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Winter 2000

Some Birding Days are Better than Others or How Finding a Great Bird is the Perfect Way to End a Millennium

By Martin Selzer

We have all had those great birding days when warblers are singing from every treetop, sparrows are calling from every bush or raptors are soaring overhead in a nonstop parade south. We have also all had those days when there isn't a bird to be seen anywhere. If we could somehow know what was in store for us before we set the alarm to be up before the crack of dawn, our birding adventures would always be successful and, as a side benefit, we could get a lot more sleep. Of course, it is the element of surprise that makes those great days or fantastic sightings all that more special. Recently, I had one of those experiences that made up for a whole lot of those too quiet days in the field.

On December 26th, 1999, Bert Filemyr and I were participating in the Bombay Hook Christmas Bird Count. This was the third straight year that Bert and I had helped out on this count. It also marked the second time we had been granted access to the refuge before sunrise to search for owls and rails. Last year, we had several pairs of Great Horned Owls, two Barred Owls, a Screech Owl and a Barn Owl so we had great hopes again for this year. Unfortunately, it was a rather windy night and we were only able to find one Barn Owl and three Great Horned Owls. We then started to cover our territory around Bear Swamp and found it to be rather quiet. Sure, we had an American Bittern fly in front of us and saw four Purple Finches, but we really hadn't had the number of species or individuals to justify having set the alarm for 2:00 A.M..

That all changed as we checked the field northeast of the Allee House. The field was a combination of corn stubble and winter wheat. In the short winter wheat there was a flock of about 100 birds. This flock consisted of killdeer, starlings and one distinctively different individual.

It was a large shorebird with a shiny/glossy green back that was twice the size the killdeer in the field. When facing away from us it tipped its tail up revealing a white belly and undertail except for a large rusty spot at the vent. In profile it showed a crested head with a medium length single plume and strong breast band. When viewed head on, the bird had a black, thick, singular chest band of even thickness across the breast. Damned if we hadn't stumbled upon an adult Northern Lapwing! Now if that doesn't make your Christmas Bird Count special, not much will.

We observed the lapwing for a few moments and

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A Fine Last Hurrah

by Bill Murphy

The late November trip to Bake Oven Knob was the last DVOC field trip that I led as Field Trip Chairman. The infamous group of Brendel, Filemyr, Henderson, Selzer, Walters and Windfelder met at the Murphy's house at 7:30 A.M.. Conditions were perfect: a front had just gone through and we would have strong northwest winds up to 25 m.p.h. all day. Great for the ridge! Walters and Brendel even arrived on time. The latter had to be rolled onto the Filemyr van due to too much "down" padding.

We arrived at the ridge parking lot around 9:00 A.M., and in short order watched eight Red-tailed Hawks blow by. As we reached the tip of the ridge, a second year Bald Eagle flew over – a great start! Lavia and Tannery were already there and had been graced with a Golden Eagle and some forty-eight Red-tailed Hawks. From then on, there was a continuous stream of raptors with three more Golden Eagles, a Rough-legged Hawk and a good number of Red-shouldered Hawks. The winds continued to howl.



Windfelder nearly tumbled off the ridge when he yelled, "SISKINS," as three of these little birds nearly hit him in the head as they rocketed by. There was also a steady stream of Evening Grosbeaks zooming down the ridge along with Snow Buntings and a Purple Finch.

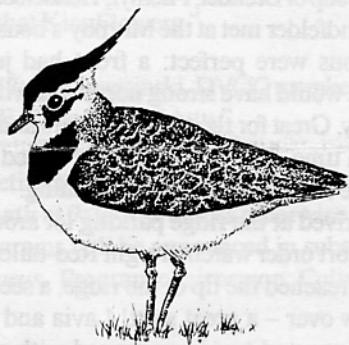
Henderson spotted an interesting bird coming down the ridge. We all got on it as it went low along, and then below, the tree line. It was hard to follow but as we watched it, we reached a consensus that it was an immature Northern Goshawk. Then, when we turned around, we discovered that the Mercers had turned when we turned around, we discovered that the Mercers had turned up.

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Great Bird, Cont'd from Page 1

then it walked over the crest of a hill in the field. We made two phone calls from a cell phone to alert local birders.

Bert left to alert other birders in the refuge, while I remained at the field to keep an eye on things. Within 20 minutes, 15 enthusiastic birders had assembled. By moving to the west edge of field we were able to see the area over the crest of the hill and relocate the bird. This group observed the bird for about 45 minutes. Then, at about 12:00 noon, the entire flock of Starlings, Killdeer and the lapwing flew in a westerly direction.



The bird was not found again that day or at all on Monday, but was rediscovered on Tuesday around noon in exactly the same spot. Sometimes the bird wandered out of view, beyond the crest of the hill. But birders walking along the edge of the field by the hedgerow next to the Allee House were still able to get a good view. This was the third record of Northern Lapwing in Delaware and it turned up very near the same spot where Delaware's first LAPWING was found 45 years ago!

I hope many of you were able to get down and see this bird. It certainly made a grand way to end the millennium for me.

Officers and Council members elected

at Annual Meeting on January 6, 2000:

President: Ron French

Vice President: Colin Campbell

Secretary: Adrian Binns

Treasurer: Naomi Murphy

Council Members: Martin Selzer and Joseph Majdan

Fellows Nominated:

Adrian Binns, Jane Henderson, Steve Kerr

Award winners

announced at banquet on Nov. 18, 1999:

Nick Pulcinella received the Witmer Stone Award for Ornithological Research, which embodies the results of ornithological research not undertaken in the course of professional duties.

Paul Guris received the Potter Award for his contributions to field ornithology.

October Tuckerton Sparrow Trip:

Another Winner

by Frank Windfelder

The DVOC's third annual field trip to Tuckerton was held on Saturday, October, 9, 1999. Twelve members met at the end of Great Bay Boulevard, locally known as Seven Bridges Road. There, we performed our annual ritual of mucking through the saltmarsh in search of the sometimes elusive Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

We were extremely lucky again this year. During a 2-hour period, we found twelve Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows. Identifying the races can be tricky, but we believed that five were of the race *subvirgatus*, six were *alterus*, and one was a well-marked *nelsoni*. We also saw over a hundred Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows and a good number of Seaside Sparrows.

Seven Bridges Road can be a great migrant trap in fall, after a cold front has moved through. That was not the case this year. The weather was balmy, and by midday the temperature had reached 75 F.

After leaving Tuckerton, most of us proceeded to Forsythe NWR (Brigantine Division). The highlights at Brigantine were two adult Bald Eagles, three Yellow-crowned Night Herons, and several Long-billed Dowitchers.

During the day, a total of 61 species were seen. The participants were club president Don Jones, former president Jim Merritt, field trip chairman Bill Murphy, incoming field trip chairman Adrian Binns, Jane Henderson, Al Driscoll, Bert Filemyr, John Danzenbaker, Martin Selzer, Fred Crown, Bill Hanley, and myself.

In past years, we have seen Purple Gallinule, Vesper Sparrow, and American Bittern, among many other species. Come join us next October, and find out what surprises are awaiting!

Illustrations by Adrian Binns

Last Hurrah, Cont'd from Page 1



We lost clouds and gained wind and finally called it a day... an excellent day. As Frank Windfelder later wrote: "Any time you get Golden Eagle, Northern Goshawk, Rough-legged hawk, Pine Siskin, Evening Grosbeak and Snow Bunting in one day, you have nothing to complain about. Even Harry Franzen, God rest his soul, would have been pleased had he been there."

DVOC Field Trips for the Year 2000

Sat, Jan. 8: Florence, NJ for great gull watching in the east: "white-wing" gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and a search for Yellow-legged Gull. Meet at boat ramp at 9:00 AM.

Call Ward Dasey (609)953-1685
(w.daseyiii@worldnet.att.net)

Sat - Mon, Jan. 15, 16, 17: Montauk, LI, NY for winter finches, eiders, scoters, alcids and possible Eurasian accidentals. Carpool from NE Philadelphia at 6:00 AM. Space limited due to lodging constraints - first come, first served! Max. 16.

Leaders: Erica Brendel (215)844-3456
(ericamb@prodigy.net)
and Chris Walters (215)642-6862 (ckwalter@rsm.com)

Sat, Feb. 19, 5:00 AM to 5:00 PM: Pelagic out of Cape May, NJ on "Miss Chris," looking for alcids, skuas and fulmars.

Capt. Fred Ascoli (609)884-3939
Call Paul Guris (215)234-8557 (pguris@money.net)

Sat, Mar. 25: Pedricktown and Mannington Marsh (SW NJ) for winter stragglers and early migrants, including Ruff.

Call Frank Windfelder (215)673-0240
(windfelder@aol.com)

Wed-Sat, April 26-29: Dry Tortugas, FL aboard the "Yankee Freedom" at the height of spring migration. Kevin Karlson's Jaeger Tours. Space limited.
Call Adrian Binns (215)364-4407 (wildlifegd@aol.com)

Fri-Sun, May 5-7: Three Days in the Swamps: Pocomoke and Environs, DE & MD, starting at the Hook and Little Creek, with an evening jaunt for rails and then Pokomoke Swamp. Camping options + nearby motel accommodations.

Call: Colin Campbell (302)792-2506
(colin.campbell@cibasc.com)

Sat, May 6: White Clay Creek, DE. Meet at Hot Shoppes rest Area on Rte. 95, south of Wilmington, between Rtes. 273 & 896 at 6:30 AM. Possible Cerulean Warblers, plus Hooded Warbler, Pileated Woodpecker, Willow Fly-catcher.

Call: Andy Ednie (302)792-9591 (ednieap@wittnet.com)

Sat, May 13: Pennypack Creek Park, Phila. for an all day affair with warblers in the morning and a search for Bicknell's Thrush in the afternoon.

Call: Frank Windfelder (215)673-6240
(windfelder@aol.com)

Sun, May 21: Hawkins Road and Brightview Farm, Burlington Co., NJ. Target species at Hawkins Rd: breeding Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Kentucky and Hooded Warblers. Grasslands species at Brightview Farm. Meet at 6 AM at Vincentown Diner, Rte. 206/38.
Call: Don Jones (609)859-0281

Fri-Mon, May 26-29: Kirtland's Warbler and Point Pelee, Michigan and Ontario, top catch the tail of spring migration over Memorial Day weekend. Yellow Rail and Kirtland's Warbler on breeding grounds.

Exact dates and Cost: TBA
Call: Adrian Binns (215)364-4407 (wildlifegd@aol.com)

Sat-Mon, May 27-29: North Carolina Pelagic. Manteo, aboard the Country Girl, to the Gulf Stream for Fea's Black-capped and Trinidade Petrels, and tropicbirds, shearwaters and cetaceans.

\$99.00 each trip. 5:30 AM.
Call: Paul Guris (215)234-8557 (pguris@money.net)
or Armas Hill (302)529-1876 (font@focuson nature.com)

Sun, May 28: Pelagic out of Cape May aboard Morning Star. Canyons SE of Cape May for shearwaters, storm-petrels, jaegers, skuas, terns, phalaropes.

Cost: \$96. Max. 20 participants.
Call: Armas Hill (302)529-1876 (font@focuson nature.com)

Sat-Sun, June 3-4: North Carolina Pelagic, Manteo. See description for May 27-29 trips.

Sun, July 16: Delaware Bayshore Trip. Bombay Hook NWR and environs to witness annual spectacle of shorebird migration. Meet at 7:30 AM at Bombay Hook headquarters.
Call: Sandy Sherman (610)237-6814 (paavocet@aol.com)

Sat-Mon, July 29-31: North Carolina Pelagic, Manteo. Shearwaters, Bridled and Sooty Terns, Black-capped Petrels, White-tailed Tropicbirds, possible Trinidade, Fea's and Bulwer's Petrels. See May 27-29 description for details.

Sat-Mon, August 5-7: North Carolina Pelagic, Manteo. White-faced Storm Petrel, South Polar Skua, Bulwer's Petrel. See May 27-29 description for details.

Sat, Aug. 26: New Jersey Pelagic, Brielle, aboard the Atlantis, to Hudson Canyon. Prime time for Long-tailed Jaegers during southbound migration. All 3 species of jaegers and South Polar Skua possible, also shearwaters & storm-petrels. 5 AM - 9 PM. Cost \$75.

Call: Paul Guris (215)234-8557 (pguris@money.net)
or Armas Hill (302)529-1876 (font@focuson nature.com)

Winter Programs

January 6: Annual Meeting. Election of Officers and Council, CBC summary reports. Club soiree with food and drink.

January 20: Ralph Mancke, "The Philippines Eagle." The story of the effort to protect this magnificent, highly endangered species.

February 3: Ross Hawkins, President of the Hummingbird Society, from Newark, DE on "Beija-fleur: The Birds that Kiss Flowers."

February 17: Joe Swertinski, DVOC member, from Newark, DE, "The Lure of Attu."

DVOC meetings fall on the first and third Thursdays of each month at 7:30 PM unless otherwise noted. Future programs will be announced in subsequent issues of *Larus*. Program chairperson: Colin Campbell.

Desperately Seeking Stone

by Sandy Sherman

In October 1937, DVOC published Witmer Stone's seminal work *Bird Studies at Old Cape May*. Fourteen hundred sets of the two-volume work were printed; each set is numbered on the last page of Volume II.

In 1965, Dover Publications reprinted the book in paperback; both versions are now out of print, but Stackpole Books intends to reprint it. As editor of *Cassinia*, I am undertaking a project to track down all remaining copies of the original version.

Would anyone who owns a copy please help me by providing the following information:

- The name of the owner or institution, location and, most importantly, the number in the back of Volume II.
- How long you have owned the copy, where you got it from and what condition it is in.
- How you obtained it;
- Any further pertinent information, such as whose copy it was originally, whether there is any inscription, autographs, dates, etc.

The results will be published in *Cassinia*. Please share this notice with anyone or any institution that might have knowledge of the whereabouts of this beloved book.

Send responses to Sandy Sherman, *Cassinia* editor, DVOC, c/o Bird Dept., Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th St. and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia, PA 19103. E-mail: paavocet@aol.com.

More Field Trips

Sun, Sept. 3: Pelagic out of Cape May aboard Morning Star to canyons SE of Cape May for White-faced Storm Petrel. Cost: \$96. Max. 20 participants. Call: Armas Hill (302)529-1876 (font@focuson nature.com)

Sun, Sept. 17: Fall birding at Bailey Tract, Palmyra, NJ. Anything is possible at this great location, but the focus will be on migrating warblers. Last year 22 species, including many Connecticut Warblers, as well as Lincoln's and Clay-colored Sparrows. Call: Ward Dasey (609)953-1685 (w.daseyiii@worldnet.att.net)

Sat-Sun, Sept. 30 - Oct. 8, Veracruz, Mexico. Join Kevin Karlson's Jaeger Tours for spectacular "River of Raptors" along with over 250 species seen in 1999. Cost: TBA. Space limited. Call: Adrian Binns (215)364-4407 (wildlifegd@aol.com)

Sat, Oct. 7: Tuckerton Marshes, NJ. Sharp-tailed sparrows, with great comparison of all races of Nelson's, as well as Saltmarsh Sharp-tails. A walk along 7 Bridges Rd. is likely to add another dozen sparrow species. Followed by a once around at Brigantine NWR. Meet at end of 7 Bridges Road at 7:30 sharp. Call: Frank Windfelder (215)673-0240 (windfelder@aol.com)

Sat, Dec. 2: Pelagic out of Brielle, NJ, going as close as possible to Hudson Canyon in search of Great Skua, Manx Shearwater, alcids, Kittiwakes and Fulmars. 5 AM - 7 PM. Call: Armas Hill (302)529-1876 (font@focuson nature.com) or Paul Guris (215)234-8557 (pguris@money.net)

Contact Field Trip Chairman Adrian Binns for more info: 791 Bridgetown Pike Langhorne, PA 19053 (215)364-4407 (215)364-1652 (fax) wildlifegd@aol.com



Please submit announcements, pieces to be considered for publication, schedules and other information

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