

Philadelphia Larus

the newsletter of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club

VOL 15 NO. 1

SPRING 1987



The 'A' Team Rides Again!

by PHIL STREET

The "A" Team, which visited Argentina two years ago, carried on the "A" motif in November by going to Australia.

Among the 14 participants were DVOCers Howard and Dede Brokaw, Don Jones, Bill and Louise Kershner, Ann O'Leary, Phil Street and Bill Tucker. Bob Kleiger from St. Louis was another repeat from Argentina.

Our very able ornithologist guide was Australian Chris Doughty. The itinerary and arrangements were made through club member Joel Abramson's Bird Bonanzas.

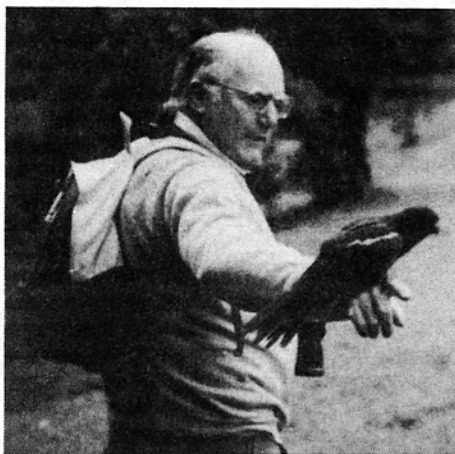
Joel boasts that Bird Bonanzas sees more birds than other groups, and he couldn't have been more correct. Seldom, if ever, has a group so thoroughly birded the continent in a month's span. Our group list was 477 species.

We started in Tasmania and saw all its 12 endemics, including the rare Forty-spotted Pardalote. Highlights in the Melbourne and southern Victoria area included the Superb Lyrebird and the very rare Cape Barren Goose and Orange-bellied Parrot.

A sea trip out of Portland produced three species of albatrosses and the Cape Petrel. The next two days, with visits to Wyperfeld and Hattah Lakes National Parks, added such nifties as Pink Cockatoo and Australian Owllet-Nightjar.

We flew from Adelaide to Perth and birded Dryanda State Forest on our way south to Albany on the southwest coast. Here we had our most exasperating experience as we all heard repeatedly — and must have gotten within 10 feet of — a Noisy Scrub-bird, an extremely rare and local little skulker. We never saw one!

From Perth we flew to Kununurra at the northern tip of western Australia for two exciting days, with such new species as Radjah Shelduck, Black Falcon, Australian Bustard, Black Bittern, White-quilled Rock-Pigeon and Great Bowerbird. Darwin followed, with two nights in Kakadu National Park, where some of the specialties were Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon, North-



At O'Reilly's in Lamington National Park, Don Jones amuses a King Parrot.

Photo by Phil Street

ern Rosella, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Brahminy Kite and Swinhoe's Snipe.

Ayer's Rock and the Olgas were fascinating, but the country was barren and the birds scarce. Chris showed us a pair of Western Bowerbirds at Mount Olga Gorge, and some of us saw the rare Grey Falcon at Ayer's. A Banded Whiteface and a White-winged Fairy-Wren were outstanding finds on the drive back to Alice Springs the next day. The sewage ponds at Alice were alive with ducks and shorebirds. We found the very local Dusky Grasswren at Simpson's Gap the next morning before our flight to Cairns.

We visited the waterfront at Cairns that afternoon, an exciting place with its multitude of shorebirds, herons and Australian Pelicans. The next morning, Tucker discovered a Papuan Frogmouth on its nest in a tree next door to our motel, and we all got good looks at a Broad-billed Sandpiper, picked out among the hundreds of peeps huddled together on what was left of the mud flats at high tide.

An afternoon flight took us north to the little-visited Cape York Peninsula, seldom included in Australian bird tours, despite its many endemics. At this point, we were less

than 100 miles from New Guinea.

We spent three nights at a new lodge in Cape York. Star of the show was a Palm Cockatoo at its nest, and the supporting cast included the unbelievably long-tailed Paradise-Kingfisher, a displaying Magificent Riflebird, a Fawn-breasted Bowerbird at its bower, a Great-billed Heron and a Marbled Frogmouth located by tape recorder and flashlight.

Returning to Cairns, we sailed out to the Great Barrier Reef to visit Green Island and Michaelmas Key, the latter with its colony of Sooty Terns and Common Noddies.

Two days in the Atherton Highlands followed, and here we had our most prolific birding, adding nearly 40 new species. Some of the most memorable were Sarus Crane, Golden Bowerbird and Victoria's Riflebird.

O'Reilly's famous Guest House in the Green Mountains of Lamington National Park completed the trip for most of us. Here, where the Crimson Rosellas and King Parrots feed from one's hand, we added the last of the bowerbirds, the Regent and the Satin, both of which were coming in to feeders. We saw the Satin's bower bedecked with blue baubles that included a toothbrush and bobby pins. An Albert's Lyrebird and a good view of a Noisy Pitta were exciting, and some patient observers got a brief look at another rare and notorious skulker, the Rufous Scrub-bird.

Jones and Tucker had a final day's birding in Sydney, where they added the last four birds to the "A" Team's trip list.

Where next? Chris Doughty has his own tour organization, Peregrine Bird Tours, and he has suggested we join him on a trip he leads to northern India and Nepal.

He promises a most reasonable cost for a three-week trip in February 1989, probably no more than \$2,000 plus air fare to Delhi; a visit to the Taj Mahal; and the possibility of seeing a tiger while birding from the back of an elephant!

The "A" Team responded enthusiastically. Contact Phil Street if you wish a copy of the itinerary.

PROGRAMS

Meetings are held the first and third Thursdays of the month at the Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th St. and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, unless otherwise indicated. Check with the guard for room location. For information, call Brian Moscatello, program chairman, 609-235-1739.

FEB. 18 — BRIAN MOSCATELLO: "The Chase Is On: Rarities of the Rio Grande." From one who has returned to tell about it.

MARCH 3 — SAMUEL C. FRIED: "Newfoundland and Labrador." Fried is a lawyer and birder from West Hartford, Conn., which is closer to Newfoundland than Philadelphia is.

MARCH 17 — SERGE LA FRANCE: "Attu: The True Story." All the other presentations on this God-forsaken place have been lies?

APRIL 7 — To be announced.

APRIL 21 — "Flight Identification of Handsaws," based loosely on the book of almost the same name due out at the end of March. The book is being credited to Pete Dunne, Clay Sutton and David Sibley; will any of them dare to face the DVOC?

NOTE: The following meeting is tentative. Confirm before showing up!

MAY 5 — Zoo meeting. Meet at the Philadelphia Zoo, 34th St. and Girard Ave. Come early to scan the trees, eat some cheese and catch a breeze.

MAY 19 — JOHN DRUMMOND: "Birds of Siberia and Mongolia."

JUNE 2 — May Run reports.

Informal meetings continue through the summer on the first Thursdays of July and August and the first and third Thursdays of September.

Mellon for President in '88

Richard Mellon was elected president of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club at the club's annual meeting Jan. 7. He succeeded Dr. John LaVia, who served for two years.

Other new officers are Brian Moscatello, vice president, and Dr. John Harding, secretary. Barbara Haas was re-elected treasurer.

Robert Sehl, chairman of the Nominating Committee, presented the slate. Also on the committee were Phillips B. Street and Charles Wonderly.

Newly elected to three-year terms on Council are Daniel Brauning and William Murphy. Other Council members are Sidney Lipschutz and Frank Haas, who will serve until 1989, and Donald Jones and Frank

Windfelder, serving until 1990.

Along with the officers and immediate past president, continuing on Council is Edward Fingerhood, as editor of *Cassinia*.

Also at the annual meeting, club awards were presented. Barbara and Frank Haas received the Witmer Stone Award for their new journal, *Pennsylvania Birds*. The award recognizes excellence in published works dealing with ornithological research. Harry Todd chaired the Nominating Committee.

For his work as project coordinator of the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas, Daniel Brauning received the Julian K. Potter Award for outstanding contributions to field ornithology. William Stocku chaired the Nominating Committee.

Wilson Society Sets Its Own Centennial

DVOC will serve as a co-host of the Wilson Ornithological Society's centennial meeting, scheduled for Wednesday, June 8, to Sunday, June 12, at Rosemont College. Club member Frank Gill, curator of ornithology at the Academy of Natural Sciences, heads the Local Committee on Arrangements.

Alexander Wilson, for whom the organization is named, is credited with establishing the scientific study of birds in North America. He died in 1813 at the age of 47 at his lodgings near Seventh and Spruce Sts. in Philadelphia, and is buried at Gloria Dei, Old Swedes Church, near the intersection of Delaware and Washington Aves.

Sessions on scientific papers will be held at the college Thursday and Saturday. Friday, Centennial Day, will be celebrated at the Academy. A highlight of the event will be a major symposium on the Paridae, to be given by international experts.

Other festivities will include a catered lunch, workshops, historical talks and a tour of old Philadelphia, including a visit to Wilson's grave. Centennial Day will conclude with a gala evening reception.

Early-morning field trips Thursday and Saturday are planned to Ridley Creek State Park and Mill Grove, and there will be all-day trips on Sunday to the New Jersey shore and Hawk Mountain. DVOCers will be called upon to provide trip leaders, as well as assistance in many other areas.

So, plan to attend this 100-year celebration. You will converse with noted ornithologists, hear interesting dissertations on facets of ornithology seldom touched upon at our club meetings and find the experience truly remarkable.

For information, call Dawn Coughlan at the Academy, 299-1181.

— Phil Street

FIELD TRIPS

Sunday, March 13: Upper Bucks owl trip. Meet at Cross Keys in Doylestown. Leader: Chris Dooley, 215-736-1637.

April 25-26: Pocomoke weekend.

First three weekends in May: May Run.

May 15: New Jersey Audubon World Series of Birding. All pledges to official DVOC teams will benefit the club's Centennial Fund.

May 21-22: Western Pennsylvania--Presque Isle. Leaders: Barb and Frank Haas, 215-565-6319.

May 27-28: Beyond the Canyon. A visit to the Gulf Stream for pelagic birds. Leaving from Barnegat Light Friday, May 27, at 8:30 p.m., returning about 6 p.m. Saturday night. \$65. Leader: Alan Brady, 215-968-2833.

June 4: Meesing Nature Center/Worthington Tract. Leaders: Bill and Naomi Murphy, 215-885-2488. Meet at 5 a.m. at Denny's on Route 309 in Montgomeryville or 7:15 a.m. at Marshall's Creek General Store, Routes 209 and 402, Marshall's Creek, Pa. Specialty: Golden-winged Warblers.

July 24: Delaware shorebirds. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Wilmington Airport on Route 13 for Upland Sandpipers, then on to Port Mahon-Little Creek for transient trans-Siberian treats or wrong-turn terns. Leader: Sandy Sherman, 215-237-6814.

For information, contact field trip chairman Don Jones, 609-859-0281, or the individual trip leaders.

Philadelphia Larus

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

Sandra Sherman, editor
912 North St.
Collingdale, Pa. 19023
215-237-6814 (home)
215-893-5739 (work)

Death Comes in the Afternoon

by SANDRA SHERMAN

On a chilly prewinter afternoon, the stakes were upped. The link in the food chain drew tighter around my backyard feeding operation. The fed became the food. Death came to my feeders.

I live in a very residential neighborhood in Collingdale, southeastern Delaware County — twins and small Cape Cod-style single homes, with row houses only a block away. The area is so boring that, although it falls within the Glenolden Christmas Count circle, no one bothers to cover it.

Last April, when I first saw the house that was to become my home, it was still in the construction stage. The backyard was a high pile of mud, and as I glanced out at an American Robin digging out worms, I involuntarily began my backyard list before I'd even put a bid in on the house.

It's a small property — 25x100 feet, giving me enough of a yard to be able to rake my own leaves. Between my own yard and the three adjoining mine on the street behind, perhaps seven or eight mature deciduous trees offer their perches — red and white oaks, sweet gums and at least one compound-leaved tree that I'm still trying to identify. (I never did find my tree identification book when I unpacked.)

There's a row of nearby young spruces; a juniper that, in January, attracted perhaps the same robin to its winter berries; and, right up against the fence separating my yard from the neighbor behind, a nice, bushy holly and a string of yews about 6 feet high that offer excellent cover.

I saw the potential for my first real feeder operation.

In November, I put up one of everything — a suet basket, a thistle sack, a triangular feeder for millet mix, on a flat surface, and a squirrel-proof (really!) pole feeder that I stocked with sunflower hearts.

The squirrels (including a black one) raided the platform feeder. What they scattered was scarfed up by three dozen to four dozen House Sparrows. The House Finches took over the pole feeder — interestingly, the sparrows had difficulty landing there, and the finches only shared it with two small families of chickadees and titmice.

The starlings discovered the suet, and a half-dozen at a time would screech at each other while trying to land in the same spot simultaneously.

I'm already obsessed enough with my birding, but now I found I could bird while brushing my teeth, washing dishes or eating breakfast. A whole new dimension to the game!

So, 98 percent of my efforts are spent feeding the trash birds, but the other 2 percent — typical feeder stuff, but in small numbers — have made it worthwhile.

The day after the DVOC annual banquet,

a Fox Sparrow dropped by for 20 seconds; two days later, a sapsucker invaded my air space. A surprise female Red-bellied Woodpecker found the suet.

For a while, every day seemed to bring something new. I was able to identify at least four different female Downy Woodpeckers by the pattern of spots on the wings. Aha! Research! Then, one day, within 30 seconds of each other, both a male Downy and a male Red-Bellied appeared. I only saw them that one time.

Saturday, Dec. 12: a day to spend more than 10 minutes peeking out while rushing to leave for work.

On this day, even though my four White-throated Sparrows didn't seem to be around, six Mourning Doves landed together. I was angered by the pigeons that had landed in my yard and tired of the domineering starlings and overwhelming House Sparrows. I'd even started day-dreaming of ways to get rid of them.

Around 2:15, I sat down for a while to read the paper. I got up one more time, looking out the kitchen window past my sink. Two squirrels roamed the yard, but no birds sat on the chain-link fence; no sparrows were on or below the feeder, no finches did their elevator flights from pole feeder to the tree branches above. Quiet.

My eye caught something out of place. A new shape, sitting upright on a four-foot-high clothesline pole: In the first fleeting glance, sans eyeglasses or binoculars, my impression was of an oversized Mourning Dove or a gigantic cuckoo. (Now stop

snickering — I didn't say that's what I *thought* it was!)

The binocs were just a quick grab away; as I got my eyes to them, the bird dove into the yews a scant foot-and-a-half away. As it went in, I caught a quick glimpse of the fanned tail with dark bands and the rusty, barred chest.

I threw open the window, both horrified and fascinated at the same time. Boy, was it quiet. With my mouth still wide open in shock, I stood there waiting for whatever had gone in to come out. Maybe it would go back to its perch so I could study it better.

The silence held for four, five minutes. Then, simultaneously, a cardinal came shooting across the yard, low to the ground, and a very distressed sound of House Sparrow screams cut through the quiet. A heartbeat later, an adult accipiter came rocketing out toward the house, rising fast. In the fraction of a second between the yews and the edge of my sight in the window, I saw it clutching a form in its talons.

Death in the afternoon.

My backyard was no longer just a simple, innocent mom-and-pop operation, an Avian Arby's, if you will. I found myself the proprietor of a roadside "Hawk Diner" of sorts, serving passerine platter specials to this regular customer. It was seen off and on through at least mid-February.

If Bill Clark's right and there's no overlap, then my guess is that the Sharp-shinned Hawk was a female. Jeez, a Cooper's would've been neat.

Fearless five — The Day After



Members of the "DVOC Farm Team" in the 1987 New Jersey Audubon World Series of Birding take a moment to breathe at Brigantine the day after the event. From left are Frank Windfelder, Ed Fingerhood, Erica Brendel, Sandy Sherman and Capt. Chris Walters. If they could have counted the birds they saw that Sunday as well, they might have been contenders. Ah well, the cause was good and the funds raised went to help the club.

LOCAL NOTES

VOICE OF THE DOVE: *Larus* has received news from far-off Grenada, West Indies, where club member **Dr. Peter Hall** spends his days. Dr. Hall, a professor of physiology at St. George's University School of Medicine in Grenada, sends good news: "The best bit of birding news is the 'rediscovery' of the Grenada Dove, *Leptotila wellsi*, last summer. At the moment, the AOU has lumped it with *rufaxilla*, but the young ornithologist who spent a month studying them and our Hook-billed Kite in July is convinced, as I am, that they were wrong. Call, habitat, the whole bit is distinctive. [The Grenada sub-species of the Hook-billed Kite has a smaller bill, to accommodate smaller varieties of tree snails on the island.]

"I used to hear them [the doves] at dawn and dusk, July to December 1979 and 1980. Their tiny habitat area centered around a disused quarry. I never saw one then, although I put many more hours trying even than I did for the California Condor. I never heard the call after the quarry started running, and I was fairly sure that it was extinct, again.

"David Blockstein, the ornithologist, came and found a reasonable number of kites (all adults, not the best sign). The best bit was the first afternoon he walked up a ridge to watch for kites and found a Grenada Dove calling and visible. He went on to find some 35 calling males and to locate the center of the tiny population. They had moved round the bay into a clump of forest on a government farm — the only patch around that whole bay that I hadn't worked! He took me out there and I had a tape recorder good enough to satisfy Hardy at Gainesville and get sonograms. A first recording.

"With luck, the AOU will have the grace to admit they knew nothing to justify lumping it and will split it out again.

"If anyone wants to come in July or early August, I'll be glad to show it to them. Most West Indies tours come too early, and if you don't find a calling bird in relatively open bush, you have no chance, and even then it takes careful stalking — they fly *down* and run. . . ."

DON'T TALK ABOUT LUMPS AND SPLITS: **Dr. Ira Joel Abramson**, head of Bird Bonanzas, Inc., in North Miami, Fla., is the first DVOC member — and only the second person in the world — to see all of the families of birds in the world. His last was a ground-roller in Madagascar.

Geoff LeBaron, former collections manager of the Academy's Project VIREO, is now hiding out in Williamsburg, Mass., where he has accepted the editorship of *American Birds'* Christmas issue. His former cohort, **Rob Cardillo**, VIREO technical director, is now a freelance photographer. And, welcome to Geoff's replacement, **Steve Holt**.

KODAK CAPERS CAPTURED: Results of the annual slide contest are in, for those of you who missed the Jan. 21 meeting. In the "Birds" category, top prize was taken by **John Harding** for his

Pomarine Jaeger in flight, followed by **Phil Street's** Snowy Egret in the Everglades and **John Drummond's** Fire-tailed Sunbird from Nepal. Based on John's entries in the contest, his May 19 program to the club should be well-illustrated. In "Natural History": **Tops** was **Tom Southerland's** elephants in Amboseli Game Reserve in Kenya; next was **Phil Street's** mule deer at Point Reyes, Calif.; and then **Erica Brendel's** fur seal in Alaska. And finally, **Margo Southerland** took both first and second places in the "Scenery" category with her women washing in Lake Baringo, Kenya, and Antarctic icebergs; **Doman Roberts' Jeffrey pine** at Sentinel Dome in Yosemite, won third place. Judges were **Alan Brady**, **Chris Walters** and **Ed Fingerhood**. And here's a better-late-than-never mention to **Harry Todd**, who upbraided *Larus* several years ago for failing to acknowledge his winning photograph.

CENTENNIAL SIGHTS SET: With DVOC's 100th anniversary rolling around in 1990, **Alan Brady** reminds us that Centennial commemorative plates are now available for purchase. Earl Poole's drawing of *Larus philadelphia* flying against the Philadelphia skyline graces the front of the plates. They're sure to become collectors' items, right? The plates are selling for \$15; all proceeds will benefit the Centennial events. **Armas Hill**, chairman of the anniversary planning committee, has received a confirmation letter from **Peter Harrison**, author of *Seabirds of the World*, agreeing to speak at one of our Centennial programs. Please give serious consideration to the request for funds sent to you by outgoing president **John LaVia**. We're a top-notch club with 100 years of high-powered reputation. We are looking to do up this celebration in proper fashion, but we need the club members' financial support to do it right.

SPEAKING OF COLLECTION PLATES: Treasurer **Barb Haas** reminds us all to pay our yearly dues — except for the 74 of us who are life members. Those who wish to become members of that elite category can send her \$225, and the rest can fork over the annual \$15 — make checks payable to DVOC and send them to Barb at 769 E. Forge Rd., Media, Pa. 19063.

Conservation Committee chairman **Clay Sutton** brings word of Hawk Migration Conference V, sponsored by the HMANA, the Hawk Migration Association of North America. It's set for April 7 to 10 in Cape May. Deadline for registration is March 1.

The club sends regrets to the family of **Sam Jones**, who died Nov. 21. Sam, a retired postal inspector, was a past president of Wyncote Audubon Society and a former compiler of the Wyncote Christmas Count.

DVOC welcomes new members: **Dr. John Drummond** of Pennington, N.J.; **Raymond Barnes** of Allentown, Pa.; **Roger "Skip" Conant** of Springfield, Pa.; **Paul Cronin** of Rockledge, Pa.; **Jean Fuschillo** of Ocean City, N.J.; and **David Ward Jr.** of Avalon, N.J.

DVOC
c/o Academy of Natural Sciences
19th St. and the Parkway
Philadelphia, Pa. 19103