

Philadelphia Larus

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The President's Column ...

Seriously listing (but still afloat)

I'm a total sucker for lists. And adventure. I guess it started early in life with trainspotting - no, not the film version, the real version in which as a prepubescent youth I visited local railway lines/stations/engine sheds within bicycling distance of home (Lincoln, UK) to see how many locomotive numbers and names I could collect and record until the landowner/stationmaster/engineer chucked me out for trespassing. Later, besotted with getting all the 'namers' in one class of engines, I devised ways of getting to the far-off main lines by train by the cheapest means possible - often involving leaping out on to some intermediate station to buy another 'day tripper' ticket to the next destination then jumping back into the same train just before it continued on its journey. Back home, I washed off the soot and grime and ticked off the new sightings in my Ian Allen Trainspotters 'field guide'. Sounds familiar, huh?

All this stopped with the demise of the steam locomotive. The attraction of a Gresley Pacific careering through the water troughs at 90 mph with the morning's down Flying Scotsman express from London to Edinburgh or the lure of a slow freight locomotive straining up an incline with steam and smoke belching from every orifice - this was the photogenic stuff I loved. When diesel and electric took over from coal, I resigned. I could not empathize with the sterile, pollution-free, quiet, efficient, streamlined trains. Boring.

There was then a gap of fifteen years when I'm not sure what happened but, after these dark ages terminated, there was light at the end of the tunnel, as it were, and birding emerged. Locomotive classes were replaced by bird families, numbers and names by species, and sound, steam and soot by Song Thrushes, Steamer Ducks and Sooty Shearwaters. The same sense of adventure rapidly emerged with high speed twitches for that 'blocker' - the missing thrush, the wheatear needed to complete the field guide page, the mega for the life list, the #300 for the UK, the #400 for the western palearctic in Israel, the #700 for the ABA area in Alaska, the #2000 lifer in Peru.....

Man-made machines have a finite lifetime; one can take up antiques, I guess, but are not our preferences outside

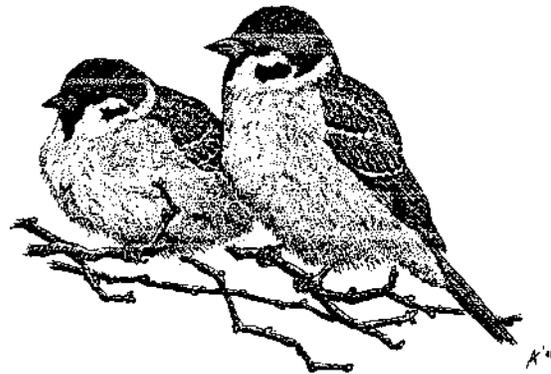
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We Had to Drop the Cat Off in El Paso (or How Anita Hit 675)

by Paul A. Guris

We all know that as our life list increases, the increments that mark new milestones decrease. It drops from even hundreds, down to fifties, and finally down to twenty-fives. You put in more and more effort, and new species get harder and harder to find. This is known as the Law of Diminishing Re-Terns.

Many of you know my wife Anita. When it comes to getting life birds, she's sort of, well, excitable. If I could package and sell the adrenalin rush that courses through her body when seeing a lifer (especially if it's pretty or "cute"), heroin would disappear from the streets within a week and I'd be living in a mansion that looks like the set from Scarface.

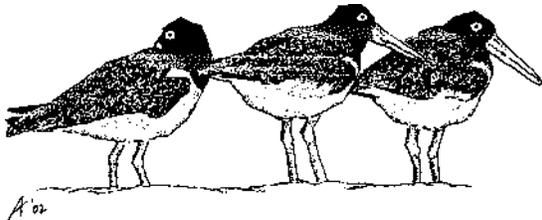


Eurasian Tree Sparrow © Adrian Binns

As lifers go, 2001 was a very successful year for Anita, in terms of both quantity and quality. It all started when we finally tallied up our life lists in late 2000. Neither of us knew our actual counts within 10 birds or so for at least several years, and Anita's "list lust" had subsided a little after she broke 600. (Buller's Shearwater, if you must know.) When the counting was done, Anita found that the juvenile Sabine's Gull she saw in New Jersey had been number 650. On top of that, a perusal of the birds that she didn't have revealed that with a bit of effort, she could break 700, even without going to Alaska. Thus, the next milestone of 675 danced in front of her like a testosterone crazed Lesser Prairie-Chicken (which she still needs). One trip to California, a flock of Pine Grosbeaks, and

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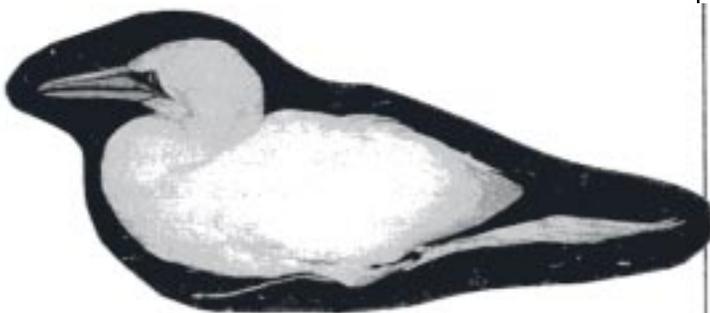
and natural? Our sport is totally absorbing and addictive (how many people do you know who took up birding then gave it up?) partly because it's there any place on Earth, in all seasons, at all times. Our passion is in contrast to that of non-birders who use their eyes and ears at 25% efficiency max. They may think that we use our brains at 25% efficiency max, but who the heck cares? Birds 'R' us. It is disturbing to see the loss of habitat, the ever-increasing amount of sterile, efficient fields and developments. Here's hoping our birds don't go the way of the steam locomotives. You can help assure that doesn't happen - you know how.



American Oystercatchers
© Adrian Binns

Lagerhead Shrikes to Compete Again

Five stalwart DVOC members will compete in the World Series of Birding to be held on May 11, 2002. Paul Guris (who will return from Geneva, Switzerland for a week to scout and participate), Adrian Binns, Bill Stocku, Mike Fretz and Rick Mellon will scour much of the state of New Jersey to find as many birds as possible during the allotted 24-hour period. Please contribute generously to their efforts. Proceeds will go toward the purchase of cabinets which house the world-class bird collections of the Academy of Natural Sciences. Send checks, payable to DVOC, to Treasurer Naomi Murphy Be generous!



Northern Gannet, found in Bucks County on March 20, 2002, and sent to wildlife rehab facility. Photo: Alan Brady

Programs

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.

June 6 -DVOC May Run Reports

Chris Walters will host the resurrection of the May Runs Reports, after an absence of several years. If you are planning a big day (anywhere and of any kind) during the month of May, please contact Chris with your results so that he can compile them. Be ready to give a brief summary of your Big Day at this meeting (as we do with the CBC's). Contact: Christopher K. Walters

September 19 - Mike Powers: Cornell's e-bird Projects

October 3 - Frank Windfelder: Vagrant Birds

DVOC member, field trip leader, raconteur and generally good egg, Frank will use the power of high technology to present his meticulously researched program in his series on vagrant birds in our area.



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

DVOC Website Address:
www.dvoc.org

2002 FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

May 4, 5, 6th (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, others stay at nearby motels.

Leader: Colin Campbell

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

Leader: Andy Ednie

May 19th (sun) - HAWKIN RD & 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

July 21st (sun) - BOMBAY HOOK and ENVIRONS, DE. Annual spectacle of shorebird migration. Least, Semi-palmated, Stilt and Pectoral Sandpipers, Red know, Dunlin, Black-necked Stilt, Avocet, both Yellowlegs and dowitchers.

Meet at 7:30 AM at headquarters.

Leader: Sandy Sherman

Aug. 18th (sun) - BOMBAY HOOK & ENVIRONS Shorebird migration. Last year: Least Bittern, Caspian Tern, Hudsonian Godwit, Wilson's Phalarope and Upland Sandpiper.

Meet at 7:30 AM at headquarters.

Leader:

September 21st (sat) - FALL BIRDING - PALMYRA, NJ

Focus on migrating warblers. 20 species possible including Connecticut. Meet 7:30 in car park.

Ward Dasey

DVOC FIELD TRIP CHAIRMAN : Adrian Binns

Classified Ads

Kitts Hummock Property for Sale

Former DVOC member has 3/4 acre at Kitts Hummock, DE for sale at reduced price for a birder.

Contact Elaine Keating (302) 678-5243

JAEGER TOURS:

"River of Raptors" Veracruz: Sept. 30 - Oct. 10.

Imagine 80,000 raptors per hour. It happened in 2001. 350 species, including visit to Catemaco Rain forest. \$2,300.

Adrian Binns, Jaeger Tours (215) 364-4407

wildlifegd@aol.com or www.jaegertours.net

FONT Birding Tours:

Spain - Extremadura & Gredos Mountains

June 16-23, \$1,495

with birds from bustards to bluethroats

Brazil - Mato Grosso (incl. Pantanal) & the Southeast (Atlantic Forest)

July 20 - Aug. 3, \$1,950

for as many as 400 bird species

Panama - in the Canal Basin

August 17-24, \$1,695

incl. Canopy Tower & Barro Colorado

Hungary in Autumn

October 29 - November 4, \$1,395

with thousands of cranes and waterfowl

(incl. Red-breasted Goose)

Overnight pelagic trips from Belmar, NJ:

May 18/19 on the "Nighthawk", \$95

May 26/17 on the "Deep Adventure", \$99

Both to Hudson Canyon

Contact Focus on Nature Tours (FONT)

(302) 529-1876

Information about these and other birding tours in the FONT (Focus on Nature tours) website at www.focusonnature.com

Club Members Reach Out to Youngsters

Martin Selzer and Lynn Jackson conducted a Bombay Hook field trip for students of the Latham School in McLean, Virginia. School Science Department Head Craig Berman sent a thank-you check for \$100 to DVOC.

successful Long-billed Murrelet chase later, she was at 671.

Which brings us to the current tale. I am supposed to be going to Geneva on business for 3 months, and Anita is coming with me. Other than the usual remote bill paying type of problems, the biggest issue we had was what to do with the cat. For those of you who know our cat Crème Brûlée (he got his name because his coloration is much like the dessert, not because he's crusty on the outside and soft and gooey in the middle), understand that he is not the usual "just leave him food and water, and clean out his box" type of cat. His need for lovin', and the fact that he'll take it wherever he can get it, led one friend to refer to him as a ... [Censor's Note: This comment is inappropriate for this publication.] Since he thrives on attention, we needed somebody who would take proper care of him. My brother who lives in El Paso is not that person, but his wife is, in spades. So we planned to take the cat out to them and get in a nice visit at the same time. Since my brother is a budding birder and his wife an interested observer, we made plans to do some birding during our stay.

Other than local birding, our first big success came with a day trip to Sandia Crest near Albuquerque. There had been a mixed flock of all 3 species of Rosy-Finch coming to seed in a parking lot at the top of the mountain. Anita needed all 3 species and I needed two, so we couldn't resist. My brother, his wife, Anita, and I took the five-hour drive. Crème Brûlée stayed behind. He's not really much of a lister.

We got up to the parking lot and could feel that we had driven from about 5000' to over 10,000'. Fortunately, this was not a physically stressful type of chase. After finding the seed pile on the snow bank that was so nicely left behind by other birders, we started to see Rosy-Finches in the surrounding trees. We set up a telescope, set up a couple of camp chairs for the girls, and we watched the show as they came in. We saw dozens of Black Rosy-Finches, several Brown-capped, and over a dozen Gray-crowns including several of the "Hepburn's" race. [Author's Note: Anita now feels that the "Hepburn's" should definitely be a split, especially if it's done before she hits 700.]

The only problem really was that it was a beautiful Sunday afternoon, and the traffic in the parking lot was a bit of a problem. Judging from the number of people who couldn't figure out the one-way road that went around the parking lot, or the other people who parked practically on top of the bird seed despite having just stared straight into four pairs of binoculars and a telescope trained on that very spot, we must have arrived at the same time as a major anti-Mensa organization.

Now fast forward to Tuesday. Anita had arranged for us to fly out of El Paso, through Dallas-Ft. Worth (no choice on American since it's their hub), up through St. Louis with a 3-1/4 hour layover, and then back home to Philadelphia. The only problem is that we are due to arrive at 4:03 PM, so our daylight was limited. As I'm sure you now all have realized, our quarry was the Eurasian Tree Sparrow, the avian toe jam of all ABA listers that live more than a reasonable drive from St. Louis. I mean, we're talking about a gussied up House Sparrow here. Still, it counts the same as our Whiskered Tern - exactly one. We armed ourselves with a printout of site information from the Internet, and a total lack of recognition for just how silly this whole situation really is.

We arrived slightly early and de-planed at just about 4:00 on the nose. We headed through the airport, which seemed amazingly long, and down to the taxi stand. The first driver in line was a very nice man from Nigeria who didn't call the cops or even laugh at us once. We asked for an estimate to make sure that we could afford the ride, hopped in, and we were off (in more ways than one)! On the way, we gave him a few more details about the birds, including the history of why they're in St. Louis. He found it so interesting, he actually helped us look for them!

About 15-20 minutes later, we arrived at the back of Seeger West County Golf Range. Immediately we saw little brown birds in the brush. "There it is!" No, it's a White-crowned. And another White-crowned. And another White-crowned. And White-throated, Fox, Song, American Tree Sparrows. Damn! Where the heck are these little illegal ornithological immigrants? We started to worry that the sun would soon be setting. Slowly, the realization crept in that this just might be a really stupid idea.

Suddenly, a small flock of birds came flying overhead with a call sounding like high pitched house sparrows (just as it's described on the web site). I immediately yelled out, "That's them!". [Author's Note: It's easy to be cocky about making a call like this when the only witnesses are a devoted spouse and a cab driver who's starting to wonder if you passed your last drug test.] The birds dropped into the nearby bushes and we got to see five of the little darlings. [Author's Note: We were calling them little somethings 2 minutes earlier, but it definitely was NOT "darlings".] I passed my binoculars to the driver so that he could get a look also. Then we hopped back into the cab and returned to the airport. We arrived at the entrance to the terminal at 5:10; plenty of time to get back through security, grab a bite to eat, and get on the plane. Anita had just racked up number 675!

Now I'm sure there are purists out there who feel that getting Eurasian Tree Sparrow as number 675 is a real letdown. After all, it's just an LBJ (little brown job) and isn't even a native species. Well, since it was Anita's mile-

stone and not mine, I think it best that I allow her own words to answer that view. She stated that if anybody felt this way, they could just go and ... [Censor's Note: This comment is inappropriate for this, or any other, publication.]

HOW IT'S DONE:

So I'm sure that the question on everybody's mind, or at least on the minds of those who still need Eurasian Tree Sparrow on their list, is, "how can I make this bird my own, without spending a lot of money"? Well, here's our step by step program that tells you how you too can take a shot at this little piece of birding bliss:

- 1) On one of your regular birding trips, get a connection through St. Louis with at least a 3 hour layover. This used to be a big TWA hub and American Airlines purchased TWA, so it shouldn't be tough to juggle if you fly American. Anita managed to pull it off without incurring any additional cost. If you can help it, I would NOT recommend scheduling it as close to sunset as we did. Give yourself a little more breathing room. Your blood pressure will thank you.
- 2) Make sure you know where you are going. We found some fantastic information on the Internet. (You see, there really is something other than porn on the Internet.) The Eurasian Tree Sparrow site that we visited is called "Little Creve Coeur Lake". We selected this site because it is relatively close to the airport, it is considered to be "one of the most reliable locations at which to find Eurasian Tree Sparrow recently", and there is a limited area for you to search. From a pronunciation standpoint, we would have been happier if it had been called "Bob's Pond", but you can't have everything. The URL of the web site with all of this information is: <http://epsc.wustl.edu/~rlk/wgnss/ets/>
- 3) On "game day", bail off the plane and rush through the airport as fast as your little legs can carry you to the taxi stand near the baggage claim area. Show the driver the directions from the web site so he knows where to go. Leave a few minutes to convince him that you are not drunk or recently escaped from a rubber room. Be sure to let him know that you will need him to wait for you while you search for the bird. I think our driver said the meter rate for waiting is \$10 per half hour. With roughly 20 minutes of birding time, our total fare was about \$67 plus tip. Don't tell him that the amount of his tip depends upon your finding the bird, even though it probably does. And don't forget to have your carry-on with you inside the cab so you can get to your binoculars on the way.
- 4) TICK!!!
- 5) Go back to the airport, go through security, get on your plane, and order a celebratory drink. If time permits, get the first round of drinks in the airport.

CAVEATS:

As with all good things, there are always a few "gotchas". So in order to be more forthcoming than a certain financially and morally bankrupt Texas-based multi-billion dollar energy trading company that shall remain nameless, I supply the following caveats:

- Past performance is no guarantee of future results.
- The "twitch" market is risky and is not suitable for all birders.
- This is not a solicitation for or a recommendation of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow.
- Eurasian Tree Sparrows and their immediate relatives are not eligible.
- The author assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of this information.
- Objects in binoculars are not closer than they appear.

THANK YOU'S:

I would like to thank the following people:

Randy Korotev, for putting up the wonderful web site on finding Eurasian Tree Sparrow. If you use the information on his site to search for the bird, PLEASE drop him a "thank you" E-mail including details on how you did.

Tony our cab driver, for his heavy foot and adept weaving in and out of traffic on the way to the bird. Funny, but I didn't really notice how he drove on the way BACK to the airport.

To my darling wife Anita, who managed to schedule us through St. Louis with the appropriate layover. And finally, to fate for blessing me with a wife who is as big a wacko as I am, and who actually wanted to chase this bird!

Book Auction a Great Success

by Sandy Sherman

DVOC put its new web domain name to good use in April and immediately reaped rewards for its Conservation Committee as announcement of our book auction was broadcast — and drew interest — internationally. The club gained access to approximately 400 books, left by the estates of two past presidents, Phillips B. Street (1954-1955), who died in 2000, and Robert H. Sehl (1962-1963), who died in 2001.

Phil's books were donated by his wife, Beryl. In addition to the books, Bob also left the club a very generous bequest of \$7,500. Both were world travelers with impressive collections. Phil, who graduated from Cornell University with a degree in ornithology, was a contemporary of such notables as Roger Tory Peterson, George Miksch Sutton, and Olin S. Pettingill, and a number of his books were autographed to him. Phil's collection also included many books that were passed down to him by his father, J. Fletcher Street, whose roots in DVOC stretch back to his initial membership in 1903.

A number of these ornithological gems left to the club were out of print; some were historic, some scarce, some just well worn with use in the field. Among them were such important works as the Dover edition of A.C. Bent's *Life Histories of North American Birds*, bound in red cloth, many important state ornithological works, four editions of James Bond's *Birds of the West Indies*, two of which were signed; and many field guides to birds around the world.

Because of the magnitude of this collection, Council agreed that we should try to identify and alert as broad an audience as possible. So, thanks to Emmerson Bowes, DVOC webmaster, we posted the complete list on our website (www.dvoc.org) and stated that we would accept bids online prior to the meeting. We got permission to post an announcement of the auction on Birdchat, which reaches more than 1,000 birders around the world, and also posted to several state and local birding e-mail lists. This announcement allowed us to reach serious birders and bird-book collectors far and wide, and indeed, we received bids from Washington State, Florida, Arizona, Pennsylvania and Panama, among other places.

Preliminary results indicate that the club raised the staggering sum of \$2,629.50 from the auction. Proceeds were split roughly 50-50 between online bidders and those who attended the meeting. Bob Mercer did his usual excellent job in organizing the books and serving as auctioneer, as well as communicating with online bidders and shipping the books afterward. Besides being able to take home a small piece of DVOC history, participants found many fantastic bargains.

Thanks to Frank Windfelder, Bob Mercer, Emmerson Bowes, Chris Walters, Al and Nancy Bilheimer, Naomi Murphy, and Rick Mellon for making the evening a success. And, of course, we all thank our two past presidents themselves for their lifelong dedication to birding, and to Beryl Street for donating Phil's collection.

DVOC Larus