/news/2005/why\\_cork.html](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/news/2005/why_cork.html)

And you can also read about the Willamette Valley Vineyards:

<http://www.willamettevalleyvineyards.com/?s=fsc>

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **LEAD AMMUNITION WEIGHED IN CALIFORNIA**

In March, we reported on the largest private hunting preserve in California, the Tejon Ranch that has banned the use of lead bullets in big-game hunting:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/marSBC07.html#TOC11>

and

<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/march07.html>

On 4 September, the California Senate passed legislation (Assembly Bill 821) to ban lead ammunition that is poisoning endangered California Condors. The bill is designed to protect condors by requiring hunters to use non-toxic ammunition for hunting big game, in order to prevent condors from consuming lead fragments in carcasses not recovered or left in the field. The measure also creates a program that would provide coupons to hunters that would help to subsidize the cost of lead-free, copper bullets.

The bill, having produced some controversy on the part of some hunters and hunting groups, is awaiting signature from Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Kelly Sorenson, the executive director of the Ventana Wildlife Society and a member of the California Condor Recovery Team, wrote an article for the SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS (19 September) summarizing the case against lead:

[http://www.mercurynews.com/opinion/ci\\_6935048](http://www.mercurynews.com/opinion/ci_6935048)

There are similar moves - voluntary and otherwise - being considered in Arizona to cover big-game hunting. Cooperation from hunting groups in Arizona involving an education campaign using coupons, DVDs, and flyers, and offering free non-lead bullets to hunters in areas frequented by condors suggests somewhat rosier prospects in that state. But voluntary compliance, no matter how creative, may still not be enough.

The broader issue, of course, goes back at least to the early 1990s, when the USFWS imposed a nationwide ban on the use of lead shot for waterfowl hunting because the shotgun pellets were poisoning waterfowl that ingested them off the bottoms of ponds and lakes. The debate on that issue ran through much of the 1980s, and the use of a ban was originally resisted from some quarters, even though today most hunter-conservationists today embrace the lead shot ban for waterfowling.

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **FOR BIRDERS WITH PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS**

There are many locations throughout the world that provide high quality, low-impact birding venues, ideal for birders with physical limitations. A U.S.-based website featuring places in North, Central, and South America as a service to birders with limited mobility or endurance, varying from moderate limitations to birders confined to wheelchairs.

The site originator, Darlene Smyth, is also asking for suggestions on ways to improve the site and how to include additional information. See the site for more details:

<http://www.comfortablebirdingforall.com/>

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[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **BOOK REVIEW: BIRDER'S CONSERVATION HANDBOOK**

Jeff Wells, currently serving as the Senior Scientist with the Boreal Songbird Initiative, has provided anyone interested in birds an important summary of the state of bird conservation in North America with his new BIRDER'S CONSERVATION HANDBOOK (Due in October from Princeton University Press; we were lucky enough to review an advance copy.)

The book's subtitle summarizes its scope: "100 North American Birds at Risk." Most of the book - organized not unlike a field guide - is made up of individual species accounts for the 100 species considered most at risk, according to assessments determined by the major bird conservation initiatives and organizations. Each profiled species has an account containing up to four pages of information that outlines the species' status and distribution (along with a unique hemispheric range-map), ecology, threats, conservation actions now in motion, and conservation needs for the future. The species accounts are preceded by several important chapters that describe the purpose of the book, how birds serve as environmental indicators, an overview of the state of our North American bird populations, the major issues impacting North American birds, the state of North American bird conservation, and what, ideally, readers can do to help conserve birds.

Best of all, the book is written for the millions of people who are simply curious about birds. The approach used by Wells in this book could potentially turn recreational birders and budding conservationists into thoughtful and active stewards of birds and the environment. Jeff Wells has produced a reader-friendly and outstanding resource to bird conservation activity that could serve as a benchmark for many years to come. We strongly recommend this title.

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **BIRDLIFE'S WORLD BIRD FESTIVAL FOCUSES ON AQUATIC BIRDS**

Held in October of every year in the Americas, BirdLife's World Bird Festival encourages bird conservation through a number of activities including nature walks, indoor meetings, lectures, seminars, performances (music, theater, films and poetry readings), children's events (face painting, bird-costume making, painting competitions), and exhibitions (paintings, prints, photographs).

This year, BirdLife's theme will celebrate Aquatic Birds of the Americas, especially since these waterbirds tie the natural and human communities of the Americas together.

For more information on this effort see:

[http://www.birdlife.org/action/awareness/world\\_bird\\_festival/americas\\_2007.html](http://www.birdlife.org/action/awareness/world_bird_festival/americas_2007.html)

and

[http://www.birdlife.org/action/awareness/world\\_bird\\_festival/aquatic\\_birds.html](http://www.birdlife.org/action/awareness/world_bird_festival/aquatic_birds.html)

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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### **"NO CHILD LEFT INSIDE" BILLS IN CONGRESS**

As teachers across the country are pressed to devote increasing time to core subjects that must be tested and evaluated, time spent on any environmental education is drastically reduced, often resulting in the giving up of field trips and other environmental explorations.

In mid-July, Congressman John P. Sarbanes (D-MD) announced his sponsorship of the No Child Left Inside Act (H.R. 3036). A few weeks later, in August, Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) introduced similar - but not identical - legislation (S. 1931) under the same name. The bills are now collecting Congressional co-sponsors. These legislators' proposals would provide new resources and incentives to states to enhance environmental education, but would not add any additional tests or requirements on school systems.

Both bills would increase funding for environmental education - focusing on teacher training and capacity building. It would give states new incentives to create environmental literacy plans to make sure graduates better understand their environment. The legislation could help fulfill an obligation to educate young people about the environment - including birds - and to help them become responsible natural stewards.

A number of organizations concerned with youth education, general environmental stewardship, and hunting have partnered to advance the cause of the No Child Left Inside Coalition. You can find details here: [www.eenclb.org](http://www.eenclb.org) <<http://www.eenclb.org/>>

[\(return to table of contents\)](#)

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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](mailto:wpetersen@massaudubon.org) OR
- Paul Baicich 410/992-9736, [paul.baicich@verizon.net](mailto:paul.baicich@verizon.net)

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