

# Philadelphia Larus

the newsletter of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club

Celebrating our centennial year

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FALL 1990



## But for a Chance Right-hand Turn

by KEITH SEAGER

Photo by Keith Seager



On Friday the 13th of July, 1990, at 5:15 a.m., I was leaving work in North Cape May. A light drizzle was falling.

Can't go to South Cape May — it's too wet. Okay, I'll drive to Hereford Inlet in North Wildwood to look for pelicans.

As I arrived in Wildwood, it began to rain harder.

Since I'm already out here, I may just as well go all the way out to the inlet in spite of the rain.

I arrived at 5:45. The winds were strong out of the northeast, and it was raining.

Can't see anything, so I'll take a nap.

After about 45 minutes, I resumed my watch.

At 7:30, three pelicans came into view, doing battle with the northeaster. They finally gave up trying to enter the inlet and let the winds send them south again.

At 7:45, I left to go home. I was driving south through Wildwood, staying close to the bayside of the island.

Look how close the salt marsh comes to the road. It might be worthwhile to remember this area to botanize later on — easy access by foot.

While stopped at the traffic light at 26th Ave. and Park Blvd., I looked to my right and saw a road leading to a dead end out into the marsh. I decided to turn instead of going straight.

I drove along slowly, surveying the marsh and mud flats to my right while looking for convenient access to botanize. It was still drizzling, with 30 mph winds.

I could only see two open spots from the car because the *Phragmites* blocked most of the view. I drove all the way to the dead end, where there was a nice view of the back bay area.

I'll have to remember this place to look for winter ducks.

As I drove back, I noticed some movement in the tidal mud flat next to the road. Putting my binoculars on the birds, I identified two Semipalmated Sandpipers and two Least Sandpipers. While watching these birds, a plover with a black eye (stripe) and wide, red or rusty breast band walked into my view.

I was immediately startled by this bird. Images of all the plovers I was familiar with raced through my mind.

Not a Wilson's — the bill is too small. Not any black-banded plover — this one has a rusty band. The size is slightly larger than a Semipalmated, smaller than either a Killdeer or a Black-bellied Plover.

I don't know what this bird is. I've never seen it before!

I grabbed the nearest field guide, which happened to be the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to Birds of North America*. Luckily, I turned directly to the section on plovers, and

jumping out at me was a Mongolian Plover, *Charadrius mongolus*.

That's it, that's the bird. My God, that's a Mongolian Plover I'm looking at.

Rusty breast band, black eye patch, white forehead, white superciliary and dark legs.

I studied the bird another five minutes . . .

I've got to photograph it and get confirmation. My camera is at home — 22 miles round-trip.

Off I went, my mind speeding almost as fast as the car.

Paul Holt, a British birder living in Cape May Point! He's birded Asia. . . . If anybody has seen this bird, he has. Got to remember to pick up Hayman/Marchant/Prater's Shorebirds while I'm home.

I got Paul out of bed, made a quick stop at my house for the camera and shorebird book and was back at 26th Street within the hour.

It took Paul and me 20 minutes to relocate the bird. Paul confirmed it as a Mongolian Plover. I took what photographs I could in the strong northeast wind and drizzle.

We left at 10 a.m. and drove down to the Cape May Bird Observatory, where Paul Kerlinger immediately made hotline calls.

Kerlinger arrived at 11 a.m., but the Mongolian Plover had disappeared when the tide came in; it reappeared at 6 p.m. at low tide.

The bird was last seen at 9 p.m. on the Friday the 13th. The next day, about 150 people spent many anxious hours waiting for the bird to reappear, but to no avail.

I estimate that the Mongolian Plover was seen by about 18 people, including DVOC members Jack Stewart, Bill Stocku, Ward Dasey, Paul Kerlinger, and Clay and Pat Sutton.

Earlier I had thought, "I'll have to remember this place for winter ducks." From now on, it will become a regular birding stop!

EDITOR'S NOTE: The appearance of the Mongolian Plover on July 13 was the first really good chance to try out the newly reconstituted DVOC telephone tree. Its organizer, Paul Guris, however, was nowhere to be found, since he and Anita Covington were busy preparing to be wed the next day. (Paul has seen the bird on Attu.)

Those who saw the bird have Jack Stewart to thank. Jack sat patiently in his office and called almost everyone on the tree before he left to find the bird himself.

Those of us who didn't see the bird know the risks of the chase. Some of us (who shall remain nameless) spent several hours Friday, only to leave minutes before the bird returned.

And for those of us who arrived Saturday, we may not have seen a rare bird, but we were treated to a class act: Keith Seager, the host of the party, came by with doughnuts for all.

# Annual Banquet Tops List of Centennial Programs

The Delaware Valley Ornithological Club will continue celebrating its centennial year this fall with a roster of high-quality guest speakers.

Topping the list is our speaker at the Centennial Banquet, Paul Butler of the RARE Center for Tropical Bird Conservation. He has done extensive research on the St. Lucia Parrot in the Caribbean.

The banquet will be held Thursday, Nov. 15, at the Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th St. and Benjamin Franklin Parkway. It will begin at 6 p.m. with an open bar; dinner will be served at 7 p.m.

Look for an invitation in the mail in early October.

Another extra-special evening is set for the meeting of Oct. 18, when Ron Naveen, United States Section representative to the International Council for Bird Preservation, will present a slide lecture based on his new book, *Wild Ice*, published by the Smithsonian Institution.

The program will cover the wildlife, ecology and conservation of the Antarctic and will be open to members of other area bird clubs and the Academy of Natural Sciences.

## FIELD TRIPS

*For more information or detailed directions to any of the meeting places, call field trip chairman Earl Harrison, 215-592-7950 (home) or 215-842-6315 (work).*

**Saturday to Monday, Sept. 1 to 3:** Labor Day Weekend at Cape May. Meet at dawn in the Higbee Beach parking lot on any or all days. Leader: Chris Dooley, 215-788-7143.

**Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 6 and 7:** DVOC Weekend, Barnegat Light to Cape May. Meet at Barnegat Lighthouse State Park on Saturday morning at 7:30. Leaders: Don Jones, 609-859-0281 (home) or 215-842-6315 (work), or Earl Harrison.

**Saturday, Oct. 13: Island Beach State Park, Seaside Heights, N.J.** Meet at 7:30 a.m. at park entrance. Leader: Paul Guris, 215-348-4295 (home) or 215-362-0966 (work).

**Sunday, Nov. 4: Bake Oven Knob.** Meet at the Lookout parking lot at 9 a.m. for traditional day of hawk-watching. Leader: Chris Dooley, 215-788-7143.

## 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)

Naveen is known for his expertise in the field of East Coast pelagic birding.

*Wild Ice* is scheduled for publication in October, and a book signing will follow Naveen's presentation.

The DVOC meeting will begin promptly at 8 p.m., with the lecture scheduled for 8:30 p.m. Please arrive early so we can start on time! Club members are welcomed to bring guests.

The upcoming schedule of programs follows in its entirety.

All meetings are held at the Academy of Natural Sciences and begin at 8 p.m., unless otherwise noted.

SEPT. 6 and 20, 1990 — Informal meetings.  
OCT. 4, 1990 — DR. FRANK GILL, chairman of the Department of Ornithology at the Academy of Natural Sciences: "The Quest for Pere David's Tit in Szechwan, China."

OCT. 18, 1990 — RON NAVEEN: "Wild Ice." (See details above.)

## Assessments of the '90 New Jersey Big Day DVOC-1 says thanks

Nikon Sports Optics sponsored one of the two DVOC teams in New Jersey Audubon's 1990 "World Series of Birding." The team, captained by Rick Mellon, included Paul Guris, Johnny Miller and Bill Stocku.

Nikon paid the entrance fee and corporate donations, covered most of the major expenses and provided the team members with jackets and other equipment, including excellent binoculars. The 8x30 E series wide-angle binoculars provide a sharp image, and a wide field of view. They focus down to about eight feet and are lightweight.

Cahill Chevrolet of Trenton donated the use of a new, four-door Chevy Blazer, with good shock absorbers. Thank God for the four doors and good shocks, with both Johnny and Bill on the team.

After a sensational morning that included Pine Siskin, Vesper Sparrow, Yellow-bellied and Alder Flycatcher and Philadelphia Vireo, we hit Brigantine at 11:30 a.m. with 136 species.

Brig had its high points — eight Lapland Longspurs — and its low points — five missed, staked-out species and no other unexpected birds. Although we left for points south at 2 p.m. with 178 species, we only found 18 additional species (including a Cave Swallow) by midnight.

Our total of 196, I believe, is the highest total for New Jersey for a team that didn't go north of I-78, except for Great Swamp at night. We had had at least 24 additional species on our route during scouting, so 200 is a definite possibility.

Our sincere thanks to Nikon Sports Optics and Cahill Chevrolet for their generous support.

— Rick Mellon

NOV. 1, 1990 — DR. DAVID WILCOVE, senior ecologist with the Wilderness Society: "Forest Biodiversity and the Spotted Owl."

NOV. 15, 1990 — ANNUAL BANQUET (See details above.)

DEC. 6, 1990 — PHIL STREET: "The Birds of India and Nepal." This is a rescheduled program from last year by our distinguished club member.

DEC. 20, 1990 — DR. RUSSELL GREENBERG, a research associate at the National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C.: "Effects of Yucatan Deforestation on Migratory Birds."

JAN. 3, 1991 — ANNUAL MEETING: Elections, Christmas Count reports and refreshments.

For information about any of the programs, contact Dr. John Harding, program chairman, 215-642-6394. For information about the banquet, contact Sandy Sherman, dinner chair, 215-237-6814.

## DVOC-2 improves record

As the seventh annual New Jersey World Series of Birding was about to start at 12:01 on May 19, 1990, the DVOC-2 team was poised in the Great Swamp. Our team this year included captain Chris Walters, Keith Russell, Sandy Sherman, Erica Brendel and Ed Fingerhood.

Sponsored only by the club, the team has steadily increased our totals in our third official year: 154 in 1987, 175 last year and 180 this year.

Unlike DVOC-1, DVOC-2 has constructed a route using lots of unfamiliar territory, such as the Jersey Highlands, in order to add hard-to-get birds of northern affinity. Target species include Winter Wren, Least Flycatcher, Brown Creeper, Hermit Thrush, Golden-winged Warbler, Solitary Vireo, Purple Finch and Golden-crowned Kinglet, all birds we recorded before 7:15 a.m.

DVOC-2's 1990 run overcame two handicaps. First, illness kept Ed from the final week's scouting, as well as the Big Day itself. Second, job responsibilities in Pittsburgh eliminated a full week of scouting for me — and I was fortunate to arrive at Newark Airport Friday night, barely in time to participate at all.

Nonetheless, with Keith spearheading a good morning in the north, the team headed south and picked up Wild Turkey and Black Rail, staked out by Erica and Sandy, to finish with 28 warbler species.

Thanks to all those — outside the club and in — who contributed to the 1990 event. At latest count, the club has raised about \$800 in net receipts (more than \$1,000 in gross receipts) for conservation research.

— Chris Walters

# The Secret's Out About Crane Creek

by DICK BELL

Despite a bleak weather prediction, an enthusiastic and anxious team of DVOC birders left after work on 16 May, 1990, to pursue the infamous warblers of Crane Creek, Ohio.

Armed with official and incredibly ugly hats (red and white with green lettering) supplied by Bill Tucker, the team of "Buffalo" Bob Anderson, Dick Bell, Harold "O.F." Jackson, Al Kronschnabel, Bob Sehl, Tucker and Lee Yoder headed west through the rain on I-80.

We arrived at Anderson's summer home on the Allegheny River in Tidioute, Pa., late in the evening and soon fell asleep with high anticipation of the morning birding excitement to follow.

Up at the crack of dawn and undaunted by the bad weather, the team birded along the western shore of the Allegheny River as far as Warren, Pa. Good views of Solitary Vireo, Veery, Ruffed Grouse and many warblers, including Golden-winged, were obtained despite the precipitation. Later in the morning, we headed west toward Crane Creek, with the idea of arriving in time for the late afternoon show of birds.

Crane Creek has to be the best-kept

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*The only really negative moment occurred when we learned that a Kirtland's Warbler was seen about 10 minutes after we left. That's the second good bird Bell, Sehl and Jackson have missed in the past decade because they went to lunch.*

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birding secret in the country. It is a spring migrant trap on the shore of Lake Erie, about 20 miles east of Toledo, Ohio. Here is a 10-acre marsh with a few trees, where spectacular concentrations of small birds can be seen low and close up. It's wet and boggy, with an elegant boardwalk built by the local Audubon Society chapter.

As the birds return north in the spring, they come up against Lake Erie and are reluctant to cross a large body of water, especially in bad weather. They find this location a haven — in fact, it's the only nabitat like that between Cleveland and Toledo. They may stop here to regroup and refuel till they get the strength to fly across

the lake.

On a good day, it is possible to see 30 or more species of warblers. Bay-breasted, Cape May, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia and Black-throated Blue warblers are all common. Philadelphia Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Prothonotary Warbler and Swainson's Thrush are impossible to miss.

Some of the group have visited Crane Creek four or five times, and it has never failed to be a special experience.

Unlike Point Pelee, on the northern shore of Lake Erie, it is small and relatively uncrowded. We may have crossed paths, in the few days we were there, with a couple hundred birders. And it's a shorter drive, too.

Upon arrival, we were greeted by a fierce 30- to 40-mile-per-hour wind, which was, at first, discouraging. Nevertheless, a couple of chilly hours late in the afternoon were remarkable. Before we even entered the main gate to the boardwalk trail, we had recorded about 10 species of warblers, including an Orange-crowned, as well as a Summer Tanager. A short walk of about 50 feet into the woods along the boardwalk produced a young Great-horned Owl in a

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## The A to Z of Birding, DVOC Style

by COLIN CAMPBELL

The complete absence of responses to my request for American birding terms (Spring 1989 Larus) only serves to emphasize the perilous state of birdspeak here.

In an effort to correct this obvious and serious omission in the vocabulary of the "compleat birder," I offer the following modest example of birding terminology as a contribution to the DVOC's centennial year.

Continued and repetitive use of these terms will once again put East Coast birders in their rightful position at the forefront of global avifaunal expertise.

**Armas:** (Active verb) To twitch globally, as in, "I'm armassing a big list this year."

**Bulbul:** Cry of alarm while birding a cattle ranch.

**Cassin:** 19th-century Philadelphia ornithologist given to naming confusing species after himself. Hence, the familiar line, "If you think it's a Cassin's, it is."

**DVOC:** (Pronounced dee-vok) Rallying call for assistance in identification, as in, "What DVOC was that?"

**Elf owl:** Mexican chicken.

**Fester:** To spend 10 hours on Hawk Mountain and see only two Redtails.

**Guristic:** Garrulous adjective descriptive of chats, babblers and laughing gulls.

**Headbanger:** Someone who missed a lifer by minutes.

**Icterid:** Smartass call of someone who can't tell his Baltimores from his Bullocks.

**Jabiru:** Japanese car used on Mexican Big Days.

**Krony:** Companionable cigar to be slowly masticated while awaiting one's 700th North American species.

**Libidove:** Fecund feral pigeon.

**Mellonistic:** Color morph adopted by the Spruce Grouse, rendering itself invisible.

**Nightjar:** The residence of the genie who grants birders' wishes for life caprimulgiforms.

**Owling:** Fanatical wailing often heard after major dip-outs, e.g., Mongolian Plover. Antonym of "stockulated," q.v.

**Peep:** A sneaky look at moulting chicks.

**Quayle:** Gamebird with unusual habit of singing with its foot in its mouth.

**Rufe:** Local taxonomist famous for having the largest number of bird species named after him (Rufe, Rufeous-sided Towhee, Rufeous-crowned and Rufeous-winged sparrows, Rufe-winged Swallow, Rufe-legged Hawk, Rufeous-necked Stint, Rufeous-capped Warbler, Rufed Grouse, etc.).

**Stockulated:** State of elation after seeing a first for the Lower 48.

**Ternabout:** Retraction of identification of juvenile Roseate Tern.

**Uh-oh:** Call of Fish Crow as a premonition of even worse things to come.

**Veery:** Erratic driving on a high-speed twitch.

**Wilson:** Generic term used by birding bluffers to sound impressive, as in, "It's a Wilson's."

**Xenophobia:** Fear of Mongolian Plovers.

**Yahoo:** Loutish birder who always talks loudly when others are attempting to listen for distant Grasshopper Sparrow, Ruffed Grouse, Brown Creeper, etc.

**Zeroed:** Numbing sensation brought on by a wind-chill factor of 0° at Brigantine.

## LOCAL NOTES

**YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST:** As the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas winds down — the manuscript is now in the hands of the University of Pittsburgh Press and should be out by the middle of 1991 — the Academy of Natural Sciences has turned to its latest project: an updated version of the A.C. Bent series.

**Frank Gill**, chairman of the Academy's Department of Ornithology, reports that the project will be "a modern, authoritative series of separate species accounts" of the life histories of the birds of North America. The 10-year project between the Academy and the American Ornithologists' Union is being funded by a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Frank will serve as executive director.

In other Academy news, Project VIREO has now collected slides or photographs of more than half the avian species in the world. . . . The bird department has begun a three-year survey of the birds in the remaining forested areas of Ecuador. The program is supported by the Natural History Museum of Quito, with funding from the MacArthur Foundation.

With the completion of much of the work on the Pennsylvania atlas, **Dan Brauning** has a new job. As a wildlife biologist/ornithologist for the Pennsylvania Game Commission, he'll be working with non-game species and endangered species, including continuing research on the Peregrine Falcon. The job means a move to Montgomery, in Lycoming County. Another big change in Dan's life is a new son. Fatherhood has also overtaken **Michael Drake**, as he, too, has a new son.

**NOT ALL CENTENNIALS ARE HAPPY ONES.** **Frank Hubbard** enlightens us: "On March 6, 1890, less than a month after the founding of the DVOC, 80 foreign agents swaggered out of their confinement in central Manhattan bent on taking over all the major cities of North America. These were tough, wiry, single-purpose invaders that would not be stopped by the kinder, gentler natural inhabitants. Have you guessed? It's the 100th anniversary of the starling in America."

## Crane Creek

(Continued from Page 3)

nest. (We saw Mama a day or two later.) Philadelphia Vireos, Blackpoll males and females in numbers, lots of other warblers, flycatchers and vireos as well as a cooperative American Bittern and four roosting Common Nighthawks on nearby limbs rounded out a satisfying day.

The entire day of 18 May was spent in the Crane Creek area or its nearby environs. Highlights included warblers, a flight of 200 Black Terns, as well as breeding-plumaged Stilt Sandpipers at the neighboring Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, and shorebirds at the nearby Metzgar Marsh.

The only really negative moment occurred when we learned that a Kirtland's Warbler had been seen by two groups about 10 minutes after we left the area in search of lunch.

We'd been searching for both Mourning and Connecticut warblers that had been reported in a small area. It had been blowing hard and was on the edge of raining.

Some of us went to the store to buy some sandwich stuff. When we returned 45 minutes later, we were told a group of birders had found the Kirtland's right in the same area. It was last seen flying due east

along the lakefront, right before we returned.

Crane Creek appears to be one of the few places the Kirtland's Warbler can be seen, other than on its breeding territory northeast of Lake Erie (mostly northern Michigan) and occasionally on its wintering grounds in the Bahamas.

That's the second good bird Bell, Sehl and Jackson have missed in the past decade because they went to lunch. They took a half-hour lunch in Milford, Conn., and missed the Ross' Gull. When will they ever learn?

The morning of 19 May dawned clear and calm. Here was a day that promised to be one to remember. Arriving before 7 a.m. proved to be a good idea, as the sights and sounds were spectacular. No fewer than six Mourning Warblers were present. Members of our group could account for five individuals seen, and there were surely more. These were not mere glimpses, mind you. The birds were seen clearly and well, often in good light and sometimes as close as 10 feet away.

The highlight of the entire trip came in mid-morning, when a "bull-in-the-sun" male Connecticut Warbler put in an appearance. Spotted first by Anderson, the bird was seen off and on for more than an hour.

**Joe Engler** keeps in touch from way out at Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge in western Utah, where he is assistant refuge manager. The NWR, he explains, is "an extremely isolated marsh on the south end of the Great Salt Lake Desert. The nearest town (with anything) is 100 miles away. . . . We have roughly 60 miles of dirt/gravel roads between us and the pavement. . . . My current projects include nesting studies on Canada Geese, ducks, colonial nesters such as Snowy Egrets, Black-crowned Night-Herons and White-faced Ibis, and Snowy Plovers. The refuge is a great migrant trap, so the birding has been fantastic."

**George Reynard** reminds anyone doing bird research that he has available for loan back copies of a number of publications. He has the complete series of Bent, Peters' *Birds of the World*, *Cassinia*, *Caribbean Journal of Science* and a lot of other books and magazines as well. Call him at 609-829-1421.

**SOUTH, EAST AND WEST HEARD FROM:** Unofficial DVOC trips this year have headed out in at least three directions. Traveling to Ecuador in July were **Bill and Naomi Murphy, Sally Conyne, Erica Brendel, Don Jones, Hart Rufe, Jewel Cummings, Lee Yoder and Benton Basham.** **Bill Tucker** led an Arizona-California trek in June with **Al Kronschnabel, Bob Sehl, Dick Bell, Harold Jackson, Brian Logan, Harry Franzen, Gene Stern and Frank Windfeider.** And **Armas Hill** sailed east to Spain in May with **Ann Bacon, Bob Myers, Alan Brady, Ron French, Charlie Wonderly, John and Vern LaVia and Rise Miyo.**

Also, Armas has joined a partnership to form a new international tour company that will focus on nature and, of course, birds. The "scope," he notes, will be international — for travelers from the USA and Europe to places throughout the Americas and elsewhere. . . . The hotline has come into the '90s: To fax bird reports to Armas, call 302-529-1085 before Thursdays.

**CONDOLENCES:** To the family of long-time DVOC member **William L. Meyer** of Deptford, N.J., who died on March 27, and to **Nick Pulcinella**, who lost his 12-year-old son, Jeremy, this summer.

At one point, I could have reached out and patted it on the head. Sehl watched it walk out on a branch about four feet away, look him right in the eye and sing its head off.

Add a few other goodies such as Lincoln's Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow and all of the eastern Empidonax flycatchers, and you can begin to get some idea of what it was like.

Reluctantly, we left at noon to return to Anderson's house in Tidioute. A brief stop at the Pymatuning Reservoir added Bald Eagle and Pine Siskin to our trip list.

On Sunday morning, 20 May, we birded in and around Tidioute, adding Purple Finch, Cliff Swallow, another Bald Eagle, Hooded Warbler, another Golden-winged Warbler and drumming Ruffed Grouse.

Our final tally was 144 species, including all vireos except White-eyed, 28 species of warbler, and all the eastern Empidonax flycatchers. More than 100 species on our total list were passerines. Anderson won the pool, with a best guess of 143 species recorded by the group. The 144th was a Ring-necked Pheasant seen on the way home in Maple Glen, Pa., after we dropped him off.

His rewarded for winning the pool was a second incredibly ugly hat. Bill, we can't thank you enough — or maybe we can!