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## THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

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October 2011

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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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### RARITY FOCUS

On 14 September Shep Thorp, Roger Hunt, and Ruth Sullivan discovered a Black-tailed Gull along the Tacoma, Washington, log booms on the northeast shore of Commencement Bay.

This species breeds in e. China, North Korea, se. Siberia, Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, and Japan. It normally winters south to Taiwan. Curiously, the first record of this species in North America (i.e., November 1954 at San Diego,

California) was originally suspected of being a ship-assisted individual, possibly from Japanese or Korean waters. However, beginning in 1980, additional observations began to be reported, first from Alaskan outposts and then from elsewhere. There are now over two dozen reports of Black-tailed Gulls from Alaska, all between April and October. Farther south along the Pacific Coast, from British Columbia to southern California, there are also at least a half-dozen reports. Additionally, there are now about 20 reports along the Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to North Carolina. Inland, there are scattered reports from Nunavut, Manitoba, Texas, Iowa, the Great Lakes states, and elsewhere.

Currently this species, almost unheard of in North America a quarter century ago, is now seemingly possible to find practically anywhere in North America and is now illustrated in almost all of the popular North American bird ID guides.

The Black-tailed Gull at Commencement Bay was roosting on booms along with California and Bonaparte's Gulls. Surprisingly, a Black-tailed Gull was at this very same location in 2009, from 13 October to 7 November. It could have been the same individual.

This recent Black-tailed Gull in Washington was observed almost daily by many happy visiting birders through the end of the month.

## **WHIMBREL LOSS RAISES ISSUES ACROSS THE CARIBBEAN**

As part of an international effort to map shorebird migration, Whimbrels on the Eastern Shore in Virginia have recently been fitted with satellite tracking devices. Some of these birds have been tracked for years. This is a project previously brought to the attention of E-bulletin readers, most recently in July when we described the remarkable international journey of one of these birds, a Whimbrel named Hope:

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/julsbc11.html#TOC05](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/julsbc11.html#TOC05)

Two other Whimbrels, a female named Machi and a male named Goshen, have also been tracked for several years. Last month, both Machi and Goshen landed on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, after first having successfully navigated their way through or around Tropical Storm Maria and Hurricane Irene, respectively. Although they were not migrating together, both stopped at Guadeloupe after encountering the two different storm systems. Then, on the morning of 12 September, both satellite-tracked birds were shot by hunters at two different wetlands in Guadeloupe. Not surprisingly, the loss of these two individuals on the same day and on the same island quickly raised international concerns from birders and conservationists over the vulnerability of migratory shorebirds throughout the Caribbean and the need for increased protection.

According to the United States Shorebird Conservation Plan, 28 of North America's 57 shorebird species are now considered highly imperiled or of high conservation concern in the U.S. Among these species, population information suggests that Whimbrels may have declined by as much as 50 percent over the last several decades. Hunting and habitat loss are among the leading causes for this decline. These factors are exacerbated during migration following severe storms, when large numbers of shorebirds are sometimes forced to land at often restricted Caribbean stopover sites. Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Barbados are specifically islands where limited natural or artificial wetlands (created to attract migrant shorebirds for sport shooting) during fall migration account for tens of thousands of shorebirds getting shot annually.

Fortunately, there has been some recent progress to change this activity on Barbados, a story the E-bulletin highlighted in July 2009

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/julSBC09.html#TOC05](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/julSBC09.html#TOC05)

While hunters and bird conservationists on many of the islands from the Bahamas to Barbados have formed partnerships to support wiser use of hunted species and their habitats, adequate conservation regulations still seem to be lacking.

Over many decades, the International Migratory Bird Treaty (IMBT) has protected many bird species that migrate across international borders. Unfortunately neither Guadeloupe nor Martinique, which are operated as French overseas departments, is party to this Treaty. More importantly, birds which are protected in the French overseas departments do not benefit from the same level of protection that exists in metropolitan France. The European Directives of Birds and Habitats, pillars of conservation of nature in Europe, do not apply to these territories. Barbados, once a British colony and now an independent state, is also not party to the IMBT.

These factors complicate matters considerably.

While birds are falling between the cracks of regulation and enforcement, bird-conservation organizations across the Americas, including the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB), are calling for action to increase shorebird protection in the French West Indies. NGOs in France, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Martinique have called for examining a number of options, including the need for the following:

- updating the standing of hunted species, notably shorebirds, according to their population status;
- adapting the hunting season to forbid hunting during periods of reproduction, dependence, and pre-nuptial migration;
- limiting the number of days of hunting and bag limits;
- limiting the use of lead in wetland zones.

Lisa Sorenson, President of SCSCB commented, "This event has quickly raised awareness of the issue of shorebird hunting and the need for updated hunting regulations in the French West Indies in a way that was not possible previously. We are optimistic that better hunting laws and other shorebird conservation measures will come out of this experience." (Those interested in writing to decision-makers in the Caribbean, with an emphasis on the French West Indies, can contact Lisa Sorenson for some guidance at: [lsoren@bu.edu](mailto:lsoren@bu.edu) )

To obtain further information, visit:

[http://ccb-wm.org/news/pressreleases\\_pdfs/20110912\\_Machi.pdf](http://ccb-wm.org/news/pressreleases_pdfs/20110912_Machi.pdf)

and

[www.birds.cornell.edu/roundrobin/2011/09/13/whimbrel-survives-tropical-storm-shot-in-caribbean/](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/roundrobin/2011/09/13/whimbrel-survives-tropical-storm-shot-in-caribbean/)

## **NEW DAKOTA GRASSLAND CONSERVATION AREA ESTABLISHED**

At the beginning of the year, we described an ambitious U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposal to protect two million acres of vital grassland habitat in the Dakotas.

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/JanSBC11.html#TOC04](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/JanSBC11.html#TOC04)

Viewed as a grassland corollary to the Services Small Wetlands Acquisition Program, the plan could become an easement-driven delivery system for native prairie conservation, something which is currently a major bird-conservation necessity.

On 6 September, USFWS Director Dan Ashe signed the Dakota Grassland Conservation Area Environmental Assessment and Land Protection Plan. Through this effort, the Service would seek to acquire easements from willing sellers on approximately 240,000 acres of wetlands and 1,700,000 acres of grasslands native prairie habitat to benefit birds and wildlife while at the same time supporting traditional economic activities, specifically livestock production.

These conservation easements will allow lands to remain in private ownership, in production, and on local tax rolls. Future funding for the easements will be the crucial issue. Funding would be expected to come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, not from general taxpayer dollars.

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC) opened the door to this newest initiative for the Refuge System on 14 September. It approved funding for 2,794 acres of initial grassland easements in South Dakota, the first commitment under this new Dakota Grassland Conservation Area.

## **ACCESS MATTERS: WHY SHOULD HOMEOWNERS TOLERATE US?**

Sometime this fall or winter, you may be fortunate enough to visit somebody's private home or yard where a special bird is being seen. It could be a local or state rarity, a late-season hold-out, or a bird that neglected to migrate.

In any case, somehow you will find out about such a bird, and somehow your presence will be tolerated.

On 25 September, in Eastpoint, Florida, Fred Dietrich banded an adult male Broad-billed Hummingbird at the home of Sheila Klink. There have been other Broad-billed Hummingbirds seen in the sunshine state, but this one is only the third to be banded. You can see photos of the bird here:

[www.pbase.com/fdietrich/klink](http://www.pbase.com/fdietrich/klink)

Although the hummingbird was back defending its sugar-water feeder minutes after being released, it only remained a couple of days in the yard. Still, birders were almost immediately informed, given the street address and backyard location, and were told, "Visitors are welcome to come and view the bird and they don't need to call beforehand."

Unfortunately, birders often become too accustomed to this sort of treatment. We shouldn't, however, because there is no guarantee that we will always be welcome. Be sure to always thank such gracious hosts and be as cordial as possible during your visit. Because, access matters!

## **TOO MANY PHARMACIES IN INDIA IGNORE DEADLY DRUG BAN**

We've written multiple times about the impact of the drug diclofenac on the vultures of the Indian subcontinent. This drug is responsible for practically wiping out three species of Gyps vultures endemic to the region. The E-bulletin covered this issue most recently in June:

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/junesbc11.html#TOC05](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/junesbc11.html#TOC05)

The manufacture and sale of diclofenac for veterinary use has been illegal since 2006, when in May of that year the Indian Government banned diclofenac for veterinary use. Similar bans in Nepal and Pakistan followed shortly thereafter. Increased measures in India in August 2008 put additional restrictions on the manufacture, sale and distribution of diclofenac and its formulations for livestock use, along with violations being punishable by imprisonment.

Unfortunately, farmers and livestock owners in the region continue to purchase human diclofenac illegally in conveniently available large bottles to treat their animals. In fact, over a third of Indian pharmacies are ignoring a ban on a veterinary drug that has brought the country's vultures to the brink of extinction, according to a new study in the science journal QRYX.

From November 2007 to June 2010, more than 250 veterinary and general pharmacies in 11 Indian states were surveyed. When specifically asked if non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs for treating cattle were available, diclofenac was recorded in 36 percent of the cases.

Lead author of the study, Dr. Richard Cuthbert, said: "Preventing the misuse of human diclofenac for veterinary use remains the main challenge in halting the decline of endangered vultures."

While the research shows that there is still widespread availability of diclofenac, it also shows an increase in the availability of meloxicam (found in 70 per cent of pharmacies), a drug that has very similar therapeutic effects on livestock as diclofenac, yet is apparently safe for vultures.

For more information, see here:

<http://tinyurl.com/3shnss8>

## **TEXAS AQUACULTURE COMPANY GUILTY OF KILLING PROTECTED WATERBIRDS**

Seaside Aquaculture Inc., a fish farm located in Palacios, Texas, and its owner were convicted by a jury in late September of violating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) in connection with the killing of protected species at a fish farm. In February, USFWS special agents recovered the remains of 90 Brown Pelicans, 17 Great Blue Herons, five Great Egrets, four Black-crowned Night-Herons, four Turkey Vultures, two Ospreys, two unidentified gulls, and one unidentified scap. The case was also investigated by the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife.

The defendants were indicted in April, specifically because of the loss of 90 Brown Pelicans.

Sentencing is set for early next month. You can find more details here:

[www.fws.gov/home/feature/2011/pdf/110812Seaside.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/home/feature/2011/pdf/110812Seaside.pdf)

## **TE EXTENSION GETS BY**

Last month we drew your attention to the bird-and-birder friendly Transportation Enhancement (TE) elements in the Highway Bill

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/sepsbc11.html#TOC11](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/sepsbc11.html#TOC11)

TE parts of the transportation bill include a number of programs that are viewed favorably by responsible outdoor recreationists and conservationists, including the acquisition of scenic or historic easements, control of some roadside outdoor advertising, support for rails-to-trails development, planting of wildflower meadows along roadways, mitigation of runoff pollution, maintenance of current refuge and park roads, and building needed wildlife connectivity.

Fortunately, in mid-September, the Senate voted - 92 to 6 - to approve an extension of the federal transportation and aviation programs. Senator Tom Coburn's (R-OK) efforts to remove Transportation Enhancement funding from the extension were unsuccessful.

Since this extension will expire at the end of March 2012, and since there are chances that new language may allow states to opt out of funding for some enhancement projects and use the funds elsewhere, this important issue is not

settled.

### **IBA NEWS: MASS STATE OF THE BIRDS RELEASED**

A number of states involved in Important Bird Area programs have enhanced their efforts by presenting parallel and useful State of the Birds reports. Within the New England Region such efforts have recently been undertaken by Connecticut and New Hampshire. The most recent New England state to provide a contribution to these avian report cards is Massachusetts.

Mass Audubon has just released its own comprehensive State of the Birds report, a report which effectively documents changes in Massachusetts birdlife as a result of a critical analysis of several long-term datasets, most importantly the results of two Massachusetts breeding bird atlas projects (1974-1979 and 2007-2011), the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and the Christmas Bird Count (CBC).

By integrating and analyzing trends reflected from these and various other extensive databases, birders, conservationists, and land managers in Massachusetts now have a current blueprint for future bird conservation efforts in the Bay State.

To see the results of the Massachusetts State of the Birds report, visit:

[www.massaudubon.org/StateoftheBirds/](http://www.massaudubon.org/StateoftheBirds/)

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/](http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/)

### **TIP OF THE MONTH: CHRISTMAS TREE PLANS**

This month we have some suggestions about dealing with your own Christmas tree once the holidays are over.

Why are we making a Christmas Holiday suggestion in October? Well, read on.

If you plan to have a Christmas tree this year, and if it's not an artificial tree, then you might just consider planning ahead, depending upon where you live and what the expected winter temperatures are like where you are located. An after-season and used tree is an ideal addition to your winter backyard brush-pile, providing fine protection for birds that might be visiting your bird-feeder area.

But, wait! If you start a month or two in advance, you might even be able to plant that cut holiday tree so that it can be even more useful for a time for winter birds. If you drive a wooden stake into the ground, say one foot of a three-foot stake, you can secure your used tree to the post in such a way that shelters the birds from wind, cold, snow, and possible predators. The point is to do this before the ground freezes. October would be a good time to get this done, so that it's already in place at the end of the holiday season.

Of course if you live in an area with warm winters, you can ignore this Christmas-tree option. You will, however, have the envy of your two E-bulletin editors, both of whom live in the cold Northeast!

### **EASTERN CRANES AGAIN IN THE NEWS**

In February we reported that the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Commission (TWRC) decided to delay its decision to open a Sandhill Crane hunting season for at least two years while more studies could be conducted. The agency cited insufficient data for establishing such a season:  
[www.refugenet.org/birding/febsbc11.html#TOC09](http://www.refugenet.org/birding/febsbc11.html#TOC09)

Now neighboring Kentucky says it is ready to set up the first authorized state hunt for Sandhill Cranes in about a century. A season in Kentucky could open as early as mid-December.

Sandhill Cranes practically disappeared in the Southeastern U.S., going back at least to the 1930s. They have, however, been steadily increasing over the last two decades. There seems to be some disagreement over the exact number of cranes migrating in the East.

While Tennessee is taking time to consider its options, Kentucky is apparently moving forward to open a season on cranes, a move that would essentially impact the same resource and much of the same migrating population of cranes. Presently, there are no other eastern states proposing a season on the eastern population of Sandhill Cranes. In fact,

Ohio even considers the Sandhill Crane to be endangered as a breeding species. Every reasonable expectation is that Ohio's cranes will have to fly across neighboring Kentucky in migration.

Promoters of the hunt claim that there are now enough cranes to justify a hunt, a hunt that will not have a negative impact on the crane population or the wildlife-viewing public. There is a claim that the birds have actually become a veritable nuisance in some localities.

The Atlantic and Mississippi Flyway Councils under the USFWS have completed a Management Plan for the Eastern Population of Sandhill Cranes consistent with hunting seasons for the cranes. There will be an annual review of applicable population and harvest information as well as conditions on the hunt (e.g., requiring an on-line identification for Sandhill and Whooping Cranes and limiting the time of the hunt to after the passage of experimental Whooping Cranes).

In the meantime, Governor Steve Beshear has declined to stop this hunt.

Some 17 conservation groups oppose the hunt, claiming the science used by the state is inadequate, insisting, among other things, that the harvest rate proposed for Kentucky alone could consume a substantial portion of the productivity of the breeding crane population in the Upper Midwest. The slow reproduction rate of Sandhill Cranes (a species which does not reach maturity until 5-7 years of age and a survival rate of only one young in three nests surviving to fall migration) has raised concerns over a replacement rate in light of the possible hunting season in Kentucky.

These groups' arguments can be found here:

<http://kyc4sandhillcranes.wordpress.com/fact-sheets/>

and, specifically, those of the Kentucky Ornithological Society can be read here:

[http://kyc4sandhillcranes.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/kos\\_4\\_8\\_11\\_to\\_kdfwr.pdf](http://kyc4sandhillcranes.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/kos_4_8_11_to_kdfwr.pdf)

You can also see the case for hunting cranes made by the League of Kentucky Sportsmen here:

[www.kentuckysportsmen.com/DistrictsNews/AnnouncementSandhillCraneFacts/tabid/932/Default.aspx](http://www.kentuckysportsmen.com/DistrictsNews/AnnouncementSandhillCraneFacts/tabid/932/Default.aspx)

## **BOOK NOTES: 10,000 COPIES OF AVES DE CUBA**

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology recently finished a grand project: producing and then donating to the people of Cuba, over 10,000 copies of a new version of a Cuban field guide to birds of that island.

AVES DE CUBA by Orlando H. Garrido and Arturo Kirkconnell was produced in conjunction with Cornell University Press, with support from the Macarthur Foundation, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the Reynolds Foundation. It has been available in English as BIRDS OF CUBA since 2000. The new Spanish-language books are being provided at no cost to every elementary and high school library in Cuba, the staff of the Cuban protected areas system, and biology programs at several universities across the country. This magnificent effort is the first large-scale free distribution of a national bird field guide in the Western Hemisphere.

You can find more details here:

[www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=2264](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=2264)

## **THE "BIG YEAR" COMING UP**

For better or worse, the movie, "The Big Year" will be released across the U.S. on 14 October. We wrote about the expectations for this film in September of last year:

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/SepSBC10.html#TOC13](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/SepSBC10.html#TOC13)

and also in April of this year:

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/aprsbc11.html#TOC11](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/aprsbc11.html#TOC11)

The plot of this "sophisticated comedy" features characters played by Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson, each of whom is at a personal crossroad. One is experiencing a mid-life crisis, another character a work-life crisis, and the third character, a no-life crisis. Each spends a year of his life following his own individual birding aspirations, highlighted by cross-continental journeys of life-changing experiences.

We can only hope it proves to be a thoughtful and fun film, yet doesn't make fun of us all who enjoy birding and its unique subculture.

You can watch the official trailer and other details here:

<http://big-year-movie-trailer.blogspot.com/>

## **A REINTRODUCTION OF OUR QUIZ FOR A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC BIRD BOOK**

We are pleased to reintroduce our quick-and-easy quiz where readers have a chance to win a fine National Geographic bird publication. Each monthly quiz question 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.

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

[www.shopng.com/birdbooks](http://www.shopng.com/birdbooks)

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.

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. This book is still at the printers, and will be released on or about 1 November. (We hope to review it very soon.) Be among the first to get this new edition into your hands. You can find more details on this sixth edition here:

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

This month's question is linked to at least two of our stories: 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?

Please send your answer by 15 October to:

[BirdingEbulletin1@verizon.net](mailto: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.

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

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html](http://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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