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Florence, NJ: A Gull Watcher's Paradise

By Bill Murphy

Where else but Florence, NJ can one go and see 10,000 to 20,000 gulls right across the river from Philadelphia? In the winter months, you are almost certain to see Lesser Black-backed, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls. You just head on over to the park or marina in Florence on any day but Sunday and watch the parade of gulls float along on the Delaware River and hope you turn up a rarity.

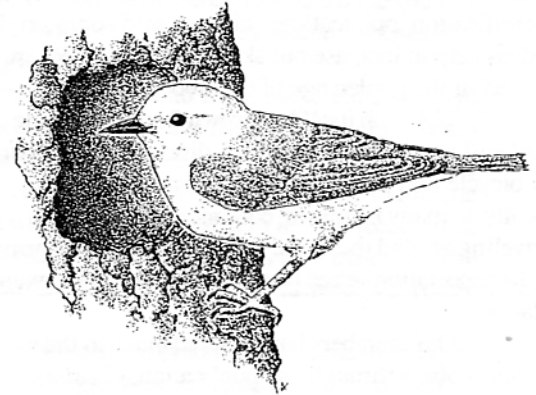
The month of February was particularly rewarding for me. In January, I started hearing some reports of dark backed gulls, possibly California and Yellow-legged Gulls. I went to Florence on February 2, 2000 with high hopes of finding one of these vagrants. I did see many "Lesser Backs" (Lesser Black-backed Gulls), several Iceland Gulls and one Glaucous Gull. There was a fellow standing next to me who said, "I have a dark mantled gull. It is flying and it has yellow legs." Try as I might, I never managed to get on that bird because just at that moment a tug boat came by and all of the birds flew.



Lesser Black-backed Gull
©Adrian Binns

On February 14, a friend reported seeing the Yellow-legged Gull at length and was pretty sure of his find. I was there the next morning and searched in vain for an unusual dark backed gull. I was rewarded with a first winter Thayer's Gull, ten Iceland, two Glaucous and more than fifty Lesser Black-backed Gulls. That same day, another guy who arrived very early said he saw the Yellow-legged Gull at 8:30 A.M. How disappointing for the rest of us.

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Prothonotary Warbler
© Adrian Binns

The Golden Warblers of Bear Swamp

By Augie Sexauer

I wholeheartedly agree with Bent, I do not like the name Prothonotary Warbler (*protonotaria citrea*) which is often misspelled and wrongly pronounced. Gold is the color that springs to mind when the bird is first spotted in the early morning gloom above the dark waters of its swampy habitat.

Bear Swamp, a 3000 acre wilderness in Medford and Southampton townships in Burlington County, New Jersey has long been a premier birding hotspot. Down through the years many interesting sightings have been reported from Hawkin Road, which on old area maps, was referred to as Manahawkin Road. Ward Dasey compiled a list of birds of Bear Swamp totaling 168 including breeders and accidentals. Seventy three are listed as breeders. Ken Tischner also wrote a paper on breeding birds of Bear Swamp, published in *Cassinia* for the years 1974 to 1979. Interestingly, he listed the Golden Swamp Warbler as a scarce breeder.

When a tract of land in the very heart of this area was posted for sale, members of the Audubon Wildlife Society became concerned about what might happen to this wonderful place. It is a land of towering white cedars, gnarled oaks, red maples and sweet gum, where Red Shouldered Hawks course through the wooded wetlands by day and Barred Owls patrol by night. Both are threatened species in New Jersey.

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As we move into the new millennium, let us reflect on the accomplishments of our club since its inception. We have come a long way from the days of shooting birds in order to identify them, to the present time of new-age optics. Endless streams of new bird identification publications, tapes of bird songs, and videos help to increase our skills as birders. We are indeed in the golden age of our hobby.

The Club itself has grown from a few male bird enthusiasts traveling great distances on foot and by bicycle and public transportation to see birds locally, to many members, both men and women, traveling around the world in the most modern forms of transportation to see birds, even in the most exotic places.

Our members have offered much to the world of ornithology through our publication, *Cassinia*, through the research of some of our members and through the programs offered at our meetings. Several of our members have gone on to receive public recognition for their accomplishments in the field of ornithology. We can certainly be proud to be members of DVOC.

Where do we go from here? This century presents a greater challenge to the survival of many of the bird species we so dearly love than we have ever experienced. The future does not look bright. Pollution, habitat loss, changing agricultural practices, and just plain ignorance on the part of the general public all contribute to this general outlook. Although we are not a conservation group, members of the DVOC do and should support the various conservation groups that fight the battles to protect our birds. As members of the club, we should be sure that our voices are heard whenever any threat to the safety of our avian friends becomes known.

As for the immediate needs of the Club, I feel that we must get the Minutes of the past meetings bound in hard cover, and our Archives Committee is moving to accomplish this end. I would also like to see our members bring new people to the Club for possible membership, since new blood always enhances the wholesomeness and productivity of any organization.

It is my further hope that we will be enlightened through our Ornithological Studies Committee to the field research of our various members so that we can acknowledge their efforts and also encourage their progress.

In closing, I would like to invite the membership to offer any suggestions that would further the goals of our fine organization.

Ron French, President

April 6 - "The Evolutionary History of the Ground Antbirds."
Nate Rice, Collections Manager at the Academy
Nate will describe the work he did on these Andean species as the focus for his dissertation at the University of Kansas.

April 20 - "The Ecology of Shorebirds in Delaware Bay."
Larry Niles

May 4 - "Weather and Bird Migration."
Paul Lehman, tour leader, Nat. Geo. Guide mapper, weather guru, former editor of *Birding*.
After a weather primer, Paul will describe how weather conditions can affect birding throughout the year. He will describe the effect of weather on migration, and explain how to predict fallouts, hawk migration and bird vagrancy.

May 18 - "Everything you ever wanted to know about hummingbirds, but were afraid to ask!"
Sheri Williamson, Director, South East Arizona Bird Observatory. Sheri, a nationally-known naturalist, is writing a guide to hummingbirds for the Peterson Nature Series.

June 1 - "Chasing Warblers."
Bob Thornton, Texas banker.
Bob will describe, in an informal manner, some of the experiences he encountered while gathering material for his book of the same title.

July 6, August 3, September 7 and 21: Informal meetings at the Academy.

December 7 - Annual Banquet. Kevin Karlson, Speaker.
"Birding in the New Millennium: What Will the Future Bring?"



Barrow's Goldeneye
© Adrian Binns

Bear Swamp is part of the Rancocas Creek watershed and boasts not only bird species but many other wonders as well. One evening in July of 1998 Gerry Bailey sighted four mink crossing one of the main trails. Numerous plants, butterflies, frogs, of course, insects can also be found.

In 1996, I erected four nest boxes along Hawkin Road on a trial basis. Two of the boxes were used and produced nine young. This was the start of the Golden Swamp Warbler nest box program in Bear Swamp.

In 1997 Gerry Bailey and I added nine more boxes with all but one being "Peterson" style boxes with oblong openings.

The boxes were placed on metal poles in running water about four feet above the water's surface. They were monitored once weekly.

Nesting material was first noted as early as April 28, and most had cups formed by May 16. Males arriving about mid-April filled the boxes with nesting material in hopes of attracting a mate. The nests consisted of a base of dry leaves, with added moss. The cups were then lined with the pedicels of winged red maple fruits. The average clutch of 5 eggs was usually completed by May 24.

Prothonotaries incubate their eggs on average for 13 days and the young usually fledge in about 12 days. At a nest where Gerry Bailey was photographing, the birds made 12 visits between 8 and 9 A.M. with the male and female sharing equal duties. The parent birds were sighted together at the entrance hole only once during that time. The birds brought in small caterpillars (about 1" long), moths and other winged insects. When the birds flew from the nest hole, they always flew downward. At another nest site Gerry observed the parent birds feeding not only the chicks from a second brood, but also the young from the first brood.

In 1997 a total of 29 young fledged with four young coming from a second brood. Of the 14 boxes erected only two went unoccupied. Only one pair out of three that attempted second broods was successful.

In 1998 another box was added for a total of 15 boxes. Eleven boxes were used solely by Prothonotary Warblers. That year the first male arrived on April 17 and immediately began inspecting a box located near the western footbridge along Miry Run. The year's first eggs were laid on May 8 and the first young hatched on May 22. The last date for fledging was on July 8. That year two pairs tried to raise second broods with only one being successful and fledging three young. Those birds were banded along with 26 other fledglings. A total of 57 eggs were counted with 44 hatched and fledged.

In 1999 it was very dry with water levels in Miry Run and Little Creek at an all time low. Boxes that had been in knee deep water in 1998 were left standing in mud. The birds neglected those sites perhaps in favor of more desirable natural cavities. Three boxes were placed at "new" sites along Little Creek and Miry Run, with nesting pairs at those sites raising a total of 14 young. Other more reliable sites were inactive due to the low water levels. The birds just didn't seem interested in boxes that were not in running water.

At one nest site a pair had a complete clutch of five eggs being incubated (only the female incubates the eggs) when a new nest was built over the old one. After the five young fledged from the second nest, Gerry checked and found the original nest intact with the five eggs still in it! The second nest was built up so high that the nest was actually above the entrance hole. The birds had to squeeze in and up to feed the young chicks.

In 1999 there were 13 nests started with nine nests being successful. A total of 62 eggs were laid and 35 hatched with 34 young fledged. Three pairs attempted to raise second broods with two being successful and hatching seven young. The season's first egg was noted on May 10 and the last young fledged on July 30.

Maintaining and monitoring a Prothonotary Warbler nest box trail is hard work, but well worth the rewards. When heavy Spring rains saturate Bear Swamp, hip boots are required. Walking over a considerable distance with waders on can be strenuous, especially when it's hot. The spaghnum floor with many downed branches and clumps of grass can be uneven and unpredictable which makes walking a challenge! As we make our way through the swamp many other bird species entertain us. Kentucky, Hooded, Blue-winged and Worm-eating warblers are common. Louisiana Waterthrushes nest along Little Creek, and Scarlet Tanagers sing from high up in the oaks. Yellow- and Black-billed Cuckoos can be found and on a Burlington Natural Sciences Club field trip in 1998 a Barred Owl landed in plain view.

IN MEMORIAM

Veteran DVOC member

Harold S. Jackson passed away

on Monday, February 21, 2000

at the Masonic Health Care Center

in Elizabethtown, PA.



The Ruff We Didn't See
© Adrian Binns

Pedricktown and Southwest NJ: The Annual Spring DVOC Trip

By Frank Windfelder

On Saturday, March 25th, a record 26 participants showed up early in the morning at the Pedricktown Causeway: Bill & Naomi Murphy, Dennis & Anna Bert, Al & Nancy Bilheimer, Fred & Chris Crown, Jim, Mike and Bridget Lyman, Bert Filemyr, Martin Selzer, Fred Lowen, Jane Henderson, Lynn Jackson, Chuck Hetzel, Ward Dasey, Kate Sommerville, Alan Brady, Joanne Raine, Judy Stepanaskie, Edie Parnum, Pam Cessario, Tom Mason, and me.

We looked for shorebirds there, and then caravanned to Featherbed Lane, Mannington Marsh, Artificial Island, Mad Horse Creek WMA, and the Stow Creek Bald Eagle nest.

We did not see a Ruff this year, but it was a great day nevertheless. The weather was beautiful. The afternoon temperature reached the 60's, and there was little wind.

The day started with Woodcock displaying along Center Square Road. We had a Rusty Blackbird at Mad Horse WMA, and Wild Turkeys just south of Salem.

We enjoyed such early spring migrants as Blue-winged Teal, Osprey, Eastern Phoebe, Snowy Egret and Glossy Ibis.

We had a trip record total of five Bald Eagles, including two adults, two second-year birds, and a first-year bird. We finished the day by observing a Great Horned Owl with young on nest.

This year, we saw an amazing 77 species of birds.

We got our extra bonus at Mad Horse WMA, where butterfly experts like Bill Murphy got to see a Henry's Elfin and everyone got to see Spring (Holly) Azures.

I returned to Florence on the morning of February 26 only to find Frank Windfelder already gazing intently through his scope. After an hour or so of scanning, Frank picked up a dark backed gull. It was the size and shape of a Herring Gull. We watched this bird for some time until it finally flew but the legs showed no yellow. We figured that maybe it was a Eurasian race of Herring Gull.

I kept watching and did see two other adult Herring Gulls with dark eyes. At around 10:00 A.M. Frank and I both saw something different and we yelled at the same time – "California Gull!" We watched this bird for some time and were able to determine that it was a third winter bird.

While I will not give a full description of these birds here because space does not permit, check out John Dunn's large gull tape for some really good pointers on the finer points of identifying this bird.

After about another half hour of scanning, I spotted another gull with a brown eye and slightly darker mantle. It was smaller than the Herring Gulls and a number of other people managed to get on it and to study it. This was an adult California Gull, probably of the mid-western race (*albertensis*).

Ward Dasey showed up after missing our birds but he had one of his own; he found an albinistic Great Black-backed Gull with a dark mega bill.

All in all, it was a very exciting day with many surprises. You just never know what you may find at Florence. All you need is a little patience.



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

for *Philadelphia Larus* to:

Jane Henderson

202 Penn Oak Road

Flourtown, PA 19031

215-836-1965 (phone + fax)

janeh008@aol.com

DVOC Website Address:

<http://www.acnatsci.org/dvoc>

DVOC Field Trips for the Year 2000

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 Trinidad 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 Trinidad, 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)

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)

Montauk 2000

By Chris Walters

After 12 straight DVOC winter treks to Long Island, the "Y2K Montauk Trip" arrived. This three-day adventure began on January 15 in the 6 A.M. cold of northeast Philly, where longtime co-leaders Brendel and Walters counted noses in the darkness: a full 17 participants ready to go. These hardy souls ranged from rookie James Quigley, age 13, all the way up to our grizzled veteran and cook, "Big Al" Kronschnabel, who first visited Montauk with DVOC in 1957.

After the obligatory breakfast stop, our three vans got set on the same radio frequency for communication and proceeded to Staten Island, where we looked at White-crowned, Fox, and Tree Sparrows, plus a male Northern Harrier and an unexpected Pheasant. Already the competition was underway as Windfelder expanded his year list, closing the gap on Murphy, who claimed to have already seen such trash birds this year.

Next stop: Port Lookout on Jones Beach Inlet. Here we found both loons, as well as Oldsquaws, Brant, Red-breasted Mergansers, plus a big flock of Bonaparte's Gulls within easy viewing range. This was our big chance: to find something rarer in the flock, like Little or Black-headed Gull. And we did: an adult Black-headed Gull. It was first picked up when it flew a short distance, its dark underwings distinguishing it from all the "Bonies."

Murphy yawned, but even he briefly paid attention to this unusual find. The group then was rewarded with close views of beautiful Harlequin Ducks and, later, Purple Sandpipers.

After grabbing lunch from the nearby deli, another trip rookie, our most distinguished Field Trip Leader Adrian Binns, proved he was more than just another pretty face by showing all of us his favorite bird: an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull sitting on Jones Beach. Most of us crept to within 30 yards, as the bird stood up and paraded regally in front of us. Murphy, of course, remained back in the parking lot saying "What? Me stir for a mere LBBG?"

From there we drove over to Long Island's north shore, to Bayville. Before most had even exited the vans, Windfelder woke us up shouting: "There it is! Drake Barrow's Goldeneye and close. What a great view!" And so it was, surrounded by lots of Common Goldeneyes for comparison. Everyone had an extended look, but Frank's quick spotting meant we could squeeze another stop into our schedule before dark.

So we had the chance to explore an area new to DVOC, the nearby Shu Swamp Preserve. There we saw birds truly unusual for this trip: Rusty Blackbirds and lots of Wood Ducks. We missed, though, the Virginia Rail seen there earlier that day.

After a dinner break, our three van caravan drove 100 miles east and rode the car ferry to the isolation of

Shelter Island. Again this year we were fortunate to be able to spread our sleeping bags in two private homes, one that we rented while its owner was away in Paris, and the other owned by our leader and host, Erica Brendel.

5 A.M. Sunday: wake-up time, to assemble for the 6 A.M. breakfast at Erica's. Here "Big Al" was king, dishing out the eggs, sausages, orange juice, bacon, coffee and toast. Even the leaders answered "Yessir and No Sir," shut up, and followed orders. The years have taught us how vital a hot and hearty Sunday breakfast is on this trip, because that is the day we face the winter blasts at the Montauk jetties, beaches, and lighthouse. No less this year, when the winds Sunday were about 15-20 knots but tolerable.

Sunday proved to be a Razorbill day; we were picking up groups of 3 or 4, 8 or 10, or more, usually in flight. At one point we had a group of about 30 passing by. Of course Murphy was paying attention, not because of those trash Razorbills, but because of... "Dovekie! I've got a Dovekie!" But we will never know. History will never know how to record this "finding;" no one else saw the bird. Still, we all did see the Common Eiders, plus all three scoter species.

After lunch at the Montauk concession building, we made the run along the south shore back to the Southampton ponds, filling in the missing duck species: Redhead, Ring-necked, Canvasback and the dabblers, as well as both scaup and Hooded and Common Mergansers. A fine total of 26 duck species for the trip.

But our final Sunday stop was a bust: Shinnecock Inlet, site of past glories, was at full high tide and turned us away empty-handed.

So, the weary group retreated to *Chez Brendel* for another of Al's *specialities de la maison*: Spaghetti and beer, spaghetti, and more spaghetti. Drinks brought the day to a close, but not before our hearing the National Marine Weather Service forecast for Monday: a FULL GALE expected, with steady winds at 35-40 knots, gusting to 45.

And the forecast was correct. So prohibitive were Monday's conditions that the leaders followed only a pretense of active birding. Instead we visited Montauk Point again, just to see what it looked like in gale conditions. We huddled in the concession building and watched the ocean, which was covered by wide sheets of foam and permanent layers of sea spray.

Plenty of birds were around, straining to make progress against the winds, but there was nothing new. After stops at Riverhead to see its waterfowl on open water, we arrived back at Philadelphia at 6 P.M., a total of 89 birds richer than when we began. The group's best birds consensus: Barrow's Goldeneye, Razorbills, Black-headed Gull, and Harlequins. I'm still waiting to see a Montauk Dovekie.