

Philadelphia Larus

Vol. 28 No. 1

Winter 2001

Birding with a Purpose: Ornithological Studies and Projects

by Chuck Hetzel

By "birding with a purpose" you can contribute to the science of birds and even help some birds in distress. Here is a list of projects that may be of interest:

1. Birdkill Survey: the tallest buildings in Philadelphia and the "tower farm" on Domino Lane in Roxborough will be studied during the migration periods in 2001. Recovered specimens will be taken to the Academy of Natural Sciences, ANS, for study and preservation in their collection. Nate Rice has asked us to participate in this important study. Funds maybe available from the PA Game Commission to defray some costs.

2. Restoration of the former and last Philadelphia breeding ground (1998) of the Kentucky warbler at the North Ravine at the Schuylkill Center will begin this spring. By using deer enclosure fencing and replanting of the native plant understory it is believed that the Kentucky will breed again in Philadelphia. Grants, donations and volunteers are being sought to carry out this project.

3. New bird study skin cabinets will be delivered in 2001 thanks to a NSF grant of \$350K to ANS. Specimens will be moved from the old cabinets to the new, a big job that calls for volunteers. Here's your chance to get your hands on the ANS collection. You'll get a new appreciation for the subtleties of bird plumage.

4. ID verification of Coastal Plain Swamp Sparrows recorded in 2000 during the SWSP survey in NJ will be attempted by comparing sonograms of these song recordings with those of the inland and boreal races. Better

Charlie Wonderly: Teacher and Naturalist Extraordinaire

by Jane Henderson



By the time this piece appears in *Larus*, Charlie Wonderly, 1978-79 President of DVOC, will be leading bird walks at Flamingo, at the southern tip of Everglades National Park. As has been his custom since the 1960's, he will do that nearly every day from late January until early March. If I know Charlie, his "bird walks" will turn out to be much more than that. Charlie's depth of knowledge about the natural world is phenomenal, and he loves sharing it.

To talk with Charlie for this piece, I arrived at his Roxborough home on a chilly morning this past December. I knew I was at the correct address when I peeked in the front window and saw all sorts of bird things: pictures, pillows, figurines.

Charlie and his wife Libby greeted me at the door. When I entered the livingroom, I found their cozy house cheerily decorated for Christmas. A fire was crackling in the fireplace. I was all set to take off my coat, sit down and start asking questions when Charlie said, "Let's go out back." He got his coat from the closet, and out we went.

Their little yard out front gives no clue as to the size of the entire property. The back yard is enormous. He has put in native plantings, a good-sized fishpond, bird feeders, and nest boxes for chickadees, titmice, and screech owls. High up in a pine tree is a nesting platform for great horned owls. We watched a Red-bellied Woodpecker at the suet feeder.

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sound equipment will be used to repeat some of these recordings as well as to document some of their interesting song variations observed last summer.

5. Coastal Plain Swamp Sparrow habitats observed in the Mullica River Estuary during the Swamp Sparrow Survey: (shrubby salt marsh, a shrubby fresh water marsh and a beaver swamp) which contained similar populations of the coastal race (*nigrescens*) will be described in detail in 2001. Their flora, mud color and salinity will be documented. Better recording equipment will be used to provide sonogram data of these birds. Better attention will be paid to the visual ID of the Swamp Sparrows in these areas.

6. Carotinoid content of bird plumage study: ANS wants to pursue the measurement of plumage color in relation to diet and other variables. This work is contingent on obtaining instrumentation, solvents and other lab ware to perform the analysis.

7. BirdCast needs more volunteers to do bird counts during the next migration.

For more info, contact Chuck Hetzel at hetzel@acnatsci.org

PEEC Runs Birding Tours

The Pocono Environmental Education Center runs year-round birding tours to South Florida, Salem and Cumberland Counties, South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley, Northern Colorado, Bombay Hook & the South Jersey Coast. Visit their website at www.peec.org

Untitled

The bustard's an exquisite fowl
With minimal reason to growl;
He escapes what would be
Illegitimacy
By grace of a fortunate vowel.

George Vaill, retired secretary to Yale University
(poem contributed by Doris McGovern)

Correction:

In the Christmas Count Issue Andy Ednie's name was misspelled. Sorry, Andy.

Letter from the President

As I write this letter, the spring bird migration has already begun. Flocks of red-winged blackbirds and common grackles are moving north to their breeding grounds. Woodcock are being sighted in our area, and phoebes cannot be far behind. Soon, the push northward will be in full progress. What will these birds find when they reach their destinations, and what can we do to protect their habitats?

Although we are not a conservation group, it still behooves us to be aware of the various governmental and corporation efforts to intrude into the habitats of our avian friends and their allies: the mammals, reptiles, fish, insects and plants. Since these creatures cannot speak for themselves, they are totally dependent upon their human friends for their survival.

The new government administration is determined to reverse laws already in place concerning endangered species, drilling for oil in national parks and logging in national forests. Our voices must be heard by our legislators. If you are like me, you hate to write to congressmen and senators about these things, but it must be done. Even if you write only one letter a year about a cause you believe in, it may be the letter that makes the difference. Take up a cause and follow through on it. The birds are depending on us!

Ron French

O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Ode to the West Wind, by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Programs

March 1: To be announced.

March 15: "Bird Singing: The Ecology of Birds' Songs and Identifying Them by Ear." Daniel Edelstein, Free-lance naturalist and science writer.

April 5: To be announced in Spring *Larus*

April 19: TBA

May 3: TBA

May 17: TBA

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We walked down several rather precipitous flagstone steps. "I put those in when I was younger," he chuckled. Charlie and his first wife Betty bought the house 50 years ago. The yard has recently been designated as a National Wildlife Sanctuary.



Great-horned Owl ©Adrian Binns

I asked Charlie how he became particularly interested in birding. He said that, as a youngster, he roamed the woods and fished the Wissahickon Creek. He admitted that he shot birds with a slingshot when he was a teenager in the 1920's, and later on, graduated to an air rifle. A friend's uncle got him interested in collecting birds' eggs. He said they were careful to take only one egg from a nest. He learned to blow out the insides, and started a collection.

He said his mother "forced" him to join the Boy Scouts, against his objections that the other kids in the organization were "sissies." But these early reservations about scouting didn't last, and he made many lifelong friends through his association with scouting. In fact, the list of Charlie's fellow Scouts reads like a "Who's Who" of early Philadelphia area birders: Dale Twining, Alan Brady, Herb Cutler, Bob Sehl, Mark Robinson and the late Trusten Baldwin and Gene Stern.

Later, through the Scouts, he joined the Comstock Society, the natural history arm of BSA. In that connection, he met many interesting people, including Norman McDonald, who became President of DVOC. He learned about insect and reptile collecting from Robinson, and soon Charlie began collecting reptiles for Roger Conant, who was then working on his book *What Snake Is That?*

McDonald invited Charlie to go birding with him in the Wissahickon. Charlie said that at that time he was confident that he knew all the local birds. McDonald found 12 new species for him that day.

Charlie has been stimulating people's interest in birds for a long time. When he went camping at Flamingo in the 1960's he was dismayed to find that the staff there had "... gone environmental. There were no more snake talks or bird walks or plant walks." The visitors to the park seemed to be disappointed. Charlie approached the head naturalist and said, "These people want to see birds. I know the birds well enough to lead a walk." Charlie asked the naturalist to go on his bird walk minus uniform so that the participants would address questions to Charlie rather than to the naturalist. The response was enthusiastic, and the next day, 35 people turned up to go on Charlie's walk. 40 years later, along with park volunteers, Charlie's still leading walks there, continuing to instruct and enthrall people.

Charlie said he "defended Washington, D.C." for two years at the beginning of World War II. From there he went to Ft. Bliss, Texas, and learned the birds of Texas, and some of Mexico. His next post was electrician's school in Schenectady, New York, where he got a "skilled electrician's rating" in seven weeks. This succeeded in keeping him out of the infantry.

He spent seven weeks in Oahu, and three months in Saipan in the Mariannas. When Saipan was secure, he studied bird migration there, and wrote pages of lengthy descriptions of the birds. Fifteen years later, he threw all his writings away when *Birds of the Western Pacific* came out in print. He also collected reptiles, pickling them in alcohol for Roger Conant.

While stationed on Okinawa, he found a rare snake, a habu, which looks like a gartersnake with fangs. Going on sick call, without actually being sick, he visited the doctor in order to get rubbing alcohol to pickle the snake for shipping back to the U.S. He later received a commendation for finding and identifying the habu. "Crazy things happen," he said.

When he got home after the war, he married Betty Strong whom he had known since high school. Amos Taylor, horticulturist and naturalist, and also a friend from high school, was best man.

After the war Charlie worked for 28 years as a letter carrier for the U.S. Postal Service. Not one to waste any birding opportunities, he learned all the Roxborough birds by call while making his rounds.

In 1947, Charlie joined the DVOC. Norman McDonald was president then, and Fred Ulmer was Conservation Chairman. Fred and Charlie spent a lot of time birding together. They found the first nest of a Red-bellied Woodpecker in the Wissahickon Valley. One night, during a

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DVOC meeting, a watchman came in to tell Fred that he was wanted on the phone. The zoo was calling to tell Fred that three wolves had broken out of their cage. Charlie and Fred spent hours at the zoo that night catching them.



Red-bellied Woodpecker on nest ©Adrian Binns

Charlie participated in many Christmas Counts over the years, including the Comstock and Philadelphia Counts. Years ago, to do the Cape May Count, Charlie and other DVOC members, including Dale Twining and Norman McDonald, drove down the night before to stay at Ernie Choate's house at the Point so they could listen for owls.

The running joke every year was: "Which windowsill shall I sleep on?" Dale and Charlie regularly found 65 – 75 species at the Point.

In 1982, I enrolled in Charlie's waterfowl class at Schuylkill Valley Nature Center (now Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education) in Roxborough. Many of Charlie's devoted followers, including Freda Rappaport, Evie Kramer and Ruth Zumeta, were in the class. I was just getting interested in birding then, and was staggered by what I didn't know. One of the field trips took us to Brigantine, another to Cape May. Charlie taught classes at SCEE for 10 years and converted many people, like me, to birding.

Charlie is not one to dwell on anything negative, so I had to ask him about the changes he has noticed in bird populations since he started keeping records so many years ago. He said that when he first started going to Flamingo, "before Everglades Park was thought of," and looked out at twilight across Florida Bay, the trees were "white with birds."

Betty Wonderly died in 1983, and everybody who knew Charlie worried about him. He and Betty had done so many wonderful things together. But Charlie was lucky enough to marry Libby, Betty's step sister in 1985. And now the two of them do wonderful things together.

I used to be a teacher. One of the greatest rewards a teacher can experience is hearing a former student say, "You made a difference in my life." Well, Charlie, lots of people can say that about you. And I'm happy to say that I'm one of them.

Field Trips

March 4, Sun. Pelagic out of Cape May on "Miss Chris" looking for alcids. Possibilities: Great Skua, Thick-billed Murre. Max. 40 people. \$65., check to "Miss Chris Boats" sent to Paul Guris

March 31, Sat. Pedricktown & Mannington Marsh for winter stragglers & early migrants, including ruff.
Info: Frank Windfelder

May 4, 5, 6, Fri-Sun. Maryland: Black Rail or Bust (Elliott Island in evenings, Pokomoke Swamp days) Cost: TBA
Info: Colin Campbell

May 13, Sun. White Clay Creek, DE. Meet at Hot Shoppes Rest Area on Rte I-95 south of Wilmington, between exits for Rtes 273 & 896 at 6:00 AM. Cerulean and Hooded Warblers, Pileated Woodpecker, Willow Flycatcher. Last year, White-winged Crossbills.
Info: Andy Ednie

May 12, Sat. Pennypack Creek Park, Phila, for all-day affair with warblers & search for Bicknell's Thrush in afternoon.
Info: Frank Windfelder

May 20, Sun. Hawkin Rd. and Brightview Farm, Burlington Co, NJ. Target birds: Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Kentucky and Hooded Warblers and grassland species at Brightview. Meet at 6 AM at Vincentown Diner, Rtes 206/38
Info: Don Jones

May 25,26, Fri-Sat. All night Pelagic on Miss Barnegat Light to Hudson and Tom's Canyons. 10 PM departure. \$120.
Info: Alan Brady

June 2, Sat. Lewes, DE Pelagic on Skip Jack" to Baltimore & Hudson Canyons. 4 AM to 4 PM. Info: Armas Hill (302)529-1876 or font@focusonnature.com or Andy Ednie (see above)

In Memoriam

Fred Mears

January 16, 2001

Those of you who knew Fred remember that he was a very special person, well loved and respected among his peers at CMBO and also at Peace Valley Nature Center, where he was employed for many years before his retirement. Our club has lost another of its very special members.

A memorial service will be held at CMBO. RF

Club News:

At the January 19 meeting, the following club officers were elected to serve a second term: Ron French, President; Colin Campbell, Vice President; Adrian Binns, Secretary; Naomi Murphy, Treasurer. Joe Majdan and Fred Mears were named DVOC Fellows. Jane Henderson and Dennis Burt were named Council members.

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At the DVOC Annual Banquet the following awards were given:

Colin Campbell received the Witmer Stone Award for his publication on White-winged Terns which appeared in the June 2000 issue of Birding.

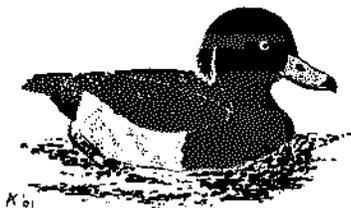
Bruce Lantz received the Julian Potter Award for his efforts in erecting Osprey nesting platforms in Cape May County and the Delaware Bay Shore.

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The following resolution was adopted to honor people outside the birding community who have contributed to the welfare of birds and, in general, to the birding community by extending them an invitation to the Annual Banquet: "This honor shall be given to any person or persons that are nonmembers and non-birders in recognition of work done that has contributed to the overall welfare of the birding community."

January Montauk Trip Highlights

Leaders: Chris Walters, Erica Brendel
13 participants

- Liberty State Park: Snowy Owl
- Ransome Beach, Bayville, NY: Barrow's Goldeneye, Harlequin Duck
- Point Lookout, Jones Beach Inlet: Razorbill, Red-necked Grebe, Iceland Gull, Snowy Owl, Lesser Black-backed Gull
- Jones Beach: Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, American Oystercatchers on bayside
- Springs, NY (near East Hampton): Dicksissel, Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwings
- Montauk's Tuthill Pond & Overlook: Iceland Gull and Great Cormorant (also seen elsewhere)
- Montauk Point: Razorbills, Common Eiders, Scoters
- Agawan Lake in Southhampton: Wood Duck
- Halsey Neck Pond in Southhampton: Tufted Duck, Glaucous Gull



Tufted Duck © Adrian Binns

- Dune Rd. west of Ponquogue Bridge: Boat-tailed Grackles
- Oak Beach: Gannets



Please submit announcements, pieces to be considered for publication, schedules and other information for *Philadelphia Larus* to:
Jane Henderson

DVOC Website Address:
<http://www.dvoc.org>

All Night Pelagic to Hudson and Tom's Canyons

Alan Brady

Friday, May 25, 2001, from Barnegat Light N.J. 18th Street and the Bay.

Sailing on the Miss Barnegat Light, 95 foot catamaran, capable of 25 knots, stable, large cabin, upper and lower decks, speaker and galley. Great for photography.

Departure, 10:00 PM Friday, May 25. Return 3:00 PM at the dock Saturday, May 26. Boarding any time after 6:00 PM Friday.

Birding in Hudson Canyon, chumming 4:00 AM on. Later south to Tom's Canyon, N.J., deep water area, until noon.

First 28 sign-ups will have reserved inside bunks. Some unassigned benches available. Others bring sleeping bag, pad and waterproof cover for sleeping on upper deck. Registration necessary. Limit: 65 birders.

Food available for purchase. Deli 3 blocks north of the boat.

Possible birds: Sooty, Cory's, Audubon's, Manx Shearwaters; three Jaegers; South Polar and Great Skua; Black-capped Petrel; Sooty, Bridled and Arctic Terns; Northern Fulmar; Red and Red-necked Phalaropes; Wilson's Leach's and Band-rumped Storm-Petrels. Chance also to find White-faced, European Storm-Petrels. The latter found feeding in chum 4:30 AM several years ago.

Very bright fishing lights used at night. Sharks, Whales and Dolphins.

Cost: \$120.00 to Alan Brady
Capt. Larson (609) 494-2094

Remember: REAL BIRDS EAT REAL FISH!!

DVOC Larus