



THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

September 2010

This Birding Community E-bulletin is being distributed to active and concerned birders, those dedicated to the joys of birding and the protection of birds and their habitats.

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www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html

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RARITY FOCUS

Shortly after noon on 26 August, Bob Sundstrom, Ryan Merrill, and Tom Aversa found a Lesser Sand-Plover (a species previously known as Mongolian Plover) at the Oyehut Wildlife Area (called the Game Range by locals), at Ocean Shores, Washington.

This species is an Asian visitor to North America, one which has rarely bred in western Alaska. It's even rarer south of Alaska. Although there have been previous reports of Lesser Sand-Plovers in Washington, until now none fully documented by multiple observers or photographs.

If you are unfamiliar with the species you might check the National Geographic Guide (fifth edition, page 158-159), the Kaufman Guide (page 162-163), or the "big" Sibley (page 166).

Many birders gathered at the site to see the bird, which only cooperated for two days, much to the relief of the quick-acting among them and the disappointment of at least 100 weekend visitors who missed it.

You can see photographs of the Lesser Sand-Plover taken by Ryan Merrill on 26 August here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/rjm284>

and others taken by Ryan Shaw at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/shvalbatross>

MORE COOK'S PETRELS

It has been another astounding year and another grand season for Cook's Petrels off California. A year ago we wrote of the remarkable occurrence of this species in California:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/sepSBC09.html#TOC02

Cook's Petrel is not particularly well known off the coast of North America, and those few birds that appear (May to November) are almost always more than 100 miles offshore. This year, in late July astounding reports were received from Peter Pyle and Abe Borker who were surveying seabirds for NOAA at the Davidson Seamount, about 60 miles from Monterey harbor. They observed a total count of over 3,000 Cook's Petrels on one day and almost 1,400 the next.

According to Debi Shearwater, who helped us collect these numbers, there were also additional sightings of Cook's Petrels: four on 31 July off Half Moon Bay and one on 6 August off Monterey. These birds then seemed to disappear offshore almost as quickly as they appeared.

Cook's Petrel breeds (October to April) on islands off New Zealand, and the birds apparently spend some of their non-breeding season off South America. The recent increase in reports off our own Pacific coast has been attributed to the successful removal by researchers of rats and cats from Little Barrier Island, New Zealand. Little Barrier Island is one of New Zealand's premier native wildlife sanctuaries and is the reported source of "our" Cook's Petrels. Indications are that we might continue to see increased numbers of them in future years as the population continues to rebound.

THE GULF: WILL FLOODING HELP?

What follows are three reports on birds and habitat in the aftermath of the Gulf oil Deepwater Horizon situation.

First, there are the attempts at discouraging migratory birds – mostly waterfowl and shorebirds – from getting close to oiled wetlands.

As the fall migratory season proceeds, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its conservation partners have flooded hundreds of acres in Louisiana, east Texas, and Mississippi along with cultivating additional tons of rice and grains in the hopes of attracting migratory birds away from oiled areas around the Gulf of Mexico. Much of this enhanced bird habitat is on National Wildlife Refuges. You can find more details here:

www.fws.gov/refuges/mediatipsheet/August_2010/HopingtoDivertMigratoryBirds.html

At the same time, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the agency responsible for conservation delivery under the Farm Bill, has recently created an enhanced and highly ambitious Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative aimed at "working wetlands" in eight States: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas.

Partners have moved rapidly. Charles Duncan, Director of the Shorebird Recovery Project at the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences and Director of the Executive Office of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN), observed that "The response from rice and crawfish farmers has been astonishingly positive." The NRCS goal was to enroll 150,000 acres across the entire Gulf region and the southern Mississippi Flyway. By early August, the NRCS had received almost 1,900 applications totaling 427,000 acres in Louisiana alone. For details, see here:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/news/Louisiana%20MBHI%20Update.pdf

At least 90 percent of the farmers who enrolled chose to do so under a three-year, rather than the alternative one-year, commitment. Ergo, the benefit to migratory birds will last well beyond the immediate crisis response from this disaster.

You can access information on the NRCS efforts here:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/news/nrcs_migratory_birds.html

Of course, among species deemed highly migratory, waterfowl and shorebirds are thought to be at particular risk in light of the oil-gusher event. There are some species of ducks (e.g., bay ducks) and certain shorebirds (e.g., some plovers) that will probably be unaffected by these flooding programs. Still, the efforts are innovative and at least effective for some species that are in danger. This is a model effort to be studied, strengthened, and perhaps replicated.

THE GULF: THE STAMP CACHET

Our second Gulf effort is acquisition related.

In late July, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar unveiled a special envelope, or "cachet," to be sold with the newest Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp. Proceeds from this effort are to be used to benefit Gulf Coast habitat security. This "cachet" features a silk-rendered image of St. Marks NWR on the Gulf Coast of Florida, and the Stamp itself features an American Widgeon.

The Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, also known as the "Duck Stamp," has been around since the 1930s. It is still used to secure waterfowl habitat, but it also serves a much larger purpose. Since the program started, over \$750 million has been raised to protect over 5.3 million acres of wetland and grassland habitat.

The USFWS will be tracking how much money is deposited in the Fund from cachet sales, and these funds will be targeted specifically for future acquisition of wetlands for Gulf Coast National Wildlife Refuges.

The Limited Edition Cachet can be purchased for \$25. You can find more details at:

www.refugeassociation.org/new-publications/flaug10.html#TOC02

and:

www.fws.gov/southeast/news/2010/r10-051.html

THE GULF: AN LWCF OPENING

The third Gulf report, in response to the runaway BP oil well, also has to do with acquisition, but on a grander scale. It deals with the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

We have previously written about the LWCF and the huge amounts of bird habitat secured through this funding vehicle. To revisit what we wrote in the January E-bulletin, see: www.refugeassociation.org/birding/janSBC10.html#TOC10

On Friday, 30 July, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 3534, the Consolidated Land, Energy, and Aquatic Resources Act, or CLEAR Act. In the bill were several provisions to help wildlife impacted by the BP event as along with providing full funding for LWCF. Of particular importance for bird and habitat supporters, the House bill would:

1. Fully fund LWCF at \$900 million annually without being subject to annual appropriations. (Appropriators would still determine what projects ultimately were funded every year.),
2. Give National Wildlife Refuges the ability to collect and keep funds for damages resulting from oil spills and other criminal acts,
3. Provide \$1.2 billion to fund a "Gulf Coast Restoration Program" with a Task Force to create a regional restoration plan.

A companion bill, S. 3663, slightly different and weaker in some elements (e.g., less than full LWCF funding), was introduced in the Senate before the August recess. It is expected that the Senate may return to the bill as early as the week of 13 September.

Conservationists only have the chance to address the LWCF about once per decade. The last time was in 2000, when the House passed the famous CARA bill, and the Senate then dropped the ball. The time to effectively reach the Senate with a message on this important cause may not come again for a long time.

You can find a fine summary from the Wildlife Management Institute here:

www.wildlifemanagementinstitute.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=469:us-house-passes-energy-bill-with-funding&catid=34:ONB%20Articles&Itemid=54

and here from the National Wildlife Refuge Association here:

www.refugeassociation.org/new-issues/delta.html#TOC98

IBA NEWS: CUBAN DIRECTORY

The National Center for Protected Areas (CNAP, BirdLife in Cuba) has launched an Important Bird Areas directory for Cuba, detailing 28 IBAs, covering over 2.3 million hectares. The book was published with financial support from BirdLife International, the British Birdwatching Fair, and the Canadian Wildlife Service/Environment Canada. The IBAs support critical populations of globally threatened birds, species with restricted-ranges, and those birds that congregate in significant numbers for breeding, feeding, or on migration.

For more on this story, see:

www.birdlife.org/news/news/2010/07/cuba-iba-directory.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:

www.audubon.org/bird/iba/

TROUBLE FOR BAHAMA ORIOLE

Here's another bit of Caribbean news of interest.

Birders have recently been made aware of two taxonomic "splits" in North American birds as announced by the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU). These include Pacific and Winter Wrens (formerly simply Winter Wren) and Eastern and Mexican Whip-poor-wills (formerly simply Whip-poor-will). Several other recent splits also reveal conservation problems.

The splitting of the Greater Antillean Oriole (*Icterus dominicensis*) into four separate species has resulted in the "creation" of four new island endemics – the Bahama (*I. northropi*), Cuban (*I. melanopsis*), Hispaniolan (*I. dominicensis*) and Puerto Rican (*I. portoricensis*) Orioles. This announcement is accompanied by a sense of concern. The new Bahama Oriole is apparently in trouble. It used to be found on the Bahamian islands of Abaco and Andros however the Abaco population was extirpated during the early 1990s, and there is strong evidence that the Andros population is in serious decline.

For more on this situation, see:

www.birdlife.org/community/2010/08/bahama-oriole-on-the-edge/

NWRA PHOTO CONTEST

The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) announced its 5th annual digital photo contest showcasing America's National Wildlife Refuges. Entries for the 2010 Refuge Photo Contest can be submitted until 24 September 2010 with results to be announced in October 2010 in connection with National Wildlife Refuge Week.

Images submitted for the photo contest can be birds, mammals, insects, fish, other animals, plants, people, or simply shots of refuge scenery. The lion's share of submissions always seems to be of birds.

This year, Southwest Airlines, the official airline of the NWRA, has donated \$2,000 cash and two round-trip tickets for the first place prize. Other prizes include offerings from Wild Bird Centers of America, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and HaberVision, with winning image hosting services provided by Zenfolio.

For photo contest details, requirements, and procedures, plus a gallery of previous winning images, see:

www.refugeassociation.org/contest/ContestHome.html

MORE EFFORTS TO GET THE LEAD OUT

An alliance of conservation, hunting, and veterinary groups filed a formal petition with the Environmental Protection Agency in early August requesting a ban on the use of toxic lead in hunting ammunition and fishing tackle.

The American Bird Conservancy, Center for Biological Diversity, Association of Avian Veterinarians, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, and a hunters' group, Project Gulpile, have asked for this ban under the Toxic Substances Control Act, which regulates dangerous chemicals in the United States.

About 75 bird species are known to be regularly poisoned by spent lead ammunition, including Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, Trumpeter Swans, Common Ravens, and endangered California Condors. At least 30 of the condors in California and Arizona have died from lead poisoning since the experimental reintroductions began.

Despite being banned in 1992 for waterfowl hunting, spent lead shotgun pellets continue to be regularly ingested by swans, ducks, geese, loons, cranes, and other waterbirds. These birds also consume lead-based fishing tackle lost in lakes and rivers, often with deadly consequences.

Lead ammunition also poses human health risks. One recent study found that up to 87 percent of cooked game killed by lead ammunition can contain unsafe levels of lead.

You can read more on this effort here:

www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/100803.html

We have written about the lead issue many times previously in the E-bulletin, including November 2007 on the ban over large parts of California:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/novSBC07.html#TOC12

September 2008 on the "blue ribbon" California Condor panel:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/sepSBC08.html#TOC03

January 2009 on Grand Canyon California Condors:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/janSBC09.html#TOC02

and

May 2009 on the National Park Service dealing with the issue:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/maySBC09.html#TOC11

ANOTHER WHOOPING CRANE APPROACH

In mid-August, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that it was seeking public comment on a proposed effort to reintroduce the endangered Whooping Crane into habitat at the state-owned White Lake Wetland Conservation Area in Vermilion Parish, Louisiana.

Whooping Cranes historically occurred in Louisiana, both a resident non-migratory flock and a migratory flock that wintered in the state.

The USFWS and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) will attempt to establish another non-migratory flock in the wetlands, marshes, and prairies of southwestern Louisiana where there are approximately 1.3 million acres of marsh, open water, and suitable Chenier habitat. If this proposal is approved, the reintroduction effort could begin in early 2011.

Currently, the only self-sustaining wild population of Whooping Cranes is the one that migrates between Wood Buffalo National Park in the Northwest Territories of Canada and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. This population continues to be vulnerable to the threats of continued habitat loss and other natural or man-made catastrophes. Multiple efforts are underway to reduce these risks by increasing other populations in the wild, including ongoing efforts to establish a migratory population in the eastern United States. You can read about these efforts here:

www.operationmigration.org/index.html

Any new, reintroduced, non-migratory population of Whooping Cranes would be designated as a non-essential, experimental population (NEP) under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act. This designation would be seen as more compatible with routine human activities in the reintroduction area.

For more details, including those on public hearings or submitting comments on the draft environmental assessment (EA), see:

www.fws.gov/southeast/news/2010/r10-058.html

BOOK NOTES: EAGLE-EYES

Anyone birding for a while will conclude that "the raptor folks" are a different sort of birder. And, if anything, this new book, *THE EAGLE WATCHERS* (Comstock 2010), will further establish "the eagle folks" as a separate category of raptorphiles.

This book, edited by Ruth Tingay and Todd Katzner, is appropriate for almost anyone who has ever admired eagles. The volume covers 24 species of eagles from the familiar (e.g., Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle) to the obscure (e.g., New Guinea Harpy Eagle) in stories provided by 29 leading eagle researchers. The introductory chapter by Tingay and Katzner on the subject of eagle diversity, ecology, and conservation is concise and valuable, and the individual profiles of both bird species and the human researchers are equally well done. Some spectacular photographs also accompany the text.

To support the conservation programs described in the volume, all royalties are being donated to two leading institutions: Hawk Mountain Sanctuary's intern program and the National Birds of Prey Trust.

TIP OF THE MONTH: SHARE A BOOK

Probably the best thing about the last part of the summer is that it marks the time when most migratory shorebirds are winging their way toward what will become their "wintering" quarters. They can be seen in large numbers and in great variety at this time of year. If you live within ready driving distance of most any coastal shoreline or large body of water, this is often the best time of year to work on your shorebird ID skills.

We stressed this birding opportunity last July:
www.refugeassociation.org/birding/julSBC09.html#TOC06

And we'll stress it again.

Don't let the opportunity pass you by, and don't be discouraged from experiencing what you might consider to be a confusing groups of birds. Shorebirds are wonderful, even if you can't name every one that you see!

Get out there and have a look!

"BIG YEAR" MOVIE CHATTER

Birders have been abuzz recently about an upcoming movie, expected early next year, loosely based on Mark Obmascik's 2004 book, THE BIG YEAR. The book was about the quest by three birders - Sandy Komito, Al Levantin, and Greg Miller - to see as many birds as possible in North America in 1998.

The movie, a 20th Century Fox production, will be a fictionalized spin-off on the book. The three main characters have been renamed in the film, many of the facts and locations moved around, and it will be set in the present-day rather than the late 1990s.

Here are a few details:

- Three months of shooting began May 3. Release expected sometime in 2011, perhaps as early as April.
- Shooting locations: Vancouver BC, Osoyoos, BC (doubles for Texas and Arizona); Tofino, BC; NYC; Arizona; the Yukon (for Attu).
- Executive Producer: Ben Stiller
- Director: David Frankel
- Casting (in part): Steve Martin, Owen Wilson, Jack Black, Brian Dennehy, Dianne Wiest, and Anjelica Huston.

The movie's director, David Frankel, says, "To me, this is a fascinating story about three men who are at a crucial point in their lives, caught up in an obsession. The bird watching really reveals their character."

Let's hope the picture of birders steers away from the unpleasant image presented by Miss Jane Hathaway in TV's famous "Beverly Hillbillies."

You can find some sample birder interest in the film here:
<http://birdersforum.com/index.php/topic,896.0.html>

And up to 15 photos from the film set may be seen at:
www.accidentalsexiness.com/2010/05/09/on-the-scene-owen-wilson-jack-black-and-steve-martin/?pid=13105

THIS MONTH'S QUIZ FOR A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC BIRD BOOK

To celebrate National Geographic's connection with the E-bulletin, we have some fine National Geographic books to distribute to E-bulletin readers. Readers who choose to enter our quick-and-easy contest have the chance to win one of these books. Each of our quiz questions will either relate to one of our news items for the previous month, or it will relate to some event or experience that is due to occur during the current month.

For more on the excellent NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC books, see:
www.shopng.com/birdbooks

There will undoubtedly be multiple readers who answer our monthly question correctly, so we will only be able to distribute five copies to readers whose names are picked at random from all those submitting correct answers. Because of shipping constraints, only folks residing in the U.S. or Canada are eligible.

The prize this month will be a copy of the standard Fifth Edition of the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA. We have five copies to distribute this month.

For more on this book, see here:
<http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/ngs/browse/productDetail.jsp?productId=55314C>

Since our Book Note deals with eagles, we have an eagle question this month: When the Bald Eagle was removed from the list of Endangered Species under the Endangered Species Act, it was still protected under two federal laws. The first is the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. What is the second?

Please send your answer by 18 September to:
birdingbulletin1@verizon.net

Question for last month:
What Alaskan-breeding shorebird holds the record for a non-stop migratory flight?

The answer:

Bar-tailed Godwit (which has been known to travel from Alaska to New Zealand - 7,258 miles - non-stop)

Last month's winners were Noah Kahn (Arlington, VA), John F. Kearney (Antigonish, Nova Scotia), Louisa J. Kreider (Northfield, OH), Doug Marooney (Littleton, CO), and Clifford Seifer (Keene, NH)

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www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html

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