

# Philadelphia Larus

the newsletter of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club

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## THE CLUB

by PETE DUNNE

*EDITOR'S NOTE: In the Summer 1993 issue of the currently dormant American Birds, club member Pete Dunne offered national readers a glimpse at the quintessential American birding club. And from what vast experience did he cull his material? Glad you asked. The April 1, 1993, (is this perfect, or what?) meeting of DVOC!*

*Editors sometimes have a concept in mind other than what the author thinks is the best approach to any given subject. Pete's original piece was upfront as to just which all-American bird club's meeting he had sat in on. To those who know DVOC, there was no doubt. And now, here is, for the first time, the unexpurgated version of "The Club." Thanks, Pete, for sharing it with us as requested. This article is excerpted from and reprinted with permission of American Birds.*

**At 7:45,** the President leaned into the gavel and eighty-odd members of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club moved to be seated. Meetings are supposed to begin at 7:30, but they never do. Nobody expects them to, and nobody particularly wants them to, either. After all, one of the reasons people join bird clubs is for the opportunity to gab with birders.

From my seat I studied my fellow members — nodding to some; exchanging greetings with others. You can learn a lot about a club and its members by watching how they take their seats, and DVOC is no exception.

It's an old club, an established club, boasting over 100 years of ornithological tradition. Its membership is national, even international, but it serves a geographic community that straddles the lines of Delaware, Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey. One of the club's strengths is this geographic mixing.

DVOC hall of famers are familiar names to North American birders.

They include such august personalities as Witmer [Bird Studies of Old Cape May] Stone, James [Birds of the West Indies] Bond and Maurice [The Godfather] Broun. Its present membership is talented and active and there are a few who could sit — and did sit — in the presence of the Giants of the Past.

As the conversational clots moved to be seated, members seg-

regated themselves roughly along age lines. Elder statesmen gravitated toward the front. The club's rank-and-file filled the middle. Toward the rear, DVOC's young Turks assembled in the celebrated "Peanut Gallery."

DVOC's reputation as a tough audience is well deserved, and one of the measures of a good meeting is the acerbic quality and quantity of abuse members heap upon each other. Only rarely are guest speakers eaten alive — and only a few have been mauled to the point of disfigurement.

**B**efore the last member was seated, before all conversation could draw to a close, the President started the meeting. His lines of welcome might be recorded in the minutes, but they were lost to the assembly, drowned out by a loud, prolonged Shhhhhhhhhhhhh!

"Quiet," a member of the Peanut Gallery encouraged, ignoring his own good advice. It was going to be a spirited meeting.

The colorful nature of DVOC idiosyncracies notwithstanding, the motivation for this column is not what distinguishes DVOC from other bird clubs. What fascinates me are the things that bird clubs everywhere have in common.

I get to travel quite a bit. It has been my fortunate pleasure to address many clubs in many places. Some large, some small. Some housed in church halls, some closeted in nature center auditoriums.

But all the clubs I have addressed, and those that I have not, serve the same function. They set up a structure that facilitates interaction. They serve the social needs of birders.

And although every club has its idiosyncracies, all are bound in a ritual of procedure that make a meeting of the DVOC resemble a meeting of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society resemble a meeting of Sanibel-Captiva Audubon.

**S**ilence finally reigned in the halls of Philadelphia's Academy of Natural Sciences. A summary of the previous meeting's minutes was read, and several corrections offered. A motion was made to accept the minutes with corrections. Seconded. All in favor expressed their satisfaction by proclaiming, "Ayyyyyyy."

The next matter of business was the introduction of visitors. The cutting edge of DVOC's acerbic tradition does not commonly fall

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upon visitors (unless they do something really stupid — like report a Broad-winged Hawk in February). On the contrary, the club goes out of its way to make visitors feel welcome. Tonight, there were three in attendance. Each was treated to a round of applause.

There was also one new member inducted into the club — a practicing psychiatrist named Susan. Membership in DVOC is open to anyone who can secure the sponsorship of two club members in good standing and who can afford a modest \$15 for club dues.

Few who are interested in birds fail to mount these procedural obstacles; fewer who are not serious about birds try. Susan, in the estimation of her two sponsor, was a beginning birder whose enthusiasm vaulted any barrier between her and membership. The club agreed.

Susan's induction was unanimous and included a welcoming dose of heckling from the Peanut Gallery — snide references to the "over-representation of psychologists in the club" (a jab directed mostly at the club President, a practicing psychiatrist.)

Club presidents, I have noted, tend to be of a certain type. There are no absolutes, of course, but bird-club officers tend to be well-traveled and well-connected individuals. People who have birded with "Jon (Dunn)" here and traveled with "Brett (Whitney)" there or who just got back from the most recent American Birding Association conference.

Preliminaries completed, the meeting got down to the routine of meetings everywhere — meaning committee reports. The first report was Conservation.

In the hands of the wrong chairman, a conservation report can be as deadly as a whiff of poisonous gas. Barraged by complex political issues and batteries of supporting facts, I have seen whole, viable environmentally sympathetic clubs slip into mass coma.

Happily, DVOC's Conservation chairman was a master of brevity and poignancy. Issues brought to the body's attention included: Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt's fence-sitting decision concerning the status of the California Gnatcatcher, an update on the old-growth-forest debate and an affirmation of the Clinton administration's decision to renew funding for UNESCO — "to try to do something about this crazy overpopulation thing," the chairman proclaimed.

In the tradition of the DVOC and clubs everywhere, the conservation report was assessed in silence. Even the Turks in the Gallery held their peace and gave attentive ears to the issues that affect their avocation.

The Conservation chairman surrendered the floor to the editor of *Cassinia*, who in short order surrendered the floor to the editor of the newsletter, who in turn surrendered the floor to the chairman of the books committee, who in turn . . .

No doubt, you know the procedure. And if you know the procedure you also know how attention spans ebb and flow (but mostly ebb) as a meeting moves along its course.

"Field trips?" the President announced.

A tall man in casual dress stood and offered details concerning

the club's upcoming trip to Pedricktown (Ruff Capital of North America) and the annual Pocomoke Weekend. Club field-trip leaders tend to be cut from a different cloth than club presidents. They are younger, rather than older. They aren't necessarily well-traveled; they may, in fact, have little or no ambition to bird beyond the borders of their region, county or state.

They don't know "Jon." They've never birded with "Brett." But they can tell you everything these bigshots, and others, have ever written about flycatcher identification. And on any give day, on home turf, these local experts can bird stride for stride and go call to call with Kenn Kaufman.

"Upcoming programs," . . . "Ornithological Studies," . . . the reports ran on. And on. There is no universal format governing the number or type of committee reports offered at a club meeting. There is no universal order to their accounting. And there is certainly nothing approaching universal receptivity among members of the club.

In fact, after two or three reports, most civic-minded members find their attention wandering.

This is where the Peanut Gallery shows its worth. It is their job to remain attentive and interject the occasional snide aside. It helps keep everyone awake and speakers on their toes.

There is, however, one item on the agenda of every bird-club meeting that brings attentions to heel. It is an item on the agenda that is unique to bird-club meetings. It, even more than the evening speaker, is the axis upon which meetings orbit.

"Any local notes?" the President of the DVOC invited, and around the room, hands went up.

The DVOC is an active group. Sometimes "Local Notes" eats up 15 minutes or more.

As the sightings were posted — notes on such notable birds as Townsend's Solitaire and Ruff — I reflected back on a misconception I once harbored about this ritual accounting. I used to think that sightings were recounted along the lines established by a club's social pecking order — less

experienced birders first, more experienced later.

But I think, now, that skill and experience only indirectly determine the order in which members offer their sightings. I think, now, that it is the merit of the sighting itself that determines when birders jump on line. That an average birder with a very exciting bird will play that bird like a good hand in poker, holding it till the end, waiting until most and maybe all the other sightings lie face up on the table. And then . . . they stand.

And at that moment, while some catch their breath, and others cry for directions, and the Peanut Gallery cries for "details, details" . . . At that moment! Even the newest members of the oldest club can stand beside Kenn and Jon and Brett and sit in the company of Giants.

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**Philadelphia Larus**

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

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912 North St.

Collingdale, Pa. 19023

610-237-6814 (home) / 215-893-5739 (work)

## PROGRAMS

Meetings are held the first and third Thursdays of the month at 7:30 p.m., at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, 19th St. and Benjamin Franklin Parkway. For information on programs, call Sandy Sherman, 610-237-6814 (home) or 215-893-5739 (work).

Parking is available at the Logan Square Parking Garage, 1815 Cherry St., for \$4 all day. This indoor, patrolled lot is between 18th and 19th Streets, with entrances on both Arch Street and Cherry Street. To park at this rate, you must have your parking ticket validated by a security guard at the Academy.

OCTOBER 6, 1994 — KEVIN KARLSON, "The Dry Tortugas." Karlson, an excellent photographer and a member of the Records Committee of New Jersey Audubon Society, has spent extended periods of time on Fort Jefferson in the spring. He will show slides of some of the migrant songbirds and nesting seabirds he has seen around this island off the southwest Florida coast and discuss some of its history as well. **Special note:** The Academy of Natural Sciences' Robert Ridgely's *Birds of South America, Volumes One and Two*, will be available for purchase at tonight's meeting, and Bob will be in attendance to autograph his books. If you miss this chance, Ridgely and Guy Tudor, artist for both volumes, as well as *Birds of Panama*, are booked as guest speakers at the club early next year.

OCTOBER 20, 1994 — BILL CLARK, "Eagles of the World." The coordinator of the Cape May raptor banding project for 27 years, Clark is the author, with artist/photographer

Brian Wheeler, of the Peterson series North American raptor field guide. Clark will discuss many of the world's 62 species of eagles, and share some of his experiences throughout the world, including the capture of Golden Eagle by hand, Indian style.

NOVEMBER 3, 1994 — ED KWATER, "Shorebird Identification." Hoping to avoid strike three, we have rescheduled Kwater, a Pittsburgh area resident, twice due to late-winter ice storms. Think we're safe?

NOVEMBER 17, 1994 — DEBRA LOVE SHEARWATER. See details on the Annual Banquet below.

DECEMBER 1, 1994 — B.J. ROSE. "Identification of Female Ducks." Coming straight from pothole country, Rose, who live in Omaha, Neb., will use the knowledge he acquired from his 16 years with Ducks Unlimited. Many DVOCers know Rose from trips he has led for Focus on Nature Tours.

DECEMBER 15, 1994 — ANDY EDNIE, "Birding the Small Wonder." Club member Ednie takes us on a visual tour of all three counties of the First State. He has been birding Delaware more than 25 years.

JANUARY 5, 1995 — ANNUAL MEETING. Election of officers and reports of Christmas Bird Counts, plus the traditional cheery refreshments.

JANUARY 19, 1995 — DAVE WARD. "Antarctica, the Falklands and South Georgia." For those members participating in the Academy's/Frank Gill's trip to the area in November/December, come compare trips.

## FIELD TRIPS

For information, call the person listed below or Tom Bailey, field trip chairman, 609-426-4727 (home) or 908-758-4402 (work).

NOTE: The two field trips to the Palmyra, Burlington County, have been cancelled.

**Saturday, Sept. 10: Brigantine (Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge).** Meet leader Megan Edwards at refuge headquarters at 8:30 a.m. For information, call Megan, 609-783-4192 (home).

**Saturday, Oct. 1, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.: Boat trip to the Conjohela Flats, Susquehanna River, Pa.** This trip is being scheduled with Early Bird Nature Tours (Bob Schutsky and Larry Lewis) especially for DVOC. Expect to add to your Pa. list. Maximum: 13 participants; at least eight needed to go. If DVOC members do not sign up, trip will be opened to a waiting list. Cost: \$25. For information, call Tom Bailey at above numbers.

**Sunday, Oct. 30: Raccoon Ridge Hawk Watch.** You can still show up on your own at Bake Oven Knob the first Sunday in November, but this year's club hawk-watching trip will take place at this North Jersey site. Call Tom Bailey for time and location.

**Sunday, Dec. 3: Late fall pelagic trip off Jersey coast.** On board the *Atlantis*, leaving at 5 a.m. from Bogan's Basin, 800 Ashley Ave., Brielle, N.J. Returning around 8 p.m. Cost: \$65. For information, contact Armas Hill, Focus on Nature Tours, 302-529-1876.

**Friday, Dec. 17, to Monday, Jan. 3, 1994:** National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Counts. For information, call Sandy Sherman.

You are cordially invited to the  
DVOC Annual Banquet  
Thursday, November 17, 1994  
at

Aona Keller's Dugan's Restaurant  
7900 Roosevelt Blvd.  
Philadelphia, Pa.

Cash Bar: 6 p.m.; dinner: 7 p.m.  
Guest Speaker:

Debra Love Shearwater

Founder of Shearwater Journeys,  
Monterey, Calif.

Topic: "Through the Seasons: An  
Introduction to the Seabirds and Marine  
Mammals of Monterey Bay"

Reservations must be received by November 10.

Clip this half and mail to:

Ed Fingerhood  
70205 Delaire Landing Rd.  
Philadelphia, Pa. 19114-4468

Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ spaces for:

\_\_\_\_\_ (names)

No.		Each dinner
_____	Breast of Capon, Stuffed Wild Rice	@ \$19.00
_____	Roast Prime Rib of Beef au jus	@ \$24.00
_____	Flounder Stuffed With Crabmeat	@ \$24.00
	Total:	_____

Make checks payable to DVOC.

UPDATE FROM A LARUS PAST: **Tom Bailey** provides this further note on the site in Palmyra, N.J.:

"As promised, here is an update on the attempt at preserving Palmyra as a wildlife area open to the public.

"Since the January 1992 Philadelphia Larus article, several important developments have happened. The first one, and most important, is that the Burlington County Bridge Commission has thrown its full support behind the project and has agreed to manage the site.

"The second one was a title search that had to be done before the state could commit to anything. The title search was completed, and a green light was given to the project.

"The third was the appointment of Bob Shinn as commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection of New Jersey. Mr. Shinn was a state assemblyman who enthusiastically helped us out in jump-starting the preservation project several years ago. He is now The Boss of the agency who must okay every project.

"I spoke with Joan Quinn, and here's where the project stands. Just after Labor Day, a proposal from the BCBC to manage the land as a wildlife preserve will be presented to the DEP Tideland Commission for its approval, which is expected. The proposal then goes to the Commission of the DEP (Mr. Shinn) for his signature, and then to the governor, Christine Whitman. (There's even a rumor she wants to sign the proposal on the site!)

"Hopefully, keeping our fingers crossed, this should happen around December or January. With the governor's signature, a 30-year charter will be given to the BCBC to manage the site. The BCBC will then incorporate a non-profit organization, whose function will be to acquire funding for, and the day-to-day operations of, the site. An advisory and executive board will also be created.

"Currently, a large area has been cleared of trees, and sand excavation started in June. The sand is being excavated by Winzinger Company for an amphitheater being built in Camden. Luckily, the Saw-whet Owl wintering area was not harmed. But 'Connecticut Warbler Alley' is gone, as well as the 'Thrush Spot.' Future sand deposits from dredging will go into this area.

"Angelo Campo, who owns the land and Marlo, a private sand-mining company, has agreed to open to the public the land he owns that is not being mined. In return, Marlo will get another

80 acres in the area to mine sand on.

"Since the Larus article, an additional 23 species of birds have been seen here. The list now stands at 234. Some of these additions are Red-necked Grebe, Golden Eagle, Common Black-headed Gull, White Pelican, Anhinga, Black Tern, Cerulean Warbler, Grasshopper Sparrow and Snow Bunting."

CLEANING? DON'T TOSS THOSE OLD NOTES! **Phil Street**, who heads the Archives Committee, reminds us to save any material that might be relevant to the DVOC archives for the Academy of Natural Sciences, which has agreed to act as professional curators of our records. This call is especially directed at secretaries who are still holding on to their minutes, but equally holds true for those who have old photos, checklists, books, letters, etc., that relate to the club's rich history. The club will still have access to the material, and it will be preserved. Call Phil for information, 610-647-8324.

SHOREBIRD SHORTS: In Delaware, only one singular sighting of a Whiskered Tern was noted (Aug. 24) this year and no Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, but last summer's excitement did attract more than 100 shorebird seekers to the American Birding Association's regional conference, held in Dover from Aug. 1 to 5.

**Ellen Short**, co-owner of the Backyard Bird Co. in Wilmington (Concord Pike Village, Route 202, 302-478-8300), did a fabulous job of coordinating field trips; **Andy Ednie** was the opening speaker, and field-trip leaders included **Colin Campbell**, **Don Jones**, **Paul DuMont** and **Sandy Sherman**.

And speaking of back yards, **Jim Keating**, a member since 1979, when he was sponsored by **Jesse Grantham**, had a ringside seat to a Curlew Sandpiper this summer: His Kitts Hummock, Del., backyard is the Delaware Bay.

BIG CHANGES AT CMBO: **Dr. Paul Kerlinger**, who has been director of the Cape May Bird Observatory for seven years, resigned this summer to move on. He is on the consulting end of the birding/environmental field, hawking his knowledge to "the other side." New director? The old director, **Pete Dunne**, who had the title when there wasn't a whole lot to the observatory, has agreed to take on the responsibilities for a while. One of his first moves was to bring on **Louise Zemaitis** as a full-time staffer.

After 20 years coordinating the Cape May Christmas Bird Count, **Keith Seager** has passed on the pencil, checklist and frozen fingers to **Louise Z.** and **Vince Elia**. Cape May has traditionally been a club count, with **Ernest Choate** doing the honors for 20 years before Keith. No word yet on whether Louise and Vince will continue Keith's tradition of buying a round of donuts for all who turn in results at the designated diner.

**Tom Bailey** has also had a pencil passed on to him — from **Pete Bacinski**. Tom will now be compiler for Region 5 of *Records of New Jersey Birds*, which encompasses the coastal area. Pass on your records by calling Tom at 609-426-4727 (home) or 908-758-4402 (work).

And finally, now it can be told. (Or can it?) Which DVOC member managed to locate a Sharp-tailed Grouse at the Minot ABA convention this summer by placing his foot squarely on a nesting female — and breaking her wing in the process? Oh, and a local TV crew filmed the whole thing.

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## *The BOOKSTORE is back!*

Through her **Backyard Bird Co.**, **Ellen Short** will be bringing birding books and related items to meetings on a regular basis. If you're interested in purchasing a particular book or birding item, contact **Ellen** and she'll try to bring it to a meeting or order it for you. Call her at **302-478-8300** or visit the store, at **Concord Pike Village, Route 202, Wilmington.**