



The Philadelphia *Larus-on-Line*

Chestnut-sided Warbler ~ Photo © N. Murphy

DIGITAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

From the President by Chris Walters

Is it true? Is summer upon us? At this season, some of us think about atlas blocs and bloc-busting in Pennsylvania; or preparing for shorebird migration which is the longest-running of our annual migrations. Although there are no formal meetings in the summer, there are still plenty Club activities in which you can participate. Join our field trips on July 15 and August 29 along the Delaware Bayshore for great opportunities to watch and learn to identify shorebirds. Or come out and brag about your summer bird adventures at the DVOC picnic on July 29 and at the informal Club meetings. See www.dvoc.org for details on the picnic, field trips and informal meetings.

May I change the subject a bit? I want to encourage DVOCers to reflect on the great opportunity you and I have to pass our love of birding along to kids and teenagers. By doing this we build the core birders of tomorrow and spread environmental awareness as well. Many of our own best field birders got started young; all the rest of us just WISH we started young. Notice how Frank Gill answered one of his "20 questions" in our last *Larus*: "The greatest contribution to birds that ornithological societies can make is to encourage, mentor, and connect young birders/ornithologists. Take them birding, connect them to ornithologists." Amen.

We are justifiably proud that the Club, under Paul Guris' leadership, has established its NewBirders (NB4NB) program, and that the kids from Rancocas Nature Center are now using the new
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DVOC Banquet – November 16 at 7:30 p.m.

Fifty years ago, foreign travel meant a trip to the Everglades. Now there is hardly a corner of the planet not visited regularly by birders. Thirty years ago, close focus binoculars meant under 25 feet. Today, it means shoe-tops. What were the pivotal decisions, products, people, and events that transformed a quaint, closet avocation in North America's fastest growing and second largest outdoor activity? Pete Dunne, Director of New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory and our speaker for the November 16 DVOC banquet, offers his list of "25 Things that Changed Birding".

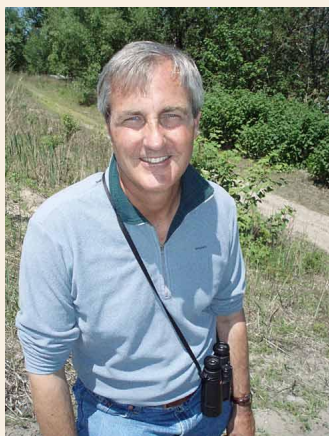
More information will follow relative to location, entrée choices, etc. In the meantime.... please, mark your calendars now. You're going to want to be there!

In This Issue—

- 20 Questions & then some with Pete Dunne
- Tips for separating Sedge and Marsh Wrens by Adrian Binns
- The next installment of our now regularly occurring column, "Beginner's Corner" by Frank Windfelder
- An article on birding
- Thompson Island by Andy Ednie
- A pictorial overview of S.W. Florida by Adrian Binns
- Articles on Spring birding in Texas by Connie Goldman and Martin Selzer
- A WSB report
- ...and much more

Thanks to those who have contributed articles for this issue and to the rest of the *Larus* committee. Now is the time to get out there and do some shore birding. Hope to see you in the field.

20 Questions and Then Some with Pete Dunne



Pete Dunne

1. You became a member of the DVOC in 1979. What were the deciding factors in your joining?

I joined DVOC for all the usual reasons people join organizations--shared interest, sense of identity, social structure, and information sharing/gathering. But there were two not so tangential elements that were determining. The first had to do with my job. DVOC has always had a strong presence in Cape May. By and by it was brought to my attention that my not being a member was being interpreted as standoffish by some. Heck, I wasn't standoffish. I was two hours away! (Remember, no Rt. 55 yet.) But I didn't want to send the wrong message or give New Jersey Audubon a black eye so I joined even though I knew, and felt bad, that I would rarely attend club meetings.

Having said this, in the seventies, there was one undermining concern that gave me misgivings relating to DVOC membership. This had to do with the club's policy of excluding female birders. But a number of younger (and older) club members were determined to change the membership rules and I hoped, as a voting member, to be part of that change. Old history now. Pertinent only in relation to your question.

2. When and where did you first get interested in birding?

I started birding when I was seven. I had my dad's old Zeiss 6x24 binoculars (read the forward in my new book to get the story). I had a hip pocket sized bird book. I had several hundred acres of woodland behind my parents' house in rural Morris County New Jersey that I could roam at will. Parents granting this kind of liberty today would be arrested and I would be placed in foster care but in the late 50's and 60's kids had the latitude to be kids--to discover and explore. Have you read LAST CHILD IN THE WOODS? Every parent should.

Anyway, to make a long story short, I discovered that birding was a great way to get away from adults (and it still is). At school, people told me what to do. If I stayed home somebody would find something for me to do. But when I ran out the back door with binoculars the world was mine. And a very exciting world it was and is.

3. Who were your birding mentors?

Mentors? By proxy, Roger Tory Peterson and Roger Barton. RTP, as head of the education at National Audubon, developed a series of Junior Audubon leaflets and other educational material relating to birds. As a kid, I was an avid subscriber. Roger Barton had a column on birds and bird watching in the old Newark Evening News. Every Sunday I'd read it--proof positive that there were other people on the planet who watched birds.

I didn't meet another birder until I was 23. I didn't meet Floyd Wolfarth, my mentor, until I was 24. I've always wondered how much better a birder I'd be today if I'd met someone like Floyd when I was in my early teens. By the time I did discover the birding community, I also discovered that I had a lot of catching up to do.

4. We know you as an author, lecturer and as a tour leader, but one forgets that you have a regular job. What is that job and what does it involve?

I can assure you that I never forget that I have a real job. It must be great to be Kenn Kaufman or David Sibley. Kidding of course. I know for a fact that both these guys fill more than the hours in a day doing what I do (i.e. serving a constituency) but without organizational support or structure.

My job? It has morphed over thirty years. In the early days I was trying to create a Cape May Bird Observatory. Now I spend most of my time trying to catch up to it. But the way I define my job is facilitating the efforts of staff and serving as a link between our 4,200 members and

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Topic III: Credibility

by Frank Windfelder

This is a difficult subject to talk about, but an important one. You want your peers to take you seriously when you report a bird. Reputations are built, good and bad.

The vast majority of birders are honest, but let me start by giving some negative example: Gulls, especially immature ones, are notoriously hard to identify. However, the same people always seem to find and identify these birds anyway, in bad light, and always when no one else is around. A birder might possibly report a large state list, but never be seen by others at the site of a rarity. Then there are the "one-ups-man-ship" experts. If you spot two Mourning Warblers, they have had three. You can't top them. I could cite many other examples, but you get the idea.

You can get away with being less than honest once or twice, but when a pattern develops, word spreads quickly and your credibility is gone. I guess the idea is to impress others. It is ironic that just the opposite happens.

Another aspect of credibility is how you count birds. I know some otherwise really good birders who always seem to report excessively high numbers. Just because you saw and heard 5 American Redstarts, don't try to extrapolate that there must have been many more around. Only report the number that you actually observed. Be conservative.

Be especially careful when reporting heard birds. Erica Brendel, Chris Walters, and I actually witnessed a Yellow-breasted Chat repeatedly doing a perfect imitation of a Northern Bobwhite. This was New Jersey World Series weekend, and any team hearing this would have had the wrong species penciled in.

If you see an unusual bird, always make sure you can eliminate commoner ones. Examine every detail of the bird while it is in view. After the bird is gone, someone will ask, "What color were the under-tail coverts?" On Tennessee Warblers, they are usually contrastingly whitish, but on the much rarer Orange-crowned Warbler, they are as yellow as the rest of the under-parts. Pay attention to the distribution of birds. Be hesitant in reporting a bird that is "out of season", unless you are really convinced.

No one will doubt a Broad-winged Hawk report in September, but if you find one in winter, be prepared to defend your position. Did you take notes? Was anyone else with you? Do you have a photo? If you're not sure about a

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20 Questions and Then Some ...continued

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the organization's mission. I also make the coffee in the morning.

5. You have a degree in political science. Do you find that it helps you in your chosen career?

Yep, it helps me steer clear of politics.

6. What are the major changes you've seen in NJ Audubon since you've worked for them?

When I started working for New Jersey Audubon in 1976 it was a birding organization with a strong conservation component. Now it's a conservation organization with a strong birding component.

7. You have done so much for conservation. What gave you the inspiration to start the World Series of Birding (WSB) in 1984?

Ego. How's that for candor? Back in 1983, as part of New Jersey Audubon's bird-a-thon effort Pete Bacinski, Bill Boyle, David Sibley and I tried to break the "200 (species) Barrier" and came up a couple or three birds short. Peering deep into the suds at the C-View Inn it occurred to me that maybe what we needed to get us over the top was a little competition. So there you have it. The inspiration for the World Series of Birding was failure.

8. Can you give us a little history on the WSB and some insight into how much it has grown over the years?

Damn, Adrian. Some day I'm going to write a whole book on this subject. The simple fact was that the WSB was the right idea for the time. Back in the 80's birding was going through its adolescent growth spurt. Everyone was trying to run the fastest, jump the highest, get the biggest list. This jejune silliness is just the kind of stuff avocations do on their way to maturity. Someone was going to come up with this idea (before they matured) and all the catalytic lines crossed in time and space right where I was standing.

To be candid, there wasn't a great deal of enthusiasm for the event at first offering. I recall a rump meeting held in Frank Gill's office at the Academy of Natural Sciences (during a DVOC meeting) where I tried to generate support. I know Tom Gilmore was there. I believe Jim Meritt, Dave Cutler, too. Tom walked away from the meeting thinking the idea was dead in the water. I was more upbeat. Lack of enthusiasm didn't constitute denunciation, right?

In time the idea began to get legs. Roger Tory Peterson's endorsement was key. ABA, American Birds and Bird Watcher's Digest all threw their support behind the idea. DVOC's and Urner Club's participation anchored the event's flanks.

Success has a way of showing a thing's merit, and very apparently the World Series has enjoyed a great deal of success. It turned out that the members of the 13 teams that participated that first year all had a blast and most could hardly wait to do it again. They went off into the birding community like apostles spreading the word.

In 1985 we got a major break when a Wall Street Journal reporter followed our team and did a front page piece on the event. It gave the event national standing and we used this collateral as leverage to gain greater and broader participation and media coverage.

Did I say earlier that I didn't use my political science background? I lied.

Anyway, from there on the event just grew and it has grown way beyond me. A hundred teams in the hunt. Probably close to \$10,000,000 raised. Lots of good press. Lots of dirty laundry for birders to whisper about when hawks aren't flying and conversation relating the so and so's report of a [fill in the blank] has grown thin and the latest and greatest in optics has already been kicked around. It's part of birding's culture now. Let's see where it goes from here.

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BEGINNER'S CORNER

Topic III: Credibility.. cont'd

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sighting, you could report, "I had a possible Little Gull at Port Mahon." Other birders can check it out without being misled. You might be able to place a bird into a family, but not be able to narrow it down to a single species. You could report something like "Jaeger sp.", short for Jaeger species.

If your reports are consistently credible, you will build trust within the birding community. While birding at Palmyra on October 16th, 2005, I noticed that American Herring Gulls were pouring down-river in groups of over a hundred at a time. I later found out that Tom Bailey thought there were 4,000-5,000 passing through on that day. It's an incredibly high number, but believable, because Tom's integrity is beyond reproach. You learn who to believe and who not to believe.

In the same regard, Tom and I were talking to a less experienced birder one day, when I noticed that Tom totally bought that birder's report. Just as I had built up trust in Tom, he had built up trust in that other birder. You reap what you sow.

Let me tell you about a young birder and DVOC member by the name of Gabe Johnson. On the Internet, Gabe had reported a Least Flycatcher at Palmyra on October 16th, 2005. For my ongoing Palmyra Bird Census, I had totally discounted the report at the time, because Gabe was an unknown quantity to me, and the species is an early fall migrant. I was therefore surprised when I received an unsolicited email from him, amending his sighting to Empidonax sp.

Here was a young man who had already learned some of the principles I have stated in this article. He had asked himself, "Was I really sure of my original identification?" I was impressed. On November 6th, I saw 7 Ruddy Ducks on the Delaware River, the first of the year at Palmyra. A day or two later, I read Gabe's Internet report of the same birds, but he added that there were 4 females and 3 males. I had never bothered to parse out the sexes. He had gained my respect.

The Holy Grail: Right now, when looking at illustrations of chickadees, you might notice that the Black-capped variety has more white on the wings than the similar Carolina Chickadee. As you build your skill level, you will notice more and more things. Here is an excerpt from a post on the de-birds listserv by expert birder Colin Campbell:

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20 Questions and Then Some ...continued

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9. The WSB has been great tool for developing the youth teams. What steps might bird clubs best consider to increase youth birding?

Actually, Adrian, I think DVOC could teach the birding world a thing or two about encouraging youth teams. Congratulations and thanks for your fine efforts as regards young people, clubs and encouragement....

I think bird clubs should serve as a bridge between kids and the natural world. Programs and events can be the vehicle. It is, of course, essential that kids have the catalytic tools in their hands that make birding possible--binoculars and a field guide. I have a great deal of faith in Ma Nature's capacity to captivate. My formula is: give kids the tools and set up the opportunity. Trust Ma to take care of the rest.

10. As both a birder and a hunter, what do you think needs to happen between these two groups in order to further our common goal of habitat preservation?

I've never been guilty of thinking small (big ideas and small ones take up the same amount of space) but to truly preserve our natural heritage is going to require a national crusade that makes grass roots efforts the centerpiece of the movement. The key to establishing mutual understanding and coordinated effort is getting both camps into the same crucible and working together.

We're tribal beings. We're going to have to mingle the tribes. When we do, hunters will realize that the engineers of the "Wise Use Movement" have been blowing smoke about birders and their presumed "anti-hunting" agenda. Birders will come to understand that the bond that hunters have with the natural world is deep, emotionally binding and *natural*.

Trust established, alliance firm, we can set our realigned sights on protecting the habitat which is, literally and figuratively, our common ground--hunters providing much of the organizational and political networking; birders providing the numeric clout and public relations platform. The enemies of open space forcing us together. Environmental fusion! Like I said in a recent article in [Birding](#), we'll worry about working out the time-shares later. Right now, get the land.

11. If you could take anyone (past or present) on a birding trip, who would it be, where, and why?

I would take Al Wilson, JJ Audubon, Witmer Stone, and Ludlow Griscomb up to the Higbee Dike on the second day after a September cold front. Plant them next to Michael O'Brien and say: "OK guys. Now watch this."

12. Is there still one bird that eludes you, and if so what is it?

Funny you should ask. There's this little bird with a kind of olivaceous back and kind of whitish underparts that's always up at the very top of the tallest tree. I get to see this bird every spring and after 47 years I still don't know what it is.

13. In addition to the many articles you've written for various birding publications, you've authored and/or co-authored many books over the last twenty years. How did you get started with your writing?

It's genetic. All the Irish can write. But I started my first book at the age of 7. Title was: TURK. THE STORY OF A HAWK. I stopped writing when I realized that all I was doing was plagiarizing another book entitled: RUFOUS-RED-TAILED. I loved this book. Must have read it eight...twelve times. Incidentally, you know Laurie Goodrich? Hawk Mountain's education specialist. It turns out that book inspired her, too.

14. Was there any one of your books that stands out as being either the most fun or the toughest to write?

Most Fun? THE FEATHER QUEST. Had a blast. Toughest? PETE DUNNE'S ESSENTIAL FIELD GUIDE COMPANION. Four years manacled to a computer. What was I thinking?

15. Have there been any credible reports of *Small-headed Flycatcher* lately?

Why, just the other day, as I was leaving the C-View Inn, this Leprechaun wearing a full-length Zeiss Night Owl binocular, walking a lilac colored peccary, and whistling "Mac Arthur Park" through a nose pipe, tapped me on the calf and asked me how common Small-headed Flycatchers were south of the....

16. What was the motivation for writing your recently published book *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion: A Comprehensive Resource for Identifying North American Birds* on field identification?

See #6. Add near bottomless naiveté.

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20 Questions and Then Some ...continued

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17. You've worked for CMBO for many years and were involved in the hawk watch since inception. Can you give us a little background on the hawk watch along with some insight into the role you played in the early years?

Thirty years to be precise. As for background, the hawk watch was the cornerstone idea of Bill Clark, CMBO's founding director. Me? I was just the passionate, determined young hawk counter who believed right down to the core of his being that nothing was more important than finding and identifying the next Merlin...or Peregrine...or Bald Eagle.... Thirty years later, I don't think I could challenge this kid's conviction and win.

18. How has the Cape May birding scene changed in the years you've been there?

Thirty years ago, Cape May was a planet in the orbit of other social and cultural institutions (including DVOC and New Jersey Audubon). Now, it's its own Social and Cultural Nucleus and people want to be part of it. And please don't give me credit for this. After all, I live in Cumberland County.

19. You've become one of the most recognized people in North American birding. Do you now find it difficult to bird well known places like Higbee's Beach in peace?

Like most public figures I have a public side and a private side. When I bird Higbee Beach I have my game face on. I'm representing New Jersey Audubon. I'm there to be helpful and welcoming to people who come expressly to bird Cape May (whether or not they know or care who I am). It's not difficult. It's what I do when I'm in Cape May because.... like I said. I live (and bird) in Cumberland County. Ever wonder why?

You know, one of the things I admired most about Roger Peterson was his sense of obligation to the birding community. It wasn't ego (although Roger certainly wasn't blind to ambition or achievement). It wasn't vanity, or book sales or pretense. Roger knew that people admired him and needed him. He said "yes" to all those many requests because he understood and accepted his role too well to say "no."

I'm no Roger Peterson. The very plurality of birding personalities today underlines his singularity. But I certainly realize that I have worked most of my life to shape birding and bird study and bird conservation. If Woody Allen is right and 90% of life is just "showing up," the balance is "follow through."

20. What's your favorite local birding destination?

You want me to tell you my favorite birding spot? Didn't you read what I just wrote?

21. If offered a free trip anyplace you have not been, what destination would you pick and why?

Oz. I want the ruby slippers.

22. If offered a free trip anyplace you've already been, where would you choose to re-visit?

My parents' back yard in Whippany the spring I discovered migrating warblers.

23. So, after looking at and reviewing hundreds of binoculars, which one is really in your hands?

I'm using the Leica 7x42 Ultravid. They're light, facile, forgiving, rugged, elegant (all the other superlatives apply). I like easy and this glass makes finding, studying and enjoying birds easy.

24. The future of birding lies with our young birders. What advice would you give them?

Rule #1. Protect the playing field. No habitat, no birds.

25. What is your favorite bird? If there is reincarnation, what bird would you like to be in the afterlife?

I'm pretty partial to northern harriers. One gutsy, beautiful, enigmatic raptor (and unlike most raptors this one comes with a brain). Reincarnation? How about Common Raven. You got to love a bird that goes body surfing down peaked, snow covered roofs.

26. You were friends with Roger Tory Peterson late in his life. What can you tell us about him as a person?

I'd like to offer you and readers something that has not been said before--some special insight. I can't offer much except to say that under

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20 Questions and Then Some ...continued

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the mantle of birding's leader, Roger was very much a warm, approachable human being. Yes, he was driven (as many creative people are) but determination is not predestination. There were choices he had to make and he let his humanness show by seeking the council and advice from those in his inner circle (a place I was privileged to find myself in the last decade of Roger's life).

The phone would ring. A voice would intone: "Dr. Peterson would like a word with you." Then you'd wait to hear...

"Hello" [pause] "Pete?"

The "hello" was also softly spoken, somewhat tentative. "Pete" was spoken with assertiveness.

Then the questions:

"Bausch and Lomb wants to use my picture to promote their new Elite binocular. Do you think I should? Is it a good binocular?"

Or. "What's going on at ABA? What's happened to Jim Tucker? Is there anything I should do?"

Roger always wanted to do the right thing. Not for Roger. For birding. But in his openness for council, he showed his faith in friendship. This is a wonderful human quality. In fact, it might be the finest human quality.

28. The C-View used to be a classic destination for birders. What's your favorite Cape May bar now?

If you're buyin', Adrian, it's your choice and I'll swear partiality later.

29. How would you compare DVOC to other bird clubs you've visited?

Unique is a dangerous word. I use it cautiously and not without some trepidation. But I think DVOC is unique in my experience. The club draws its strength from a long, ornithological tradition but where some clubs with such standing have grown staid, DVOC continues to be vibrant, energetic, even feisty. The DVOC approach to bird study strikes a balance between knowledge and fun.

From this balance, as well as the talents and commitment of club members, DVOC enjoys a depth and strength that might even allow it to transcend the challenge facing most clubs and organizations today - finding relevance in an age where information is shared and social interactions consecrated on-line. I hope we succeed. One of these days I'd like to get up to a meeting or two. Just wouldn't be the same on-line.

Beginner's Corner: Topic III: Credibility... continued

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October 21st, 2005 - First impressions (sans binoculars)

1. Whoa, that's one spectacular chickadee!
2. It's got such an extensive brilliant white cheek, getting wider and going right back to the rear of the nape.
3. That cheek is so contrasty, sandwiched between with the shiny black cap and the black bib.
4. 4. Man, that is one bulky chick compared to the other chicks in my yard.

Second impressions (getting to grips with bins and increasing enthusiasm)

1. *Boy, it doesn't give much time for a prolonged look.*
2. *That bulky look is due not just to the bull-necked appearance, which might be due to the extensive white on the head, but to the whole body.*

3. *Those buffy flanks and under rear end are so neat. This is a colorful bird. The white secondary edges on the folded wing are so much more obvious than on Carolinas.*

4. *That grayish mantle (even in poor light) definitely shows a greenish tinge; let's call it olive (Carolinas show uniform gray).*

And finally: 1. Isn't that tail long compared with Carolinas? 2. That tail has obvious white edges; can't say I can see that on Carolinas. No, you don't necessarily need it to call. It's big and eye-catching. OK, there's hybrids, yadayada, but when you get one like this, you just know.

You could place a bet that Colin had seen a Black-capped Chickadee in Delaware. Study the common birds. When you see something rare, you will know the difference, and be able to explain why to others. And, most importantly, they will believe you!

Rebuttal: Frank, who are you kidding? I went to Colorado with you, and watched you shamelessly count two Chukars that had scurried behind a private home. When the owner came out and put them on a leash, you still had to be cajoled into taking them off your list. The smudge mark that remains is a constant reminder of your transgression!

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

Separating Sedge Wren (*C. platensis*) from Marsh Wren (*C. palustris*)

by Adrian Binns

Abundance: Sedge Wrens are less common than Marsh Wrens. Both are secretive and hard to see, yet easily heard during the breeding season. Geographically, they overlap east of the Rockies, with Sedge Wrens being rare east of the Appalachians.

Habitat: Marsh Wrens choose really wet places with cattails and tall reeds in standing water, whereas Sedge Wrens prefer slightly higher and drier spots, such as grassy edges of marshes with scattered bushes and damp tall grass meadows.

Song: The song of the Marsh Wren is a liquid chatter, whereas Sedge Wrens begin with several single notes followed by a weak chatter.

GISS: Sedge Wrens are overall stubby with a thicker neck, shorter bill, shorter tail and legs, and rounder body than Marsh Wrens. Marsh Wrens at 5" are slightly larger. Both cock their tails, with Sedge Wrens flicking theirs when agitated. Sedge Wrens tend to have the weakest flight of all the wrens.

Overall Coloration: Marsh Wrens, in particular the eastern race, have a relatively bright patterned plumage whereas Sedge Wrens are paler and duller

Bill and Face: Marsh Wrens have much **longer thin bills** (hence its old name "Long-billed Marsh Wren?") with a **striking bold white supercilium** whereas Sedge Wrens have shorter bills (Short-billed Marsh Wrens) and a rather plain face, as the supercilium is duller in color.



Sedge Wren - John Blackmer/River Bend Nature Center ©

Crown: The top of the head / crown on Sedge Wrens is **finely streaked and plain brown**, whereas it is a **solid dark brown crown** in Marsh Wren, which enhances the white supercilium.

Back: Seen from above, Sedge Wrens have a more complex pattern, completely covered with streaks and bars, particularly in places where the Marsh Wren is brown. In the center of its back the Marsh Wren has a **triangular black patch with white longitudinal streaks**, offset by rich brown scapulars. On Sedge Wrens the **entire upper back is dark with fine, less prominent white streaks**.

Coverts: The wing coverts on Sedge Wrens have distinct

heavy dark bars on a brown background, showing a more contrasting (and duller) pattern than on Marsh Wrens. Marsh Wrens lack barring and show a **plain rich rufous color**.



Photo by Dan Tallman ©

Upper Tail: The lower rump on Sedge Wren is **barred black, a continuation of the tail with a buffy rump**, whereas on Marsh Wren the **upper tail and rump are a dark rufous color**. (Note: some western Marsh Wrens show barred upper tail coverts)

Under Tail: The undertail coverts on Sedge Wrens are typically unmarked and of buffy coloration, whereas on Marsh Wrens they are highly variable, from unmarked to heavily barred and whitish to pale brown. However, in general **Sedge Wrens tend to have warmer buff underparts**.

BIRDING HOTSPOTS

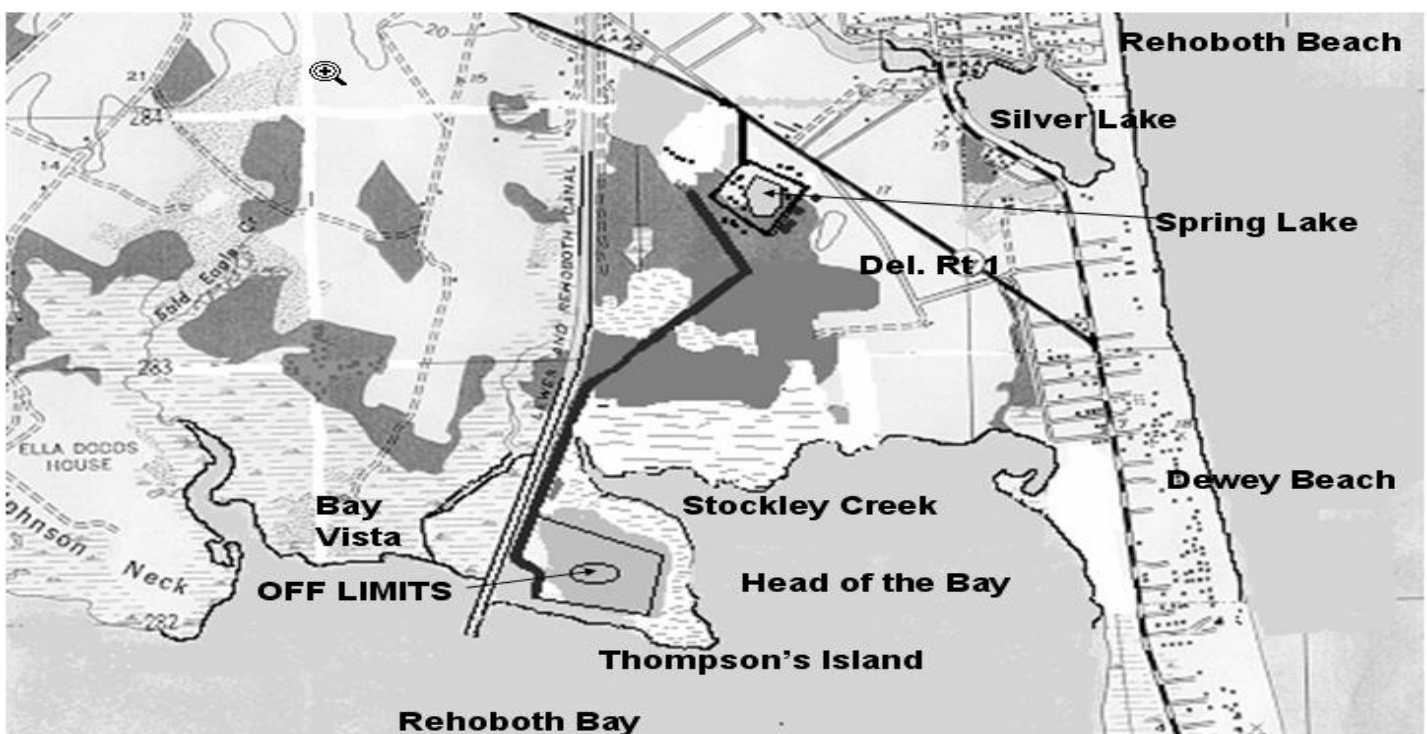
Birding Delaware's Prehistoric Past: Thompson's Island at Delaware Seashore State Park by Andrew P. Ednie

The first sign that a spring fallout had occurred were the three male Bay-breasted Warblers that greeted us at the head of the trail. The early morning sun hitting their throats made their creamy color glow in contrast to the new green in the leaves coming out. Walking into the woods behind Rehoboth Beach, I saw a thrush hopping across the path. Not your typical thrush ... this one had an olive green back. I motioned to my birding partner, Ralph Kelly, to hold fast. Ralph was a northern Delaware birder, about to get his first dose of birding coastal Delaware in the spring. First one, then two, then three, then the forest floor was alive with feeding thrushes. We quickly identified American Robin, Wood Thrush, Veery, Swainson's Thrush, and Gray-Checked Thrush. Walking to the edge of the woods, we were greeted by a pair of Eastern Bluebirds by the marsh. This was the first time I had bluebirds in Rehoboth and it brought us to six species of thrush in ten minutes. We might have had more, but Bicknell's Thrush wasn't a species then. We ended the walk with over 20 species of warblers. Not bad for about an hour of birding.

Located between Rehoboth and Dewey Beach, Thompson's Island is part of Delaware Seashore State Park. The island is a 68 acre peninsula jutting out into the north end of Rehoboth Bay. Stockley Creek, which runs into the Head of the Bay at Dewey, dissects the island from the mainland. Thompson's is not really an island except at storm tides when it is cut off from the mainland. The entire area is only about 120 acres. It is a difficult place to find; there are no parking lots. Access is by foot or boat. The trailhead is located in the Spring Lake condominiums off Delaware Rt. 1, just south of the Lewes-Rehoboth Canal. Turn west at the first light south of the bridge over the canal into the condos. Take the first left hand fork and drive back to the woods. Park by the culvert as the driveway starts to turn left and look for an opening into the woods that is the start of the trail. There is no parking here, there are no trail signs. The area remains undisturbed and wild.

Thompson's Island became known purely by accident. I was reading Carl Weslager's Delaware's Buried Past. At that time, Island Fields, the state prehistoric Native American museum, was still open at South Bower's Beach. This inspired me to look for more archeological sites in the state. Professor Weslager mentions an area of high ground behind Rehoboth Beach that was used as a camp site. The Indians (ancestors of the Nanticoke) spent time here to hunt, fish and gather oysters. The trick in finding their campsites is to look for the old fossilized piles of oyster shells. In fact, the Indians threw everything into these piles: trash, dogs, each other, etc. The area was excavated several times from 1960-1990. The remains date from the Woodlawn II period, from 3000 BC to 1600 AD. The natives buried their dead in communal graves, called an ossuary. In April 1983, I went back into the woods at Thompson's Island to look for these pits. What I found was a wonderful birding area, mixed old growth pines and oaks along the coast that has been undisturbed for years. Some of the biggest oaks in Delaware are on the trail to the island. I immediately heard a Yellow-throated Warbler, and lots of Yellow-Rumps, Pines, and Palms were seen. I knew I would be coming back here for the North American Migration Day count.

I heard Paul Lehman talk about looking for migration traps like islands, peninsulas, and oasis. Thompson's Island is all that. It is the last stand of mature forest left along the Delaware coast, only a half mile from the beach. The peninsula funnels migrants onto the island, where they are trapped by seven miles of inland bays and coast. Birds hitting the coast are attracted to the island as a place to rest, refuel, and seek shelter. The island provides nine different habitat zones from which to choose: wood edge, hardwood swamp, Carolina bay, Virginia Pine woods, brackish marsh, mature mixed hardwood/loblolly forest, salt marsh, pine plantation, and wild cherry orchard. The trick is picking
(Continued on page 9)



BIRDING HOTSPOTS

Birding Delaware's Prehistoric Past ... continued

(Continued from page 8)

where to spend your birding time in the zones that are the most productive at that time of year.

When you first enter the trail, the Spring Lake roadway runs past a mature woods edge that faces east into the morning sun. This is an excellent area for Neotropical migrants catching insects at first light. Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Eastern Wood Pewee, Blue-headed Vireo, Nashville Warbler and Rose-breasted Grosbeak are frequently found. The trail is 1.5 miles out to Thompson's Island, running through woods, marsh, and along the canal. As you enter into the woods, the first zone is swamp maples, good habitat for Hooded Warbler and Acadian Flycatcher. Associated with the Swamp Maple is a unique Delmarva feature, the Carolina Bay. Also called "whale wallows", these sinkhole depressions were once thought to be caused in the ancient sea floor by prehistoric whales. During wet springs, water collects here to provide habitat for Northern Waterthrush. Alongside the Carolina bay is a stand of Virginia Pines, giving the area that southern feeling found in "slower" Delaware. Scarlet and rarely Summer Tanagers are found among the pines. The forest floor is open, providing habitat for pluming Pink Lady Slippers. It is also a favorite area for thrushes, as previously described.

As you leave this area of forest, the first obstacle of the trail is a brackish marsh. A small creek runs through the marsh, entering the Rehoboth-Lewes Canal to the north just behind the Rehoboth Beach water treatment plant. At spring tides, several feet of water will back up into the marsh. A good pair of boots may be needed to wade through. Lately, a wooden pier has been anchored over the creek to allow access. The marsh has produced some outstanding finds, such as Sedge Wren and King Rail. In the fall, it is a favorite open area to watch Merlins zipping through, taking dragonflies or swallows. At the far edge of the marsh is a Division of Fish and Wildlife sign, announcing that you are entering Thompson's Island. This is the only clue that you are at the right place.

The woods after the marsh is one of the oldest, most mature woods in Delaware. The dominate species are White Oak and Loblolly Pine. Since Loblolly is the dominate wood for lumbering, it is surprising to see 100 year old trees still standing. As you walk down the trail, the forest canopy becomes dominated by a single White Oak. This tree is 80-100 feet tall, with a girth of 48—60 inches. It is easily 250 years old. Warblers can be found in abundance when this tree flowers in spring. Even at the canopy's great height, the orange of a Blackburnian Warbler's throat appears incandescent in the morning light. A cacophony of sound is produced from the singing Pine Warblers, Northern Parulas, and Red-eyed Vireos.

Further along, you begin to leave the woods at the edge of the Lewes-Rehoboth Canal. The salt marsh from Stockley Creek is to the east, while the Bay Vista marsh is across the canal. Seaside Sparrows sing from the cordgrass and Tricolored Herons can be seen feeding in the marsh. Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows can be found in the Bay Vista marsh and it is the last place that Henslow's Sparrow was reported in Delaware. Walking through the marsh, the trail is constructed from the dike along the canal. This opening provides a panorama, allowing birders to scan for perched Bald Eagles in the dead pines along the marsh edges.

Finally, after a half hour hike, you are actually on the island. The park requires that you stay on the path, not entering the center of the island. That is where the archeological deposits and grave sites are located. Due to the sensitive nature of the Native American religious philosophy, this area is off limits. The center of Thompson's Island was cultivated and used as pasture land until the end of the 19th century. A second growth woods is in the middle of the island which isn't very productive for birding. Immediately, the trail enters the edge of an old White Pine plantation. This area seems to attract Blackpoll and Worm-eating Warblers. The trail ends at the north end of Rehoboth Bay at the mouth of the canal. A pair of jetties guards the mouth, providing perches for Black Skimmer and American Oystercatcher. One of Delaware's best kept secrets is that hundreds of Horned Grebes stage for migration at the north end of Rehoboth Bay. Sometimes there are rafts of over a hundred birds sitting and feeding off the island. Every year in early March, an Eared Grebe is found here at the Head of the Bay. If you take the trail completely around the island, you'll pass by the bluffs over the bay, where erosion exposes the fossilized oyster shell piles. The woods are an old orchard now filled with chokecherry. These woods attract Blue Grosbeak and cuckoos drawn to the insects and tent caterpillars. The trail doubles back and meets at the pine plantation to head back to Spring Lake.

There are dangers when birding the island. Nobody birds Thompson's Island during the summer, unless they want to be at the mercy of the dreaded Greenhead Flies. "Fly season" starts in early June and can extend into September. Fall birding is excellent for passerines, but you have to stay on the trails. Chiggers in the autumn are prevalent, leaving several weeks of itchy welts on the skin. During the winter, hunters use the island for deer and waterfowl. Hunters desecrating the Native American burial site caused the state to close the island to all visitors from 1995-2000. Hunting has since been banned, creating an overpopulation of deer. Spring is tick season. The large herd of White-tailed Deer has created a huge population of the Black-legged or Deer tick, a vector for Lyme disease. Dog and Lone-star Ticks are also common, and are vectors for other pathogens. In 2003, I contracted ehrlichiosis after a tick bite received on Thompson's Island. Ten days later, high fevers started that persisted for two weeks. Luckily, quick treatment with Doxycycline prevented hospitalization.

Most birders visit Thompson's Island because Brown-headed Nuthatches are residents. Other residents such as Hairy Woodpecker and Belted Kingfisher, which are hard to find along the coast, can be found. The pond at Spring Lake produces interesting waterfowl; Canvasback, Redhead, and even Tufted Duck. Field birds like Horned Lark, Snow Bunting, and Water Pipit are the only species missing from the area. Two factors influence birding, seasons and weather. If the oaks are in bloom, watch for warblers. If the oaks are past, move to the later blooming cherry trees. Watch the weather, the best time is before a frontline, with a southwest wind followed by a raising warm front during the night. That will push migrants in and ground them. An east wind pushes migrants inland, killing birding on the island. Like Cape May's Higbee Beach, the island is a migration trap. Personally, I've recorded 205 species on the island, which I only get to visit a couple times a year. Included in that total are six species of vireo and 36 species of warbler. That is every species of commonly occurring warbler found in Delaware. Maybe, someday a Swainson's Warbler will be there. Hopefully, I'll be visiting too.

CONSERVATION

Conservation Corner by Debbie Beer, Conservation Committee Chair

Current Recipient of WSB Funds:

The DVOC Conservation Committee designated the Montgomery County Lands Trust (MCLT) to receive this year's fundraising proceeds of our annual World Series of Birding. We are pleased to present MCLT with \$3,500 to use in their efforts to expand a buffer zone around a Great Blue Heron Rookery in New Hanover Township. Thanks to everyone who donated to our WSB fundraising to support the Heron Rookery. (And it's never too late to send in donations!)

Last year, our WSB fundraising proceeds were donated to support Red Knots. A brief update about Red Knots is posted in the Conservation Corner of our website. The Conservation Corner features a running list of conservation issues that may be of interest to DVOC members. The previous posting (still viewable on-line) is about Wade Island and the competing populations of Great Egrets, Black-Crowned Night Herons and Double-Crested Cormorants.

Please contact me at debbeer@hotmail.com with any comments or suggestions for conservation issues, including ideas for next year's WSB conservation project. We're now looking for local projects to support in 2007.

The Uncertain Future of Red Knots

Each year, hundreds and thousands of shorebirds, including Red Knots, descend upon the Delaware Bay to gorge on horseshoe crab eggs. These shorebirds and others rely on the fat-rich eggs to fuel their Spring migration flight to their arctic breeding grounds. The Delaware Bay is one of the most important shorebird migration sites in the world, with some of the largest concentrations in North America. The bay also hosts the world's largest remaining spawning population of horseshoe crabs.

Unfortunately, if current trends continue, the Red Knot could go extinct by 2010, according to Joanna Wolaver of NJ Audubon Society, in an article dated April 2006. The over harvest of horseshoe crabs for eel and conch bait during the 1990's has reduced the number of horseshoe crab eggs to dangerously low levels. The reduction in eggs has resulted in huge declines in both shorebird population numbers and shorebird weight gain in recent years.

The Red Knots in the Delaware Bay area declined from over 100,000 in the 1980's to 15,000 in 2005, which is the most drastic decline noted among shorebirds globally. Based on these declines, leading scientists predict that the Red Knot *rufa* subspecies will be at or near extinction by 2010. Findings suggest that additional shorebirds such as Ruddy Turnstones and Semipalmated Sandpipers are facing similar declines, linked to the reduced number of horseshoe crab eggs available to sustain the birds during migration.

The good news is that the advocacy efforts of NJ Audubon Society and its coalition partners might be paying off. On May 15, 2006 the NJ Dept of Environmental Protection (DEP) implemented a two year moratorium on the harvest of horseshoe crabs. This action addresses the immediate threat to Red Knot populations and should allow the horseshoe crab populations to significantly recover.

In more good news, a 73-acre bit of sand, mud and rock has been purchased by the nonprofit Conservation Fund for permanent habitat protection. The Mispillion Harbor purchase, announced May 24, 2006, protects an important spawning area for horseshoe crabs and a critical stopover point for migrating Red Knots and other shorebirds. This area in coastal Delaware is considered to be one of the most significant shorebird migration stopovers in the world. Crab harvesting won't be permitted by the new owners, said Blaine T. Phillips Jr., Mid-Atlantic director of the Conservation Fund. The land is especially important as some estimates calculate that up to 80% of Red Knots in the area stop at Mispillion Harbor to feed and rest.

However, more encompassing regional provisions must be put in place to ensure the overall survival of the Red Knot. The Atlantic States Marines Fisheries commission failed to adopt the two year moratorium, opting for less restrictive measures, and a delay on their effective dates. NJ Audubon will continue to work with partners in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia to adopt more region-wide conservation strategies. In addition, it is critical to the species survival that the Red Knot *rufa* subspecies be listed and protected under the Endangered Species Act.



Red Knots—Photo copyright A&J Binns



Of Interest on the DVOC Web

Conservation Corner:

Interested in local conservation issues? Check out the relatively new running list of issues and articles provided by our Conservation Chair, Debbie Beer. Additional information is also provided relative conservation grants made by the Club in prior years.

www.dvoc.org/Conservation/Conservation.htm#Corner

Directions:

This webpage provides directions to such diverse places as the Club's meeting sites, pre-meeting dinner locations, the annual banquet as well as directions to field trip meeting places.

www.dvoc.org/Directions/Directions.htm#Chapter

Delaware valley birders on the web:

You'll find links to a number of websites that are maintained by DVOC-ers on this page. Some are geared mainly to photography, some to trip reports and photography and one, birdingonthe.net, is Jack Siler's excellent and longstanding site providing everything from links to listservs, info on birding tours, equipment, etc.

Check out the offerings and if you know of others that should be listed, send that info to Bert Filemyr, the DVOC webmaster.

www.dvoc.org/DelValBirding/DelValBirders.htm

Frank Windfelder's ID Bibliography:

Unless you spend time poking around on the DVOC website, you might have missed this gold mine of information. Frank Windfelder has compiled a database of bird ID articles. It includes info on the family, subfamily, the title of the article, the author, the publication, year, issue and page. Follow the link shown below and you'll see a list that was generated from the database. No more wondering where that series of articles on storm petrels appeared.

If you know of other articles that should be included, send that information to Frank at fwindfelder@yahoo.com.

www.dvoc.org/OrnithStudy/IDArticles1.htm

Do you have ideas and material that you believe would make a nice addition to the DVOC website? If so, contact Bert Filemyr at afilemyr@comcast.net

2005 ABA Area List by Adrian Binns

Names of DVOC members who reported the number of species they have in the ABA area are shown below. The ABA area for listing purposes includes the 49 continental United States, Canada, the French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon (along with adjacent waters to a distance of 200 miles from land or half the distance to a neighboring country, whichever is less). It does not include Hawaii, Bermuda or Greenland. The current leader, Macklin Smith, has 873 out of a possible 939.

DVOC Members:

790 John Danzenbaker
 770 Colin Campbell
 732 Ken Tischner
 732 Bradford Merritt
 725 Bernie Morris
 721 John Drummond
 709 Frank Windfelder
 706 William Murphy
 703 Bob Rufe
 689 Marvin Hyett
 669 Bert Filemyr
 666 Karl Lukens
 647 Al Guarente
 626 Tom Reeves
 606 Irene Goverts

Updates Needed?

Moved? Changed your name or your email address? Added a new phone to your communications arsenal? Please notify us so that we can keep the DVOC database up to date.

Send any corrections, additions or deletions to Naomi Murphy at: ndmurphy3@hotmail.com.

Or sent it via snail mail to:

234 Orlemann Avenue
 Oreland, PA 19075

DELAWARE VALLEY RARITY ROUNDUP**SPRING 2006 by Adrian Binns****PA**

YELLOW-BILLED LOON - Blue Marsh Lake, Berks Co, Apr 6 – 1st PA RECORD

LITTLE GULL - Tullytown, Bucks Co, Apr 8 – 3rd County Record

SWALLOW-TAILED KITE - Rose Tree Park Hawk Watch, Delaware Co, Apr 20

PAINTED BUNTING - Berks Co, Apr 21-23 – 3rd County Record

ANHINGA - Church Farm Pond, Exton, Chester Co, May 4

DE

RUFF - Bombay Hook, Kent Co, Apr 16

SEDGE WREN - 1000 Acre Marsh, New Castle Co, Apr 21-22

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE - Ashland Nature Center, New Castle Co, Apr 24

PINE SISKINS - nr. Ashland Nature Center, New Castle Co, thru May 12

WHITE-WINGED DOVE - Cape Henlopen SP, Sussex Co, May 12 thru May 19

RED-NECKED STINT - Port Mahon, May 21

RUFF - Woodland Beach, Kent Co, May 27

WESTERN GREBE - Battery Park, New Castle, New Castle Co, May 28-June 1 – Possible 4th

DE RECORD

NJ

7 BREWER'S BLACKBIRDS - West Supawana, Salem Co, thru Mar 28

LARK SPARROW - nr. Supawana Meadows NWR, Salem Co, Mar 28

2 LITTLE GULLS - Spruce Run Reservoir, Apr 3

LITTLE GULL - Round Valley Reservoir, Apr 12

WHITE-FACED IBIS - Tuckahoe WMA, Cape May Co, Apr 17-18

WILSON'S PLOVER - Norbury Landing Rd & Villas, Cape May County, Apr 19 thru May 1

SWALLOW-TAILED KITE - Beanery, Cape May Co, Apr 20

SWAINSON'S WARBLER - Higbee Beach, Cape May Co, Apr 27

2 WHITE-FACED IBIS - Beaver Swamp, Cape May Co, May 1 thru 6

WESTERN GREBE - Reeds Beach, Cape May Co, May 6-14

EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE - Stone Harbor, Cape May Co, May 8-18

2 CURLEW SANDPIPER - Heislerville impoundments, Cumberland Co, May 9-14

WHITE-WINGED DOVE - Cape May Point, Cape May Co, May 10-14

SEDGE WREN - Sandy Hook, Monmouth Co, May 16

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD - Cape May, Cape May Co, May 18

GRAY KINGBIRD - Cape May, Cape May Co, May 20-21

SWAINSON'S WARBLER - Cape May Point, Cape May Co, May 23

EARED GREBE - Round Valley, Hunterdon Co, May 26-31

**Benjamin Rush State Park
by Keith Russell**

One of the least known of Pennsylvania's state parks is Benjamin Rush State Park. This small, 275-acre park located along the Poquessing Creek in Northeastern Philadelphia,



has never become well known, in part, because it has not yet been fully developed by the state. As a result the park still has no formal facilities for visitors, no formal park programs, nor is there even adequate signage to direct people to the park's main entrance on Roosevelt Boulevard just north of Southampton Road. Despite the lack of amenities, the park still has much to offer, especially to those interested in birds.

Benjamin Rush was created in 1975 from land that was formerly used as a sod farm. Consequentially, much of the land is still in a state of early succession today. About one half of the area is currently covered with grassy and weedy fields that are bisected by large hedgerows, and several acres within the park are still being farmed by a group of community gardeners. But the park also includes a significant amount of deciduous forest, including a mature riparian strip along the Poquessing Creek.



The park now represents the single largest block of undeveloped land remaining along the Poquessing Creek, and as such it plays an important role in protecting the Poquessing Watershed and in providing open space

within the densely populated communities of far Northeastern Philadelphia and lower Bucks County. Regular usage of the park however, has been limited mainly to a few groups. In addition to the community gardeners, the park is also used regularly by a group that flies model airplanes, and by a group called The Friends of the Poquessing Watershed that has spearheaded a number of stewardship activities from trash removal to political advocacy. Unfortunately, usage of the park by birders has always been low, and there are currently only a few (including several DVOG members) that visit the park with any regularity.

Existing information from Benjamin Rush indicates that while the park attracts many standard woodland bird species, its uniqueness probably lies in its attractiveness to birds of field, edge, and riparian habitats. Bobolinks occur regularly during spring migration and species such as Savannah Sparrows, Brown Thrashers, Warbling

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Coastal Southwestern Florida – in Winter & Spring by Adrian Binns

The gulf coast of Florida has some exceptional, easily accessible, shorebird habitat that includes the excellent coastal beaches, tidal flats and lagoons of southwest Florida. Two of the best areas are Tigertail Beach and Little Estero Lagoon which are within an hour's drive of each other. Both locations hold numerous waders and are major wintering grounds for shorebirds. A visit in mid-March to late April is likely to produce an abundance of birds since that is when the wintering birds are joined by many migrants. Unlike sandpipers, plovers rarely feed in large groups. That does not matter here, however, because where else are you likely to find five plover species in a day in one location?



Tigertail Beach

Tigertail Beach, situated on the northwestern side of Marco Island, has a tidal lagoon and miles of sandy beaches. It is a major breeding area for Least Terns, Black Skimmers, and Wilson's and Snowy Plovers. The area holds a small wintering population of Piping Plovers which makes it one of Florida's most important wintering grounds. The lagoon is bordered on the coastal side by a newly formed barrier island known as Sand Dollar Island which boasts a roped off area of critical shorebird nesting habitat. One has to wade across the lagoon, thigh to waist deep in places (low tide is best) to reach Sand Dollar Island. It is well worth it. The emergent sandbars and mudflats, whose configuration changes with the tides and hurricanes on either side the lagoon, are the best places to find Black-bellied Plover, Wilson's Plover and Willet as the birds wander about within feet of 'snowbirds' taking in the last of the winter rays.

Little Estero Lagoon

Just south of Fort Myers Beach is another tidal lagoon along with a small brackish pond bordered by mangroves. Little Estero Lagoon attracts Roseate Spoonbills especially in the early morning hours. While Tigertail and Little Estero look similar, there is a subtle difference in the species that each area attracts. Herons and egrets are far more conspicuous at Little Estero with both morphs of the Reddish Egret likely to be seen dancing about the shallows. It is also a good place for gulls, Sandwich and Royal Terns, American Oystercatcher and Osprey. Of the *Charadriidae* species, only the Wilson's Plover breeds here, but as at Tigertail, there is always a chance to see five plover species!



The **Snowy Plover**, an uncommon resident species, is Florida's most endangered breeding bird with an estimated 300 individuals breeding in the state. The race in Florida and along the gulf coast is also known as the Cuban Snowy Plover - *C.a. tenuirostris*. It tends to be paler than the western race and, though smaller in size than a Piping Plover, it has a longer thin black bill, and is the only plover with a broken collar ring. The birds forage mainly on wet sand and at the surf line in tidal flats and salt ponds along the gulf coast. They run, stop, tilt their heads to one side and scan before probing and plucking prey from the surface. They are also known to 'patter', vibrate their feet, to scare up prey. They begin nesting by late March and will likely raise two or three broods. They incubate for 24 days with both parents sharing duties, though the male is often left with all the duties after only a few days. At four weeks of age the young are able to fly. Snowys are unusual in that they sometimes move considerable distances (hundreds of miles) between nesting attempts.

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Coastal Southwestern Florida ...continued

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Piping Plovers breed on sandy shell-strewn beaches but in winter, they prefer dry sandy beaches. The Atlantic coast population winters from the southern US to the West Indies, with some 450 individuals wintering in Florida. It is estimated that the world population is less than 6000 birds. Some leave Florida as early March, but there are usually a few about into early May. Piping Plover's feeding habits are similar to those of Snowy Plovers - running for short distances, stopping, staring at the sand.. then tilting their heads to one side before picking something off the surface. In addition, they shake their feet in the mud to attract prey. They have a neat breeding display where the male whistles, crouches and then circles the female, spreading his wings and tail while holding his head up and stamping his feet.



The largest of the 'small' black billed plovers is the resident **Wilson's Plover**. Its bill is larger than any of the other plovers. It frequently adopts a crouched posture when danger is near and differs from other plovers in that it prefers to run away from danger rather than fly. Wilson's Plovers forage in areas of large wide beaches with tidal mud flats, gleaning fiddler crabs from the surface. They have a slightly different courtship than Piping Plover. They stamp their feet and keep their head and tail low with the tail spread out and wings drooped.

(Continued on page 15)

Coastal Southwestern Florida ..continued

(Continued from page 14)

As with the other plovers, the **Semipalmated Plover** ‘foot stamps’ to bring aquatic invertebrates to the surface. It often runs with its head held high before stabbing prey. This common species is usually found in small groups, and winters along the coast from the mid-Atlantic to Chile. It breeds in the arctic tundra and is often found in the company of Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers during migration.



Some **Black-bellied Plovers** are short distance migrants wintering in Florida where they prefer tidal flats and beaches. They feed on worms, crustaceans and bivalves and even defend a small feeding territory during the non-breeding season. On their breeding grounds in the tundra they feed primarily on insects. During spring they are joined by those that have over-wintered in South America and can be found in all plumages from their winter grays to almost full breeding colors.



Marbled Godwits are local winter residents that prefer coastal mudflats and are often found in association with Willets. They usually feed by feel in mid-thigh water with their head submerged and can bury their slightly upturned bill in the mud.

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Coastal Southwestern Florida ...continued

(Continued from page 15)

Willetts are common along the coastal beaches and tidal flats, with the western race *C. s. inornatus* replacing the eastern race *C. s. semipalmatus* in winter. By late March “Easterns” have returned from South America and both subspecies can be seen together for about six weeks before “Western’s” head west. Unless they are side by side, where one can see structural differences and that Western’s average 10% larger, they can be tough to tell apart. These preening birds show a long all dark bill; the steeper angle from bill to forehead give it a tall crown. The thin dark markings on the upperparts and breast, along with the contrasting gray upperparts with browner under parts, are all characteristics of Western Willet. In April, many birds still retain the plain gray upperparts of non-breeding plumage, though these two individuals are well on their way to acquiring full breeding plumage.



A group of **Roseate Spoonbills** sweep their bills through the water from side to side, where the shape of the bill works like a hydrofoil. The bill action moves prey off the substrate and then the bird snaps its bill shut when it feels prey. By the late 1930’s, the numbers of Roseate Spoonbills in Florida had been reduced to several dozen due to the fact that their wing feathers were being used to make ladies fans. Numbers are on the increase currently and there are now more than a thousand pairs breeding in Florida.

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Coastal Southwestern Florida ...continued

(Continued from page 16)



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Few birds can ruffle their feathers like a **Reddish Egret**. They are the most active of the *ardeids* with a foraging technique that includes prancing about through the shallows with wings and neck outstretched as they chase small fish. Occasionally they pirouette as they try to flush prey or use one wing to shade a section of water to draw in prey. Plume hunters had essentially wiped them out in Florida by 1927. The birds only survived because one colony in Texas was overlooked! They now number about 500 pairs, with the white morph more common in the Keys.



→

Though not as animated as the Reddish Egret, the resident **Tri-colored Heron** often uses the foot stirring technique to flush its prey.



Here a **Little Blue Heron**, almost at the height of full breeding plumage with its blue-grey bill, blue lore, head and tail plume patiently waits for prey to come within striking distance.

→

Great Egrets can be found in groups, especially where schools of fish have congregated. They often wait near fishermen to take advantage of any part of the catch that may be discarded.



(Continued on page 18)

Coastal Southwestern Florida ...continued

(Continued from page 17)



Bottoms up...this is the characteristic pose of a group of **Short-billed Dowitchers** feeding in the salt water shallows. They are common migrants and winter residents along the coast.



Though a few winter in Florida, it is during April that the numbers of **Red Knots** build as they work their way from Argentina to the Arctic. At this time it is possible to see birds with a wide variation in plumage from plain gray (non-breeding/winter) to almost full breeding colors with deep orange-red breast and belly.

(Continued on page 19)

Coastal Southwestern Florida ...continued

(Continued from page 18)



Small numbers of **Dunlin** are found on extensive mudflats and sandy beaches with males tending to over-winter farther north than females. Numbers peak in March but even in late April one is likely to come across small groups, most of which have yet to attain full alternate plumage.



Short, plump, stocky, yet remarkably agile with a prominent dark eye, **Sanderlings** are common winter residents often found in small groups working the edge of the surf where they probe for crustaceans as the tide recedes. They can often be found resting, and feeding at a quieter pace, along intertidal mudflats. It is the only *scolopacid* that does not have a hind toe.



One of the more common of Florida's wintering *calidris* species, the **Western Sandpiper**, normally feeds in the sandier substrate of shallow waters, where it can be seen walking at a slower pace than Least or Semipalmated Sandpipers.

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Coastal Southwestern Florida ...continued

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Almost completely wiped out for the millinery trade by the early 1900's, **Least Terns** have recovered and can be found nesting in small numbers amongst the railroad vines in unlined scrapes in the sand and shingles. Disturbance by humans and their dogs has meant that they are increasingly found nesting on roof tops.



Noisy **Black Skimmers** are touch feeders that are primarily found in shallow coastal bays where they have more success feeding at night on small fish that are found nearer the water's surface. They are colony nesters that associate themselves with terns and gulls. They are the only bird species that can close its pupil into a vertical slit (like a cat). This protects the retina from the bright sunlight since their fully dilated pupils are larger than any other species that forages by day.

All photos © Adrian Binns

April 2006 Texas Trip Report by Connie Goldman

Five friends, Bert Filemyr, Karl Lukens, Connie Goldman, Ann Scott and Art McMorris, planned an 11-day birding trip to Texas. We would visit the Hill Country, the Concan area, Del Rio, Big Bend National Park, the Davis Mountain



Sunset at Big Bend Photo © C. Goldman

area and points east on a return trip to San Antonio. While we would focus on some target species, we would bird various spots along our trip route, trying to maximize our Texas bird sightings.

Day 1 Monday April 24th

In preparation for trip departure, Karl had spent the night at Bert's home. By 3:50 am, the two were met there by Connie, and by 4:00 am the three of us were on the road to the airport. There we were met by Ann and Art. With our plane fully loaded and ready to take off near 6:15 am, our luck took a turn for the worse. Engine trouble was announced. Within a short time, all passengers were asked to leave the plane, and we found ourselves back in the terminal. Our prospects for early birding in San Antonio area were quickly being dashed. Hours of waiting confirmed our suspicion that we would not get in much birding today. Art wisely used some of this time to catch up on sleep, nodding off while seated on the floor of the busy departure gate area. Only after the assertive "nudging" of airline employees by Bert, were we switched to another airline. We left Philadelphia at 1:00 pm, seven hours later than our original schedule. With a connecting flight to Atlanta, we finally arrived in San Antonio at 7:00 pm. Quick car rental and baggage retrieval only left time for birding the highways en route to our first night's lodging in Kerrville. As we drove, we were able to get 12 species of birds, including our first trip Cattle Egrets, White-face Ibis, and numerous Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. We arrived at our hotel by 9 pm, did a quick list and settled in for a night's sleep. Though we had had a disappointing first trip day, we were all in good spirits and ready to bird enthusiastically to make up for lost time in the field!

Day 2 Tuesday April 25th

Eager to get our trip seriously underway, we were up, ate breakfast at our hotel and were on the road by 6:15 am. Tony Gallucci, our local contact in the Hill Country area, met us near Kerrville and escorted us to our first stop for the day. This roadside area along the south fork of the Guadalupe River at Lynx Haven was a beautiful example of Hill Country habitat. Ashe junipers, oaks and other mixed hardwood trees grew on either side of the road, and a small river crossing provided some wet habitat for us to explore. We walked a stretch of the road, eager to spot Golden-cheeked Warbler, one of our target species for the day. We soon began to appreciate Tony's expert knowledge of local natural history. We listened and looked primarily for birds, but he also pointed out Rain Lilies and Salvia growing along the road, and

other flora and fauna of the area. Before long we heard the song of the Golden-cheeked Warbler, and soon all got good looks at this much-desired bird. Among other birds we identified here were White-eyed Vireo, Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped and Nashville Warbler. Blue Grosbeaks foraged in low grass, and a large white shape in the tree-tops proved to be a Great Egret, not commonly seen in this area, according to Tony. We then drove into the town of Hunt for coffee, encountering Scissor-tailed Flycatchers on wires and Barn Swallows overhead. Our next destination point would be the Kerr Wildlife Management Area. Along the way we picked up some new trip species, including Western Kingbirds, which sang from their perches on communication wires. We stopped to watch Cliff Swallows collect mud from a roadside puddle and carry it to nest-building sites on a structure called Stonehenge II. This is a local landmark, constructed by a rancher who found boulders on his property remi-



Kerr WMA Photo © C. Goldman

niscent of the ancient European original. His efforts certainly seemed appreciated by the large group of Cliff Swallows nesting there.

Driving closer to Kerr WMA, we noted the beauty of limestone

outcroppings along the Guadalupe. In one

massive wall of rock, hundreds more Cliff Swallows flew wide circles into and out of nest sites in the crevices there. We got out of our vehicles and birded promising spots along our route, sighting Painted Bunting, Lesser Goldfinch and Black-chinned Hummingbirds. Cave Swallows congregated and peeked out from nests down under a small bridge crossing. Wildflowers including Mexican hat and antelope-horn milkweed dotted the roadsides.

We turned onto the entrance road to the Bobcat Pasture section of Kerr WMA, parked, and walked back along the road. The habitat here was drier, with desert plants interspersed with various shrubs and small trees. Many areas had foliage reaching down to the ground, providing ideal nesting conditions for Black-capped Vireo. We looked and listened for this species. Field and Rufous-crowned Sparrows were present, as well as Summer Tanager. Sure enough, the Black-capped Vireo appeared! A male was heard singing and was soon seen, with his female companion nearby. The two birds foraged in shrubs very near our roadside viewing spot, repeatedly coming out into the open atop branches. With Tony's help, we had seen two important trip target birds before lunch!

We birded the fields and brush for a few additional species. Butterflies, including Orange Sulphur, Reakirt's Blue and Duskywing added interest in this area. We headed out to other Kerr WMA areas, stopping next at an idyllic spring-fed wet area. Spotted Sandpiper and

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Black-chinned Hummingbird were seen here, and some in our group got fleeting looks at a Green Kingfisher that fled down the waterway. At the main entrance area of Kerr WMA, we birded fields alongside the headquarters buildings. Vermilion Flycatcher frequented the area. A female Vermilion perched on a fence and gave us an opportunity to study its field marks, less distinctive than



Pond—Photo © C. Goldman

those of the male. Lark and Clay-colored Sparrows bathed in the water of a shallow trough, and preened in nearby trees.

Next we visited an open area with a pond and low-cut fields. Here a Northern Waterthrush

walked the pond edge,

and a group of American Pipits worked the ground nearby. A Peregrine Falcon flew overhead and two Hutton's Vireos, uncommon for the area, were observed in a nearby grove of trees. We birded old farm fields, checking the barn and small outbuildings for owls, finding none. A pleasant walk out into one field ended our Kerr WMA birding, and we left the area for lunch at "Whattaburger" in Ingram.

We were back on the road by 2:00 pm. Tony escorted us to the Heart of the Hills Fisheries Research Center near Mountain Home, TX. An expansive open area here was made up of numerous large rectangular pools, separated by grassy berms. We walked along these rises, searching each impoundment for waterbirds. While few low water areas appropriate for shorebirds were found, we did encounter Green Heron. Passerines drew our attention as they made themselves apparent in the surrounding trees. We identified Yellow-throated Warbler and Yellow-throated Vireo, and got clear looks at a rare migrant for the area, Olive-sided Flycatcher. The ubiquitous Scissor-tailed Flycatchers caught our attention as they flew low over the impoundments and came down in the grasses nearby. Savannah Sparrows also worked the grasses. A wooded rise that was a natural boundary on one side of the fishery was the nesting site for Common Raven. We were able to hear the young nestlings' begging calls from the trees there. As we looked upward above this hilly area, we noticed many Turkey vultures in flight, and searched among them for something different. Soon we were identifying other raptors. A Zone-tailed Hawk flew among the vultures, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk and Peregrine Falcon flew over. A Red-Shouldered Hawk carrying a snake was an especially entertaining sighting. Dozens of Mississippi Kites streamed over, adding to the much-appreciated raptor spectacle above our heads. At 3:30 pm we decided to head out toward Tony's place of work, a camp in the area. As we drove the fishery exit road, Yellow-headed Blackbirds were sighted in the trees beside a small pond, adding another trip species.

We drove past Ingram Lake, and vehicle brakes came to an almost screeching stop when gulls were spotted over the water. It was a

small flock of Franklin's Gull, a county record, according to Tony! Entering the Sierra Vista/Rio Vista Camp where Tony had worked, we visited some animals and birds kept there. Hip-hop the kangaroo accepted our handouts happily. Though the peacock, Golden Pheasant and Northern Bobwhite were captive, we enjoyed this opportunity to see them "up close and personal." We said our good-byes to Tony here, needing to make progress toward our lodging for the night. We had had a wonderfully successful and enjoyable day of birding in Hill Country, thanks to his terrific guidance and expertise!

We drove the highways to Neal's Lodge, had dinner there by 6:00 pm, and headed out for an evening adventure at Concan's Frio Bat Cave. Here we walked up a small hill and found ourselves peering into the mouth of a large cave. We listened to a brief interpretive talk about the history of the cave, and learned about Mexican Free-tailed Bats, the cave's inhabitants. We got a chance to view a bat up close, one of millions that dwell within the cave. We birded the area

as the sun set and we waited for the bats to emerge. An Eastern Phoebe hawked for insects near the cave opening. Red-tailed and Swainson's Hawks circled above, also waiting for the bats to fly. As dusk settled in, the bats emerged in ever-increasing numbers. Hundreds and hundreds



Bats at Concan Cave Photo © C. Goldman

streamed in a long ribbon across the sky. Hawks dove into the mass of bats, as we watched them hunt these animals as prey. We watched this amazing natural spectacle for a long time, and still bats continued to fly from the cave. We returned to the lodge for the night and compiled our checklist of birds for this busy day. With close to 100 species, we had certainly made up for lost time.

Day 3 Wednesday April 26th

On our third day of Texas birding we were up and at breakfast by 6:30 am, and out onto Neal's Lodge trails by 7:00am. A Rufous-capped Warbler had been seen here, and we would seek this species while birding the general area. We first searched a shrubby area, finding Olive Sparrow. The Rufous-capped had frequented a feeding area with a drip, so we stationed ourselves there for about an hour's time. Birds visiting the feeder as we watched included Long-billed Thrasher, Indigo Bunting, Bewick's Wren, Black-chinned and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, and White-throated Sparrow. A Yellow-breasted Chat flew into the adjacent wooded area. A number of Mississippi Kites streamed overhead. Giving up on the warbler watch, we headed to another drip feeding station at the "cattle guard" area of Neal's. Here we saw Lincoln's and Clay-colored Sparrow, Verdin, Pine Siskin, and White-crowned Sparrow. A deep call from the brush was recognized by Art as Greater Roadrunner; and, though we did not see the bird, we confirmed this ID by listening to Bert's iPod recording of the call. We walked the paths at Neal's, adding a few species to our trip list, then headed out to make

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progress toward our
next destination.

We ate lunch in Uvalde and arrived near 1:00 pm at the Uvalde National Fish Hatchery. In the parking lot area, kingbirds perched on the wires. One appeared brighter than the more common



Heart of the Hills Fishery Photo © C. Goldman

Western Kingbird, and Connie recognized its song as that of Couch's Kingbird. Along with the bird's field marks, recordings of the bird's song helped us confirm ID. Impoundments at the hatchery held various waterbirds. We sighted Long-billed Dowitchers, Least Sandpiper, Pied-billed and, more surprising, a Least Grebe. Ducks included Cinnamon Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, and Black-bellied Whistling Duck. Bullock's Oriole was seen in surrounding trees. We birded the hatchery until 2:00 pm and headed toward Del Rio. Here we visited Laguna de Plata Birdwatching Area. In the marsh here we were treated to views of shorebirds and ducks, adding Baird's Sandpiper and Green-winged Teal to our trip list. Next we birded a series of duck ponds in the Del Rio area. While these required tricky parking maneuvers along busy roadsides, as well as peering through thick brush in some areas, we were able to overcome obstacles and find some interesting birds. These included Hooded Oriole, Double-crested Cormorant, Common Moorhen, and Greater White-fronted Goose. A Great Kiskadee perched in a tree alongside one pond and called out its unmistakable name for us to hear. Art and Ann got the best looks of a Ringed Kingfisher that fled across another pond. Bert drove us up and down the road in an attempt to re-find the bird so that the rest of us could improve our fleeting glance at it; but the kingfisher did not show itself again. Connie did periscope duty, popping up through the sunroof to get a look over the hedges obstructing another pond – but no additional species were found tucked in there.

As a final destination for the day, we took a short drive down River Road. Here Connie saw a blob in a tree that proved to be a Harris's Hawk, the first of our trip, and a good last bird the day. We checked into our Del Rio hotel, completed our checklist, and ended

the day with a fun happy hour and dinner at a local steakhouse.

Day 4 Thursday April 27th

Today would be our travel day to Big Bend, with birding destinations along the way. We had breakfast in our hotel, and were on the road by 7:00 am. Our first stop was Amistad



Amistad Scene Photo © C. Goldman

National Recreation Area. Along the entrance road we heard Northern Bob-white and had additional oriole sightings. Heavy winds challenged us as we scanned the huge reservoir from numerous points along the water's edge. New birds included Forster's and Least Terns, Canvasback, and American Coot. At a scrubby desert area, Bert had us out of the car "habitat-birding," as he would occasionally suggest. His suggestions usually lead to something good, as we found out here. Art soon heard a birdsong and ID'd it as Cassin's Sparrow. The faint but undeniable sound led us across the road, and we were soon all getting looks at this species as it hopped up on cactus plants. We also picked up Cactus Wren, Northern Mockingbird and more Clay-colored Sparrows. At one point we sighted road kill which had enticed vultures and a beautiful Harris's Hawk down to the ground. In a brushy spot, Art ID'd the busy song of Bell's Vireo. We saw the bird well, and soon were all familiar with its song, too, hearing it numerous times throughout the day. Amistad also gave us our first trip Black-crowned Night-herons and Great Blue Heron. Great-tailed Grackles were common. In a picnic area adjacent to the reservoir, we got very close looks at Bronzed Cowbird, admiring its distinctive red eye. Finally we stopped at the Amistad Dam, where we could see species on both the US and Mexican side. The serious listers among us were mentally tallying Mexico birds!



View from a gorge Photo © C. Goldman

We headed farther south and west, and reached the gorge at the Pecos River. We stopped to enjoy the expansive views and look for birds along the gorge. A Canyon Wren entertained us here, singing its descending song and coming up and perching under the gorge bridge. We drove into Langtry, Texas and had a picnic lunch at 12:30. For a brief history lesson, we visited the Jersey Lily, the historic site where Judge Roy Bean presided as "the law west of the Pecos" and ran his bar establishment. We learned about the judge at the visitor center and "stepped up to the bar" in the Jersey Lily. Outside the historic site there is a desert botanic garden, and we birded here before leaving Langtry. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Bewick's Wren and Hooded Oriole were present, and White-crowned Sparrows foraged at a grassy edge. Our best sighting here was Scott's Oriole, in the desert scrub adjacent to the garden. Back on the road, we made several "habitat" stops along the route toward Marathon. These stops rewarded us with Cassin's Kingbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's) and great looks at Vesper Sparrow and Greater Roadrunner.

We arrived near the entrance sign to Big Bend National Park, excited about reaching a major destination of our trip. Birding the desert habitat around this sign, we saw Pyrrhuloxia and Black-tailed

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Gnatcatcher. We listened to the song of the gnatcatcher and compared its field marks to the Blue-gray, our familiar gnatcatcher back home. We drove into Big Bend, seeing Scaled Quail running along the road. We drove higher and higher in elevation, admiring the ever more imposing Chisos Mountain landscape as we approached the park proper. We checked in and ate dinner in the lodge restaurant at 6:00 pm, watching Say's Phoebe fly and perch on the outside veranda. On that first evening in the park, we watched a beautiful sunset over the Window Trail, with its open window-like area between two mountains.

Day 5 Friday April 28th

Breakfast at Big Bend is offered at 7:00 am, and we had our car packed for the day's expedition and were at the lodge restaurant as it opened. After eating, a stop at a gas station and the main park



Big Bend Scene Photo © C. Goldman

visitor center had us sighting some new trip birds. Curve-billed Thrasher perched out in the open near the gas station, and Green-tailed Towhee foraged in the scrub nearby. Blue-throated Hummingbird gave us fleeting looks at the visitor center and Common Yellowthroat was present in the area. We drove next to Sam Neal Ranch to check this possible wet oasis for birds. At the Sam Neal Ranch, the well was the historic source of water, but Texas draught had left it dry now. We walked the trail there and were able to find Black-and-White Warbler, Verdin, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Ash-throated Flycatcher.

We headed to Blue Creek Canyon, arriving there at 9:45 am. Here we would walk deep into the canyon searching for Lucifer Hummingbird and Gray Vireo, two of our target species. We heard Canyon Wren as we started down the trail. Black-throated Sparrow sang its melodious song and perched up on green ocotillo stems in the sun. Ash-throated Flycatcher was present in numbers. We marveled at the desert habitat and the canyon rock formations, carved by time and weather into various interesting shapes. As the day grew hotter and hotter, we considered the difficulties faced by families who historically settled the Big Bend area and attempted to make lives here. Bert ID'd a Varied Bunting up on one canyon slope and worked to get us all on the bird. We stopped at each area we found with blooming flowers, in hopes of finding a foraging Lucifer; but we had no luck with this. Eventually, though, we began hearing a slow Vireo song, and Art ID'd it as possible Gray Vireo. We worked hard and were successful in seeing the bird and confirming its identification. As we walked the path back we recognized the song more than once, identifying a

few more Gray Vireos along the trail.

Our next stop was Cottonwood Campground, where we bought lunch in the store and birded this traditional area for warblers and other song-



Cottonwood Campground Photo © C. Goldman

birds. Some of the frozen sandwiches were not quite thawed, and Ann and Connie used solar energy on the hood of our hot vehicle to thaw their lunch. After eating, we birded the campground in increasingly windy but hot conditions. We saw some valuable trip firsts, including Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Wood-pewee, a female Summer Tanager, and Lucy's Warbler. Cowbirds, Chipping Sparrows and Blue Grosbeaks foraged in numbers in shaded grass. At the campground amphitheater, we saw Yellow Warbler in the shrubs and White-throated Swift overhead. An ice cream break took us back to the campground store. From the porch there, Karl watched vultures flying overhead and recognized a distant Zone-tailed Hawk among them!

We headed back to the lodge, bought breakfast and lunch for the next day's long hike, and had dinner at 5:30 pm. We drove out to Dugout Well where we heard an Elf Owl calling from near a hole in a snag. Checking the brush in the area, Bert sighted a MacGillivray's Warbler, but we were unable to get this skulking bird to reappear for the rest of our group. We then drove to Rio Grande Village for some evening birding, arriving there at 7:30 pm. We stopped along the road at an area sign-posted as a Common Black Hawk nesting site. Peering into the trees, we found some old empty nests but could not see the hawks. Bert walked farther down the road, past the posted area, and found a Common Black Hawk perched out in the open on a large branch. We all got wonderful looks at this handsome bird. At the road's end in a grove of trees, we searched for a Gray Hawk nest, but were unsuccessful. Then, as we stood in the road near our car, we saw two gray Hawks, flying circles overhead! We watched for a few minutes as they drifted farther and farther away.

We birded the Rio Grande campground next, walking the boardwalk over a marsh there. The night became increasingly windy, and we saw no new species; we searched for Western Screech Owl in the area but were unsuccessful. We ended our day by stopping on the road in the dark, turning off all lights and power in the car and getting out under the sky. Looking in every direction, no artificial light, not even the glow of a distant town, could be seen. We marveled at the remoteness of our location and the stark beauty of nighttime in the desert of Big Bend.

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Day 6 Saturday April 29th

This was it! Today would be our hike to find the Colima Warbler, a life bird sought by every member of our group. We had planned an early departure, taking advantage of the coolest hours of the day for our hike up the challenging Laguna Meadows Trail. We were out and on the trail by 6:20 am. It was an uncharacteristically cool (53 degrees), breezy morning. With breakfast, lunch and lots of water in tow, we hiked in the dark at first, using flashlight beams to help us find footing. As we made progress upward, the morning sun rose over the top of the canyon, revealing the rocky canyon walls and the surrounding desert habitat. We began finding birds along the trail, including many Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Spotted Towhee and noisy Mexican Jays, some of which seemed almost tame in their willingness to perch low and allow close scrutiny. The landscape changed as we reached higher elevations, with oak and juniper thickets gaining prominence over the lowland desert plants. This was looking like potential Colima territory. We arrived at the area of repeated switchbacks in the trail, and observed a Townsend's Warbler flitting among the shrubs there. Then the song we all had studied the night before was heard – the Colima Warbler was nearby! Sure enough, its silhouette could be seen as it foraged among the small trees overhanging the canyon slope. We each jockeyed for a position that would allow a look at the bird, and all were able to get satisfying views, allowing positive visual identification. We all had our lifer Colima! A self-congratulatory group hug ensued, as we celebrated this pivotal success for our Texas birding trip.

We had now met our goal of hiking as high on the trail as was required to see this bird, but decided to climb higher, to bird the trail to Laguna Meadow. We turned a bend onto the next switchback and heard another Colima singing! This bird provided even better looks,



Laguna Meadows Vista Photo © C. Goldman

as it foraged near eye level in a more open, partially sunlit shrub along the trail. "Killer looks" had now been had by all, a two-Colima day! We were energized for our further hike up the trail. We climbed upward onto Laguna Meadows, passing among typical high elevation vegetation, including alligator spruce and manzanita. From the flatter surface of the meadow we searched among a few blooming cacti for possible hummingbirds, finding none. Art recognized a buzzy distant song as that of the Black-chinned Sparrow. We scanned over the slopes beyond the meadow for this bird, not finding it. This cool, windy morning had few songbirds out in the open on the meadow. We took time to enjoy the scenery and take photos, and decided to head back down the way we had come. Our return hike rewarded us with a few more birds, including Acorn Woodpeckers performing their typical antics in the trees. A House Wren foraged in leaf litter, and a Swainson's Thrush was seen in a shaded woody area. An at-

first-unnoticed rattlesnake in the trail, at close range to Connie's next footstep, created a bit of non-bird entertainment at one point. Screams were heard, but happily, no first aid was required (by the snake or Connie). We later confirmed that this had been a western diamondback.

We made multiple attempts at finding the Black-chinned Sparrow whenever we reached an area of open desert hillside, but we remained unsuccessful. Finally we returned to the trailhead; we had completed our Colima adventure. After a brief break in our lodge rooms we headed out for some afternoon birding. We looked for shorebirds at a sewage treatment area near the Basin Campground, but found it under construction and mostly dry. We went on to the Panther Junction Visitor Center to look for the Blue-throated Hummingbird, which some of us had not yet seen. Finding only House Sparrow and Black-chinned hummers, we left. At Dugout Wells, we tried to re-find the MacGillivray's Warbler, but were unsuccessful with this also. Not wanting to range much farther before dinner, we decided to return to the lodge for the remainder of the afternoon.



Say's Phoebe © K. Lukens

We met at the lodge restaurant for a 5:00 pm dinner, after which we headed to Rio Grande Village. This bright, calm evening seemed much more likely to provide bird sightings than our last night's attempt. We drove slowly along the area posted for the Common Black Hawk, but did not see that bird again. A Coyote walked along the roadside ahead of us, giving us a new trip mammal sighting. In the grove of trees at one end of the road, we found Vermilion Flycatcher, Chipping and vesper Sparrows, Say's Phoebe and Blue Grosbeak. One side of the grove had a hedgerow that opened onto a pocket of tall grass. We recognized the blue color and other field marks of Lazuli Bunting among the birds there. We enjoyed watching a number of these birds perch on the tips of blades of grass and flit around this area in the evening sunlight. Next we drove to the other end of the road for another search in the Rio Grande Campground area. We walked the marsh boardwalk again, encountering men fishing for turtles as we identified Common Yellowthroat in the phragmites-like grass there. We heard Least Bittern calling, though they remained concealed within the marsh. At the far end of the short boardwalk, a dirt trail led up a rise. We decided to go up to see if views into the marsh could be had from above. Walking up, we encountered a Verdin at its nest, woven onto a sapling along the trail. Up on top we reached a wide flat area, with hills rising higher beyond. Marsh below and hills above, we decided to look from here – we had climbed high enough for one day! Now we looked down over what we could see was a more expansive area of marsh. Numerous Yellow-rumped Warblers (Audubon's) flew over the tall grasses. As we walked among sundried cactus and low desert plants, a group of Lesser Nighthawks flew into the area and circled below us. We listened to their calls and

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watched them fly wide loops over the marsh, with their wings handsomely lit up by the low-angled evening sun. As dusk settled in, we returned down the short trail, hearing coyotes calling from the hills in the distance. Bats now flew over the small marsh impoundments as we walked back to the campground.

Reports of Western Screech Owl had been had from the campground in years past, and though we searched for a time, the habitat just did not seem promising for this species. On Bert's suggestion, we returned to the grove of trees at the other end of the village to try there. Sure enough we soon heard at least three of these owls calling, each from a different direction. We walked across the village road toward the closest call and slowly approached a few tall trees. While it sounded distant, a scan of the area with a light soon revealed a Western Screech on a nearby tree. The owl perched down on its breast and belly out in the open on a branch and continued calling, seemingly unaffected by our observation. We enjoyed the bird's muffled calls, watching its entire body twitch with each phrase.

Now it had become dark, and we headed back toward the lodge. As we drove the road through Big Bend, the headlights lit upon a large bird in the road, a Great Horned Owl! The bird flew into the desert along the roadside and perched for a few moments up on a cactus. We admired this familiar species, happy to have a third owl species for our day's birding list. We drove on, encountering many jackrabbits and desert cottontails scooting across the road, and presumed that these species were likely frequent prey for that big owl we had just seen. We decided to stop again and experience the dark desert environment. We did some impromptu stargazing, and, with the help of a birding scope, viewed Saturn and

two of its moons. Happy after another successful Texas day, we returned to the lodge to complete our day's list and settle in for the night.

Day 7 Sunday
April 30th

This would be our last Big Bend day, and we had decided

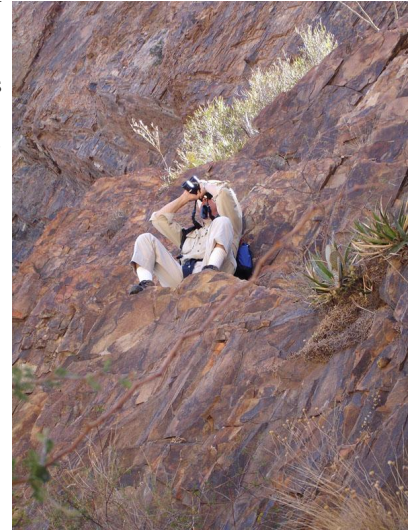
to try and bird for local species not yet encountered. We were up at the lodge at 7:00 am for breakfast and then out onto the Window Trail. Not long after commenting that it would be nice to add Rock Wren to our list today, we were met by one, working along a low rock wall right at the trail head! We watched this handsome pale gray bird forage among the crevices before we proceeded onto the trail. We hiked approximately 2 ½ miles, to a spot from which there were reports of Lucifer Hummingbird feeding at a flowering agave plant. We spotted numerous species along the way, including Violet-green Swallow, Scott's Oriole, Gray Vireo, and Rufous-capped Sparrow. This trail revealed itself to be

a challenge similar to the Laguna Meadow Trail the day before, but with most of the uphill trial to be on our return trip. We walked lower and lower on the hike out, encountering ever more dramatic scenery as we went. A few small cacti were in bloom along the trail, but dry conditions had prevented the normal amount of desert flowering. We searched for Crissal Thrasher in dry creek beds, but did not find it.

Finally we approached the area deep in the canyon where the hummingbird had been seen. A small group of hopeful birders had gathered along one slope of the canyon, which was very rocky and narrow here. All eyes were trained on a single agave plant on the top of the opposite wall of the canyon.

"Operation Lucifer-watch" would require sitting, watching and waiting. Mountain-goat style, Art climbed to a high rock perch fit for the task at hand. The rest of us found equally uncomfortable, though lower, rock seating. The hummingbird was reportedly sporadic in its appearance. We watched that agave. A large Blue-throated Hummingbird came to the plant, a happy sighting for those in our group who had not yet had good looks at one. This bird returned at frequent intervals to feed. A Canyon Towhee sang from the top of the canyon. We watched and waited. A Cordilleran Flycatcher was also present, returning for repeated visits to fly-catch insects around the flower. We waited and watched. It got hotter and hotter as the sun rose and moved across the sky, encroaching little by little on us in our viewing area. Finally a hummingbird flitted close by, not up on the agave, but in front of us at eye level. It flew into a shrubby plant growing on the opposite slope. It was a male Lucifer Hummingbird! It flitted quickly up and over the slope and out of sight. Then a small hummingbird appeared at the agave, only to be immediately expelled by the Blue-throated who apparently had been sitting in wait for any intruders. Had the hummer been our same Lucifer? The expulsion had happened too quickly to allow an ID.

Not everyone in our group had gotten a look at the Lucifer. We waited for it to return. After a time, another small hummingbird approached the agave. From its long curved bill and buffy underparts, we ID'd it as a female Lucifer. Everyone got to see this bird. The Blue-throated Hummingbird would not tolerate other hummers at the plant for very long. Though we waited a bit for the male Lucifer to reappear, we did not get another sighting of it. We decided to start our uphill climb back. As we experienced the hot desert afternoon, Bert regaled us with western songs about "cool, cool water," played on his iPod. We reached the dry creek bed on our return trek and tried again for the Crissal Thrasher. This time we got it! At least two of the birds were present, and perched up in a desert shrub for us to see. As Bert walked the creek bed, a small bird flushed. Seconds later a small bird flew past Connie at eye level. It was a MacGillivray's! Ann spotted the



Art McMorris Photo © C. Goldman



Windows Trail Photo © C. Goldman

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April 2006 Texas Trip Report ... continued

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bird as it flew into a bush, but it did not stay long, and flew down the creek bed under cover again. We were not able to get on the warbler again, but had gotten fleeting looks, enabling ID. We completed our hike back, with Art and Bert taking the longer trail back to the car. (such gallant knights!) Connie, Ann and Karl took a shorter exit to the Basin Campground to await them. Near the end of our hike, a shady spot offered the three of us a cool spot to rest. We were about to decide what tall tale of a fictitious bird sighting we could tease the other two with once we met again. At that point a Hermit Thrush appeared in the brush on the opposite side of the trail. A new trip species! No fibs necessary, we had a true sighting to report. Art and Bert picked us up at the campground and we all returned to the lodge for a well-deserved rest.

As we prepared to meet for dinner, Ann went out onto the balcony of their room, saw a bird and called Connie out to see it. A gray bird alternately perched and hawked in characteristic flycatcher style from the trees. Each time it set down on a branch, its tail bobbed. It was a Gray Flycatcher, another new trip species! Knowing the others would want to see it, Connie walked up to Karl and Bert's room (up another hill!) to report the sighting. This was the only way to alert them, as there were no phones at Big Bend, no cell phone towers, and no internet access from lodge rooms. Due to logistical lodging maneuvers, Art was in the process of checking into a room and not in the general area at the time. Karl and Bert proceeded to Ann and Connie's room, leaving behind a note stating "Gray Flycatcher in the ladies' room, now!" Now, we're not sure exactly how Art interpreted that note, or where he went first, but eventually he was seen running excitedly in the direction of our room. Though we had not realized it, this was a life bird for him! Luckily the flycatcher was still in the vicinity and Art saw the behaviors and field marks he needed to confirm its identification. Then it was back up the hill to Karl and Bert's room for happy hour. This had required more running around than we would have liked, after our exertion from earlier in the day, but seeing this species certainly made our happy hour all that much happier!

Our evening birding would be devoted to getting visual ID on the Elf Owl at Dugout Well, and we proceeded to the site of the snag there after dinner. At dusk, a number of other birders had gathered in the area and scopes were aimed toward the hole in the snag. We began hearing Elf Owl calls, and an owl began periodically showing itself at the snag opening. After two or three times of positioning itself at the opening and then returning into the snag, the owl appeared one last time and flew out. We all waited expectantly for a second owl to come to replace it, thinking there were likely eggs to be attended to by a second parent bird. No exchange took place. As we stared at the snag opening, a car approached and a number of birders exited, saying, "We think you have the wrong hole." We explained that an owl had just been seen, and they reasoned that perhaps the snag was a roost site. They told us that there was another hole in an adjacent tree from which they had heard nestlings begging the previous night. We all did 180 degree turns toward the tree indicated, repositioned scopes as recommended, and looked toward a hole just beneath an elbow in a large tree. Sure enough there was owl activity here. An adult Elf Owl was seen entering then leaving the nest hole. Young owls called from within. The

parent owls were seen positioned on various branches of the tree over the next 20 minutes or so. As it got darker and darker, we realized it was going to be too difficult to observe the birds further, so we called it a night, happy with our owl experience. We returned to the lodge to do our day's list for our final day in Big Bend.



Big Bend Photo © C. Goldman

Day 8 Monday
April May 1st

After breakfast at 7:00 am, we packed the car and drove the exit road out of Big Bend. We caught last glimpses and made final exclamatory statements about the beauty of the Chisos Mountains as we drove off, not knowing when or if we would have the chance to see this amazing part of our country again. As had become our routine, we stopped at various places along the road to "habitat bird." At one of these stops a surprisingly visible MacGillivray's Warbler provided us with great looks as it flitted low in roadside brush. We drove to a park in the Marathon Basin, known as "The Post." Tall trees provided a shady picnic and recreation spot for local residents, and a pond and oak grove drew birds to this locality. We walked the grounds and saw a number of passerine species, including many Wilson's Warblers, American Pipit, American Redstart, Cassin's Kingbird, Townsend's Warbler, and Summer Tanager.

We had lunch in Marathon, and drove the streets checking neighborhood bird feeders. At one home we observed Black-chinned and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, but saw no other species. We drove on to a prairie dog colony in Marathon, hoping to see Burrowing Owls that had been reported in the area. Making various stops in the habitat, we scanned the colony repeatedly, but found no owls.

We drove toward the Davis Mountains, making various stops. We observed Eastern Meadowlarks, studying and discussing the field marks of eastern vs. western, and the Lilian's variety of this species. We saw Horned Lark in a field where we had stopped to get closer looks at Pronghorn. As we approached closer to the Davis Mountain area, a roadside pond offered us a chance to see Great Blue Heron, Pied-billed Grebe, and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. By late afternoon we had arrived at Davis Mountain State Park where we would spend the next two nights. We checked in at the Indian Lodge and went to check park feeder stations. We had interesting looks at White-breasted Nuthatch, White-crowned and other sparrows, and Summer Tanager, but no new trip species. We investigated possible sighting locations for Montezuma Quail, which would be our main target species here. We were told to watch

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campground roads, a specific feeding station, and, basically, anywhere else.

We had dinner at the lodge restaurant and decided to divide and conquer, staking out two areas after dinner to watch for quail. Ann and Bert went to the feeding station while Art, Karl and Connie birded the campground road. Cassin's Kingbirds were common and their calls were heard repeatedly throughout the area. Hermit Thrushes appeared in campsites and Black-headed Grosbeaks sang in the trees, but we did not get any looks at Montezuma Quail that night. We drove the park road in the dark before turning in for the night. A Common Poorwill suddenly appeared in the road just in front of our vehicle. It hawked insects low in the road, alternately flying up and across the road to one side or the other, then landing in the road again. Bert skillfully maneuvered the headlights as the bird's direction changed. We all got good looks at this infrequently seen species and enjoyed watching its feeding behavior. Karl did periscope duty this time, attempting to photograph the poorwill while standing with his head out the sunroof. We completed our list back at the lodge and got some sleep for our Montezuma Quail hunt the next day.



Montezuma Quail © K. Lukens

zuma Quail hunt the next day.

Day 9 Tuesday May 2nd

We gathered for breakfast shortly before the restaurant's opening at 7:00 am. Our original plan was to eat and then devote the

entire day, if needed, to

staking out quail sighting areas until we had seen the bird. However, Bert suggested that, since the restaurant served breakfast until 10:00 am, it might be advisable to drive the park roads early. If we didn't see the quail, we could always eat before 10:00 am and then get back out birding again. We grabbed quick cups of coffee from the guest lobby, a few granola bars, and were into the car. We drove at snail's pace through the campground area, checking every bending shadow and moving blade of grass that suggested the possibility of approaching Montezumas. No quail appeared for us. We drove up to a higher elevation sightseeing trail and scenic viewing area. In the parking area at the top, Bert slowly rotated the car to turn and go back downhill. All of a sudden he brought the vehicle to a complete stop, yelling "Straight ahead!!!!" Out the front window of the car, where the asphalt met the grasses, was a small dusty area. A group of Montezuma Quail gathered there! Some stood watching while others took dust-baths! This was an amazing out-in-the-open look at a number of these birds. We could appreciate their clown-like faces and brightly patterned plumage as they stood or wriggled their bodies in the dust. We watched in amazed appreciation at this rare chance to observe these birds. Karl slowly took position out the sunroof again, and was able to get photographic documentation of our special Montezuma Quail sighting. And it was only 7:15 am!! We could go eat breakfast and spend the day birding the area casually, as our major goal for the day had already been achieved!

We spread the word as we passed the feeding station on our way down to the lodge, alerting other birders to the quails' whereabouts. We had a happy breakfast celebration and were on the road by 8:45 to check other spots in the area. We drove to the McDonald Observatory grounds, where we saw Western Bluebirds and other songbirds. At the Lawrence E. Wood picnic area we walked the grounds among various trees and shrubs, adding Plumbeous Vireo, Least Flycatcher, Dark-eyed Junco to our trip list. After a quick return to the observatory for a pit-stop, we were on the road to Fort Davis for lunch, and then to Lake Balmorhea. As we passed farm fields along the way, we searched among cattle for black-birds or other new species.



Lake Balmorhea © C. Goldman

At one point Ann called out "Scaled Quail on a bale!" We laughed at the rhyming location of the bird but looked toward the hay bale. The bird was gone. Someone said it had "baled" from the bale, someone else added that we'd "failed" to see it. Five poetic birders were getting a bit punchy at this point. Things turned serious again when a lump in a tree off to one side of the road presented us with a hawk identification challenge. Since the bird was distant, we got out and set up a scope on the roadside to check field marks. We saw an incomplete breast bib and streaked underparts: a juvenile Swainson's Hawk. In a roadside pond we found a group of American Avocets, a much-appreciated shorebird species.

At Lake Balmorhea, we drove across the dam and looked into the water from various vantage points around the lake's perimeter. We had our first trip sightings of Clark's and Western Grebes. Least and Forster's Terns flew over the lake. Ann spotted a distant Black Tern and we all got scope views of it flying and diving into the lake. Wilson's Phalaropes in breeding plumage were present in numbers. Lesser Nighthawks flew over the water, and various duck species were present. While observing a flock of Franklin's Gulls, we saw one individual with the rosy pink cast that is sometimes seen on the breast and abdomen feathers of this species. Shorebirds here included Long-billed Dowitchers, Western, Least and Spotted Sandpiper, and Willet. Scaled Quail were common here, scurrying along the lake roads in small groups. We heard Sora calling from a concealed location in thick reeds. We left the lake at 5:00 pm, and returned to the lodge for happy hour, our checklist and dinner.

Day 10 Wednesday May 3rd

Following breakfast at 7:00 am at the lodge restaurant, we left Fort Davis State Park, stopping at the feeder before leaving. There we observed Bewick's Wren, Blue Grosbeak, Lesser Goldfinch and Pine Siskin among the feeder birds. Campers walked down the road saying

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there were quail behind the adjacent building. We walked over and



Lake Balmorhea Photo © C. Goldman

We were able to catch fleeting glimpses of Montezuma Quail as they foraged in tall grass and trees behind a campground building. Yesterday's views had been better, but we now had two sightings of

these birds on our trip! By 8:30 am we

were on the road to Balmorhea State Park. This area, supplied by the San Soloman springs, has a swimming pool, and is the site of a project aimed at recreating a desert wetland. We saw Greater Roadrunner and Song Sparrow, but the marsh area reported to hold wetland birds proved unproductive. We did look through viewing windows at the Comanche Springs pupfish and Pecos gambusia fish that are benefiting from the wetland project there.

We headed toward our next destination, Imperial Reservoir near Grandfalls, Texas. As we approached along a desert road, Ann suddenly called out that she had spotted a Burrowing Owl! Bert turned our vehicle around, and we went back to see the bird. It was sitting out in the open up on a fence post. We wondered where the bird might find a burrow in this desert scrub area, but appreciated the opportunity to observe it and add the species to our trip list. We proceeded on to the reservoir, and were treated to a large gathering

of waterbirds. Hundreds of Wilson's Phalaropes congregated along the bank. Shorebirds included both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Black-necked Stilt, Snowy Plover, and Avocets. Ducks included Lesser Scaup, Redhead, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Ruddy, Ring-necked and Fulvous Whistling Duck. Along the reservoir roads we saw Greater Roadrunner, Curve-billed Thrasher and Pyrrhuloxia. We left Imperial, happy to have had the opportunity to bird this area.

Fort Lancaster, off route #10, had been our back-up site for Gray Vireo. Though we had already seen this species, we decided to explore there on our way to Junction, TX, our destination for this night's lodging. We birded this old Civil War fort area, appreciating how its high elevation would allow patrolling of the road below. We were not able to find Gray Vireo in the area, but saw a Hutton's Vireo in the small trees. We arrived in the town of Junction at 4:45 pm. We held our final trip happy hour, toasting our great trip successes. We had seen most of our targeted birds, and had enjoyed sightings of 230 Texas bird species. Our celebration culminated at a local Mexican restaurant, where beer and cilantro provided just the right finishing touches to our Texas adventures.

Day 11 Thursday May 4th

We had breakfast at our hotel and drove to the San Antonio airport. In spite of a traffic jam, we arrived in sufficient time to allow for rental car return and check-in procedures. We left Texas on schedule at 11:30 am. Our connections were on time also, and we arrived in Philadelphia by 6:00 pm. At the airport Art would take a cab and Ann would be picked up by her husband. We gave goodbye hugs and final thanks for a fantastic trip. Karl and Connie went with Bert to retrieve his car and headed back to his house. The five of us had had wonderful birding experiences on this Texas trip. We arrived home with many great memories, already anticipating the chance to travel and bird together again in the future.

Texas Coast Migration Spectacle By Martin Selzer

This April Jane Henderson, Erica Brendel, Bob Krinsky and I took a trip to the springtime migration Mecca of High Island, Texas to witness the phenomenal passerine passage that occurs there annually. Virtually all the migrant warblers, vireos, orioles, grosbeaks, and tanagers that we so earnestly await returning from Mexico and Central and South America set out over the Gulf of Mexico northward at dark and arrive over the Texas coast at some time the following day. Depending on the weather conditions, they may be well inland as the sun rises but if they hit even a slight headwind or foul weather, they will seek refuge in the first vegetation they encounter behind the beach. Birding these isolated coastal wooded grooves, such as High Island, can be excellent even without weather fronts to knock down the migrants.



Common Nighthawk © J. Henderson

have the Bolivar Peninsula and nearby Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge promising 30-35 species of shorebirds; as well as the freshwater and brackish marshes of the coastal plain offering terns and long-legged wader possibilities to provide you with a fantastic springtime birding adventure.

While birding with Jane at Palmyra last fall, I had casually mentioned feeling that I had missed spring migration and that I wanted to go to High Island or Point Pelee this coming spring to be sure to catch it in 2006. That conversation led to another slightly more serious conversation on the subject, so we looked at our respective calendars and various tour companies' schedules.

Then an e-mail or two followed and Jane and I signed up for this tour with Field Guides. Unbeknownst to us, Bob signed up for this trip. He then talked Erica into coming on the tour. It wasn't

until the tour participant list was mailed out that Jane and I were able to realize the Bob and Erica were also coming on the trip.

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Besides good to phenomenal passerine birding at High Island you

Texas Coast Migration Spectacle... continued

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Prothonotary Warbler © J. Hender-

We spent the first two days of the trip in the Big Thicket area which is home of the southern pine specialist – red-cockaded woodpecker, brown-headed nuthatch and Bachman’s sparrow. This region is also host to southern breeding warblers such as prothonotary, yellow-throated and Swainson’s. Needless to say we got them all. The Trinity River flows through the Big Thicket and the area is the last known area of ivory-billed woodpecker in Texas. Although we kept our eyes open, we did not see any. We left the Big Thicket area and headed to High Island for the remainder of our trip.

Typically, your routine at High Island is to bird the Bolivar Peninsula and/or Anahuac in the morning and then in the afternoon, “check on the pulse of migration” at the Boy Scout woods. If migrants are showing up stay there or move on to Smith Oaks or any of the other patches of coastal live oaks from early afternoon until dark or whenever the birding activity slows down.

We had three mornings at High Island and each morning we started out at a different spot to get a better sampling of the shorebirds and marsh birds in the area. One day we headed straight to Anahuac NWR, one day we headed straight to the Bolivar Flats at the southern end of the peninsula and worked our way north and one day we started at the northern end of the peninsula and birded our way south. This way we hit the various tidal areas and marshes at different times of the day and were able to sample the differences in shorebird migration, heron and egret behavior.

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge is your typical auto-route with a series of impoundments and wet fields/marshes. It struck me as a very nice refuge. While for the most part waterfowl had already migrated north, the reedy edges held numerous common moorhens, purple gallinules, and king rails. These three species seemed to be everywhere as we scanned for other rails and for bitterns. The most common long-legged herons were snowy egrets, little blue and tri-colored herons. Besides the king rails, the real star of the morning were several extremely cooperative least bitterns that we watched as they hunted the edges of the reeds. In addition to birds, we had several garter snakes to look at, a foot-long cottonmouth in the middle of the road to photograph and lots of alligators of varying sizes.

The day we started at the Bolivar Flats and worked our way north we ended up with a shorebird list before lunch of 22 species including snowy, piping, black-bellied and Wilson’s plover; upland sandpiper; Wilson’s phalarope, and marbled godwit; 9 species of tern; Nelson’s sharp-tailed sparrow and tons of herons and egrets.

After our mornings we then stopped in at the Boy Scout Woods to check on the pulse of migration and after about an hour there made a move over to Smith Oaks. This is the larger of the two main patches of woods that people bird on High Island (there are several smaller patches that people, including us, routinely check out). Personally, I much preferred Smith Oaks and after checking in at the Boy Scout Woods would recommend spending the majority of one’s time there. The Houston Audubon Society maintains an information kiosk and small gift shop at the Boy Scout Woods so that makes it a good starting point to gather information and to get a flavor of the day’s activity. There is also a water drip that that the birds can be seen coming to and a photographer’s blind there.

While the first afternoon birding the Boy Scout Woods at High Island could at best be described as quiet. The moment we walked into Smith Oaks the second day, we knew something GOOD was happening as we had tons of birds immediately. There were lots and lots of northern orioles. Clearly the winds had changed enough to produce a fallout of migrants. The change since the day before was striking. Besides dozens of orioles, we had dozens of Tennessee warblers, numbers of rose-breasted grosbeaks, and, as we walked along the trails through the woods, lots of warblers (blackpolls, black-and-whites, yellows, black-throated greens, and redstarts) and vireos (red-eyed and yellow-throated). It was very exciting. After two hours we walked over to the lake to check out the heronry and check the woods on that side for anything different.



There is a small island that holds a colony of breeding roseate spoonbills, tri-colored herons, snowy, great and cattle egrets. All of them were in their breeding finery with their

Cottonmouth © J. Henderson

bills at breeding intensity and many of the nestlings were pretty good size already. The pink, fluffy spoonbill young won the unofficial award for the cutest young. We ducked back into a “secret” spot in the woods and stumbled onto a nice mixed flock of migrants which held our first (of what would be many) Blackburnian warblers, a magnolia warbler, a Philadelphia vireo and many more of what we saw when we first arrived at Smith Oaks. When we returned to where we first entered the oaks, all those orioles and grosbeaks were gone, but 6-10 catbirds were now there. We did another quick loop of the main trail

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Texas Coast Migration Spectacle.... continued

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and found another pocket of grosbeaks, a female golden-winged warbler and a warbling vireo. All in all a pretty incredible day and a great example of a fallout on High Island as it exists today. Now I'm sure there are some old timers out there who would say "Back in the day....", but I was pretty darn happy with what I saw today.

Our third afternoon there was very similar to the day I just described although the make-up of the migrant flocks was different. We had far fewer orioles and grosbeaks but we did have numerous bay-breasted warblers and Philadelphia vireos were everywhere. We walked the trails and caught up with small flocks of migrants throughout the woods in hopes of finding something new for the day.

It was a great trip. Deny him though I may, there is a lister buried deep, deep inside of me and there I shall happily keep him there except for those rare occasions when I let him out for some fresh air. For him I tallied 28 species of warblers (20 was the biggest single species day), 9 species of tern (all in one day), 31 species of shorebirds, (22 was the biggest single species day). The big shorebird day and the big tern day coincided. Now what does that tell you about the Bolivar Peninsula as a productive coastal/marsh habitat in late spring? Pretty good stuff, don't you think?



Roseate Spoonbill © J. Henderson

We choose to travel with Field Guides and had a tremendous trip. Bill and Naomi Murphy took a similar trip with WINGS the week before we did and had a similar experience. Whether you go on your own or with a reputable tour company (see the Birder Beware article on the DVOC web page for more information on this subject), I strongly recommend that you make your own pilgrimage to High Island, the Bolivar Peninsula and the Big Thicket some spring to enjoy the spring migration spectacle that you can witness there.

GLEANINGS

gleanings (glē' nīngz) *pl.n.* Defined as things that have been collected bit by bit: *the gleanings of patient scholars.*

So.. this column will be just that, interesting items, collected bit by bit. This issue's GLEANING is a June 2, 2006 post to the Delaware Listserv. It pertains to Colin Campbell's recent "retrotwitch" for Western Grebe in Delaware.

Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away.....

Date: Fri, 2 Jun 2006 17:36:50 -0400
 Sender: Delaware Birding
 From: Colin Campbell
 Subject: Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away...

As I started to write this missive last night (Thursday), one of the most beautifully loud and spectacular thunderstorms swept through north Wilmington and wiped out all of my - and apparently all of my neighbors - electrics. Delmarva Power and I are not friends. I pay them extravagantly, they treat me like a serf in a feudal system. How long this time I wonder; perhaps I can charge them for lack of service at \$20 an hour? It's now 5pm Friday and power has just been restored. That's \$400 they owe me. There's nothing new in what's below but, having written it, I'm sending it anyway. Your delete button isn't far away.

Today I experienced only the second occurrence of 'retrotwitch' in my birding life. Those unfamiliar with the British-derived word 'twitch' are advised that it refers to a situation in which a birder drops everything (well, nearly everything) and rushes by whatever means available to a locale wherein a bird he/she 'needs' has been reported. Generally, this means rapid transport from home or workplace.

A retrotwitch is a much more rare occasion where the birder is away from his/her usual domain and a rare/needed bird is reported in his/her local patch; he/she thus has to make a decision as to whether to gird the loins and race back to home territory to 'bag the bird' before it moves

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Membership Update: March thru June, 2006 by Connie Goldman, Membership Chair

Wow, what a busy season for birding! DVOC members have been traveling to many parts of the country and the world in recent months. From Oregon to North Carolina and Texas to Maine, DVOCers have been crisscrossing the map in pursuit of enriching birding experiences. Costa Rica and countries in Europe and Africa also have DVOC footprints this spring. Right here, close to home, our friends are spotting rarities in the field. Many members are busily tracking nesting species for the PA Breeding Bird Atlas. Seeing birds - that's at the heart of DVOC membership for all of us. So, spend time in the field, and enjoy! But...before you run back out, help me welcome our newest DVOC members. Share your field experiences with them, and find out what they've been up to!

Wendy Lenhart

I first became interested in birds at my best friend's turkey farm when I was a child. During my college years at Penn State, I enrolled in ornithology and spent my summers watching wild birds at a summer camp while working as a councilor. After graduation, I realized that birds HAD to be a part of my career, so I accepted an aviculture internship at the Tracy Aviary shortly after my under-graduate degree was finished. After working for several months at the San Antonio Zoo as a bird keeper, I moved back to Pennsylvania in 2002 for my current job as a bird keeper at the Philadelphia Zoo.

Megan Buliano

I started having an interest in birding about eight years ago. Most of my birding time has been spent a few hours north at Hawk Mountain. Some of my favorite locations have been Hawk Ridge, MN; Acadia National Park, ME; and Hammonasset State Park, CT. I recently relocated to the Philadelphia area and look forward to broadening my education in birding with the members of DVOC.

Mike Zickler

I have been backyard birding for 20+ years. I grew up near Hawk Mountain and we go to Cape May several times a year. I recently met Art McMorris, who is helping me write an article on Peregrine Falcons for my employer for the EPA Newsletter. He suggested I join the DVOC.

Buster Raff

Have been birding for 32 years. Participate in many New Jersey field surveys and studies. Began birding while working at Brigantine NWR 1972. Worked in YCC Program. Bird in Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland Counties with frequent field trips to tristate areas. WSB team "Wrending Talons," Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey.

Steve Saunders

I began birding about five years ago with the normal glamour events of fall hawk migration. From there I've expanded by joining my local Audubon chapter, through which I've been on numerous walks and outings. I have participated in the last two Christmas Bird Counts and I look forward this year to joining the spring bird count for the first time. I'm at the point now where I always have a pair of binoculars with me as I take my dog on a nightly walk through a nearby park. I regularly bird at Mill Grove, Meng Sanctuary, Valley Forge, the Norristown Farm Park and the Heinz refuge. I have continued my annual trips to Hawk Mountain and Cape May and I frequently hike in the Poconos.

GLEANINGS

Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away...continued

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on, or to stay in place and see the Oleaginous Hemispingus, the Marvelous Spatuletail or the Diademed Sandpiper-Plover, depending on where you happen to be. Geography usually determines the outcome, but if you're within fighting distance of a 'day-off' to get the local bird, the fever sets in. Failure to return if possible will instantly castigate the birder locally as a wimp, a gutless individual who doesn't really care about his/her state list and retributions are dire: ex-communication from the local hotline, background mutterings at the local bird club, ostracism, pointe-digitale (finger-pointing), etc, etc.. Not an enviable situation to be in, as you'll agree. I hope few of you have to make such agonizing decisions.

I was completing day 2 of a 5-day North Carolina pelagic bonanza when I received the news that a Western Grebe had been seen on the Delaware River in New Castle, about 10 miles from my home. Instant dilemma. A new state bird or to continue with Gulfstream rides? But pseudo-sense ruled, I'd an offspring's college investment staked in these pelagics and I wasn't going to miss the chance of a European Storm-Petrel suddenly appearing. Well, it did, but not from my boat, dammit. However, the pelagics were excellent and I returned today (Thursday) after an exactly 7-hour drive from Buxton NC to New Castle DE.

I parked by the yacht club and, fully opticalled, slowly walked the whole length of the footpath to the south - not a grebe to be seen through any lens. Despair then panic were setting in. I knew through kind friends that the bird had been seen this morning. no way was it going to leave in 90F heat and no wind. I took the car to the pier and scanned again. Nothing. It was 1.30pm. Then I noticed a young man seemingly photographing something right back whence I'd just come. I jumped in the car and, narrowly avoiding a bunch of school kids boarding a bus, headed back to the yacht club parking lot. The young man was Jim Wilson from the E Shore of MD and ... he had his scope on the Western Grebe. I must be getting old. The relief had to be witnessed to be believed. Jim'll tell you.

Colin Campbell

How NOT to do a Big Day - An account of the World Series of Birding run by "The Four Loons": DVOC members Bill Reaume (Captain), Scott Fraser, Mike Lyman, and Art McMorris

All photos © Scott Fraser



The "dead" van

"very tiny little" Volkswagen GTI. Nevertheless, it had 4 wheels and an intact engine, and we were on our way.

We proceeded with the northern portion of our planned and scouted route. We first went to the Wantage Grasslands for sparrows, Ring-necked Pheasant, Brown Thrasher and many other grassland and edge species. Our next spot was High Point State Park where we added such goodies as Common Raven, Cooper's Hawk, Least Flycatcher, Brown Creeper and White-crowned Sparrow; followed by the nearby Stokes State Forest where we picked up Broad-winged Hawk, Louisiana Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler and Cerulean Warbler, among many others. Our next stops at Culvers Lake, Van Ness Road, and a few other locations netted such targets as Golden-winged Warbler, Cliff and Rough-winged Swallows, and Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

We had now completed the northern portion of our route and found most of our target species in the allotted length of time, in spite of the fact that we were doing it five hours late and well after the critical pre-dawn and dawn hours when many species vocalize for the only time during the day. The time was now 3:00 PM rather than 10:00 AM. It was obvious that it would be impossible to make the long run down south for our carefully-scouted specialty habitats and southern birds. Determined to make the best of the situation, we

Splash! Thud! Pfffsst! That's the way our World Series of Birding started this year. Not a welcome sound at the start of a race around the state of New Jersey to find as many species of birds as possible during a 24-hour period, midnight to midnight. Five minutes before the start of the event, our van bottomed out in a hole on a rain-soaked gravel road in Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in northern New Jersey, breaking an engine coolant pipe and leaving us with a dead van.

Refusing to let that deter us, we pushed forward with our quest, but with a severely altered game plan. We birded Great Swamp for the next 2 hours, as had been our original plan, getting such great birds as King Rail, Virginia Rail, Sora, American Woodcock, American Bittern, Gray-cheeked Thrush and Willow Flycatcher; but then we had to spend the next five hours nursing the van out of the swamp and onto a paved road, getting a tow, and finding a replacement vehicle, which was (in the words of Bill Reaume, our team Captain), a



Arranging for the new vehicle

decided to go to the less-distant Sandy Hook and to DeKorte Park at Hackensack Meadowlands. We had not scouted either area, but they would give us the ocean and salt marsh habitats that were now out of reach down south.

Sandy Hook yielded such birds as gulls, terns, Brant, Northern Gannet, Double-crested Cormorant and Clapper Rail, whereas DeKorte, with the last rays of the sun, yielded Gadwall, Ruddy Duck, Common Nighthawk, Dunlin, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and Black Skimmer, among others. With darkness now upon us we returned to Great Swamp (probably the only time in World Series of Birding history that a state-wide team has started and finished in the same place!) to try again for Least Bittern and Eastern Screech Owl, but alas, neither chose to make its presence known.

In the end, we didn't do badly. We found 150 species, including 24 species of warblers and all but one species each of the rails, woodpeckers, vireos, swallows and thrushes; and we had some lucky finds, such as unscouted Common Mer-



Carrying on with it

ganser and Brant. Our total of 150 species was far below our original goal of 200, but considering that we lost a huge chunk of our day, and at a very critical time too, and that we had to scrap most of our planned route, we were quite pleased to pull a successful day out of the jaws of disaster. We would like to give special thanks to the DVOC team: Paul Guris, Bert Filemyr, Mike Fritz, Adrian Binns and Eric Pilotte, for their generous advice and sharing of scouting information. We attribute a large part of our success to the generous help that the DVOC team gave us. They brought cooperation and sharing to a new high and made the event even more fun than it already was.

From the President...continued

Nikon binoculars supplied to them through that program. We are also proud of the many Club members (Filemyr, Windfelder, Guris, Selzer, Fritz and others) who, over the last two years, have helped the kids at the Upper Main Line YMCA to expand their birding horizons as they scouted for and participated in the World Series of Birding. Congrats to the U-Terns team which won the World Series Youth competition in the grades six to eight division this year. They had a total of 157 species -- thanks to DVOC scouting help.

Our thanks also to members Binns, Henderson, Murphy, and Selzer for their past field work with kids from Langley School in Virginia and from the Oak Lane Day School. And kudos to Keith Russell, our 2003 Potter Award winner, for his ongoing work with inner city youngsters at the East Park Reservoir in Philadelphia. Not to mention our six members who lead trips at Tinicum (McGovern, Parnum, Brennan, Krober, Reeves, and Conant) and our Cape May members (like Louise Zemaitis, Mike O'Brien and the Suttons) who do so much with young birders.

Not too long ago two teenagers were on the Club's annual winter field trip to Montauk, Long Island (Glenn Seeholzer and Cameron Rutt). Surely it was Joann Raine that encouraged them. While several years have since passed, it was great to bump into Cameron last summer, working full-time for pay as an atlas blocbuster out in western Pennsylvania. In the meantime, we hear Glenn is continuing his college studies -- at Cornell, which he selected for its ornithology graduate program. We should never underestimate how we, as DVOC members, can influence the future.

Finally, I want to leave you with a word about this fall's DVOC banquet. Pete Dunne will be our speaker that evening, after last doing so in 1984. The date is November 16; get it on your calendar! Let's have a terrific evening.

A Blast from the Past! Were You There? Confess and Tell All! by Connie Goldman

I had the pleasure of meeting Bob Anderson during a March birding outing. Bob introduced himself and pointed out the best birding areas in this local park, which is a place I had not been to before. We started talking and soon realized we were both DVOC-ers! Bob explained that he is retired, spends most of his time in Bucks County and in western Pennsylvania, where he has a second family home. While formerly involved in the club, he does not like coming into the city so much these days, so has not been actively involved in meetings.



We watched the park's winter ducks together for awhile, with Bob recounting birding experiences he had with Rick Mellon, Alan Brady and other club members in years past. One incident, whose details are hazy and participants unnamed, involved birding Florida military property for Red-cockaded Woodpecker. "Special permission, designated roads only." Except, the bird, of course, was not on the designated road -- so...off-road they went in pursuit, and into deep wet sand. Stuck! Military property fence in view. Second vehicle on the other side willing to help, but how to fit the towing equipment through the fence? Part of that fence just had to go. Snip, Snip. Tow-rope attached, rescue accomplished. Get the bird and get away!

I got Bob to agree to a photo, thinking those who birded with him in years past would enjoy seeing and hearing of him. I certainly enjoyed meeting a fellow club member with such entertaining stories to tell!

Benjamin Rush State Park ...continued

(Continued from page 12)

Vireos, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles and both vultures occur during the breeding season. Other unusual species such as Yellow-breasted Chats and Chestnut-sided Warblers (which have both been found during the breeding season in a section of Fairmount Park that lies adjacent to Benjamin Rush) may also occur as breeders, but this has not yet been confirmed. Birds of open habitats found during the winter months have ranged from Catbirds and Brown Thrashers to Merlins and Long-eared Owls, but the most unusual species found to date was a Lark Sparrow that was observed in the community gardens area during January and February of 2001. Many migratory species also occur, especially in the park's forested sections, but a lack of regular surveys has severely limited our knowledge of which species use the park during migration.

Although Benjamin Rush is now a state park it is not necessarily immune from inappropriate uses or from commercial development. In 1993 for example, 19 acres of the park's land was used to construct a Veteran's Administration Nursing Home despite protests from park users. This loss probably occurred in part because so little was known about the park as a natural area then that the land was considered to have little intrinsic value.

Since that time we have learned that the park is not only a good area for birds but that it is also an area that still contains healthy populations of trout lilies, may apples, wild geraniums and other species of native plants. But there is still more to learn. In response to this need several DVOC members are participating in an informal survey of the park's breeding birds this summer. It is hoped that more birders will visit the park in the future and help add to our knowledge of the area's birdlife. If you have a chance to bird at Benjamin Rush and you are willing to share your observations I would be happy to receive them and add them to a database of information I'm collecting about the park. Observations may be sent to me at the following address.

Keith Russell
6222 McCallum St.
Philadelphia, PA 19144

Spring 2006 - Warbler Migration at Fort Washington State Park by Naomi Murphy

I've always loved spring. Not only is it a period of growth and renewal, longer days and warmer weather. It is also migration - and all across the country, migratory birds are returning to their breeding grounds. As far as I am concerned, there is hardly a more exciting time in the birding calendar.

Some of my favorite migrants are the wood warblers. One might ask how these stunning little birds navigate thousands of miles from their wintering grounds in Mexico, and Central and South America. Well, recent scientific evidence actually suggests that birds have specialized molecules in their visual system that translates magnetic compass information into visual patterns* and they use this specialized night vision, in conjunction with the stars and magnetic cues, to accomplish this feat.



American Redstart Photo © A. Binns

From a birding perspective, the window of opportunity for seeing and hearing migrating warblers is really rather small. When I was still working, this was often cause for much weeping and gnashing of teeth. It just never (oh, ok...rarely) seemed that there was any fall out on the weekends.

Well, I'm retired now and this spring we (Bill – the spousal unit and I) decided that we would concentrate our “warbling” effort at Ft. Washington State Park (FWSP) which is more or less our local patch and only a few miles from our home. We'd talked about making this kind of concerted effort before, but the idea solidified for us this year after we spent some time on the Texas coast with a Brit by the name of Dave Nurney. Dave told us that, with petrol at about \$8.00 a gallon in the UK, many British birders are spending more time birding their local patch. This made sense to us. In order to really do this, we agreed that we'd bird the park consistently to see how migration proceeded throughout the period. We started on April 25, continued through May 24 and hit the park just about every morning....even on days that were rainy and when the winds were wrong. .

This approach provided us with a great deal of insight into day to day changes in species and numbers. Trying to get good looks at the birds was challenging, particularly on the Ridge Road. They were often very high and moving through the treetops.

While you will get no argument from me that the most gratifying way to identify migrating warblers is to see them, being able to identify them on song is also a much needed skill. It takes work, but when you can identify birds by their song, you have a much better sense of just how many Black-throated Blues (for example) are in the woods on any given day. The best way to approach this is to spend time in the field.

(Continued on page 36)

Request for Black Rail Information

Black Rails have been decreasing alarmingly for the last ten years or so. Harry Armistead is accumulating data and working on an article relative to the status of the Black Rail in coastal states (but also including inland areas of those states) from Texas, along the Gulf Coast to Florida, and up to New England. So far, the article at 9,100 words has been mostly a review of literature that incorporates Harry's field experience and what he has been able to find concerning others' field experience. If you have any records (or ideas) please contact Harry Armistead, 523 E. Durham St., Philadelphia, PA 19119-1225, 215-248-4120, harryarmistead@hotmail.com. All contributors will be acknowledged in the article.

Summer 2006

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Thursday July 6, 2006, 7:30 pm

Informal Summer meeting to be held at the Palmyra Cove Nature Center, Palmyra NJ

Thursday August 3, 2006, 7:30 pm

Informal Summer meeting to be held at the Palmyra Cove Nature Center, Palmyra NJ

Thursday September 7, 2006, 7:30 pm

Informal Summer meeting to be held at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.

Thursday November 16, 2006, 7:30 pm

Annual Banquet: Mark your calendars for this special event. Our speaker this year will be Pete Dunne - Director of the Cape May Bird Observatory. His program “Twenty-five Things that Changed Birding ” will no doubt be a treat. More information will follow as it becomes available.

As always, keep an eye on the DVOC website for more information relative to programs.

www.dvoc.org

Summer 2006 Bird Quiz

- 1 - Which is the most widespread of our warblers?
- 2 - Which two warblers have an obvious black terminal under tail band?
- 3 - Where do Kirtland's Warblers winter?
- 4 - Which warblers are affectionately known as the “four ladies”?

(Answers on page 38)

Warbler Migration at Fort Washington State Park ... continued



(Continued from page 35)

And nothing beats hearing the bird and tracking it down to confirm (or not) your identification. Pneumonic devices can be very helpful to the learning process. The first warbler songs I

Black & White Warbler Photo © A. Binns

learned were through the use of a pneumonic device. Ruth Zumeta, a member of Wyncote Audubon, taught me that Black-throated Blue “says” *I am la-zee* and Black-throated Green says *trees trees whispering trees*. Twenty years later I can pretty much identify these birds on call without a second thought. Thanks, Ruth!

Listening to CDs and audio tapes of bird calls can also be very useful. You can learn and also confirm the calls. But don’t try to learn too many songs at once. For me it really was a process and even now, all



Black-throated Blue Photo © A. Binns

of these years later, there are still calls I need to refresh myself on each year and still birds I have to chase down to confirm (or not) my identification. Identifying birds by ear really can be one of the most challenging, frustrating and (for me) gratifying parts of birding.

So how did the warbler migration go at FWSP this year? Well, here is a brief synopsis broken down by week.

Week 1: April 25 thru June 1

- We averaged about ten species a day
- Yellow-rumps were the predominant bird.
- In addition to the Yellow-rumped we saw our first Blue-winged, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Pine, good numbers of Palm, Black & White, Ovenbird, Yellowthroat & Hooded Warblers.

Week 2: June 2 thru 8

- We had between 13 – 18 species a day during week 2.
- Yellow-rumps were still the predominant species. It was hard, on some mornings, to pull out some of the other songs because of the din of Yellow-rump song.
- We continued to see the species we’d had in week 1 but in greater numbers.
- In addition to those species we added: Tennessee, Nashville, Parula, Yellow, Black-throated Blue, Magnolia, Blackburnian, the first Blackpolls, Redstart and Worm-eating Warbler . We

also had a Yellow-breasted Chat at the Flourtown piece of the park.

- By the end of Week 2 the numbers of Palms dropped and the few Prairies that had been around disappeared.
- Although we couldn’t count it as a species, we were excited by great looks at a Lawrence’s Warbler.

Week 3: June 9 thru 15

- The number of species we saw each day rose to between 16 to 18
- Numbers of Tennessee, Blackburnian, Blackpoll and Bay-breasted Warblers increased while Blue-winged dropped out almost completely.
- We were seeing Hooded Warblers on a daily basis.
- We saw our first Northern and Louisiana Waterthrushes along with Canada Warbler.
- The numbers of Yellow-rumped Warblers dropped precipitously by the end of the week. We went from 100+ per day to 10 – 12 per day.



Prairie Warbler Photo © A. Binns

Week 4: June 16 thru 22 (plus 23 &24)

- Numbers of species dropped during the week but we still had between 12 – 15 species each day.
- We continued to see Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll and Canada Warblers.
- Numbers of individuals were generally lower.
- It was a different experience due to the decrease in Yellow-rumps. It was quieter overall but was much easier to hear all of the other birds.
- We had three Mourning Warblers during the week.
- We had a singing Kentucky.

All in all it was a great migration for us. We ended up with 29 species of warblers this year. Over the 25 years that we’ve been birding the park we’ve recorded 34 species of warblers in migration (mostly spring but a few in fall as well).

It is always a bit of a let down when it’s all over but we are already looking forward to next spring.

*Erich Jarvis Ph.D., (919) 681-1680, assistant professor of neurobiology at Duke University Medical Center
DukeMedNews, <http://news.mc.duke.edu/news/article.php?id=8769>

Field Trips ...Adrian Binns, Field Trip Chair

July 15 - BOMBAY HOOK NWR and ENVIRONS, DELAWARE, Part 1

Join us to witness the early part of the annual southbound shorebird migration spectacle. Meet at 7:30AM at the headquarters Leader: Martin Selzer

July 29, 2006 - Annual Picnic

Details will be posted here.

August 19 - BOMBAY HOOK NWR and COASTAL, DELAWARE Part 2 A trip to catch the later wave of the shorebird migration spectacle. Meet at 7:30AM at the headquarters. Leader: Martin Selzer

August 26 - BRANDYWINE CREEK STATE PARK, DELAWARE This is a good time for early warblers (Golden-winged and Mourning) and possible unusual flycatchers such as Yellow-bellied or Olive-sided. Meet at the park nature center at 7:45 AM. Park fee is in effect. Leader: Andy Ednie

August 27 - PALMYRA COVE NATURE PARK, PALMYRA, NJ We will bird for passerines and then go to the cove for water birds around 10:30 AM when the tide will be low. This is a good time for early fall migrants and in addition to the more common migrants, we will look for Golden-winged & Mourning Warblers, Yellow-bellied, Least and Olive-sided Flycatchers. Meet in the parking lot at 6:45 AM Leader: Frank Windfelder

September 1 - CONFUSING FALL BIRDERS at HIGBEE BEACH WMA, NJ

Spend a morning birding the fields and forest edges looking for migrating songbirds. We will sort through the fall plumages of the (hopefully) numerous migrants at this Fall hotspot. With any luck we will get to see a big fallout of birds, but there should be plenty to see in any case at this time of year. Emphasis will be on sorting out "confusing fall warblers". The warblers are not confused, we are. Meet at the main lot at Higbee Beach WMA Cape May Point at 7:30 AM Leader: Mike Fritz

September 2 - JOHNSON SOD FARM IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY, NJ

We should see an assortment of shorebirds including plovers and sandpipers. We have had some nice rarities in prior years....Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in 2003 and Pacific Golden Plover in 2002. Meet on Grier's Lane, just east of Route 77 at 7:30AM Leader: Martin Selzer

September 9 - JOHN HEINZ NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AT TINICUM, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

We'll look for Bald Eagle, Blue-winged Teal, Bololink and fall warblers such as Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Palm Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler, Redstart. Meet at 8 AM at the Cusano Environmental Education Center Leader: Denis Brennan

September 16 - FALL BIRDING AT THE PALMYRA COVE, NEW JERSEY

Our focus for this trip will be on migrating warblers - but anything is possible including numerous Connecticut's. Up to 20 species of warblers have been seen on past trips to this wonderful birding location. Meet at 7:00 AM in the parking area. Leader: Ward Dasey

September 17 - HAWK MOUNTAIN, PENNSYLVANIA

This is the peak time for Broad-wing migration. Meet at the visitor's center at 8:00AM. Bring a packed lunch. There is an entrance fee unless you are a member. Leader: To be announced

September 18 - MANAYUNK SWIFT ROOST, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Huge numbers of Chimney Swifts roost in chimneys of certain schools in the Roxborough/Manayunk area in Fall migration. Meet at the Dobson School on Umbria Street and Hermitage Lane in Manayunk on Monday, at 7:00 PM to witness this annual spectacle. Please check dvoc.org to confirm the location of the field trip since we may move the trip if the swifts are roosting elsewhere. Parking is limited; carpooling advisable. Leader: Jane Henderson

October 1 - TUCKERTON MARSHES, NEW JERSEY

Focus for this trip is on Sharp-tailed Sparrows. We should get great looks at Salt Marsh Sharp-tail's and will be able to compare all races of Nelson's. A walk along Seven Bridges Road should add additional species. We have gotten Clay-colored Sparrow on past trips. Bring high boots or wellies and pack a lunch if you plan to follow us to Brigantine afterwards. Meet at the end of Seven Bridges Road at 7:30 sharp! Leader: Frank Windfelder

October 21 , THE NATIVE GRASSLANDS, PENNYPACK TRUST, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PA

Tour the native grasslands at Pennypack Trust for sparrows and other grassland birds. Notable recent finds there include Dickcissel, Orange-crowned Warbler and Vesper Sparrow. Savannah Sparrows are abundant. The area is also good for raptors. Meet at the Creek Road entrance off Terwood Road, 1.2 miles south of Edgemoor Road, Huntingdon Valley, PA. Contact leader for driving instructions or go to [their web site](#) where a map can be found. Leader: JoAnn Raine

November 4 or 5 - BAKE OVEN KNOB, PA

This trip is for raptors including possible Golden Eagle and Goshawk. A decision as to which day the trip goes will be made during the week leading up to the trip and will be based on which day appears to have the best conditions for migrating raptors. Meet at parking lot at 8:30AM and bring lunch. Leaders : Frank Windfelder, Bill Murphy and Chris Walters

Our Field Trip Chair, Adrian Binns, is always looking for volunteers to lead field trips. If you are willing to lead a trip or two, please contact [Adrian](#). You'll be providing a service for the Club. This is a great way to give back and to help... especially our new membersto learn field ID and/or the birding hotspots in the Delaware Valley area.

Officers

President

Chris Walters

Vice-President

Paul Guris

Secretary

Frank Windfelder

Treasurer

Naomi Murphy



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Doris McGovern

Martin Selzer

Jeff Holt

Mike Lyman

Nate Rice

Connie Goldman

DVOC is an organization for birders and bird enthusiasts in the Delaware Valley region. Anyone with an interest in birds is invited to attend our functions.

Visit our website at www.dvoc.org. Interested in becoming a member? Follow the link to "Membership Information" for everything you need to know about how to join the club.

Larus Committee

Naomi Murphy

Jane Henderson

Martin Selzer

Larus will be published three times in 2006 - April, July, and October. We want to thank those of you who have submitted articles for this issue or for prior issues and we encourage members with an interest to submit articles for publication.

Deadlines for submissions are March 10, June 10, and October 10.

Caption Contest by Naomi Murphy



Here is this month's picture that is just crying-out-for a caption. Just let your creative juices flow. Send along the myriad of suggested captions to me at ndmurphy3@hotmail.com

Bird Fact – Summer 2006 by Adrian Binns

Only four of our wood warblers show a different and distinguishable color on their rumps. Three have yellow rumps: Yellow-rumped (aptly named), Magnolia and Cape May. The only one that has a white rump patch is the Red-faced Warbler.

Answers to the Summer 2006 Bird Quiz by A. Binns

1 - Which is the most widespread of our warblers?
Yellow Warbler

2 - Which two warblers have an obvious black terminal under tail band?
American Redstart & Magnolia

3 - Where do Kirtland's Warblers winter?
The Bahamas

4 - Which warblers are affectionately known as the "four ladies"?
Virginia's, Lucy's, Grace's and Olive

Vote on Changes to DVOC By-Laws and Constitution

The By-Laws Committee has proposed a revision to the By-Laws and Constitution. Details of those proposed changes were included in the last Larus-on-Line, in the Paper Larus and on the DVOC website. <http://www.dvoc.org/Misc/ByLawChanges.htm>

The vote on these changes is now scheduled for the October 5 meeting. Please review the proposed changes and be prepared to vote at that meeting.