

From: Paul Baicich & Wayne Petersen paul.baicich@verizon.net
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To: jpatterson@refugeassociation.org

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THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

June 2016



The **Birding Community E-bulletin** is 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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<http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

RARITY FOCUS

To qualify as one of our rarities of the month, a species should be a real rarity anywhere in the continental United States and Canada and be an individual bird that can be seen by birders over multiple days. This month's focus is on a species that, indeed, is rare anywhere in the U.S. and Canada and was present at least for a weekend where regional birdwatchers could make an attempt to see it. Most importantly, perhaps, it was not a species discovered at the periphery of North America in a locality such as Florida, Alaska, Maritime Canada, or Texas. It was found in the heart of the continent!

On Saturday, 21 May, Charles Sontag and Mark Hodgson reported a White-winged Tern at the Manitowoc harbor impoundments in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, on the shores of Lake Michigan north of Sheboygan.

While White-winged Terns are very rare in spring or fall on the Atlantic coast (indeed, there was a one-day-wonder on 8 May at Provincetown, Massachusetts), extraordinary in the West (in Alaska and a couple of times in California), they are truly exceptional in the interior of the continent during spring and summer anywhere from the Great Lakes to Manitoba. Interior records (e.g., Indiana, Ontario, and Manitoba) are particularly enigmatic, too. What is the origin of these Eurasian vagrants?

Curiously, the Manitowoc tern is the second record for the state, the first going back to 1873.

Unfortunately, the Manitowoc bird only stayed for a weekend, , but a number of birders within driving distance were nonetheless able to catch up to this mid-continent super-rarity.

See here for a short report and photos by Jim Edlhuber:

<http://www.windowtowildlife.com/white-winged-tern-manitowoc-impoundment-manitowoc-wisconsin-may-21-2016/>

NEW STATE OF THE BIRDS: NORTH AMERICA

The 2006 NABCI (North American Bird Conservation Initiative) annual report, the *State of North America's Birds 2016* was released in mid-May. Canadian Minister of the Environment, Catherine McKenna, released the report at the Canadian Museum of Nature, followed by remarks from USFWS director Dan Ashe and Yolanda Alaniz Pasini, who was representing the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico.

This report is based on the first-ever conservation vulnerability assessment for all 1,154 native bird species that occur in Canada, the continental United States, and Mexico. Additional parts of the report include: conservation concern levels for none North American habitat types, conservation status descriptions and success stories for seven habitat types, year-round abundance maps and animations for selected key species, and additional resources for conservation and change.

You can find more on the report here:

www.stateofthebirds.org

And download the entire report here:

<http://www.stateofthebirds.org/2016/state-of-the-birds-2016-pdf-download/>

BOOK NOTES: WOODPECKERS

We are happy to review another "Peterson Reference Guide" from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and it's another good one. The title is *Woodpeckers of North America* by Stephen A. Shunk. This handsome reference covers 23 native woodpecker species and is enhanced by over 250 fine photos.

The book opens with a highly informative Introduction, which covers such essential topics as the anatomy and adaptations of woodpeckers, from their unique tongues to their extraordinary tails; woodpecker behavior and ecology; and a thoughtful discussion of woodpecker conservation and management issues. Indeed, Shunk has a particular sensitivity to the threats facing this family of birds.

The expected species accounts are very thorough, more so in fact than in many of the

other "family" books in this series, and also quite readable. You may want to start by sampling accounts for particularly interesting and unique species, particularly species such as Lewis's Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, or Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

You will not be disappointed.

IBA NEWS: KACHEMAK BAY WHSRN SITE EXPANDED

The Kachemak Bay and surrounding areas in south-central Alaska are designated Important Bird Areas (IBAs) of global significance. In fact, the IBAs overlap with the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) sites because of the area's importance for shorebirds. Last month, the WHSRN Hemispheric Council unanimously approved a request to expand the boundaries of the Kachemak Bay WHSRN Site by approximately 231,000 acres, and maintain its category status as a site of "International Importance."

The four original WHSRN areas, designated over 20 years ago in 1995, have annually supported more than 100,000 migrating shorebirds. Today, the expanded site also includes Beluga Slough, with properties owned by City of Homer and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the entire Kachemak Bay Critical Habitat Area (CHA), and Sixty-Foot Rock, an island also managed by the USFWS. All of these properties within the WHSRN site are also protected by federal, state, or local governments.

Last month, during the annual Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival, partners celebrated the WHSRN site's expansion, especially in the context of the recent 20th anniversary milestone. For George Matz, champion of this expansion effort for many years, "It is an expression of values and says a lot about Homer's support for shorebird conservation. In fact, at certain times of the year, there are more shorebirds in the City of Homer than there are people!"

For more on this recent WHSRN expansion, see here:

<http://www.whsrn.org/alertsupdates/update/20160513>

For information on the Kachemak Bay IBA and related Homer Spit IBA, see here, respectively:

<http://netapp.audubon.org/iba/Site/4419>

and

<http://netapp.audubon.org/iba/Site/1089>

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

www.audubon.org/bird/iba/

VIEQUES NWR DODGES THE BULLET

According to revised congressional language introduced in mid-May, this controversial land transfer threatening the status of Vieques National Wildlife Refuge in Puerto Rico

is no longer part of a legislative relief package for heavily indebted Puerto Rico. The Obama administration also came out strongly against the transfer, saying it would have set an "unacceptable" precedent of transferring protected federal lands.

We wrote about these efforts in last month's IBA coverage in the Birding Community E-bulletin:

http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Birding-Community-E-bulletin---May-2016.html?soid=1106822336233&aid=jtgXTXfE_ml

For a more complete report on the refuge victory, see the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) summary:

<http://refugeassociation.org/2016/05/vieques-land-transfer-removed-from-debt-deal/>

ACCESS MATTERS: HANDLING A RARE FEEDER-VISITOR

We've mentioned rare birds at feeders and in backyards before, but here is an interesting experience from last month in Massachusetts.

Golden-crowned Sparrow is a rare bird in the East, and there are only about a dozen records for Massachusetts. When a Golden-crowned Sparrow appeared on 1 May at a Hingham, Massachusetts, backyard feeder, not surprisingly there was great interest. The homeowner was first reluctant to let the news out because of concerns about crowds of birders visiting the neighborhood. Fortunately, local birder Sean Williams was able to negotiate access to the area with the homeowners and their neighbors on the street. Sean and others posted on the local birding listserv that birders interested in seeing the sparrow could sign up through an online Google doc. Every birder who signed up on the Google doc was then sent directions and a list of expectations that they had to follow if they intended to visit the neighborhood.

Ultimately, everyone stayed on the sidewalk, no one shouted, and people parked in appropriate areas. Birders were also given the option to make a voluntary donation to The Trustees of the Reservation (TTOR), an organization which manages and cares for more than 100 special places across Massachusetts. This optional donation provided an outlet for birders to express their appreciation, and the neighborhood was thrilled that the benefits of granting access to birders extended beyond birders making an addition to their state and/or life lists.

The hosts were ultimately delighted with the novelty of the event, and the neighbors got as big of a kick out of seeing a bunch of obsessed birders as the birders got out of seeing the rarity. No fewer than 100-150 people were able to see the sparrow during its stay in Hingham until 6 May.

Kudos to Sean and his helpers for their willingness to negotiate with the homeowners and outline the standards for visitation. They took it upon themselves to clarify how and when the site was available for birding visitors. Because this approach works so well, local bird clubs and state organizations should really consider of the possibility of creating "access committees" for these very occasions. Such situations in the future won't always be fortunate enough to have a Sean Williams to expedite and negotiate such potentially delicate situations as transpired in Massachusetts.

SAGE-GROUSE DEFENSE

Last month we let you know about the continuing debate concerning the spurious conflict between sage-grouse conservation and national security:

http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Birding-Community-E-bulletin---May-2016.html?soid=1106822336233&aid=jtgXTXfE_ml

The unfortunate trend continues, with the 18 May U.S. House of Representatives' passage of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Contained in this 'must-pass' legislation that funds America's military readiness was language that would force the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to abandon successful sage-grouse conservation plans. If this House bill becomes law, it will undermine decades of statutory precedent, a set of environmental laws and the subsequent legal decisions supported by those laws. It will also scuttle the combination of strong existing conservation plans on federal public lands and state conservation plans and voluntary efforts on the part of private landowners.

The nightmare, now relying on action from the Senate, is summarized by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership:

<http://www.trcp.org/media/press-release/house-passes-dangerous-sage-grouse-rider-in-defense-bill#.V1eHjl-cGP8>

and by conservation columnist, Bob Marshall:

<http://www.fieldandstream.com/blogs/the-conservationist/sage-grouse-clean-water-act-under-attack-by-house%E2%80%94again>

OUR ATLANTIC PUFFINS STILL IN TROUBLE

In the July 2013 Birding Community E-bulletin, we drew attention to problems plaguing Atlantic Puffins in U.S. and nearby Canadian waters:

<http://refugeassociation.org/?p=7787/#problems>

In the Gulf of Maine, puffins have been losing body weight and dying of starvation, possibly as a result of shifting fish populations caused by an increase in ocean temperature. Last summer, the survival rates of fledglings on Maine's two largest puffin colonies plunged, and currently puffins are in declining health at the largest puffin colony in the Gulf of Maine.

Shifting fish populations can impact the diet of puffins and the productivity of these and other local seabirds. In this region, a shortage of herring is perceived to be at the center of the problem. Even though Atlantic Puffins are continuing to produce chicks, often these chicks are small and weigh less than they should.

In late April, a new scientific paper on the subject by Stephen Kress, Paula Shannon, and Christopher O'Neal was published. It concludes that a puffin chick's diet determines not only its chance of successfully fledging from its nest, but also its chances of long-term survival at sea. This was one of the key conclusions that points to the connection between commercial fisheries and climate change and how they

to the connection between commercial fisheries and climate changes and how they affect the diet of puffin chicks.

You can find the article here:

<http://facetsjournal.com/article/facets-2015-0009/>

TIP OF THE MONTH: SHARE THE BEACH

In the past, we have mentioned threats to birds on coastal beaches, but late last month our colleagues at the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) released a set of conservation suggestions for all of us to follow. With the onset of summer, millions of Americans head to beaches to enjoy the sun and water. Many birds, however, have already staked out their own shoreline claims, choosing nesting sites on the sand and raising young along the shore, in the dunes, and in nearby marshy areas. ABC is encouraging beachgoers to be mindful of birds that share these vacation spots and to try and help coastal birds this summer.

ABC's recommendations include watching where you step on the beach (i.e., look for eggs and chicks), pay attention to signs, teach children to play responsibly and avoid nesting areas, don't feed gulls, keep your dog on a leash or at home, be aware of the behavioral cues from beach nesting birds, and stay close to the water (most nesting birds tend to use higher parts of the beach).

Here are some notable beach-nesting bird problems for three regions of the United States:

The Pacific Coast

Western beaches host populations of the federally Threatened "Western" Snowy Plover, Endangered "California" Least Tern, and Black Oystercatcher (which is more frequently found on rocky rather than sandy beaches).

The Gulf Coast

Least Terns and Black Skimmers nest in colonies. Wilson's and Snowy Plovers maintain single-pair territories, but can also be found within Least Tern colonies. American Oystercatchers tend to be more spread out and favor both beach habitat and islands covered with oyster shells.

The Atlantic Coast

Federally Threatened Piping Plovers can be found on Atlantic Coast beaches extending from North Carolina to Maine, especially concentrated along the northeastern coast. Other species you might encounter include the Least Tern, Black Skimmer, American Oystercatcher, and Wilson's Plover.

Don't forget there are also problems on Great Lakes beaches, too.

For more information about these suggestions, check this link:

<https://abcbirds.org/article/help-coastal-birds-this-summer/>

SALTMARSH SPARROW DECLINE

Since we have mentioned the Atlantic coast and nearby marshes behind the beaches,

it may be good to consider the plight of the Saltmarsh Sparrow.

Last month, researchers from a number of universities in the Northeast including universities in Maine, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Delaware, and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry released concerns over the ongoing decline of Saltmarsh Sparrows in the region.

While the birds still number in the tens of thousands, Brian Olsen, from the University of Maine, said their population has dropped about 9 percent annually since 1998. Olsen pointed to coastal construction of structures such as roads and railways as obstacles restricting the flow of the tides to salt marshes that interfere with the crucial habitat. Sea-level rise has also threatened the species.

"We're watching a species in incredibly rapid decline," Olsen said. "The Saltmarsh Sparrow is especially sensitive to changes in the tidal marsh."

The situation is reviewed in an Associated Press (AP) story found here:
<http://www.chron.com/news/science/article/East-Coast-s-saltmarsh-sparrow-disappearing-7909908.php#photo-10118646>

McCOWN'S LONGSPUR IN CANADA

Last month, we mentioned that listing the Sprague's Pipit under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (as Threatened or Endangered) had been determined to be "not warranted," so that this grassland specialty was accordingly removed from the "candidate list":

http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Birding-Community-E-bulletin---May-2016.html?soid=1106822336233&aid=jtgXTXfE_ml

Now we have news of another grassland species in trouble in a report from Canada. At its spring meeting at Kelowna, BC, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) reassessed the conservation status of McCown's Longspur. In Canada, the longspur is restricted to dry shortgrass habitat in southern Saskatchewan and Alberta. McCown's Longspur was assessed as a species of Special Concern in 2006, and its numbers continue to decrease. The Canadian population has declined by an estimated 98% since 1970. COSEWIC reassessed this species as Threatened. Visit the COSEWIC website to learn more about recent status assessments of Canada's wildlife:

http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct5/index_e.cfm

RARE BRAZILLIAN SPECIES REDISCOVERED

In an astounding story for Brazilian conservation, a group of researchers announced last month the rediscovery of the Blue-eyed Ground-dove. Last documented in 1941, this species was actually believed to be extinct. Now the species has been found at secret locations in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. Researchers, however, can only confirm sightings of a dozen individual birds. Securing appropriate habitat will be the key to conserving this elusive bird. You can read more about this rediscovery here:

key to conserving the species and you can read more about this recovery here:
<http://tinyurl.com/BirdlifeGroundDove>

JED BURTT: RIP

Internationally recognized ornithologist, much-respected teacher, and 37-year faculty member at Ohio Wesleyan University, Edward H. "Jed" Burtt Jr., passed away at his home in late April.

Throughout his career, Jed Burtt delivered hundreds of presentations at national and international scientific meetings, often in collaboration with undergraduate students. He wrote seven books and many research papers, often co-authored with his students. He was a world-renowned ornithologist whose research into the microbiology of feathers led to his discovery of feather-degrading bacteria on wild birds, and new insights into the evolution of avian color and feather-maintenance behavior.

He served as the president of the Association of Field Ornithologists from 1991 to 1993, the president of the Wilson Ornithological Society from 1997 to 2000, and the president of the American Ornithologists' Union from 2008 to 2010.

His dedication to teaching, perhaps, best defining his career. According to Jed Burtt, "Awakening a passion in a young person and helping each student fulfill a newly formulated dream, is the essence of teaching. There is no higher calling, no greater purpose in life."

You can access a thoughtful obituary from Ohio Wesleyan University here:
<https://www.owu.edu/files/resources/burttobituary.pdf>

CORRECTION

The departure date for last month's rarity, the Cuban Vireo, was a typo/error. The last day the bird was seen was 24 April.



ARCHIVES AND MORE

You can access all the past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website:
<http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

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Also, if you have any friends or co-workers who want to get onto the monthly E-bulletin mailing list, they can also simply contact either:

Wayne R. Petersen
Director, Massachusetts Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program
Mass Audubon
781/259-2178
wpetersen@massaudubon.org

or

Paul J. Baicich
Great Birding Projects
410/992-9736
paul.baicich@verizon.net

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