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## SWAROVSKI BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE NORTH AMERICAN SWAROVSKI BIRDING COMMUNITY

**\*Information, communication, and inspiration on birds, wildlife, and nature\***

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July 2004

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**WELCOME!**

## **WELCOME!**

Welcome to the third of our "Swarovski Birding Community E-bulletins" for North America. This monthly communication is intended to keep friends and associates informed about the developing plans for the Swarovski Birding Community in North America. The E-bulletin will have information about planned SBC activities, along with keeping you abreast of important birding and bird conservation news.

This month is "National Parks and Recreation Month," which is intended to showcase and invite community participation in quality leisure activities for all segments of the population. For us, of course, "quality leisure activity" means birding!

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## **RARITY FOCUS**

The "Rarity Focus" for June is Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, a Mexican species which appeared in Pharr, in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, during the last days of May and remained on site for the entire month of June. The bird was found at the Allen Williams' residence at 750 Sam Houston Avenue in Pharr. This is the same location where a Blue Mockingbird has made off-again-on-again appearances for many months.

The identification of the Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush is unequivocal. However, on the U.S./Mexican border, anytime a new species that has a predominantly Mexican distribution shows up, birders wrestle with the issue of the bird's origin. This is because of the continuing, illegal traffic in native bird species for the caged bird trade in Mexican border towns. The question of whether the Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush is officially a new species in North America will be an issue the Texas Bird Records Committee and the ABA Checklist Committee to determine.

Interested readers may find additional information about the Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush in the field guides by Peterson & Chalif (plate 35, page 187) and Howell & Webb (plate 50, page 586). It should be noted that the species is found in humid subtropical forests from central Tamaulipas, Mexico, south to western Panama. It is resident in the southern part of its range but is migratory in northern regions. Precisely where the population goes that departs from the cloud forests of the Sierra Madre Oriental, where the species is the most common breeding species in the forests, is not known, but it is probably within the range of resident populations. There is also a disjunct population in the lower Sierra de Tamaulipas, near the coast north of Tampico. Since there is no cloud forest in that portion of the range, the Black-headed Nightingale-Thrushes there inhabit a semi-humid pine-oak/tropical transition forest.

The bird in Pharr appears at the Williams' birdbath in the thicket behind the house most evenings. The residence is located between the "Senior Friends Nursing Home" and the "Skinner-Silva Funeral Home." Arrangements to visit the Williams' residence can be made by calling Allen Williams at 956/460-9864.

Assuming that the TBRC accepts this record, it would be a first for the ABA Area. Robert Tizard has posted photos of the nightingale-thrush (and a photo of the Blue Mockingbird) [on the Web](#).

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## **DIGISCOPING**

Banding, digiscoping, and e-mail communication fortuitously combined in May to provide a fascinating story about the longevity and migration of Red Knots. On Tuesday afternoon, 18 May, while conducting shorebird surveys between Florida's Bird Islands and Fort George Inlet, near Jacksonville, Patrick and Doris Leary noticed a banded Red Knot with "a strange gray-colored marker" on its leg. The bird was digiscoped, and the resulting images were immediately e-mailed to Brian Harrington at the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences in Massachusetts. From the unique, hand-made, flag marker and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) band affixed to this bird, Harrington was able to identify the year that this Red Knot was banded, although not the precise individual bird.

Harrington confirmed that the knot was one banded by his shorebird team in 1984 in Lagoa do Peixe in southern Brazil. At the time of banding the bird was an adult, so Harrington postulates that the bird is at least 21 years old, thus very likely making it the oldest Red Knot on record. More incredibly, this bird may have logged nearly 400,000 migration miles over the course of its lifetime! "It is a champion migrant," Harrington said, noting that even though this species is known for its remarkable flights, this particular individual has an exceptional history. Harrington also commented, "By its 13th birthday, this Red Knot, weighing only about 4.5 ounces, had migrated a distance equal to the moon and back."

This entire event represents an extraordinary mix of 20th-century banding techniques and early 21st-century digital technology. John James Audubon's early, crude experiments with silver leg bands on Eastern Phoebe

digital technology. JOHN JAMES AUDUBON'S early crude experiments with silver leg bands on Eastern Phoebe in the Philadelphia area in the early 1800s have "come a very long way, indeed" according to Patrick Leary.

For get more details and see accompanying photos of this remarkable knot, click [here](#).

For more information about color-banded and color-flagged shorebirds click [here](#).

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## **BIRD CONSERVATION NOTES**

**MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING AND CONSERVATION STAMP** - This month, a new "Federal Duck Stamp" has become available at post offices, national wildlife refuges, some national retail chain stores, and various sporting-goods stores nationwide.

The Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, the stamp's official name, has enjoyed an imposing success during its 70-year history. Initiated in the mid-1930s to address a major crisis in bird conservation and wetland habitat loss, the stamp has been a highly effective funding mechanism for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The more than \$670 million raised from stamp sales have been used to secure more than five million acres of valuable wetland habitat for the Refuge System. Approximately \$25 million a year is currently collected through annual stamp sales.

Proceeds from the purchase price of the \$15 stamp go into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, which is used to purchase valuable wetlands for the Refuge System. In fact, approximately 98 percent of the revenue from the stamp go through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to purchase refuge wetlands. Importantly for birders, the stamp can be used between July of this year through June of 2005 to gain admission to any National Wildlife Refuge in the country that charges an entry fee.

Concerned birders are increasingly engaged in discussions about ways in which the stamp might be expanded beyond the vital, but limited, purpose of refuge wetland habitat acquisition. Among the changes that some active birders hope to see incorporated into the program are: 1) inclusion of more species than simply waterfowl, 2) acquisition of habitat types in addition to wetlands, and 3) the support of a broader public constituency.

1) *More Species*: In 1934 bird-conservation visionaries created the stamp when North American waterfowl populations were in deep crisis. The stamp and the Refuge System succeeded splendidly in helping save waterfowl. Today, additional bird species are in similar trouble. If these additional species could be properly highlighted, their conservation and management needs could conceivably be addressed through stamp sales.

2) *More Habitat and Causes*: The stamp has been a mainstay for refuge wetland habitat acquisition. The fact is, however, that additional upland habitats might also be able to benefit from stamp-funding sources. Furthermore, other bird-conservation causes could benefit through sales of the stamp, such as increased development of the bird plans (e.g., Partners in Flight, the Waterbird Plan, the U.S. Shorebird Plan), a supplement to the Neotropical Migratory Bird Fund, the promotion of International Migratory Bird Day, and/or additional funding for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

3) *A Broader Constituency*: Waterfowl hunters cannot do it alone. By including a broader constituency, such as the birding community, sale of the stamp could significantly increase its usefulness and its value.

Finally, implicit in a retooled stamp would need to be a willingness to modify the artwork on the current stamp along with giving the stamp greater value. Modifying the artwork might mean cycling of the art through other family groups beyond waterfowl (e.g., shorebirds, passerines, raptors, upland gamebirds, and other waterbirds) or including other bird species on the stamp alongside the traditional waterfowl. Giving the stamp added value could also mean using it as an expanded entrance pass elsewhere or a de facto "discount card," something that would be valuable for waterfowl hunters and non-hunters alike.

Essential, even to modest changes in the stamp, must be an assurance that the legacy and grand achievements of the existing stamp are appreciated and maintained. Any changes in the stamp must build on the stamp's existing success and only serve to strengthen its foundations while not neglecting its past success. This is why an expanded stamp, not a "new alternative," has been proposed. Any expanded or revised approach would be predicated on "wetlands first." Only if a revised stamp could provide historic revenue amounts would proceeds from sale of the new stamp go toward supporting additional bird-conservation concerns.

Beyond the recent discussion over forging a retooled Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, all concerned birders should support the current stamp by purchasing one this month. For more details on birders and the stamp, click [here](#).

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**NEW HAMPSHIRE MOVES TO GET THE LEAD OUT** - Effective January 2005, a new state law in New Hampshire will expand the prohibition on using certain sizes of lead sinkers and jigs on all freshwaters in the state, and will ban the sale of this gear statewide beginning January 2006.

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department has for years encouraged anglers to dispose of old lead sinkers and jigs and replace them with non-lead alternatives because of the health hazard that lead tackle presents for loons and other wildlife. In 2000, New Hampshire became the first state to ban the use of lead sinkers of one ounce or less and jigs less than one inch long on freshwater lakes and ponds. The new law will extend the ban to rivers and streams, effectively making the tackle illegal to use on any freshwater body in the state.

"The new law is an important step in continuing to reduce human impacts on wildlife. The earlier law and educational campaign alerted people to the dangers of lead tackle to wildlife and the ready availability of non-lead alternatives, but the reality is that loons are still dying from lead poisoning," said John Kanter, Coordinator of New Hampshire Fish and Game's Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program.

Loons that die from ingesting lead sinkers or jigs usually die within a matter of weeks. It is believed that loons and other waterbirds ingest lead by eating fish that have swallowed lead sinkers, by striking at jigs pulled through the water, or simply by picking up the tackle as they sift through mud at the bottom of lakes for pebbles and grit needed to aid their digestion. Lead poisoning accounted for more than half of the loon deaths analyzed in a research project conducted by the Loon Preservation Committee and Tufts University.

Most anglers have been supportive about making the change from lead tackle. According to Mark Beauchesne, coordinator of New Hampshire's Let's Go Fishing program, "Anglers know that it's the right thing to do and continue to do their part by using the many great alternatives to lead tackle that are now available."

For details on the state's Loon Preservation Committee, click [here](#).

Elsewhere in the U.S., Maine, Massachusetts, and, most recently, New York already restrict the use of lead sinkers and jigs.

In the meantime, Canadians are also moving in the direction to ban lead in fishing gear. Some provinces already restrict lead gear, and Canada's Minister of the Environment, David Anderson, recently announced that he would soon propose regulations that will bring about an eventual countrywide ban on the import, manufacture, and sale of fishing sinkers and jigs containing lead.

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**WESTERN ALASKA UNDER THE RADAR ON THE NPR-A** - In 1976, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was given jurisdiction over the 23.5-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) formerly administered by the Navy. Four years later, Congress authorized leasing and development, but directed the Department of the Interior to minimize ecological disturbances. Since then, the area has been the object of a series of leasing openings and compromises, the most important of which was settled in 1998, balancing energy development and natural considerations, opening up for drilling some 87 percent of 4.6 million acres in the Northeast portion of the NPR-A.

Early last month, the BLM in Alaska released their revised development plan for the Northeast portion of the NPR-A, a plan which could now open a large portion of the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, thereby potentially subjecting 387,000 acres previously closed to drillers in the 1998 compromise. The area in question is a productive bird and wildlife area. For example 30 percent of all Pacific Brant, tens of thousands of Greater White Fronted Geese, smaller populations of Spectacled, Steller's, and King Eiders, along with nesting loons, other waterfowl, and shorebirds habitually use this area.

The BLM's recommended plan is "below the radar" for most Americans, with all the required public hearings, except for one, taking place in Alaska. Indeed, the energy industry is calling for even more leasing, exceeding the BLM's new recommended limits.

For the BLM plan click [here](#).

For a view critical of the BLM plan click [here](#).

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**BALD EAGLE DELISTING DRAWS CLOSER** - The Bald Eagle, perhaps the quintessential North American species whose decline helped establish the Endangered Species Act and helped to ban DDT, may drop off the threatened species list later this year, Bush administration officials have claimed.

If this happens, the birds still would be safeguarded under the federal Bald Eagle Protection Act passed in 1940 and amended multiple times (e.g., 1962, 1972, 1978), a law which prohibits killing or selling the animals. The Interior Department will outline its plans this summer after taking public comment on how to protect the birds' habitat, while also recognizing that its population has recovered. "The more species that we get off the list that are ready to be recovered, the more we can start focusing on those that are not quite there and ultimately move them off the list as well," said Craig Manson, the Interior Department's Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The widespread use of DDT after World War II resulted in eggshell thinning, which ultimately caused a crash in eagle productivity. The Bald Eagle was reduced to just 417 known breeding pairs in the lower-48 states by 1963. By the late 1970s, the bird was endangered in 43 states and threatened in five others. By 1995, however, the species was reclassified as threatened throughout the lower-48 states. Bald Eagles were never deemed to be in danger in Alaska.

The delisting process for the Bald Eagle began over four years ago, but is taking far longer than originally expected. Drafting a five-year, post-recovery plan for such a species with such a huge range requires updated counts for every state, and eagle-protection rules already in place in some states have made the bureaucratic process even more difficult. Some observers also think the move toward delisting is premature, with the species not doing as well as claimed in the West.

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**MBTA CLARIFICATION AND NMBCA REAUTHORIZATION** - Until recently, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) has been interpreted as excluding all introduced, non-native birds from protection. In the decision *Hill v. Norton* (D.C. Circuit 2001), however, the court ruled that the MBTA actually did apply to the exotic, non-native Mute Swan, and subsequent decisions have blocked all efforts to control this species. The case turned conventional wisdom on its head, and now Congress has to clarify the intent of the MBTA.

The U.S. Senate is considering S. 2547, legislation that is exactly the same as HR 4114 being considered in the House. The legislation would clearly remove all non-native, introduced species from the MBTA.

The legislation would also renew the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) to raise authorized funding from the current \$5 million to \$15 million, lower matching requirements from 3-1 to 1-1, add Canada to coverage, and increase administrative costs for the USFWS to at least \$125,000 from the current \$80,000.

These combined measures are receiving wide support among bird conservationists.

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## **ODDS & ENDS**

**MORE ON SAGE-GROUSE** - Last month we reported on the status of sage-grouse, and growing concerns on their status. Now the "Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment" is finished and available through the [Nevada Department of Wildlife web site](#), where the document is currently available for light reading - all 610 pages! Kudos to John Connelly (ID), Steve Knick (ID), Mike Schroeder (WA), and San Stiver (AZ) for their efforts.

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**BIRDING AT THE G-8 IN GEORGIA** - During the 30th Annual G-8 Summit at Sea Island, Georgia, in early June, U.S. First Lady, Laura Bush, asked Victor Emanuel (head of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours - VENT) to lead a birdwalk for the spouses of the leaders of the G-8. The event took place on the morning of June 9. Madame Bernadette Chirac, Mrs. Cherie Blair, and Mrs. Ludmila Putin joined Victor and Laura Bush for the birdwalk. Victor co-led the walk with Stacia Hendricks, Naturalist for Sea Island Company. Among the highlights on the walk were Tricolored Heron and Snowy Egret feeding side-by-side, male and female Wood Ducks, recently hatched baby Killdeer, a two-and-a-half-foot Yellow Rat Snake, an American Alligator, and both larvae and adults of the handsome Gulf Fritillary butterfly.

On a more personal note, Victor Emanuel was recently recognized by his receiving the "Roger Tory Peterson

Award" from the American Birding Association for his promotion of birding, and the "Arthur Allen Award" from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology for making ornithology more accessible to the general public.

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**POSTER-WINNERS FOR "CATS INDOORS"** - The children's poster-winners for the American Bird Conservancy's "2004 National Keep Your Cat Indoors Day" can be viewed [here](#). The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources conducted a state-wide poster competition this year and submitted the three winning posters. Also received were many fine posters from local competitions in Florida and Arizona, along with the state-wide competition sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Nongame Wildlife Program. Details and winning posters from the Minnesota competition can be viewed [here](#).

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**CONDOR CORRECTION AND UPDATE** - We had a typo in June in the item on California Condors. The male condor, AC9, is not 2 years old, but is actually 24 years old. In the meantime, two condor pairs in northern Arizona, incubating eggs this year have now produced young, confirmed by using behavioral observations of adult birds as an indicator. One condor chick was produced at a nest site in Grand Canyon National Park, while the second chick was produced at a nest site located on the BLM's Vermilion Cliffs National Monument. This marks the second consecutive year wild California Condors have been hatched in Arizona since releases began in 1996.

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*If you have a friend who wants to get future copies of the North American Swarovski Birding E-bulletin, have them contact:*

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