From the President  ..Adrian Binns

As my tenure comes to end (where has the time gone?), there are a great number of people to thank for making my job easier. The blueprint for the club was laid out by my predecessor and thanks to our wonderful members, I feel that the club has grown considerably.

Among the achievements over the past two years is a 20% growth in membership, in no small part due to the enthusiasm of Anita Guris, Connie Goldman and Deborah Danila. In addition to an overall increase in membership, we have seen the number of attendees at meetings rise to an average of 55-60 and it is apparent that those attending enjoy the lively discussions, informative programs and ornithological studies which have done so much to advance the club’s mission. Kudos go to Art McMorris and Chuck Hetzel for establishing the Orni Studies program and to all of the members who have contributed.

As most of you are now aware, there have been tremendous changes in our newsletter. While it always provided much needed information relative to field trips and programs, along with some topical pieces for members to enjoy, we have gone electronic and now offer greatly expanded content in the new Larus-on-Line. It takes a lot of time to put Larus-on-Line together and the Larus Committee which includes Naomi Murphy, Martin Selzer and Jane Henderson, is to be highly commended for a job well done.

Since we are geographically centered between three states, the DVOC is often looked upon as one of the birding authorities for the Delaware Valley. As befits our organization, Bert Filemyr has worked to take our website to a new level. It allows members from all over the country to keep up with our activities and also now provides access to comprehensive information about birding the Delaware Valley. Thanks to Bert for a truly great job.

Great times lie ahead for the club. Chris Walters enthusiastically takes over as president in January and he has numerous ideas for our growth. It is my hope that everyone will contribute in one way or another and help to make this ‘your’ club.
20 Questions and Then Some with Bill Stocku

1. You love to chase. What are your current life, NJ, PA, and AZ lists?

AZ list: 478
NJ list: 378
PA list: 337

Your ABA list?

791

Bill Stocku

3. Describe some of the more memorable chases you've made.

In 1979 to Amherst Island, Ontario, Canada with Brian Moscatello, Harry Franzen and friends of Harry where we saw all the species of northeastern owls.

In the eighties, Brian Moscatello, Paul Guris, the late Serge LaFrance and I went on some of the craziest chases. We took weekend trips to Florida, Nova Scotia and St Louis to chase the hottest birds.

Even today, if something shows up in the Rio Grande valley of Texas which is an 18 hour drive, I am ready. I have been about eight times since I retired, driving every time. The last time was for the Roadside Hawk in February 2005. I missed the Social Flycatcher in January, but did get the Black-headed Nightingale Thrush in August of last year!

4. You did the World Series of Birding for years. Which teams have you been a member of over the years?

I started the World Series with Rancocas Nature Center in 1983 with Brian, Paul, and Serge. In 1988 Paul and I became part of the DVOC team with Rick Mellon as the leader. Over the years some of the participants have included Johnny Miller, Chris Dooley, Bob Mercer, Bill Murphy, Megan Edwards, Adrian Binns and Mike Fritz.

5. Before 1999, did you ever think you'd win the WSB?

The team was always competitive, but how do you compete with teams that live in NJ? My big goal was to break two hundred species but until we established the route and perfected it, winning seemed far away. With Paul's planning and the addition of New Jersey native Mike (the MVP) and Adrian (our token Brit), winning became possible.

6. What are your favorite groups of birds (i.e., hawks, shorebirds, warblers, sparrows, etc.)? And why?

Shorebirds, and I now live in AZ — go figure. For a beginning birder, shorebirds are one of the hardest groups to identify. Before I retired, I lived in an area where there are great locations for shorebird migration. The more time I spent in the field looking at them, the more fascinated I became with the entire group.

7. How did you get started in birding?

In 1972 on a family trip to Chincoteague Island, VA we took a boat trip around the island. I became intrigued by the identification skills of the people pointing out the different birds. I purchased my first field guide and a twenty-five dollar pair of Bushnell binoculars.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

*BEGINNER’S CORNER*

Contd. from Page 1

I remember when I first started birding, I found my first 100 species before I realized that I was going about it incorrectly. I asked myself, “How many species was I really SURE about?” This prompted me to rewrite my list. In the process, I had lost about half my lifers.

That was painful, but it was one of the best things I ever did. After that point, I only counted birds that I was 100% sure about. It’s not very satisfying to put a checkmark on a list for a poorly viewed bird, but the afterglow from seeing a well-viewed lifer is wonderful. Don’t worry if you miss a bird. You’ll get another chance someday.

Another important point is to make sure that every bird you count is one you can identify yourself. I have to shake my head every time I observe what goes on at the end of a birding day on a commercial trip. The trip leaders get everyone together to do the day’s checklist and then proceed to tell the participants what they have seen. Many people just check off everything like robots, whether they saw and identified each species themselves or not. I like club member Bert Filemyr’s method. For birds he doesn’t get himself, he makes a notation in the checklist “NBM”, or not by me.

It’s also a good idea to put numbers down, rather than just checks. Put down your own numbers. The leaders may have seen many more, but who cares? It’s your list. Later on, you might want to use bird-listing software, such as AVISYS, where you will have the ability to enter numbers. It’s nice to be able to look back at your records to the time when you observed 6,000 Northern Pintails at Brigantine. Also, keep as much detail as you can, such as the actual location where you saw that Sandhill Crane.

By the way, it’s okay to count heard birds as lifers. There is no other bird that matches the hooting pattern of a Great Horned Owl. Just make a notation that you heard, not saw, and identified each species themselves or not. I like club member Bert Filemyr’s method. For birds he doesn’t get himself, he makes a notation in the checklist “NBM”, or not by me.

It’s not very satisfying to put a checkmark on a list for a poorly viewed bird, but the afterglow from seeing a well-viewed lifer is wonderful. Don’t worry if you miss a bird. You’ll get another chance someday.

Don’t get into a competition. If a friend sees 75 species, and you only see 62, it doesn’t mean he or she has had a more enjoyable trip. Maybe you got to study some of the birds at length, or learned something new. No one but you can measure the quality of your own experience.
20 Questions and Then Some …cont’d

and the rest is history.

8. How were you introduced to DVOC?

I read a newspaper article about something new called "Rare Bird Alert" which was sponsored by the DVOC. I would run into DVOCers when chasing the birds mentioned on the RBA. I also found out that one of the teachers at my daughter Carol’s school was a DVOC member.

9. Who were your birding mentors?

In the beginning, I went birding on my own. The reason I joined the DVOC was to come in contact with other birders. I walked into the club in 1978, introduced myself to the president Charlie Wonderly, and along with the other person sitting at the desk whose name I cannot remember, they signed my letter. My mentors were the group that I went birding with, Brian, Paul and Serge.

10. How was the club different in the days before they allowed women into DVOC?

When I first went to the DVOC I had no idea it was "men only." It felt like I was stepping back in time into a male dominated society.

11. Where do you see DVOC headed in the future?

I think it will be a local force for birding and environmental awareness.

12. What advice would you give someone who is just starting out in birding?

Get a good pair of binoculars, get involved in your local bird club and participate in field trips.

13. What’s your favorite sandwich?

Lebanon Bologna and Havarti Cheese on rye bread with pickle———sorry Paul.

14. You chose to retire in Arizona. Why?

Blame it all on Rick Mellon. In 1979 I came to AZ on a DVOC trip with Rick. I fell in love with the area and visited every year until I retired in June 1995. I moved here in September of that year. I wanted to move to the Chiricahus, but my wife Joyce chose Hereford because Portal was in the boonies! If you stay here a week, you’ll know why I retired here. I never get tired of looking at trogons. Where else can you take the dogs for a walk and see Spotted Owls?

15. What are your common backyard birds?

Year round…..Gambel’s and Scaled Quail, Curved-billed Thrasher, Cactus Wren, Verdin, Canyon Towhee, Zone-tailed Hawk, Lesser Goldfinch, Pyrrhuloxia, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Gila Woodpecker, White-winged Dove, Inca Dove, Bullock’s Oriole, Roadrunner, and Anna's and Black-chinned Hummingbirds. There are a total of ten species of hummingbirds on my yard list.

16. How big is your yard list and what is the rarest bird you have had in your yard?

Olive-sided Flycatcher was #119. The rarest bird I had was Gray Catbird once. It stayed for three weeks and was on the 2003 CBC.

17. What are you doing now that you’re retired, other than chasing birds?

In April 1998 I began working for Geronimo Educational Foundation as coordinator and field trip leader for their Elderhostel birding programs. I average about

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

*BEGINNER’S CORNER*

Topic 1: Listing (cont’d)

Birding is a personal thing, much as is the enjoyment of music. Stay out of the gladiator’s arena. When you get more experience and want to engage in a formal competition, so be it.

Finally, organize your trip reports and checklists. I use manila folders for this purpose. The TAB on one folder might simply say, “Local Trips”, and this is where you keep your checklists for places close to home. Another folder might be much more specific, such as “Arizona, August 5th to 13th, 2003”. If you get into bird listing software later on, you’ll be glad you kept good records.

On the Web… By Bert Filemyr

Since the inception of the DVOC website, our site been graciously hosted by the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. On Thursday November 3, we moved our site to a commercial host. We thank the Academy for all their help and courtesies over the years.

Moving to a commercial host has many advantages. Among them are:

2. The ability to track site usage.
3. The ability to add a site specific search engine.

The commercial host we are using also provides us with a dedicated list serve. This replaces the e-mail service that Frank Windfelder has done such a super job with over the years. On Friday November 4th Frank sent his last message using his mailing list. At that time, all current subscribers to Frank’s list became subscribers to the new list serve. Both members and non-members can manage their subscriptions directly from the DVOC website.

This is a moderated list, not a discussion list. Only a few designated people can post to the list. Over each weekend, a message will be sent out detailing upcoming club activities and other items of interest. Continuing what Frank so ably did, news of significant bird sightings will be also be distributed when appropriate.

If you are not a member of this club list serve, sign up now at www.dvoc.org.
20 Questions and Then Some …cont’d

fourteen week long birding trips a year. I just finished my 97th trip for them! I am also involved in the Southwest Wings Birding Festival held in Bisbee in August. I take visiting DVOCers birding whenever they show up. So far this includes Paul, Rick, Adrian, Colin Campbell, Bruce Lantz, Ellen Short, John Harding, Frank and Barbara Haas, Chris Walters, Ward Dasey, Harry Todd, Bill and Naomi Murphy, Bert Filemyr, Al Driscoll, Tom Bailey, Don Jones and Jim Merritt.

18. What do you miss the most and the least about birding back in the East?

That is simple. I miss DVOC meetings and birding in Cape May. I don't miss the congestion and the traffic.

19. Given the time and money, what birding location would you go back to in a heartbeat?

ALASKA. I still need to get to Nome and Gambel.

20. What new birding locations are top on your list to get to?

The United Kingdom, because I have had contact with numerous Brits, so there is a good chance I could free-load. Believe it or not I do not have a passion to go to the tropics.

21. What is your most wanted bird in North America or Arizona?

Spectacled Eider which would clean up all the eiders for me. When I first moved to Arizona I had three target species - Slate-throated Redstart, Aztec Thrush and Yellow Grosbeak. Now that I have all of those, I still need to make an effort to get Chukar which is found in the northern part of the state. There have been a few Sharp-tailed Sandpiper records but I always seem to be away when one shows up. There has also been one record of Yellow-footed Gull so that is another AZ bird I need.

22. What’s next?

My next goal is to reach 800 ABA and have a Lebanon Bologna and Havarti Cheese on rye bread with pickle ……sorry Paul.

Editor’s Note - Bill’s wife, Joyce, provided the following additional information

On Sunday November 13, Bill drove to Phoenix airport and boarded a flight to Seattle Washington. He arrived early in the morning and drove to Ocean Shores where he got the Temminck's Stint for number 792. He observed the bird for about an hour. He went back the next morning for a closer look after which he left for a flight back to Phoenix. He was going to stay until Tuesday, but it was so easy getting a look at the bird he decided to come back early.

Random Musings—Why Are Shorebirds Hard? …by Jeff Holt

One evening, while vacantly watching highlights from the Phillies 1980 championship run for the umpteenth time (it was a rain delay), I overheard a longtime birder utter the phrase to a neophyte, “Shorebirds are hard.” Now, I've overheard a longtime birder utter the phrase to for the umpteenth time (it was a rain delay), I

Highbee’s just for the chance to spend delightful Highbee’s just for the chance to spend delightful hours trying to separate the faintest of clues on those “confusing fall warblers?” (Was that a complete or broken eye ring?)

Is it because shorebirds congregate in large masses and it takes time to sort through each one in order to separate the wheat from the chaff? (Granted, gull fanciers have the same problem, but then again, anyone willing to stand around in a landfill for hours on end scanning through gulls has other issues that need to be worked through.) Logically, this should make life easier, particularly when compared to trying to pin a name on some five inch passerine that’s flitting around the top of some fifty foot leafed out oak tree.

Remembering my first shore birding trip to Bombay Hook (Mid-July, 95 degrees, 85% humidity, no wind, wearing shorts and a T-shirt and no DEET… I’ve since learned) could the explanation be found in the fact the prime shorebird conditions tend not to be prime conditions for humans? But how many of us will rush to sign up for a February trip to Cape Ann, Massachusetts just for the opportunity to stand on a sea wall in single digit temperatures and 20 mile per hour winds, with tears freezing on your cheeks and digits so cold that you’re actually looking forward to the screaming barfies (that condition where your fingers begin to thaw out and the pain is so bad you want to vomit), just so you can experience the pleasure of scanning the horizon for a brief glimpse of some distant black and white diving alcid?

Downing my beer, I came to the following conclusions – that the 1980 Phillies had really bad hair; that someone needs to clean the dirt off the screen of the television more than once a year, and that if birding in general (and shore birding in particular) were easy, we probably wouldn’t do it. Engaging in the challenge (mental and physical) is as important as the end itself.
Aging of Northern Gannets..by Paul Guris

The Northern Gannet, *Morus bassanus*, is one of the most spectacular seabirds that we see in the Mid-Atlantic region. With a length of about 3 feet and a wingspan of nearly 6 feet, it is larger than any other species you can expect to find at sea. Its long pointed head and bill at the front, long pointed tail at the back, and slender, pointed, and strongly angled wings give it a highly distinctive shape. It can soar on the breeze, glide quickly along the wave tops, achieve great speed during powered flight, and when feeding will fold up into a javelin shape and plunge into the water from heights of over 100 feet. All in all, it is an impressive bird.

Observation of Northern Gannets is fairly easy from shore. Numbers of birds migrate southward past our coasts starting in October and peaking in November. Birds can be seen throughout the winter, though in smaller numbers. They migrate north again in March and continue into May. It is not uncommon to have a young stray bird at any time of the year. During peak months, hundreds can be seen in a single day.

If the light is good and the birds are reasonably close to shore, decent views can be had. But it is on dedicated pelagic trips where the show is truly amazing. When the birds come into the chum at the back of the boat, plumage characteristics can be seen in great detail. Birds regularly pass so close to the boat that you can see their beautiful pale blue eyes. Sometimes they compete with the gulls by diving into the wake for bits of fish, while letting out a harsh and grating keeerrrrow! call. When a large group of Gannets are attracted close to the boat, the show is spectacular.

When the birds are close and seen well, it can be fun to age them. The Northern Gannet takes approximately 5 years to achieve full adult plumage. It is a bit different from gulls in that it progressively achieves adult plumage throughout the year, and does not show the clearly defined plumages that gulls usually show.

This article discusses the plumage stages that we see here from roughly October through May. It should help you confidently age most of the Gannets you see well. It is important to note that individual variation in plumage characteristics is fairly common, and not all birds will “match” an expected standard to a tee. Also, birds seen in April will be more advanced than the same birds seen in November.

**Juvenile / 1st Winter**

Birds of the year generally have the darkest overall plumage of any age. The head and neck are a grayish-brown and very speckled, giving it a unique look at close range. The back is also grayish-brown, with a variable amount of small white spotting. Flight feathers are darker. The rump normally shows a white “V”. The underparts are generally paler, and the bird usually shows a darker breastband. As the bird gets older, the underparts get lighter, the breastband becomes more obvious, and the white speckling fades.

**2nd Winter**

By their second winter, the head and upper neck become mostly white. Towards spring, the head can show the golden yellowish “toasted marshmallow” coloration of the adults, particularly in the spring. The back and wings are nearly black, though more adult-like white feathers start showing up. The rump can still show the white “V”. The underparts are mostly to completely white.

**3rd Winter**

By their third winter, the birds are beginning to look quite a bit like the adults. The head and underparts are pure white, except for the “toasted marshmallow” color on the head, again particularly in the spring. The back is heavily speckled black and white, becoming progressively white towards spring. The flight feathers and tail are black.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6
Aging of Northern Gannets (cont’d)

Figure 3: Third Winter Northern Gannet – Note the nearly white upperparts, but still with some black feathering, the mostly dark flight feathers, and the dark feathers in the tail. Copyright Chip Krilowicz.

4th Winter/Adult

Adult Northern Gannets have a gorgeous black and white plumage, somewhat reminiscent of a white morph Snow Goose. Their entire plumage is white, except for their jet black wingtips and that “toasted marshmallow” color on the head. By their 4th winter, Northern Gannets have almost completely achieved adult plumage, but usually show more black in the central tail feathers and in the secondaries. They often show completely black secondaries, very much like a Masked Booby, but without the mask!

Figure 4: Adult Northern Gannet – Note the generally white plumage and the dark wingtips. Copyright Kevin Watson.

Northern Gannets are fascinating birds that deserve to be studied. Next time you have the opportunity, take a bit of time looking at their plumage, and try to sort them out by age. It will make you appreciate this fantastic bird even more.

Figure 3: Adult Northern Gannet – Check out the blue eye! Copyright Chip Krilowicz.

Bibliography


Bird Facts - Winter 2005...A. Binns

Since 1600, at least 90 species and 19 subspecies of North American birds have become extinct. The most recent was Florida’s Dusky Seaside Sparrow in 1987.

The last Labrador Duck was shot on Long Island in 1875

Since 1600, at least 90 species and 19 subspecies of North American birds have become extinct. The most recent was Florida’s Dusky Seaside Sparrow in 1987.

Once found in the millions, the last Passenger Pigeon died on September 1, 1914 at the Cincinnati Zoo.

The Heath Hen, with a population of less than 200 and confined to Martha’s Vineyard, had a preserve created to protect them. The population rose to 2000 by 1915 but by the mid-1920’s, fires, severe winters, disease and predation by Northern Goshawks reduced the number to thirteen. By 1932, the Heath Hen was extinct.

Bird Quiz, Winter 2005....A. Binns

1. Which North American game bird constructs a domed nest?

2. How many primaries do all NA quail have?

3. Which North American bird spends the night gathered in a circular group facing outwards?

4. Which nidifugous or precocial species has the largest clutch?

Fact: Grouse have concave, rounded wings, which enable them to take off rapidly and fly short distances quickly.

See Page 27 for answers to the quiz.
Sandy Hook’s “Salt Pond” ... Scott Barnes, Senior Naturalist Sandy Hook Bird Observatory

Sandy Hook’s “salt pond” is a relatively new addition to the birding opportunities available at the 2,040 acre National Recreation Area. Located at the top of the Jersey shore, “the hook” provides good to excellent year-round birding, with peak times of activity in April-May and September-October. Over 340 species of birds have been recorded in the last 30 years at Sandy Hook. About 280+ species of birds occur annually.

The littoral drift moves northward along the northern coastline of New Jersey and keeps Sandy Hook growing. One of the biggest changes to the landscape at the hook is the accretion of sand. The north end of Sandy Hook has grown tremendously in the past few decades, and areas that were once ocean now support dune grass, goldenrod, and bayberry. All told, 375 acres of new land exist today that were ocean when the park was established.

There are two ponds at the north end of the hook. Both were initially tidal pools created by shifting sands and storms. They became pinched off from tidal flow by high dunes and now are fed solely by rainwater. Although brackish, the salinity level in the ponds is low enough to support breeding dragonflies. Large populations of Striped Killifish are resident. North Pond is shallow and dominated by phragmites around the periphery, with scattered tall cottonwood trees, and other typical dune plants. The pond is an excellent location for a variety of water birds including Least Bittern, American Bittern (counts of up to 12 birds have been recorded in April), Sora, and Virginia Rail. The list of rarities here is long and includes Eurasian Wigeon, Purple Gallinule, Sandhill Crane, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, and Cave Swallow.

Vegetation at the newer salt pond is slowly becoming more prevalent with Marsh Mallow, Salt Marsh Fleabane, Seaside Goldenrod, and Cottonwood trees. Over time, the salt pond may look more and more like the north pond as natural succession takes place.

The salt pond is an important feeding and roosting habitat for Federally Endangered Piping Plovers and Least Terns. Many Common Terns and the occasional Black Skimmer utilize the pond as well. The peak of bird activity at the salt pond takes place from mid-July through September, when a variety of southbound shorebirds visit. Numbers here are not overwhelming, with 100 individuals being a good count. However, diversity can be excellent, with 15+ species of shorebirds present most weeks. The salt pond is arguably one of the most reliable locations in New Jersey for viewing juvenile Baird’s Sandpipers during August and September. Counts of a half a dozen individuals are not uncommon. One enjoyable feature at the salt pond is the ability to observe shorebirds at close range. Although a string fence is in place from mid-March to Labor Day, birders can walk a path behind the fencing that allows close approach to the pond. After Labor Day the fencing is removed and birders can walk around the perimeter of the entire pond. In addition to shorebirds, the pond hosts gulls, terns (Black Tern is reliable here in May and August), and a few ducks. The dunes and low vegetation around the pond can be good for pipits, sparrows, and other open-country birds.

Rarities found at the salt pond have included American Avocet, Hudsonian Godwit, Red-necked Phalarope, Arctic Tern, Western Kingbird, Lark Sparrow, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. With the pond’s strategic location at the northern terminus of the hook, local birders salivate at the thought of what rarity might appear here next. Vagrants like Groove-billed Ani, Gray Kingbird, and Chestnut-collared Longspur have all been recorded just a stone’s throw away.

The ponds are located at the northern end of Sandy Hook and are accessible from Parking Lot K. For details, stop in at the Bird Observatory where you can pick up a free, detailed birding map of Sandy Hook.
Delaware City Area ~ North of the C&D Canal...by Colin Campbell

You enter Delaware City from the north via Route 9 directly from New Castle or coming off Route 1 on Route 72 east about eight miles south of I-95. Your nostrils are assailed frequently by the sulphides emanating from the Premcor refinery and you ask yourself why the amazing profits from the oil industry of late can’t be used to address the stink problem. But all these thoughts disappear as you pull up on the right shoulder at a small bridge over a sluice gate just before entering Delaware City. A look to the right gives a small, angled view of Dragon Run Marsh. Wood Ducks, Pied-billed Grebe, geese and ducks can be seen in season without getting out of your car. Spring and summer can yield close kingfisher and even Least Bittern at this spot, which is always worth checking for passeresines on both sides of the road.

A couple of hundred yards further on, hang a right in front of the brand new fire station and proceed to the parking lot at Dragon Run Park. Take your scope and walk out across the Little League baseball ground to a small concrete platform which serves as an admirable base for your tripod. You can scan some of Dragon Run Marsh, but this year’s incredible vegetative growth has blocked some of the peripheral views. The passage of herons in spring and summer can be impressive as they fly to and from the Pea Patch Island heronry. Little Blue Herons and Glossy Ibis are particularly attracted to this marsh. Look for breeding moorhen, an increasingly rare bird in the state and coot in the colder months. This was the last breeding place of the Purple Gallinule in the state in 1975, but the species has not been documented in the state since 1976. Bald Eagles have nested here.

Return to Cox Neck Road. Farther to the west is a dirt road access to the C&D Canal Wildlife Area which leads to the canal through small trees and scrubby brush with lots of thrashers, towhees and, in summer, Yellow-breasted Chat amongst other warblers. Drivable tracks parallel the canal all the way to the St George’s Bridges. Bald Eagle, Osprey, cormorants, and gulls are attracted by the water while passerines occupy the bushes.

Even further west along Cox Neck Road is Gunning Bedford School. Avoiding school times, you can walk a delightful little trail behind the school which meanders though mixed woodland and overlooks a pond. A good view of 80% of the pond can be scanned. If no fishermens are in boats, there may be a variety of ducks, coot, moorhen and p-b grebes; however since the Mute Swans moved in (there are now about two dozen), the other waterfowl have been reduced considerably.

Return to Route 9 and turn right to the light and take a left. This is Clinton Street, DC’s main drag. It is wide and quite attractive with a few shops and eating places. At the eastern end, by the Delaware River, is a parking area (Veteran’s Park) from where you can scope Pea Patch Island with the historic Fort Delaware and the second largest heronry in the eastern US. From April to September, one can view the comings and goings of up to nine species of heron and Glossy Ibis. The three white egrets, Great and Little Blue Herons and Black-crowned Night-Herons are the commonest, but with patience and the right timing, individuals from the small populations of Tricolored Heron and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron can be found and Green Heron is occasionally found on the local mainland side. Double-crested Cormorants have bred recently on a marker buoy in the river. Caspian, Forster’s and the occasional Royal Tern can be seen in the warmer months when Ospreys abound. Try a crab cake sandwich and a beer on the deck of the Canal House Tavern while still birding!

Delaware River Bay Authority operates a ferry from the end of April to mid-September from here to Fort Delaware on Pea Patch Island and on to Fort Mott in NJ. It’s a delightful day out, and the Club has run this as a field trip a couple of times. Ferry schedules are on http://www.threeforts.com/sched.html. A trail from Fort Delaware allows views (somewhat distant – take a scope) of the heronry. The Yellow-crowns are not in the main heronry – they are on the east side of the island just north of the Fort. Check out the state park website for Fort Delaware SP too: http://www.desateparks.com/fdsp/index.asp.

Returning westwards along Clinton Street, go straight through the lights and, at the edge of town, scan Dragon Run Marsh again on your right. Although heavy with aquatic vegetation, the few open pools can be good for Least Bittern and other herons, a variety of ducks; King Rail and Sora have been reported along the edge. Another large pool, this one without the spatterdock, “Swan Pond” on the south side of the road, can be accessed by parking a few hundred yards further on and scrambling up the muddy bank. However, a better view of the pond is obtained by going farther west along Cox Neck Road and looking carefully for a concealed dirt trail on the left. Pull into here and park at the first corner. Take a scope and walk the trail for a hundred yards then drop down to a concealed (and probably illegal) boat launch. A good view of 80% of the pond can be scanned. If no fishermen are in boats, there may be a variety of ducks, coot, moorhen and p-b grebes; however since the Mute Swans moved in (there are now about two dozen), the other waterfowl have been reduced considerably.

Continued on Page 9
Delaware City Area ~ North of the C&D Canal...(cont’d)

Egrets and Fish Crows can be had.

In the far southeast corner (opposite from where you entered) is the entrance to Fort Dupont State Park. A fee or permit is needed May 1 through October 31 payable through an ‘honesty box’ system – your car is likely to be checked.

http://www.destateparks.com/know/fees/entryfees/entryfee.htm. This small riverside park has a small mixed woodland surrounded by the Delaware River on one side, the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal on another, Fort Dupont lands on the remaining two sides. The wood is the closest to the river for some distance north or south and thus has potential as a compact migrant trap. As with all such locations, you can be lucky and you can be frustrated! First, check out the grassy area north of the parking lot for sparrows etc. Scope the river if you haven’t done so already. Trails lead from the parking area either between the wood and the river or through the woods. It’s relatively easy to work out a loop walk which covers most of the park and most of the habitats available. The woods contain the expected woodpeckers, robins and ‘garden birds’, Great Horned Owl and accipiters. All of the eastern warblers have been recorded here; sometimes the place can be jumping, other times dead; either way, it’s a very nice small walk and there’s always action somewhere on the river. A peculiarity is the extensive ‘observation deck’ in the woods. I guess it was just put up to cover another unsightly concrete structure (or to use up excess budget at the end of the year), but it is only five feet high, has virtually nowhere to ‘observe’ and has handicapped (wheelchair) access, though anyone in such a device has to negotiate a quarter mile of muddy track to get there! Oh, well.

Another part of the park, on the other (south) side of the Reedy Point Bridge, has a little conference building – the Grassdale Center. Parking in the lot here allows you to walk around some trails leading to wetland areas or to the Canal. A good and quiet(ish) area for Willow Flycatcher, Marsh Wren and sparrows.

All of these areas are good for a short visit if you have limited time. There is little habitat for shorebirds. You need to head south on Route 9 over Reedy Point Bridge for those. This 1.75 mile masterpiece of post neo-Army Corps of Engineers design leads into another land, another world indeed. Quaintly known by the locals as “South of the Canal”, this is a sparsely populated area where the means of transport is confined to red pick-up trucks, and people eat muskrat burgers. Birding here can be excellent but is outside the scope of this note; a guide to birding this area (and tips for survival) will be the subject of a future “hotspots” article.

Delaware Valley Rarity Roundup: Fall (Sept-Nov) 2005

Pennsylvania
RUFOUS HUMMINBIRD – Westgrove, Chester Co, Oct 12-thru at least Nov 9

Delaware
CLAY-COLORED SPARROW - Prime Hook, Sussex Co, Oct 22

New Jersey
GREEN VIOLET-EAR - Rumson, Monmouth Co, Aug 30-31. 1st State Record
PAINTED BUNTING female - Highbee Beach, Cape May Co, Sept 4
YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD female - at Forsythe NWR, Atlantic Co, Sept 10-11
SABINE’S GULL - Warren Green Acres, Somerset Co, Sept 11
BROWN BOOBY - Cape May, Cape May Co, Sept 16
RUFOUS/ALLEN’S HUMMINGBIRD - Verga, Gloucester Co, Oct 9-Nov 8
RED PHALAROPE - Spruce Run Reservoir, Oct 14
ANHINGA - Wall, Monmouth Co, Oct 19
CAVE SWALLOW - Maurice River Bridge, Cumberland County, Oct. 26 (an early date)
SWAINSON’S HAWK - immature light-morph - Cape May, Cape May Co, Oct 26
HENSLOW’S SPARROW - Sandy Hook, Monmouth Co, Oct 30
MARBLED GODWITS - Brigantine Island, Atlantic Co, an exceptional count of 55. Nov 2
SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER - Sandy Hook, Monmouth Co, Nov 4
MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD - a female over Barnegat Light, Ocean Co, Nov 6
WHITE-WINGED DOVE - Cape May, Cape May Co, Nov 6
FRANKLIN’S GULL - Cape May Point, Cape May Co, Nov 8
MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD - 2 near Sandy Hook, Monmouth Co, Nov 9
CAVE SWALLOWS - Cape May Point, Cape May Co, Nov 10, a record high 135

Magnificent Frigatebird. Copyright 2005 S. Leibhaber & N. Cooke

Rufous Hummingbird—Copyright 2005 N. Pulcinella
Fall Pelagics Off of the North California Coast ...Nikolas K. Haass

Much has been written about sea life in California, so I don’t want to be too redundant. There are three major factors that make the California Coast unique for pelagic trips: the prevailing winds, ocean currents and the continental shelf line. On the North American East Coast, the Gulf Stream pours warm tropical water northward, whereas on the West Coast, the California current moves cool water southward. This together with mainly northwesterly winds and the abrupt edge of the continental shelf close to shore causes a coastal upwelling that brings nutrient-rich deepwater to the surface. The net effect is that you may see alcids and other off-shore birds before you even leave the harbor.

In Monterey harbor, your list most often starts with Pigeon Guillemot, other off-shore birds before you even leave the harbor.

Deepwater to the surface. The net effect is that you may see alcids and other off-shore birds before you even leave the harbor.

Interestingly, there are increasing sightings of Manx Shearwater in the Pacific – approximately 140 have been reported since the first record in the North Pacific on June 4, 1975. As long-distance migrants, they easily can switch oceans in the Cape Horn area. Manx Shearwaters (Fig. 2) need to be carefully studied in order to separate them from other small ‘dark-and-white’ shearwaters – especially from Black-vented. Be aware of the ‘sea-glare illusion’, which can make a Black-vented Shearwater appear ‘crisply black-and-white’! Being used to the white Northern Fulmars of the Atlantic, it is a nice change to see the dark morph alongside with pale ones in the Pacific.

There are also chances to see Tufted Puffin and Marbled Murrelet, but you need loads of luck (not necessarily krill) to see any of the other sought-after alcid species. Usually, there are reasonable chances to see good numbers of South Polar Skuas and sometimes all three Jaegers as well as Sabine’s Gulls alongside the common Western, California and Heermann’s Gulls. On some trips you might be lucky to see rafts of storm-petrels: up to 5,000 Ashy and 250 Black, a few Least and Forktailed and occasional Wilson’s Storm-petrels. This may lead you to conclude that Ashy is common and Wilson’s is rare. That is true for California. Globally it is the opposite: Wilson’s Storm-petrel is traditionally regarded to be one of most numerous seabird in the world (several million breeding pairs), whereas Ashy is one of the rarest Storm-petrels in the world. There are only a few breeding colonies on a couple of islands off California and Baja California with a total of approximately 5,200 breeding pairs. Thus, you might be able to see 50% of the world population on one single pelagic trip. This very restricted breeding range makes the Ashy Storm-petrel a highly vulnerable species. A single oil spill could bring the Ashy Storm-petrel to the edge of extinction.

Besides birds, you might encounter lots of mammals as well: California and Steller’s Sea-lions, Northern Fur Seal, Harbor Seal, Northern Elephant Seal, Humpback and Blue Whale, Risso’s Dolphin, Northern Right-Whale Dolphin, Pacific White-sided Dolphin, Harbor and Dall’s Porpoise and – as with the birds – the occasional surprise. A very interesting behavior is shown by young male Northern Elephant Seals: they sleep offshore. They ‘hang’ vertically at the surface and only the head, with the nose pointing straight into the sky, is visible. The Northern Elephant Seal is – after its Southern cousin – the world’s second largest phocoid pinniped – it weighs twelve times as much as a Harbor Seal or five times as much as a California Sea Lion. You can appreciate the Northern Elephant Seal’s size when you watch them resting along the Big Sur Coast but these giants don’t look as gigantic when they sleep offshore and you are only able to see a small cone-shaped fraction of them!

Of course, the major reason for many birders to participate in West Coast pelagic trips is the chance to see rarities. I am not going to write about them, since this would either lead to a simple uncommented list or to a very long article, which I am not supposed to write. Taken all that together: a pelagic trip out West is a ‘must’!
**Day 1 / Sunday August 21**

We arrived at 9 pm at Kenyatta Airport in Nairobi after a rather uneventful eight hour flight. After meeting our charismatic guide Ben and his tall skinny driver BK, we were whisked away to the very plush Serena Hotel.

**Day 2 / Monday August 22 – Nairobi National Park**

Nairobi National Park is situated a stone’s throw from Nairobi and, although small in size, it is a rather impressive way to begin a safari. The short drive to the main gate produced Pied Crows, Black Kites and a platoon of Marabou Storks wandering on top of the football stadium. We were inside the park by 6:45 am and watching roosting White-backed and Rupell’s Griffin Vultures, Bushbuck, Hadada Ibis, Common Bulbul and White-browed Sparrow Weaver. Our second mammal of the trip was a Silver-backed Jackal and it was not long before Common Zebra, Eland and Coke’s Hartebeests were seen on the plains, a vast expanse of rolling grassland dotted with acacias.

We took the perimeter track, riding the edge between the grasslands and the shrub land. We stopped to watch and photograph a multitude of new species. These included Olive Greenbul, Rattling Cisticola, Violet-backed Starling, Speckled and Blue-naped Mousebirds, Red-eyed and Ring-necked Doves, Tropical Boubou, Variable Sunbird, flocks of Yellow-rumped Seedeaters, African Firefinch, Baglafecht Weaver, Rufous Sparrow, Common Waxbills, Bronze Mannikins, Brimstone Canary, Yellow-throated Longclaw and a pair of gorgeous Little Bee-eaters… all of this in our first hour! We came across a dead Marsh Owl on the road which had been hit by another vehicle during the night. Grant’s Gazelle, Masai Giraffe, Impala, Wildebeest, and a pair of Black Rhinos, along with Ostriches, soon followed. Some of the more common species we came across during the remainder of the day included Long-tailed Fiscal-Shrike perched on low acacias, Fawn-colored Larks on the tracks, Tawny-flanked Prinia and Pectoral-patched Cisticolas. In the air, Red-rumped and Barn Swallows were common and we saw Sand and House Martins, African Palm Swift and a few Black Saw-wings. In a Yellow-barked Acacia, a Lesser Spotted Eagle was ripping apart prey and feeding it to its well grown chick and a male Ostrich wooing its mate. Before long she sat on the ground and they mated.

A group of about twenty Impala, the first of many bachelor herds we would encounter over the next several weeks, put in an appearance. In contrast to the grasslands, the Whistling-thorn Acacias grow to about six feet in height and seem to be devoid of wildlife with the exception of Rufous Sparrows which use them for nest sites. When we asked why we were not seeing Lions, our guide Ben told us that a pride of thirteen was recently killed by local Masai farmers because they were raiding livestock. We finished the day amongst grass munching Cape Buffalo while we watched a Serval, our first cat of the trip. What a start and could we top this day?

**Day 3 / Tuesday August 23 – Blue Lodge; Mountain Lodge**

We headed north out of Nairobi later than usual so that we would miss rush hour traffic. We dodged pot holes on the poor uneven roads that led through agricultural areas of coffee, corn, bananas, potatoes, beans and pineapples. Our first stop was on the grounds of the Blue Lodge Hotel in Thika. A Brown-hooded Kingfisher greeted us in the car park along with White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers. We encountered White-browed Sparrow Weavers building their nests as we walked the grounds. These weavers spend most of their time upgrading their nests and one can tell that it is this species that has taken over because they only build on the west facing side of the tree. Another spectacular sight was a Giant Kingfisher, the mother of all kingfishers, perched on a low branch ahead of us. Though not rare, they are at times hard to come across. At the Thiba River waterfall, we picked up Mountain Wagtail and got good looks at Great Sparrowhawk as it crossed the water below us. From here we continued to climb in elevation, passing roadside stands of charcoal and common species such as Common Fiscal, Superb Starling, Common Drongo and Grey-headed Kingfisher. Raptor species were seen well, including our only Walberg’s Eagle and African Harrier Hawks circling above the road. We saw many Augur Buzzards which turned out to be about as common as a Red-tails back home. We continued on our long drive with a few stops including the Karatina Ponds for Little Grebes, Red-
A Birding Safari to Kenya...continued

knobbed Coot, Grey Heron and Yellow-billed Stork. We were amazed at the sight of the twenty foot tall giant euphorbias that grew in the small patches separating the road from agricultural plots.

It was 1 pm by the time we reached the Mountain Lodge. This was due, in part, to the bad roads but also to frequent stops made as we neared the lodge. We found Long-Crested Eagle, Common Waxbills, Common Stonechat, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater and Cape Robin Chat. Upon arrival, we were greeted with a very civilized warm washcloth to clean our face and hands and a cold refreshing juice drink. The lodge is set within the forested foothills of Mt. Kenya at 2700m (8858'). It is not as well known as Treetops, but is probably the best of Kenya’s three ‘tree’ lodges. All of the rooms face the watering hole and there are two upper level viewing areas as well as a lower level underground hide that allowed for eye level views of animals visiting the watering hole. We were warned about the monkeys – in a nutshell, if one left the window open a crack, there was a good chance that your belongings would be stolen, destroyed or exposed for all to see!

We opted to forego the 3 pm armed guided walk into the forest after our lunch. This was not for fear of encountering big game but was due to threatening weather. Instead we took in all the activity going on around the lodge, starting on the rooftop. A rolling trill was due to threatening weather. Instead we took in all the activity going on around the lodge, starting on the rooftop. A rolling trill was due to threatening weather. Instead we took in all the activity our buffet lunch. This was not for fear of encountering big game but we opted to forego the 3 pm armed guided walk into the forest after good chance that your belongings would be stolen, destroyed or exposed for all to see!

As luck would have it there was a feeding platform with a slab of meat on it just outside our room. At dusk, a Small Spotted Genet settled in for a gourmet meal and a White-tailed Mongoose also paid a visit. The staff brought around a list during dinner for us to mark down animals that we wanted them to wake us for during the night should they come to the watering hole. We marked off Leopard, Striped Hyena, Forest Elephant and Giant Forest Hog. Dinner was interrupted when an elephant showed up. Everyone left the table and headed for the verandah to watch it drink and scratch itself against a giant boulder. Three Spotted Hyenas and some Waterbucks were also there. We attended a slide presentation on the wildlife around the lodge that was given after dinner by a very animated and amusing resident naturalist. We stayed up late editing photos while watching the watering hole. We were reluctant to go to bed in case something came in but we finally turned in after midnight since no new species appeared. Nobody came to wake us during the night.

Day 4 / Wednesday August 24 – Mountain Lodge; Samburu

The best time to see glacier capped Mt Kenya is at first light. At 5200 meters (17,060”) it is Kenya’s second highest peak. At dawn the watering hole held Egyptian Goose, Hammerkop, Green Sandpiper and Hadada Ibis. Pigeons came down to take advantage of the natural salt lick, the monkeys were up and Rock Martins perched on the verandah. We got looks at juvenile African Goshawk, Little Sparrowhawk and, after breakfast, watched a very active Paradise Flycatcher along with Black-headed and Black-throated Apalis and Kedrick’s Starling. We added Small Mongoose and Olive Bush Squirrel to the list.

We had to leave this wonderful spot but we took our time on the long way out. We stopped for several Yellow-bellied Waxbills and saw African Citril and a Dusky Turtle Dove perched atop a Podo tree. Some seemingly “out of habitat” Black-headed Herons appeared along the way and we were enthralled for a half hour by a gathering of forty Silver-cheeked Hornbills as they preened, fought and chased each other through an open stand of croton forest. A couple of hours after leaving the Mountain Lodge we reached what would be the first of many equator crossings. We stopped for a demonstration of how water flows on the equator and also had our first experience with window shopping…. Kenyan style. It took a little hard bargaining, much to the amusement of the locals, and I though we did well with our purchases. Later we...
A Birding Safari to Kenya...continued

found out that one could get items like wooden giraffes and masks at the same price or better at the lodges so we really did not get a bargain – but at least we all had fun and did our bit to keep the economy going.

We passed numerous villages as we continued on through the grassy central highlands at around 9000’. We slowed down where we could and were rewarded with sightings of Speke’s Weavers nest building along the road-side. We saw Cape Rooks and Common Fiscals as well. The “paved road” abruptly ended at a checkpoint in Isiolo and one correctly assumed that from here northwards to the Somali or Ethiopian border it would be dirt roads all the way – and it’s a long way! In fact, this particular 48 kilometer stretch road was undoubtedly the worst we would encounter on the whole trip. And with a dirt road comes an abundance of dust, so we battened down the hatches, pulled handkerchiefs over our mouths and noses and hoped the kilometer sign was wrong. The torture receded half an hour later when we reached the main gate. There are actually two reserves in this area, Buffalo Springs which consists mainly of rolling plains and Samburu which is more rugged with rocky outcroppings.

The sight of Oryx standing in the shade of an acacia, Grevy’s Zebra, elephants, Gerenuk’s, Reticulated Giraffes and Common Waterbuck did a lot to take our minds off of the road conditions. We also saw Secretary Birds, Red-billed Hornbills, Lilac-breasted Roller and Bateleur. We reached the electric fence that enclosed the lodge compound and were greeted by Somalis dressed in bright red garb. Tucked in the middle of the bush, this is one of three or four lodges that cater to tourists. And what a stunning lodge it is. Our rooms were chalets stretching away from the main lodge with a dining area under the tall acacia canopy overlooking the Ewaso Ngiro River. At our buffet lunch we sat out in the open watching brazen Red-billed Hornbills and Superb Starlings take hand outs from the native marksman. This was heaven.

The savannah bush habitat north of the equator is drier and some species such as the Gerenuk and Grevy’s Zebra reach their southern limit here. Along with good numbers of other Land Rovers, we set out at 4 pm on a game drive. Not surprisingly there was something to see everywhere one looked. Too much to handle? No way, just bloody amazing! As we wound our way through the rocky savannah, we came across weaver nests in acacia trees. Most are unoccupied but we soon saw their master craftsmen….White-headed Buffalo Weavers, Don Smiths aka Donaldson-Smith’s Sparrow Weavers and Black-capped Social Weavers.

We saw African Grey Flycatcher which was a rather non-descript species. But the Pink-breasted Lark, Grey-headed Sparrow, Lesser Honeyguide and the Yellow-bellied Eremomela that we found in the scrub by the river were not. We also saw Crested Bustard, Nyanza Swift, Somali Fiscal, Crested Francolin, Yellow-necked Spurfowl, Helmeted and Vulturine Guineafowl, Grey-headed Kingsfisher, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Namaqua Dove, Laughing Dove and African Mourning Dove.

There were Great White Egret, Marabou Stork and Nile Crocodile along the wide river which had foot of running water in it from recent rains. The majestic Martial Eagle and a pair of Verreaux Eagle Owls were found on their roosts and, on a hillside, we could see a congregation of vultures. A half hour after sunset we were back at the lodge. Since we were not allowed out of the compound at night we were able to get a good night’s sleep.

Day 5 / Thursday August 25 - Samburu

Sometimes the excitement is just so great you can not wait to get up! Our pre breakfast game drive led us along the river and began with the usual suspects, guineafowl, francolin, roller, drongo, hornbill, spurfowl, dove, weaver and some new species such as Northern Black Flycatcher, Northern White-crowned Shrike, African Hoopoe, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Spur-winged Plover, Black-cheeked Waxbill, Spotted Morning Thrush, Grey-Wren Warbler, Yellow-spotted Petronia, Eastern Pale Chanting Goshawk, Three-streaked Tchagra, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, Slate-colored Boubou, White-bellied Go-away Bird, White-headed and Blue-naped Mousebirds, Bearded Woodpecker, various sunbirds including Black-bellied and Eastern Violet-backed , Eastern Yellow-billed and Von der Decken’s Hornbills and D’Arnaud’s Barbet.

As amazing as it was to see all these birds, it was the mammals, in particular the Lions that took center stage. We returned to a spot where we’d seen a dead giraffe and found a pride of eleven just finishing up. The skin of the giraffe was peeled back and the ribs had been striped of any meat, thus setting the table for the waiting vultures. It was amazing to think that such a large mammal could be devoured so quickly. Speaking of devouring things,
A Birding Safari to Kenya...continued

African Paradise Flycatcher

Lion on a giraffe kill

breakfast was next!

We were back on a game drive soon after breakfast. We saw our first Speckled Pigeon on the ground and though it remained largely hidden, we got to see many more of this species during the next week. We saw a Dwarf Mongoose moving through the rocks and Von der Decken’s hornbills moved from tree to tree with occasional stops to eat berries with their large two-toned bills. From our viewpoint looking across the river, we saw a herd of elephants making their way down to and crossing the water.

We rested up in the afternoon and by 4 pm we were back on a three hour game drive. Plovers are one group that is well represented in Kenya. The beautiful Crowned Plover, a noisy bird of the dry grasslands, is the most common but we saw Spur-winged as well. Passerines on our afternoon run included Grey Wren-Warbler and Banded Parus. We spotted several Fan-tailed Ravens over the hills and Black-shouldered Kite perched atop an acacia while a Secretary Bird fixed her nest in a nearby toothbrush bush.

We sighted some new mammals including African Cape Hare and Common Waterbuck. We came across a herd of elephants that was engaged in a dispute and there was a lot of trumpeting going on. On our way back to the lodge, Ben spotted a rare and very elusive African Wild Cat at the base of a bush. There was a group of about sixty Olive Baboons preening, playing and aggressively chasing each other across the sand of a dry river bed. It was another wonderful day!

Day 6 / Friday August 26 – Samburu; Naro Moru River Lodge

We loaded up the van and headed out along the river where we found Dikdiks foraging in the shrubbery and an adult and juvenile Palm Nut Vulture which is a large vultine eagle that likes to scavenge along floodplains. Wire-tailed Swallows flew over the water and a small flock of Green Wood-Hoopoe moved from tree to tree as they searched crevices in the bark for insects. We saw a large mixed flock of Cuckoos and Chestnut Sparrows and then a group of thirty or so sandgrouse in which Ben found a male Black-faced beside the track. Raptors were very evident with Martial and Tawny Eagle, Augur Buzzard and African Harrier Hawk all seen well. We were mentally prepared this time as we headed out onto the long dusty bumpy road so it seemed that we were back on the paved road before we knew it. We passed a small clan of Somali tribal elders, dressed in fine garb and seated on the ground in a circle. We figured they were no doubt discussing the business at hand as they had been doing for centuries. There were multiple police check points on all the roads but since they did not seem to be interested in us, it did was slow us down.

We drove back through Nanuyki climbing in elevation to around 8000’ before reaching the Naru Moru Lodge. This place is used as a base camp for those keen and fit enough to hike to the summit of Mt Kenya. We were greeted by Red-cheeked Cordon Bleu, Brimstone Canary, Grey-headed Bush-Shrike, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Bronze Sunbird and Crowned Hornbill, all on the extensive grounds of the lodge.

With the clouds thickening and weather threatening, we took an afternoon stroll along the banks of the Naro Moru. We passed through the woodlands and scrub, some of which had been stripped to make way for a golf course. We found Chin-spotted Batis, Yellow-whiskered Green-bul, Northern Double-collared Sunbird, Black-backed Puffback, Grey-backed Camaroptera, and Mountain Wagtail along with a few Black Sawwings flying overhead. In backtracking to get better looks at a pair of very pretty African Black Ducks, we found a male Paradise Flycatcher. In the open areas, Gray Flycatcher, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Streaky Seedeeater, Purple Grenadier, Common Fiscal, African Citril Finch, mousebirds and White-browed Robin Chats were very cooperative.

A small dump site not far from one of the fairways had Cape Rooks, Hadada Ibis and a group of Sacred Ibis. We had Singing Cisticola, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Yellow-rumped Seedeater, Bronzed Mannikin, the beautiful Golden-breasted Bunting and a Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike, after a little chase. Returning to our rooms at dusk we found a Tree Hyrax sitting in the crotch of a tree and we heard their eerie calls soon after.

Day 7 / Saturday August 27 – Naro Moru River Lodge; Sweetwater Sanctuary

A pre-breakfast check of the trees around the buildings produced Red-fronted and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Montane Oriole, Montane White-eye and more Crested Hornbills. By 8:15 am we were on the road for the one hour drive to Sweetwater Sanctuary. We saw Cape Rook, Speckled Pigeon and Superb Starling along the roadsides and we stopped for Northern Pied Babbler, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Rufous-naped Lark and a Black-winged Plover in the grasslands.

As we entered the gates there were considerable open areas of short grass where we were greeted by herds of zebra and elephant, Grants’ and Thompson’s Gazelles, and warthogs. We found Blacksmith and Black-winged Plovers, Red-capped Larks, Plain-backed Pipit and Grass-
A Birding Safari to Kenya...continued

land Pipits on the short grass while Northern White-crowned Shrike, Northern Anteater Chat, Rattling Cisticola, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Ruppell’s Long-tailed Starling and White-bellied Tits perched on fence posts. We saw a Black-bellied Bustard, so intent on his display that we were able to get very close.

We stopped by the chimpanzee enclosure which was a large holding pen used for animals that need rehabilitation. Along the path that led to the river, we saw several butterflies including Dark Blue Pansy and Citrus Butterfly. We also came across African Pied Wagtail, Three-banded Plover, Spectacled Weaver and White-browed Coucal. But it was the secretive and often elusive African Finfoot that quickly crossed the narrow river to take shelter under dense overhanging shrubbery that got us all excited.

We moved on through some shrub woodlands which had troops of baboons, Black-tipped Mongoose, Bushbuck, Klaus’s Cuckoo, Brown-crowned Tchagra, and Augur Buzzards along with African Palm Swifts and Black Saw-wings. In adjacent marshy areas we saw huge Marsh Cane Rats feeding in front of their dens, Grey Crowned Cranes, Egyptian Geese, Yellow-billed Ducks, Saddle-billed Stork and Defassa Waterbuck.

During our picnic lunch at the visitor’s centers, a family group of D’Arnaud’s Barbets, White-bellied Go-away Birds, Speckled Pigeons, Speckled Mousebirds and Grey-capped Social Weavers kept us entertained. With a storm fast approaching we headed back to the lodge, picking up Nyanza Swifts, Bateleur and African Harrier Hawk en route.

Day 8 / Sunday August 28 – Mweiga; Thompson’s Falls; Lake Naivasha Country Club

We were traveling across the plains towards the Aberdare range by 8 am. On the way, we saw many rhinos and a few birds such as Wattled Starling, Long-tailed Widowbird, Pied Crow, Rufous Sparrow, pipits, Namaqua Dove, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Black-headed Oriole. The morning was overcast and, as usual, the driving was interesting due to the need to dodge potholes and the many bicycles that were also on the road. Since it was Sunday, everyone was out and about, heading to church or just hanging out - a lot of the kids were dressed in their Sunday best - hats and all!

We stopped at Mweiga Quarry a couple of hours later where we met Paul, the local bird authority or keeper of the roost. Guiding us down to the quarry to search for Mackinder’s Cape Eagle Owl, we came across Red-knobbed Coot, Yellow-billed Duck, Great Cormorant, Hammerkop, Little Grebe, Rock Thrush and Yellow-crowned Canary. But we saw no owl. Paul took us up the road to his father’s farmland, down a steep embankment, across a wet field and located the owl sitting out in the open on a rock ledge on the escarpment. Our next stop was at Thompson Falls where Ben found an amazingly well camouflaged Von Honnel Chameleon.

We eventually made it to the Naivasha Country Club, which is at 6200’ in elevation. We were greeted with wash towels and juice, got settled in, and then had lunch out on the lawn, with an entertaining juggler/contortionist/comedian and Scared Ibis wandering about. Naivasha is on the eastern edge of Kenya’s Rift Valley and is one of the freshwater lakes, along with Baringo, that has a tremendous diversity of species. The open acacia trees on the grounds held a number of species including Laughing and Ring-necked Dove, a large group of Superb Starlings taking a bath, White-eyed Slaty and Paradise Flycatchers, Black-headed Oriole, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Spectacled and Red-headed Weavers, Tropical Boubou, Red-faced Crombec, a very co-operative Klaus’s Cuckoo, Black Cuckoo-Shrike, Grey Woodpecker and Amethyst Sunbird. As the trees gave way to the wetlands, we saw Blacksmith and Spur-winged Plovers circling the lake. Wildebeest, waterbuck and a hippopotamus also became obvious. The hippo was unusual since they normally feed at night. The guards kept a close eye on him and people were told to keep their distance. At each place we stayed we heard stories of animal-people encounters. Lions and hippos were the main culprits and neither are to be messed with.

Along the shoreline, Common Sandpiper, Ruff, Marabou, Grey-headed Gull and Great and Little Cormorants could all be seen with three or four Pied Kingfishers hovering near the water’s edge. Wire-tailed Swallows perched on boats while Malachite Kingfishers flashed by in a streak of blue. We took a boat out onto the lake where noisy Fish Eagles greeted us and Pink-backed and Great White Pelicans loafed on the edge of an island. We saw African Spoonbill, Wood Sandpiper, Hotentot Teal and Little Grebe. But it was the large group of hippos that was the highlight of the boat trip.

Day 9 / Monday August 29 – Lake Naivasha Country Club; Crescent Island; Nakuru NP

Fischer’s Lovebirds were nesting in the palm trees next to our rooms and at first light, they were beginning to stir. The noisy squawks of Hadada Ibis were also very evident.

We were at the lake and aboard our boat by 7:30 am. It was equipped with a small outboard motor in case we needed to make a quick get away from the hippos. The water was shallow near the shore which made it tough to photograph some species. Despite this fact, we got shots of Fish Eagle and Malachite Kingfisher, and saw Whiskered Tern, Red-billed Teal, Giant Kingfisher, Straky Seedeater, Gray-capped Warbler, Variable Sunbird and Hunter’s Cisticola.

Crescent Island adjoins the country club property. It is an exposed lip of a submerged volcanic crater which, because of its beauty and relative safety, was used extensively in the film “Out of Africa”. It is a vast open short grass plain dotted with stately Yellow-bark Acacia trees. We spent a couple of hours on the ‘island’ finding Brown Pari-
Day 10 / Tuesday August 30 – Nakuru

We were up early for breakfast and on the road for a game drive by 7:00. We were on the hunt for Leopard. It was a beautiful clear bright morning and, as we wound through the woods and grasslands, we saw large herds of Impala, some with Red-billed Oxpeckers on them. The oxpeckers are in the same family as starlings and they have a fondness for ticks, blood and all. While in a mammal’s ears, they help themselves to the wax which probably enhances their bright bill colors. Red- chested Cuckoo, a rather elusive canopy bird whose descending three note we heard often, showed well on this morning and Arrow-marked Babblers and Grey-backed Fiscals were also conspicuous. We came across a Broad-billed Roller, a small brown bird with large yellow bill, Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike, Hildebrandt’s Francolin, White-fronted Bee-eater and the ubiquitous Lilac-breasted Roller.

We saw the impressive Rothschild’s Giraffes for the first time on the trip along with a pair of Secretary Birds that were actively feeding on insects that had been kicked up by Common Zebras and Impalas. Eland is the largest of the antelope family and its small head seems disproportionate to its large body. We easily picked out these impressive beasts amongst all the other ungulates. Raptors included a pair of Lesser Spotted Eagles on a nest at the top of an acacia and a Gabar Goshawk which is a small dark woodland hawk. Another amazing sight was a Hammerkop’s nest which was about three feet in height with a large round opening on the side. It takes these birds a year to build a nest. Consequently, they only raise young every other year. Coming around a bend we caught a glimpse of a Leopard walking down the dirt track. It melted into the undergrowth but just that brief look was breathtaking. Although we followed its movement through the dense vegetation, we never got better looks at that animal.

The afternoon game drive continued right where the morning run left off. While watching a family of White Rhinos, we spotted a Leopard walking across the short grassland towards the road and us! We watched as it crossed in front of us and headed into the shrubbery. While all this was going on the Impalas and gazelles were fully alert making sure they knew exactly where the predator was.

We finished the day again on the lakeshore surrounded by noisy flamingos and pelicans - just breathtaking. After adding Ringed Plovers and Black-winged Stilts to the list, we headed back to the lodge for dinner after which we listened and danced to an excellent local African choir.

Day 11 / Wednesday August 31 – Nakuru; Lake Baringo Club

Our final game run in this wonderful park produced Yellow-throated Longclaw, which looks just like a meadowlark. We saw White-crested Helmet Shrike, an assortment of starlings, flycatchers, fiscals and doves, Augur Buzzard, three Yellow-breasted Apalis and a dozen Green Wood...
A Birding Safari to Kenya...continued

Hoopoes foraging as a family group. We saw Tawny-flanked Prinia, Black-headed Oriole, rattling Cisticola, a pair of Black Cuckoo-Shrikes, Spectacled Weavers building a nest and White-browed Robin Chats. Despite the bright sunny day and the fact that we saw all the usual animals including a Spotted Hyena crossing in front of us, we were unable to locate the Leopard that had been spotted in the area with two cubs. We did have one last look at the flamingos and in the process found a dead Marabou Stork that was about to be eaten by the other Marabous! We headed north on what were pretty good roads, passing agricultural areas, farms, yucca plantations, wool factories and numerous roadside honey stalls. Our smooth road ended and the last hour was a mixed blessing which afforded opportunities to see Leopard Tortoise, Black-headed Heron, Yellow-billed Stork, White-faced Whistling Duck and Black-chested Snake Eagle along with the very common White-browed Sparrow Weavers. We found out that one of the bridges to the Lake Baringo Club was washed out and we had to take a detour through the bush to get back to the road.

Lake Baringo is a freshwater lake situated in the lower elevation of the Rift valley some 250 kilometers northwest of Nairobi, Lake Naivasha, the grounds are lush with stately trees and mowed lawns that lead to the water which is buffered with a broad band of reeds. The termite mounds are shaped differently in this part of the country due to increased warmth and lower elevation. They are tall chimney like structures, some as high as 15' and they are built to keep the termites cool. They are a favorite feeding place of Red-and-yellow Barbets.

The large feeding station, basically a stone table, had Northern Masked, Jackson's Golden-backed and White-browed Buffalo Weavers visiting it. On the grounds while having lunch, we saw Beautiful Sunbird, Spotted Morning Thrush, D'Arnoud's Barbet and Northern White-crowned Shrike. An afternoon walk of the grounds produced Ruppell's Long-tailed Starling, Red-billed Quelea (arguably the world's most numerous bird), Nubian Woodpecker, Red-fronted Barbet, Brown Babbler, Bristled-crowned Starling, Fan-tailed Raven, Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird, Lesser Honeyguide, and some Jackson's Hornbills that were nesting in the car park and pecking the mirrors of cars. We also saw White-browed Sparrow Weaver, Hunter's Sunbird on yellow oleander, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Cardinal Woodpecker, Rufous Chatterer, Fischer's Lovebird, Little Weaver, Little Bee-eater, Verreaux Eagle Owl and Red-chested Cuckoo.

Lake Baringo itself was a dirty brown color due to an iron imbalance, but that did not stop the birds and Nile Crocodiles. There where a couple of kids in the water fishing (yes, with crocs) and at this spot, we saw African Pied Wagtail, Black Crake, Pygmy and Malachite Kingfisher, Squacco Heron and a Chestnut Weaver. Some after hours (night time) grunting outdoors turned out to be a hippo on the lawn.

Day 12 / Thursday September 1 – Lake Baringo; Lake Bogoria

Heading down to the dock at 7:15 a.m., we found the boardwalk (wooden pallets) broken in a number of places. It was also splattered with dung as was our boat! This was the work of a hippo. “Dung showering” as it is known, is the result of a ritual between territorial bulls. We met our boatmen Peter, and he took us for a two hour boat ride. It was very tough to do photography since the wind was strong and there were enough waves to rock the boat. We got great looks at Red Bishop, Yellow Bishop, Madagascar Bee-eater, and Lesser Masked, Northern Masked and Jackson’s Golden-backed Weavers. The males do the nest building and then attract the females by clinging upside down on the nest while they flutter their wings. If the female is not impressed by the abode, she’ll rip it apart and move on and he’ll start over again. The boatman had a fish and he was able to whistle in Fish Eagle that came and took the fish out of the water. A Zitting Cisticola called continuously as we glided near the water’s edge. Barn Swallows covered a couple of dead shrubs that stuck out of the water and we spotted Comb Ducks flying away from us. On the grassy edge, Great and Little Egrets where joined by African Spoonbills, African Jacanas, Squacco Herons, White-faced Whistling Ducks and a Long-toed Plover, the largest of the wetland plovers. We slowed down on the home stretch to look at a Green-backed Heron, Yellow-billed Stork, Malachite Kingfisher, an African Darter and we found a Nile Monitor basking on a rock.

We headed south to Lake Borogia in the afternoon and saw a number of species en route including Cape Hare, Red-billed Hornbill, Beautiful Sunbird, Green Sandpiper, Northern Crombec, Ostrich and Marabous. Since this is a reserve, the natives are allowed limited use of the land. There were goats everywhere near the park entrance as we drove towards the edge of the alkaline lake, we stopped briefly to help some Germans who had a flat tire.

Rufous-crowned Roller and two Silverbirds allowed a close approach and there were about a thousand Lesser Flamingos hanging with a few Greater Flamingos on the lake. We saw Marsh and Common Sandpipers and we had a flock of Cape Teal resting along a channel. As we continued south, we found Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove and Pygmy Batis. We finally reached the hot springs and geysers which were impressive with the Siracho Escarpment as a backdrop. The lakes high level of salinity offered only limited feeding opportunities for most water birds. Small pools in the sand next to the hot springs had a few Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, Ruffs, Kittlitz’s and Ringed Plovers. On the way back in the afternoon, we spotted an odd looking grebe on the water. It turned out to be an albino Black-necked (Eared) Grebe. Mammals and a large Leopard Tortoise were the highlights on way out. We also saw Zebra, Impala, Rock Hyrax, Vervet Monkey, Klipspringer and several Greater Kudo which is a shy and secretive beautifully patterned antelope with long twisting horns.

Day 13 / Friday September 2 – Lake Baringo; Kakamega

We returned to the lake for another boat ride first thing in the morning. The goal was to try for better photos of some of the species. The numbers of swallow had doubled with 100s being seen along with White-rumped Swifts. We were after the Goliath Heron and found one that was pretty cooperative. It took a little while to get a shot of the Red Bishops since they kept perching in awkward spots but persistence paid off. A Cuckoo Hawk was a surprise as it flew towards us, impressing her’ll rip it apart and move on and he’ll start over again. The boatman had a fish and he was able to whistle in Fish Eagle that came and took the fish out of the water. A Zitting Cisticola called continuously as we glided near the water’s edge. Barn Swallows covered a couple of dead shrubs that stuck out of the water and we spotted Comb Ducks flying away from us. On the grassy edge, Great and Little Egrets where joined by African Spoonbills, African Jacanas, Squacco Herons, White-faced Whistling Ducks and a Long-toed Plover, the largest of the wetland plovers. We slowed down on the home stretch to look at a Green-backed Heron, Yellow-billed Stork, Malachite Kingfisher, an African Darter and we found a Nile Monitor basking on a rock.

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Next up was a visit to the base of the Baringo Basalt Cliffs, a stone’s throw from the Club. This is a stone scrub habitat where we picked up a young local friend of Ben’s named Francis whose motto was “All birds are available (for a fee)”. It was mid-morning it was probably the hottest part of our trip. Here we found Hemprich’s and Jackson’s Hornbills, Northern Brubru, Bristle-crowned Starlings, Northern Puffback, Eurasian Kestrel, Diederik’s Cuckoo, Black and White Cuckoo, Brown-tailed Rock Chat, Cliff Chat, Rufous-crowned Roller and three

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We saw a new species for the trip, a Dark Chanting Goshawk on a telephone wire as we left Baringo. By 11:15 we were on the road and on our way to Kakamega, climbing from 900 to 2700 meters. The Rift Valley is a 6400 km crack in the earth’s crust between two sunken faults. It stretches from Jordan to South Africa and here in this part of Southern Kenya, the valley is at its narrowest. We had to drive up over the eastern escarpment of the Rift Valley and then back down into it where the acacias were thick with lots of goats and cows. Then we took the slow and steady climb up the western side. It was much cooler and the change in the temperatures was amazing. We stopped and had a packed lunch at one of the highest points, with Fan-tailed Ravens, Brown-chested Snake Eagle and Gambaga Flycatcher. This was the beginning of the western highlands where all the world class long distance Kenyan runners come from. Maize seems to be the predominant crop growing here and, as we neared Kakamega, tea plantations were very evident. A stop in a marshy area produced Hartlaub’s Marsh Widowbird, Fan-tailed Widowbird, ibis and herons.

After five hours we reached the forest which is virtually an island in a sea of agricultural lands. The road was good until we entered the forest where it became dirt and then it really got hairy because it started to rain. We passed a truck that had slid into the ditch. The road was packed with people that either rode their bikes, or walked and herded cows and goats. It was a zoo. We almost hit a man getting off one of the little buses because he ran out in front of it as we were overtaking it!

Situated in western Kenya along the northern edge of the Lake Victoria basin at an altitude of about 1500 meters, Kakamega is all that is left of a rainforest which once spanned the equator from the west coast to the east coast of the continent. The National Reserve now encompasses 36 square kilometer, only a fraction of the original forested area. It has a unique collection of central African lowland species as well some highland species. It is also Kenya’s last refuge for the Grey Parrot, where numbers are now counted in single digits. Specialties include Shelley’s Greenbul, Red-headed Bluebill and Blue-headed Bee-eater, all of which we saw well. We headed through the forest where, under overcast and darkening skies, we saw Black and White Colobus Monkeys, Olive Baboons and Syke’s Monkeys along with Black and White Casqued Hornbills.

Day 14 / Saturday September 3 – Kakamega Forest

Someone parked behind the van, blocking it in, so we had to wake up everyone before breakfast to find the culprit. We were met by our local guides when we reached the forest center and we walked the trails, some of which were wet and muddy. We saw the typical rainforest habitat, dense under story and tall canopy. The hornbills were seen again and we added Red-legged Sun Squirrels and Red-tailed Monkeys to the list. Some of the additional bird species we saw included Sender-billed, Yellow-whiskered and Cabana’s Greenbul, Dark-backed and Black-billed Weaver, White-headed Saw-wing, Brown-chested Alethe, Blue-headed and White-throated Bee-eater, Ugandan Woodland Warbler, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, African Thrush, Yellow, Chestnut and Common Wattle-eye, Petit’s Cuckoo Shrike, Snowy-headed Robin Chat, Grey-headed Negro Finch, Olive, Green, Collared and Green-throated Sunbird, White-chinned Prinia, Least Honeyguide, Black and White Mannikin, Grey-throated Barbet, African Shrike Tanager and Northern Black Flycatcher. It was really a great pre-breakfast walk!

We ate at the Rondo Retreat and, although we were unable to stay there, it seemed, without a doubt, to be THE place to stay in the area. Set deep in the heart of the forest, it is a gorgeous place with beautiful grounds that produced Vieillot’s Black Weaver and Stuhlmann’s Starling along with many species we had already seen. Late morning, we walked a tiny bit of their extensive grounds, first in the manicured section and then along the well groomed path through the forest down to the pond. Double-toothed Barbet was nice to see as it bounced back and forth across the road near the entrance gate. We added White-chinned Prinia and African Blue Flycatcher and we came across a large rotund reddish-brown toad. As we watched the toad, we were serenaded by Emerald Cuckoos and we saw Grey-winged Robin Chat, Brown-chested Alethe and Red-headed Bluebill. Chubb’s Cisticola (I love their names, they tell it as it is) and Red-chested Cuckoo were also about and, as we searched the upper canopy, we were lucky to find two Great Blue Turacos. This large arboreal species can be hard to locate since its blue and green plumage blends into the foliage very well.

We took a walk after our picnic lunch but it was a lot quieter. We were able to dig out some good stuff such as Western Black-headed Oriole, Square-tailed Drongo, duetting Yellow-billed Barbets, Equatorial Akalat, female Pink-footed Puffback, the aptly named Grobosek Weaver and another forest weaver, the striking Red-headed Malimbe.

Up to this point we had not seen many butterflies but here at least, we found a good variety including many Layman, several Green-tailed Swallowtails, False Chief, Catana criba, Elegant Acraea (a clearwing), an Eggfly and a Morpho looking species. Most of the species still remain to be identified.

We stopped at a bridge where Little Swifts were hawking insects over the river and Yellow-backed Weavers were nest building as an Augur Buzzard watched on.

Day 15 / Sunday September 4 – Kisumu at Lake Victoria; Masai Mara

We got up in the morning and even the waiter greeted us by saying, “I know that you had a bad night”. There was an all night party with a DJ blaring out tunes! We headed south to Kisumu on Lake Victoria and Dunga Beach. It was a one hour drive on good roads, through lush green agricultural areas. Healthy stands of trees surrounded agricultural plots and there was a generous number of speed bumps. Most of the villages had busy roadside kiosks, shops and markets full of pedestrians and the fourteen passenger taxis and bikes that are everywhere in the country. It came as no surprise that it was the women and children that did most of the work, the former often carrying considerable loads on their heads. All the villages looked alike with similar stores, kiosks and stands consisting of fruit, vegetables, milk bars and churches next to batteries, tire repair, welding, barbers, used shoe shops, salon boutiques and my favorite, the Joy Ride School of Driving. The names of the hotels were always amusing, especially the very plain two room Hilton Hotel!

En route to Kisumu we saw a few Brown Babblers and Black Kites along with a long tailed Pin-tailed Whydah. Kisumu is on the very eastern edge of Lake Victoria and along the way to Dunga Swamp and Hippo Point. This is where the Lou tribe lives and they are fishermen. They had the catch from the previous night which the ladies were cleaning on the edge of the lake, while lots of Hammerkops, Yellow-billed Storks, Sacred Ibis and Great and Little Egrets looked on patiently wait-
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ing for free meals of the fish innards. While we photographed, there was some loud preaching coming from the church as seems to be the local custom. Some preachers even use bull horns and the singing was very good! Along with the mentioned waders, African Jacanas, Marsh Sandpipers and a Greenshank were feeding along the rocky shoreline. An African Openbill Stork was a distance away working along a sand spit, male and female Diederik’s Cuckoos and Bronzed Mannikins perched on the wires. Woodland Kingfishers sat on bare snags, several Red-chested Sunbirds moved about various nectar sources and Red-cheeked Crowned Bles and Speckled Mousebirds were in attendance. Near the church in the scrub, a Black-headed Gonolek and Swamp Flycatchers obliged by posing for photographs while Northern Brown-throated Weavers perched on the masts of the fishing boats.

We were on our way by mid morning and heading south towards Kisii. We saw Black-headed Herons, Sacred Ibis and White-faced Whistling Ducks, African Spoonbills, Hammerkops and egrets amongst the rice paddies. Kisii is a densely populated rural community with rich soils that have been extensively cultivated. Banana plantations seem to be the favored crop. After Kisii the roads became pot holey and as we went to lower elevations, the temperatures went up.

We picked a spot in the middle of nowhere for lunch. Under thickening clouds we saw Purple Grenadiers, Yellow Bishop and twenty or so Eurasian Bee-eaters. As we made the final push towards the Mara from the west and came over the Esoi Oloolo Escarpment, we began to see Common Zebras and Olive Baboons as well as Blue-headed Tree Agamas. The Masai are highly nomadic people moving their cattle from place to place in this semi-arid environment. We came across a small group of a dozen or so warriors with spears, make up, masks and all in full battle cry. They were running up the road having just come from an initiation ceremony which may well have included stalking a Lion. As we descended to the gates of the Mara Conservancy at about 5000’ above sea level, we got our first look at the landscape. Mara means dotted plains and it is well named as the vast sea of undulating grassland plains in front of us was dotted with acacia trees. Being part of the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem, it is one of the world’s great wildernesses.

The excitement built as we waited to enter the park. We saw Impala, warthog and buffalo along with waxbills, gneradiers, Red-necked Spurfowl and a subspecies of the D’Arnaud’s Barbet, the Usambiro Barbet, which some consider a separate species. Once inside the park, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Rufous-naped Lark, Grassland Pipit, Lilac-breasted Roller, Yellow-rumped Seedleeter, Yellow-fronted Canary, Northern Anteater Chat, Greater Blue-eared Starling and Egyptian Goose were all a common sight. We also picked up Sooty Chat, Stout Cisticola, Yellow-billed Stork, White-backed Vulture and Tawny Eagle. With storms approaching from both sides, we stopped to watch a female Saddled-billed Stork, with its bright yellow eye, wading in the water while her two offspring waited on the banks.

Shortly before arriving at the excellent Serena Lodge which is set on a hill above the Mara River, the heavens opened and a storm raged for a while. We checked in and went to our rooms with umbrellas, but we still got soaked and the paths were flooded. By the time we were through with dinner, the storm had passed and we listened to the sounds of zebra baying and crickets and frogs calling. We watched Montane Nightjars catch moths in the spotlights that lit up the grassland below our room and an African Marsh Owl silently glided across the opening for our last species of the day. We looked forward with great anticipation to what the next day held.

Day 16 / Monday September 5 – Masai Mara

We left early for our first game drive. Sadly, it was overcast and everything was wet but at least it did not rain again. In this section of the Mara, we were allowed to go off road with the vehicles but were required to stay inside of them. We found Brown Babblers, Common Drongo, Banded Martin, Crowned Plover, Black-bellied Bustard, Wattled Starling, Zitting and Winding Cisticola, Ruppell’s Griffon Vulture and Secretary Bird.

The mammals just got better and better. Wildebeest stretched out over the plains as far as the eye could see. Numbering in the 1000s, they were without a doubt the clown princes of the plains. They were very playful, made up of what appeared to be a hodgepodge of animal parts - a horse’s tail, grasshopper’s head, warthog’s mane, goat’s beard and buffalo’s horns. Large numbers of Zebras dotted the plains and were often seen with the Wildebeest. We came across one male Lion and four females sleeping with a Wildebeest next to them. We had missed the kill, which usually takes place at night, but got to watch them at very close quarters as they rested. They had not eaten any of the kill, no doubt exhausted from the chase, and they eventually moved out of the sun to get under the shade of a nearby tree.

The vultures were circling in the sky, aware of the fresh kill but they could do nothing about it until it is “opened”. The Lappet-faced’s bill is large enough to tear open a kill, but rarely does it do so unless it is absolutely has to. It prefers to let the Lions do the work. Ruppell’s and White-backed, along with Lappet-faced, have long necks which enable them to feed deeper inside the body. The vultures with shorter necks such as the Hooded, have to wait their turn and take what is left. In all, we counted twenty-three vultures and a Bateleur. Within 48 hours, that kill would be stripped clean.

When looking at the landscape, one can not believe the shear number of prey, mainly ungulates, that are available to the predators. It is very impressive. We saw a new mammal, the Topi, and as is often the case with antelopes, we found them in single sex herds. Being a member of the same family as Hartebeest and Wildebeest, their front legs are taller than their hind legs. They are built this way for galloping. They seem to prefer the shorter grasses and can be seen standing with their long front legs on termite mounds, either proclaiming their territory or keeping a lookout out for predators. Gazelles, both Thompson’s and Grant’s as well as Impala, are everywhere.

Nineteen elephants were by the airstrip not far from our lodge. Broad-tailed Warbler, Fischer’s Sparrow-Lark, Barn Swallow, Common Bulbul, Rufous Sparrow, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Rose-breasted Longclaw, weavers, and a number of raptors including Tawny Eagle, Bateleur and a White-headed Vulture, rounded out the morning’s avian species.

On our afternoon drive, we saw Red-billed Oxpeckers, this time on zebras. We witnessed the aggressive threat display of Crowned Plovers and saw Slaty-colored Boubou as well. We were lucky to see a pair of nocturnal Bat-eared Foxes that had just come out of their burrow to begin their search for food. They seem to survive very well amongst herbivores, preferring to pick through dung piles for insects. A troop of about thirty Banded Mongoose appeared and scattered once they realized we were there. Another dung-pile forager, Red-necked Spurfowl, was also around. We had Pectoral-patch Cisticola, which was a new
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We drove down near the river to see if we could find any signs of a Wildebeest crossing. It had just rained and the drive was horrendous. It was nerve racking with some truly hair-raising moments. Some areas where very muddy, slippery and treacherous and we almost got stuck in the black mud. The van got caked in mud but our driver BK, a graduate of the Joy Ride Driving School, was able to master these roads and to the amazement of some of the other drivers, we all made it back in one piece.

Day 17 / Tuesday September 6 – Masai Mara

A dark Marico Sunbird, which is similar looking to a Purple-banded, was fluttering about the car park as we loaded up to head into the south-eastern part of the Mara. We took the lower river track towards the Mara Bridge and saw elephants browsing among the croton thickets and warthogs running from some unseen danger with their tails raised skywards. The phoebe-like call of Rufous-naped Larks resounded as we passed through short grasslands. Yellow-throated Longclaws were relatively common, and we came across a Yellow-mantled Widowbird along the way, too.

Within a short distance, the habitats changed and we were in very open short-grasslands dotted with small termite mounds. Billions and billions of termites provide protein for mongoose, rollers, bee-eaters, wheatears and nocturnal creatures such as aardwolves and aardvarks. They also provide nest chambers for hyenas, jackals and Bat-eared Foxes as well as lookouts for Cheetahs. And sure enough, Ben’s sharp eyes picked out a Cheetah on a mound and we are the first vehicle to spot her.

Though not one of the “Big Five”, Cheetah surely is one of the most sought after species. A daytime solitary hunter that only eats what it has killed, these cats can reach speeds of up to 65 mph but can not sustain it for more than a couple of hundred meters. It is the fastest mammal and it has twenty foot strides at full speed. The Cheetah’s main prey items are the smaller gazelles, Thompson’s being a favorite. Our Cheetah was surrounded by her many “tommys” and she no doubt had her mind set on making a kill. From her vantage point she searched for a gazelle that is close enough to strike as well as one that may not have been aware of her presence. She got into various positions; she would sit upright and lay down, she peered from behind the mound, checked out all the angles and finally descended upon a victim. She crouched low on the approach because in this open landscape, only surprise is out all the angles and finally descended upon a victim. She crouched low on the approach because in this open landscape, only surprise is going to make a fully exposed predator successful. Her steps and pace were cautious until she felt she was within striking distance. As she moved closer to her victim, it moved nonchalantly just little bit further away, obviously aware of Cheetah. It was cat-and-mouse game and it was breathtaking to watch, but with her prey aware of the situation, it meant that this hunt would be unsuccessful. That ended up to be the case after a half hearted chase that never reached maxi-

mum speed. As is often the case, as soon as one vehicle is seen to have spotted something, others come to investigate ‘what you have’ and by now we had a small gathering of vehicles. The Cheetah returned to the mound, came to drink from a small puddle of water and decided to investigate one of the land rovers by jumping onto the bonnet, playing with the wipers and checking out those taking pictures of her from the open top roof. Only with a Cheetah would one be allowed this close since the results would have been far different with either a Lion or Leopard.

We moved on after three quarters of an hour and spotted a Lion lying on a mound and one higher up on a hillside. As we went around the hill, we discovered that a Lioness had just killed a young Lion and the rangers would not let us look at it until they had checked it out. More than likely this happened because the young Lion was rejected by the pride but refused to leave the area. We passed zebras drinking and huge herds of Wildebeest – the numbers were breath taking. We saw a bachelor herd of Eland that was skittish and would not allow us to get very close. As we headed onwards, we looked down to the river and saw a massive gathering of Wildebeest. This could only mean one thing. They were getting ready to make the most dangerous crossing of their lives and we were about to witness part of what is arguably the greatest game show of them all - the Wildebeest migration.

Every summer, waves of zebras, Thompson’s Gazelles and Wildebeest head out of the Serengeti and into the greener pastures of the Mara during the dry season. Once in the Mara, they have several rivers they have to cross before finishing their journey. As we anxiously waited for 5000 of the Wildebeest to cross, we jostled with rangers and others for the best possible view. The animals started their descent down the bank along well worn paths and then jumped into the river and began the desperate swim across to the near side while being swept down stream. A large number got across. Three hippos swim by and the Wildebeests stopped crossing at that point. They faced danger from the swollen river as well as being crushed or attacked by Nile Crocodiles.

We were waiting for such an encounter, but once most had crossed, the few hundred that remained backed off. Though we could not see it coming, they noticed a giant crocodile working its way towards them and decided that they could wait for another time. At this point, a lot of them started to return to the plain to feed and since no more seemed in the mood to cross, we moved on. What an amazing phenomenon and how lucky we were to be there at the right time to see it.

We spotted a hippo up on the embankment of the river. He was walking along the top trying to find a place to descend to the river when he came across a land rover that was in his way. He got very upset and ruffled and went charging back along the bank. This was another great interaction to watch as it played out. A Grey Kestrel flew out of a tree
next to the van and across the river and we came across Singing Cisti-
cola, Grey-headed Kingfisher and flocks of Yellow-rumped Seedeaters
along with a Martial Eagle sitting high in a majestic tree next to the
river. We noticed a Vervet Monkey frozen only meters away from the
eagle and realized this was another “who was going to be more patient”
moment. We had to move on though, so we drove through the herds of
Wildebeest, picking up a very plain looking Buff-bellied Warbler at the
gates to the Mara triangle where we also saw a dead Wildebeest floating
down the Mara River. At one stage, we ventured into Tanzania, but
there was little fanfare - only a single stone column marking the border.

The grounds of the Keekorek Lodge were very nice and spacious with
many birds about including Bare-faced Go-way Bird, Northern Brubru,
African Hoopoe, Yellow-fronted Canary, Cordon Bleu, Hildebrandt’s
Starling, Marico and Hunter’s Sunbird, Paradise Flycatcher and Nubian
Woodpecker. There was a board walk down to the hippo pool which
was a waterhole with a “Hippo Bar”. You could get drinks, rest and
relax there and watch whatever may be at the waterhole, namely hip-
pos.

As we chatted with our neighbors in the next room and looked at some
of their photos, black clouds rolled in again along with thunder and
lightning. By 4 pm when we were due to go on a game drive, it was
pouring. We headed out anyway and soon saw Spotted Thick-knee,
Black-bellied Bustard, Marabou and Ostrich. We also found a pride of
eleven Lions resting in the drizzle. They seemed restless and a couple
had their eyes set on gazelles feeding a hundred meters away. Then, to
our amazement, a female took off and separated a young “tommy”
from its mother and got a kill. The rest of the pride, mainly youngsters,
demolished it in no time - all very exciting. One cub had a bad limp
and had trouble keeping up with the rest of the pride. Sadly, we figured
it would not survive very long.

We headed down to see a Cheetah that was tagged on the ear - #155.
She must just have just eaten too because she was cleaning herself and
you could still see traces of blood on her. Her belly was very large and
we though that she was pregnant. It was amazing to see two Cheetahs
in one day - apparently there are less than thirty left in the Mara. By the
time we headed back to the lodge, the rains had passed and we finished
up by seeing a nice baby Waterbuck.

We were not in a fenced compound so there were Masai guards at night
to escort you to your room. This was because the animals, especially
hippos, come in very close to the rooms.

Day 18 / Wednesday September 7 – Masai Mara
After breakfast we watched a group of about thirty Little Swifts feeding
in a tight formation. Our guide eventually showed up with the excuse
that a pride of Lions spent the night around and under the van. Some
gentle prodding was necessary to get them to move.

Our next destination was the Intrepids tented camp. We looked for
Cheetahs that had been reported basking the day before but we could
not find them. We did, however, get great looks at a Brown Snake Eagle
and Striped Kingfisher before coming across three Lions on a Wilde-
beest kill. There were a lot of kills to be seen as we drove along since
the food supply was plentiful due to migration.

We continued through an area of brush thickets dominated by crotons,
brown olive and teclea. This area is known as Kissinger - named after
the secretary of state, who so famously got stuck here a few decades
ago. We paused to view Green Pigeon, rollers, oxpeckers, White-headed
Barbet, Black-shouldered Kite and giraffes. We turned a corner only to
be confronted by an elephant and her baby. She made a move towards
us and our guide reacted by putting his foot down. Clearly, he wanted
avoid a potentially devastating outcome. Further on we saw several
vans all stopped at something, so we headed in that direction. When we
pulled up, they said that they just saw a Leopard. We waited and then
scouted out the area. When we returned to the original spot, a striking
male Leopard walked out of the bushes and down the hill. It passed
between the vehicles just a few feet in front of us, and disappeared into
the bush.

We saw Cocqui Francolin, Fischer’s Sparrow Lark and Secretary Bird
before reaching the Talek gate and, once there, a couple of Red-faced
Crombees and a Chin-spotted Batis were seen in the acacias shading the
camp building. We passed hundreds of Topi’s, another Yellow-mantled
Widowbird and a male Pallid Harrier quartering over the tracks. This
was not a direct route, but was the only way to get to Intrepids.

We arrived at the Tented Camp by 1pm and were greeted by the man-
ger Tom and the Masai naturalist Joseph, who was very friendly and
informative. We were taken to our tent which was next to the river. No
keys, just zippers. The tent sat on a concrete floor and it had concrete
walls to the bathroom ...but the rest was just a tent. There were carpets,
furnishings and two mosquito draped beds - very pleasant.

The sky looked ominous with very black storm clouds and rain in the
distance as we left for our afternoon game drive. There was an airstrip
right outside the lodge and as we headed out the gates, we saw vans on
the runway. The were viewing a pride of sleepy Lions in a variety of
poses. Since we had no other direction in which to go, we headed into
the storm. Scouring the area, we spotted four massive turkey-sized
Southern Ground Hornbills moving through the very tall grass. At first,
only the heads were visible, so we maneuvered onto another track to get
better looks. They were obliging as they combed the grass as a family
group looking for anything they could find.

Further down the road we came across many vehicles watching Lions
mate. This was our first adult Lion with a mane and was it ever
impressive. We arrived just as they finished mating so we thought that we had missed it. But in reality, there was still a great deal of unfinished business. Once the female comes into estrus, usually for three days, the male will mate with her up to 150
times, making sure that she never leaves his side during this time.
Within five minutes, the female moved, he followed, she lay down and
they mated. Within ten seconds it was over and both collapsed ex-
hausted and fell asleep. He had a second female in attendance and we
figured he would more than likely mate with her in the coming days.

A Birding Safari to Kenya...continued
A Birding Safari to Kenya...continued

Life is good in the pride and it is good to be the king.

It was hard to pull away from such an event but we left them to it, and headed down where we came across a giraffe in the river. We had a different perspective being on the embankment and looking down on the animal. Five of its friends were further down the river and obviously were concerned. They paced about until the one in the water found a path to ascend back onto the plains and join the others. We found the pride of Lions again at the airstrip on our way back to the lodge. There were quite a few cubs in this pride and they were mischievous, chewing on ropes and playing around.

During dinner, which was outdoors under a thatched roof, we had a pair of Greater Galagos or Bush babies, one black and the other white. They wandered about the beams looking for handouts. We were also treated to a traditional Masai warrior dance. We expected them to be tall, but few of them reached six foot. It was amazing to see how high they were able to jump. Sleeping in a tent allows you to hear all the noises of the night and we were regularly awoken by the screaming of the hyraxes.

Day 19 / Thursday September 8 – Masai Mara

We are serenaded by the rich whistled phrases of White-browed Robin Chats on our way to an early breakfast. Grey-headed Sparrows, Hildebrandt’s Starling and Hildebrandt’s Francolin were at the feeders, while a Common (or Brown-throated) Wattle-eye sang in the trees above.

We started early with Crowned and Wattled Plover, Ostrich, White-bellied Bustard, Fawn-colored Lark, Brown Parrot, Woodland Kingfisher and a host of other common species, including the same four Southern Ground Hornbills that we saw the afternoon before. The mating Lions were going at it, so we spent a little time to see if the frequency had slowed down. It hadn’t.

“Big Cats” - the BBC film crew, were in the Mara to film Leopards and they were at the river looking for one that they had briefly spotted at first light. Leopards are shy predators and are elusive. In spite of our lookout positions, the film crew was having no success in relocating the cat. Further up the river we saw Olive Baboons eating the remains of an Impala. There were a dozen White-headed Barbets, Black-backed Puffbacks and some Speckled Mousebirds busy feeding in a large fig tree and, along the water course, Grey-headed Kingfishers were in evidence. A large mixed congregation of vultures assembled on a hillside, but upon further investigation, we could not find any kill. We figured it was probably a daily gathering to discuss the goings on in the Mara. When we got back to camp, we had seven Brown Babblers and a monster troop of Banded Mongoose pass through in high fashion as they searched for insects.

Our final afternoon game drive produced excellent looks at Yellow-throated Sandgrouse along with Black-winged Plover, a large flock of Red-capped Larks and Temminck’s Courser. It was a very overcast and windy day with occasional short bursts of late afternoon sun through the clouds. We came across the mating Lions again - this time at a different location. We also found a new antelope hunkered down in a wetland, the Bohor Reedbuck, with its short horns hooked forward.

As the light faded, we noticed a gathering of vehicles on one side of a narrow tributary to the Talek River. All eyes were on the opposite side. There was a pride of fourteen Lions and a herd of buffalo. The Lions seemed intent on taking down a buffalo. The buffalo were chasing the Lions. We watched in awe as the cats circled a buffalo and cornered it, only to have some of the buffalo herd come to its rescue and force the Lions back. The numbers seemed to favor the Lions, fourteen against one (most of the time), but the inexperience of the Lions showed. Younger members moved forward too quickly and lost the advantage of surprise. At times the buffalo seemed oblivious to the well camouflaged cats, and with careful stalking, the Lions were able to get within a few meters. But at the last moment the buffalo kept them at bay with a show of its formidable horns. The Lions were so close, yet so far. It was great fun to watch the action unfold but, sadly, the Lions were not able to make the kill while we were there. Groups are not allowed out after dark so we had get back lodge. We saw two Water Thick-knees in the headlights beside the track on the way back to the camp. What a great ending to a fantastic day.

Day 20 / Friday September 9 – Masai Mara; drive to Nairobi

We made an early start because of the long trek to Nairobi but also so that we could take over time as we headed out of the Mara. The sight of seven Lions wandering the plains at first light meant that they probably failed on their night hunt. Though very enthusiastic, the younger cats will sooner or later have to learn to be patient and wait for the experienced elders to show them how to hunt. There is an abundance of prey but only patience ensures success. The prey know that they are potential meals and act accordingly.

We passed Emerald Wood Dove, Ostrich, Plain-backed Pipit, Black-bellied and White-bellied Bustard and Wattled Plover before coming across a large gathering of vultures on a zebra kill. The group was dominated by Ruppell’s Vultures. There was a great deal of hissing and squawking going on as they jostled for position. They looked very ungainly as some even chased others away by making large hops. This gathering gave the birds a chance for social interaction and an opportunity to react to others of their own species. A couple of Lappet’s were in attendance, along with numerous White-backed and Hooded Vultures that had to wait for the others to have their fill before scouring for scraps.

Moving on, we got last looks at Helmeted Guineafowl, Sooty Chats and then had to bring the van to grinding halt as a Coqui Francolin decided to freeze in the middle of the track. I’m sure we could have picked it up and moved it to the other side, but we waited it out, and finally she moved of her own accord. We kept pace with a Spotted Hyena as it ran alongside the track and, after having enough of it, double backed and eventually left. Just as we had on the first day, we watched a Serval Cat at close quarters as it successfully stalked a rodent for five or ten minutes.

By 10:30, we reached the Sekanani Gate on the eastern side of the Mara where Masai women did their best get us to purchase their wares. If it weren’t for the fact that we’d picked up pretty much everything we really wanted, we may have been a bit more generous in our offers. I mean, how many bracelets or masks does one need to take home? If nothing else, the experience was something to remember.

On the last stretch of dirt road, we picked up Wire-tailed Swallows, Grey Hornbill, Rattling Cisticola, Grey-headed Silverbill, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Black-tipped Mongoose and Acacia Rats. The Lolita Plains which are scattered with short Whistling-thorn Acacias are well grazed by livestock. The only species we saw in this spot was a dark-morph Augur Buzzard. After lunch in Narok, we had Red-billed Fire-
A Birding Safari to Kenya...continued

finch, Black-headed Weavers, Cutthroats and, believe it or not, House Sparrows fighting for the last drop of water in a trough. We made one final search for Kori Bustards since that bird had somehow eluded us. We were watching Cape Rook, Grey Flycatcher, Northern Anteater Chat, and Crowned Cranes when Ben spotted our bird deep in a acacia filled field. We got terrific looks as it allowed us to walk up on it. Its size is astonishing and it blended into the landscape perfectly. Actually, there were two birds, one of which took off and flew a short distance away. At around forty pounds, this is the world's heaviest flying bird and it showed. As Ben would say, “So far so good”. You bet! More than satisfied, it was onto Nairobi….unfortunately.

South Eastern Arizona in Early September .... a Brit’s mission ...by Colin Campbell

Note: All photos by Colin Campbell, Copyright 2005

Long time DVOC member and DVOC/Nikon World Series of Birding team member Bill Stocku retired several years ago and he and his wife Joyce moved to Hereford, AZ. Bill’s yard, beautifully set out in keeping with the local landscape (none of this ”Must have a lawn” crap), looks out onto the spectacular Huachuca mountains. While marveling at this scenic beauty from his back porch, a Roadrunner scuttles past your feet, a bunch of Gambel’s Quail join the White-winged Doves, Canyon Towhees, and the Rock Squirrels feeding on the ground seed. A gorgeous male Anna’s Hummingbird joins the Black-chinned at the numerous sugar solution feeders, occasionally displacing Verdins and Bullock’s Orioles. In the evening, the hummers are replaced by Mexican freetailed bats, which consume the remaining sugar overnight.

Hey, that’s just on late arrival.

A visiting friend from the UK, let’s call him Phil ‘cos that’s his name, had spent much time in the US but had never been to se AZ. Don’t ask me why – it’s probably my favorite place in the US for birding. His aim for our week in AZ was to add at least 20 species to his US list, which stood at about 530. On our trip to AZ between September 3 to 10 this year with our host Bill Stocku, Phil added 43 life species. Here’s his story, written by me. He doesn’t know that yet.

COL and I (FIL – I can’t use PHL because…) met in PHL (see?) airport on 3 SEP in time to catch our flight to PHX. Sometimes these abbreviations get to you. On arrival, we rented a car for the week – the company had the perk of free bottles of water from two massive refrigerators. The water was warm. The ordered car was not available. We took an alternate car which was on the lot, answering with wild chirps to the salesmans’s remote, making me think I’d got my first lifer. After a few more lies from the guy, we set off southwards on I-80. It was

Roadrunner

Saguaro Cactus

December 1, 2005
Scott Barnes - Senior Naturalist, Sandy Hook (NJ) Bird Observatory
"The Birds and Happenings at Sandy Hook Bird Observatory".

What do you know about this, the newest bird observatory in the Mid-Atlantic States? Do you know what research is going on there? What hot birds appear there regularly? Do you know about Nantico Lake and nearby Coneskonk Point? Come hear Scott Barnes, the guy who is there full-time. He’ll give us all the answers.

Ornithological Study - Carl Perry: A Forensic Approach to the Presence of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers

December 15, 2005
Members’ Photography Night

We are renewing this time honored tradition so please submit your best for the contest. Duke it out with traditional top guns such as Steve Kerr for the prize. Categories are Birds, Birders, Flora & Fauna, and Landscapes.

Ornithological Study - Art McMorris: 2005 Peregrine Falcon Nesting Season in PA

January 5, 2006—Annual Meeting

Join us for a review of the area’s CBCs and for the election of officers, new council members and fellows. The meeting will be followed by refreshments.

January 19, 2006
Frank Haas—Adak: Gambling on Birds

Join us for what should be a great program on this hot, “new” birding destination!

Editor’s Note:

Meetings are held on the first and third Thursday of the month. Many things are in the works for our 2006 programs so keep an eye on the website, www.dvoc.org, where more info will be posted as it becomes available.
high noon and hot, hot, hot. But, unlike in my country where we can open the windows, we had air-conditioning in the car enabling one of us to catch up on sleep until the turn-off to the Red Rock Cattle Pens between Phoenix and Tucson. A bunch of Yellow-headed Blackbirds greeted us. Bill Stocku had informed us that Ruddy Ground-Doves had been here “in recent months” but not reported recently. After a swelling half hour, with Mourning, White-winged and Eurasian Collared-Doves ticked off in numbers, Colin spotted a male Ruddy and we left sweaty and happy. We had time to check out the Sweetwater wetlands area of Tucson – the marvelous transformation of sewage works settling ponds into a natural haven. Something most other cities should follow. Here, Cinnamon Teal, Gambel’s Quail, Sora (photographed, even!), Baird’s Sandpiper, Cactus Wren and Verdin introduced me to the western desert. Well after dark we found our way, sort of, to Bill’s domicile in Hereford. Wife and dog were ‘away’ so we enjoyed a single guys’ evening! Kielbasa which we’d bought from the Polish ghetto in Wilmington, DE was one of our passports and we enjoyed BBQing them and blethering! A great start, marred only by the fact that we’d both bought bottles of malt scotch as gifts for our host. He doesn’t drink scotch, something Colin should have told me or … was it subterfuge? Bloody crafty, these Scots, even pseudo-Scots like him.

I was up early, anxious to see what was in Bill’s yard with its array of feeding devices. Bill was already out, replenishing, changing, cleaning … apparently as with every morning … Gamble’s Quail, Roadrunner, Black-chinned and Anna’s Hummers, Verdin, Cactus and Bewick’s Wrens, Curve-billed Thrasher, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock’s Oriole, Lesser Goldfinch, Rock Squirrel … a heck of a list … and so totally different from Colin’s yard birds. The latter appeared an hour later, looking grumpy and asking what’s for breakfast. Bill said ‘self-service, you bum, let’s go birding’. Bill’s estimable plan was to check out the becards at Patagonia as it was figured they may be fledging soon, checking the desert grasslands en route. Stops at Upper Elgin Road and Las Cienegas gave us, in the beautiful stillness and tranquility of the morning desert, Black-throated, Grasshopper, Cassin’s and Botteri’s Sparrows and flocks of Lark Bunting. Cruising through Sonoita to Patagonia Rest Stop, we marveled at the superlative sight of singing Common Poorwills, one of which obligingly perched 20 feet from us on a road sign. What a way to end another spectacular day! Needless to say, a wee refreshment was enjoyed later!

The next day was to be the Canyon day – after all, Aztec Thrushes had been reported in recent weeks in a couple of these spectacular places. Bill’s Nissan X-Terra made short work of the long, hairy climb to the campground atop Carr Canyon. On the way, Canyon Wren, Hutton’s Vireo, the first of several Nashville Warblers along with Black-throated Gray, Grace’s and a surprising Black-and-white Warbler and the gorgeous Painted Redstart were picked out. The view from the top was amazing, lacking only in certain needed thrushes. Descending the long rough track back into the valley we ventured into Lutz Canyon and really lucked out as Bill spotted us an owl … yes, a Spotted Owl. Very confiding, we moved slowly and gently to obtain good photos despite the under-canopy gloom. Our next Canyon was Miller’s and, after a Zone-tailed Hawk circled overhead, Tom Beatty set us up at the hummingbird feeders at the upper cabins. They were alive with Magnificent, Broad-tailed, Black-chinned, Rufous and Blue-throated Hummers, but the stars were Calliope and a resplendent male White-eared – almost a life bird for Colin who’d forgotten what this bird looked like on first viewing in 1991. Just time to back off and race to Ramsey Canyon where, just before they closed for the day, the Berryline Hummingbird appeared a couple of times. This was one spectacular hummer day and, with the owl, was another reason to celebrate late into the night. Only to be woken ….

We made a very early start on the 6th since we had to get to California Gulch before the birds shut up. The paved road to near Nogales and the long drive out along the unique Ruby Road followed by a mile hike down into the Gulch was several hours from Bill’s house. What a remote, gorgeous canyon! A male Varied Bunting kicked things off well, but Colin and I were both in the wrong places when Bill called the mega-bird – Five-striped Sparrow! After six hours or so, we succumbed, but the multiple Northern Beardless Tyrannulets, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Dusky and Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Plumbeous Vireo, Rock Wrens, Black-tailed Gnatchatcher, Crissal Thrashers, Hepatic Tanagers, Rufous-winged Sparrows and Hooded Oriole made the trip one heck of good value! On re-emerging into some sort of civilization, we had time to head up to Madera Canyon via Continental (Rufous-crowned Sparrow) but it was late and birds had settled in for the night so we headed Billwards across Box Canyon, only to be assailed at the crest by a multitude of singing Common Poorwills, one of which obligingly perched 20 feet from us on a road sign. What a way to end another spectacular day! Needless to say, a wee refreshment was enjoyed later!
Bill had planned a two-day trip to the fabulous Chiricahua Mountains in the extreme south eastern portion of the state, surely one of the most spectacular birding spots in the country. We were to stay overnight at the Southwestern Research Station in Cave Creek. We motored across Sulphur Springs Valley picking up Scaled Quail en route and Bendire’s Thrasher on Coffman Rd – just as Bill said we would, of course – and entered the Chirí’s via Pinery Canyon where a delightful couple of spots gave us loose flocks within which were Townsend’s, Hermit and Olive Warblers, Painted Redstart, Hutton’s and Plumbeous Vireos, and a late and delicious seasonal surprise – Red-faced Warbler. A late afternoon excursion from the research station along the South Fork Road afforded a beautiful, noisy pair of Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, eminently photographic, and one of those numerous magical instances in birding – a “Holy Shit Moment” - we step back into Bill’s truck just as an Elegant Trogon decides to fly in and perch in the only visible spot over the creek just feet from the vehicle. The food at the Research Station was totally superb, the young researchers fun and the additions to the list suitably celebrated.

Up early the next day to see the sun against the red rocks – magical - and along Paradise Road to get the early Black-chinned Sparrow. Took time but we got there. A Cordilleran Fly was outside the Research Station. Herb Martyr Road after breakfast gave a Virginia’s Warbler and an Arizona Woodpecker but not the desired Montezuma Quail. We headed up, up and up to Rustler Park and found the expected Mexican Chickadee, Pygmy and Red-breasted Nuts. Bill suggested the way back home would be best by Pinery Canyon Road for Montezuma Quail by the roadside and, guess what, after giving upon this species, ‘twas I who spotted a pair by the road after an hour or two, allowing great looks and a few photos! Bill’s experience and quiet determination to get his ‘clients’ the bird is truly wonderful! An Olive-sided Fly rounded out our Chiricahuan adventure, the long drive back to Bill’s was enlivened by a Harris’ Hawk at Elfrida.

On our last day, we birded the San Pedro Inn area (a birding mecca, delightful people) and the no-go-over Hereford bridge over the San Pedro River. Another Gray Hawk and tons of Verm Flies and a variety of sparrows, Green-tailed and Abert’s Towhees and a Hooded Oriole, then back to Bill’s … where he checked the local bird-alert and found that a Plain-capped Starthroat had visited a feeder in Portal the day before (where we’d just come from!). Well, I could see Colin getting twitchier by the moment, this being a new bird for him, so we hastily said our good-byes to Bill and set off back to Portal. After an hour and a half watching the hummer feeders, a vigorous storm moved through. Then another. And another. We needed to be back in Phoenix that night for an early morning PHL flight. It was a three+ hour drive, the first leg of which was a 25-mile dirt road with ‘washouts’ – dubs carrying storm water run-off. We had a rental Chevy nanocar. A lifer for Colin or not making it to PHX? Against strenuous protests I went for the flight out … and not a moment too soon! The storm had brought the desert streams flooding across the dirt road in six or more places … it was a case of shut your eyes, gun the throttle, and if you’ve got a God, pray. That wee car made it, a different color than that when we’d hired it, but what the heck. And birding was not even then complete. I added Lesser Nighthawks to my list as we hit the interstate en route to Phoenix.

It was a great trip with magic birds in a highly scenic landscape. Birding at its best. And when combined with the delightful company of the local, knowledgeable, generous DVOC member Bill Stocku, who could ask for more? Thanks a brazillion, Bill!

Members Photography Night ~ Dec 15, 2005

With the advent of digital cameras, everyone has jumped on the bandwagon, and an astonishing number of great images are now being taken. The club has some truly gifted photographers and we would like to showcase the best of your images at our December 15 Members Photography Night. Categories are: Birds ; Birders ; Flora & Fauna ; Landscapes

Deadline to submit: Sunday December 4, 2005

Want to join our Photo Club?

We are looking for members for our new Photography Club. Our goal would be to create a List Serv, share information, showcase photos, have field trips etc. If any of you are interested in being part of this please e-mail Adrian wildlifegd@aol.com and we’ll start by adding your name to an e-mail list specifically for DVOC Photo Club Members.

South Eastern Arizona in Early September .... continued
Field Trips …Martin Selzer & Adrian Binns, Field Trip Chairs

Note: Field trips for 2006 are subject to change. Please check the website at www.dvoc.org for the most current information as it gets closer to the date if you are interested in participating.

**BE SURE TO NOTIFY THE FIELD TRIP LEADER IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND.**

*November 19, 2005 ~ Bucks County PA / Florence NJ Gull Trip*
Matt Sharp, our leader for this trip writes, “Since access to the local landfill in both Bucks Co. and Delaware is restricted and since the location of the feeding/roosting flock at Florence moves around and can often settle in inaccessible locales, this trip will be somewhat exploratory. We hope to find large numbers of birds easily visible from Florence, but may have to check some other locations in Bucks County, including several of the known hang-outs on lakes and reservoirs.” Meet at Florence boat ramp at 9 am. Leader: Matt Sharp (215) 299-1069

*November 28-30, 2005 ~ Niagara Falls Gull & Waterfowl Extravaganza*
This trip is scheduled so participants can take in the gull spectacle on the Niagara River at a time when they congregate in tremendous numbers. There is a good chance of a dozen species, and we search for California, Thayer’s, Little, and Black-headed Gulls. You never know, maybe we will find something ultra rare like Ross’s Gull. Large numbers of waterfowl can also be seen. Leave in the early hours on Monday and return late evening Wednesday. All expenses will be shared. Leader: Adrian Binns (215) 364-4407

*January 8, 2006 ~ Winter Birding in the DIX Wildlife Management Area*
Come check out a little birded area in Cumberland County, NJ. The mixture of farm fields with great hedgerows (a scarce habitat these days), oak/holly woodlands, salt-marsh, and bay shore provides excellent food and cover for a variety of winter birds. This territory on the Cumberland County CBC has produced some notable winter birds like Gyrfalcon, Sandhill Crane, Northern Goshawk, Saw-Whet Owl, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Lincoln’s Sparrow. Both diurnal and nocturnal raptor numbers can be excellent, and this area has produced the nation’s highest CBC counts for Eastern-Screetch and Great-horned Owls ever. Some years it holds large numbers of sparrows, can be very good for Hermit Thrush and Fox Sparrow, and often holds numbers of lingering birds like Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, and Eastern Towhee. So come out and try birding someplace new. Meeting Time: 7:00 AM. Meeting Place: End of Duck Cove Road, Fairton, NJ (DeLorme NJ Atlas Page 68, Block G-1). This is the first right turn off Route 601 / Back Neck Rd., and overlooks an area of the Cohansey River where the local Bald Eagle pair can often be seen. Leader: Paul Guris (215) 234-6805 or paul@paulagics.com

*January 14-16, 2006 ~ MONTAUK (LONG ISLAND), NY*
Join us for winter finches, eiders, scoters, alcids and any Eurasian accidentals. Car pool from N.E. Philadelphia at 6 AM. Space is limited due to lodging constraints – first come, first served! Shared expenses. Leaders: Erica Brendel (215) 844-3456 or ericamb@verizon.com, Chris Walters (215) 642-6862 or CWalters@ReedSmith.com

*January 21, 2006 ~ FLORENCE, NJ*
This is the spot for some of the best gull watching in the east. “White-winged” gulls, Lesser Black-backs, and a search for Thayer’s, California, Slaty-backed and Yellow-legged Gull. Meet at 9AM. Half-day trip Leader: Matt Sharp (215) 299-1069 or sharp@acnatsci.org

*January 22, 2006 ~ BARNEGAT LIGHT*
The best location in Jersey to see Harlequin Duck and Purple Sandpiper. Common Eider is regular here and we’ll look for King Eider. An assortment of ducks and loons should be found in the inlet. The dunes hold “Ipswich” Sparrow and usually Snow Buntings, and, in good years, longspurs. Dress warmly. Meet at the Light car park at 8:00AM Leader: To be announced

*January 28, 2006 ~ The NORTH JERSEY SHORE*
We’ll search the ponds, inlets, jetties and shoreline from Manasquan to Sandy Hook for loons, ducks, gulls and alcids. Meet at the south jetty of Manasquan Inlet at 8:30 AM. We’ll be birding through early afternoon. Leader: Martin Selzer 215-233-9090 or mselzer@prdus.jnj.com

*February 18-20, 2006 ~ NEW ENGLAND*
A three day trip over Presidents’ Weekend to look for alcids, loons, Red-necked Grebe, white-winged gulls, King Eider, Barrow’s Goldeneye, Snowy and Short-eared Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, longspurs, Snow Buntings and any winter invasion species. Limited registration. Fee. Leader: Adrian Binns (215) 364-4407 or wildlife@pd@aol.com

*February 25, 2006 ~ INDIAN RIVER INLET NORTH*
Join us as we search for wintering waterfowl, gulls, seabirds and other late winter visitors. We will meet at the Super Wawa on Route 1 just outside of Lewes at 9 AM. Besides birding Indian River Inlet and Rehoboth Bay, we will stop at Silver Lake, Cape Henlopen State Park, Prime Hook and Bombay Hook as we bird our way back north. Meet at the Super WAWA on Route 1 just north of Cape Henlopen at 9 AM. Leader: Martin Selzer (215) 233-9090 or mselzer@prdus.jnj.com
Field Trips...continued

**March 3-5, 2006 ~ AMHERST & ALGONQUIN CANADA**
A three day trip for owls, with a good chance of: Boreal, Saw-Whet and Snowy and possibly Great Grey and Hawk Owl; wintering finches, both crossbills, Pine Grosbeak, Gray Jay, Black-backed Woodpecker, Boreal Chickadee, Redpoll and Spruce Grouse. Limited registration. Fee. Leader: Adrian Binns (215) 364-4407 or wildlifegd@aol.com

**March 4, 2006 ~ Full Day Gull Bonanza**
We will go to a noted inland gull hotspot and then to a more coastal spot in an attempt to accumulate the largest number of gull species in a single day. Expect at least one longish car ride. We will start at one of the landfills in the AM for the big 3 as well the “white-winged species” and then search for more coastal species like Bonaparte’s and rarities like Black-headed or Little either along the Del Bay or on the NJ coast. 8 species are expected. Anything over 10 and I’ll buy the first round! Start time is 8 AM. Meeting point TBA Feel free to join in for the 1st half of the day only. Leader: Matt Sharp (215) 299-1069 or sharp@acnatsci.org

**March 11, 2006 ~ CONOWINGO DAM and MUDDY RUN**
After birding the dam we will head north to Muddy Run, a PPL reservoir. Meet at 9 AM at Fisherman’s Park. Directions: From Rt.1. Immediately after crossing the dam, turn left on Fisherman Park Rd. for .07 mile and follow signs to Fisherman’s Park. Leader: Tom Reeves (610) 544-4217 tomrevs7@verizon.net

**March 18, 2006 ~ CHERRY ISLAND LANDFILL WILMINGTON, DE.**
Join DOS for a half day trip to search for rarer gull species and study plumages at the Wilmington Landfill. Meet at 7:30 AM at Fox Point State Park off the Edgemoor/Hay Rd exit on I-495. Coming from the north, the exit is about 4-5 miles past the DE/PA line. Take the second exit, marked for Hay Road, follow the clover-leaf back underneath I-495, then make a left (north) onto Hay at the stop sign. Follow this to the end, straight into Fox Point Park. We go to Cherry Island Landfill, so if folks miss us at Fox Point they can head straight down Hay Road (south) to the end, right onto 12th street, then quickly left into the landfill. Or they can hop back on I-495 to the next exit, left onto 12th street almost to its end, then right into the landfill. Leader: Mike Smith smithma@che.udel.edu

**April 1, 2006 ~ SOUTHWEST, NEW JERSEY** (Pedricktown and Mannington Marsh)
This is the trip for possible winter stragglers (Ross’s Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, blackbirds) and any early migrants (Ruffs have previously been seen on this trip). Leader: Frank Windfelder (215) 673-0240 or fwindfelder@yahoo.com

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**Winter 2005 Bird Quiz Answers**

1. Montezuma Quail
2. Ten
3. Bobwhite—so they can detect predators from all directions
4. Bobwhite—as many as 28 eggs!

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**Sad News**

Steve Mallanson, long time birder, photographer and DVOC member passed away recently. He will be missed by both his family and birding friends.
**Win Shafer (Edwin)**
Win is a 7th grade teacher at Episcopal Academy. He has been birding for 1 1/2 years. He birds at Haverford College, Rolling Hill Park, Tinicum, the Barnes Foundation. Says he “got hooked” on two trips with Martin Selzer last winter. Met Paul Guris & Bert Filemyr during the Cape May weekend last spring. Has met Chris Walters. Knows Michael Stalpers, a board member for National Audubon.

**Scott McGonigle**
Influences on Scott’s birding have been his father, a duck hunter who infused in him the value of life, “never kill anything you aren’t prepared to eat.” Also the Rev. John Pemberton of Cape Island Baptist Church who took him duck hunting at age 15, from whom he learned about the importance of nesting habitat and the environment. From 1984 to the 90’s, he and his wife, both Cape May natives, began birding at Higbee Beach. They birded Cape May, Cumberland and Atlantic Counties, entered a non-competitive WSB team in 1987 and tallied 102 birds. An out of town job in 1988 brought their birding to a temporary halt in the 90’s, but their interest was re-kindled last year. He describes their early years of birding in club activities and field trips. Encourage them to access our great web site, including Larus-on-Line. Make sure they know about our new e-mail listserv, Cassinia and other club resources. In other words, take them under your wing, share DVOC with them and help them make it their club, too!

**Alexander Grimwade**
Alexander has been birding for over 40 years, since assisting a high school biology teacher with bird-banding in Scotland. Has birded Europe, North and Central America, and the Caribbean. Recently installed a pond in his back yard and says it has "transformed" the local bird life.

**Gabe E. Johnson** (student membership)
Gabe is a high school senior at Cherry Hill East HS. Has been birding with his father for about a year. Birds Palmyra most weekends, as well as various other locations in southern NJ. Gabe particularly enjoys pelagic birds and boreal finches.

**Howard M. Einspahr**
Howard has been birding on and off for about 30 years, with about ten years off to raise kids. Moved to NJ and resumed birding in 1997. Birds the "pole farm" or the Brearly House locally most weekday mornings for a couple of hours, ranges across the state with Brad Merritt every now and again, and birds throughout the US, making 3-4 trips per year.

**Bradford F. Whitman**
Started birding in 1969 with a trip to Point Pelee; then with Audubon Naturalist Society in Washington D.C. in the 1970's. (Brad was VP for programs for the Society); and ever since then, with his wife, Elaine. Together they have birded the Delaware Valley, Rhode Island, and also Ecuador, Costa Rica, Belize, Trinidad & Tobago and Mexico. Brad's special interests are songbirds (warblers!), their songs and behavior. He would enjoy assisting in banding. Brad writes on nature and the environment. His article "A Birder Reflects on Names" appears in DVOC's latest issue of Cassinia (vol.70).

**Scott Fraser**
Scott lives next to Evansburg State Park and is the CTO and Founder of Portico. (Formerly FMG Technologies Software Company in Conshohocken) He is an Environmental Biology major at Eastern University, Wayne PA. He has been birding since the early 90’s and has birded Scotland, Kenya, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Galapagos, Florida, eastern North America. WSOB team "The Four Loons" last 8 years; but mostly just yard birding the rest of the year due to kids and work!
Officers

President
Adrian Binns
Vice-President
Chris Walters
Secretary
Paul Guris
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Naomi Murphy

Council
Art McMorris
Bert Filemyr
Doris McGovern
Martin Selzer
Jeff Holt
Mike Lyman

DVOC is an organization for birders and bird enthusiasts in the Delaware Valley region.

Anyone with an interest in birds is invited to attend our functions.

Visit our website at www.dvoc.org. Interested in becoming a member? Follow the link to "Membership Information" for everything you need to know about how to join the club.

Caption Contest by Naomi Murphy

Responses—Fall Issue

We had some good responses to our last caption contest.

♦ Ivory-billed gets a leg up
♦ Ebo-knee and ivory
♦ Campophilophiles, principally
♦ “It’s an Ivory-billed Woodpecker….and get your hand off my thigh”.

Here are this issue’s photos that are just crying out for captions. Send your suggestions to me at ndmurphy3@hotmail.com

Larus Committee
Naomi Murphy
Jane Henderson
Martin Selzer

Larus will be published three times in 2006 - April, July, and November. Deadlines for submissions of articles for publication are March 10, June 10, and November 10.
Christmas Bird Counts

Saturday, December 17
Oceanville (Brigantine), NJ: Brian Moscatello, Ed Bristow, Co-Compilers
201-871-7226 (h), 201-568-6093 (w)
bmoscat@ix.netcom.com

Wyncote, PA: Andy Fayer
215 542-8114
AndyFayer@aol.com

Sandy Hook, NJ: Scott Barnes
732-872-2500
scott.barnes@njaudubon.org

Glenolden, PA: Nick Pulcinella
610-696-0687
nickpulcinella@comcast.net

Southern Bucks County, PA: Bob Mercer
215-785-1177
ramercer@co.bucks.pa.us

Gloucester County, NJ: Bob Cassell
856-478-2496

Sunday, December 18
Upper Bucks/Montgomery Counties, PA: Bill Etter
better@netcarrier.com

Salem County, NJ: Jerry Haag
haagi@algorithms.com

Cape May, NJ: Louise Zemaitis
swallowtailstudio@comcast.net

Middletown, DE: Bruce Lantz
302-378-8469
Emdb2lantz@aol.com

Bombay Hook, DE: Andy Ednie
Home: 302-792-9591
Work: 302-661-3314
ednieap@wittnet.com

Pinelands, NJ: Bob Confer
parula9@hotmail.com

Saturday, December 24
Audubon/Valley Forge, PA: Edie Parnum
610-964-8331
eparnum@comcast.net

Monday, December 26
Mooresstown, NJ: Mark Pensiero
856-235-0171
vwpassat99@verizon.net

Wednesday, December 28
Elmer, NJ: Jerry Haag
haagi@algorithms.com

Seaford, DE: Glen Lovelace
302-628-3978 (H) or 302-760-2321 (W)
govelace@dol.net

Friday, December 30
Pelagic Count at the Hudson Self Valley, NJ: Paul Guris
215-234-6805
paul@paulagics.com

Saturday, December 31
Trenton Marsh, NJ: Brad Merritt, Mary Doscher
609-921-8964, balmerritt@aol.com
609-586-3185, doschem@msn.com

Sunday, January 1
Cumberland County, NJ: Pat & Clay Sutton
609-465-3397
patclaysutton@comcast.net

Central Bucks County, PA: Diane Allison
610-847-2085
dalliso@postoffice.ptd.net

Monday, January 2
Milford, DE: Glen Lovelace
302-628-3978 (H) or 302-760-2321 (W)
govelace@dol.net

For information on additional counts, check http://www.dvoc.org/Misc/2005Counts.htm.