

Philadelphia Larus

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Israel: Miracle of Migration

by SANDRA SHERMAN

EILAT, ISRAEL — THE PRESIDENT OF the American Birding Association stands on the North Beach here, taking in the wonders of birding the Red Sea.

Larry Balch, a Chicago math teacher, has concentrated his birding time on tracking down more than 750 avian species in North America, and he seems amused by the familiar, yet new life forms around him.

Several Greater Sand Plover still in basic plumage — this is mid-March, and they are heading north — feed at the shoreline; a distant Great Crested Grebe hasn't moved north yet after overwintering here; a Slender-billed Gull joins the flock of Black-headed Gulls wheeling around in search of a quick meal.

Someone points out a Reef Heron sitting casually in a small rowboat just a few hundred feet offshore.

Balch fixes his gaze on the bird, its proportionately long bill drooping toward the bow, and, just as casually, remarks, "Oh, I've never seen a *white* one."

Of course, Balch's life Reef Heron was the dark-phase *Egretta gularis* seen on Nantucket Island in the summer of 1983.

If he'd been lucky enough to be in Cape May at the right time, he could have had a Northern Wheatear or a Eurasian Kestrel there. But what might be specialties on Dunne's Dunes are merely trash birds in Israel.

Balch was one of 35 representatives of birding or conservation organizations or publications from 14 countries to partake in a whirlwind tour of the hottest birding spots in southern Israel during spring migration. DVOG had three members on the trip: Hawk Mountain Sanctuary's Jim Brett, Cape May Bird Observatory's Pete Dunne and me.

The primary sponsor of the trip was the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, a non-profit organization that is responsible for a lot of excellent conservation and education work in that country.

SPNI's dedicated staffers — such as group leaders Yossi Leshem, director of SPNI's Israel Raptor Information Center, and Edna Gorney, director of the Eilat Bird Observatory — have a lot to share with the world's birders.

Through their country, about the size of New Jersey, passes one of the greatest bird migrations on earth. In just two spring days a few years ago, birdwatchers in Eilat counted more raptors than can be seen in almost three of Cape May's best fall hawk-watching seasons — more than 200,000, and all one species, the Honey Buzzard.

More than 750,000 raptors have been counted in a spring in Eilat, and ornithologists estimate that millions may pass over the Eilat mountains each year.

Israel sits at the juncture of three continents, and almost 500 species have been seen there, many of which are migrants heading to or from their breeding grounds in Eastern Europe and Asia.

Migrating birds coming up from their wintering grounds in Africa will avoid crossing the Mediterranean Sea — particularly the passive migrants, or those that soar on thermals rather than actively flap.

While we were not to witness the spectacle of tens of thousands of Steppe Eagles (*Aquila nipalensis*, known affectionately during the trip as "nips") or Steppe Buzzards (*Buteo buteo vulpinus*, a subspecies of the common Buzzard), at times we did see steady streams of these species, as well as a fair number of Black Kites.

The highlights of our trip came in two forms: the multitudes of migrating White Storks and the spectacularly serendipitous sighting of one Lappet-faced Vulture — there is only one breeding pair of the Israeli subspecies *Torgos tracheliotus negevensis*, remaining in the country.

We viewed the impressive line of White Storks — maybe 4,000 of them — as they lazily soared north through the central Negev Desert, stringing out, kettling, stringing out again.

THE LAPPET-FACED VULTURE, ugly, to be sure, was a welcome sight as it perched atop an electric line poll right by the side of the road near Yotvata, in the southern part of the Negev. Staying in the bus so as not to disturb the bird, we propped our tripods and scopes up on the seats of the bus. We could even see the blushing pink neck and the auricular opening.

Later, we passed a low tree in which a huge pile of sticks hung on two levels. The remains of a long-ago-abandoned Lappet-faced's nest, the pile had collapsed because of its weight and its state of disrepair.

Besides all the European migrants, Israel is home to many desert species. We caught glimpses of Trumpeter Finches, with their stubby red bills and tinkling songs, as well as the common Hoopoe Lark, the rare Bar-tailed Desert Lark, a Lanner Falcon on nest and several species of sandgrouse. We were taken to a spot in Eilat where, just at nightfall, a flock of rare Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse flew in to drink.

Our hosts gave us a number of chances to meet with some of Israel's top scientists involved in ornithology. Tel Aviv University Professor Heinrich Mendelssohn, head of the school's Zoological Center, showed us 4-day-old Lappet-faced Vultures that are part of a breeding project, as well as Rosa, a 34-year-old Lappet-faced who spurns the advances of a younger male, but follows her keeper around the cage.

We visited Amatz Zahavi, who is doing research in the Arava

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by EDWARD D. FINGERHOOD

Field Notes:

The Arctic Loon is distinguished in breeding plumage by a deep green to blackish patch on the neck. In breeding plumage the Pacific Loon has a purple to blackish patch on the neck. Both neck patches appear black except in good light. In winter plumage, the two species are indistinguishable in the field.

The Pacific Loon is more common than the Arctic Loon, and it ranges from Alaska to Southern California and eastward to the Hudson Bay, rarely to the East Coast. The Arctic Loon ranges from Alaska south to about Victoria, British Columbia.

The best illustrations of these two species are in Peter Harrison's *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*, Plate 6.

The Western Grebe's black cap extends below the eyes and into the lores; its bill is yellow-green. The dark cap on Clark's Grebe does not reach the eyes or lores, and its bill is orange-yellow. The Western Grebe predominates in the north and east of its range. Clark's Grebe predominates in the south. But there is much sympatry, or overlapping. The two species are well-illustrated in the *National Geographic Guide*.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker's range is northern and eastern. The Red-Naped Sapsucker's range is western. Both sexes of the Red-Naped Sapsucker have red on the crown, neck and nape. Neither sex of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker has red on the nape. The two species are well-illustrated in the *National Geographic Guide*.

LUMPS

Happily, none!

EDITOR'S NOTE: This information was summarized from "The Thirty-Fifth Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union — Check-List of North American Birds," *The Auk* 102:680-686. July 1985.

Quickie Quiz

1. South Carolina's state bird is the Carolina Wren. Rhode Island's is the Rhode Island Red. California's state bird is the California Quail. What state has adopted a bird with a different state's name?

2. The Northern Cardinal is the most adopted state bird, with the American Robin coming in third. What species is number two?

3. What ornithological family has the most representative species among state birds?

ANSWERS
1. Utah's state bird is the California Gull.
2. The Western Meadowlark is the state bird of Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon and Wyoming.
3. The thrush family is represented by the American Robin, Mountain Bluebird, Eastern Bluebird, Wood Thrush and Hermit Thrush.

Meetings are held the first and thirds Thursdays of each month at 8 p.m., at the Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th St. and Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

NOV. 7 — HOWARD BROKAW: Attu. This meeting was rescheduled.

NOV. 21 — ANNUAL BANQUET. Armas Hill, no doubt with a little help from his friends, will enlighten us on the charms of birding in Brazil. For a preview in print, see Alan Brady's article herein. Kate Brethwaite is back as chairwoman; this year she is offering us a choice of dinners: filet mignon at \$12.75 or \$11.50 for chicken. The banquet will again be held at Walber's on the Delaware, Essington, Pa. **DEADLINE FOR RESERVATIONS IS NOV. 7.** Please specify choice of main course. **NOTE:** Due to construction, Route 291 may still be closed. From either direction, follow Route 95 to Route 420 South. Follow 420 to end, bear right and go about one block. Walber's is still on your left.

DEC. 5 — PETER DAVEY: African Birds. Davey, a member of Ker and Downey Safaris, Ltd., "the oldest established ongoing safari company in Africa," will share his slides with us. He is a contributor to Project VIREO.

DEC. 19 — SERGE LaFRANCE: Coastal Birding. Bring hip boots and mosquito repellent.

JAN. 2 — ANNUAL ELECTION MEETING. Bring your own cheese and crackers.

FIELD TRIPS

Nov. 3: **Bake Oven Knob.** Meet at parking lot at 9 a.m.

Nov. 16: "The World of Birds," a trip to the New York Zoological Society. Leader: Sidney Lipshutz, 215-232-8645. Meet at 10 a.m. at the Vince Lombardi rest area on the New Jersey Turnpike (just past the last toll gate going north).

Jan. 11-12: **Pocono Weekend.** Meet leader Phil Street at the Holiday Inn in Allentown, at the intersection of Routes 309 and 22 at 8 a.m. For information, call Phil, 215-363-7776.

Jan. 26: **Shark River.** Meet at Municipal Pier opposite Pat's Diner, Belmar, N.J., at 8 a.m.

For information on any field trips, call Frank Windfelder, field trip chairman, 215-673-0240.

Philadelphia Larus

Send information you would like considered for publication in *Philadelphia Larus* to:

Sandra Sherman, editor
Philadelphia Larus
c/o Academy of Natural Sciences
19th St. and the Parkway
Philadelphia, Pa. 19103
215-893-5739 (work)

The American Ornithologists' Union recently changed the status and nomenclature of a number of birds from those published in the 1983 edition of the AOU *Check-list*. This, the 35th supplement to the *Check-list*, affects various North and Middle American and Hawaiian birds.

The following abstract summarizes only those changes that relate to birds in the United States and Canada.

NAME CHANGES

American Black Oystercatcher to **Black Oystercatcher**
Toxostoma dorsale to **Toxostoma crissale** (Crissal Thrasher)

ADDITIONS

Additions to the AOU *Check-list* needed documentation of occurrence by specimen, photograph or tape-recorded evidence. The AOU now recommends that photographic evidence be deposited with one of several institutions, including Project VIREO at the Academy of Natural Sciences.

Western Reef-Heron, *Egretta gularis*, *Accidental*, Massachusetts

Northern Hobby, *Falco subbuteo*, *Accidental*, Alaska

Black-winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*, *Accidental*, Alaska

Green Sandpiper, *Tringa ocropus*, *Casual*, Alaska

Brown-chested Martin, *Phaeoprogne tapera*, *Accidental*, Massachusetts

Eurasian Jackdaw, *Corvus monedula*, *Casual*, northeastern North America, Pennsylvania (my addition)

Lanceolated Warbler, *Locustella lanceolata*, *Casual*, Alaska

Red-flanked Bluetail, *Tarsiger cyanurus*, *Accidental*, Alaska

The only specimen of a Calandra Lark, *Melanocorypha calandra*, collected in the United States was by John A. Gillespie, the late DVOC president, in Glenolden, Pa., in May 1928. This bird has now been added to the AOU's Hypothetical List. It is regarded as a "man-assisted vagrant." For further information, see *The Auk*, Vol. 45 (1928), pp. 375-376.

DELETIONS

None.

SPLITS

Arctic Loon becomes:
Arctic Loon, *Gavia arctica*, and Pacific Loon, *G. pacifica*

Western Grebe becomes:
Western Grebe, *Aechmophorus occidentalis*, and Clark's Grebe, *A. clarkii*

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker becomes:
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, *Spizella breweri*, and Red-naped Sapsucker, *S. nuchalis*

WHAM! Brazil's Birds Are All Over!

by ALAN BRADY

AM I DREAMING or did we really depart Kennedy Airport at noon; arrive in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; fly to the small town of Corumba on the western border of Brazil; travel 40 miles by minibus to the Paraguay River; take two aluminum outboard boats more than six hours up river to this place called Fazenda Santa Clara, a sort of ranch deep in the Pantanal, the marshland of the Mato Grasso?

Armas Hill, Kate Brethwaite, Jim Meritt, Harry Franzen, Chris Danzenbaker, Sally Conyne and my wife, Liz, and I are making this trip, following directions given to us by Bob Ridgely.

The final three hours of our boat ride could have been the final three hours of our lives, as we traveled in complete darkness up an ever-narrowing river in a crashing electrical storm. One of the boats even ran out of gas in this pitch-black night, and we were obliged to syphon some gas out of our tank for the other boat.

All this occurred while we were incomunicado with our two boatmen, who spoke only Portuguese, the official language of Brazil. We arrived at the Fazenda about 24 hours after our New York departure.

At dawn it's bird-time in the tropics, and as I step outside, it's WHAM! All over birds!

Eyeball to eyeball with a Southern Lapwing; a dozen Buff-necked Ibis come screaming out of their roost overhead, while a flock of 50 Bare-faced Ibis fly by. A third species of ibis, Plumbeous, poses on a bare limb, watching a horde of Monk Parakeets flowing into the low trees around the Fazenda.

Six Nandy Conures are squawking at the Golden-collared Macaws that have zoomed in. A fancy-looking woodpecker called a Campo Flicker is on a fencepost a few feet away, and a lone Nacunda Nighthawk makes a couple of flip-flop passes and lands close by.

Cattle Tyrants ride the backs of pigs, and Tiger Herons stalk the pond just behind the



Deep in the Mato Grasso in Brazil (kneeling, from left) are Chris Danzenbaker, Armas Hill and Kate Brethwaite. Standing (from left) are Jim Meritt, Juan Carlos Aguilar, Alan Brady, Harry Franzen, Liz Brady and Sally Conyne.

kitchen. There's a kettle of Jabirus overhead, and a half-dozen B-29-type Red-and-green Macaws come laboring by.

We're all in paradise! Bob told us this place would blow our minds!

The target bird in these parts is the Arara Azul, the 40-inch-long Hyacinth Macaw, largest of all parrots.

After breakfast, we set out along the dike road that runs through the extensive marshland. Small tree islands are interspersed through the marsh, and the macaws are known to frequent these roosting spots.

Up until now, we've been sorting out hundreds of hawks and kites, including the lovely Pearl Kite, Plumbeous Kite, Snail Kite, Barred Forest Falcon, Collared Hawk and Savannah Hawk that are continually in sight.

Jim spots an ostrich-like Rhea; it eludes us, but we discover a half-dozen more. A special surprise is the discovery of eight Giant River Otters that come snorting and blowing up to see us. Their extreme curiosity is obviously a prime reason for their rarity, for they easily fall prey to poachers.

Suddenly, our sharp-eyed host and guide, Juan Carlos Aguilar, calls out, "Arara!" He has spotted three Hyacinth Macaws — two adults and a juvenile. Juan Carlos, in our three-day stay here, proved to be not only a valuable bird-finder, but also a most gracious host and a fast friend to all of us.

On our last morning, he and his right-hand man, Geronimo, take us back to Corumba aboard the same two skiffs, and this time we take a magnificent "inland pelagic trip."

Flocks of Green Ibis and Chaco Chachalacas are abundant. Yellow-billed and Red-crested cardinals are jumping around the water's edge. Hundreds of assorted kingfishers dash about, and Capybaras, dog-sized rodents, wander along the shore trying to avoid the waiting Caymans.

The sharp lookout is rewarded with the sight of a dozen Bat Falcons, a Crane Hawk and a spectacular Orange-breasted Falcon perched over the water. We glide past a pair of Bare-faced Curassows, many turkey-sized Southern Screammers with their knobby knees, huge Maguari Storks and White-necked Herons.

Yes, this is a land of giant, exciting birds, and we all vowed to return. And there's no need to pinch me, for I'm NOT dreaming.

You are cordially invited to the

DVOC Annual Dinner

Thursday, November 21, 1985

Guest speaker: Armas Hill, voice of Delaware Valley Hot Line: "Adventures in Brazil"

Walber's on the Delaware

Taylor Avenue

Essington, Pa.

Social hour, 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Dinner, 7:30 p.m.

Cost: \$12.75, steak, \$11.50 chicken

Mail checks to:

C. Brethwaite, chairwoman

533 Atterbury Rd.

Villanova, Pa.

19085

Make checks payable to DVOC

LOCAL NOTES

ARE DUNNE'S DUNES DONE FOR? He'll find plenty of reasons to return, but as of Dec. 1, **Pete Dunne** will be leaving the Cape May Bird Observatory for higher ground. Pete will be working out of New Jersey Audubon's Scherman-Hoffman Sanctuary in Bernardsville, N.J., where he will be director of communications/public relations for N.J. Aud. He also will be managing editor of the organization's publication, cleverly called *New Jersey Audubon*. Pete's been in Cape May since 1976. No permanent replacement has been found yet, but **Renee Kochenberger** will continue to staff the CMBO office.

By the way, Pete says this fall's ban on using certain fields and woods at Higbee Beach is probably temporary. In a sign posted in the fields, the state Department of Environmental Protection and the Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife announce that, in order to "minimize the influence of people on migrating birds, all human use, including bird watching, will be restricted to designated trails . . . from Sept. 15 to Nov. 1." Also, Fish & Game plans to "determine how human activity [in this area] affects these migrating birds."

WOULDN'T YOU REALLY RATHER HAVE A BEWICK'S? The summer-long controversy continues over the report of a singing Bewick's Wren or two near Fort Washington. The birds were first discovered in early July by a tenant on the property of former DVOC member **John Cadwalader**, but the report was apparently clouded by resident Carolina Wrens singing very uncharacteristic songs. The discussion was brought into the meeting via tape recordings introduced by **Ed Manners** and **Alan Brady**, as well as comments from **George Reynard**. Could this species, extirpated for perhaps 25 or 30 years from eastern Pennsylvania, have nested here this summer? The answer, like a Sooty Tern, is still up in the air.

Audubon Action, the newspaper of the National Audubon

Society, has rightfully recognized **Ed Fingerhood** as the first to suggest the idea of a John James Audubon postage stamp. The 22-cent stamp was issued this year to celebrate the bird artist's 200th birthday in April. Before he moved to the Baltimore area, Ed was president of Valley Forge Audubon.

AN AUSPICIOUS YEAR: 1985 is the year **Jim Meritt** retired from General Electric and the Brigantine Christmas Count. After 17 years, Jim has passed the baton to **Brian Moscatello**. The Brigantine count is set for Dec. 21. Call Brian — 609-235-1739 — for details.

Count dates this year are between Dec. 18 and Jan. 5. Other local dates and their leaders are: Cape May, Dec. 22, **Keith Seager**, 609-884-8778; Bombay Hook, Dec. 29, **Dave Cutler**, 215-886-0937; and Glenolden, Dec. 28, **Frank Haas**, 215-565-6319. The Glenolden count was moved back a week because of a scheduled deer hunt at Ridley Creek State Park.

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, in cooperation with Cedar Crest College in Allentown, is offering a short course in "The Ecology and Conservation of Raptors" Jan. 2 to 11. For information, contact Hawk Mountain, Route 2, Kempton, PA 19529, 215-756-6961. . . . Checklists to the birds of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area are still available. Send a self-addressed stamped envelope to **Sandy Sherman**, c/o the Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th St. and the Parkway, Philadelphia, PA 19103. The lists were provided to DVOC by **Jack Padalino**.

TRY AGAIN: **Stephen R. Wylie's** title with the Oklahoma Zoo was incorrectly listed in the summer issue of *Larus*. He is director of the zoo.

DVOC is saddened at the news of the death of longtime member **H. Waldemar Fries**, who died May 6 at the age of 96. . . . The club welcomes new members **Walter Thurber** of Media, Pa., and **Barbara Warren** of Mount Wolf, Pa.

Go to Israel to See Miracle of Migration

(Continued from Page 1)

Valley on the wierd social habits of Arabian Babblers.

We also stopped up in the Northern Negev to observe the dramatic courtship display dance of the endangered Houbara Bustard. The males prance and strut, throwing their heads back and extending their ruffs until they seem to have turned themselves inside out.

Spring is the best time to bird Israel. Raptor migration gets under way around Feb. 15 with the Steppe Eagles. Around the end of March, the Buzzards, Black Hawks and Lesser Spotted Eagles come through in large numbers. Almost the entire population of Levant Sparrowhawks, which breed in the Balkans, funnels through between April 20 and 30, with the Honey Buzzards arriving in May.

The Honey Buzzards, insect eaters that have a short nesting period, are the last of the raptors to go north and the first to return. They make their way back south around Sept. 5 or 6, beginning again the cycle of migration that continues through November, as it does here. So, while spring may be better, there's plenty to see in the fall, too.

Eilat, in the extreme southern tip of Israel, is the birding capital of the country. For birds migrating north from Africa, the Eilat area is the first chance to make landfall and to feed after having crossed the Sinai and Sahara deserts.

Besides the raptor, stork and pelican migration, Eilat is an excellent place to see shorebirds or passerines that will continue on to Central and Eastern Europe.

In the fields of Kibbutz Elot, the group was fortunate to have two of the trip's migrating rarities — a number of Caspian Plovers, some already showing their beautiful chestnut chest bands, and a Sociable Plover, which Pete Dunne discovered by call.

In the center of town, surrounded by modern hotels, an airstrip, lots of traffic and, beyond them all, spectacular mountains, is a small patch of grass. On the grass, along with a lot of birders looking skyward at hawks, were plenty of White Wagtails and Yellow

Wagtails, along with one Citrine Wagtail. Several species of pipits also were identified there.

At a nearby dump, we were treated to an early-morning demonstration of raptor banding by Bill Clark, who has been in charge of 19 years of hawk banding at Cape May and who began a similar program in Eilat two years ago.

Clark may have set up the banding program for the Society for Protection of Nature in Israel, but SPNI has done a great deal on its own.

It conducts nesting surveys and raptor migration surveys in spring and fall and offers consulting services on bird conservation issues. SPNI lives up to its name as a protector of wildlife as it has enlisted the Israel Air Force's cooperation in studying raptor migration routes to minimize serious collisions between raptors and aircraft.

SPNI has ties to the Philadelphia area, too, as Hawk Mountain Sanctuary and the Israeli organization will co-sponsor the International Council of Bird Preservation's 1987 World Conference on Birds of Prey, which will be held in Eilat. The group also sent two banders to work with Clark in Cape May last year.

SPNI has a host of educational programs open to both Israelis and foreign visitors, including weeklong tours specifically for birders. It provides a system of Field Study Centers and guest houses throughout the country where birders can stay in comfortable, dorm-style accommodations for much less than hotel rates.

Despite what you may read, Israel is an easy and relatively safe country in which to travel. Many Israelis speak English, and much of the land is owned by the state and is open to the public. You're probably welcome to visit a kibbutz and study its wildlife, but ask permission first.

For information on birding in Israel, write to the Society for Protection of Nature in Israel, 4 Hashfela St., Tel Aviv 66183 Israel.

DVOC member and Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Curator **Jim Brett** will be leading a birding tour to Israel from March 23 to April 4. For information, call him at Hawk Mountain, 756-6961.