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THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

November 2011

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.

This issue is sponsored by NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC and the wonderful bird and birding books they make available:
www.shopng.com/birdbooks

You can access an archive of past E-bulletins on the website of the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA):
www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html

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RARITY FOCUS

Birders can find Northern Wheatear in most North American field guides, but that doesn't mean they can find one close to home! Northern Wheatears are primarily an Old-World species which, in North America, prefer open and rock-strewn habitats in Alaska and the Yukon in the west and Nunavut and northernmost Quebec and Labrador in the east. The Alaskan/Yukon and the Greenland/Eastern-Canadian-Arctic wheatears represent two different subspecies, both of which leave North America in the fall, each population traveling an extraordinary distance to winter in sub-Saharan Africa. Because of this, finding one south of the species' limited North American breeding range is remarkable.

But this is exactly what happened in late September and October at a number of places, both at coastal sites and even at a few inland locations. Although Northern Wheatears are occasionally found along the Atlantic coast in fall, the species is much rarer on the West Coast.

Here's what we already know about this fall:

The first sighting under consideration actually occurred on 28 September in Newfoundland where a Northern Wheatear (probably a female) was found at Red Cliff.

Then, on 6 October, a visiting South Carolina birder found a Northern Wheatear at a dumpster behind a Days Inn in Lickdale, Pennsylvania. The bird stayed until 10 October and was photographed on 8 October by Geoff Malosh, whose photos and notes can be found here:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~pomarine4/id23.html>

Next, on 7 October, another Northern Wheatear was found at the Wallkill Watershed Management Area in Orange County, New York, right across the way from the viewing platform at Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge. This bird remained until at least 9 October.

About the same time, another Northern Wheatear was found at the lagoon at Abram's Village on Prince Edward Island on 8 October. This individual continued through 10 October, the same day that another wheatear was seen and photographed along Waite Road in Sherbrooke. This individual was reported again on 20 October.

In addition to these and other East Coast reports of Northern Wheatears, some were even found on the West Coast:

Starting on 23 September, Daniel Tinoco observed and photographed a Northern Wheatear at Malibu Lagoon in California. To see pictures of this bird see:

www.whatbird.com/forums/forums/storage/10/259878/IMG_2647.JPG

Then, on the afternoon of 2 October, a birder found a Northern Wheatear on private property north of Anchor Bay, Mendocino County, California, where it was last seen on the morning of 4 October.

And most recently another Northern Wheatear was observed for several minutes in Curry County, Oregon, just east of the Pistol River Bridge on 17 October.

And there may have been more Northern Wheatears found last month and this fall, but this is certainly an impressive sample.

TRANSLOCATING NIHOA MILLERBIRDS

When the Nihoa Millerbird was first discovered on Nihoa Island in the Pacific in 1923, the population was estimated to number about 100 birds. Between 1967 and 2010, population estimates have fluctuated from as few as 31 birds to as many as 814 individuals, with the 2010 population estimated at 507 birds.

In early September, an effort led by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and American Bird Conservancy (ABC) began, to establish a second population of the Nihoa Millerbird on Laysan Island. Both islands are part of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge.

Millerbirds have been absent from Laysan Island in the Pacific for nearly a century since a closely related subspecies went extinct there in the early 20th Century. Now the first steps toward translocating Nihoa Millerbirds from Nihoa Island to Laysan Island have begun. This has involved relocating 24 birds to Laysan. Already appropriate feeding, pairing, and initial nest-building behaviors have been observed.

Many of the fascinating details can be found here:
www.fws.gov/pacificislands/nihoamillerbird.html

SeaBC NOT THE CBC

If you know people with a seaworthy boat, you might consider asking them to take you out for a sail or cruise in order to participate in the inaugural "SeaBC" Sea Bird Count! Its similar to a Christmas Bird Count (CBC) or the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), except it's an event where one counts birds at sea. You can choose your day in December and count all the birds you see for a couple of hours, or for an entire day on the water.

A group of eight long-distance boaters, all volunteers, have organized this event in its inaugural year. The SeaBC was created to raise awareness among long-distance boaters from around the world to systematically record their seabird observations.

The intent is help seabird conservation by mobilizing a worldwide boating community to document ocean bird sightings, thus providing critical and otherwise seldom-recorded data on seabird numbers, distribution, and ocean migration routes.

Not surprisingly, the central clearinghouse for the data will be the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird website.

For additional information, including tally sheets see here:
http://web.me.com/mtwquides/CBC_at_Sea_Media_Release/CBC_at_Sea_Media_Release.html

Even if you're a landlubber, but know your birds, you can team up with a boating friend to contribute to the count!

NEW REFUGE VISION

Earlier this year, readers of the E-bulletin were told about the planning for last summer's Refuge Vision Meeting in Madison, Wisconsin, a process to benefit the National Wildlife Refuge System:
www.refugeassociation.org/birding/febsbc11.html#TOC10

Last month, the finalized vision document, *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation*, was released. This document represents the result of 18 months of study and public conversation about conservation and the strategy for the Refuge System over the next decade.

Among its most vital points, this 21st-century strategic vision for the Refuge System acknowledges that the nations population has grown "larger and more diverse and the landscape for conservation has changed there is less undeveloped land, more invasive species, and we are experiencing the impacts of a changing climate."

The document's final recommendations incorporate extensive suggestions from the public, with implementation expected to be largely complete within about five years

We encourage readers to look at the document. Birds, of course, are essential to the plan, and birding also has a role to play:
<http://americaswildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Final-Vision-Document.pdf>

NEW URBAN REFUGE LAUNCHED NEAR ALBUQUERQUE

One of the new proposals of the Refuge System's Vision Document is to launch a new "urban refuge initiative." This effort is intended to define excellence in existing urban refuges, establish the framework for creating new urban refuge partnerships, and implement a refuge presence in 10 demographically and geographically varied cities across the country by 2015.

The drive for new refuges has already started, with news on a just-announced urban-area refuge just south of Albuquerque, New Mexico. In late September, it was announced that 570 acres, located about five miles from downtown Albuquerque, would become a refuge.

The former Price's Dairy Farm is one of the largest remaining farms in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. Not only is the property within a half hour drive of nearly half of New Mexico's population and is the largest agricultural property within the Albuquerque metro region, it is also expected to protect habitat for a number of species and subspecies, including

the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.

Many cooperative partners were instrumental in launching this project. You can read more here:
www.ens-newswire.com/ens/sep2011/2011-09-29-091.html

HEADWATERS MAKES HEADWAY

In February the E-bulletin described the Everglades Headwaters project in Florida, an effort to create a new National Wildlife Refuge and to protect additional surrounding conservation acres by creating easements with willing landowners.
www.refugeassociation.org/birding/febsbc11.html#TOC04

In early September, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced its groundbreaking proposal to establish this new National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area in central Florida.

The effort would help restore and protect wetlands to support water quality for millions of Floridians; to sustain Florida's ranching economy and way of life by including conservation dollars for the maintenance of private landownership and delivery of conservation benefits; to increase access and opportunities for hunting and fishing; to conserve Florida's threatened wildlife by protecting significant habitat for a number of species including, Crested Caracara, Snail Kite, Florida Scrub-Jay, [Florida] Grasshopper Sparrow, and habitat for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker; to support military readiness by creating buffer areas around strategic training grounds; and to protect a mosaic of lands of sufficient size and continuity to enable wildlife to adapt in response to climate change and other natural and man-made threats.

Specifically, the Everglades Headwaters proposal would allow the National Wildlife Refuge System to acquire land and conservation easements from willing sellers in certain areas of the headwaters region, from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes to Avon Air Force Park.

The proposal includes the establishment of six focus areas where the USFWS would be authorized to acquire up to 50,000 acres as National Wildlife Refuge lands, along with a larger Conservation Area within which the Service could acquire up to 100,000 acres of conservation easements. The Service would only proceed with willing sellers inside the newly defined boundary.

The comment period is now closed, and the proposal is expected to be revised by the USFWS before being finalized.

You can follow the proposal's developments here:
<http://www.fws.gov/southeast/evergladesheadwaters/>

ACCESS MATTERS: CAN BIRDING MAKE HEADWAY?

The Everglades Headwaters proposal would make allowances for hunting and fishing. These, of course are considered legitimate and important priority public uses on National Wildlife Refuges, as are wildlife observation (dominated by birding), wildlife photography, wildlife interpretation, and education.

In the final Everglades Headwater plan, there may even be efforts made to accommodate camping, hiking, horseback riding, and bicycling, especially when they are associated with wildlife-based recreation.

In response to certain concerns voiced about public access for hunting and fishing, these programs on Headwaters refuge lands will be co-managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as state wildlife management areas, with particular emphasis on developing youth outdoor and sporting education programs.

Accordingly, special efforts and accommodations are being made for these activities. We wish our colleagues in the hunting and fishing communities well, of course.

We also look forward to the day when birding interests (as the main element of wildlife watching) receive similar accommodation, and the same kind of attention for recruitment, education, and access.

SF BIRD-FRIENDLY DESIGN APPROVED

In the August E-bulletin, we described the Bird Safe Building Standards which the San Francisco Planning Commission approved the previous month - standards that could greatly reduce bird deaths and injuries resulting from collisions with buildings in the city:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/augsbc11.html#TOC05

In August, these standards were unanimously approved by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, and in September, Mayor Edwin Lee signed the standards into law.

These standards include significant sections for the design of safer windows, night lighting, and the construction of wind turbines in the urban environment. The guidelines address the effects of light pollution, which can confound birds ability to navigate during migration. Even by simply turning off unnecessary lights at night, owners and operators can save thousands of dollars a year along with greatly reducing risks to migrating birds.

Reducing bird strikes can often be achieved with simple and cost-effective means. "There are a number of buildings in San Francisco, such as the San Francisco Federal Building and the De Young Museum, that are, albeit unintentionally, already bird-friendly. Where new construction is concerned, the bird-friendly options need not be more expensive, since bird-safe materials and designs can be incorporated from the beginning," said Christine Sheppard, manager of the American Bird Conservancy's Bird Collisions Campaign.

Copies of the San Francisco Standards are available online at:

[www.sf-planning.org/ftp/files/publications_reports/bird_safe_bldgs/Standards for Bird-Safe Buildings 8-11-11.pdf](http://www.sf-planning.org/ftp/files/publications_reports/bird_safe_bldgs/Standards_for_Bird-Safe_Buildings_8-11-11.pdf)

For more information on the issue and the signing, see here:

www.goldengateaudubon.org/news/planning-commission-approves-new-bird-safe-standards-for-san-francisco-buildings/

BOREAL BIRDS OF CANADA AT RISK

North America's Boreal forest remains the largest intact forest left on Earth. To draw attention to this treasure, an international coalition of conservation groups released a new report in late October. "Birds at Risk: The Importance of Canada's Boreal Wetlands and Waterways," examines natural areas in the Boreal forest that are critical for birds, and draws attention to the dual threats of industrial expansion and climate change.

The report calls on the Canadian governments (national and provincial) to increase protection of Canada's "bird nursery of the north" by protecting at least half of the Boreal forest and supporting sustainable development practices in the remaining areas.

For details, photos, video, and the full report, you can visit:

www.borealbirds.org/report-birdswater.shtml

IMPERIAL WOODPECKER FOOTAGE

The last documented sighting of an Imperial Woodpecker occurred in 1956 in the state of Durango in the high-altitude pine forest of Mexico's Sierra Madre. The supporting film documentation, taken by Pennsylvania dentist and amateur ornithologist, William L. Rhein, remained unearthed for decades.

The Imperial Woodpecker, a closely related cousin to the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, is presumed extinct, and the 85 seconds of 16mm color movie footage that Rhein took in 1956 represents the only such documentation ever captured of this species in life.

Last month, scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology publicly released this fascinating footage, showing a female Imperial Woodpecker flying from tree to tree and hitching up the trunks of Durango pines.

You can view this footage here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0OCd6b1aXU&feature=player_embedded

and access the full story here:

www.allaboutbirds.org/Page.aspx?pid=2314

AVITOURISM DOLLARS IN RIO GRANDE VALLEY OF TEXAS

Texas A&M University recently released a survey that concluded that nature tourism which is dominated by birding brings in over \$300 million a year to the Rio Grande Valley economy.

The survey commissioned by the South Texas Nature Marketing Coop, revealed that nature tourists tend to stay in the Rio Grande Valley an average of five days, and that 64% had visited the Valley previously, with the average number of

previous visits being 15.

Said Keith Hackland, owner of Alamo Inn B&B, "We've known that nature tourism had a huge economic impact on the area; we just didn't realize how big it really is."

The survey, conducted during May and June, was the first of two survey phases. The second will be run this fall. Survey statisticians expect the economic impact figure to increase once the second phase is completed.

The full report can be accessed here:

www.southtexasnature.com/pdf/EconImpactReport2011.pdf

IBA NEWS: SF BAY "STATE OF THE BIRDS"

Last month we reported on the release of a new state-oriented "State of the Birds" report, one for Massachusetts:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/octsb11.html#TOC08

and

www.massaudubon.org/StateoftheBirds/

We have the feeling that readers will be seeing more of these regional reports in the near future that will effectively meld their messages into the whole Important Bird Area (IBA) effort. As these reports emerge, not all will receive notice in the E-bulletin, but the latest addition certainly does.

Last month, the first-ever State of the Birds Report for San Francisco Bay was released by PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO) and the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture (SFBayJV). The 29 partners involved in the effort included the US Geological Survey, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, Audubon California, Audubon Canyon Ranch, California Coastal Conservancy, the National Park Service, and Laney College.

This report details the many factors that impact bird populations in the Bay Area (an area of hemispheric importance to migratory waterbirds) including sea level rise and extreme storm conditions due to global climate change.

"The good news is that a majority of bird species are doing well after decades of investments in habitat restoration and other conservation measures around the Bay. The bad news is that increasing sea levels, extreme weather events, non-native predators, contaminants, and invasive species pose serious threats to the gains we have made," explained Melissa Pitkin, PRBO Outreach Director and editor of the report.

The San Francisco Bay Area includes about a dozen distinct IBAs.

You can access the full report here:

www.prbo.org/sfbaystateofthebirds

For additional information about IBA programs worldwide, including those across the U.S., check the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Area program web site at:

www.audubon.org/bird/iba/

TIP OF THE MONTH: GET THOSE FEEDERS READY

If you have a personal backyard feeding station or run a nature center or refuge/park visitor center feeding station, now is the time to assess your winter feeding strategy, especially if you don't regularly feed birds throughout the year.

Review your feeder arrangement, including having the right mix of hopper, sunflower-tube, suet, and nyjer feeder offerings. Consider creating a nearby brush pile where songbirds can poke around for feed and shelter, including hiding from raptors. Be sure, however, to maintain a 10-foot clear-zone around each feeder to keep cats from having a close hiding place. Also, consider including water (a heated bird bath if required) as a feature for your feeding station.

Finally, clean those feeders, bird baths, and surrounding grounds regularly.

WHY NAB?

Your two E-bulletin editors enjoy practically all the North American bird and birding magazines. Why shouldn't we? These publications help us keep abreast of what's going on in the world of birds and bird-appreciation. More to the point, not "everything you need" is available on the Internet.

That's why this month we encourage you to consider supporting the contribution and value of the publication, NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS. This journal currently sponsored and published by the American Birding Association, presents seasonal summaries and analyses of what's going on in the bird world at the continental level. It is the only "journal of record" for North American birdlife.

Check out NAB editor, Ned Brinkley's, recent summary of what the publication continues to offer, after almost a century of recording the changing seasons year after year.

<http://blog.aba.org/2011/10/north-american-birds-65.html>

BOOK NOTES: NG GUIDE NEW EDITION

National Geographics FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA has been a standard since first appearing in 1983.

Still, why would yet another edition merit attention? And, more importantly, if you have the 4th or 5th edition, why would you even consider getting this 6th edition that has just been produced?

Your editors definitely think its worth it!

The 6th edition - thoroughly re-tooled by Jon Dunn and Jonathan Alderfer - contains more new material than any other previously published revision, and it is most impressive. For instance, it includes 300 new art figures (amazingly produced by five artists, all with extensive field experience); it contains extensive migration information overlaid on the species maps; it also includes a series of breakthrough subspecies maps; and there are thumbnail presentations that increase the number of mega-rarities covered at the end of the book from an impressive 71 to an astounding 92.

Of course, the ID text has also improved where desired or necessary. Even the font is finer and crisper than the previous editions. But perhaps the most interesting innovation in this 6th edition is the addition of field-mark labels on almost all the illustrations. These are often mini-notes, hints, or Peterson-like pointers to draw your attention to one or another aspect of each species look and feel.

The combination of organization, illustration, and design adds up to a book that should please birders at virtually any level of experience.

NEW STAMP ART CHOSEN

On 29 October, the new artwork for the 20012-13 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (commonly called the "Duck Stamp") was chosen. There were five qualifying species in the competition: Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Wood Duck, and Gadwall. An image of a male Wood Duck by Joseph Hautman was ultimately chosen. (Joe Hautman has now won the contest four times!) You can access more details and view the artwork here:

www.fws.gov/duckstamps/

This colorful illustration will appear on the 2012-2013 stamp and the proceeds for the \$15-stamp will go to the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) to secure wetland and grassland habitat for the Refuge System.

"THE BIG YEAR" - GOOD FOR US

Released on 14 October in theaters across the country, The Big Year is a movie that is at the same time thoughtful, charming, and amusing.

Not surprisingly, some reviewers didn't enjoy the film, complaining that Steve Martin, Jack Black, and Owen Wilson are far funnier than the script for the film allowed.

In reality, some of these reviewers were no doubt disappointed that the opportunity was not taken to focus on the silly and goofball antics of birding. And those reviewers were spot on about that point; birders are not portrayed as total geeks.

Frankly, the film is good to birders. It is about passion for an avocation in this case pursuing birds and balancing a near obsession with actual day-to-day living and relationships. The film is well done, and the script is woven in such a way to explain to the non-birding public how many birders operate from the interested to the totally obsessive. If you haven't

seen the film, do give it a try. Warning: it may disappear from the theaters very quickly.

In the meantime, to view one of the better insider reviews from colleagues at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, see: www.birds.cornell.edu/roundrobin/2011/10/15/the-big-year-our-movie-review/

THIS MONTH'S QUIZ FOR A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC BIRD BOOK

Each of our monthly quiz questions will either relate to one of our previous news items, or it will pertain to an event or experience that is scheduled to occur during the current or coming month.

We will give away five books to E-bulletin readers whose names are picked at random from among those submitting correct answers. Due to shipping constraints, only folks residing in the U.S. or Canada are eligible to win.

For details on NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, publishers of acclaimed birding books and field guides, available wherever books are sold, visit:

www.shopng.com/birdbooks

The prize for this month will be a copy of the sixth edition of the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA. It is covered in our own "Book Notes" above, but you can also find more details on this sixth edition here:

<http://tinyurl.com/3vv7q9s>

Here is last months question: "What Cuban (and Bahamian) bird, previously reported to be seen in Florida, had to be removed from listing and remains unlisted for the state and for the United States because it was never photographed or otherwise fully documented?"

The correct answer, Cuban Emerald (*Chlorostilbon ricordii*), was not particularly easy. Curiously, we covered the species and its status in the November 2006 issue of the E-bulletin:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/novSBC06.html#TOC03

Last month's winners were Harriet Davidson (Fort Gratiot, MI), Laura Hubers (Webster, SD), Bruce Luebke (Portage, WI), Bill Pranty (Bayonet Point, FL), and Chris Sloan (Nashville, TN)

Here is this months question: What was the very last "year bird" that the characters Stu Preissler and Brad Harris saw together in the movie "The Big Year"? (Hint: it was one of our monthly rarity species within the last year.)

Please send your answer by 15 November to:

BirdingEbulletin1@verizon.net

Make the subject line "QUIZ! " and please include your full name and mailing address along with your answer so that we can mail you a book should you be a fortunate winner. We will also provide the correct answer next month.

You can access past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website:

www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html

If you wish to distribute all or parts of any of the monthly Birding Community E-bulletins, we simply request that you mention the source of any material used. (Include a URL for the E-bulletin archives, if possible.)

If you have any friends or co-workers who want to get onto the monthly E-bulletin mailing list, have them contact either:

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