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## Swarovski Birding E-Bulletin

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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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June 2004

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## **GREETINGS!**

We welcome you to this, the second of our monthly "Swarovski Birding Community E-bulletins" for North America. We intend for this E-bulletin to include up-to-date information about our plans for both on-line and real-time SBC activities, along with keeping you abreast of important birding and bird conservation news. As we said in the May issue, the format here will not be particularly flashy, but the content will be substantive and as streamlined as possible.

You may not realize that June is officially "American Rivers Month." We prefer to call it "Avian Riparian Habitat Month," since it gives birders an opportunity to celebrate the various bird connections with our nation's network of waterways. Rivers course their way through 3,500,000 miles of the U.S., and this month is a great time to enjoy, maintain, and secure the web of rivers and waterways which cross our continent, most of which are vital to both wetland and riparian bird species. Think about it.

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## **RARITY FOCUS**

In each issue of our E-bulletin, we'll try to focus on some specific rarity that has appeared within the month following the previous E-Bulletin. The rarity will typically be a species that exemplifies the month's birding possibilities. May's North American highlight rarity in was an adult male Yellow Grosbeak first observed on the afternoon of 17 May at the Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum near Tucson. The bird continued near the site at least until 22 May.

This individual showed a "V" pattern of converging black lines on the yellow-olive upper back that merged into solid black on the lower back. The bird appeared somewhat intermediate between the adult male depicted in Sibley (p. 465) and National Geographic (p. 429) guides, perhaps suggesting that the male was entering its second summer. For the period it was present, the bird was not easy to find, but a number of intrepid observers were ultimately successful in locating it.

This bird may have been attracted to the singing of a hybrid Yellow x Black-headed Grosbeak held in the Desert Museum aviary. There was no indication of abnormal feather wear to suggest that the Yellow Grosbeak was an escapee. In fact, the Desert Museum does not currently hold any "pure" male Yellow Grosbeaks in the aviary.

There are approximately 16 previous records for Yellow Grosbeak in southeast Arizona, the first in 1971. The vast majority of these records pertain to males appearing during the period from early June to late July.

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## **SWAROVSKI BIRDING IN THE FIELD (TOURS)**

There are a number of trips scheduled for Swarovski Birding. One of the forthcoming excursions is to the Galapagos, 2 -16 November 2004. It is being operated by, and designed in cooperation with, WildWings UK. The Galapagos, as you probably know, have over two dozen species of endemic birds, including Waved Albatross, Galapagos Penguin, Swallow-tailed Gull, and Lava Gull. The islands also host the celebrated and unique Darwin's Finches. Although the number of birds expected on this trip is not large - about 55 species - that total includes a marvelous selection. Trip features include tour guide Tony Marr, a modern 83-foot long motor yacht, and free use of the latest Swarovski optical products.

More information can be found [here](#).

Another Swarovski Birding tour already full is bound for New Zealand in late November 2004. This excursion will be co-led by Wayne Petersen and Tony Wilson of Manu Tours. The trip was designed in cooperation with the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

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## **WEEKEND WORKSHOPS**

The Swarovski Birding Community efforts here in North America will soon be running a series of weekend workshops designed to improve your birding skills and knowledge. Birding workshops currently in the pipeline include offerings on the subject of pelagic birds, raptors, shorebirds, warblers, and digiscoping. The first of these offerings will occur in Massachusetts. Stand by for more details in the July E-bulletin. If you have questions, please contact [Wayne Petersen](#) at [wpetersen@manutours.com](mailto:wpetersen@manutours.com).

have questions or ideas for weekend workshop topics that you would like to see offered, contact [Wayne Peterson](#).

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## **BIRD CONSERVATION NOTES**

**REFUGE SUMMIT** - In late May, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Refuge System hosted a meeting at the National Conservation and Training Center in West Virginia for the purpose of discussing the formulation of measurable priorities for the Refuge System over the next five to 15 years. Among the 250 attendees (from over 38 states) were representatives from 23 "Friends of Refuge" groups, 44 conservation organizations, and 67 National Wildlife Refuges. Built on the foundation of the System's reflections during its centennial year, the conference focused on five themes: Wildlife and Habitat, Strategic Growth, Science, Leadership, and Wildlife Dependent Recreation.

The summit's meeting covered far too many topics to mention here, but three questions posed by the Refuge System Chief, Bill Hartwig, in his keynote presentation deserve mention: 1) What demographic trends should guide the Refuge System? 2) What actions can heighten public awareness and support for the Refuge System? 3) How can refuges serve a more urbanized America, yet continue to fulfill their mission to conserve wildlife and habitats?

If you need more details on the summit, you can contact us, and we will respond based on our presence at the event. Alternately, you can get more information [here](#).

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**COFFEE** - The issue of shade-grown and sustainable coffee is a vital one for birders concerned about bird conservation, since shade-grown coffee farms have been proven to support a robust variety of bird species (including many Neotropical migrants) in important parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. We thought you might be interested in an article on socially responsible and shade-grown coffee in the most recent issue of SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE (May 2004). The article focuses mainly on the reality and the possibilities in Nicaragua, highlighting the work of the Thanksgiving Coffee Company, makers of SongBird Coffee and other lines of "conscience coffee."

The piece appears as a downloadable pdf on the following [web page](#).

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**VIEW OF THE CORONADOS** - The Coronado Islands, resting just south of the U.S./Mexican border and only eight miles off the Tijuana shore, are known as the "Sentinels of San Diego Harbor." ChevronTexaco, has bid for a Mexican-government concession to operate a fuel-receiving terminal at the Coronados, anchoring a platform the size of three football fields east of South Island, the largest of the group's four islands. The platform would hold a re-gasification plant, storage tanks, and support operations and living facilities for dozens of workers. With the island offering protection from wind and surf, tankers are expected to dock and unload fuel every few days. Liquefied fuel would be re-gasified and piped from the platform to the mainland for use in Baja California and Southern California.

Bird conservationists worry especially about the possible risk to the region's largest breeding colony of Xantus's Murrelets on the Coronados. The murrelets, accessing nesting sites at night, could be drawn to platform lights and could crash into the structures near the fuel terminal. It is also feared that the platform itself, as well as the lights, might also disrupt feeding activities. (Xantus's Murrelet, at least at monitored U.S. breeding sites, has recently declined substantially, with drops up to 70 percent.) Brown Pelicans, cormorants, Black Oystercatchers, a variety of gulls and terns, and several other seabirds are permanent or part-time residents on the Coronado Islands that could possibly be affected by the terminal construction and placement.

ChevronTexaco has announced plans to employ experts over the next year to determine how best to reduce negative impact to the birds. Commercial and sport-fishing interests, divers, environmental educators, and various other interest groups have also raised concern over opening of the facility.

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**MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVANCY ANNOUNCES GRANTS** - The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation announced in mid-May that the Migratory Bird Conservancy has awarded three new grants totaling \$161,300.

The combined impact of these awards will result in better habitat protection and improved management on more than 14,000 acres of high-priority bird habitats in Missouri, Wisconsin, and Alberta.

The Migratory Bird Conservancy is managed as a special program of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The Conservancy is a partnership between the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, more than a dozen birding businesses, and hundreds of birders who have contributed to the program. The Conservancy was created by birding businesses as a cooperative and voluntary program through which they and their customers can contribute funds to help conserve priority habitats for birds. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and its partner, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provide matching federal funds to the program.

The three Migratory Bird Conservancy project awards approved in April were as follows:

\* \$75,000 was awarded to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to help restore and enhance more than 3,000 acres of shallow marsh potholes, mudflats, and diverse vegetation at the Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Management Area. This 11,000-acre site attracts more than 280 species of birds and half a million visitors every year. Peak concentrations of waterfowl at Horicon exceed 120,000 ducks and 300,000 Canada Geese. Horicon Marsh also supports the largest concentration of breeding Redheads east of the Mississippi River. Many other wetland birds will also benefit from this investment.

\* \$50,000 was awarded to the USFWS to help establish an Urban Bird Treaty with the city of St. Louis, Missouri. Funds will be used to help restore more than 1,000 acres of forests and wetland habitats within the St. Louis metropolitan area. Under the Urban Bird Treaty, the Service also will launch bird education and awareness programs for thousands of youth and adults in St. Louis. The declining Red-headed Woodpecker and Neotropical migrants such as Cerulean Warbler, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Eastern Wood Pewee will be among the beneficiaries of this funding.

\* \$36,300 was awarded to the Alberta Fish and Game Association to support Operation Grassland Community. Funding will help create 50 to 60 new Habitat Stewardship Agreements with landowners, potentially impacting about 10,000 acres of prairie. Numerous waterfowl, Greater Sage-Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Burrowing Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike, and Sprague's Pipit, are among the species that will benefit from this program.

Jim Morey, President of Swarovski Optik NA, a founding member of the Migratory Bird Conservancy, stated that "Swarovski and its customers are proud to help support habitat conservation through the Migratory Bird Conservancy. These three grants will benefit hundreds of species of birds and enhance the birding experience for hundreds of thousands of children and adults."

Funding through the Migratory Bird Conservancy would not be possible without the generous support of the following additional companies and associations: Aspects Inc., Big Pockets, Bird Doings, D&D Commodities, Duncraft Inc., Droll Yankee, ETO Sterilization, Longdown Management Inc., Stokes Nature Company, Vari-Crafts, Web Spectrum, Inc., and the Wild Bird Feeding Industry.

For more information on the Migratory Bird Conservancy, click [here](#).

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**SAGE-GROUSE WATCH** - Earlier this spring, the USFWS moved the Gunnison Sage-Grouse (of southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah) closer to listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), while at the same time keeping the listing priority of Greater Sage-Grouse for the Columbia Basin populations (in Washington State) the same.

According to the USFWS, the Gunnison Sage-Grouse has been reduced to less than a quarter of its historic range by habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation (due mainly to building development, road and utility corridors, fences, energy development, and the conversion of native habitat to crop fields). The USFWS judged that threats to the Gunnison Sage-Grouse in the past year have increased due to the effects of drought on habitat and chick survival, and to relaxation of restrictions on land use in Gunnison County, Colorado, an area which harbors the only large population of this species. As a result, in its Candidate Notice of Review, the Service elevated the listing priority from a 5 to a 2, but stopped short of recommending emergency listing action.

The Columbia Basin population of the Greater Sage-Grouse declined by a surprising 30 percent between 2000 and 2001. The population is estimated at only 700 individuals, the lowest ever recorded. Military training has constituted the primary threat to the southern subpopulation, and habitat conversion has been the primary threat impacting the northern subpopulation. These impacts are mitigated, according to the USFWS, by recent conservation measures, and the Service concluded that non-imminent threats to the Columbia Basin populations of Greater Sage-Grouse warrant no change in its listing priority at the number 6 level.

populations of Greater Sage-Grouse warrant no change in its listing priority at the number 3 level.

In the meantime, the USFWS has determined that enough biological information exists to warrant a more in-depth examination of the status of the Greater Sage-Grouse population as a whole. This will begin with a full status review of the species which, once complete, will determine whether, and if, to propose listing the species at either the Threatened or Endangered level.

Recent estimates indicate that Greater Sage-Grouse populations have declined by approximately 86 percent from historic levels. One of the prime threats to this species may be loss of sagebrush habitat. Greater Sage-Grouse depend almost entirely on sagebrush for food, shelter, and protection from predators. Sagebrush once covered approximately 156 million acres in western North America. Research indicates that almost none of the remaining habitat is unaltered and that about half the original area occupied by Greater Sage-Grouse is no longer capable of supporting the species on a year-round basis.

For the most current and authoritative information on the distribution of both sage-grouse species (including possible pre-settlement distribution), check the most recent issue of THE CONDOR (Vol 106, No. 2, May 2004: pp. 363-376) in an article by 17 authors (Schroeder, et al.).

About half the sagebrush habitat in the United States is on land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Over the past five years, the BLM and several western states have worked alone and in cooperation on sage-grouse conservation projects, including establishing partnerships with communities throughout the West to address sage-grouse habitat issues. Although millions of dollars have been invested in these efforts, there are no easy solutions in sight, and bird conservationists are deeply concerned. The situation, some fear, is a crisis not only waiting to happen, but already underway.

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**CONDOR SUCCESS IN CALIFORNIA** - In the area of good news for Endangered Species, comes a report from Ventura County, California, on California Condors. Three California Condor chicks hatched in the wild this past April, the last on 22 April. The parents of the chicks have varied backgrounds. Two of the females were released in Big Sur, where they remained for more than three years. One of the males is 2-year old, AC9 who was the last wild condor brought in from the wild in 1987. After 15 years in a captive breeding program he was released back into the wild on 1 May 2002. AC9 was originally captured on Easter Sunday in 1987, and his first chick since being released was hatched on Easter Sunday 2004!

"To have an original wild condor reproducing again in the wild after 17 years is very gratifying, we have come full circle. When this same bird was captured in 1987, and no California Condors soared free, we faced an uncertain future," remarked Steve Thompson, Manager of the USFWS California-Nevada Operations Office.

Last year only one chick was produced in southern California, and that chick died after only four months. The first wild chick to survive past fledging was hatched last year in Arizona. That bird, at about 11 months of age, is still with its parents and doing fine. Two condor pairs in Arizona have also been incubating eggs this year.

Ventana Wilderness Society has been releasing condors in Monterey County's Big Sur region since 1997. This is the first year that Big Sur birds have reproduced.

There are 97 condors now living in the wild in California, Arizona and Baja, Mexico, and 124 in captivity at the Los Angeles Zoo, San Diego Wild Animal Park and the Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho. The goal of the California Condor Recovery Plan is to establish two geographically separate populations, one in California and the other in Arizona, each with 150 birds and at least 15 breeding pairs.

"This may be the last year that there are more condors in captivity than in the wild," stated Dr. Bill Burnham, President of The Peregrine Fund. "The steady progress we have made in the recovery of this species is a credit to the adaptive nature of the condor, the skilled field crew, and cooperation of government and private participants."

In 1982, the condor population reached its lowest level of 22 birds, prompting biologists to start collecting chicks and eggs for a captive breeding program. By late 1984, only 15 condors remained in the wild. After seven condors died in rapid succession, it was decided to bring the remaining birds in from the wild for the captive breeding program. By 1992, the Recovery Program began releasing California Condors back into the wild.

The USFWS is the principal Federal agency responsible for coordinating the conservation of the California condor, along with other Federal and state agencies and several private partners to help insure the project's success.



For more information see: <http://hoppermountain.fws.gov/cacondor/index.html> or [http://www.peregrinefund.org/notes\\_condor.html](http://www.peregrinefund.org/notes_condor.html)

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## **ODDS & ENDS**

**ALEXANDER SKUTCH PASSES AWAY** - Born near Baltimore, Maryland, in 1904, Alexander F. Skutch's feelings for nature were first aroused at an early age when his family moved to a farm in the country. In November 1928, after receiving a Doctorate in Botany, Skutch sailed from New York to Panama, where the New World tropics got into his blood. The rest, as they say, is history.

Skutch did field work in Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica, during which time his interests shifted from botany to ornithology. Since 1941, his studies centered on his rural 178-acre home in Costa Rica, not far from the Pacific Coast. His continual enthusiasm for unlocking nature's secrets and his inimitable way with words resulted in his becoming a prolific naturalist-writer. Alexander Skutch published 30 books, mostly

about birds, but also on philosophy, along with untold contributions to journals and magazines. The late Roger Tory Peterson maintained that Skutch's detailed and sensitive life-history accounts of Central American birds did for birds of the Neotropics what John James Audubon's paintings did for the birds of North America. Alexander Skutch passed away at his farm in Costa Rica on Wednesday, 12 May 04, just five days before his 100th birthday.

The 2004 Loye and Alden Miller Research Award, which is given by the Cooper Ornithological Society for lifetime achievement in ornithological research was bestowed on Dr. Skutch a few days before his death. The Association of Field Ornithologists also has an award, the Pamela and Alexander F. Skutch Research Award for Studies in Avian Natural History, named after the ornithologist and his late wife. The award is intended to support the study of life histories of little-known birds of the Neotropics.

Robert McCracken Peck, senior fellow at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, recently wrote that Alexander Skutch has left a legacy "that is sure to inspire a better understanding and stewardship of the natural world for generations to come."

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**WORLD SERIES OF BIRDING** - On 16 May, the team from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology came out ahead among all the out-of-area teams in the popular World Series of Birding, the competition where teams of birders crisscross New Jersey to find as many species as possible in 24 hours. The Cornell/Swarovski Sapsuckers, named in part for team sponsor Swarovski Optik, this year won the Stearns Award, having placed first for best out-of-region team total. This is a title the Sapsuckers have claimed for more than six years. The most coveted prize, the Urner/Stone Cup for first-place overall, eluded the Sapsuckers for the second year in a row. The team's final tally was 209 species for the prestigious event - 10 species behind their colleagues on the first-place Delaware Valley Ornithological Club (DVOC) team.

Regardless, the Cornell/Swarovski Sapsuckers brought in more than \$650 per species in pledges, shattering their previous record of \$640 per species. This year's pledges brought in more than \$160,000 (including sponsorship), which will go to support the Cornell Lab's various bird conservation programs.

"We are so grateful to our generous, enthusiastic members and friends who pledged their support and made this a record-breaking year in funding for our vital conservation work," says John Fitzpatrick, Lab director and co-captain of the team. "All of us on the team share that passion for and commitment to bird conservation. But I have to admit that we're all also highly competitive. Bringing home the Urner/Stone Cup would have been icing on the cake."

Details on the Sapsuckers' activities may be found [here](#).

Final standings for all the teams in the 2004 World Series of Birding are [here](#).

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**SBC OFFICES SOON TO OPEN** - The North American SBC office will be opening soon in Newburyport, Massachusetts. The office will be located in the new (one year-old) Joppa Flats Education Center, owned and operated by the Massachusetts Audubon Society. We anticipate a warm and symbiotic relationship with MassAudubon.

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*We welcome your distribution of all or parts of this E-bulletin, only requesting mention of the material's SBC origins.*

*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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