



## THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

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October 2008

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### RARITY FOCUS

With our September E-bulletin, we mentioned in passing the discovery of a Sinaloa Wren on 25 August at The Nature Conservancy's Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve in southeast Arizona. You can find our original report with details here: <http://www.refugenet.org/birding/sepSBC08.html#TOC02>

The wren was relocated by sound a few times before the end of August, but few observers were actually lucky enough to see the bird. We promised that if the bird persisted we'd give more details with this issue. Well, the bird did continue to be recorded, but it wasn't always cooperative.

This wren from Mexico - also known as Bar-vented Wren (*Thryothorus sinaloa*) - played hide-and-seek with many birders for much of the month. Most days it was only heard intermittently in the early morning. Although some observers got wonderful lengthy looks, most did not. Persistence combined with a modicum of luck seemed to be necessary to really observe the bird.

The good news was that a very rare Plain-capped Starthroat visited hummingbird feeders in the middle of the month at the Paton residence nearby, where many birders were treated to good looks of this unusual visitor.

Also, it is gratifying to know that TNC staffers and volunteers were appreciative of the fact that birders at the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve were respectful of both the wren and of the TNC-managed habitat.

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## **IBA NEWS: BAFFIN ISLAND WILDERNESS**

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are not simply meaningful for identifying sites, but they can be crucial in highlighting and deepening the protection of these sites.

An example of this transpired in early September, when the Canadian government announced that it will protect more than 1,737 square miles of Arctic wilderness in the Nunavut Territory by establishing three new National Wildlife Areas. These three sites, all located on or adjacent to the northeast side of Baffin Island, are Ninginganiq (Isabella Bay), Qaulluit (Cape Searle), and Akpait (Reid Bay). The areas include two globally significant IBAs.

"This is great news for Canada's birds, biodiversity and the cause of wilderness preservation," said Julie Gelfand, president of Nature Canada. "Two of Canada's Important Bird Areas are found within the Qaulluit and Akpait National Wildlife Areas. This means critical breeding and feeding grounds for millions of migratory birds will be preserved."

The Qaulluit (ka-koo-loo-eet) and Akpait (ak-pa-eet) National Wildlife Areas are inhabited by many seabirds, including, respectively, Canada's largest colony of Northern Fulmars and one of Canada's largest colonies of Thick-billed Murres.

You can find more information on these two IBA sites here:

<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/iba/site.jsp?siteID=NU003> and <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/iba/site.jsp?siteID=NU072>

Once a site is designated as a National Wildlife Area, natural features integral to the location are protected from disturbance, and activities considered harmful to species or their habitats are prohibited. Wildlife research and interpretation may take place in these areas, but these activities require a permit.

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/> ([return to table of contents](#))

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## **BAHAMIAN FLAMINGO RIDDLE**

From an IBA to our south we received an interesting report of missing birds at the Bahamian island of Great Inagua. The location is known for two things - an old salt works plant and a Greater Flamingo colony with 30,000 nesting pairs of birds.

The flamingos, which attract birders from all over the world, are one of the hallmarks of this IBA. You can read more on the IBA program in the Bahamas and the Great Inagua National Park site here: [http://www.bnt.bs/partners\\_ibademonstrationsite.php](http://www.bnt.bs/partners_ibademonstrationsite.php)

Before Hurricane Ike tore through the Bahamas, most of the flamingos evacuated the area. A few dozen of these birds were found dead in the aftermath, and a few hundred live flamingos were seen on site immediately after the winds settled; however, thousands of others took off before Ike arrived according to officials in charge of the islands' national parks.

The local Bahama Parrots also seem to have taken off before the hurricane, but they returned after the storm, where they were recently seen feeding on the ground among the storm-ravaged trees and plant life. As of this writing, most of the flamingos have not returned to Great Inagua, and observers have little idea where they went.

"Some of the flamingos are now reappearing, but it could be one or two years before they get back to their regular nesting pattern," said Lynn Gape, of the Bahamas National Trust.

Not surprisingly, a few flamingos appeared in the southern U.S., probably waifs from some recent storms.

In late August, right after Tropical Storm Fay and then after Hurricane Gustav in September, at least two flamingos were found in Harrison, Jackson, and Hancock counties on the Mississippi coast. Also, in the Florida Panhandle in Okaloosa and Santa Rosa Counties, a storm-weary flamingo appeared, tracked by birders hither and yon, and eventually also going into Baldwin County, Alabama. Indeed, each of these errant flamingo sightings on the Gulf coast also attracted curious humans - casual birdwatchers all - to the sites. Unfortunately, one of the Mississippi birds was found dead on the beach under mysterious circumstances toward the end of the month.

Keep an eye out during this hurricane season, since Greater Flamingos could conceivably appear almost anywhere on the Gulf or Atlantic Coasts!

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## **IKE: DAMAGE TO BIRD HABITAT**

And while we are on the subject of hurricanes, reports are still coming in about the impact of Hurricane Ike on the immediate Texas coast, and we can share some news items pertaining to destruction at birding areas and bird habitats. The 110-mph winds and a 20-foot storm surge certainly had an impact.

As an indication of the force of Ike, the five-mile-long Texas City Dike across from Galveston was almost washed away. Celebrated as the world's longest manmade fishing pier, the dike is in such disrepair that city leaders say it will remain closed indefinitely. The dike is primarily a birding observation site, though not necessarily vital bird habitat.

But, in case you were wondering, the adjacent habitat was clobbered.

The Bolivar Flats and High Island Sanctuaries, run by the Houston Audubon Society, suffered. Bolivar Flats was littered with debris, including at least two large shipping containers. Oil and hazardous material spills have been reported. At High Island, litter, broken trees, dead and bloated cattle, and vegetation saturated by intrusive saltwater mark the scene.

To find more reports and to see photos, check here:

<http://www.houstonaudubon.org/index.cfm/MenuItemID/692.htm>

A number of Texas State properties have reported damage, including the J. D. Murphee Wildlife Management Area (with an oil spill impacting an estimated 1,200 acres) and the Bessie Heights Marsh of the Lower Neches WMA (with some oiling on about 2,000 acres). Concern over these spills involves threats to waterfowl, ducks and geese expected to start arriving in late October.

The impact to three local National Wildlife Refuges - Anahuac, McFaddin, and Texas Point - has also been considerable. Aransas NWR, a bit farther down the coast, was also hit. Hurricane Ike caused an estimated \$260 million in damage to the refuges. The destruction of structures, roads, and visitor facilities was one element, and habitat devastation, especially the saltwater inundation of freshwater and brackish habitat, along with oil leakage, was another. In many areas, prescribed burning may prove to be the first step in recovery. Elsewhere, it is hoped that a good rain will flush out some of the salt, reviving a zone currently brown for miles.

For more details on the cost of the effort at refuges, see the National Wildlife Refuge Association assessment:

<http://www.refugenet.org/new-publications/flsep08.html#TOC06>

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### **BOOK REVIEW: RAPTOR TRENDS**

A joint production of the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary and Hawkwatch International, THE STATE OF NORTH AMERICA'S BIRDS OF PREY is a compendium edited by Keith L. Bildstein, Jeff P. Smith, Ernesto Ruelas Inzunza, and Richard R. Veit. It is rigorous and technical, not necessarily a bedtime read for every hawkwatcher, but a volume that should interest many long-term raptorophiles and bird conservationists. The dozen chapters, written by a kettle of researchers and practitioners, analyze data from the past 30 years at 22 selected hawk-watching sites, along with information from the Beeding Bird Survey and Christmas Bird Count, to give the reader a splendid overview of raptor population trends in North America. Happily, a number of the analyses suggest that many, but by no means all, raptor populations are in relatively good shape. For those with a serious interest in the subject, the book will stand as a benchmark for years to come. It appears as a monograph published by the Nuttall Ornithological Club and the American Ornithologists' Union. The book is available at:

<http://www.buteobooks.com/archives/StateofBOP.html>

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### **LIGHTS OUT BOSTON: ENERGY AND BIRDS**

Boston recently joined several other cities in North America in an ambitious effort to reduce energy and avian mortality by turning off skyscraper lights at almost three dozen large downtown buildings during migration.

Toronto originally took the lead with their Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP), and other cities, such as

Chicago, have gradually followed suit. Starting early last month, Boston started having some of its tallest office buildings shut off their lights from 11pm to 5am through the end of this month. The two-month effort is intended to set an example as to how to reduce carbon emissions associated with production of electricity, while at the same time helping to save migratory birds from striking the buildings at night as a result of disorientation created by bright lights and reflective glass at tall buildings.

Boston's Mayor, Thomas Menino, some of the city's largest property owners, and Mass Audubon representatives unveiled the Lights Out Boston effort last month, and a number of other cities are carefully watching the results of Boston's efforts to save energy and reduce avian mortality.

Bird advocates are actively promoting these joint conservation efforts and have increasingly been pushing the concept of "air space as habitat."

concept of all space as habitat.

In June of last year, we reported on FLAP's recent findings concerning bird mortality and Toronto buildings:  
<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/junSBC07.html#TOC05>

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### **TIP OF THE MONTH: CLEAN IT UP!**

Invariably the most important and most expensive pieces of equipment that birders have are their binoculars and spotting scopes. Sure, cameras and recording equipment can fit this description, but for most birders it's their optics that are most valuable.

The only maintenance that optics regularly need is a periodic cleaning of the lenses. By "regular" we mean after every few field trips, or whenever conditions such as wind-blown dust or sand, salt spray, or breadcrumbs from a lunch afield mandate that they be cleaned. The key to optical maintenance is to be careful. Whenever possible use a camel-hair brush to remove dust from the lenses, either water or spray-on lens-cleaning liquid to wash them, a clean chamois cloth or soft optical cleaning cloth to wipe them dry. In a pinch you can use your own saliva and the end of a cotton t-shirt, but this should be avoided whenever possible, since this is how the fine coating on expensive lenses can become scratched or otherwise compromised. There is no good reason why a lens-cleaning kit can't be regularly brought into the field in a small plastic bag, or carried in your backpack or field-guide pouch. Always remember to blow on the lenses before cleaning them, too. This helps to remove larger dust and dirt particles before applying liquid to the lenses. If fine optics are treated appropriately, they can last a lifetime.

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### **ONE-BILLION-DOLLAR MARK: MBCF**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last month announced that the one billionth dollar from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) - the nation's primary funding source for migratory bird habitat acquisition and protection - has been spent.

The Migratory Bird Conservation Fund is used to acquire habitat, typically wetlands and grasslands that are important for migratory bird conservation for the National Wildlife Refuge System and associated small wetlands and grasslands (WPAs and permanent easements).

The lion's share of the MBCF comes from funds collected through the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, commonly known as the "Duck Stamp." Over \$700 million of the \$1 billion spent have come through sale of the Stamp, the rest coming from excise/import fees, fines, and several lesser sources.

The billionth dollar was actually spent to complete the purchase of a permanent conservation easement on a 133-acre grassland tract on private land in Campbell County, South Dakota. This easement will complement nearby Waterfowl Production areas owned in fee by the Service and open to the public for wildlife-dependent recreation.

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### **OCTOBER: TIME FOR THE BIG SIT!**

The Big Sit!, that annual noncompetitive birding event held in October, hosted by BIRD WATCHER'S DIGEST, and founded by the New Haven (Connecticut) Bird Club is this year scheduled for Sunday, 12 October. The premise of The Big Sit! is simple: find a good spot for birding, and identify as many birds as possible from inside a 17-foot-diameter circle within a 24-hour period.

It's an easy-going event, perfect for families, park/refuge visitors, and casual birders, and a fine way to learn about birds. Some bird clubs, nature centers, and bird observatories also use The Big Sit! like a fund raising event, not unlike a bird-a-thon.

You can find details about the Big Sit!, find the location of a local circle, or register your own site at:  
<http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/site/funbirds/bigsit/bigsit.aspx>

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### **THREE CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES: NCLI, NMBCA, and IZEMBEK**

As September ended, the U.S. Congress was preoccupied with the Wall Street economic package debate, and observers were unsure how much would get accomplished before a recess or if there would be a post-election "lame-duck" session. Indeed, some issues of concern may have to await real action with the next Congress. In any case, there are three developments that deserve our attention:

1. NCLI Passes House - The No Child Left Inside Act (H.R. 3036) passed overwhelmingly in the House of Representatives in late September. Bird and wildlife conservationists from throughout the country pushed for passage of this legislation.

This legislation would authorize funding for environmental education and would provide incentives to states to develop environmental literacy plans. Such funding could be used for teacher training.

The Senate companion bill (S. 1981) has not moved since it was introduced by Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) in August 2007.

You can find details here: <http://www.nclicoalition.org/>

2. NEOTROP Bill Introduced in Senate - Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD), George Voinovich (R-OH), Susan Collins (R-ME), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Joseph Lieberman (I-CT), Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) have introduced bipartisan legislation to increase funding for the conservation of migratory birds. The Senate bill, S. 3490, reauthorizes the existing Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA), but at significantly higher levels in order to meet the growing concerns about the future of migratory birds, many of which are in serious trouble. Meanwhile, in the House of Representatives, Ron Kind (D-WI) and Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD) have introduced similar bipartisan legislation, H.R. 5756.

More details on NMBCA success and potential can be found at:

[http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/act\\_songbirds.pdf](http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/act_songbirds.pdf)

To support this legislative effort, check here:

<http://www.birdconservationalliance.org/campaigns/actforsongbirds/index.htm>

3. IZEMBEK Boondoggle Still Has Life - On September 11th, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved a bill (S. 1680) that would create a nine-mile, \$30-million road through designated Wilderness and wildlife habitat in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. We featured this "Road to Nowhere" in May:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/maySBC08.html#TOC11>

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## **TWO HAWAIIAN BIRDS: PROPOSED FOR ESA**

In late September, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed to list two Hawaiian birds, the Akikiki and Akekee, as Endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Both species inhabit the Island of Kauai. The current population of the Akikiki is estimated to be less than 1,400 birds, based on surveys conducted in 2007. The current population of the Akekee is estimated to be 3,500 birds, also based on surveys conducted in 2007. The proposal for ESA listing begins a 60-day public comment period. More details can be found here:

<http://www.fws.gov/news/NewsReleases/showNews.cfm?newsId=B4C23F5C-AA81-DFC5-9BA21948AC36A07F>

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## **PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP**

We end this E-bulletin on a note concerning the U.S. Presidency. In the next month you will be inundated with details on choices to be made for the highest office of the land. We will not enter that discussion through this E-bulletin, but we will highlight the issue of past Presidential bird-and-conservation leadership.

This month marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of the U.S. President who, arguably, made the most significant contributions to bird-and-wildlife conservation in our history. Dedicated birdwatcher, hunter, angler, hiker, and all-around outdoor enthusiast, Theodore Roosevelt was born 150 years ago this month, on 27 October 1858.

As President, Theodore Roosevelt created the first National Bird Preserve, (the beginning of the National Wildlife Refuge system) at Pelican Island, Florida (1903) and urged Congress to establish the United States Forest Service (1905). He actually set aside more land for national parks and refuge/preserves than all of his predecessors combined, 194 million acres. By 1909, his administration had created an unprecedented 42 million acres of national forests, 53 national wildlife refuges, and 18 areas of "special interest," including the Grand Canyon. Just as importantly, throughout his life TR was fully engaged in myriad efforts to save birds and wildlife and to promote wildlife-associated recreation and enjoyment.

His activities in these areas present examples of leadership that any contender for the Presidency might do well to follow.

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