

Philadelphia Larus



the newsletter of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club
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Riding Ruff-shot at Pedricktown

by JIM MERITT

Because the spring of 1985 had been such a good one at the Pedricktown, N.J., mud flats — nine Ruffs and three reeves were seen — Ed Manners and I decided to collaborate in a shorebird survey in the spring of 1986.

Being now gentlemen of leisure, we were able to make frequent trips to Pedricktown, either together or separately, from mid-March into May. Sheryl Forte, a birder from nearby Swedesboro, soon became a third member of our survey team. Many DVOC members and others also visited the area during the period, and, to the extent possible, we collected sightings from them, too.

The Ruff total this year was at least five and possibly six individuals. No reeves were reported.

The season's first Ruff was a winter-plumaged brown bird seen off the causeway



John Maron/VIREO

These Ruffs were photographed not on the mudflats of Pedricktown, but in the grasses of Finland.

March 18. On March 23, John LaVia, club president, saw two such birds together in virtually identical plumage at the overlook just east of Pedricktown. A brown Ruff,

presumably one of these birds, was seen consistently during the first week of April.

A dark brown bird with strong breast blotches and a blackish head was first seen on or about April 1. The black coloration became more extensive over the next several weeks, and by late April the bird was essentially all black, with some lighter coloration only on the lower abdomen.

On April 25, some iridescence was noted around the head and throat. This bird was last reported April 27.

On April 9, Forte sighted a Ruff with a conspicuous white collar. This was easily the best-viewed Ruff at Pedricktown this spring. Over the course of the next three weeks, the throat and breast became white, also.

This Ruff is believed to be an individual seen annually at Pedricktown since 1981. It was last reported April 30 by Kate Brethwaite. I searched for the bird on the

(Continued on Page 2)

Other Shorebird Species Also Favor Flats Along the Causeway

Here is a list of the 13 other species of shorebirds seen at "the Ruff Capital of North America" in the spring of 1986.

Semi-palmated Sandpiper: One to three present May 3-19.

Killdeer: Present from mid-March into May, with a high count of 18 on March 21.

Lesser Golden-Plover: Ed Fingerhood, Ed Manners and I saw one basic-plumaged bird March 20. Harry Todd saw two on April 1. The species was consistently reported during the first half of April, with a high count of 15 on April 6, by Ed Manners, and again on April 13, by Rich Kane. None was reported after April 16. The area along the railroad tracks was a better observation point than the causeway for this species. None of the Golden-Plovers sighted this spring was in

full breeding plumage.

Black-bellied Plover: One or two birds seen sporadically between April 4 and 29.

Common Snipe: Present from late March into the latter part of May, with a high count of 60 on April 6.

Spotted Sandpiper: One seen May 5.

Greater Yellowlegs: Present in numbers from mid-March into May. The high count was 150 on April 7; two were still present May 19.

Lesser Yellowlegs: Present from late March until the end of the first week in May, with a high count of 50 on April 7. Four seen on March 23 were partially oiled, undoubtedly the result of the 105,000-gallon oil spill at Marcus Hook on March 21.

Pectoral Sandpiper: Easily the most common shorebird at Pedricktown. On

April 6, 621 were counted, a new high for the species in New Jersey. One was still present May 19.

Least Sandpiper: First seen April 7, last seen May 19. The high count was 25 on April 29.

Dunlin: First seen April 6, last reported April 27. The high count was 10 on April 19.

Dowitcher: A single dowitcher seen by Laurie Larson March 15 was probably a Long-billed in view of the early date. Alan Brady reported two dowitchers (sp.) on April 6.

Stilt Sandpiper: The most unexpected shorebird of the spring was one basic-plumaged bird seen just off the causeway April 14 and 15. The date is an early one.

— Jim Meritt

PROGRAMS

Meetings are normally held the first and third Thursdays of the month at the Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th St. and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, unless otherwise indicated. Please note the changes in meeting dates.

OCT. 2 — DAN BRAUNING, project coordinator, Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas of Project VIREO: "Rare Nesting Birds of Pennsylvania."

OCT. 16 — TOM SOUTHERLAND: "Birding Australia, the Land Down Under."

OCT. 30 — JOHN MILLER: "Birds Around the World." This meeting replaces the first meeting in November.

NOV. 20 — ANNUAL BANQUET. See information elsewhere on this page.

DEC. 4 — To be announced.

DEC. 18 — FRANK HAAS, ornithological studies chairman: "ID Potpourri."

FIELD TRIPS



Sept. 27th, 1986
Barnegat Light, N.J.

leave 2:00 AM
return 6:30 PM

make \$40.00 check payable to:

DVOC

Send to: Alan Brady
P.O. Box 103
Wycombe, PA 18980
(215) 598-7856
will send details

Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 4 and 5: DVOC Weekend. Barnegat Light to Cape May. Meet at Barnegat Lighthouse State Park on Saturday morning at 7:30.

Sunday, Oct. 12: Walking tour of Center City natural history sites. Meet at Bartram Gardens, 54th St. and Elmwood Ave., at 12:30 p.m. For information, call trip leader David Lauer, 215-423-9488.

Sunday, Nov. 2: Bake Oven Knob. Meet at the Lookout parking lot at 9 a.m. for traditional day of hawk-watching.

Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 10 and 11: Pocono Weekend. Meet at the Allentown Holiday Inn at the intersection of Routes 309 and 22 at 8 a.m. For information, call Phil Street, 215-363-7776.

Sunday, Jan. 25: Shark River. Meet at the Municipal Pier opposite Pat's Diner, Belmar, N.J., at 8 a.m.

For information on any of these trips or to suggest other trips, contact field trip chairman Frank Windfelder, 215-673-0240.

You are cordially invited to the DVOC Annual Dinner

Thursday, November 20, 1986

Guest speaker: Jim Brett, curator of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary
Topic: "From David's Spring to Wadi Qelt: A Naturalist's Israel"

Place: Cannstatter-Volksfest-Verein
9130 Academy Rd.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Cash Bar: 6:30 p.m.

Dinner: 7:30 p.m.

Indicate choice of roast beef or broiled flounder

Academy Road exit off 195; for information, call Kronschnabel, 215-673-3620

Mail checks to:

Al Kronschnabel

P.O. Box 16263

Philadelphia, Pa. 19114

Cost: \$12.50

Checks payable to DVOC

Riding Ruff-shot at Pedricktown, N.J.

(Continued from Page 1)

following day, but I kept intact my perfect record of never having seen a Ruff at Pedricktown in May.

Often, by the beginning of May the marsh vegetation covers the mud flats, leaving far too many hiding places for such small birds as Ruffs.

On April 11, an essentially brown Ruff with a cinnamon crown, black throat and scaly back was first noted. This bird was seen consistently through April 26.

A DVOC trip was scheduled at Pedricktown on Sunday, April 6. Much of the morning's weather was cold and raw, and there was rain at times. Those hardy observers saw relatively few birds, and some called it quits early.

The weather improved about mid-day, and shorebirds appeared in numbers — the 11 species compiled were the highest for any one day this spring. Two Ruffs were among them.

In addition to the shorebirds, there were other birds of interest in the area this spring. A pair of Great Horned Owls nested in plain view, just to the west of the causeway and successfully reared two young. This nest had been used in 1984, but not last year.

About 75 Tundra Swans and 6,000 Northern Pintails were present in mid-March, and several swans remained well into April. About 600 Snow Geese flew over on April 12. A pair of Red-Breasted Mergansers were a surprise on April 18. Bob Ridgely saw a Peregrine Falcon on April 23, perhaps one of the Commodore Barry Bridge birds. Ten Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*) were there April 16, and there was a Caspian Tern on May 1.

On April 23, Walter F. Naedele, a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and Stephen Shames, an *Inquirer* photographer, visited Pedricktown. Working on a story about the Philadelphia Birding Hot Line, they went there because Armas Hill, the voice of the Hot Line, annually and enthusiastically labels Pedricktown "the Ruff Capital of North America."

It was a cold, windy day, and a picture of several bundled-up observers and a well-written article appeared in the paper's early Philadelphia editions the next morning. Two Ruffs had been seen that day, but they had been too distant to photograph.

Like many others, I'm sure, I often had to answer the question "Whatcha looking at?" from curious passing motorists. I tried to develop a stock answer that would not elicit too many additional questions.

One fellow asked me if Ruffs were edible. A woman asked me if I had seen her lost dog, which liked to romp in the mud.

One day in late March I struck up a lengthy conversation with a fellow who stated he was part owner of the marshes. He said he was there to check on damage from the March 21 oil spill on the Delaware River. Indeed, the incoming tide did show traces of oil.

When I explained that many observers would be coming to the causeway to look for Ruffs, his main concern was that there be no trespassing out in the marshes. I could assure him with complete honesty that I had no such intentions and I doubted that others did, either. In fact, I have always considered the placement of "No Trespassing" signs out on the flats one of the engineering marvels of the decade.

A local resident politely warned Manners in early April that there had been many complaints about birders parking along the causeway and that police had been notified. Word to this effect was put on the Hot Line, and the on-causeway parking ceased.

To my knowledge, no one was ticketed, and I did see police patrol cars checking periodically thereafter — a point to remember for 1987.

I made my 27th and final visit of the spring to the causeway on May 29 and on that date drew a complete blank on shorebirds.

If readers have spring 1986 sightings of shorebirds not mentioned herein or of Ruffs either before or after the dates furnished, I would appreciate a note to that effect.

VIREO: Projecting Into the Future

by SANDHA SHERMAN

How can a 40,000-slide collection that represents one-third of the world's avifauna be "weak" on photographs of Rock Doves or House Sparrows?

The Academy of Natural Sciences' Project VIREO — Visual Resources for Ornithology — was established as a central collection of photos of the world's 9,000-plus species of birds, both plain and fancy, by photographers both well-known and unknown.



You never know when you might need a picture of Piping Plover or Killdeer in a distraction display or a shot of Western Grebes during courtship. Ask for a Ruff on nest with young or a Red Bird of Paradise curling his coverts for the camera, and Geoff LeBaron, VIREO's collection manager, can provide it. But

pigeons and sparrows? Who looks at them?

It's a curious list of species that are either underrepresented or just plain not included in VIREO's North American catalog. LeBaron points out that, until recently, no Greater Scaups graced the VIREO archives. Among others on the project's North American "weak" or "missing" list are Hairy Woodpecker, Common Raven, various swifts, American Woodcock, Common Snipe, Mississippi Kite, Black Scoter, Pine Warbler, Black-chinned Sparrow, Baird's Sparrow, several races of Dark-eyed Juncos and Least Sandpipers in breeding plumage.

VIREO's national "claim to fame," LeBaron points out, was solving the mystery of the Nantucket Western Reef Heron. The case was cracked through photos taken by Rob Cardillo, technical director of VIREO, as well as expertise provided by Academy staff.

The photos, says LeBaron, proved the bird "wasn't just a molting juvenile Little Blue," as some other experts had suggested, "ignoring the fact that it was staying in the same plumage for four months or that it had yellow feet."

LeBaron credits two men with creating the impetus for VIREO: Frank Gill, curator and chairman of the Ornithology Department at the Academy, and Crawford H. Greenewalt, a past president and chairman of the board of Du Pont de Nemours EI & Co. and a top-flight bird photographer.

"Mr. Greenewalt saw his originals were deteriorating with age," says LeBaron. "They decided to start VIREO to preserve the originals. Our baseline funding is an endowment from Mr. Greenewalt, but that doesn't cover it all, by any means."

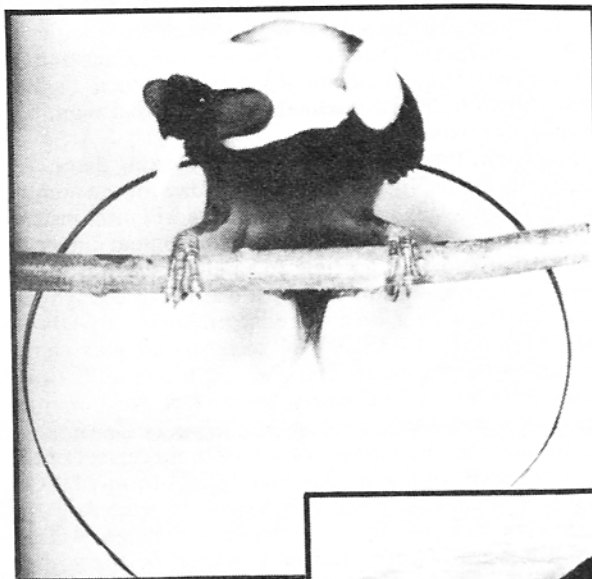
Pete Myers is director of VIREO. His charges, Cardillo and LeBaron, often can be found in VIREO's mezzanine offices, surrounded by drawers and drawers of files, plastic sheets of slides, two personal computer systems and lots of bird books. The two of them, in addition to their job descriptions, must file, fill orders for specific images from commercial and non-commercial users around the world, answer correspondence and put up with curious newsletter editors who ask them silly questions such as, "Do you have any photos of birds in silly poses?"

LeBaron explains the procedure once a batch of slides is received.

"All photographs accepted by VIREO are kept at near-freezing temperatures in humidity-controlled storage units. (*Editor's note: For those of you who don't understand technical ornithological language, he means a refrigerator.*)"

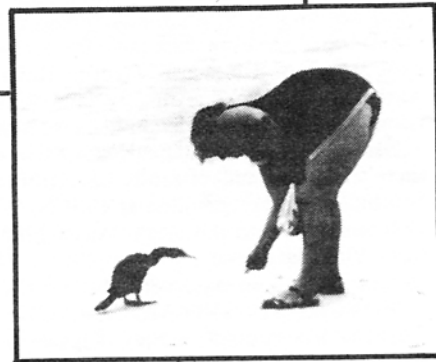
"Incoming slides are reviewed, and two sets of high-quality duplicates are made from those selected," LeBaron continues. "One set is returned to the photographer, and the other set enters the heart of VIREO, the working collection."

"All photos in the slide library are given two numbers. One, the species code, is unique for the species represented in the picture. The second, the VIREO code, is unique to that slide in the collection. The species code is derived from the currently accepted taxonomic order of birds of the world. It is an alphanumeric code representing the order, family and species of the bird.



C.H. Greenewalt/VIREO

Part of VIREO's collection: A Double-crested Cormorant and friend; a Red Bird of Paradise (*Paradisaea rubra*).



Natalie Abel/VIREO

"Thus, the Bald Eagle becomes kAcci037: "k" for order Falconiformes, "Acci" for family Accipitridae and "037" for Bald Eagle. The VIREO code is derived from the donating photographer's assigned number, the batch number and the specific slide number of that batch. Thus, the 68th slide in the 11th batch of Helen Cruickshank's slides in VIREO becomes c03/11/068."

VIREO's collection also houses photographs from Cruickshank and her husband, Allen; Roger Tory Peterson, Eliot Porter and many other well-known bird photographers. Nationally recognized shorebird expert Tom Davis, whose death this summer left many saddened, willed his entire slide collection to VIREO.

And DVOC members also are well-represented: Among the club members whose works can be found — and this is by no means a complete list — are Alan Brady, Sid Lipschutz, Rick Mellon, Howard Brokaw, Serge LaFrance, Marv Hyett, Jim Stasz, Ed Fingerhood and Mark Stocku.

Cardillo and LeBaron are knee-deep in slides, and they sure could use some help. They would welcome volunteers with any amount of time to help sort and label slides or to work on specific projects. This summer, besides Lipschutz, who is now a VIREO associate, Andy Thurber, son of club member Walter Thurber, has pitched in, as did Ann O'Leary earlier in the year.

"We've got all kinds of projects that need to be done," LeBaron says. "We have the entire Helen and Allen Cruickshank slide and negative collection and Allen's 4x5 black-and-whites just sitting here uncurated. We do have a volunteer who's going to start working on that. Everybody has to do some skut work once in a while, as Andy knows. He spent the summer sticking labels on slides and sorting extra duplicates."

VIREO also accepts prints. One of the more intriguing in the collection is an 8x10 black-and-white, with no negative, of a scene taken by Frank Schleicher at South Oyster Bay on Long Island. In one frame, he has captured in flight eight recognizable shorebird species: Red Knot, Marbled Godwit, Hudsonian Godwit, American Oystercatcher, Ruddy Turnstone, Semi-palmated Plover, Semi-palmated Sandpiper and Willet.

And I got an answer to my "silly bird" question, didn't I?

LOCAL NOTES

CHANGE OF VENUE, CHANGE OF MENU: Club President **John LaVia** has dislodged the annual dinner from its traditional moorings at Walber's on the Delaware. The new site, Cannstatter-Volksfest-Verein, just off the Academy Road exit of I-95 in the Far Northeast, was chosen by **Al Kronschnabel**, dinner chairman. See Page 2 for more information.

Also, make a note of the changes in upcoming meeting dates. We all automatically reserve the first and third Thursdays of the month, but the Academy is not available on Nov. 6, so we will meet instead on Oct. 30. The only November meeting will be the annual dinner. It was also decided that Jan. 1 is no time for a club meeting, so the annual meeting has been moved to Jan. 8. It was tough enough last year on Jan. 2. See Page 2 for even more information.

NEWS FROM NEWSPAPERS: DVOC members are making the news all the time. Just a few names over the past few months: **Alan Brady** was featured in the *Bucks County Courier Times* in a story on his May pelagic trip; **Bob Ridgely** made the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Boston Globe* and the wire services with his announcement of the discovery of a new species of parrot; and **Fred Ulmer**, former DVOC conservation chairman, had a letter to the editor printed in the *Inquirer* in June about the increase in coyotes in New Jersey. But the BIG story, of course, is **George Reynard**, whose tape-recording work in Cuba seeking out the Ivory-billed Woodpecker placed his name in many newspapers and news magazines across the country.

NEWS OF DUES: The DVOC Council has decided that since there's no more nickel candy bar, no more shave and a haircut for two bits, no more gasoline at 19.9 cents a gallon, it's time to bring club members into the 1980s. As of 1987, dues will be \$15 per year. In another development, Council has voted to open all its meetings to members on an observer basis.

MOVING UP AND MOVING ON: The Academy of Natural Sciences has named **Sidney Lipschutz** an associate of Project VIREO. . . . **Gerry McChesney** has moved to Pacific Grove, Calif.

WITH THANKS: Congratulations to **Ed Fingerhood** and **Jim Meritt** for what must be the largest edition of *Cassinia* ever — and a fine one at that.

WITH SADNESS: We note the recent deaths of three former DVOC officers, **Philip A. Livingston**, **Frank B. Moody** and **Will Middleton**. Livingston, a past DVOC president and former co-chairman of the American Ornithologists Union, died July 6. He edited a definitive series of books on the birds of Central and South America. Moody, a fellow and life member of the club, died May 20. He joined the club in 1960 and served as secretary in 1978 and 1979. He was elected vice president in 1980, but resigned from that position later that year due to his wife's illness. Middleton, president of the club in 1972 and 1973, died June 19 after a long illness.

Howard Brokaw passes on the information about an effort in his state of Delaware to gather and publish data on the breeding status and seasonal distribution of birds in that state. Chairing the Publication Committee for the atlas project is DVOC member **Winston J. Wayne**. . . . **Donald S. Heintzelman** has been named executive director and vice president of the Wildlife Information Center, Inc., a new conservation organization. Heintzelman says the center will sponsor the official Bake Oven Knob hawk count this year.

Larus welcomes new or recent DVOC members: **Sally Conyne** of Rushland, Pa.; **Dawn Coughlan** of Philadelphia; **Jewel Cummings** of Perkasio, Pa.; **Barbara Fox** of Harrisburg, Pa.; **Earl H. Harrison** of Philadelphia; **Betsy Jones** of Absecon, N.J.; **Kenn and Lynn Kaufman** of Devon, Pa.; **Katrina Knight** of Horsham, Pa.; **Charles Lyman** of Philadelphia; **Robert Miller** of Glendora, N.J. **Edmund W. Mudge III** of Dallas, Texas; **Daniel Murray** of Linwood, N.J.; **Michael Newlon** of Berkeley Heights, N.J.; **Janet Sedicino** of Stanhope, N.J.; **John D. Stewart** of Cinnaminson, N.J.; **Joan and Andrew Warren** of Villanova, Pa.; **Sandra Weiss** of Medford, N.J.; and **Richard Williams** of Devon, Pa.

ACTION ALERT!

In the coming months, DVOC members will be called upon to lobby in Pennsylvania and New Jersey to support bills banning the importation and sale of live wild-caught birds.

In Pennsylvania, S.B. 1479 remains in the Games and Fisheries Committee, with the House resuming session on Sept. 22. The bill will cover such species as birds of prey, psittacines — parrots, macaws and their relatives — and others.

Club member **Donald Heintzelman**, executive director of the Wildlife Information Center, Inc., is behind the Pennsylvania bill, which was introduced by State Sen. **Guy Kratzer** of Allentown. Heintzelman suggests that a full-fledged push to pass the bill is still to come.

It is estimated that, in the 20th century alone, several hundred million birds have been removed from their natural habitats for sale around the world. Many die in transit, often the victims of inhumane shipping conditions or disease.

Brian Moscatello, club secretary,

has forwarded a letter to Heintzelman, stating that DVOC members "recognize the terrible waste of avian life that results from the traffic in wild-caught birds. This has become a major threat to several highly sought species."

New York passed the first such bill in the country in 1985, and Moscatello points out New Jersey's bill, A-2332, "has recently cleared its committee and should include amendments providing for exemptions for avian species historically bred in captivity, and appropriations for enforcement.

"It would be a wonderful step for avian conservation if Pennsylvania could join with New Jersey and New York in prohibiting the importation and sale of wild-caught birds," Moscatello concluded in his letter.

In Pennsylvania, you can show your support of S.B. 1479 by writing to Sen. **James J. Rhoades**, chairman, Senate Game and Fisheries Committee, Room 184, Main Capitol, Harrisburg, Pa., 17120.

Philadelphia Larus

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