



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

September 2008

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RARITY FOCUS

On the evening of 20 August Ruth Hoyt and Rafa Flores observed and photographed a Jabiru outside of Raymondville, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas. Rafa Flores actually found the Jabiru 10 days previously, but unfortunately had no camera at the time, nor could he relocate the bird until 20 August, when he and Hoyt once again found the huge stork feeding on frogs in a flooded sorghum field.

Jabirus are extremely rare visitors to South Texas, with at least seven previous records since the early 1970s, all in late summer and fall.. There is also at least one Texas record away from the Rio Grande Valley (Houston 1973), one record for Oklahoma (1973), and a record of possibly two birds - or the same individual observed twice - that showed up last summer in Mississippi and this summer in Louisiana.

For readers unfamiliar with this unique stork, see the National Geographic Guide (pp. 114-115). The species is essentially resident from southeastern Mexico to South America.

The Jabiru in the Raymondville area may have been present for about a month, according to the owner of the house next to the field where the bird was relocated. The stork allegedly appeared in the area a few days after Hurricane Dolly, when it was observed in various places in the Raymondville area.

The numerous birders that went to Raymondville within the first two days of the bird's discovery were able to find and photograph it , but the estimated hundred birders who appeared on Saturday, 22 August failed to find it.

You can see photos that Ruth Hoyt took of the Jabiru on the 20 and 21 August at:

<http://www.ruthhoyt.com/jabiru/>

and

<http://www.ruthhoyt.com/Jabiru%20Thursday/>

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SINALOA WREN: ANOTHER GREAT FIND!

As outstanding as Jabiru for the Rarity of the Month is Sinaloa Wren - also known as Bar-vented Wren (*Thryothorus sinaloa*).

On 25 August, Robin Baxter and Matt Brown found and carefully documented a singing Sinaloa Wren at The Nature Conservancy's Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve in Patagonia, Arizona. It was photographed and sound-recorded. This species is native to western Mexico, and it has been found nesting multiple times as close as 35-60 miles from the Arizona/Mexico border. The species has never been positively identified before in the U.S. (There was a hopeful, yet unverified, report at least once, in June 1989.)

The wren was relocated by sound a few times before the end of August, after diligent searching, with few observers actually lucky enough to see the bird.

Details of this extraordinary sighting, along with a photo and sound clip by Matt Brown, can be found here: http://www.azfo.org/gallery/Sinaloa_Wren_Patagonia_Brown_20080825.html

Not coincidentally, almost a decade ago, in a mini-series article in BIRDING magazine titled, "Next new birds for the ABA Area," the Sinaloa Wren was among the half-dozen species chosen by an expert birding panel to someday make a premier appearance somewhere in the Arizona/New-Mexico Region in the U.S.

There will be more news next month if the wren becomes more cooperative in September.

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CONDOR REPORT POINTS THE WAY

Last month we drew attention to the forest fires in central California and how they impacted the California Condor recovery effort:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/auqSBC08.html#TOC06>

and

<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/auq08.html>

This month, we profile the work of a special condor "blue ribbon panel" of the American Ornithologists' Union that was convened at the request of Audubon California. The panel's report, released last month, is based on a year-long review of the ongoing condor recovery program.

The effort to bring the California Condor back from the brink of extinction has been more successful than many in the field had ever thought possible; however, according to the panel there are still lingering concerns. The presence of lead in the environment continues to stand in the way of the condor's survival in the wild without continuous hands-on human assistance. In order to ensure that the condors have adequate food, the panel's report calls for an increase in the promotion of sport hunting for large game, and depredation hunting for feral pigs wherever they occur in condor habitat. At the same time, the plan calls for the elimination of lead ammunition throughout much of the range of the California Condor: California, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah.

The panel has made several recommendations to position the recovery program for increased success, and it specifically recommends not releasing any California Condors at new sites until the lead issue is resolved.

A seven-page summary of the condor report can be found at:

http://www.ca.audubon.org/pdf/AOU_report_summary_Auq08_web_final.pdf

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CWS COUNTS YOUNG WHOOPING CRANES

The Canadian Wildlife Service has completed its annual August fledgling Whooping Crane survey in Wood Buffalo National Park and surrounding areas with encouraging results.

The Service tallied a total of 41 young surviving out of 64 chicks counted in June from a record of 66 nests. The total of 41 chicks included two sets of twins, down from 12 sets counted in June. (Normally one of the twins does not survive.) Three of the crane family groups present in June could not be relocated, so there may still be one or two additional surviving fledglings present.

Unfortunately, additional mortality could occur this summer, or during the fall migration to the primary

wintering area at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in coastal Texas.

Last winter there was a record total flock of 266 cranes on the Texas coast. Researchers are anticipating an arrival of about 285 Whooping Cranes this winter. Things are looking up for this spectacular recovering species.

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CARBOFURON BAN: GOOD FOR BIRDS, GOOD FOR PEOPLE

In late July, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that it will be revoking the regulations that allow the use of carbofuran, a highly toxic pesticide, on a variety of crops. Public comments are due by 29 September, although it is likely that that carbofuran will be eliminated from the U.S. market, which will be a benefit to consumers, farm workers, and birds.

This EPA announcement is the latest move to halt all uses of carbofuran (sold under the trade name Furadan). In 2006, the EPA announced its intention to cancel carbofuran registration, but the manufacturer, FMC Corporation, is pursuing a court battle in order to continue selling the pesticide. This is the first time in two decades that a pesticide manufacturer has fought cancellation of a registered pesticide.

Carbofuran is currently one of the deadliest pesticides to birds left on the market. It is estimated that it has been responsible for the deaths of millions of birds since its introduction in 1967. The greatest use of carbofuran has been on alfalfa and rice, with turf and grapes making up most of the remainder.

More details about EPA's announcement are available at:

http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/reregistration/carbofuran/carbofuran_noic.htm

and from the American Bird Conservancy and Defenders of Wildlife:

<http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/080724.html>

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IBA NEWS: TESHEKPUK LAKE GETS A BREAK

Following over 200,000 letters and messages supporting the conservation of the resources of the Teshekpuk Lake area in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) on Alaska's North Slope, the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has modified its oil and gas leasing plans for the Teshekpuk Lake area. In mid-July, the Secretary of Interior announced the BLM's Record of Decision for the Northeast Area of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

Since Teshekpuk Lake is an Important Bird Area (IBA), we have covered the site multiple times in the Birding Community E-bulletin. For example:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/octSBC06.html#TOC08>

and

<http://www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin/oct06.html>

In the most recent environmental statement and land use plan, NPR-A, a critical molting area for geese (up to 30% of the Brant in the Pacific Flyway use this area), is deferred from leasing for 10 years. Additionally, lands surrounding the Lake including breeding areas for threatened species such as Spectacled and Steller's Eider, and other species in apparent decline such as Yellow-billed Loon, have received special protections from development and disturbances.

This recent decision lifts the immediate threat to the area, but does not afford permanent protection for these critical tundra and wetland areas. Bird conservationists and allies in Congress will continue to seek permanent protection of the Teshekpuk Lake area.

For more details on the IBAs of Alaska, see a poster-sized map recently produced by Audubon Alaska, that highlights the 145 identified IBA sites in the state, plus a handful of potential sites that are likely to meet listing criteria in the near future:

http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2008/07/alaska_iba_poster.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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MINING IN THE SANTA RITAS?

Connected to IBAs, there is currently another issue brewing, this one in Southeast Arizona.

The Vancouver-based Augusta-Rosemont Corporation has been eyeing mining opportunities in the Santa Rita Mountains just south of Tucson. Consequently, many conservationists and birders are concerned over the

impact of an open-pit copper mine in this area and on these lands, most of which are administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

The scoping period, the first part of the approval process under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), has been concluded. The Forest Service must now analyze the consequences of this proposal for public land and prepare a draft Environmental Impact Statement to assess options.

It is thought that if the mine proposal is approved as is, it could impact at least 10 bird species of conservation concern within the northern half of the Santa Rita Mountains.

Two websites that supply many important details can be found at:
www.scenicsantaritas.org <<http://www.scenicsantaritas.org/>>
www.friendsofmaderacanyon.org/ <<http://www.friendsofmaderacanyon.org/>>

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ASFMC NEGLECTS THE NEEDS OF RED KNOTS

In late August, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Horseshoe Crab Management Board failed to take essential action to approve a moratorium on a horseshoe crab harvest in the Mid-Atlantic States. The commission ignored the immediate and long-term needs of an imperiled shorebird, the Red Knot, which heavily relies on horseshoe crab eggs for its survival.

Instead of imposing a ban on the take of horseshoe crabs, or at least instituting a major reduction in the allowable take, the board opted to maintain current fishing quotas, quotas that will still permit each state to take 100,000 male crabs per year. Fortunately, some individual states have historically opted for stricter standards (e.g., New Jersey).

The Red Knot population in the East depends on horseshoe crab eggs during its annual migration stopover on the Delaware Bay shore during the bird's formidable 10,000 mile trip from the tip of South America to the Arctic.

A drastic increase in the take of horseshoe crabs in the mid-1990s for use as bait in conch and eel traps has significantly decreased the number of horseshoe crabs in the Delaware Bay. Consequently, the food supply for Red Knots has dwindled. In other words, fewer horseshoe crabs increasingly mean fewer Red Knots.

For more information:
<http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/080822.html>

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BOOK REVIEW: PETERSON BLENDED

We are nearing the saturation point for RTP material presented in the Birding Community E-bulletin over the past few months, but one more item certainly deserves attention.

In celebration of the centennial of Roger Tory Peterson's birth, an admirable effort to preserve and enhance his legacy emerged last month. A new book, PETERSON FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA (Houghton Mifflin), combines the classic Peterson Eastern and Peterson Western guides into one volume, along with welcoming and concise birding information, including access to almost three hours of video podcasts to help make birding easier. The text has been revised and taxonomy updated; 40 new paintings were added, and some of Peterson's original works have been digitally enhanced to correspond with current ID knowledge. Larger than most other Peterson guides, some of the images actually suffer because of their oversize, but mostly it is a grand effort. And, at long last, one can have all this great RTP field-guide artwork in one place.

Enhanced and updated by a team effort of well-known birding experts, the book deserves serious attention by anyone looking for a welcoming and practical guide to birding.

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A WEB-BASED FEATHER QUEST

There is a new web-based resource for the examination and identification of wing and tail feathers of our birds. Currently, the "Feather Atlas of North American Birds" already contains high-resolution scanned images of the flight feathers of over 110 species, including many grouse and quail, hawks and eagles, long-legged waders, vultures, owls, pigeons and doves, and woodpeckers. Each scan includes a table with specific data and measurements of feather lengths.

This is an ongoing project of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory, the only lab in the world actually dedicated to crimes against wildlife. This fascinating project is designed to continually add new bird species. To sample this remarkable resource, see:

<http://www.lab.fws.gov/featheratlas/>

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TIP OF THE MONTH: THE CORRECT ANSWER

Invariably, when birders are in the field, they are asked by curious passers-by and novice birders alike if there has been "anything good" seen.

No matter that you might have only seen a chickadee and a junco so far in the day's birding, the correct response remains the same: "It's all good!"

Let the curious know the wonders of the chickadee and the reliability of the junco as well as your effervescent expectations to find those flocks of wonderful birds just beyond the edge of the trees on the path ahead.

Make it interesting; make it wondrous, and realize that every birder in the field is a potential ambassador for our pastime.

Remember: "It's all good!"

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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.