

# Philadelphia Larus

Vol. 29 No. 1

## **The President's Column . . . .**

### **Some Thoughts on Namedropping**

I heard a recent piece on PBS News concerning a guy being taken to court by the California Department of Motor Vehicles for continuing to display his vanity tags – REDSKIN1. He and his wife (RDSKN2) were big fans. The nonsense generated over this sort of correctness caused me to reflect on bird names. I've always thought that the common or familiar (i.e. English language) name for a bird ought to be given (or at least approved) by birders, leaving the scientific naming to the professionals in ornithology. After all, there's a heck of a lot more of us than them. But, on hearing all this politically correct rubbish, perhaps we'd also better look to new bird names in this age of 'enlightenment'.

Let's take some common birds in your yard. For instance, the Northern Cardinal. What a misnomer. Where's the Southern Cardinal, let alone the Eastern or Western. Sounds like directional favoritism. And Cardinal? Smacks of religious bias and male dominance to me. So how do we rework the appellation of this popular bird. Well, the first thing that hits you about the male is the color red and, as the female has an underwash of redness, then (skinless) red seems apropos. It's a grosbeak, but this is a no-no. Gros is from the French 'gros' meaning big and we certainly don't want any froggy (oops, sorry) influence here, so why not just 'big'? Beak is childish, Sibley always uses bill. So Grosbeak becomes Bigbill and the Northern Cardinal is now Red Bigbill without any offense to anyone (other than an angry William Murphy perhaps).

Carolina Chickadee. Do the Carolinas really have over 50% of these to justify that name? No way. And they've already got the Wren, the greedy buggers. No, that'll have to go. What we, as birders, need is something to distinguish these from the look-alike Black-capped Chickadee (and you can fight over that nomenclature too with its racial and sentenced-to-death overtones). Here's actually a reasonable case for a genuine Northern and Southern split (with the hybrid Mason-Dixon Chickadee for those

Continued on Page 4

## **Investigations of Song Variation Among Prothonotary Warblers with Adjoining Territories**

by Doris McGovern



Augie Sexauer and Friend

I never expected to contribute to the conservation of birds, except by participation in a CBC/NAMC census or area survey, or, of course, by donating money. So it's amazing that this is the third year I've been working on a project investigating song variation among Prothonotary Warblers with adjoining territories. Better still, Don Jones and Augie Sexauer are enthusiastically working side by side with me, and we have a great helper, a Burlington Co. birder, Kathi Fertig.

The project addresses several questions with regard to Prothonotary Warblers: Can an individual male be distinguished from another male by voice characteristics visualized in an audiospectrogram (the technical term for 'sonogram')? Will individual voice characteristics be retained from year to year? If an individual retains a distinct identifiable voice, this project could provide a non-invasive, reliable census tool for researchers and land managers. If, on the other hand, voice characteristics of adjoining males are indistinguishable, or become similar over time, then how/why did birds from different natal environments adapt their songs to each other?..... By borrowing syllables from neighbors? There is some research to support each view.

For years I watched W. John Smith, Jr., a recently retired biology professor at Penn, and his wife Anne Marie, standing quietly by a wooded stream, holding a large plastic

Continued on Page 2

McGovern, Cont'd from Page 1

parabola in the air, with packs and mysterious gadgets hung over their shoulders and about their waists. I didn't know why they were recording, but when John asked if I wanted to help with his project, I didn't have to think twice. After three field seasons helping him band and record birds, I thought I might be able to do a similar project.

John Smith's methodology for gathering data is straightforward. Find accessible habitat where a number of the same species breed from year to year. Band as many males of the species as possible with USFWS and color bands. Record the songs of color-identified birds, produce audio spectrograms from the audio tapes, and compare them. Find the birds in the next breeding season, and record their songs again and compare. Analyze the data and draw conclusions.

Working on John Smith's spectrograph machine in his acoustical lab at Penn showed me there was a huge visual difference in the complexity of songs of different species. If a species' song were 'supercalifragilisticexpialidocious,' the number of variables would be beyond my amateur ability. I needed a species with simple, discrete, song components like "sweet, sweet, sweet," which had not been studied, and was accessible in numbers, on land that would not be developed.

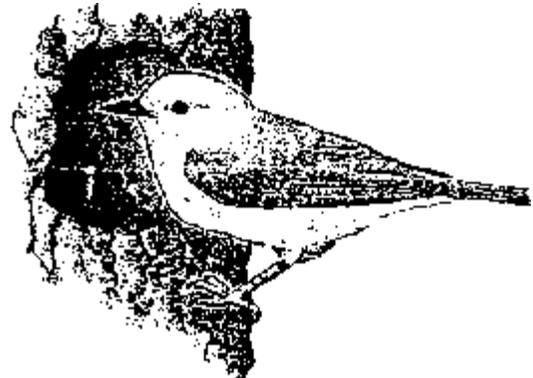
In 1997 John Miller asked me to help band the Prothonotary nestlings at Augie Sexauer's nest box trail at Hawkin Road (Red Lion Bear Swamp Preserve, Medford Lakes, NJ). There I saw several species that were ideal, and land that had recently been protected. Prothonotary warblers were most numerous due to Augie's boxes, and their song was a simple repetition of a single note. It looked very promising.

Augie was reluctant to have his birds banded, but after he realized that the capture-to-release time was 2-3 minutes, he agreed. He accepted the proposal for the project, and I applied to the Bird Banding Laboratory for a sequence of colors. I band the right leg with a USFWS aluminum band and the left leg with two colored plastic bands, each 1/8" high. We call our birds by their leg colors: Red/Red, Blue/Yellow, and so on.

During 1999 Don Jones read some of the Prothonotary literature I had gathered and he immediately offered to help. He took to the woods to begin recording. The birds we recorded that year were unbanded and although we think some have returned, they can't be used in a serious study. The 2000 season saw a May with 15 days of rain, lots of wind creating leaf rustle that garbles a sonogram, and a student pilot who buzzed the area constantly. By the time we got some "color" on three males, the nesting season was almost over and the birds were off territory. I despaired, because in two seasons there had been a lot of 3:30 a.m. wake ups, long drives and bridge tolls with not too much to show. Fast forward

to April 23, 2001 and Don's email saying that "Red/Red and Yellow /Yellow (banded June of 2000) have returned!!." We were ecstatic.

As every Club member knows, there's a sub-group of diehard birders who also record bird songs. George Reynard, a master recordist (who gave me my first microphone, the one I still use), Don Jones and Kate Somerville gave a fascinating DVOC program showing their equipment and work they had done. The tradition began in 1889 when Ludwig Kock made the first recording of a caged bird in Germany. Sylvester Judd played a recording of his pet Brown Thrasher at an AOU meeting in 1898. By 1932, with improvements in technology, Cornell University ornithologists were using recorded song to teach and collect bird songs. Today miniaturization and digitization have increased the reliability of portable devices to an unbelievable degree. Every PC can produce sonograms using software and shareware available on the Internet. Don Jones purchased "Canary" (Macintosh only) from Cornell's Laboratory of Natural Sounds. I use "Syrinx," a free download also from CLNS. Don spent many days reviewing the audio tapes, producing sonograms, and creating a filing system for the data. We will be able to examine individual males, locations, note types, etc., to determine what patterns are emerging.



Prothonotary Warbler © Adrian Binns

A sonogram is a graph of sound. Pitch shows on one axis and time on the other. The wavy line of the graph shows volume, harmonic overtones, and subtle nuances generated by the syrinx. It displays for the human eye what a bird hears. The full range of avian song is not available to our ears. The avian "voice box," the syrinx, has two chambers which enable a bird to duet with itself, producing different tones at the same time. There are no "vocal cords". Volume is controlled by air sacs which inflate to put pressure on the muscles of the syrinx, making sounds higher, louder, more tonal, etc.

The 2001 season was our best, with eight males banded and many more birds recorded. Although we no have recordings for a few banded birds, which means that even if they return, and we locate them, we won't be able to say whether they changed or not, we've doubled our chances for the coming field season. If 50% survive migration, as in 2000, we'll have at least four birds to work with. Don, Augie, Kathi, and I spent many happy days chasing the Golden Swamp warblers of Hawkins Road. With work and a lot of luck in the next three years, we should have a significant data set.

## 2002 FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

**February 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> (sat-mon) - MONTAUK, NY** for winter finches, eiders, scoters, alcids and any Eurasian accidentals. Car pool from N.E. Phila at 6AM. Space is limited due to lodging constraints – first come, first served! Max. 16

Leaders: Erica Brendel  
Chris Walters

**April 6<sup>th</sup> (sat) - PEDRICKTOWN and MANNINGTON MARSH ( SW NJ)** for Woodcock, winter stragglers such as Eurasian Wigeon, Ross's Goose, Yellow-headed or Brewer's Blackbird and early migrants, including Ruff. Bald Eagle should be on nest. Leader: Frank Windfelder

**May 4, 5, 6<sup>th</sup> (fri-sun) - "THREE DAYS IN THE SWAMPS", POCOMOKE and the ENVIRONS, DE and MD** starting at the Hook and Little Creek followed by an evening jaunt for rails and then onto the Pocomoke Swamp. Kentucky and Worm-eating Warbler, Red-headed Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Chuck-will's-widow, Whip Poor Will, Woodcock, Bald Eagles..... Some folks camp, while others get accommodations at nearby motels.

**tentative May 5<sup>th</sup> (sun) - WHITE CLAY CREEK, DE.** Meet at the Hot Shoppes Rest area on Rte 95 south of Wilmington, between Rtes 273 & 896 at 6:30AM. Nesting Cerulean Warblers are possible along with Hooded Warbler, Pileated Woodpecker and Willow Flycatcher.  
Leader: Andy Ednie

**May 19<sup>th</sup> (sun) - HAWKIN ROAD and BRIGHTVIEW FARM, Burlington Co., NJ.** The target species at Hawkin Road will be breeding Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Kentucky and Hooded Warblers and at Brightview Farm grasslands species such as Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink and possibly Dickcissel. Meet at 6:30AM at Hawkin Road.  
Leader : Don Jones

DVOC FIELD TRIP CHAIRMAN : Adrian Binns

### IN MEMORIAM

**Charles A. Wonderly**

September 17, 1915 - January 12, 2002

President DVOC 1978-79

Naturalist, Teacher, Mentor

### The Meaning of Charlie

by Ruth Pfeffer

**C - Conductor** - You guided us, you taught us and you showed us the way into the natural world.

**H - Harmony** - You created harmony in each group that you belonged to, and you introduced many individuals to the harmony found in nature.

**A - Abundance** - Thank you for the wealth of information that you so willingly shared.

**R - Respect** - A mail carrier from Roxborough who was a leader everywhere he went: Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Church, DVOC, Schuylkill Center, Wyncote Audubon Society.

**L - Light** - You passed a torch of light for birding that will always be lit because it was passed to a multitude.

**I - Influence** - Your knowledge and skills became seeds that you planted and that continue to grow.

**E - Energy** - You exhibited energy as you inspired all of us, not only in the natural world, but in life itself.

Mentor, Teacher, Co-leader, Friend.

You will be missed, but never forgotten.

## 2002 DVOC Officers, Council Members and Committee Chairpersons

### Officers:

**President:** Colin Campbell  
**Vice-President:** Adrian Binns  
**Secretary:** Chris Walters  
**Treasurer:** Naomi Murphy

### Councillors:

Martin Selzer (to Jan 2003), Joseph Majdan (to Jan 2003), Jane Henderson (to Jan 2004), Dennis Bert (to Jan 2004), Anita Guris (to Jan 2005), Lynn Jackson (to Jan 2005), Sandy Sherman (Cassinia Editor), Ron French (Past President)

### Committees:

**Archives:** Katrina Knight  
**Banquet:** Bernice & Joseph Koplín  
**Cassinia:** Sandy Sherman  
**Checklist:** Clay Sutton, Rick Mellon, Ward Dasey, Bill Murphy, Colin Campbell, Bert Filemyr  
**Conservation:** Jan & Ken Gordon  
**E-mail alert:** Frank Windfelder  
**Field Trips:** Adrian Binns  
**Larus:** Jane Henderson  
**Nominating:** Hart Rufe  
**Ornithological Studies:** Chuck Hetzel  
**Potter Award for Field Studies 2002:** TBA  
**Stone Award for 2002:** TBA  
**Website:** Emmerson Bowes  
**Trustees:** Chris Walters, Hart Rufe, Paul Guris

### Goose Neck Collars

by Roy Frock

Birders often see snow geese, Canada geese and swans wearing neck collars with letters and numerals on them. They can be reported by phone to the US Banding Office at 301-497-5943. The person reporting should have the date, location of sighting, color of collar and color of numerals, and of course species.

The person on the phone will take the info and the reporter's name and address. They will then contact the person who put the collar on the bird and report where and when it was marked to the person reporting the collar. It might take a few weeks to get the information to the reporter.

Note that this is not the number used to report bird bands to the Banding Office. that number is to be used only to report a bird band. It is 800-327-2263.

indeterminates). Personally, I like Chickadee. It rolls

President, continued from Page 1  
off the tongue, is reasonably onomatopoeic and definitely a cut above members of the same family in Europe - the tits. We're not going into that here, that's for them to sort out. So, Southern Chickadee it is.

By similar deep thought processes for species introduced from Europe we can show our disdain with the Boring Weaver (House Sparrow), the Fecund Dove (Eurasian Collared-Dove) and the Greedy Bastard (Eurasian Starling). Try it yourself; you should have fun with Hairy Woodpecker, Bald Eagle and Northern Beardless Tyrannulet. Suggestions in a sealed brown envelope should be sent to Carl von Linné, c/o The Academy.

Unless there's a (successful) coup, I'll be your President for the next two years. Never hesitate to let me know your thoughts on how we can make our great Club even better.

Good Birding, *Colin Campbell*



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker © Adrian Binns



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>

## PROGRAMS

### **February 7: Matt Sharp: Conservation and Recovery of Peregrines in Pennsylvania**

### **February 21: Doug Gill: Restoring Eastern Grassland Prairies: A Success Story**

We have conducted comprehensive ecological studies on 230 acres of native grasslands planted on Chino Farms in Queen Anne's County, MD in March 1999, and have monitored the ecological responses for the first three establishment years. Focusing on the growth performance of the planted native warm season grasses and invasive alien species under alternative management protocols for effective grassland establishment; the responses of wildlife, especially species of special concern such as Grasshopper Sparrow, Dickcissel and Bobwhite Quail. In addition, other first sightings of birds of special concern in this first field season include nesting Horned Lark, first breeding pairs of Vesper Sparrow, and flocks of migrant Upland Sandpiper in August. We are delighted at these major, positive responses of non-game and game species so soon in the experimental grasslands.

### **March 7: Joe Majdan, The History, Habits and Research of Purple Martins**

### **March 21, Nate Rice: The Academy's 2001 Expedition to Southern Australia**

Starting in the Gawler and Flinders Ranges of South Australia, we worked through South Australia, and then did a transect across New South Wales. The focus of the trip was to collect some of the more common species of birds to this region for specific research projects and also to enhance the Academy's collection of Australian birds. These are the first Australian bird specimens to come to the Academy since we purchased Gould's collection in 1848.

### **April 4: Kevin Karlson, Birds on the Wind: The Miracle of Migration**

Nothing is more fascinating in the avian world than seasonal migratory movements of birds. From the 20,000-mile journey of Arctic Terns to the 1,200-mile non-stop flight of Blackpoll Warblers, there are still many unanswered questions concerning the "how, why, where and when" of bird migration. This show begins with a review of the different types of bird migration, giving general examples of each. Kevin will then highlight bird families and selected species that share unbelievable feats of physical endurance undertaken each year during migration. Finally, interesting facts will be shared that help to maintain the mystique of bird migration.

### **April 18: Bob Mercer, Book Auction**

The annual DVOC Book Auction will have a new twist. All of the books will come from the collection of deceased members Phil Street, Bob Sehl and Roy Imsick. Since these constitute a large and diverse collection, no other material will be accepted for this auction. For the first time, you will be able to see a list of all the books in advance by visiting the DVOC website. The list should be available at least two weeks prior to the sale. Since this is a large selection of books, members from other local clubs will be invited to attend this meeting and join the fun. Checks, cash and IOU's in blood will be accepted.

### **May 2: Larry Niles, Delaware Shorebird Update**

### **May 16: John Serrao, The Magic of Spring**

The timing and sequence of nature's spring events are remarkable. The opening of buds and blossoming of wildflowers are followed by the emergence of leaf-eating and pollinating insect-eating birds from the south. This program highlights these magical events, plus the breeding of spring amphibians and birth of a new generation of wildlife.

## CLASSIFIED ADS

### **A Central American Birding Triple-header**

**Panama, March 23-31** (including the "Pipeline Road")  
**Costa Rica, March 31-April 10** (Southern Costa Rica & Guanacaste)

**Guatemala, April 10-22** (including Tikal)

Do any or all of these.

FONT (Focus on Nature Tours)

[www.focusonnature.com](http://www.focusonnature.com) or 1-800-362-0869

**"Chicken Odyssey" Colorado April 12-21** for all the "chickens" including Gunnison's Sage Grouse and White-tailed Ptarmigan also Mountain Plover and rosy-finches. \$1,395

Adrian Binns, Jaeger Tours 215-364-4407

[wildlifegd@aol.com](mailto:wildlifegd@aol.com) [www.jaegertours.net](http://www.jaegertours.net)

**South Florida & Dry Tortugas April 27-May 5** at the height of spring migration and for all the Florida specialties. \$1700 or \$775 DTs only April 30-May 3

Adrian Binns, Jaeger Tours 215-364-4407

[wildlifegd@aol.com](mailto:wildlifegd@aol.com) [www.jaegertours.net](http://www.jaegertours.net)

**"River of Raptors" Veracruz Sept 30-Oct 10** Imagine 80,000 raptors per hour. It happened in 2001. 350 species. Including the Catemaco rain forest. \$ TBA

Adrian Binns, Jaeger Tours 215-364-4407

[wildlifegd@aol.com](mailto:wildlifegd@aol.com) [www.jaegertours.net](http://www.jaegertours.net)

**THE DECEMBER 1ST PELAGIC TRIP  
FROM BRIELLE, NEW JERSEY**

by Armas Hill

A number of DVOCers participated on the 9th annual FONT (Focus on Nature Tours) “winter birding” pelagic trip on December 1st on the “Atlantis” from Brielle, New Jersey. It was certainly warmer weather than any of the previous 8 December trips. Onshore, the temperature reached a record 72 degrees F. Offshore, the air temperature was a bit cooler, but the heavy clothing was not necessary this year! The water temperature ranged from 55 to 57 degrees F.

We may have had the most CHUM ever! Chumming all-day, during the entire trip, meant that birds were with us all the time. And it may have been our most potent chum ever! FULMARS and other seabirds, we’re sure, could smell what we were offering them from many many miles away. GULLS and GANNETS were with the boat throughout the trip. The first FULMAR appeared 24 miles offshore, and we had that species with us all day until nearly dark. Our tally of FULMARS for the day was 52. A large number of KITTIWAKES were with us throughout. Their tally was over 1,200. Most of the day, adults were with us. Late in the day, juveniles became more evident. A large number of RED PHALAROPES were seen. Flocks tallied up to between 4 and 5 hundred.

During this trip, we hope for SKUA (We’ve seen it in the past). We’ve also seen, on occasion, POMARINE JAEGERS. This time our count of JAEGERS was 19 POMARINES and 1 PARASITIC. 2 MANX SHEARWATERS were seen during the trip. We also hope for DOVEKIE (We’ve seen it in the past). This time, maybe the surface of the water was not smooth enough, but 3 species of ALCIDS were seen: RAZORBILL, ATLANTIC PUFFIN, and THICK-BILLED MURRE. All of these were seen sitting on the water. The PUFFIN only quickly. But the RAZORBILL and MURRE were seen longer, and probably by everyone onboard.

What we did not see were fishing boats offshore. Often, during December trips, we find large groups of birds around such boats. This time, we did succeed in finding large groups of birds on the water - minus the boats. Under the water, and leaping above it, were two large groups of Common, or Saddleback, Dolphins. Our estimated count of them was 180. It was a good day at sea! Every day there is different. We look forward to going again in 2002.

**DVOC Larus**