



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

September 2007

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RARITY FOCUS

Our rarity of the month is Fan-tailed Warbler. This is a species that normally occurs in Mexico from southern Sonora and southern Tamaulipas, south to northern Nicaragua. The species has been found in the U.S. only about seven times, all in southeastern Arizona. (For field-guide details on this species, see pp. 396-397 in the latest National Geographic guide.)

On 13 August last month, a Fan-tailed Warbler was found by Eric Carpenter in Pine Canyon at Big Bend National Park, Texas. Those looking for the bird had to negotiate a rugged 6.7-mile drive along Glen Springs and Pine Canyon Roads, followed by a 2-mile hike. Despite these challenges, a number of birders made the pilgrimage and were successful in finding the bird.

The warbler stayed through the end of the month along the shaded creek bed of Pine Canyon.

A photograph taken by Carolyn Ohi-Johnson on 15 August of the warbler can be seen at:

<http://bigbendbirdhabitat.com/images/fan-tail1.jpg>
<<http://bigbendbirdhabitat.com/images/fan-tail1.jpg>>

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A GREAT ONE-DAY WONDER

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There were some short-visit contenders for this month's "Rarity Focus," including a Jabiru in north-central Mississippi, a Macronesian/Little Shearwater off Massachusetts, and, in Alaska, a Brown Hawk-Owl on the Pribilofs and a Marsh Sandpiper on Adak. But another bird that remained on site for only one day (for certain) and was observed by only a lucky few birders also deserves special mention.

On Monday, 13 August, Steve Gillispie found a strange shorebird at Winfield Locks and Dam in western West Virginia. The shorebird turned out to be a Great Knot, a species for which there are only about 18 North American records, all except one (Oregon, 1990) coming from Alaska. . (For field-guide details on this species, see pp. 178-179 in the latest National Geographic guide.)

By the end of the day of the bird's first discovery, about half a dozen birders were fortunate enough to glimpse the rare vagrant, but unfortunately it was not able to be found the next day. (Caveat: There might have been a single-observer report from Tuesday evening.)

A photo taken on 13 August may be seen at:

http://wvbird.com/tmp9/wv_08-13-07_b.JPG

<http://wvbird.com/tmp9/wv_08-13-07_b.JPG>

Great Knots breed in northeastern Asia, and spend the winter from India eastward to Australia. To appreciate how far out of range this bird was, check the range map at:

http://wvbird.com/tmp9/Gknot_range.jpg

<http://wvbird.com/tmp9/Gknot_range.jpg>

This record once again proves that almost anything is possible in the world of birding!

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TOWNSEND'S/NEWELL'S SHEARWATER: NEW FOR U.S. CONTINENTAL WATERS

And now another remarkable discovery: On 1 and 2 August, workmen on night duty on the railroad lines at Del

Mar, just north of San Diego, California, encountered a shearwater flying in from the ocean. The shearwater dive-bombed the men, who were wearing headlamps at the time.

The shearwater was eventually recovered and taken to Project Wildlife, and later to the San Diego Natural History Museum. At the museum the bird was identified as a "Newell's" Shearwater, a form thought by some authorities to represent a species distinct from Townsend's Shearwater. Townsend's Shearwater (*Puffinus auricularis*) is currently comprised of two subspecies: the nominate race (*Puffinus a. auricularis*) that breeds on the *Islas Revillagigedos* off western Mexico, and *P. a. newelli* ("Newell's" Shearwater) that breeds on Kauai and perhaps other islands in the Hawaiian archipelago.

The Newell's subspecies is thought to remain in Hawaiian waters from April through October. With a population estimated at 84,000 in the early 1990s, this form may be undergoing a serious decline, with a 60 percent reduction in birds breeding at Kauai during the 1990s. There may have been as few as 30,000 at the end of the 20th century. "Newell's" Shearwater, regardless of its taxonomic status, is formally listed as Threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - USFWS). "Newell's" Shearwaters are thought to disperse after breeding mostly east and south of Hawaii into the Equatorial Countercurrent, while Townsend's Shearwaters breeding in the Revillagigo Islands are thought to disperse along the continental shelf from southern Baja California Sur to Central America.

Although there have been unconfirmed sight reports of Townsend's Shearwaters off California in the past, there has never been a confirmed record of its occurrence. The August "Newell's" Shearwater incident represents the first substantiated record for U.S. Continental waters, regardless of how it is classified.

You can find more details here:

<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/news/Newells.html>

<<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/news/Newells.html>>

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A NEW CONCEPT IN SEABIRD MITIGATION

Since we have mentioned a federally Threatened seabird, the "Newell's" Shearwater, it's appropriate to consider a new tool being used for seabird conservation.

The new concept speaks to the issue of fisheries bycatch, a persistent problem in seabird conservation. (Bycatch refers to species caught in a fishery intended to target another species - in this case, seabirds that are caught and killed in the process of wide-scale commercial fishing.)

An unconventional approach to seabird conservation was presented last month in an article in the journal *FRONTIERS IN ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT*. The article, "Compensatory mitigation as a solution to fisheries bycatch-biodiversity conservation conflicts" was written by Dr Chris Wilcox, from Australia's national science agency, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), and C. Josh Donlan of

agency, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), and of Scott Donlan of Cornell University.

The authors explored the possibility of compensatory mitigation, specifically looking into "the full suite of cost-effective tools available, in a responsible and integrated way." Their offset approach is aimed at directing specific bycatch penalties to pay for island invasive (e.g., rat, cat) removal. They maintain that this approach could prove effective for many seabird scenarios worldwide. They concluded that bycatch offsets, in conjunction with direct bycatch mitigation efforts, are "an effective, enforceable, and cost-effective approach to seabird conservation."

Some observers and critics have concluded that Wilcox and Donlan are downplaying the pernicious effects of bycatch, but such is not the case Wilcox says: "While the priority should always be for fishers to avoid bycatch, they could also 'offset' the bycatch that does occur by funding conservation measures that tackle other, often greater, threats to bycatch-affected species."

More details and links here:

<http://www.csiro.au/news/ps3a8.html>

<<http://www.csiro.au/news/ps3a8.html>>

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BOOK REVIEW: STORIES AND LESSONS FROM PUERTO RICO

Herbert A. Raffaele, author of the GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF PUERTO RICO AND THE VIRGIN ISLANDS and senior author of the GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF THE WEST INDIES has produced a totally different kind of book with this latest title.

BIRDS, BEASTS, AND BUREAUCRATS (Cold Tree Press, 2007) is a narrative describing his own introduction to birds, natural history, and the bureaucratic tangles of working as a naturalist in Puerto Rico (Division of Flora and Fauna, Area of Natural Resources) in the 1970s. The reader travels with Raffaele to distant corners of the island in his effort to learn more, to better manage species appropriately, and to simply save the island's wildlife. While the book is a journey of discovery that reveals the birds and other wildlife of Puerto Rico, it also deals with the challenges of making conservation possible. Perhaps the most important sections of the book are the "Reflections" at the end of each chapter. Even without the Reflections, the chapters are variously entertaining, funny, and sad, but the wisdom provided by each "Reflection" makes the book absolutely invaluable for anyone interested in making a difference in the field of natural resource and bird conservation.

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FARM BILL REMINDER: THE SENATE'S NEXT

Last month we reported on Farm Bill progress, with some conservation elements doing well in the House and some others less satisfying:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/augSBC07.html#TOC13>

<<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/augSBC07.html#TOC13>> and

<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/aug07.html>

<<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/aug07.html>>

With Congress returning from August recess, the action on the 2007 Farm Bill will move to the Senate's Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee, where efforts are underway to draft a version parallel to that of the House. Bird-oriented conservation may actually do better on the Senate side, but only if pressure is sustained.

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LWCF CHEERS

Here's another Congressional issue to watch. Many observers of the natural resources scene have been buoyed by recent Congressional interest in accessing the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), the offshore oil-and-gas revenue "conservation royalty" intended to take investment from non-renewable resources (oil and gas) for land and habitat conservation (parks, trails, refuges, and open space).

On the books since the mid-1960s, LWCF has languished for some time, seriously under funded by Congress. The FY 2008 possibilities are real, with potential appropriations committee increases cleared by the House (a 44 percent hike at \$205.6 million) and the Senate (a 28 percent hike at \$182.2 million) and resolution pending. Some conservationists are calling this revival the possible "rebirth of the LWCF."

Still, the LWCF, signed into law in September 1964 (due to the leadership of Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, Sen. Henry M. Jackson, and many others) was envisioned to be the start of great conservation effort, not the end. The program's authorized funding level from oil-and-gas revenue was augmented to \$200 million a year in 1968, \$300 million in 1970, and \$900 million in 1977, which is the current level. (Half - \$450 million - was to be used for federal land-based conservation, with the other half for stateside projects.)

Many great birding locations - refuges, parks, and forests - owe their very existence to the LWCF.

Not only has the authorized limit not gone up in the last 30 years, but also the stateside funding has been notoriously under-funded over the decades (some years there has been no funding whatsoever for stateside projects). The closest Congress came to full funding for LWCF was the House passage of the CARA (Conservation and Reinvestment Act) legislation in May 2000, with LWCF funding embedded as an essential component of that mega-bill. Unfortunately, the Senate was not given the opportunity to act on it.

While conservationists should be pleased that LWCF is getting some "respect," it is important to remember that this much-vaunted "rebirth" of LWCF falls far short of the full-funding possibilities envisioned as far back as thirty years ago, 1977.

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SOUTHERN LAPWING: GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

Regular E-bulletin readers may remember our coverage (August 2006) of Southern Lapwings seen last year in Florida (St. Marks NWR) and Maryland (Worcester Co.) - and previous reports from Florida:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/augSBC06.html#TOC03>
<<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/augSBC06.html#TOC03>> and
<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/aug06.html>
<<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/aug06.html>>

The good news is that Southern Lapwing breeding in the southern Caribbean (e.g. Trinidad and Tobago, Aruba) was augmented this year with the first nesting on Barbados. Stories ran in the local news about the nesting success (three young) to make sure that local hunters knew about them. The Southern Lapwings nested between two artificial lakes used for shorebird hunting.

The bad news is that one of the young was shot and killed in mid-August.

The sport of "swamp shooting" in Barbados is nothing like waterfowling in the U.S. or Canada today. In Barbados, tens of thousands of shorebirds (possibly as many as 30,000 to 45,000) are shot each year on artificial lakes using lures, caged birds, and amplified birdcalls. The shorebirds reportedly taken include Lesser Yellowlegs, Greater Yellowlegs, Whimbrel, Stilt Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, and American Golden-Plover. (In September 1963, the last known Eskimo Curlew ever shot was among the birds killed.)

Because of their social and racial status (most are well-to-do Caucasians), the shooters have considerable economic and political influence on the island. In fact, "swamp shooting" has been taking place on Barbados for generations.

To justify the practice of "swamp shooting" the shooters assert that the wetland sites are maintained on private land and provide a haven for birds during the other eight months of the year, outside the July-October "season." Barbados has a wild-bird protection law, at least on the books, and is a CITES signatory, but is not a party to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA).

An international effort to enforce existing laws and to establish some essential restrictions needs to be seriously considered. For a graphic report of this activity in Barbados see:

<http://www.nationnews.com/story/296696461313615.php>

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IBA NEWS: JAMAICA BAY (NYC) IN DISTRESS

Jamaica Bay, New York City's wildlife-rich saltwater marsh island complex and an Important Bird Area (IBA), is a crucial breeding, stopover, and wintering location for many species of waterfowl, long-legged waders, and shorebirds. Unfortunately, the site is also in significant trouble. The islands of Jamaica Bay, core habitat for the famous Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, have long been slowly vanishing. According to a study released in early August the islands could actually disappear by 2024 due to rapidly increasing degradation caused mainly by excess nitrogen from wastewater treatment. The study was conducted by New York's appointed 7-member Advisory Committee on the bay, and it includes programmatic targets, as well as recommendations.

It had been previously estimated that between 1924 and 1999 Jamaica Bay lost half of its tidal wetlands, and that this loss accelerated over time. Evidence from satellite imagery and aerial photographs taken between 2003 and 2005 reveals that losses have been particularly drastic.

For a link to the August report from the Advisory Committee on the bay, visit:

http://nbii-nin.ciesin.columbia.edu/jamaicabay/jbwppac/JBAC_Recommendations_Report_060107.pdf
<http://nbii-nin.ciesin.columbia.edu/jamaicabay/jbwppac/JBAC_Recommendations_Report_060107.pdf>

For a description of the IBA Status of Jamaica Bay, see:

<http://iba.audubon.org/iba/viewSiteProfile.do?siteId=1722&navSite=state>
<<http://iba.audubon.org/iba/viewSiteProfile.do?siteId=1722&navSite=state>>

For more information about National Audubon Society's Important Bird Area program, visit:

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

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WHOOPING CRANE CONCERNS IN TEXAS

Wetland-and-bird conservation concerns are also arising on the coast of Texas.

The Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Gulf Coast of Texas is comprised of over 115,000 acres including the Blackjack Peninsula (Aransas proper), Matagorda Island, and the Myrtle Foester-Whitmire, Tatton, and Lamar units. These areas provide vital resting, feeding, wintering, and nesting grounds for migratory birds and native Texas wildlife.

Most significantly, the area is home to the only natural, wild, migrating population of Whooping Cranes in the world, but a developer wants to build a 700-acre housing development right next to the refuge. A portion of the development would be in Whooping Crane critical habitat.

The proposal by Seadrift Ranch Partners, Ltd. would build two marinas, several canals and channels, as well as a number of luxury homes at the site. This could have serious ramifications for the cranes that depend on the refuge for roosting in the evening, and adjacent wetlands used for feeding during the daytime. In addition to the cranes, the proposed development could have adverse impacts on numerous other migratory birds as well.

The survival of the Whooping Cranes in the Aransas area has been a real conservation success story, but nibbling away at critical habitat needed by the remaining birds is presenting a threatening precedent.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is considering the developer's permit. Thus far, an environmental consultant hired by the developer has conducted the only data collection on the impacts to wildlife. Without an independent assessment, however, the Army Corps could potentially breach its responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act.

At minimum, such an assessment of the potential impacts should include an analysis of the following three issues:

- The impact of the development on water quality.

- The minimum buffer necessary between the proposed development and critical crane habitat.

- The impact on Whooping Cranes of construction noise and increased human activity including fences, power lines and towers, and additional boat activities (airboats in particular).

A local news story can be found here:

<http://www.thevictoriaadvocate.com/region/local/story/99786.html>

<<http://www.thevictoriaadvocate.com/region/local/story/99786.html>>

We will attempt to keep you informed of developments.

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RED KNOT: NOT GOOD

A "Red Knot Assessment Report" released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in late July contains troubling news about the health of the Red Knot (subspecies *Calidris canutus rufa*).

Population numbers at this subspecies' South American wintering grounds fell from 51,300 in 2000 to about 30,000 in 2004, to only 17,200 in 2006. The report predicts possible extinction for the rufa subspecies with ten years if declines continue at current rates.

A significant contributing factor to the population crash has been the low availability of horseshoe crab eggs in Delaware Bay, (a key Red Knot stopover site during spring migration), due to continued over-harvesting of adult crabs by conch and eel fishing industries. There was also mass Red Knot mortality this April at stopover sites in Uruguay, a possible outcome of harmful algal blooms. The extreme decline noted in recent years highlights the need for further research into threats to the rufa population.

Based on recent information, USFWS biologists determined that the Red Knot warranted Endangered Species Act protection, but placing the bird on the endangered species list was precluded by higher priority listing actions for other species at greater risk. The rufa race of the Red Knot is listed as Endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

For a summary from BirdLife International, visit:

http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/08/red_knot_report.html

<http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/08/red_knot_report.html>

For a press release from the USFWS, visit:

<http://www.fws.gov/news/NewsReleases/showNews.cfm?newsId=E486E645-9CED-D287-8D803DE0A02D757A>

<<http://www.fws.gov/news/NewsReleases/showNews.cfm?newsId=E486E645-9CED-D287-8D803DE0A02D757A>>

And finally, to see the USFWS report itself, have a look at:

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/Endangered/Red%20Knot%20Assessment%20May%202007.standard.pdf>
<<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/Endangered/Red%20Knot%20Assessment%20May%202007.standard.pdf>>

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OCTOBER: REFUGE WEEK AND BIG SIT REMINDERS

The USFWS originally launched National Wildlife Refuge Week (NWRW) in 1995 in order to raise awareness of the importance of refuges for wildlife. NWRW is celebrated during the second week of October (this year: 6-14 October – over two weekends), in part to coincide with southward migration in autumn.

This year, a number of birders and refuges will celebrate the event by initiating a "Big Sit" on Sunday, 14 October 2007. (In 1992, the New Haven [Connecticut] Bird Club started The Big Sit, an event now annually hosted by BIRD WATCHER'S DIGEST and sponsored by a number of other organizations as well. The event's official name: "The Big Sit!")

For details on The Big Sit! coming up next month, or to plan your very own event, see:

<http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/site/funbirds/bigsit/bigsit.aspx>

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OUR REEF-HERON ERRATA

In the August issue of the E-bulletin, we stated that the first North American record of Western Reef-Heron in North America was on Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts in 1983. Actually it was on Nantucket Island.

Moreover, we wrote that the bird in New York was present through 25 August, when we actually meant 25 July. (Incidentally, the reef-heron did reappear for a time in the first week of August in Brooklyn and then was rediscovered on 24 August at Great Kills Park, on Staten Island, on the other side of New York Harbor.)

Our errors and oversights were not discovered until most of the E-bulletins had already been electronically distributed.

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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.