



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

September 2006

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RARITY FOCUS

In the last week of July, seven or more Aztec Thrushes appeared in Madera Canyon, in the Santa Rita Mountains (Coronado National Forest) of Southeastern Arizona. These birds, in decreasing numbers, appeared through at least 10 August, usually feasting on Choke Cherries near the Carrie Nation/Vault Mine trail.

In late July there were also one-day reports of single Aztec Thrushes at Ramsey and Carr Canyons in the nearby Huachuca Mountains.

Aztec Thrush, usually found in the western and central mountains of Mexico, has been seen on over 50 occasions in North America, beginning in 1977. (See page 352-3 in the National Geographic guide or page 404 in the "big" Sibley.) Nearly all of the records have been from the mountains of SE Arizona and mostly from late summer (July-August) into the early fall. Indeed, August records quite likely represent widespread post-breeding northward dispersal from Mexico. There are also some scattered Texas records. There was even a single tantalizing Santa Fe, New Mexico, report in mid-July this year.

Many observers were rewarded with views of multiple birds in Madera Canyon in early August. Shortly after the Ramsey Canyon birds disappeared, a pair of Aztec Thrushes made a brief appearance in the Huachuca Mountains to the southeast at Old Sawmill Spring, Carr Canyon, once again feeding on Choke Cherries.

Finally, a cooperative female Aztec Thrush re-appeared at Madera Canyon on 29 August, and remained at least to the end of the month, to the delight of additional observers.

[Photos](#) (by M. Moore and A. Tozier) and details on the Madera Canyon birds

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COUNT SWIFTLY

If you know where Chimney Swifts (central continent to East Coast) or Vaux's Swift (West Coast) are engaged in post-nesting collective roosting in your area, you are encouraged to participate in the "Swift Night Out."

Originally inspired by John Connors with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, North Carolina, the "Swift Night Out" is currently sponsored by the Driftwood Wildlife Association, in Texas.

This month, on any night over the weekend of 8, 9, and 10 September, volunteers are invited to observe and estimate the number of swifts - roosting in a cavity or chimney near where they live. Observers should start counting or estimating numbers about 30 minutes before dusk. Once the total number has been determined, numbers can be posted, along with those

of other volunteer counters, on the web link below. It's that simple, and it can be spectacular!

See [details](#).

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CARBOFURAN RELIEF

In early August, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that the use of the pesticide carbofuran would be banned for use on rice, corn, alfalfa, and potato crops. There will also be a four-year phase-out-period for use on six other minor crops (artichokes, spinach, cucumbers, chili peppers, sunflowers, and pine seedlings). This phase-out for secondary crop uses will give growers time to find effective alternatives.

The EPA recently acknowledged that there are risks associated with carbofuran to both food and drinking water, as well as to pesticide applicators, and birds that are exposed to the chemical in fields treated with the pesticide.

Carbofuran has been perhaps the greatest chemical threat to our wild birds since the pesticides DDT and dieldrin were banned in the early 1970s. In its ecological risk assessment for carbofuran last year, the EPA stated that there simply were no legal uses of carbofuran that did not kill wild birds. For example, if a flock of Mallards were to feed in a carbofuran-treated alfalfa or rice field, the EPA predicted that over 90 percent of the birds would quickly die.

Carbofuran has been one of the most heavily used insecticides in the world, but its extreme toxicity to farm workers and to birds and other wildlife has made it very dangerous. The cancellation will hopefully have a domino effect internationally, as many other countries often follow the U.S. EPA's lead on such policies.

The cancellation follows a multi-year campaign to ban carbofuran. See more [details](#), including the role of the American Bird Conservancy, Defenders of Wildlife, and a number of other groups.

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GETTING ASIAN VULTURES OFF DRUGS

For many years, south Asia's vultures have been declining, both drastically and mysteriously. After years of worsening numbers, the culprit was discovered in early 2004. The drug, diclofenac, a compound used in human medicine for decades, was first introduced for veterinary use in India, Pakistan, and elsewhere on livestock. Vultures exposed to the drug while scavenging on livestock carcasses were found dying of renal failure.

In May, the Indian government said the use of diclofenac for the treatment of livestock would be banned within three months. Recently, hopes of saving

Asia's seriously threatened vultures have been given a second boost by a drug company in Nepal.

In early August, Nepal's largest veterinary pharmaceutical firm started promoting a replacement drug at the same price as diclofenac, prompting the Nepalese authorities to halt the domestic manufacture and import of diclofenac. Until recently, diclofenac was significantly cheaper than the new and safer compound, meloxicam.

The numbers of White-rumped Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*) and Slender-billed Vultures (*G. tenuirostris*) have declined by an estimated 90 percent in Nepal and 97 percent in India and Pakistan just in the last decade. Indian Vultures (*G. indicus*) have also suffered a parallel decline, and half the population of all the remaining vultures is estimated to be dying annually.

One can only hope that these regulatory moves have arrived in time.

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IBA NEWS: OREGON MURRELETS

Thirty volunteers have been trained to conduct surveys to detect the presence of Marbled Murrelets at the proposed Central Coast Marbled Murrelet Important Bird Area (IBA) in Oregon. This training was intended to raise awareness about the unique life history of this small and elusive seabird that nests in the upper canopy of coastal old-growth forests, and to initiate a citizen-science monitoring effort at the proposed Marbled Murrelet IBA, located mostly on U.S. Forest Service property. The Marbled Murrelet is currently listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

This coastal temperate rainforest comprised of about 80,000 acres has been designated by the U.S. Forest Service to be managed for old-growth forest habitat for the ESA-listed Northern Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet, along with other species dependent on these ancient forests.

The Audubon Society of Portland's IBA Program not only identifies and designates areas in Oregon as outstanding habitat for birds, but also encourages the continued productivity of these sites through conservation, citizen-science monitoring, research, and education. To date, 104 IBA sites have been designated in Oregon.

[More information](#) on Oregon IBAs

General information on the ongoing [IBA program](#)

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NEW WESTERN HEMISPHERE SHOREBIRD RESERVE NETWORK (WHSRN) SITE AND ASSESSMENT TOOL

Among the most significant IBAs for shorebirds are locations that have already been given a WHSRN designation. The Western Hemispheric Shorebird

Reserve Network (WHSRN) has recently launched a new [web site](#).

WHSRN today consists of 64 locations in eight nations and over 21 million acres. Working in conjunction with hundreds of landowners, land trusts, corporations, and government entities, WHSRN is the only hemisphere-wide conservation program focused on protecting shorebirds.

The goal of the new web site is to build communications capacity to protect a vital chain of international ecosystems. (A Spanish language version of the site is under development.) In addition to updated information about WHSRN and shorebirds, the site provides new opportunities for the WHSRN locations to tell their individual stories. Ten locales agreed to serve as

pilots for these showcase opportunities. The website also features interactive [Google Maps](#) to browse satellite images of the network's 64 locations.

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TRACKING LONG-BILLED CURLEWS

And speaking of shorebirds and their conservation, the movements of two large-bodied shorebirds of the West are currently being tracked via satellite transmitters: Long-billed Curlew and Marbled Godwit.

Alex Hartman and Lewis Oring (Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Science, University of Nevada, Reno) have a fascinating [website](#) showing the locations of some migrating Long-billed Curlews.

There may soon also be a public site developed for Marbled Godwit movements.

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MACHIAS SEAL ISLAND DILEMMA

This has been a very difficult season for Arctic Terns at a popular birding site, Machias Seal Island. This tiny Canadian island, located between Maine and New Brunswick, has long supported the largest Downeast colony of Atlantic Puffins in the Gulf of Maine.

The Atlantic Puffins are not in immediate trouble, but Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls have been increasingly devastating to the Arctic Tern colony on Machias Seal Island. Gull predation in recent years, says University of New Brunswick biologist Tony Diamond, has resulted in the loss of the largest Arctic Tern colony in eastern North America.

Five years ago, there were about 2,000 pairs of Arctic Terns and 1,000 pairs of Common Terns on Machias Seal Island. This past nesting season, there were only 900 pairs of Arctic Terns and 213 pairs of Common Terns. Diamond and his researchers estimate that 1,700 nests were destroyed by gull predation this spring.

With declining tern numbers, and lacking aggressive gull-control,

researchers fear that the gulls will eventually begin preying on Atlantic Puffin eggs and young. Beyond the threat of gulls, researchers say that the puffins are beginning to also reflect the possible effects of human over fishing. The puffins' diet has shifted from a normal fish diet (such as herring) to less healthful krill and smaller fish. Puffin chicks appear to be growing more slowly and fledging later than in past seasons.

[More information](#) on Machias Seal Island

Stephen Kress, a researcher who has been working on puffin restoration efforts elsewhere in the Gulf of Maine (e.g., Seal Island NWR, Matinicus Rock, Eastern Egg Rock, etc.), where gull control IS practiced, remarked, "There is no such thing as balance. There is management."

Details on [Project Puffin](#)

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FINAL RULING ON RESIDENT CANADA GEESE

In recent decades, the numbers of Canada Geese that nest or reside predominantly within the conterminous United States (resident Canada Geese, also known as "Giant" Canada Geese) have undergone such dramatic growth that their numbers are increasingly coming into conflict with human activity. In many parts of the country there are concerns over personal and public property damage, as well as over public health.

Expansion of existing annual hunting seasons and the issuance of control hunting permits have all been recently used to try and reduce the numbers of resident Canada Geese. Unfortunately, these efforts have met with varying degrees of success.

In February 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service completed a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for resident Canada Goose management

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for resident Canada Goose management. The following year, a proposed rule was recommended to establish proposed action, known as Alternative F. The USFWS said that it received more than 2,700 written comments on the 2002 draft Environmental Impact Statement and almost 3,000 public comments on the 2003 proposed rule. In November 2005, the notice of availability for a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was published, followed by a 30-day public review period.

The upshot is that this final rule now sets forth a policy, Alternative F, which would authorize State wildlife agencies, private landowners, and airports to conduct (or allow) indirect and/or direct population control management activities, including the take of birds and expanded hunting methods, on resident Canada Goose populations.

This final rule went into effect on September 11, 2006.

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SKI RESORT AND BICKNELL'S THRUSH CO-HABITATE

In 2001, New York State's Olympic Regional Development Authority announced a plan to extend by seven miles 18 miles of ski-trails at Whiteface Mountain in the Adirondack Mountains. Unfortunately for the executives at Whiteface, the plans ran up against the breeding-habitat needs of the Bicknell's Thrush, a bird listed as a "species of special concern" in New York. The ski resort officials, surprised by the determination of advocates for the Bicknell's Thrush, agreed earlier this year to make significant changes in the configuration and design of the proposed ski trails.

Last month, the state went further by signing a cooperative agreement with conservation groups that commits them to protecting the bird's habitat, along with establishing a fund to help conservation efforts on the island of Hispaniola - Haiti and the Dominican Republic - where the thrushes spend the winter. The Olympic Regional Development Authority also plans to create kiosks containing information about the Bicknell's Thrushes on Whiteface Mountain.

Responding to recommendations made by the Vermont Institute for Natural Science (VINS), the organization that has led much of the Bicknell's Thrush conservation effort in New England, new ski trails are to be laid out that will avoid essential Bicknell's Thrush habitat. In addition the plans for tree-cutting and other construction work will take place outside the active nesting cycle - mid-May to early August. There will also be regular monitoring of the Bicknell's Thrush population both during and after ski-trail construction is completed.

[Report by VINS](#) on the Whiteface Mountain options (December 2004)

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KIRTLAND'S WARBLERS UP: MICHIGAN, WISCONSIN, AND ONTARIO

Michigan's Department of Natural Resources recently released its annual Kirtland's Warbler count, indicating the state's population of the officially Endangered (ESA) warbler is increasing. The Kirtland's Warbler population relies on northern Michigan's Jack Pine barrens ecosystem for nesting habitat. The warbler nests on the ground in stands of Jack Pine that are between four and 20 years old. Historically, these stands of young Jack Pine were created by natural wildfires, but modern fire suppression programs have altered this natural process, thereby reducing Kirtland's Warbler habitat. With Jack-Pine management and control of the Brown-headed Cowbird (a brood parasite), the population of Kirtland's Warblers has increased

This summer's census was a joint effort by the DNR, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Michigan Department of Military Affairs, and citizen volunteers. Together these groups observed 1,478 singing males during the 2006 official census period. This number exceeds the 1,415 males observed in 2005, and it represents the largest number of warblers recorded since monitoring began. (The census was started in 1951. The lowest numbers were recorded in 1974 and 1987, when only 167 singing males were found.) Only the males sing, so estimates of breeding population size are obtained by doubling the number of singing males recorded.

Besides the birds counted in Michigan, four singing males were observed in Wisconsin this year.

In August, military officials at the armed forces base in Petawawa, Ontario, revealed that at least two Kirtland's Warblers spent the summer in the extensive Jack Pine forests found on the base. This is the first record for the Ottawa area since 1985 and the first territorial birds for the Petawawa base since a singing male spent the summer there in 1977. Prior to the early 1900s, the species was thought to be "not uncommon" in the Petawawa area.

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WEST NILE: SAGE-GROUSE CONCERNS CONTINUE

Research on Greater Sage-Grouse in the Powder River Basin of Montana and Wyoming by Dave Naugle at the University of Montana confirms that West Nile virus has again killed radio-marked sage-grouse for the fourth year in a row.

Naugle and his colleagues at the North American Grouse Partnership have passed on this disturbing information.

In 2003, about 25 percent of the radio-marked sage-grouse in the Powder River Basin died from West Nile virus. That number dropped to 10 percent in 2004 and 2 percent in 2005 in response to cool summer temperatures. However, there is confirmation of significantly increased mortality this year now that hot weather has returned to the West. This suggests that West Nile virus mortality may be an endemic source of mortality to Greater Sage-Grouse, a factor that will need to be considered in ongoing conservation planning. Similar events with high rates of mortality are being reported in Oregon and Idaho. Another month must pass for researchers to understand the full extent of mortality from this exotic disease.

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BOOK REVIEW: MEXICAN AND CENTRAL AMERICAN BIRDS

Some of our "Rarity Focus" birds over the past year have been species from Mexico (e.g., Aztec Thrush, Yellow Grosbeak, Piratic Flycatcher, and Crescent-chested Warbler), and birders along the U.S.-Mexican border are increasingly aware of the possibility of rare avian visitors from points south.

A recent addition to the birder's bookshelf, BIRDS OF MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA, may be of some interest to those contemplating these possibilities. This is the only field guide to illustrate every species of bird found from Mexico through Panama. Written and illustrated by Ber van Perlo, this compact and useful work covers more than 1,500 species. This Princeton University Press guide is a handy and portable volume for birders interested in a rapid reference to any of the birds from Mexico through

Panama. The 98 color plates appear with corresponding opposite text for quick and easy reference. The written information is virtually in shorthand, with key identification features, habitats, and voice included, along with helpful maps. Bird names are given in common, scientific, and Spanish-language (mainly Mexican- and Costa Rican-sourced) versions. Although the maps are painfully small and the voice renditions are disappointing, the final results are still satisfying for such a small book (336 pp), a reference actually billed as an "illustrated checklist."

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