



## THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

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September 2009

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### RARITY FOCUS

Blue-footed Booby is a common species in the Gulf of California in Pacific Mexican waters, but not north into the United States. This species, which ranges south to Peru, is at best a sporadic visitor to southern California, most often to the Salton Sea and the lower Colorado River. The bird is found rarely north to large lakes in southern Nevada and southwestern Arizona, with stragglers occasionally occurring north to Washington and inland to central California. There was also an occurrence in central Texas in 1994. Most U.S. reports occur between June and September.

For readers unfamiliar with this species, check the latest National Geo guide (p.100-101), the "large" Sibley guide (p. 56), or the Kaufman guide (p. 66-67).

You can imagine his surprise when Bob Mumford, a ranger at Santa Rosa Lake State Park in northeastern New Mexico, identified and photographed a sub-adult Blue-footed Booby at Conchas Lake on 15 August. The booby was on the rocks just south of the lake's dam. It was relocated the next day, and then remained on the lake for the rest of August.

This rarity is a first state record for New Mexico. To view six photos of the bird taken by Cole Wolf (from 16 August), see:  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/nmcrotalus/>

Many birders have already come from afar to see this booby, and the bird has appeared on local TV, radio, and

newspapers, including this story from the QUAY COUNTY SUN:  
<http://www.qcsunonline.com/news/conchas-7525-lake-makes.html>

(Another Blue-footed Booby was seen for at least three days in late August at the north end of the Salton Sea in California.)

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## **CALIFORNIA: COOKING WITH OFFSHORE PETRELS**

There are other interesting developments in California.

Cook's Petrel is a somewhat enigmatic species that is not particularly well known off North America. The species breeds (October to April) on islands off New Zealand, and apparently some spend their non-breeding time off South America. It is a species that is fairly rare in West Coast waters, with most birds appearing mainly from May to November more than 100 miles offshore; they are also accidental in Alaskan waters. Consequently it was shocking to witness something of an incursion in late July and August off southern and central California. In late July, 126 birds showed up off Santa Barbara, and another 138 birds off Monterey, some within 15 miles of shore. Again, in early August, 91 birds and 22 birds were seen on different pelagic trips off Monterey. In addition, on August 12 there were about a dozen Cook's Petrels on a trip out of Bodega Bay. And on 21 August there were another 35 birds off Monterey.

While this is not a complete summary, it is obvious that this summer has been an amazing season for Cook's Petrels off southern and central California.

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## **SORA AND NAB**

If E-bulletin readers are not familiar with SORA (the Searchable Ornithological Research Archive), this is fine time to get acquainted. SORA is a free electronic resource archive for professional bird literature that is drawn from over a dozen journals, some dating as far back as the late 19th century.

The most recent addition to SORA is a valuable and venerable archive for the back issues of NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS and its predecessors (e.g., AUDUBON FIELD NOTES and AMERICAN BIRDS). Currently the NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS archives run from 1973 to 2008, however there are plans to go as far back as 1947. NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS is published by the American Birding Association and is the journal of record for birds observed within its area of coverage. (Full disclosure: both E-bulletin editors have had previous connections to ABA – e.g., previously on the ABA board – and WRP remains a regional editor for NAB.)

SORA may be accessed at:  
<http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/>

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## **IBA NEWS: NEW SEABIRD GUIDELINES**

BirdLife International has moved toward the identification of Marine Important Bird Areas (mIBAs) for seabirds around the world. "Seabirds have deteriorated in IUCN Red List status faster than any other group of bird species," said Ben Lascelles, BirdLife's Global Marine IBA officer. "We urgently need to protect their habitats if we are to stop and reverse these rapid declines."

BirdLife has established new guidelines for following seabirds and analyzing the data used to identify Marine IBAs, a major step towards establishing a global network of representative protected areas for seabirds.

BirdLife and its partners are now focused on getting the outcomes of these standards endorsed by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at an upcoming meeting in Ottawa, Canada.

For more on mIBAs, see details here:  
<http://bit.ly/rBN7r>

For those in the USA, this effort is coming at a good time since there have recently been some significant recent moves to protect Pacific marine environments under U.S. jurisdiction. For example, see the report in the July 2006 E-bulletin:  
<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/julSBC06.html#TOC17>

These protection and conservation efforts all deserve further emphasis and protection.

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:

... Audubon Society's important bird club program has also been  
<http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/>

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## **AUSTIN AREA PRESERVE IN CONTENTION**

The Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) is a system of protected lands in the Austin, Texas, area that exists as a multi-agency conservation effort operating through a 1996 permit issued under the Endangered Species

Act by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). The permit was specifically issued jointly to the BCP's two managing partners, the City of Austin and Travis County, even though several other organizations own and manage land dedicated to the BCP.

For example, the Barton Creek Greenbelt Wilderness Park section of the BCP was set aside to offset the secondary damage of development that has spread across the region's hills, an activity that threatens the destruction of wooded habitat for the Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo, both Endangered species.

However, of the approximately 65 miles of trails in this BCP section, more than 40 miles are illegal, estimates Willy Conrad, division manager of wildland conservation for the Austin Water Utility, a group which manages the preserve along with the city's Parks and Recreation Department. Many of the trails appear to be the creation of cyclists.

Cyclists, hikers, and trail runners have long demanded access to the Balcones Canyonlands holdings, an area acquired with the help of \$42 million in bonds approved by city voters in 1992 "to protect water quality, conserve endangered species... and provide open space for passive public use." The city's interpretation of "passive public use" mainly covers walking and nature watching, with biking allowed only on the main trail that cuts through the BCP.

Biologists warn that mountain bikers could be driving away the very species the preserve was meant to protect. A 2003 study of the effects of mountain biking on the birds at nearby Fort Hood showed that nesting success was 50 percent higher in non-biking areas.

"I'm a big fan of recreation, but this is the birds' last stronghold," says BCP biologist Bill Reiner. "We don't know what effect mountain bikers and hikers and dog walkers will have on the Golden-cheeked Warbler."

"Do we really need 65 miles of trail on this site, or can we find some trails to agree on?" Conrad adds. The city has recently scheduled some meetings with cyclists this month to discuss opening up two trails in safe areas.

Much of the land is fenced and posted, with gates designed to prevent bikes from entering. Recently, bikers found themselves barred from trails to which they once had free access. Cyclists say they don't cause any more disturbance than hikers, who sometimes go off trail.

Currently, some of the land - such as in the Bull Creek area - is only open to small groups of visitors who need a special permit to enter during the nesting season. For details on this creative permit system, see here: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/water/wildland/permitsteps.htm>

The USFWS, which issued a permit to the City of Austin and Travis County to manage the lands under the Endangered Species Act, has to agree on standards. The agency could withdraw the city's permit if it decides the lands are not being properly managed.

The BCP should not be confused with the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge located northwest of Austin, where Travis, Williamson, and Burnet Counties come together. Both areas conserve habitat for the Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. One benefit of having both the BCNWR and the BCP near each other is that one can serve as alternative habitat to the other should catastrophic damage occur in a significant portion of either one.

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## **75 YEARS AT HAWK MOUNTAIN**

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. Maurice Broun, the first director at Hawk Mountain, was hired as "ornithologist-in charge" when he arrived at the site on 10 September 1934. Broun began posting no-trespassing signs the very next day. His systematic hawk counts started 10 days later. The world's first sanctuary for birds of prey, leased by the remarkable Rosalie Edge, was launched in September 1934.

There is to be a special three-day anniversary celebration at Hawk Mountain on 11-13 September:

<http://www.hawkmountain.org>

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## **BOOK NOTES: DISCOVERING ROSALIE EDGE**

For those unaware of the crucial role played by Rosalie Edge (1877- 1962) in American bird conservation history, it's probably because no full biography of her life has ever been written until now. The recently released ROSALIE EDGE: HAWK OF MERCY, by Dyana Z. Furmansky (Georgia University Press, 2009), portrays the implacable and resilient woman whose small, yet powerful, Emergency Conservation Committee (ECC) made an indelible contribution to bird and land conservation. New York socialite and experienced suffragist, Rosalie Edge did not engage in conservation issues until 1930 when she was in her early fifties. In a very readable book the author covers Edge's fearless battles with the Audubon Society, her band of advisors and close colleagues, her skills at reaching thousands of supporters from the lowly to the highly-placed, and her virtues as well as her foibles. The first two chapters may appear tedious for those who wish to see Edge in action, but the wait is all part of the story.

No matter how well one knows the history of American bird conservation, readers cannot help but learn something of value in Furmansky's book. For example, there is information about the near-secret cooperation between Edge's Committee and FDR's Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes. Or readers will find out that during the Congressional hearings in the early 1930s, literally while some conservationists were testifying that hawks needed no laws to protect them because they were common, Edge's mentor, Willard Van Name, leaned over to her and whispered, "But the time to save a species is while it is still common." Edge was astute enough to seize the idea, call her ECC printer, and launch the summation of her guiding conservation principle: "The time to save a species is while it is still common. The only way to save a species is to never let it become rare."

Despite a few minor errors, the book is packed with stories about major resource battles, shifting alliances, loyal friends and disappointing betrayals, indomitable direction, and awkward family relations that can add up to lessons for any reader.

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## **EXXON MOBIL GUILTY OF KILLING BIRDS**

Last month the E-bulletin focused on PacifiCorp, one of the largest electric utilities in the West, pleading guilty to unlawfully killing Golden Eagles and other raptors and migratory birds in Wyoming: <http://www.refugenet.org/birding/augSBC09.html#TOC07>

This month it's ExxonMobil with connections to bird deaths in six states, again mostly in the West (i.e., Texas, Colorado, Wyoming, Oklahoma and Kansas).

ExxonMobil, the world's largest publicly traded oil-and-gas company, pleaded guilty in federal court on August

13 to charges that it killed 85 protected birds, including hawks, owls, and waterfowl. The company violated the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) in five states over the last five years. The discovered birds died from exposure to natural gas well reserve pits, oil tanks, and waste water storage facilities at Exxon Mobil drilling and production facilities.

The company will pay \$400,000 in fines and \$200,000 in community service fees to waterfowl rehabilitation and preservation programs. ExxonMobil will also be placed on probation for three years and must implement a plan to minimize future bird deaths.

There are thousands of similar energy facilities across the West, including and beyond ExxonMobil. It is unknown how many bird deaths go undetected

The \$600,000 paid by ExxonMobil may seem substantial. Still, the amount is roughly equal to what the company makes in income in 20 minutes, based on their \$8.6 billion earnings for the first half of 2009.

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## **MEXICO LAUNCHES SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION STRATEGY**

Earlier this year, the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) and the Technical Subcommittee for Shorebird Conservation in Mexico published and presented the Strategy for the Conservation and Management of Shorebirds and their Habitats in Mexico.

This publication is the third national shorebird conservation plan in North America, joining those published for the U.S. and Canada (i.e., the United States Shorebird Conservation Plan and the Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan). This latest shorebird strategy will promote the development of national programs and projects for the conservation and management of shorebirds and the wetland habitats they require in Mexico.

More than 60 people and 40 institutions representing academic, community, government, private, and nongovernmental organizations participated in the process of developing this national strategy. The entire process was made possible through the participation of these institutions, along with support from the U.S. Forest Service, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and SEMARNAT. For more information, read SEMARNAT's official press

release (in Spanish), here:

<http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/prensa/semarnat/?contenido=43739>

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### **TIP OF THE MONTH: CHOW DOWN**

In January under our "tips" category we suggested a pair of New Year's resolutions: :

1. I will try to enjoy birds more this year by engaging in relaxing, healthy, outdoor appreciation with others.
2. I will regularly engage in activity to save birds, specifically by making a difference, locally or regionally, with others of like mind.

We also indicated that we would remind you of examples of these possibilities as the year goes by. We have tried not to be particularly imposing, but we've actually tried to suggest tips in these categories so far through the year:

January – two original resolutions  
February – examine your water habit

March – think like a bird  
April – re-think the lawn  
May – don't keep spring migration to yourself  
June – take a friend to a birding festival  
July – study your local shorebirds  
August – drop by the office

For September, we simply suggest that you bring snacks on your next field trip. (That's snacks for people, not birds.) Yes, you may have planned to stop by a nice restaurant for a leisurely lunch or a fast-food place for a quick stop between great birding locations this month, but plans sometimes change. If the day is so good for birds that you don't want to stop, you will need some snack-food to keep you going. Always consider bringing fruit, granola bars, nuts, and cheese-crackers, along with some drinks on your next field outing. Also, consider bringing enough for others. Eventually on one of these trips, you or a companion may need the energy.

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### **NEW URBAN BIRD TREATY: PHILADELPHIA**

Last month, Philadelphia became the tenth city in the U.S. to sign an Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds. The Urban Conservation Treaty Program began in 1999, and last fall, the E-bulletin covered the inclusion of New York City in this creative initiative:

<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/novSBC08.html#TOC09>

Other cities currently in the program are Chicago, Houston, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Portland (OR), St. Louis, Nashville, and Anchorage.

The agreement was announced during a ceremony on August 13th held at a ceremony at the Philadelphia Zoo that coincided with a meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union. Details can be found here:

<http://www.fws.gov/news/NewsReleases/showNews.cfm?newsId=190C5617-E54D-B422-631F3B767CCFC66>

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### **DEPARTMENT OF SHAMELESS SELF-PROMOTION**

As the Birding Community E-bulletin enters its sixth year of publication and distribution, we are continuing to share some remarks from some of our readers. As previously noted, we will include a comment or two each month this year. These will be placed at the very end of each E-bulletin so you can simply stop reading at this point if you'd like!

"I get a lot of e-news these days, but I always look forward to getting the Birding Community E-bulletin to catch up with what is happening in the world of bird conservation and birding. The rarities report is great, and I always get good background information on bird news."

-Jon Andrew, Chief of Refuges, USFWS Southeast Region

"I'm pretty well tuned in to birding and bird conservation, and I get information from many sources, but my single best concentrated source is the Birding Community E-bulletin. When it arrives I drop everything and read it right away, and without fail, I learn important new things every time."

-Kenn Kaufman, author of "Kaufman Field Guide to the Birds of North America"

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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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