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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

October 2004

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GREETINGS!

Here is our sixth "Swarovski Birding Community E-bulletin" for North America. This communication is appearing every month, and it is intended to keep friends and associates informed about Swarovski Birding plans here in North America and to keep interested readers informed about birding and bird conservation news.

This month witnesses the celebration of National Wildlife Refuge week. Our country's 544 National Wildlife Refuges approach 100 million acres in cumulative extent, and there are refuges in every state. In fact, practically every major city in the country has a refuge within an hour's drive. Refuge celebrations will be taking place across the country between the dates of 10-16 October, and there may be one at a refuge near you. Even though some of these celebrations may occur before or after the official celebration week, they will still be a part of the event. [Click here](#) for more information.

In keeping with National Wildlife Refuge week, you will note that there are a number of additional reports on the Refuge System in the E-bulletin this month.

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RARITY FOCUS

Again we visit South Texas for our monthly "Rarity Focus." A brilliant adult male Green-breasted Mango was found in McAllen, Texas (found in National Geo guide on page 264) toward the end of August. This large hummingbird, normally found from eastern Mexico southward to northern South America, remained into the first week of September, visiting a feeder visible from an alley behind 612 Laurel Street. There have been only 12 previously documented records for Green-breasted Mango for Texas (not including this year), mostly in fall and winter. Along with maintaining her feeder to accommodate visiting birders, the gracious homeowner on Laurel Street also trimmed her trees back for better viewing over the short fence in the alley.

After seemingly abandoning the Laurel Street site, it suddenly reappeared toward the end of September. Remarkably, what may have been a different male Green-breasted Mango showed up at about the same time at a different feeder a mile and a half away, at 500 Rose Ellen Boulevard, also in McAllen. The feeder used by this Green-breasted Mango is along a stucco fence that runs along the south side of the backyard, and is easily viewed from the driveway. The welcoming host at this address roped-off a viewing area and has requested a donation to a missionary charity from visiting birders.

Images of both (?) of these hummingbirds have yet to be compared closely, to determine if there are actually two different birds involved.

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DIGISCOPING

The "Father of Digiscoping," Laurence Poh, passed away on the morning of 19 September. His pioneering digiscoping efforts were recently recognized by the Malaysian Nature Society, which presented him a special award of recognition prior to his death. For those unfamiliar with Laurence Poh's pioneering work, it can be viewed [here](#).

For some fine testimonials, [see these pages](#).

Lawrence Poh also wrote a short and informative article on digiscoping in BIRD WATCHER'S DIGEST (November-December 01) which can be seen [here](#).

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CALIFORNIA WORKING ON MARINE RESERVES ALONG COAST

California wildlife officials have recently revived a program to create marine reserves along the state's 1,100-mile coastline. Although previously jeopardized by state budget woes, private donors have contributed the necessary funding to sustain the program (The state of California will contribute half a million dollars, private donors \$2 million.). The marine reserves will protect 10-20% of California's coastline out to a distance of three miles. California has a number of protected marine areas, although their boundaries and restrictions are conflicting. This new effort is intended to develop a more systematic, statewide approach to protecting coastal habitat. The program will establish restricted fishing zones to protect the entire marine ecosystem and will attempt to restore fish species that have been depleted by over-fishing, pollution, and other disruptive activities. The reserve plan will, of course, also benefit coastal and pelagic birds. California's program is expected to serve as a model for state-based ocean habitat protection. A statewide marine reserves plan is expected by 2011. More details can be found [here](#).

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SEABIRDS SAVED AT WAKE ISLAND, CATS ELIMINATED

Speaking of seabirds, there is good news from Wake Island, an atoll in the North Pacific, located approximately two-thirds of the way from Hawaii to the Northern Mariana Islands. The US annexed Wake Island in 1899 in order to create a cable station; an air and naval base was constructed there in 1940-41, and the island was captured by the Japanese early in WWII. After the war, Wake was developed as a stopover and refueling site for military and commercial aircraft transiting the Pacific, with the island's airstrip being used since 1974 by US military and commercial cargo planes, as well as for emergency landings. Seabirds there have suffered through the years, especially as a result of the presence of feral cats.

A collaboration between the Department of Defense, The Endangered Species Recovery Council, Wildlife Management International of New Zealand, and Marine Endeavors was initiated in mid-2003. As a result cooperators began a concerted effort to remove feral cats that have been causing significant damage to indigenous bird populations on the atoll. By the start of this year, about 170 cats had been removed from the three islets comprising the atoll. Searches in July and August failed to find any signs of cats; however, it will require several years without sightings to confirm that no cats remain.

With the removal of feral cats, Pacific Rats have increased. Rodenticide has been placed in populated areas, but current rodent control effort has been less effective than originally hoped for. Local Hermit Crabs often reach the bait before the rats, but fortunately the bait is not toxic to them. Currently both the contractor and Air Force are investigating alternative rat eradication options.

The benefits to seabirds have been immediately evident. Booby populations were among the first to increase after cat control was initiated. Breeding pairs of Masked Boobies went from 3 in 1996 to 20 by 2004, while Brown Boobies increased from 73 pairs in 1996 to 162 in 2003. Wedge-tailed Shearwaters expanded to form at least three colonies. By August 2004, Gray-backed Terns, a species not recorded breeding on the atoll since the 1980s, were raising young in two new colonies. Some of these birds are thought to be immigrants from Johnston Atoll and French Frigate Shoals, Hawaii.

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MARbled MURRELET LISTING STATUS

The Marbled Murrelet is a bird that spends most of its life at sea, but flies as much as 50 miles inland to nest in old-growth conifers. In early September, the Interior Department announced that the Marbled Murrelet, a species with a declining population currently estimated at about 21,000 in Washington, Oregon, and California, should no longer be offered special protection since the species remains abundant in Canada and Alaska, where the population is estimated at 930,000. Originally listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1992, the murrelet will continue to be protected in the lower 48 states, but the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will be reviewing its status across its entire range - a process that could take up to a year. Depending on the findings, the Service could recommend that the Marbled Murrelet be removed from the list in the US, a process that would take another year.

In April, however, USFWS scientists had concluded that the birds in the lower-48 deserved continued protection as a distinct population. Furthermore, researchers calculate that the southern population of the species could be wiped out over the next several decades. (The USFWS estimated in 1997 that the decline of Marbled Murrelets was running between 4% and 7% per year in the Pacific Northwest.) The original report found that old-growth forest logging, predation, and oil spills are the key threats to this small, tree-nesting seabird's survival.

In the meantime, Canada's version of the Endangered Species Act, the Species at Risk Act (SARA) went into place this summer. The Canadians have indicated that they have no idea what effect the projected US efforts might have on the species.

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SAGE-GROUSE IN TUG OF WAR

We have reported on sage-grouse issues in this E-bulletin before (e.g., June, July). Even though the decline in Greater Sage-Grouse numbers has averaged about 2% per year since 1965, the USFWS is still trying to determine whether sufficient information exists to require listing the species throughout its range under the Endangered Species Act. Given the issue of the ESA and the Marbled Murrelet, it seems appropriate to review some of what has, and has not, recently been done in the way of sage-grouse conservation.

On the positive side, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently announced that \$2 million of Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) funds would be specifically targeted to help protect sage-grouse habitat in Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Washington. This year each of these four western states is receiving \$500,000 from the Farm Bill conservation program to protect and enhance sage-grouse habitat on GRP easement lands. The funds are intended to provide technical assistance and boost existing financial assistance to states and private landowner partnerships for efforts that will improve the viability of the sage-grouse. In early August, the USDA also announced that \$350,000 would be provided under a different Farm Bill conservation program-the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program [WHIP] - to protect habitat of sage-grouse at Parker Mountain, Utah. While most sage-grouse habitat is on publicly owned (BLM) lands, conservationists, such as those at the Wildlife Management Institute, have noted that, "the Farm Bill conservation programs, such as GRP and WHIP, for private lands are important because approximately 30 percent of the lands dominated by sagebrush cover (40 million acres) is privately owned."

On the other side of the ledger, despite important efforts to get private-landowner cooperation on the sage-grouse front, there are still some who insist upon blocking meaningful conservation efforts. An organization called Partnership for the West (PFTW), recently sent a letter to western governors asking them to encourage the federal government not to list the Greater Sage-Grouse under the Endangered Species Act. PFTW also runs the so-called "Sage Grouse Conservation Task Force" whose coordinator, Jim Sims, is quoted as saying, "These fringe activists [conservationists who support the ESA] really want to use this law to take away private property, run farmers off their land, stop all natural resource development, raise energy prices, and turn back the clock on progress in the West."

One hopes that addressing the sage-grouse situation using the kind of incentives that the Farm Bill provides, will help the species before any ESA listing is necessary. Clearly, however, the PFTW rhetoric will not make things any easier.

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COFFEE/FOREST BUFFERS & BEES

One of the best things about bird-compatible shade-coffee is that the coffee farms support much of the same biological diversity present in natural forests. With epiphytes, insect life, leaf-litter, and other elements

characteristic of natural forest ecosystems in the tropics present, a complex intermingling of forest ecology features are effectively mimicked. It is easy to see why bird life is compatible with this level of biodiversity.

Indeed, shade coffee plantings have been proven to offer good buffers for natural forest - whether one views the buffer as a social one or a biological one! Socially, there is less commercial pressure on the forest; biologically the "transition" or "corridor" effect comes into play.

Recently, a study of insects and coffee in Costa Rica has shown that coffee plantings actually benefit from nearby natural forests, thereby "returning the favor" of acting as a buffer for the forest.

Because they pollinate crops near their hives, wild and feral bees are viewed as assets to farmers. Therefore, by conserving wooded habitats adjacent to farmlands there can be significant secondary advantages. Ecologists in the Costa Rican study discovered that forest-based pollinators within one kilometer of the forest increased coffee yields by 20%. Pollination near forests also reduced the frequency of "coffee peaberries" (i.e., small misshapen seeds) by 27%. These ecologists suggested that a square kilometer of tropical forest might be worth \$60,000 per year when next to a coffee farm, which is on par with the potential value of using the land for other purposes, such as cattle grazing.

An abstract of this Stanford University study is available [here](#).

You can also read about related past studies (2002) on "Africanized" bees and benefits to shade-coffee in Panama [here](#).

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SAVE INTERNATIONAL: GREAT SPOONBILL MIGRATION

For the last eight years, a creative project to save the Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) from extinction has involved a special trans-Pacific coalition of students, teachers, conservationists, and communities organized around SAVE (Spoonbill Action Volunteer Echo) International. In the US, the focus of activity is marshaled through the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning at the University of California at Berkeley. There, staff and students are forging links with their counterparts at the National Taiwan University and with local communities in Taiwan, allowing SAVE International the flexibility and reach

Taiwan University and with local communities in Taiwan, allowing SAVE International the flexibility and reach to send a message about preserving these beautiful wading birds. Additional recent collaboration has expanded to include bird-enthusiasts and conservationists in other countries, including Korea.

Most of the world's population of Black-faced Spoonbills winters in fragile and threatened wetland habitat in southwestern Taiwan. In January of this year, a total of 1,186 Black-faced Spoonbills were counted at about 40 sites in a number of Asian countries as a result of the International Black-faced Spoonbill Census held in January. This is only the second time the number of spoonbills has exceed 1,000.

On 14 October, SAVE International will hold its annual "Great Spoonbill Migration" at the UC campus at Berkeley. For the eighth year in a row, undergraduate students in Environmental Design will display their artful and educational visions spoonbills. Visitors can see some amazing student art, and celebrate a way to save a magnificent species. SAVE International deserves the support of bird devotees everywhere. For details on how you can help, [click here](#).

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WILDLIFE REFUGES CLOBBERED

According to the USFWS, the quartet of hurricanes hitting the US over the past few months has caused extensive damage to National Wildlife Refuges throughout Florida, Georgia, Alabama and the Carolinas, resulting in millions of dollars worth of damage to both their facilities and their habitats.

These natural disasters have caused approximately \$70 million worth of damage to the National Wildlife Refuge System, which represents practically 18% of the Refuge System's overall annual operations and maintenance budget. To help with the costs, Congress has planned to take up an emergency supplemental appropriations bill. However, the Administration's funding request for refuges is far below the cost that is required to repair the extensive damage (providing only about a fifth of what is needed).

Some well-known bird locales are among the severely damaged refuges. For example, at Hobe Sound NWR, one of the few remaining areas in southeastern Florida where Least Terns still nest on the beach, the habitat has been severely damaged and the visitor's center destroyed. Similarly, at Ding Darling NWR, an extremely popular location for crowds of birding visitors, parts of the refuge are unrecognizable after the scourging from Hurricane Charley, while at Pelican Island, America's first refuge, established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, severe erosion has critically shrunken the extent of the roosting area used by long-legged waders at this historic site.

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NWRA/NFWF REFUGE AWARDS

Since we are on a refuge theme, the annual National Wildlife Refuge System Awards are looking for nominations. These awards, sponsored by the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), honor outstanding accomplishments by refuge managers, refuge system employees, volunteers, and friends groups. Award recipients receive a commemorative plaque and a monetary award (\$1000 for Refuge Manager, Employee, and Volunteer awards and \$2000 for the Friends Group), along with paid travel expenses to the award presentation ceremony to take place early next year. Nominations are due no later than 15 November 2004. To find out more about the awards program and guidelines, [click here](#).

Please feel free to make this information available to any birding or other interested individual, group, or agency whom you think might be interested in submitting a nomination.

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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:

*Wayne Petersen 781/293-9730, wayne.petersen@swarovskibirding.com
OR Paul Baicich 410/992-9736, paul.baicich@swarovskibirding.com*

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