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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.

Larus Committee

Naomi Murphy
Jane Henderson
Martin Selzer

Larus-on-Line will only be published twice in 2007 - April and late September. We want to thank those of you who have submitted articles for this issue or for prior issues and we encourage members with an interest to submit articles for publication. Please see the Larus area of the website for some new guidelines for submissions. http://www.dvoc.org/Publications/Larus/Larus.htm

The deadline for submissions for the next issue is September 1.
This is the DVOC president’s column for March 2007, with highlights of Summer Student Internships at the Academy Bird Department supported by our World Series pledge donations, plus nesting Bald Eagles in Philadelphia, plus birdsong expert Don Kroodsma as our banquet speaker later this year.

First, I am proud to announce that the funds raised by our “cracker-jack” World Series of Birding team this year will be used to fund DVOC Internships which will allow a student to study and work during the summer in the Bird Department of Philadelphia’s Academy of Natural Sciences. If we raise enough money this year, the proceeds will fund a summer internship for this year and for 2008 and 2009 as well.

The ideal intern is a student between 15-20 years old with a demonstrated strong interest in biology (interest in birds also preferred). The intern will work and study in the summer under the supervision of Dr. Nate Rice at the Academy, will attend DVOC summer field trips, and will report on his/her work at a DVOC summer meeting. Please spread the word about this student internship opportunity as widely as you can – the more applicants the better. All interested should contact Nate Rice at the Academy for additional details (215-299-1125).

Second, as excited as we are to announce these internships, nothing compares to the news that Bald Eagles are currently nesting in Philadelphia for the first time in over 100 years! Mirabile dictu! And all you cynics should hold your fire – this is not a rumor hatched by the Marketing Department of the Philadelphia Eagles football team – it is really true.

Finally, here’s a “heads-up” on what promises to be another wonderful DVOC Banquet late this year. Our speaker will be Dr. Don Kroodsma, whom the American Ornithologists’ Union has dubbed “the reigning authority on the biology of avian vocal behavior”. Don is a great speaker and the author of the acclaimed book “The Singing Life of Birds”. Save the date (an unusual one for DVOC) – Wednesday evening, December 5, 2007, and let’s celebrate again at the Sheet Metal Workers Hall on the Delaware in South Philadelphia.

OK. Enough said by your President. Spring’s here. Make your World Series pledge a generous one so we can pay for a great intern, and let’s get out and hear those Juncos singing – before they head north.
1. You have been called the “First Couple” of Jersey Birders. When and how did you two meet and how long have you been married?

Thank you for the compliment. Donald and Lillian Stokes we’re not, but we love what we do and we love doing it together! We met in 1974, in DVOC’s backyard at a New Year’s Eve party in Montgomery County. Pat’s cousin and her cousin’s boyfriend (a good friend of Clay’s) hosted the party. We met because Pat was wearing her grandmother’s fur coat, and after considerable holiday cheer, Clay “suggested” that this was inappropriate. Pat agreed and they talked into the night. (It was the last time she ever wore the coat). A month later we went to South Florida for the first birding trip either of us had ever made there. We were married in 1975, and just celebrated our 31st Wedding Anniversary. We’re aiming for 31 more.

2. When and how did each of you get started in birding?

Clay’s grandmother gave him a Peterson Guide in about 1962 when he was 13 years old, although he had looked at birds before that. There was also a “sporting” track, as he fished and hunted with his father in his teens (bird hunting for quail, pheasant, and woodcock). Pat became a “born-again birder” when she met Clay. Clay first put binoculars into her hands on the 1975 Florida trip, and it changed her life.

3. We understand that you’ve had a new book published. Can you tell us a little about it?

Birds and Birding at Cape May was published in December 2006 by Stackpole Books. It is a complete guide and lengthy at 568 pages. It includes three distinct parts: the history of ornithology at Cape May; Cape May through the seasons -- with an in-depth look at the many Cape May phenomena; and finally a site guide – not only to Cape May County, but also to “greater Cape May” (north to Barnegat Light and west through Cumberland County). It was a major effort, and it took a lot longer than we thought it would – there were just so many stories that needed to be told! We think that readers will find not only a lot of DVOC references in the book, but also a major DVOC influence.

4. Can you tell us a bit about the other current work (or projects) that you are each working on?

At the moment we are simply catching our breath and catching up on all those things put on the back burner during the 3 ½ years it took us to write the Cape May book. Down the line, there may be a book of essays in Clay’s future and Pat is playing with some “Cape May Nature Journal” ideas. But right now, mainly we want to go birding again! And, along these lines, maybe this is the appropriate time to mention that we are both partially “retiring” early in 2007. After 21 years, Pat is leaving her job as Program Director at the Cape May Bird Observatory. It was an agonizing decision, but it’s now time for the next chapter in her life as a naturalist. Clay is scaling back his consulting, too. It’s time to travel and enjoy life while we’re still healthy, and able (Pat is 55, Clay is 57). But don’t worry, we’re not going away! We plan to continue writing, giving programs, and leading tours. But mainly, there will now be time to stop and smell the wildflowers.

5. We understand that you have also “retired” as compilers of the Cumberland County (N.J.) Christmas Bird Count. Why?

The count on January 1, 2006 marked the 56th Annual Cumberland County CBC and our 20th year as compilers. We’ve enjoyed every minute of it, and hopefully, we’ve given it our best, but as Sheryl Crow sings, “Maybe a change will do you good.” The count’s previous compilers served about 10-15 years each, and each time there was a changing of the guard, the count was shaken up and revitalized – with new people, new ideas, fresh faces and a fresh approach to methods and mission. In this spirit we feel it’s time to step down, to pass the count to some of the fresh, younger (more energetic?) birders who have most ably come on board. And of course this allows someone else the honor, privilege, and opportunity that we have enjoyed these 20 memorable years. We thank you all for your help. DVOC members have played a big part in the Cumberland Co. CBC.
The new compiler is DVOC member Mike Fritz. Mike, as many of you know, is a long-time member of our count, and pioneered the difficult interior Bevan WMA territory. He and his wife, Jeanne, have worked this large area hard, day and night, during the Cumberland Count. Mike is most able, qualified, and well-suited to take over the reins. Perhaps most importantly, Mike embraces the “old-time” philosophy of birding – of finding new areas and out-of-the-way places and making discoveries. We feel that this approach is what the Cumberland CBC is all about, and we feel good about passing the count compilation duties along to someone who shares our vision of Cumberland County and of the count.

6. Explain what “The Glades” is, where it is, and why it is such a neat spot for birding.

The Glades is the 6,000 acre preserve owned by the Natural Lands Trust, Inc. It spans from east of Hansey Creek west to Fortescue in Cumberland County, NJ, mostly south of Route 553. Combined with additional lands now owned by NLT, including 1,000 acres in Bear Swamp, this area has incredible habitat diversity – from old growth forest to old fields -- and vast areas of salt marsh. It is one of South Jersey’s gems, and the new NLT trails are exceptional and little birded. Clay has been doing inventory work there for NLT and would have to describe Kentucky Warbler as “common” and Prothonotary Warbler as “abundant.” It’s an amazing place.

7. Should your “Birding Cumberland, A Birder’s Guide to Cumberland County, NJ” be required reading for all DVOC members?

No! If they all came there we wouldn’t have the solitude we’ve come to expect! Just kidding of course, but outside of Heislerville WMA, Bivalve, and Turkey Point, the area is little birded. We need more people to make more discoveries. It’s big. Suffice it to say, if they’ve put their time in, they have never been disappointed in Cumberland County. Protected open space is still growing in the Delaware Bayshore region. Interestingly, many of the new Glades lands and trails are not in Birding Cumberland; they have been added since the 2003 publication.

8. Would you be willing someday to lead a DVOC field trip to selected Cumberland County “hot spots”?

Absolutely. You know, we’ve in fact offered a number of times, yet somehow it’s never come to pass. Yes, we would be most happy to share Cumberland County with our fellow DVOC members.

9. You two have had articles in many, many birding journals and magazines (e.g. New Jersey Audubon, Peregrine Observer, New Jersey Outdoors, Sanctuary, American Butterflies, Wild Bird, Bird Watcher’s Digest, Birder’s World, Birding, Living Bird). Can you tell us how you got started with your writing?

Clay got his start in writing scientific papers more than in penning popular literature. Pat was a literature major in college and took many journalism courses while getting her Masters Degree in Environmental Studies. She first began writing for the Cape May Geographic Society Bulletin and later the Peregrine Observer. Our very first joint publication was in Cassinia, No. 59 (1982) on a study of “Wintering Eagles in Southern New Jersey.” In winter 1974-75 we found a whopping 12 eagles in all of South Jersey during an entire winter search (just a few weeks ago, we had eleven in sight at once and 31 for the day . . .). But the progression from journals to magazines was a natural one, and a fun one that allowed us to teach and to use our many accumulated photographs. I think most of our writing stems from a story that just begs to be told.

10. It takes a tremendous amount of discipline to write books. How have you been able to author so many great books? Can you tell us about how you developed the “How to Spot…” series?

Thank you again. There is no prerequisite, but you should see our wine cork collection! Actually we didn’t initiate the “How to Spot” series. The first book was “How to Spot a Fox” and was a fairly obscure title. Chapters Publishing approached Jack Connor to write “How to Spot an Owl” and Jack directed them to us. We are forever indebted to Jack, for this gave us our start. Chapters was bought by Houghton Mifflin and we did “How to Spot Hawks & Eagles” and “How to Spot Butterflies” for them. Seabirds and Shorebirds may be in the future, so we’ll see. Again, we like the opportunity to teach about the natural history of the birds and bugs we so love.

11. What are the origins of your strong interest in searching out and finding roosting owls?

Pat may have become a born again birder when she met Clay, but she spurred his interest in owls. Actually, the origin of our interest came from our mentors. Al Nicholson, a former DVOC member, didn’t consider a March day complete unless he found, or at least searched for, a Great Horned Owl nest, or a swamp tromp complete without hearing a Barred Owl. And of course the late Ed Manners was a wonderful mentor too.
His enthusiasm for Saw-whets was infectious. Since owling with Ed, finding one Saw-whet doesn’t satiate the appetite, it only whets it (pardon the pun).

12. How is it that your “team” always gets so many owl species on the Cape May Christmas Counts?

It is really focus. Owling is quite specific – if you are searching for owls, you are not really birding in the classic way. Crawling through deep thickets is not the way to get a big CBC bird list. The team usually starts at midnight if conditions are right, and sometimes “owls” the second evening too. In between, during daylight, all known and potential roosts are methodically checked. Plus team member Karen Johnson has some of the best ears of any birder we know. That helps too.

13. How did it come about that Clay did so much work surveying grassland birds in the Lakehurst, N.J. area? What were the principal discoveries or surprises?

Clay worked for Herpetological Associates, Inc. for ten years as an environmental consultant – first as South Jersey regional manager and for five years as Vice President of this small consulting firm. (He was the staff ornithologist.) Certainly it was a surprise to find how abundant Grasshopper Sparrows can be in that region, not only in Lakehurst NAS grasslands, but also in abandoned strip mines. One of the biggest surprises was not being rehired by a client after finding so many rare, threatened, and endangered species on a proposed development site. It’s funny how the next consultant found far fewer. Environmental consulting may be the only vocation in which the harder you work and the better job you do, the less work you are likely to get.

14. Do you think we still have Red-shouldered Hawks nesting in South Jersey? Any ideas you can share about how many or approximately where?

Red-shoulders seem to be holding their own. Interestingly, they seem to be gone from a number of “classic” areas where we once found them, yet turn up in some odd places that you would consider to be minimal or marginal habitat. We guess they are victims of the plight of amphibians, yet sometimes frog populations can explode due to the actions of man (or beavers). The numbers are hard to assess without targeted fieldwork, which we haven’t done recently, but we know of about six pairs. There’s still one pair in Bear Swamp (Cumberland County) and the forested wetlands in Salem County are a major stronghold.

15. Our late past President Sandra Sherman was, we understand, in the process of editing a project of Clay’s when she died. What work did Sandy do at CMBO?

Sandy Sherman was editing the second edition of “Hawks in Flight,” by Pete Dunne, David Sibley, and Clay when she died. She was such a tough act to follow that the book has been shelved by Houghton Mifflin ever since, and we’re still not sure when the second edition will be published. Sandy was also the long-time editor of the Cape May Bird Observatory’s journal, the Peregrine Observer. Sandy also contributed many excellent articles that were printed in CMBO and NJ Audubon Society publications. For many years she was invited to NJ Audubon’s Cape May Autumn and Spring Weekends as a field trip leader. Her birding skills and more importantly her people skills were tops. We miss her deeply.

16. You guys used to make a spring trip to the Santee Delta of South Carolina, and you have made presentations at DVOC about the kites there. How did you get started doing that, would you recommend that other DVOCers do it, and what are the highlights that stand out in your memory?

We still make an annual trip to the low country of South Carolina. We have friends there, but it’s one of our favorite places as well. Admittedly, we first started going there to find kites, and we’ve seen as many as 20 Swallow-tails and 40-50 Mississippi Kites together there. And, on one of our first trips, in 1978, we were still hoping to find Bachman’s Warbler…. Since 1993, Pat has compiled two North American Butterfly Association counts in South Carolina: Hobcaw Barony and Francis Marion National Forest, so today a focus is butterflies. One highlight there has been making some true discoveries in butterfly status and distribution. I’d certainly recommend the trip to DVOC members, yet admittedly birding amenities are few and there are no bird species you won’t see elsewhere in the Southeast or in Florida. Highlights have
been as diverse as ½ inch E. Pygmy-Blues and 5’ Canebrake Rattlesnakes, and certainly finding South Carolina’s first record of Sabine’s Gull was a memorable event. But what is really interesting is that all of our South Carolina adventures over time had their origin at a DVOC Meeting, we think in 1978, when Alan Brady gave us a hand-drawn map (which we still have, incidentally) to his favorite places in Ion Swamp. His excitement rubbed off on us, and we’ve been going there ever since!

17. Did either or both of you have a birding ‘mentor’ who shaped your life in birding?

Al Nicholson and Ed Manners, whom we mentioned above, were two major influences. Interestingly, their approaches were very different, but both taught us so much. We think mentors not only teach you what is important, but also what is not. We still bird with Al whenever possible, mainly on winter eagle outings. Bill Bailey, a botanist of the Cape May Geographic Society era (not the ornithologist who was a founder of DVOC) was also a mentor for Pat, spurring her beyond birds to all of nature. Although our friendship with Fred Mears developed well after our formative years, by way of his selfless teaching and positive attitude, Fred was indeed a mentor too.

18. What appears to be the future for the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge? What sort of lobbying or other efforts were needed to get it started? We know you were among the earliest “movers and shakers” that created it; would you share some of the things you did?

The future of the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge is both bright and at the same time cause for worry. The bright aspects are the talents and the commitment of a very hard working staff, and a vision of the refuge that allows for boundaries to continue expanding as opportunities become available. Currently some 11,500 acres of the proposed 21,200 acres are protected. (The Assistant Manager of the Cape May NWR, Virginia Rettig, is an avid and skilled birder!) The dim side is that appropriations have dwindled since the U.S. began to send all its money to the Middle East and, as you know, land is not becoming either any more abundant or cheaper. A bright note is that South Jersey Congressman Frank LoBiondo has been an unflagging champion of both the refuge and the Delaware Bayshore and continues to fight for funding.

We don’t know if we were movers and shakers. We did push for creation of the refuge on the lower Cape in the late 1970s and wrote lots of letters in the 1980s when the concept came up again, this time focusing on the spine of the Cape and on the Delaware Bayshore. Pat’s major role consisted of presenting detailed mapping (both tax maps with land ownership and sightings records) that led US FWS to increase the proposed boundaries to include the Great Cedar Swamp unit near Dennisville as well as inland wetlands like Bidwell’s Creek, major expansions in both the acquisition philosophy and boundaries. Continued support is needed, as the refuge has seen many layoffs due to budget cuts.

19. Given your residence in Cape May County about 80 miles from Philadelphia, why and when did you join DVOC? Has being in DVOC been a value as your birding careers developed?

Clay joined DVOC in 1978 and Pat in 1983 soon after women were first “admitted.” It has been a very good and positive experience, and we have always felt a bond with the club. Understand that in 1978, before CMBO soared, DVOC was at the center of birding at Cape May. When Clay first began birding the Cape, DVOC members Ernie Choate and Keith Seager were the only other daily birders. Pre Route 55, going to meetings was a bit of a trek, but Clay made the journey many times with Ernie and Keith. By the time Clay joined he had already read Bird Studies at Old Cape May cover-to-cover a number of times, and due to his South Jersey roots, was attracted to the ornithological history in a big way. To join DVOC was to connect with history and to bird with the masters. Due to the distance (and the fact that both of us are basically morning people, not night owls), we don’t attend many meetings or field trips today, yet always feel the presence of the club, and love to connect with members both here at Cape May and afar. So, apart from the usual learning opportunities and aspects, I think the value of DVOC to us has always been the body of work and the members who are the great masters of the trade – both those of the past and those with us today.

20. What are the biggest contributions that DVOC could make to advance the spread of ornithological knowledge and understanding?

There can be a number of layers to this question. One specific area in which we feel that DVOC has had a major contribution to ornithological knowledge, and can continue to do so, is with its journal CASSINIA. While it might be possible for some to think that today CASSINIA is anachronistic (due to North American Birds, New Jersey Birds, Pennsylvania Birds, Peregrine Observer, records committees, list-serves, etc.), we feel that CASSINIA covers a beat that none of these other publications do. There is a place for CASSINIA’s editorial philosophies and policies in regards to Delaware Valley birding that none of these other publications cover. It can publish types and categories of regional papers, findings, stories, and notes that none of the other publications can. Simply put, we feel that CASSINIA very much has a place among bird journals.
This is particularly true for “General Notes,” and we urge DVOC members to contribute here – to commemorate sightings of a type or depth that will never be recorded in other journals. As an example, we offer the case of Clay’s recent submission of a record of Ross’s Gull at the Avalon Seawatch. We know that CASSINIA editors took some heat for publishing the record prior to the New Jersey Bird Records Committee voting on it (in the form of a mild rebuke by the Records Committee in their rejection of the CASSINIA-published record).

This sighting had not been submitted to the NJBRC simply because there was little likelihood that this conservative committee would accept a single observer’s sighting of a distant bird identified mainly by GISS. We will let readers and club members decide if the sighting had merit as a record or was worthy of CASSINIA interest, but that is not the point. The point is, it was an intriguing and interesting sighting that never would have seen the light of day if it had not been published in General Notes. A corollary that no one ever seems to think of, amidst the controversy, might be: should the Ivory-billed Woodpecker not have been reported because there was no incontrovertible scientific proof? We like to think that the conservation measures that resulted readily support the decision to “publish” the records in that case!

Perusal of the now 70 Volumes of CASSINIA indeed reveals many years of such fascinating notes and records. We think there will always be a place for CASSINIA among the pantheon of current publications. Not every journal needs to contain only vetted, hard facts. At least one needs to continue the tradition of honoring the excitement, the possibilities, the curious or unconventional, and the joys of birding. We think CASSINIA is doing just that. Maybe we’re just old fashioned – we still love to read Arthur Cleveland Bent’s life histories published in the 1930s!

Regarding the larger question of DVOC’s role, we guess this is where we are supposed to enthuse about taking kids birding so we have a future generation of birders and environmentalists. We of course agree, and have met some incredibly keen young birders, yet some days we’re pessimistic about the extent that this can be successful. In attempting to get children into birding we are fighting an uphill battle against demographics, sprawl, safety and security issues, and a general public obsessed with multi-media, cyberspace, and organized sports.

In many cases, kids just don’t have the time or the place to go birding. We can take them birding, but they simply can’t go birding on their own in this day and age. They can’t follow-up group forays by going out on their own. Clay spent countless hours in the dune forests and on the water as a kid, but any kid growing up in Stone Harbor today will find far diminished opportunities (and even fewer opportunities in suburban and urban areas). We can attempt to generate interest and opportunity, but if kids can’t follow-up on their own, birding to them will be no different than stamp collecting – checkmarks on a list – rather than the mystery and discovery aspects that so enthralled Clay as a kid.

As an aside, and not that we’ve really thought this through, but maybe the very things that make birding so much easier today – the number and quality of books, field guides, site guides, internet, e-mail and instant messaging – may at the same time make it harder to achieve that sense of discovery that leads to passion. With everything at our fingertips, who needs to search? At a bare minimum, the entire process of learning about birds has changed drastically since we were kids. We sense that there may be less mentoring today simply because of the information age. Have a question on *Empidonax* ID? No need to ask an elder at next month’s meeting, just click the mouse a few times and it’s all there. Post a query on an ID chat room, and there is an avalanche of responses – often in minutes. One bright point is that some of the teenage and twenty-something birders we’ve met today are astoundingly skilled – certainly as good as we can ever hope to be. They ask few questions because they know so much, and have learned so much already, even at such a young age.

Sorry for the digression. Anyway, we think the best thing DVOC can do is precisely what the club is doing. We have always noted how welcoming the club members are to guests at meetings, on field trips, and in responses to co-workers and friends. All such opportunities foster learning and interest. DVOC has always done this very well, but it seems like recently the club has stepped it up a notch. Not to single out any individual, but we have truly loved watching Anita Guris at recent meetings and gatherings welcoming all guests with open arms. Keep up the good work, everybody!

We think this is the best contribution we as individuals or as a club can make – to eagerly and enthusiastically answer any and all questions about birds in the meeting, field, neighborhood, or community. And if kids can’t easily be reached due to the structure of modern society, young adults can show great interest and curiosity. We can foster this interest. Enthusiasm and passion can be infectious. As a life-long adult educator, Pat’s greatest joy has been seeing the results of tiny seeds she has sown. In many cases they were seeds she didn’t even realize she had sown, and they had taken decades to germinate, but grow they did! We think DVOC is doing this important work extremely well, and we’re very proud to be however small a part of it.
In the Delaware Valley, winter is a time of looking for rare gems among our common birds. At the shore and at landfills we look for rare winter gulls. On our lakes and reservoirs we scan through large flocks of Canada Geese and Snow Geese for our rarer wintering species. Flocks of ducks everywhere are scrutinized, as are large flocks of wintering blackbirds. On the stark landscapes of plowed fields, beach dunes and sod farms mixed flocks of Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs, and Snow Buntings may harbor rarer species of Longspur.

This year, just outside of the Delaware Valley, Ed Coyle discovered a Smith’s Longspur at Jones Beach State Park in New York. This bird caused quite a sensation locally, with birders arriving from up and down the Atlantic coast to celebrate this rare visitor. In the past, the Delaware Valley has hosted both Smith’s and Chestnut-collared Longspurs. Smith’s Longspur appeared at Cape May, NJ in 1991 and at Island Beach, NJ in 1995. Two records of Chestnut-collared Longspurs exist for the Delaware Valley: Cape May, NJ in 1980 and Sandy Hook, NJ in 1984. As of yet, the least migratory species McCown’s Longspur has not been discovered in the Delaware Valley, but has been recorded in Massachusetts. Our expected longspur species is the Lapland Longspur: an annual visitor with numbers ranging from single birds to double digits depending on locality and year-to-year variation.

All the longspurs are migratory sparrows with a long hind claw. Alternate plumaged males are strikingly colored and easily separated in the field. Birds in basic plumage and first year birds are cryptically colored brown-gray and not so easy to identify in the field. Each feather of the basic plumage is thickly edged with cryptic colors, and as those edges wear off, the colors of the alternate plumage are exposed. Essentially, longspurs wear into their breeding plumage, but they do have a limited pre-alternate molt. In adult birds, these thick-edged feathers create a shadowy impression of the alternate plumage. The immature birds present the greatest identification challenge in that they rarely show this shadow effect, with the plumages of immature females being the least patterned of any longspur plumage. All four species show some amount of white in the tail, prefer open featureless habitats, frequently crouch to avoid detection, and creep along in a hunched posture rather than hop like other sparrows.

The Lapland Longspur begins to arrive in the Delaware Valley in October and has largely left the region by the end of April. Their abundance in the region may be tied to the harshness of the winter conditions and heaviness of snow cover farther north. In winter, the Lapland Longspur may utilize sod farms, plowed fields, and beach dunes, showing some preference for slightly wet or muddy habitats and barely vegetated fields and dunes. Lapland Longspurs frequently give a “rt-rt-rt-rt” rattle call in flight, allowing detection by call well before the bird is actually seen. As for plumage, the Lapland Longspur is the most well-marked species in basic plumage.

Three marks are unique for Lapland Longspur: 1) Rufous or rusty-edged secondary coverts 2) White in the tail feathers restricted to the outer two tail feathers and difficult to see unless the tail is fanned 3) Very light or white underparts with heavy streaking on the sides and flanks. Other good field marks to note include a relatively large size (similar to Snow Bunting), a conical finch-like bill, and a necklace formed by the breast streaks at the throat. The head pattern is most pronounced in the Lapland longspur with a buffy or golden-colored supercilium, median stripe and cheek. The buffy cheek is framed by a boldly edged, dark triangle giving it an open-faced appearance similar to Clay-colored Sparrow. The Lapland Longspur is the most migratory longspur and shows the most primary projection of all the longspurs. Examination of the primaries on a closed wing shows that up to six primaries can be seen, all of which are evenly spaced.
Both Lapland Longspur and Smith’s Longspurs are highly migratory tundra species. Not surprisingly, both show similarly large body size and long primary projection. Smith’s Longspur has slightly less primary projection than Lapland Longspur showing three or four exposed primaries with a larger step between P5 and P6 compared to the five or six evenly spaced primaries in Lapland Longspur. The flight call of the Smith’s Longspur is similar to Lapland Longspur but harsher with each note of the rattle somewhat punctuated. Smith’s Longspur is a grass-loving species, preferring ankle or shin high grasses that are somewhat sparse allowing the birds to walk through the grass with their feet actually touching the dirt. Two key field marks are unique to the Smith’s Longspur: 1) Completely buffy underparts including the undertail coverts 2) White in the outer tail feathers is bold, more extensive than in Lapland Longspur and easily seen even in a closed tail, but still limited to the outer two tail feathers. Smith’s Longspur is also the only longspur to show a white shoulder patch, but this may not be prominent on immature females. A small white inner spot in the cheek is occasionally visible on close inspection as well. The bill is somewhat less finch-like and more slender and pointed than Lapland Longspur, and the head pattern is similar to Lapland Longspur but more muted in appearance due to the buffy background color on the head. Also due to the buffy background color, Smith’s Longspur appears more uniformly plumaged than the other longspurs.

Chestnut-collared Longspur, like Smith’s Longspur, has had two records in the Delaware Valley. This is the more migratory of the two prairie species and the smallest longspur. Chestnut-collared Longspur is likely to utilize large open expanses with short grasses or fallow fields, staying hidden in the grass unless flushed. The flight call of the Chestnut-collared Longspur includes a rattle and a two noted “kiddel.” In basic plumage, the Chestnut-collared Longspur is a fairly drab species that is pale buff below fading to white at the undertail coverts with only vague streaking. The face shows a faint median crown, faint eyebrow stripes, slightly outlined cheeks, faint malar marks and a small conical bill. The wings are short and have the shortest primary projection. The key field mark involves the tail pattern, which is essentially a white tail with a black triangle extending from the base of the tail to the upper tail coverts. On the ground, the white is usually visible on the sides of the tail. Some adult males may begin to show rufous plumage on the collar and muted black underparts, but in fresh basic plumage that may not be apparent. Both Chestnut-collared and McCown’s Longspur are more stocky and have shorter tails than either tundra species.

McCown’s Longspur is slightly larger than the Chestnut-collared Longspur. McCown’s Longspur shows the same short primary projection, but with a relatively longer primary projection than Chestnut-collared Longspur. Their habitat of choice is over-grazed, sparsely vegetated or barren dirt fields where they may associate with flocks of Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs. The flight call includes a half-hearted rattle and a Horned Lark style “prit-up” call. On the ground, it is a small, fairly dull plumaged longspur, more sandy or gray than Chestnut-collared Longspur. The face pattern is more like a House Sparrow’s than a longspur’s with a pale supercilium, broad eye-line, and large dark-tipped pink bill. McCown’s Longspur has a short tail, but with very long upper tail coverts. The spread tail pattern is that of a white tail with a dark edge and dark central tail feathers, creating an inverted “T” pattern. The combination of the upper tail coverts and the dark central tail feathers creates a two-toned pattern on the center of the tail when seen from above. A good deal of white is visible in the tail when the bird is on the ground. Other good field marks include a rusty shoulder and unstreaked underparts.
While a number of brown sparrow-like birds show white outer tail feathers, the only additional species worth considering is the Sky Lark. The initial mis-identification of the Pt Reyes, CA Sky Lark as a Smith’s Longspur makes it worth considering the field marks used to separate these two species. Sky Larks behave differently than longspurs, avoiding flocks and preferring to forage alone. While the Sky Lark does show a buffy upper breast, the lower breast, belly and undertail coverts are white and contrast well with the upper breast. Sky Larks do not have a white spot in the ear coverots or white wing bars as Smith’s Longspur does. Tail pattern should exclude either of the prairie longspurs as the white in the tail is restricted to the outer tail feathers. In addition, the Sky Lark’s central tail feathers are brown which is not seen in any longspur species. Also unlike any longspur species, the wings of a Sky Lark show a white trailing edge. Bill shape is thin, flat and pointed unlike that of the conical-billed longspurs. The supercilium is buffy yellow going to white in the front and streaked. Sky Lark flight calls are also distinctively different from any longspur, sounding like a low rolling “drirdrirk”.

In essence, separating the four longspurs and the Sky Lark should begin with close examination of the spread tail patterns. A two-toned inverted “T” of black on a white tail marks the tail of the McCown’s Longspur. A triangle of black from base to upper tail coverts indicates the Chestnut-collared Longspur. Bold white stripes on the outer tail feathers with brown central tail feathers are the marks of the Sky Lark, while the same pattern with black central tail feathers indicate a Smith’s Longspur. A tail with white restricted to only the outermost tail feathers would be a Lapland Longspur. Additional key field marks should then be used to support or refute the initial identification and clarify any ambiguities that might have arisen due to plumage variation, feather wear, lighting, or vantage point.

Keep Your Contact Info Updated!

Have your moved, gotten a new phone number or new email address lately? If so, please send these changes to Naomi Murphy at ndmurphy3@hotmail.com.

DVOC Field Trips

As usual, the DVOC has a full slate of great field trips scheduled for the Spring. It’s an exciting time to be out and a great opportunity to learn more about migrating and breeding birds. Please join us! Follow this link for the most current information.

http://www.dvoc.org/FieldTrips/FieldTrips2007/FieldTrips2007.htm
Peace Valley Park and Nature Center is nestled in the hills of central Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Established in the early 1970s, the north branch of the Neshaminy Creek was dammed to create a three mile long finger lake for the purpose of flood control, water conservation and recreation. It has proved to be a wonderful area for birding, so much so that it has been designated an “Important Bird Area”. Birding any season of the year will bring the birder a wealth of sightings.

In winter, check the lake amongst the thousands of Canada Geese in winter. The National Bird, the Bald Eagle, is present most weeks during this time of year. Bucks County is the North American capital for the European Lesser Black-backed Gull which can be present in winter in the hundreds. Also look through the flocks of gulls for an Iceland Gull or a Black-headed Gull. Many species of ducks migrate through the area and some winter in the park.

Common Mergansers can be seen in the hundreds in some years. At the feeders at the Nature Center one should carefully look over the passerines for any rarities. Just about all the expected eastern species of sparrows have been recorded. Along the edge of the water in the park, Snow Buntings, American Pipit and even a Lapland Longspur have been seen. Northern Shrike has been present in some winters and, one winter, a Bohemian Waxwing was found amongst a flock of Cedar Waxwings. One never knows what might turn up.

As spring approaches, migrating Tundra Swans and many species of ducks may be found, even the scoter species. Common Loons are regular and once in a while a Red-throated Loon makes an appearance. Horned Grebe and, occasionally, Red-necked Grebe pass through the area and are on the lake for a day or so. Woodcocks can be seen and heard displaying in the fields around the Nature Center. A parade of raptors including Bald Eagle, Osprey and all the Eastern species of hawks have been noted.

While rarer, Bonaparte’s Gulls, Caspian Terns, Black Terns and even an occasional Common Tern have made the park list. As migration reaches its peak on certain days, the park can be alive with passerine species arriving, some just passing through on their way north. Although some luck is needed to witness a big fallout, one never knows what each day may bring. Just about all the eastern warbler species have been ticked off and surprises such as Summer Tanager, Olive-sided Flycatcher and Blue Grosbeak are possible.

Peace Valley has had several rare sightings over the years, but the most spectacular of all was a Redwing, a bird of the Turdus family and a relative of our American Robin. This species is native to northern Europe, Iceland and Siberia. It was present just one day in winter with a flock of robins and seen by only a precious few. At Peace Valley the sighting possibilities are endless. What will be the next rare species to appear? Only some very alert birder will answer this question.

Things get quiet in the early summer as birds settle in to raise their young. Along with the expected nesting species one should watch and listen carefully for the rarer ones such as Acadian Flycatcher, Louisiana Waterthrush and Blue Grosbeak. All three of these have nested successfully near the Nature Center. By July, the southern migration is already under way, starting with sandpiper species such as Least Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpiper and possibly a Semipalmated Plover or even a phalarope species. The area by the Chapman Road Bridge can be very good if the mud flats are exposed. By August, migration is well along, with the swallows and some of the warbler species already heading south. The young of many species are noticeable. One should look carefully on the island off the bridge for Black-crowned Night Heron, Green Heron and even Yellow-crowned Night Heron. The passerine migration is at its height during September and again, with a little luck, you may hit a fall-out of migrating birds with possibly a Connecticut Warbler or Philadelphia Vireo amongst the group.

Each year, about the second week of September, a hawk watch is set up on the south side of the lake at the parking lot closest to the dam to record the Broad-winged Hawk migration. Although the hawk watch is in operation for only about two weeks, many other species of raptors can be seen passing through. It is also a great place to meet other birders and share sighting information.

As fall arrives, migration is at its peak. On some days warblers, kinglets, sparrows, tanagers, orioles and flycatchers abound. Winter residents such as White-throated sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos return. Others species pass through on their journey south. Large numbers of geese arrive and settle in for the winter. Snow Geese can be seen and heard passing over on their way to the coast. Some years they stop and rest on the lake. In some winters Long-eared and Saw-whet Owls make Peace Valley their winter haunts and they can be found in suitable habitat. Great Horned Owl is already hooting, and mating is beginning. Another year is upon us.
Birding Hotspot ~ Peace Valley Park....continued

To visit Peace Valley Nature Center, the best way to start your journey around the lake is to begin at the intersection of Rt. 611 and Rt. 313 just north of Doylestown. Going north on Rt. 313 and after passing three traffic lights, watch for New Galena Road on your left. Turn left here and take the first left (Chapman Rd.) to the parking lot for the Nature Center. Go into the lobby and check the sightings log which is kept to let you know what is being seen on a particular day. Also pick up a map of the trails and the lake itself. You will find the map most helpful. A bird list is also available. The Nature Center itself is well worth a visit. You might wish to browse the nature shop on the premises. There is a bird blind to the right of the Nature Center, a good spot to start your journey. There are 14 miles of trails in this 750-acre park. Time of year will determine which is best for that particular season.

To proceed around the lake, go back up Chapman Road to New Galena Road and turn left. Take the first left to the North Lookout, about the best spot to view the lake while in your car. Continuing on, at the second stop sign, take a left down to Sailors’ Point. You can again view the lake from here while in your car and, with a good telescope, see even down to the dam itself. Continuing on you will come to a circle at the end of the park where you should turn left on Callowhill Road and go across the valley to the next intersection (Creek Rd). Turn left and watch for the first gravel road into the lake on the south side. This is a very good spot for viewing in the morning hours. Farther along you will come to a paved road into the lake and this again is a good morning spot. Going back to Creek Road and heading east you will finally come to a dead end parking lot. Park here and take a short walk to the lake. You can also walk from here along the closed road to a trail leading back to the Nature Center.

The book, Birds of Bucks County, by Ken Kitson, may be of interest for those birding this area. It is available in the Nature Store at the Center. You may also wish to refer to Arlene Koch’s article on page 45 of the February 2007 issue of “Birder’s World” for more information on this delightful birding spot.

PEACE VALLEY NATURE CENTER
170 Chapman Road
Doylestown, PA 18901
www.peacevalleynaturecenter.org
(215) 345-7860

Wednesday December 5, 2007 ~ Annual DVOC Banquet

Although the banquet is not until December, we are excited about our speaker and wanted to share the info early and often. First……note the date and day. We have always had our banquet on a Thursday evening in November but that has changed this year in order to accommodate our speaker’s schedule. Dr. Don Kroodsma, Professor of Biology at the University of Massachusetts is THE man in the science of bird song today. He has studied bird song for thirty years and has written a book about the art and science of birdsong. His focus and approach to his study is unique inasmuch as he tours the US on his bicycle, collecting bird songs along the way. Dr. Kroodsma maintains that there is no better way to hear a continent sing than by bicycle. More info relative to the banquet menu, cost, etc., will be posted when it becomes available but please, mark your calendars now because you don’t want to miss this program.
Okay, you’re really into birding now, but you’re not sure how to tap the resources on the Web. Of course, you can find information on just about any birding topic by going to www.google.com, and doing a search. There is also a wealth of information on our website at www.dvoc.org. However, the main thrust of this article is to provide information about some useful Listservs.

First, some vocabulary:

- **Listserv**, also known as a Mailing List (noun) – software for managing e-mail transmissions to and from a list of subscribers
- **Listowner** (noun) – the person who manages the Listserv
- **To post** (infinitive) – to send a message via a Listserv, distributed to all the subscribers
- **Command** (noun) – a message sent to the Listserv to manage your individual subscription
- **To subscribe** (infinitive) - to join a Mailing List, enabling you to receive messages, and in most cases to post as well

**DVOC E-Mail list:** You don’t have to be a member to join this Listserv, but if you are, it’s highly recommended. Webmaster Bert Filemyr has done a great job in hosting this. Only club officers can post, but if you subscribe, you will receive weekly DVOC bulletins, which detail upcoming meetings, field trips, announcements, cancellations, etc. You will also receive occasional rare bird alerts. It’s easy! Just go to the website. From the top menu bar select the button “About the Club” and select Listserv from the drop down menu. This will take you to the Listserv page and you will see general information about the service. Look for a place to subscribe, unsubscribe, and manage your subscription.

There are many birding Listservs. A partial list can be found at http://www.americanbirding.org/resources/mailinglists.html.

Wouldn’t it be nice if you could go to a single website and read the messages on the various Listservs, without having to subscribe? Thanks to Jack Siler, such a site exists at http://birdingonthe.net. As an example, if you wanted to see the messages on the Listserv known as pabirds, you would click on “Regional/Specialty”, then scroll down and click on “Pennsylvania”. If you scroll through the remainder of the list, you will see that there are even Listservs on Butterflies and Dragonflies. Many of the more advanced birders subscribe to ID-Frontiers.

For Birdeast, described below, you would click on “Rare Bird Alerts” instead of “Regional/Specialty”. The DVOC E-Mail list is not available here, so you will have to subscribe as above. Here are some specifics on subscribing and posting to some common Listservs:

**Birdeast:** listserv@listserv.arizona.edu
- To subscribe, send a command with something like this in both the subject line and body of the message: “subscribe birdeast John Doe”. You will then be sent emails containing text versions of most of the weekly telephone hotlines in the eastern U.S. – you cannot post to this list.

**New Jersey (jerseybirds)** – once subscribed, you will receive emails about bird sightings and related matters of interest in New Jersey, plus you will be able to post. The command is “subscribe jerseybirds John Doe”. You will be sent a set of instructions outlining your options, posting protocols, etc.

**Subscribe, unsubscribe, or manage your subscription:**
listserv@princeton.edu
To post to the list: jerseybirds@princeton.edu
You might want to receive your messages in DIGEST form, as per the instructions. Instead of receiving many emails, you will receive just one, a compilation of all the postings for that day. If you do this, you will not get up-to-the-minute rare birds postings, since the DIGEST is only transmitted once a day.

**Pennsylvania (pabirds):**
- Subscribe, unsubscribe, or manage your subscription: listserv@list.audubon.org
- To post to the list: pabirds@list.audubon.org

**Delaware (de-birds):**
- Subscribe, unsubscribe, or manage your subscription: listserv@new-lists.princeton.edu
- To post to the list: de-birds@lists.princeton.edu

**Posting Caveats:**
Make sure you send commands to the e-mail address beginning with the word “listserv”, and posts to the other address listed above. Be very sensitive about listing protocol – if you’re new to a list, it’s best to observe from the sidelines before you post yourself - for example, you will learn that directly criticizing others on the list or giving away the roosting locations of nocturnal owls are both taboo.
The Great American Bald Eagle Debate
by Debbie Beer, Conservation Chair

Some tout it as a triumph; others stand back in fear. Either way, the proposed delisting of the Bald Eagle from the Threatened species list invokes lively debate.

As with many wildlife species, the Bald Eagle story began many decades ago. For much of the 19th and early 20th centuries, eagles were considered a threat and a nuisance, and were routinely shot by hunters, farmers and fishermen. The 1940 Bald Eagle Protection Act outlawed the shooting of eagles, but their numbers continued to dwindle due to the widespread use of DDT after WWII. DDT not only lethally poisoned many birds, but resulted in egg shells too thin to support a growing chick.

Wildlife conservationists and birders dared to be hopeful about the future of Bald Eagles and other species after the banning of DDT in 1972, and the enactment of the Endangered Species Act a year later.

Now, in the 21st century, optimism seems to abound. After implementing rigorous programs for improving water quality, minimizing disturbances and monitoring nests, Pennsylvania officials proudly announced in Summer 2006 that there were over 100 Bald Eagle nests in the state, the highest number in over a century. According to Greg Butcher, Director of Bird Conservation at the National Audubon Society, “Pennsylvania is just a bellwether for every state… it’s been a great couple of decades for eagles all across the country.”

Once listed as a federally Endangered Species, Bald Eagles were changed to a Threatened Species in 1995; the state followed suit in 2005. This brings us to the current lively debate. The federal government is considering delisting the species altogether, touting the eagle’s recovery as a national achievement. The bird has recovered so well that it no longer needs to be listed under the Endangered Species Act. Or does it?

The Endangered Species act is one of the most powerful conservation tools in the country; evidence consistently shows that species protected under this act fare much better than those without such clout. If Bald Eagles are delisted, environmentalists, conservationists and citizens are concerned that the eagle protection laws that are left to protect the species won’t suffice. The US Fish & Wildlife Service needs to make their momentous decision no later than June 29, 2007.

After the Endangered Species laws, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act becomes the primary regulation for eagles. Enacted in 1940, the Act prohibits the taking or possession of and commerce in Bald and Golden Eagles, with limited exceptions. The definition of ‘take’ includes pursue, shoot, shoot at, poison, wound, kill, capture, trap, collect, molest or disturb.

Recognizing and foreseeing the newly-spotlighted role of the 1940 Eagle Protection Act, environmentalists want to make sure the word “disturb” is amply defined to defend Bald Eagles from opposing interests. The US Fish & Wildlife Service recently proposed a definition: A bird would be considered disturbed if it was dead, injured or forced to abandon its nest. Activists protested, citing that the common understanding of the word includes actions that frighten, alarm or annoy Bald Eagles. Developers were concerned that the definition was already too expansive. What if a home construction project causes an eagle to leave the nest? Many would say that’s exactly the point, but builders claim you can’t prove that their building directly caused the bird to leave. Who can read a bird’s mind?

Some philosophical souls ponder the removal of any “apex” species from Endangered Species protection, such as Bald Eagles or Gray Wolves. They posit, how can a species be protected or saved, if the ecosystem and habitat are disregarded? The laws that focus on the disturbance of a pair of nesting eagles miss the point of protecting the area around the nest. Currently, the Endangered Species Act requires a significant no-disturbance zone around a nest. The Eagle Protection Act doesn’t mention any habitat factors.

The debate rages. As the last chills of winter fade into the first mild days of spring. The Bald Eagles that I monitor remain intently focused on their tasks of hunting fish from the river, reinforcing their stout twig nest, and incubating a clutch of eggs. I suspect they don’t ponder their future, or worry about the development creeping ever closer to their nest. I hope they remain undisturbed for years to come, reaping success purely from survival instinct.
Long gone are the glory days of birding. As I sit here today, considering my favorite birders and birding areas over the years, I can’t help but get a little nostalgic about what once was. When did the hobby lose its innocence? Where did we go so wrong? Between the performance-enhancing drugs, the smaller playing fields, the monster that is technology, the ever narrowing gap between church and state, and the file-sharing sites on the internet I suppose it is no wonder that this favorite American past time should be drifting into decay and (as it is here) disrememberment. Still though, I like to think that there are a good many of us around who remember the good old days the way they really were and who won’t allow them to wither away so prematurely.

At the end of every year my father and I used to make an annual sojourn to the Outer Banks of North Carolina to do the Cape Hatteras Christmas Bird count. We’d always work the area around Hatteras village in the morning but the afternoon was always the big highlight. After we’d covered our territory we headed out to Cape Point and, driven by just the slim hope of picking out a Thayer’s Gull from the throngs of other gulls, would face—with grim determination—the ripping winter winds for about a two mile hike through the thick, soft sand. This I would do knowing full well that the odds of success were much more sparse than those of failure, but as my father used to always say, “well you’ll never see anything at all if you don’t go out there and try.” His logic was solid and while not exactly inspiring there was enough truth behind it to get me tugging at my bootstraps. And so I’d walk, the wind tearing fissures in my face and the salty sand stinging my eyes, armed only with a little hope. I’ll never forget the glee we experienced the first time we found a Thayer’s Gull out there at Cape Point. There were, my father, Matt Sharp and myself backslapping, high-fivin’, hands held high as we jumped, heels clickin’ in the air. We were on cloud nine. Then one year some kids have got all sorts of gadgets and gizmos and practically all the work is done for them. I was saddened the other day to run into an old pro (birder, that is). Spring time in the Great Dismal Swamp is anything but, and there amid the Kelly green leaves of the swamp magnolias and the softer olive Atlantic white cedars, Prothonotary Warblers sing away unencumbered by the weight that the modern world thrusts upon most of us. There I was, surrounded by their songs and those of Louisiana Waterthrushes and Prairie Warblers with their cacophony occasionally punctuated by the exclamations of a Swainson’s Warbler or the flutter-by of a Zebra Swallowtail. As I sat and absorbed the Zen of it all I spied another familiar form. Just down the trail a little ways was my old friend and mentor Guy Lister. Guy was out this day for all the same reasons as I, and was talking on his cell phone. He hadn’t noticed me and as he chatted away, apparently oblivious to everything he’d come to see and hear, I couldn’t help but notice something different in his stature. For starters he appeared as though he were heading into combat. With his binoculars, his scope, his camera, his microphone & recorder, and several other unidentified pieces of equipment draped around him I couldn’t tell if he looked more like Batman or as though he’d been rounded up in a rodeo by Spiderman. Poor Guy was so laden with technology that he could barely walk a straight line, and I don’t think that anything to do with the Bloody Mary he carries in his bar-noculars. Rather than greet my friend I slunk away a little disturbed at the realization that birding had changed so very much since I was a kid. I asked myself, what ever happened to just grabbing your binoculars and going?

But Guy is not alone. We’ve all succumbed to the pressure of trying to stay current. It ain’t enough just to go birding anymore. Nowadays if you haven’t got an iPod, a laser pointer, a couple walkie-talkies and a GPS you’re a gosh darn dinosaur. Today these items are commonplace, with the sum total being deemed just the minimal necessary for a day in the field; just the basic necessities anymore. Can’t help but long for the days
of my Swift spotting scope and the search for Thayer’s Gulls at Cape Point.

Today of course the whole idea of what a Thayer’s Gull really is evokes considerable debate, and this brings me to another problem with birding today. There seems to be a disturbing trend afoot among the taxonomists at the American Ornithologists Union. Currently the splitters have taken the reins, and if this doesn’t disturb you then just you sit idly by and watch them as eight new Red Crossbills emerge, and a couple three White-breasted Nuthatches are unveiled. The splitters have been good at staying ‘on message’ with neat little catch phrases (e.g. “genetically isolated” and “vocally distinct”) that are easily digested by the birding public. At the risk of sounding redundant however, I should note that the splitters are fragmented. That is to say that the splitters themselves are not well unified, or have the potential to be busted up, or split, if you will. Some of the splitters are splitting species (albeit if through questionable means) to serve noble conservation ends like preserving habitats or small populations of critters. Other splitters need grant money for their pork barrel projects and see the “evolution” of “new” species as a means of getting the slush spicket flowing forth.

It is this variable and questionable methodology, rife with ulterior motives, that makes them vulnerable should the lumpers find a way to unite and take advantage of the precarious position. Rumor is that there has been a lot of in-fighting and political back-biting amongst the SNAC (Splitters for a New American Century) board and it is good citizens like us that will the pay the price as they get their way and split everything on god’s green earth. Inquiries made at the latest AOU convention, directly to the board were met with the public statement that the SNAC board (AOU insiders in Baton Rouge and Ithaca have taken to calling them the “SNAC Pack”), “will not lend credence to any of these unsubstantiated rumors by dignifying them with a response”. When it was pointed out that this very statement was in fact a response, chairman Dr. Richard Seed responded by merely saying, “Look I am the decider here.”

Gossip and chit-chat aside, it seems clear that the extremist taxonomists of today are using this whole Thayer’s Gull problem as a wedge issue to divide the splitters and the lumpers and distract us all from the real issues facing ornithology today. You’ve got to give them credit though. These evolutionary biologists have harnessed a pretty intelligent design for keeping us from discussing the real issues, like the limits of the species concept, big woodpeckers and whether Greenland should be added to the ABA area. We have to keep things in perspective and focus our resolve because these taxonomists will stop at nothing to derail the discussion of these serious matters. We have to fight them on their own turf at the next AOU convention so that we never have to fight them at home.

In 1990 I received my driver’s license. While somewhat prone to vagrancy prior to that, once fully liberated by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation I was to greatly expand my range beyond my known northwest Philadelphia haunts. A few months before obtaining said license, a Little Egret that had been discovered frequenting one of the impoundments at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia. I’d been itching to make that bird mine, and so I jotted down the directions and near as I can recall they went something akin to this:

1. Park by the ‘no parking’ sign on Wildlife Drive and hop the fence where it says ‘No entry permitted beyond this sign’.
2. Walk down the trail about three tenths of a mile till you see a sign that says “Danger: Blasting area, unstable edge”.
3. Go left, past this sign until you come to an electric fence.
4. Look for the fencepost with the unexploded ordnance at the foot of it and step over the fence.
5. Walk out through the Least Tern/Piping Plover breeding area until you come to the Peregrine Falcon hacking tower.
6. Climb the tower (best way is to use the plover enclosure to get a leg up) and set up your scope. Look through the Phragmites for the egret. (If you don’t see it after a few minutes it may be hidden by the reeds in which case shooting off some shellcrackers may flush it into a position where you can see it (don’t forget the 16-gauge). Guy Lister had success this way after his third round of shellcrackers, when the Least Terns settled down a bit.)

It was a simpler time in those days. Today, a lot of folks’d say you shouldn’t even be allowed to park on wildlife drive. I never could see any harm in it.
Volunteering is for the Birds at Tri-State Bird Rescue
By Cindy Ahern

It is an honor to write this piece representing Tri State Bird Rescue and Research, as a volunteer in their wildlife clinic. Tri State Bird Rescue is located in the Frink Center for Wildlife at 110 Possum Hollow Rd., in Newark, Delaware and is situated on many acres of woods and meadowlands. This year, Tri State celebrates its thirty-first year of oil spill response and rehabilitation of injured wild birds. Throughout the thirty-one years Tri State has been in operation, many of the hours spent with the thousands of birds treated have been volunteer hours.

I came to be a volunteer when I first learned of Tri State during the devastating oil spill in November of 2004, when the Athos spilled its load into the Delaware River wreaking havoc on hundreds of birds and the wildlife that utilizes the river habitat. I contacted Tri State to find out how I could help. Supplies were desperately needed in support of the intense and massive clean up of hundreds of oiled birds. I put out a plea to everyone I knew to contribute supplies, loaded up my truck, and drove to Tri State to deliver our contributions. Upon my arrival, I was greeted by a cheerful volunteer, Cindy Naylor, who assisted me with the donation drop-off. I asked for additional information about helping the oiled birds, and was told of the opportunity to register for the upcoming oil spill training session. I added my name to the list, attended the training, and began to volunteer at Tri State. I attended additional training to qualify as a clinic volunteer, and have been volunteering ever since! Tri State has a small core staff of administrative personnel, an oil spill response team, and the clinic staff, which includes an office manager, veterinarians and clinic supervisors. Volunteers work together with staff in all areas of operation including bird care and clinic support, transport, front desk reception, garden and grounds maintenance, board membership, fundraising, and special event planning. Most of the volunteer work I’m involved with is in the clinic year-round, and transporting birds to Tri State for treatment, and from Tri State for release. I try to work a shift as often as possible, and usually work three to four shifts each month. Volunteer opportunities are always available in all areas of operation.

Two volunteer shifts are scheduled each day, and a third is added during nesting season. A typical shift involves a variety of responsibilities, including changing food and water, cleaning and changing cages, preparing bird diets, and any necessary cleaning tasks that need to be addressed on a daily basis. Experienced volunteers may assist clinic supervisors with administering medications and special feedings. Volunteers must read the medical charts for each bird they work with to become aware of the circumstances in which the bird arrived at Tri State. Volunteers will note any special amendments made to feeding and caging due to the injury or illness of the bird and take the appropriate steps to properly care for the bird during their volunteer shift. Most birds treated at Tri State are common species, including passerine, waterfowl, and raptors, each genera with diverse habitual and dietary needs. The majority of cases admitted at Tri State are the result of human activities, direct and indirect. Further statistics can be found on Tri State’s web site, www.tristatebird.org.

It is crucial for Tri State to provide proper housing and diet to meet the needs of each individual, creating a habitat as close as possible to their natural world. Upon arrival, each bird is examined by veterinary staff in the clinic, its case diagnosed and treatment prescribed. If a bird is in dire condition and will no longer be able to survive in the wild, it is humanely euthanized. At times a bird will be placed with an educational facility. After being admitted, the bird is then transferred to the appropriate housing inside the clinic. Inside the clinic, the birds are looked after a number of times during the day. Many of these birds are receiving medication or require housing adaptations due to injuries such as broken bones or wounds. The cages in the clinic are small and comfortable which
allow the bird to rest and recover. Each bird is carefully monitored and their progress is documented. Birds remain in the clinic for care until they are well enough to transfer to outside caging, usually after they are no longer in need of special attention. Clinic staff determines when a bird is ready to be moved to outdoor housing. The outside housing allows birds to move about and fly or swim freely in their recreated habitat as they continue to recover and gain their strength and flight. Their progress continues to be monitored until they have shown readiness for release. Criteria for release include self-feeding, preening and good feather condition, proper weight, and strong flight.

In addition to the numerous common species admitted each year to Tri State, a smaller percentage of the birds cared for at the facility are less common to rare or require additional attention. Loons for example, both Common and Red Throated have been treated at Tri State, and require housing that simulates water. Species specific housing was designed for loons, grebes, scoters, etc. during their indoor stay until they are well enough to move to outdoor pools. Shorebirds including sandpipers, plovers and terns must be provided with salt water and a sandy environment. While all birds may become stressed, the Cooper's Hawk needs a padded environment and a tail guard to keep it from becoming injured during its stay due to its tendency to be highly stressed.

At the time of this writing, a flock of Brown Pelicans have been admitted to Tri State and will remain under our care for an undetermined length of time. The victims of frostbite, the young pelicans obviously enjoyed the mild weather in Maryland and were surprised by the wintry weather in February. Other members of their flock were found dead on the scene, unable to survive the extent of the exposure and hypothermia they suffered. Special shifts have been established specifically for pelican care which requires daily medical treatment, feeding (they eat up to 100 lbs. of herring fortified with vitamins per day), and husbandry including cleaning pools and cages. I had the pleasure of working a few shifts with these peculiar birds, and must say it’s been an incredible experience. Not to mention the wonderful scent I get to share, "eau de Pelican"! Absolutely precious is how I will best describe them, although their behavior is not exactly something to be considered precious…they do like to bite, so care is taken not to get too close to those incredible beaks. We’re wearing special booties while working with the pelicans so not to contaminate the entire clinic with "eau de Pelican", a mixture of pelican excrement, sand and fish oil. Not the neatest bird in the world…all the same, a treat to work with, and they’ve been delighting everyone who has had the opportunity to spend time with them. Volunteer opportunities are now available, so you too can get up close and personal with the flock! Visit [http://www.tristatebird.org/volunteer/volunteer.htm](http://www.tristatebird.org/volunteer/volunteer.htm) to learn about upcoming volunteer informational sessions.

Many of the patients recovering at Tri State will show some typical behaviors observed in the species in their natural habitat. Take for instance the Carolina Wren, a familiar favorite. In a backyard setting, Carolina Wrens are often seen flitting around scrub and woodpiles, excitedly singing, chirping, and scampering about. It should come as no surprise that this small but mighty bird has been labeled as an "escape artist" when restricted by caging. The Great Blue Heron will quickly hide behind tall grasses when sighting human activity in their marshy homeland. At Tri State, Great Blue Herons are provided with tall, covered hiding places where humans are out of sight. The American Crow is a highly intelligent species who live and play together in flocks. Plenty of toys are included in crow cages to keep them busy and engaged. Mirrors are also placed in cages for crows and other flocking birds including doves, geese and gulls to mimic the visual of being with a number of birds.

During nesting season, the patient caseload explodes, filling our nursery with hungry nestlings and fledglings needing round the clock feeding and care throughout the daylight hours. Volunteers handle most of the feeding and caging responsibilities under the supervision of the clinic staff. Baby birds
Volunteering is for the Birds at Tri-State Bird Rescue continued

require a specialized diet, rich in protein and vitamins to ensure proper development. Baby birds in all stages of development are cared for in the nursery, located inside the clinic. Special care is taken with raptors and crows since they easily imprint on humans if given the opportunity. The baby birds are handled only when absolutely necessary in order to raise them as truly wild birds.

Naked nestlings are safe and warm inside incubators in their simulated nests and are fed as often as every 15 minutes! Baby birds are moved to roomier caging and given perches to explore as they grow larger and venture out of their nests. Fledgling birds are again moved to more spacious housing to allow them to safely test their wings and learn to self feed as they would in an outdoor environment. Finally, the day comes when the baby bird is ready to be relocated outdoors in a flight cage. Baby birds in outdoor housing will have met the criteria necessary to gradually be introduced to the habitat where they’ll spend the rest of their lives. With fully developed feathers, they are self feeding, completely able to fly, forage, preen, hide, and are at the proper weight for their species. Contact with humans is very limited at this point, as the baby birds grow closer to their eventual release. Behaviors typical to their genera are learned here as they are acclimated to outdoor living. A final examination is given to each bird before they are released, then finally, the hatch to the cage is opened and the juvenile birds are free to leave! Feeding stations are situated in a number of locations on the property, and many of the youngsters stay in the neighborhood for a while.

Finally, I thought I’d close with a few personal experiences and comments about volunteering at Tri State. First and foremost, I’ve found the staff to be appreciative and respectful. Questions are always answered, and the opportunity to learn is welcomed, encouraged, and supported. Some of the experiences I’ve had at Tri State will never leave me… although bountiful now; Bald Eagles (a record number were treated in 2006) were once nearly extinct. As a child, I never thought I’d have the opportunity to see a Bald Eagle flying free, let alone touch one! I’ve had a number of opportunities to hold this majestic bird as a clinic supervisor administered medication. Raptors are my favorite genera, with the Red-tailed Hawk being my favorite. Another wonderful experience I’ve had included a Red-tailed Hawk who came to us after being hit by a car, suffering from intense bruising and lacerations. My heart ached for this poor creature as it obviously carried lots of pain. It had come from the county where I live, and I requested to release the hawk if it pulled through. The hawk remained critical for a while, then slowly began to recover, and eventually made a full recovery after considerable time spent in the flight cage. The time had come to release the beautiful hawk back to nature. Transportation was arranged, and I picked the hawk up at Tri State, releasing it in a state preserve just a few miles from the intersection where it was found. I remembered the condition this bird was in several weeks before as it came to Tri State, and I realized I was witnessing a miracle as that same hawk flew off into a tree. Another unique opportunity came my way last summer, in the form of two baby Common Terns with foot injuries. Medically treated for their injuries, the nestlings were raised to juveniles at Tri State. Together with state agencies, arrangements were made for the terns to be released in a large tern colony. I was pleased to play a part in arranging the release of the terns, and enjoyed working together with others orchestrating the release.

As the end of winter draws upon us opening the doors for spring, with it comes the busy chatter of our feathered friends that will soon fill the air and our clinic as they begin to raise their families. I invite you to explore the many volunteer opportunities with Tri State Bird Rescue by attending an informational session or our annual Open House on April 29. Further information is available by visiting www.tristatebird.org or telephone 302-737-9543.
Panamania or “Silent, upon a peak in Darien”...by Colin Campbell

What do you mean, what’s all that about? Well, I’ve had a mania about going to Panama for years, and especially the Darien. And, of course you know John Keats so you must know his 1816 sonnet “On first looking into Chapman’s Homer”. Ivan Hoyos, our young Panamanian guide in the Darien knew all about it. Keats was so enthralled by George Chapman’s translation of the famous Greek’s ‘Odyssey’ that he rattled off the poem which has my quoted title as its last line. The fact that he implied that ‘stout Cortez’ was the first Euro to see the Pacific was incorrect – it was Balboa – in no way detracts from this marvelous bit of poetry which was forced on me as homework when I was knee-high to a Scottish sheep. I’ve wondered and dreamed about Darien for over 50 years.

All of which leads me to an expedition there – and other parts of Panama – which a few of us from the Club undertook in January of this year. Our leader was Jean Jacques Gozard of Amazilia Tours, a Frenchman living in Costa Rica, with one of the most interesting and bizarre life histories I’ve heard in a long while.

Our 18-day adventure was basically in four parts. The acclimatization was done in the Metropolitano Park in Panama City (PC). Then a charter flight to Cana Field Station in the Darien, a huge and remote area of preserved rain forest stretching from the Caribbean to the Pacific and adjacent to the Colombian border. Two members of our party just came for this bit and, on our return to PC, they headed home and the four of us who were in for the whole nine yards caught an internal flight to David on the edge of the Chiriqui Highlands. Two others joined us at that stage after a frustrating delay, and the next week was spent at two locations, the delightful guesthouse of Cielito Sur near the scenic but cloudy Volcano Baru and the more primitive but spectacular forest lodge Willie Mazu’s in Bocas del Toro on the Caribbean Slope. Our final days were based in PC where we birded the world famous Canal Zone area (Canopy Tower, Pipeline Road, Summit Ponds, Old Panama City, etc) and, of course, watched the huge ships pass through the Miraflores Locks on the Canal; well, they were encircled by frigatebirds, pelicans and Ospreys! We finished exhausted with a huge checklist of over 450 birds and some very interesting and odd mammals, insects and plants.

Photos © C Campbell. This page—top left to bottom right: Squirrel Cuckoo, Great Jacamar, Crested Guan, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, Black-tipped Cotinga, Turquoise Cotinga, Semiplumbeous Hawk, Short-Tailed Hawk, Gray-headed Kite, Spectacled Owl, Mottled Owl.
Panamania or “Silent, upon a peak in Darien”...continued

Rather than bore you stupid with a litany of birds seen, names you’ll never remember and incidents which will mean nothing to non-participants, I’m going to use the magic of Larus-on-Line to caption a series of photos (the number indeterminate but large – almost certain to be axed by your editor, God bless her) to give you a flavour of this highly scenic and wonderful country with, of course, the emphasis on birds. In this case, total emphasis. Here goes.

First – some of the Spectacular Stuff. You go birding in the tropics to see colourful and wonderful birds; here’s a sprinkling, starting with the ubiquitous Squirrel Cuckoo, the unusually obliging Great Jacamar and the usually tree-blocked Crested Guan. This is followed by a statue-like Rufescent Tiger-Heron, then a yardbird – the Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, and a Red-legged Honeystperer. Cottingas are always rare, weird and wonderful; examples here are the 99.9% all-white male Black-tipped Cotinga in the Darien and the beautiful male Turquoise Cotinga at a shade-grown coffee plantation in the Chiriqui Highlands. The coffee was excellent too! Raptors were diverse but not abundant, but great views of Semiplumbeous Hawk, Gray-headed Kite and Short-tailed Hawk were just three of the highlights. Finally in this section, owls are represented by the motionless Mottled and the spectacular Spectacled.

Next - brown and gray things. Not everything is big and colourful by any means but, for the true birder, little dull things can be almost as exciting. The cute little Slaty Flowerpiercer which takes a short cut to the nectar, the enigmatic Clay-coloured Robin and the sharp-eyed Tropical Pewee are examples. Add the Torrent Tyrannulet, only found on rocks in rushing mountain streams, and the dapper Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant and you begin to see what I mean.

We had a motmot bonanza with four species. That’s an awful lot of Mots. My motley collection includes the Blue-crowned, which is the commonest, the Rufous which is the largest, its smaller cousin the similarly-looking Broad-billed, and finally the diminutive Tody, a real gem of a find.

Photos © C Campbell. This page — top left to bottom right: Slaty Flowerpiercer, Clay-colored Robin, Tropical Pewee, Torrent Tyrannulet, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Blue-crowned, Broad-billed, Rufous and Tody Motmots, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Blue-gray Tanager, White-shouldered Tanager, Palm Tanager.
Then there are the Tanagers. Most are very active and high in the canopy and so difficult to photograph, so you’ll just have to settle for the yard birds – the Palm and Blue-gray Tanagers - and the low-level White-shouldered Tanager and the ground level forest-dwelling Red-throated Ant-Tanager.

One cannot go birding in Central and South America without being amazed by the number and beauty of the hummingbirds. And the names! My small selection includes the Green Violet-ear, the Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, the Purple-crowned Fairy, the Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer and the Violet-crowned Woodnymph.

Finally, ant-icipation. In American tropical forest birding, one is always on the look-out, or rather hear-out, of sounds suggesting an ant swarm. A big column of army ants stirs up the forest floor, revealing succulent goodies for the attendant birds. And what birds they are, these ‘professional ant-followers’. My little portfolio shows Oscillated, Bicolored, Spotted and Dusky Antbirds, a Plain Xenops and a Gray-headed Tanager as representatives of this class of forest floor sweepers. But our biggest surprise was to find the Holy Grail bird of these ant swarms, a bird bearing a remarkable resemblance to a Roadrunner – the large but very elusive Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo. To get photos of this beast was way beyond my wildest dreams.

My thanks for the wonderful company of fellow DVOC participants Alison Ellicott, Edie Parnum, Nancy Cooke, Steve Liebhaber, Scott Henderson, Jeff Holt and France Dewaghe. Jean Jacques Gozard did a great job as organizer and leader as did the local guides we encountered, especially Ivan Hoyos in the Darien; our driver, Vladimir and his substitutes were excellent on the sometimes dubious roads.
I departed on February 14th 2006 on a nearly three-month tour of Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Thialand. My band R.A.M.B.O played concerts in all of those countries except Vietnam and Sri Lanka. Although playing music was the primary focus of the trip, I was able to bird in every country except Cambodia. The secondary focus was to film for a birding documentary I am working on tentatively called “Life Birds” which will hopefully be a full-length feature documentary on birding that will do with a movie what Kingbird Highway and The Feather Quest did with books.

I hope this article will not just prove interesting but that it will also provide useful information for anyone traveling Asia. Birding specific package tours allows you to rack up huge numbers of species and you get your money’s worth. However the good infrastructure, cheap food and accommodations (Japan excluded), availability of excellent local guides and friendly local people makes Asia the perfect choice for someone wanting to travel independently.

Considering the nature of our travels I had to have all my belongings fit into one backpack for the majority of the trip. I wanted to bring a spotting scope along but was unsure what to do about a tripod. I opted for a Manfrotto 676b digi Monopod. I have a Cabela’s camouflage armor coated scope which is under a foot long and sturdy. Those of you with high-end scopes might want to bring a beater instead. I had little trouble using the monopod and was able to get great looks at distant birds. The tripod version of the digi is also very compact and not much more expensive. Had I known that in advance I might have used it. I was impressed that every spot I found on my own was in this book. I would recommend buying more country specific guidebooks if you have the space and especially if you are traveling to fewer countries. Taiwan and Indonesia have really good guidebooks that would have helped me if I’d had them.

I was not able to find a field guide for Japan in English before my trip. I had a friend pick up a copy of A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan which was published by the Wild Bird Society of Japan. It’s in Japanese but has scientific names for each species. I found that this guide was available in every nature center in Japan. I ordered A Field Guide to the Birds of Korea by Woos-Shin Lee from L. A. Audubon which is in English and covers almost all the birds in Japan as well so it is useful for both countries. I was unable to get a field guide for Taiwan in advance but one was waiting for me when I arrived. This guide is available in every nature center in Taiwan and it has English and scientific names. Every thing else is in Mandarin including the title. The plastic rain jacket has Wild Bird Society of Taipei written on it so maybe they publish it.

I picked up a copy of Birds of Hong Kong and South China by Clive Viney from a bookstore in Hong Kong. It appears to be published by the government of Hong Kong. For Vietnam and Thailand I ordered Craig Robson’s excellent Birds of Southeast Asia, Princeton. Another useful book was Birds of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives also published by Princeton. The Oxford guide to Sri Lanka was too expensive so I opted for the regional guide instead. It covered all the birds. There were just about a thousand extra species to sort through. Speaking of Oxford, I was able to find a used copy of Where to Watch Birds in Asia, yet another of Princeton’s gifts to birding. This guide is a great place to start. I didn’t have it on my first trip to Asia but could have used it. I was impressed that every spot I found on my own was in this book. I would recommend buying more country specific guidebooks if you have the space and especially if you are traveling to fewer countries. Taiwan and Indonesia have really good guidebooks that would have helped me if I’d had them.

You are probably asking right now - how did I get to all these countries and how could I possible afford it? The answer is the incredible “All Asia Pass” offered by Cathay Pacific. It cost just under $2000 to visit all but one of the countries listed above over a three-month period. The exception was Cambodia. We had to take a bus there from Vietnam. The “All Asia Pass” allows unlimited flights within twenty-day blocks of time. Flights have to be booked in advance and you have to pay for departure taxes and for additional increments of time. We had to book three months of time to cover the time needed for the music tour. That allowed me a week of time to fly anywhere for free.
For me the choice was obvious. It had to be Japan, specifically Hokkaido. I have been dreaming of seeing a Steller’s Sea Eagle since I was a kid and I knew that if I didn’t get it on this trip I’d have to go again which would be expensive. Although Cathay Pacific does offer Sapporo on the pass, I chose to meet my friend (and the organizer of our Japanese shows) Satoshi in Nagoya and fly to Kushiro on an internal flight. You would have to take another flight or make a very long drive if you flew into Sapporo. The sea eagles are concentrated on the east side of Hokkaido. Driving from Kushiro towards Numero, the eastern most point in Japan, we stopped at a bridge over a harbor. I could see ducks from the bridge including Common Goldeneye, Greater Scaup, and Eurasian Wigeon. Glaucous Gulls were also on the river. These were all birds I’ve seen at home but it was neat to see them in this new scenery. Further along, as it was getting dark, the first eagles appeared. Unfortunately the light was bad and we could only make out silhouettes.

We spent the night in a traditional Japanese hotel in Ochiishi. The rooms had no beds, just bamboo mats on the floor. They were still very comfortable and only about $60 for a room which is not bad by Japanese standards. We drove for Numero early the next morning. On the way an adult White-tailed Sea Eagle flew low over the road. What an impressive bird. It reminded me very much of our Bald Eagle. Numero had sea ice but not the eagle concentrations I was hoping for. Several Harlequin Ducks bobbed in the water and Slaty-backed and Glaucous-winged Gulls rested on the rocks. There was a marker demanding that the islands taken by Russia after World War II be returned. I saw many signs proclaiming, “Give us back our stolen islands” all over this part of Hokkaido.

We headed back down the Numero peninsula to a nature center on Lake Furen-Ko where I was treated to sightings of Brown-eared Bulbul, Eurasian Nuthatch, Willow Tit, and Greater Spotted Woodpecker. We learned that Steller’s Sea Eagles could be seen at another spot on the lake that is used by ice fisherman. We found the turn off and some fishermen had vehicles out on the ice so Satoshi decided to give it a try. Before I realized what he was doing we were stuck in a snow bank. Since we could clearly see eagles out on the ice, we abandoned the mired car and trudged in their direction. A shadow on the ice made me look up to see a Steller’s Sea Eagle low overhead. Nothing can prepare you for the sheer absurdity of this bird. The size is staggering and I believe it to have the largest wingspan of any eagle. The bill is not only oversized, but it is so bright an orange that it almost glows. The dark chocolate feathers contrast sharply with the white shoulders, forehead, leggings and tail – it is hard to believe that it’s even real. Once we got closer to the birds I started counting them. Eighty-five adult Steller’s Sea Eagles were on the ice and probably about half as many juveniles along with the same number of White-tailed Sea Eagles. There were also at least two hundred Black Kites and it was with great pleasure that I watched a young White-tailed Sea Eagle snatch a fish from the talons of a Black Kite.

We went back to the stranded car where, after giving up on getting the car in four-wheel drive, a nice couple came to our aid and pulled us out of the bank. When we got back to the nature center we ran into a Bird Quest group. They told us about their trip to Rausu. It is about two hours further north and one can buy a ticket on a boat the cruises the pack ice and feeds hundreds of Steller’s Sea Eagles at extremely close range. We headed to a nearby nature center on the small Notsuke peninsula where I spotted several Spectacled Guillemots in the offshore waters.

We spent another night in Ochiishi, this time waking up in daylight. To our surprise the hotel overlooked a beautiful harbor walled in by sheer cliffs. Sika Deer could be seen grazing down the slope and up on the bluffs across the harbor. Several Steller’s Sea Eagles roosted in the trees behind the hotel and were soaring over the harbor. We headed to the Tancho No Sato Crane Center where Red-crowned Cranes come daily to feed. There are outdoor bleachers and observation decks for viewing. It’s not the most wild of settings but these are still wild birds. Their stunning beauty and stirring calls give you chills no matter what the circumstances.

We headed inland to Lake Akan which is famous for its spherical moss. We where hoping to find some natural hot springs since, unfortunately for me, people with tattoos are forbidden in public baths and spas. Since we had no specific information we did not find any but we did find a nice nature center that had spherical moss on display in aquariums. Apparently the moss can get pretty big - larger than a basketball. They sell it in key chains and cans to be unleashed into your home aquarium. Near the lake, we found natural hot seeps that provided open ground for birds to feed. We picked up Eurasian Siskin and a juvenile Goshawk made an appearance before we left. This would be a good area in which to spend more time for some of the mountain specialties. We went back towards Tancho No Sato to another crane feeding area that was less commercial than Tancho No Sato. We waited on a bridge over the Setsurigawa.
River for the cranes to come in to roost. While waiting, we encountered Crested Kingfisher and Japanese Wagtail. Only a few cranes came in close but the rest could be seen roosting farther down the river. It was lovely to see one family group working the river close to the bridge. They are such gorgeous birds and it was nice to see them in a more natural setting. We settled in for the night at a hotel in Kushiro and flew out the next evening after stopping back at the river and going to Kushiro Moor.

I arrived in Hong Kong and was warmly received by my old friend Pranjal. We took the ferry to his home on Lamma Island and en route I was captivated by a stunning view of Hong Kong at night. Lamma Island is the smallest island in Hong Kong and has absolutely no cars or buses. Making the rounds in the morning I saw Gray Wagtail, Magpie, Red-whiskered and Chinese Bulbul, Common Tailorbird, Black-eared Kite, Little Egret and Chinese Pond-Heron. Two Pacific Reef-Herons perched on a small boat in the harbor near the ferry dock. The rest of the band arrived later that night.

Rising (but not birding) early we headed out to Victoria Peak on HK Island to search for Blue Magpie. We stopped on our way for dim sum, a Hong Kong specialty. The crowds were big and by the time we hit the trail nothing was moving. We did get some great footage of Black-eared Kites soaring at eye level. No magpies were spotted, but this park certainly warrants a trip in the early morning.

Hong Kong is most famous for the Mai Po Marshes, an area of mudflats, mangroves and shrimp ponds in the Pearl River Delta. In the spring it is absolutely one of the best places in the world for shorebirds. In the winter it is noted for its wintering Black-faced Spoonbills. Unfortunately, Mai Po was closed when I was there due to bird flu. The adjacent area of Tsim Bei Tsui is not contained in the refuge and we were able to visit there. You need a special permit to visit Mai Po and you have to prove you are a “serious bird watcher” before it is granted. A membership to any birding group will suffice. Contact the Agriculture and Fisheries Department or the World Wildlife Fund, which oversees the reserve. Be sure to ask for a permit for both Mai Po and Deep Bay which is the body of water on which Mai Po is located. There is a special boardwalk that exits the huge fence (to keep out illegal immigrants from China) and goes out to three different hides on the mudflats. Look into getting permission from WWF to use the hides. I made a visit to Mai Po in 2004 in late April and believe me it is worth all the hassle. Bring a scope! If you for some reason do not have the required permit or if Mai Po is closed, Tsim Bei Tsui has many of the same birds - just without the nice facilities. You can reach both Mai Po and Tsim Bei Tsui by public transportation. Take the subway (you’ll have to switch lines) to the last stop near the border and then take a cab or a mini bus. The cabs are more affordable and the time you save makes it worthwhile. WWF offers accommodations if you want to stay closer to the action.

After a three-hour trip involving two ferries, two trains, a bus and a cab we arrived at Tsim Bei Tsui (TBT). TBT is an area of road that follows the coast of Deep Bay and winds behind the big fence and through an area of shrimp ponds. We stopped to scope the bay periodically as we walked down the road. We were rewarded with Great Cormorant, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail and Great-crested Grebe. An Osprey perched on a nearby snag and Pied Avocet, Common Greenshank, Eurasian Curlew and Grey Heron were working the shallows. From a rise in the road I could see into the mangroves and mudflats behind the fence. A large number of egrets and a group of Black-faced Spoonbills suddenly took flight and, in checking to see what scared them, I spotted a White-bellied Sea-Eagle. There were two Pied Kingfishers on a wire over the shrimp ponds and I was treated to nice close views of large roosts of Grey Herons along with Little and Great Egrets. We found a Long-tailed Shrike and Plain Prinia in brush along the dike and a Common Buzzard soaring overhead. On the way out and right next to the road we were blessed with crippling views of a feeding Black-faced Spoonbill - a nice way to end the day.

We spent a morning cycling and row boating in the Plover Cove and Bride’s Pool area where we had White-throated Kingfisher and Pied Crow. I also found an Asian Brown Flycatcher in the forested hillsides. This area seems to be a good place to hit earlier in the morning, especially during migration.

It is possible to get an all-purpose debit card in Hong Kong which is called the Octopus. It can be used on public transportation and ferries and it makes traveling...
After playing our first show on tour at a youth center on Hong Kong Island, we enjoyed some vegetarian dim sum and were on our way to South Korea.

Birding in Korea was not what I had hoped. Finding someone to drive me out to the Han River Estuary proved impossible. If the concentrations of waterfowl I saw on the Han River in Seoul and on Namyang Lake were any indication of what to expect, you will surely not be disappointed if you can make a trip out there. I had the largest gathering of Mallards I've ever seen on Namyang Lake which is 45 kilometers south of Seoul. There must have been ten thousand birds just in the cove near where we parked. I was able to find one gorgeous male Baikal Teal amongst the throngs of Mallards, as well as many Spot-billed ducks and Goosanders (Common Merganser). I found Common Teal, Pintail, Common Pochard, Baer's Pochard, Great and Japanese Cormorants, and Great-crested Grebes while birding along the Han River and a tributary in Seoul. Magpies, Marsh Tits and Brown-eared Bulbuls were the only songbirds I could muster.

The shows we played in Korea were fantastic. The first show was outside, yes outside, during the first week in March. It was on a stage built into the back of a public restroom in a busy business section. We played in two other smaller cities and a final big show in Seoul at the preeminent punk venue Skunk Hell. Amongst the mostly Korean crowd were about a dozen GIs who were quite happy not to be in Iraq.

Korea is not nearly as expensive as Japan but is still much more expensive than the other countries we visited in Asia. The advice I have is that the street food is fairly cheap and good and the public baths are amazing. For the equivalent of five dollars, you can go to these great spas and you will find a plethora of different temperature hot tubs and pools, some with massaging water jets. Downstairs in the co-ed area are various saunas, with hot lamps, coarse salt, steam, an ice room, a white noise lounge and places you can sleep. Many people spend the night in these baths; this is one way to save money.

We had some days off at the end of our Taiwan visit and I spent all of them birding. I found that Wheatly's guide is not very good for Taiwan although there are a few good suggestions. I was directed by the local kids to Guandu Nature Park located on the northern outskirts of Taiwan. It is easily reached by subway. Just take the Tamsui line of the MRT train to the Guandu stop. It’s a short walk from the station and there are signs pointing the way. A raptor on top of a power pole in a car lot caught our attention and it turned out to be a Crested Goshawk. What a way to start a day of birding. Unfortunately the weather was cool and rainy every day but that did not stop me from seeing some great birds. Guandu has a nature center and a stellar gift shop. If on Taiwan for business this would be a great place to stop, not just for the great birding, but also for the information that is available. There are two huge free pamphlets. One is titled Top 10 Taipei Bird Watching Spots and other is Top Ten Taiwan Bird Watching Spots. Both are excellent and include directions. The Field Guide to Taiwan Birds and a excellent English language guide to birding Taiwan are both available at the gift shop as well.

Guandu is a small wetland reserve equipped with blinds and boardwalks which provide access to both fresh and salt water marshes. Some Little Ringed Plovers made a nice appearance for me and Black Drongos hawked insects in the fields behind the marsh. In front of
the nearby Guandu Temple is a causeway through a mangrove swamp. This area proved even more productive for birds. The highlight, even though it wasn’t a new bird, was the two Red-necked Phalaropes spinning in a pool in the salt flats. There were Great and Little Egrets as well as Black-crowned Night Herons. Black-winged Stilts were also abundant.

The whole gang made a visit to the Taipei Botanical Gardens to look for Malayan Night Herons. This has to be the easiest place to see Malayan Night Heron in the world. I don’t know how or why such a normally secretive and nocturnal bird decided to start breeding in a botanical garden, but if you want this bird, this place is a must. We easily found three of them and were also treated to Himalayan (Grey) Treepies and some very bold squirrels which jumped on us while we were walking the boardwalk.

We all made an outing to Yangmingshan National Park which can be reached easily by bus from downtown Taipei. We were on the hunt for Taiwan Blue Magpies and were successful in finding them on the Chu-tsi Hu (Bamboo Lake) Trail where it meets the main road. A flock of about fifteen of the magpies was in a large tree with some treepies. This has to be one of the most impressive looking corvids out there. It is larger than our Black-billed Magpie and is dark, almost purplish blue, with a black head and neck, a bright yellow eye and a striking red bill and legs. We had great views along the trail of the fabulous green, red, yellow and blue Muller’s Barbet while Gray-cheeked Fulvetas and Black Bulbuls flitted in the canopy. Taiwan was great but I really wish I had more time to spend there.

Malaysia and Borneo are legendary for birding; Fraser’s Hill and Taman Negara on the peninsula, Mount Kinabalu and the Danum Valley on Borneo - all are well known to the international birding community. Although I did not have time to visit those spots, I did spend an afternoon and a morning at Kuala Selangor Nature Park and it was an incredible experience.

Reaching Kuala Selangor NP is quite easy. Buses run twice an hour from the central station in Kuala Lumpur to the town of Kuala Selangor. I was not able to figure out where to catch the express bus but the three-hour trip on the local bus wasn’t so bad. The nature park is a short walk from town and accommodations are cheap, adequate, and will be offered to you as soon as you get off the bus. You need not plan this trip in advance. Malaysia, like Thailand, is a modern country with an easy, efficient, comfortable and inexpensive transit system. Cabs are cheap, too, so if you make a mistake and get on the wrong bus you can always get a cab and get right back on track.

Kuala Selangor NP is a wetland reserve with some remaining secondary forest that includes fresh water pools and areas of mangrove forest. On our walk into the park we immediately encountered Mangrove Blue Flycatcher, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird, Common Iora, Black-naped Oriole and a Crested Serpent Eagle that was in full view on a low branch. Although this eagle is one of the most common raptors in the area it never fails to impress. A huge and well-made observation tower overlooks the canopy and provides views of two shallow pools with a heronry. While we watched the Gray Herons in the colony, a Milky Stork flew in and joined the feeding herons. Brahminy Kites, looking very much like small Bald Eagles, were constantly in the air along with a few White-bellied Sea-Eagles. Three species of kingfisher could be seen from the tower as well - Black-capped, White-throated and Collared. Exploring the scrub around the pools revealed Ashy Tailorbirds and both Olive-backed and Brown-throated Sunbirds. Don’t let those drab names fool you, all sunbirds are fabulous.

A very nice elevated concrete pathway led us on a loop through a mangrove forest. Both Greater and Common Flamebacks (woodpeckers) were cooperative and gave us great looks. These birds look like an absurd version of a Pileated Woodpecker. They have a vibrant yellow-olive mantle and bright red-orange back and tail. We ran into two Malay birders and were shown pictures of a Mangrove Whistler we just missed. These were the only local birders who weren’t guides that we encountered on the whole trip. We spent an hour...
together picking through the Ashy and Bronzed Drongos while enjoying the activities of a flock of Great Tits. Two Sunda-pygmy Woodpeckers appeared and put on a show. Back out at the ponds we had great looks at Purple and Striated Herons and were entertained by the many Blue-tailed Bee-eaters. Peaceful Dove, Thick-billed Green Pigeon and Emerald Dove provided some Columbid flavor to our day. On our way out we ran into a large troop of Long-tailed Macaques which is the ubiquitous trouble making monkey of Southeast Asia. We had the scary experience of being chased by one in Indonesia, but this troop proved harmless and let us pass unmolested. We’d seen a few Silvered Leaf-Monkeys in the park but were delighted to find a tree that contained forty individuals. These are elegant, elongated creatures when compared to the muscular almost pit bull like physique of the macaque.

Kuala Selangor is famous for its fireflies and the proprietor of our guesthouse took us on a half hour boat trip to see their spectacular synchronized flashing. Kuala Selangor is a great place to visit if you find yourself in Kuala Lumpur and don’t have the time to make it farther out. Even if you have more time, you will still want to come and spend a day or two at this amazing park.

The estimates on travel time between Kuala Selangor and Johor Bahru where our next show was were inaccurate to say the least. What we were told would be a five hour bus ride took ten hours. Much to the aggravation of the two band members who didn’t come to the park and to the disappointment of audience, we missed our show by twenty minutes. We felt horrible for missing the show but Johor Bahru is only a bridge away from Singapore so many people were able to make it our great show the next day. I can confidently say we thoroughly rocked the house. It didn’t hurt that the turnout was phenomenal and the audience went crazy. The form of punk rock we play attracts a very active but nonviolent crowd where all injuries are purely unintentional.

Singapore is home to a wonderful wetland reserve. Although Kuala Selangor had great and well-maintained facilities, I’ve never seen a reserve with as many blinds, observation towers and educational facilities as Sungei Buloh Nature Park. This park is accessible via public transportation but I opted to take a cab since it only cost the equivalent of twelve U.S. dollars. It was worth it to save time and get to the park soon after dawn.

Sungei Buloh is known for shorebirds and since I was visiting in late March, I was able to catch many migrants along with some birds that winter there. While I was picking through the Common Greenshanks, Common and Spotted Redshanks, Marsh Sandpipers, Common Sandpipers and Pacific Golden Plovers, I discovered my life Terek Sandpiper bopping along the flats with it’s slightly upturned bill. My life Dollarbird, a striking dark green roller with a wide red bill, was across the river perched high on a twig. A Milky Stork soared overhead and Common Kingfishers darted across the river. Many of the water birds were the same as at Kuala Selangor but a Yellow Bittern and White-breasted Waterhen were sweet additions. I spent the day with a Chinese Malaysian birder and her British husband and was quite chagrined when she spotted a Stork-billed Kingfisher on the opposite side of the blind. This was a bird that eluded me for the entire trip but I saw a brilliant Chestnut-winged Cuckoo which consoled me.

Along the path a park employee showed us a nine-foot Indopacific crocodile that was basking amongst mangrove roots. There were many Malayan water monitors, some even exceeding six feet in length. Like most coastal wetlands in Southeast Asia, mudskippers were everywhere. I don’t know if Singapore is deserving of an intentional birding visit but there are many parks to explore including two forest reserves that, from what I hear, are full of birds.

We had a show scheduled in Cambodia and since the “All Asia Pass” does not service Cambodia, we had to take a bus from either Thailand or Vietnam. It was decided we’d go via Vietnam. I found a guide on Birdingpal.com, Nguyen Hoa Bao, from Wild Tour Vietnam who was able to arrange our visas for us. You can have an agency do this for you if you don’t have a letter of invitation. Cambodia enables you to get a visa on arrival. Remember to have extra passport-sized photos with you for both countries and have ample space in your passport for a visa sticker that takes up an entire page. In addition, you need an open space for the entry stamp on the page opposite the visa.

Bao arranged to have us picked up at the airport and met us our hotel. It was quite nice and the rooms only cost eighteen dollars a night. In Vietnam and Cambodia you can pay for everything in dollars. Sometimes it’s the only currency accepted(41,864),(949,969)
Asia Trip Report….continued

leaving at five in morning.

Bao arrived in a four-wheel drive Toyota minivan complete with driver. Despite being only twenty-eight, Bao is a Biology professor and two of his students joined us. We drove about three hours to the park and saw firsthand how densely populated Vietnam is. There is unbroken habitation interspersed with rubber plantations almost to the border of the park. We arrived at Tan Phu National Park and began birding the entrance track. Soon we encountered Asian Brown Flycatcher, Scaly-browed Babbler, Bronzed Drongo, Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker, Grey-eyed Bulbul and the bird of the day - Banded Broadbill. I’d always wanted to see a broadbill and wow! This bird is ridiculous with its wine colored head, pink body separated by a black and gray stripe, bright yellow zigzag x across the mantle and a large extremely wide, dare I say, broad bill. Oh, did I mention the bright blue eye?

We were brought to a warm water stream that fed a small lake where we were greeted by a ten-year old boy who proudly showed us a dead Chinese Pond Heron he’d trapped. I didn’t really know how to react. A Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike was in a nearby tree - nothing beats a well-hyphenated bird name, especially one that combines two other bird names. For lunch we were brought to a rustic (putting it mildly) restaurant on the banks of a beautiful boulder filled river. We were able to pose for some pictures with a park ranger’s AK-47. Then we hiked up a trail that followed the river and brought us through a stand of large buttressed trees with many large strangler figs. We flushed a flock of Oriental Pied Hornbills and entered a cashew orchard. There were many Indian Rollers perched on the highest exposed twigs and Green Bee-eaters, Vernal Hanging Parrots and Rose-breasted Parakeets gave us some nice views as they flew over. An older man on a bicycle with a strange homemade contraption rode past us. We were informed the device was a metal detector used to find mines and unexploded ordinance. We startled a Scaly-breasted Partridge in the orchard and had tea at the thatched hut of a retired park ranger who fought with the Viet Cong during the war. We drank many cups of green tea while watching a Black-shouldered Kite hover over a field on the far side of the river.

The next morning we woke early and headed into the forest. We found a great assortment of birds in a clearing including White-crested Laughing-thrush, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Lineated Barbet, Racket-tailed Treepie, and a low flying Shikra. Shikra are the Cooper’s Hawks of Southeast Asia, sharp looking in their smoky grey plumage and orange barred breast. They tend to hunt more in the open than other accipiters. Our target bird was the endemic Orange-necked Partridge. Boa and his crew started playing tape of a partridge call that they recorded in that very spot. Although we tried for the better part of two hours, we only had short glimpses to show for it. Bao then proceeded to deftly call in a stunning Orange-breasted Trogon without the use of a tape. It was an orange day indeed.

Sadly we found the remains of a Siamese Fireback (pheasant) that had been poached. Poaching still occurs despite rangers being armed with AK-47’s. There was a dearth of mammals in the park. We saw no gibbons, monkeys or deer but I believe the other parks farther from Ho Chi Minh City have better protected wildlife. We took a siesta at a park ranger’s residence, ate some jack fruit and took one final hike. We saw Hill Myna, Paddyfield Pipit, Purple-throated Sunbird, Striped Tit-Babbler, and both Streak-eared and Stripe-throated Bulbuls. The trip only cost us $115 per person including meals and a night in a nice guesthouse. Considering the fact that arranging for the visa to Vietnam cost $50 and Wild Tour included this in their package, you could say the tour cost only $65 per person! Wild Tour Vietnam offers many other birding tours. For more information you can visit their site at www.vietnamwildtour.com.

We traveled to Cambodia via bus which cost between $6 and $12 from Saigon to Phnom Penh. The ride isn’t the most comfortable and...
the road is almost a dirt road, but it’s simple enough to do. There are cheap hotels and guesthouses that are offered to you when you arrive. Took Tooks (motorcycle drawn carriages) are the main way to get around and there are motorbike taxis as well for the more adventurous. Osmose Productions and the Wildlife Conservation Society offer several fairly inexpensive birding tours mostly out of Siem Reap which is the city nearest Angkor Wat. We would have done one of these tours if we’d had the time. With Wild Tour Vietnam and the tours offered by Osmose and WCS you could easily put together a fabulous, relatively inexpensive tour yourself. There are many travel agencies and visa process services in these backpacker circuits and as long as you have some patience, getting around is pretty easy.

Our next stop was Sri Lanka. We were originally scheduled to play a week in the Philippines but when we ordered out tickets from Cathay Pacific, we found out that the “All Asia Pass” no longer flies there. We decided to pick a place to just visit and have a week off. The only countries left were Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The choice was obvious.

I used Birdingpal.com to find our guide Rohan Cooray who was amazing to say the least. I had heard that Yala National Park was a great place to see leopards and elephants and after being picked up at the airport, we were on our way to the park. We started to see birds along the road as it got light. White-bellied Drongo, Black-headed Oriole, Bush Lark, Jedron’s Leafbird, Green Imperial Pigeon and Changeable Hawk-Eagle put in an appearance. Rohan also spotted Sri Lankan Grey Hornbill for us which was the only one we saw on the trip.

We passed through another park on the way to Yala. Man made lakes or tanks, as are they called in Sri Lanka, are a prominent feature of the landscape. From the dyke we were able to get our first taste of water birds. We had Indian Pond –Heron, Painted Stork, Whiskered Tern and both Indian and Little Cormorants. This park also gave us our first Indian Peafowl. White-bellied Sea-Eagle and Black-shouldered Kite were out and about as well. Before we left the park we spotted our first elephant far across a field. We had a much closer adolescent male further down the road at the electric fence separating the park from a farm. Malabar Pied Hornbill and Crimson-fronted Barbet put in appearances while we watched the elephants.

We arrived at our lovely lodge after some hours of driving. It was almost too nice. I felt like some imperial colonial British naturalist or a former tennis pro perhaps. It was weird to have our luggage taken to our rooms and to be served like that. After a siesta and a meal we were ready for our afternoon safari into Yala National Park. On the road to the park we stopped by a tank where we picked up Asian Open-billed Stork, Lesser Whistling-Duck, Pheasant-tailed Jacana and Yellow-wattled Lapwing. The Pheasant-tailed Jacanas were in full alternate plumage and were spectacular.

Yala is on the dry side of Sri Lanka and is open acacia scrub as opposed to the lush forests and tea plantations which we drove through en route. It looked very much as I’d expect East Africa to look. Visitors are only allowed in Yala at specific times and only in jeeps. The park provides jeeps and guides to hire on the spot – just be sure to hire a guide who knows the wildlife well. Rohan arranged for an excellent driver and although Rohan was the only guide we needed, the park guide still had to come along. It was ok in this case since he made for some good company.

We hadn’t even gone through the park gates when we saw a bird filled lagoon. We saw Spot-billed Pelican, Indian Darter, Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Eurasian Thick-knee, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Black-winged Stilt, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Greenshank, Little Stint, Common Sandpiper and Lesser Sand and Kentish Plovers.
The park was awesome. Upon entering we saw langur monkeys, wild boar and spotted deer. The birds were just everywhere. I finally saw a Hoopoe and we had a peacock displaying at us on the road. We weren’t allowed to leave the Land Rover but we still managed to see skulkers like Barred Buttonquail and Sirkeer Malkoha. An amazing male Asian Paradise Flycatcher landed right in front of the jeep and we were honored with amazing looks. The park has many ponds, impoundments, tanks and lagoons and is almost like Bombay Hook but with elephants. We had the privilege of seeing one of Sri Lanka’s very few Black-necked Storks which is an unbelievable looking bird.

We could smell a carcass as we passed through an area of thick scrub and Rohan pointed out the body of a spotted deer. Behind it was a leopard and we saw the pattern of rosettes moving through the brush. We watched the leopard for a few minutes as it slipped farther into the bush and we all were ecstatic after seeing our first big cat.

We saw an image I will never forget as we drove out of the park. A group of elephants with a large tusker was on the edge of a lagoon. Eurasian Spoonbills and Painted Storks were roosting in the trees. A Great Thick-knee was working the edge of the lagoon. Water buffalo, sambar and spotted deer were walking amongst the elephants. Mugger Crocodiles were basking on the water’s edge. What an incredible day we had. We retired to the lodge for a good meal and were ready for bed early.

We awoke refreshed and ready for our morning trip into the park. We saw many of the same beasts as the day before like jackals and ruddy mongooses. We saw leopard again, too, this time out in the open lounging on a boulder. The cat stood, stretched in a leisurely manner and left the rock. It scaled a tree which was right next to the road and we were able to see the great cat lying in the thick branches. Not too long after this encounter, we drove right up on a Sloth Bear digging into the berm of the road. Rohan turned to us and said, “I have nothing left to show you”. The bear gave us a great show and was wholly unconcerned with the line of jeeps that eventually gathered behind us. Everyone was ecstatic — even the guide and driver — and we drove away from the bear to let others have a look.

Rohan was wrong — he still had much to show us. Purple and Purple-rumped Sunbirds for instance, not to mention Lesser Adjutant (stork), Rose-ringed Parakeet, Common Woodshrike and Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark, as well as Pompadour and Orange-necked Green Pigeons. We were treated on the way out to dust bathing Green, Chestnut-headed and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters. A stop at a tank outside the park gave us Gargany and Purple Swamphen.

Rohan took us to the wreckage of the hotel he used to guide for which has destroyed in the Tsunami. He was actually carried away by the water but managed to grab on to a tree and survive. One hundred and fifty guests and hotel staff perished. Rohan lost his bird library and Swarovski binoculars.

We followed the coast on the drive to Aloothgama which was where we would stay next. It was very beautiful but we saw much tsunami damage. We stayed the next three nights with a wonderful lady who cooked amazing meals at three dollars each. The rooms cost only $14 a night. It was a lovely guesthouse with three rooms located right on an inlet of the Indian Ocean. The beach was only a pleasant twenty-minute walk away. We were treated like family at the guesthouse. As seems to be the case in this part of the world, whatever you feel like doing the guesthouse will arrange including a van and driver to take you there. We asked to go to Sinharaja Forest Reserve. Sri Lanka has great parks and 12% of the country is protected. A guide is required and provided for you at the gate and ours was incredible. Soon after entering the forest we came across a feeding flock or a “bird wave”. Apparently the Crested Drongos (an endemic sub-species of Greater Racket-tailed Drongo that may be split) mimic the calls of other birds as a way of getting species to join the flock. Our flock had Indian Scimitar-Babbler, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush and Malabar Trogon. Further along the...
We entered an open area where Sri Lankan Blue-Magpies were hanging out in some roadside bushes. Our guide was able to show us a pair of Sri Lankan Frogmouths near the bottom of a shrub that was right next to the road. White-faced Starlings were flying about and landing on tall trees. Sri Lankan Hanging-Parrot and Layard’s Parakeet gave us fly over views, and a leech filled short trek produced Scaly Thrush. Possibly the best named mammal ever, the grizzled giant squirrel, was seen several times during our walk.

We rested in the pavilion of a research station where feeders produced close looks at a group of Sri Lankan Blue-Magpies and Sri Lankan Junglefowl. The field guide did not do the magpies justice. The skin around the eye really protrudes and appears quite waxy. Our guide’s binoculars had fungus growing on the lens and I was so appreciative of his skill and decorum that I gave him my spare pair of Celestron Outland binoculars. I hope they serve him well.

On the way out we picked up Legge’s Flowerpecker, Yellow-fronted Barbet, and Dark Fronted and Orange Billed Babblers. We were very excited to see purple-faced leaf monkeys and toque macaque, both Sri Lanka endemic primates. On this walk alone we saw 11 of the endemic birds of Sri Lanka. We bid our guide goodbye in a drenching rain and headed back to the guesthouse for another great meal and a relaxing evening.

We spent the next few days chilling and relaxing or “chillaxing” if you will. One night we went to a sea turtle center. Eggs are brought to the center to be hatched and released and we got to release a few bucketfuls of green and olive ridley sea turtles. Some sea turtles are kept as adults for a few years for educational purposes. We were introduced to a hawksbill named Osama for his nasty disposition. The center’s tables were covered in U.S. aid bags as the center was wiped out in the Tsunami.

We were sad to leave our adopted Sri Lankan family but had to get to Colombo to catch our flight. We were stopped by well-armed (Ak-47 and Browning shotgun) guards at the airport barricade who examined our tickets. They informed us that we had missed our flight as it was scheduled for 2:00 AM not 2:00 PM! The next two days were an ordeal to say the least. We tried to get new tickets issued at the airport but had to go back to the city to get them reissued at the main office. The staff at the main office told us to go back to the airport. At the airport we were told to go back to the main office the next day. Colombo is a city dealing with civil war. There are well-armed soldiers and police everywhere. On bridges, even small ones, there were sandbag machine gun nests and at the airport there was a machine gun bunker. We got back to the main office and it was obvious they were trying to get us to buy new tickets in order to get the commission. They kept telling us the New York office didn’t approve the ticket change but when I firmly asked to talk to the New York office, we were promptly issued new tickets for a $100 fee instead of the $750 they were trying to charge us. We did manage to find delicious soy ice cream and ate a great dinner while watching cricket. We spent the rest of the night at the airport.

We missed the first two of our Japan dates but did make our show in Hiroshima where we visited the peace museum, a very harrowing experience. Our time in Japan was all business. We played an amazing show at Antinock, Tokyo’s legendary punk venue with Gauze. Gauze is Japan’s longest running and most revered hardcore punk band.

Indonesia is a place every near to my heart. The people are wonderful and the food is fantastic. The place is kind of like Thailand except spread out over 17,000 islands and without the easy infrastructure. Indonesia has a huge punk scene and we were able to play many shows even on weekdays. We decided to stay two weeks this time, going to Sumatra, Borneo and Bali as well as Java. I did not get to devote much time to birding but I plan to go back to this marvelous country.

We arrived in Java and our main man, Ari arranged for a friend to pick us up. We stayed the night in a converted pillbox art studio in Jakarta and we woke early to catch the flight to Sumatra. Arriving after a very short flight, I was surprised to see how quaint and lovely the airport in Lampung was. We were ushered to the promoter’s family home and then played the outdoor amphitheatre at the university. The city was very clean and modern, unlike anything in Java. As is the norm in Indonesia we played with 15 other bands to somewhere between six hundred and a thousand people. A fun time was had by all.

I suggested we visit Way Kambas National Park but I could not
convince the band to wake up early. After a late start it took three hours to get to the park. Unfortunately all the guides had already been utilized and we had to get special permission to drive the entrance track without a guide. We were not allowed to stop which was unfortunate because the entrance track is apparently where the best birding is done. After almost getting stuck in a large puddle we arrived at Way Kanan, a group of small buildings used by park officials. We met with our guide and were led on a small trail through the rainforest. The guide seemed uninterested and not very knowledgeable. Oriental White-eye was literally the only bird sighted. The trail was a leech massacre. I had the brilliant idea of wearing sandals. I figured since leeches were able to penetrate socks and slip through the eyelets of my hiking shoes, I would be able to flick them off immediately if I could see them. It seemed like a better strategy. Yeah, I’m going to say that I made an error, and the leeches just hid inter the straps on my sandals and feasted.

Way Kambas is definitely worth the trip, just go early and plan to spend the night. On the way out we saw a Red Junglefowl and a Crested Fireback was glimpsed through the forest on the side of the road. We stopped the truck and got fantastic looks of this striking pheasant. I was not able to bird Sumatra like I wanted too, but I feel privileged to have seen a part of it. We flew back to Java and played several shows. Try as I may I did not get to visit any parks or the Bogor Botanical Gardens since our show there was moved to another city.

The last show in Java was in Surabaya which is a very polluted industrial town. I met several young birders who took me on a motorbike trip to do some shore birding. We hit an area of shrimp ponds and birded those and the surrounding scrub. There is usually an area of wetlands worth birding near every major city. It is what unites us urban birders. There’s Tinicum, Tijuana Estuary and Jamaica Bay in America, Boondall in Australia, Mai Po in Hong Kong, the Spoonbill Sandpiper salt pans near Bangkok, and the shrimp ponds of Surabaya.

Birding with these guys was great and despite not being the most glamorous of locales, I did manage to see two Indonesian endemics. Several Little-blue Kingfishers darted across the ponds and perched in the small trees growing on the dykes. My companions showed me a few Javan Plovers working the edges of the ponds and even on a nest. Some familiar faces like Whimbrel and Gull-billed Terns were roosting in the shallows as well as some gorgeous White-winged Terns. My companions located a Yellow-bellied Gerygone in a tree, finally putting a face on that beautiful descending song I’d been hearing all morning. We had a flyby of Sunda Teals. Several families and nesting Australian Grebes were in the ponds. Javan and Chestnut Munias were all over the place and a Pied Fantail flew to a tree across the ponds. We bought iced tea (not actually iced) from the farm’s concession stand and parted ways.

We flew to Borneo after Surabaya. The city of Balikpapan is by far the most modern and clean of all the cities I’ve seen in Indonesia. The world is getting much smaller and although Borneo has always been exotic and an icon of the wild, it didn’t feel that way to me. The organizer of our gig was Timbull. He works with his American wife, Ali Redman, at the Environmental Education and Recreation Center of Balikpapan, Kalimantan. The Center is located just out side of the city and is in an extremely strategic position to educate the people of Kalimantan of the importance of preserving their spectacular ecosystem. The center has a huge enclosure for five rescued Sun Bears. We were fortunate enough to spend two nights at the center.

We spent the first night with Timbull’s family in the city and the next day we went to the center which has extensive grounds and contains several large buildings. The main building has displays on all the world’s bears. Timbull is a fantastic artist and painted the displays. A local sculptor created excellent dioramas on different aspects of Sun Bear life. The center is associated with Balikpapan’s Forest Reserve and has offices behind the center’s bear facilities. I can’t say enough about the center and it’s staff and volunteers. We had a blast. Seeing the bears was so much fun. They look adorable with their small size, relatively huge heads and fifteen-inch tongues. People often want to make pets of them. The enclosure was gigantic and although a boardwalk crosses part of the it, there is no guarantee of seeing the bears except at feeding time.

We had a Czech primatologist guide some of us on a mission to find proboscis monkeys. Ali arranged to hire a boat which met us at a rickety dock on a mangrove lined river. The river widened dramatically and we had a brief glimpse of monkeys but then couldn’t
We tried for Irrawaddy dolphins in the river mouth but to no avail. With daylight running out it was time to head back. Several Brahminy Kites sailed over the river.

As the sun was setting Dr. Zaius spotted a group of proboscis monkeys coming out to the mangroves to spend the night. We managed to get the boat close to the monkeys and had some quality time with these fabulous icons of Borneo. I use Brunton Epoch 7.5x43 binoculars and was able to see the monkeys clearly well after the sun was below the horizon. Big noses and potbellies are awesome trademarks for a creature to possess. We bid farewell to the monkeys, the bears, our friends and Borneo.

Upon arriving in Bali I realized that if this is the only part of Indonesia you’ve been to - you have not really been to Indonesia. Bali is like Wildwood without the rides. There is a Hard Rock Café and Ron Jon’s Surf Shop. Ok, I should specify if you only go to Kuta Beach you have not really been to Indonesia. I know Bali has an unbelievable cultural heritage and some beautiful nature, we just elected not to do anything that was not in walking distance from our guesthouse. The beach was spectacular as long as you looked only towards the ocean. It was a lot of fun and it was nice just to chillax for a few days.

Many people expressed concern about us playing Bali since the bombings. I dismissed their fears by saying that R.A.M.B.O. never plays the tourist circuit and stays with the local people. Well I was wrong. Our guesthouse was around the corner from the memorial to the bombing where the hotel once stood. Our show was right in Kuta Beach and although it was to a local crowd, it seems the scene in Bali is a lot more affluent and commercial.

Thailand is my favorite country to visit. The people are warm and friendly, the food is fabulous and the birds are out of this world. Traveling within Thailand is extremely easy so you need not plan your trip in advance. The first time I came to Thailand I had four days notice and flew for only $75 as an air courier. Unfortunately I couldn’t take more than a few days off of work but I still had a great time.

On this trip to Thailand we gave ourselves two weeks since our girlfriends were meeting us and we wanted to allow some time to relax. My girlfriend wasn’t scheduled to arrive for another week but the rest of the guys were reunited when we arrived. We went to the backpacker ghetto Khao San Road to get food and guesthouses for the night. Many people frown upon Khao San Road as being a place where western backpackers, shady ex-pats, highbrow spring breakers and burnouts wallow. But if you are on a long trip and want to just find great food and decent places to stay, it’s perfect. There are many small travel agencies that arrange treks, trips, flights, and visas to Cambodia, Laos etc.

Andy’s girlfriend is a Muay Thai fighter and had a few days left at her training camp so Andy and I set off on our own to bird and get some footage at KhaoYai National Park. It is only a two hour bus ride from Bangkok and the bus is nicer than a Greyhound. It only costs three dollars. You must go to the Mo Chit or northern bus station. If you take a taxi, ask the driver to use the meter or negotiate the price before hand. You should never have to pay more than two or three hundred Baht for travel inside Bangkok it is usually less if you are not going across town.

We spotted Asian Open-billed Storks feeding in flooded fields in the Rangsit area which is a very good place to see waterbirds. The bus arrived at Pak Chong where pick-up truck taxis are available to take you to your guesthouse. We were staying at the Green Leaf Guesthouse and were met when we got off the bus. You do not need to reserve in advance, but we did. The two and a half days I spent at...
Asia Trip Report….continued

Greenleaf, the food, accommodation and tours cost me around $70

Greenleaf Guest House offers tours of the park by the legendary Nine the Birdman. The usual tour offered is a one and a half day trip. The first evening is spent going to a cave that serves as a Buddhist shrine, as well as a natural spring swimming hole. The finale is a cave where millions of wrinkle-lipped bats emerge in a huge serpentine swarm. The next morning Andy and I hired the Birdman for a private birding tour. The usual tour starts a bit later and includes a night drive. We had great looks at white-handed gibbons upon entering the park since Nine knew where the figs were fruiting. Three species of barbets and Great Hornbills were feeding as well.

The Great Hornbill is one of the most absurd looking birds. Even the biggest toucan is only crow sized, and yes, I’ll concede that a toucan’s bill is larger in proportion, but a big hornbill is turkey sized and the casque on top of the bill is really impressive. Nine took us to a Wreathed Hornbill nest and a clearing gave us a straight through look at the nest tree. The female was on eggs and had walled herself in with mud and excrement leaving only a small opening for the male to feed her. We were prepared to wait hours but the male came in ten minutes. We could hear him coming; the big hornbills have wing beats that are audible even over the noise of the forest and incessant cicadas. Va-roosh! Va-roosh! Some say it sounds like a helicopter or even a pteranodon. The male landed on the trunk and fed the female and was off. Nine also showed us a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo and Scarlet Minivet nests, however these were too far and the birds too small to film. We didn’t rack up huge numbers of species but the looks we got were great and that is hard to accomplish in a tropical forest. Red-headed Trogon, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Mountain Imperial Pigeon and White-browed Scimitar Babbler were some of the day’s highlights.

Bull and Dave and their ladies, Jennifer and Danielle, arrived and joined other guests on the evening trip. We were reunited at Greenleaf’s restaurant for dinner. The food at the guesthouse is phenomenal. Andy maintains it is the best he has tried in Thai-

Khao Yai consists mostly of broadleaf evergreen forests with dipterocarp trees predominating. Dipterocarp trees are named for their “two winged” seed pods that helicopter down to the forest floor. The leeches were relentless. We were issued leech socks and they helped but the leeches were still unnerving to some of our group. The sheer numbers were intimidating. We took several hikes and saw some great birds. We had a spine-mangling look at a Black-naped Monarch, a beautiful sky-blue old world flycatcher on its nest which was a tiny cup in the fork of a bare shrub not two feet of the ground. While looking at the bird its mate flew straight between my legs to change the guard.

We left the forest to go to an area of tall grass and elephant mineral licks where we climbed a watchtower. A Bright-headed Cisticola sang from a blade of grass and we saw a Mountain Hawk-Eagle fly by. We also saw and tracks and scat from dholes (a.k.a Asiatic wild dog) but no wild dogs were seen. Nine took us down a ravine to a small river to look for Siamese crocodile but he was unable to locate it at its usual basking spot. We had Great Hornbills fly over and, in the herp department, we saw a bamboo pit-viper in a stand of bamboo by the visitor’s center. This is one of only two venomous snakes I’ve ever seen in the wild, the other being a spitting cobra seen two years before also in Khao Yai.

While driving the park’s road we came across a herd of about twenty elephants, many with calves, and we were charged by one matriarch. It’s unbelievable how close you can be to a whole herd of these massive animals. Seeing the vegetation move not ten yards away and still not seeing any part of the great beasts is amazing. I wonder how close to a tiger or clouded leopard I may have been in this park. The day ended with a night drive, seeing many sambar, barking deer and a civet. A small reticulated python was found warming itself on the on the road. We stayed one more night, ate some more of the guesthouse’s fine cooking and returned to Bangkok. We had a show to play. We played the show in Bangkok, did the usual tourist things and ate like kings. My girlfriend arrived and we headed back to Khao Yai.
Asia Trip Report… continued

To make a long story short, we did the usual two and a half day tour, except we were alone with Nine as our private guide. I arranged this for it was my intention to propose to her on the overlook of Khao Yai Mountain. I had been carrying a ring with me for the entire trip. Not knowing what she would do to me in the future, I proposed to her on that mountain and she accepted. We saw many good birds such as Asian Fairy Bluebird, Sultan Tit and Hill Blue Flycatcher along with a binturong a.k.a. the bearcat, a type of civet. We saw more elephants spotlighted at the mineral licks and right next to the road. We celebrated back at the guesthouse with our fellow guests and the staff. That day existed and nothing can take that away from me.

My fiancé (soon to be my ex-fiancé) returned to Arizona and R.A.M.B.O. played two more shows before we, too, returned to the States.

Epilogue:
No one took home any infectious diseases. Even Bull who came home with typhoid last time we were in Asia returned home with no ailments. The band has not played a show since Bangkok and will play a final show Memorial Day weekend. It is just time to focus on different aspects of our lives; we are all still great friends.

My engagement lasted only six weeks but I know now I was lucky to get out of a bad situation. In the aftermath and while I was making my way back from my brief residence in Arizona, I stopped by the Lower Rio Grand Valley and got both kingfishers. I formed a World Series of Birding team sponsored by the Environmental Education and Recreation Facility of Balikpapan where we stayed in Borneo. Seeing how far the dollar stretches in Indonesia I am sure the money we will raise for them will make an impact. For more info or to make a pledge, visit our team website www.bristlehead.org. We will be using a vegetable oil fueled vehicle that has been converted by Dave’s (our drummer) company Fossil Free Fuel, www.fossilfreefuel.com. If any one needs any information on traveling Asia please feel free to contact me. I would love to organize a DVOC field trip to Asia in the future. My email address is tony@r5productions.com

Membership Update—March 2007
by Connie Goldman, Membership Chair

At a recent DVOC meeting, president Chris Walters read a quote from Joseph Kastner’s book, A World of Watchers. Up to that time, the membership stance of many prestigious bird clubs was elitist and exclusionary. Kastner’s perception in 1986 was that DVOC was known as one of the most exclusive of these clubs. On hearing this re-read in today’s more open environment, our membership reacted with chuckles and giggles. While appreciating the history, we are happy with the transition DVOC has made to its current position. We strongly advocate the ideas of inclusion and welcome to potential members. And 2007 is shaping up to be another great year for DVOC! Program topics of high interest for birders are providing for stimulating meetings. Ornithological studies continue to provide education that leads some into more in depth bird study. Field trip destinations have been enhanced. All these factors make membership in DVOC attractive to birders. Eight applicants have joined us this quarter. Help me welcome the following new DVOC members!

James Maloney Jr
44 Spinythorn Road
Levittown, PA 19056
215-946-3866
jamesmaloneyII@gmail.com
"My name is James Maloney and I have become interested in birding mainly through Rick Mellon, a friend of the family. I attend East Stroudsburg University and have plans to teach environmental science when I graduate. I have been birding only a short time, but can see it becoming a life goal."
Membership Update—March 2007...cont’d

Michael Morell
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West Chester, PA 19380
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eve: 610 594 3608
straycougar7@yahoo.com
"I am new to birding and got started 10 months ago with a backyard feeder. So far have been to Ridley Creek State Park and have participated in two hawk watch groups, one at Rose Tree Park and one at Haverford College. I recently took a 2-day trip to Cape May NJ for bird and butterfly watching, with Tyler Arboretum.

Nancy Keeler
855 N. 28th Street "B"
Philadelphia PA 19130
Day: 215 299 1013
Eve: 215 239 0791
nancy.keeler@comcast.net
"After working to conserve birds of prey at Hawk Mountain for 15 years, I arrived at the Academy of Natural Sciences in June, as their V.P. of Development. I started watching birds at a feeder, then next remember watching pewees in the woods near Waterford PA. I worked at Hawk Mountain as Director of Development and am most proud of the Wings of Wonder Gallery and the Acopian Center for Conservation Learning. I am used to (spoiled by) birding with experts, keener of eyesight than me!"

John P. Tramontano
70 Old Dublin Pike, K4
Doylestown PA 18901
Day: 267 247 5224
Eve: same
DOCBI0936@hotmail.com
"My earliest years of birding were in Massachusetts and began before the age of 10. By 15 my family had moved to southern California where I participated in numerous Big Days and Xmas Counts (L.A., Hollywood, Coastal Orange County & N.E Orange County) I was also the first compiler of the Salton Sea South Christmas Count. I published the first breeding record of the Starling in California in the Condor: 63 (1).1959 as an undergraduate at Long Beach State University. I did graduate work at the University of Arizona, first under Dr. Joe Marshall and later under Dr. Stephen Russell. My master's thesis was a comparative study of Rock and Canyon Wrens and my dissertation was on breeding sympatry of six species of sparrows in an Arizona grassland. Some of my earliest birding mentors were Arnold Small, James Peters and Herb & Olga Clark. During two different tours of duty with the US Navy in the Far East, I visited the breeding grounds of the world's rarest albatross species, the Short-tailed, and later published my three observations of this species at sea in the Condor 72(1).1970. I am the founding president of the Orange County Audubon Society, in Orange County, New York. For thirty years I have taught numerous courses in biology, including Avian Biology, at Orange County Community College in Middletown, NY from which I retired as Professor Emeritus in 2000. I chaired the checklist committee of the local bird club (Edgar A. Mearns) and published the first Checklist of the Birds of Orange County, NY in 2003. The 2nd edition, published in 2005, reflected the most recent realignment of families by the A.O.U. I’ve been a member of the A.O.U. for over 40 years. I’ve been a sub-regional editor of Audubon Field Notes, American Birds/North American Birds for 23 years as well as for the New York State Journal, The Kingbird. I’ve led numerous pelagic trips on both coasts, as well as field trips in Arizona, California, Massachusetts and New York. As a volunteer for the Orange County Land Trust I evaluated the biological worth of new properties purchased and compiled lists of both breeding and wintering bird species to be expected on each. I continue to bird as ardently as ever. Since moving to Bucks County last May, to be nearer my first grandchild, I've joined the Bucks County Birders and am participating in both the Upper and Central Bucks Christmas Counts. Birds and birding are and have been, central to my life.

Martin Dellwo
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phlblader@earthlink.net
"I grew up in central Virginia and have birded casually all of my life. We always had a birdfeeder out the kitchen window frequented by cardinals, chickadees, titmouse, nuthatch. I recently (past 2 years) became much more engaged in birding through the influence of my middle sister and her husband. We bird together on trips to other family members, and trade stories. I frequently go to Tincum, but am having fun discovering new places to bird."

Cindy Ahern
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Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006
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eve: same
cnsneahern@msn.com

"I'm a casual birder who became interested in bird watching accidently. As I was enjoying a perfect June day in my garden about 5 years ago, a curious hummingbird paid me a chance visit, hovering close enough to my face that I felt the breeze from its tiny wing beats. Once I recovered from the surprise visit, I immediately began my mission to learn more about these little jewels, and how to create a habitat for them. How was I to know that I had just happened upon an interest that would have a major effect on my life? First it was just "backyard bird watching," which quickly graduated to visits to Hawk Mountain (had no idea what the birds were, but they were big and easy to see!), Cape May, and local places of interest - (Penndack Trust is closest to me.) Then the terrible event that beckoned me to get involved...the Athos oil spill on Nov 26th, 2004. I contacted Tri-state Bird Rescue to find out how I could help during the cleanup of this terrible disaster to wildlife. I became involved as a volunteer and continued with the clinic after the oiled birds were rehabilitated and released. As a volunteer, I became alarmed by the lack of environmental awareness in the general population and in our children's schools. I made a commitment to helping children learn the importance of varied habitats, the wildlife they support, and what they can do to ensure the many species have places to call home for years to come. Birds and their behavior teach us so much about our environment, leading me to explore birding on a different level. During 2005, I participated in a number of workshops and field trips with Cape May Bird Observatory; many led by Pat Sutton, whose enthusiasm and love for the natural world is contagious! In my travels I've met a number of DVOC members who recommended this club to me."

Ross Geredien
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Valley Forge, PA 19481-0183
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goodmigrationsross@goodmigrationsphoto.com

"I am a professional conservation ecologist with expertise in invasive species and ornithology. I have been a birder since 1991. I have birded throughout North America and have taken trips to Ecuador and Costa Rica, the latter with a Yale University botany course. I am originally from NJ, and am new to SE Pennsylvania. I currently work at Valley Forge NHP, where I do most of my local birding, including the Christmas Bird Count; but I am also learning the local hotspots. My particular interests are in conservation, and I am happy to talk about mountaintop removal and Cerulean Warbler conservation, as well as conservation of the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow."

David M. Lauer VMD
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dmk100@verizon.net

"I've been out of touch with the DVOC for a few years now (I was a fairly regularly active member in the '80s and early '90); haven't received membership renewals, and I haven't tried recontacting you. But I'd like to do so now and reactivate my membership if that's still possible."

DVOC Programs

The Club has had some great programs this season and we are not done yet! Please follow the link provided below for the full scoop on what's scheduled ...both for formal and informal meetings. Everyone is welcome and it doesn't cost a thing. We hope to see you there.

http://www.dvoc.org/MeetingsPrograms/MeetingsPrograms2007/Programs2007.htm
Birding in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands by Dick Bell

St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands is a popular winter cruise ship destination. Typically, a cruise ship arrives in St. Thomas in the early morning and leaves in the late afternoon on the same day. Passengers can disembark for shore excursions and shopping at about 8:30 A.M. and must return to the ship by 4:00 P.M.

When Shelly and I booked such a trip on the Queen Mary 2 for early January of 2007, we began to explore the possibility of birding on St. Thomas. The short amount of time available to spend on the island combined with almost no available information on the internet or elsewhere about birding on St. Thomas was, at first, discouraging. But we are happy to report that it is possible to overcome these obstacles and have a very rewarding day of birding in St. Thomas.

We located the web site of the Audubon Club of St. Thomas and Shelly sent them an email. We promptly received a reply from Mario A. Francis who is the club’s president. He advised that he would be happy to meet us at the dock in St. Thomas and take us birding. A small fee was involved which turned out to be about one-half the amount that taxi drivers charge for the day. In addition, Mario knew all the good birding spots while the taxi drivers knew little about birds and birding locations. We promptly replied by email and exchanged contact information.

Our regular US cell phone service was available and, once in port, we called Mario on his cell phone to coordinate a meeting time and place. We saw White-tailed Tropicbird and Brown Booby in the harbor while waiting to disembark and then met Mario and Winston Wenner, the club’s vice president, as soon as we got ashore. We left the port area of Charlotte Amalie and proceeded past the airport to the marine biology station of the University of the Virgin Islands.

As we passed the airport, we saw a Smooth-billed Ani on a fence. The grounds, salt-water bay, and fresh water pond in the vicinity of the marine biology station produced Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, White-cheeked Pintail, Little Blue Heron, Yellow Warbler, Bananaquit, Black-faced Grassquit, Spotted Sandpiper, Pearly-eyed Thrasher, Gray Kingbird, and an Antillean Mango. Mr. Francis saw a secretive Scaly-naped Pigeon but we were looking in a different direction and missed it. Unfortunately, the Scaly-naped Pigeon and the Brown-throated Parrot are best observed in the very early morning before we were able to leave the ship. By mid-morning, they have settled down and are rarely seen until evening.

A wonderful ride into the hills produced fabulous views of Charlotte Amalie and the ship. After enjoying the view, we proceeded on to the famous beach at Magans Bay where Brown Boobies and Brown Pelicans put on a dazzling display of acrobatics as they fell out of the sky into the water just offshore in search of food. Royal Terns were also visible and Zenaida Doves were very common in the parking lot.

Through the efforts of Mr. Francis and the members of the Audubon Club, an arboretum and trail through a preserved mangrove and forested area near Magans Bay provides a beautiful habitat for birds and other wildlife. A walk on the trail produced wintering Black and White Warbler, Northern Parula, Hooded Warbler, Yellow Warbler, American Redstart, and many Northern Waterthrushes as well as Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Black-faced Grassquit, and Pearly-eyed Thrasher. Although we failed to find one on this day, the Mangrove Cuckoo can sometimes be found in this area. Mario saw a Brown-throated Parrot fly by, but we were looking at an Antillean Crested Hummingbird and missed the parrot.

After leaving Magans Bay we took a ride up into the hills to the beautiful home of Edmund and Angie Penn who are active in the Hibiscus Society on the island. We were warmly greeted here by the homeowner and were treated to a spectacular view of Magans Bay and a great deal of bird activity at the many bird feeders in his beautiful garden. Here we saw a Merlin flyover and an American Kestrel. It turns out that American Kestrels are quite common on the island and we saw many during our day of birding. We were also treated to the spectacular sight of about 40 Bananaquits competing with the Antillean Crested and Green-throated Carib Hummingbirds at the feeders. Black-faced Grassquits, White-winged Doves and Zenaida Doves were also observed here.

On the way back to Charlotte Amalie we saw more American Kestrels, many Gray Kingbirds, Common Ground Doves, a Red-tailed Hawk and a couple of Northern Mockingbirds. Next on the itinerary was a pleasant visit to the home of a relative of Mr. Wenner who grows orchids as a hobby. There were thousands of beautiful orchid plants to be enjoyed and we also met their pet dog, Brownie, whose job it is to keep the iguanas from eating the orchids. While we were there, we observed a rather large iguana scaling the fence to get to the valuable plants but the patrol pup was giving the proper attention to the situation and had everything under control.

Our final stop of the day was at a salt pond near Red Hook just east of Charlotte Amalie. Although the water level was very low due to lack of recent rainfall, we found Green Heron, Great Egret, Spotted Sandpiper, Pearly-eyed Thrasher, Black-faced Grassquit, and Bananaquit. Just as we were preparing to leave the area we were treated to an outstanding sight of a King Rail. The bird walked...
across the mud flat about 20 feet from us, posed and gave us great views.

In all, our group recorded 35 species of birds in about 6 hours of birding time. Mr. Francis was very pleased as he indicated that 28 species would be average for the time of day that we were birding, and for the time of year that we were there.

If you should find yourself going to St. Thomas and wish to do some birding, you would do very well to contact Mr. Francis who is a very amiable person and a knowledgeable birder. He is well known on the island and is active in the Audubon Club and Hibiscus Society. He is involved in preservation and conservation projects, various community endeavors and runs a junior ecology group designed to engage students in environmental understanding and appreciation.

Contact information is as follows:
Audubon Club of St. Thomas
P.O. Box 9085
St. Thomas, V.I. 00801
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Mario A. Francis, President
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The Southeastern Bird Quest

The Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA) Bird Quest is scheduled for Saturday, April 28. The goal is to get beginner birders involved and to promote the many great natural areas and parks found in the six county region. Here are the details:

WHAT is the 2007 SEPA Bird Quest?
A way to discover the parks and natural areas in the six county region (counties of Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia)
A way to discover the unique birds that live in and migrate through southeastern Pennsylvania
A chance to learn how to identify birds by sight, sound, behavior, and habitat
A chance to have fun with family, friends, and colleagues
A light-hearted competition

WHO can participate?
People of all ages may form teams: families, friends, Scout groups, school groups, etc.

HOW does it work?
Team size varies. One or more persons should be able to identify some birds by sight/sound. At least half of the team should be novices: people interested in learning.
A packet of information is mailed to every team before SEPA Bird Quest, including the bird checklist.
Teams have 12 hours on Saturday, April 28 (midnight to noon) to visit sites of their choice throughout southeastern Pennsylvania. Teams are not required to begin the event at midnight—they can start at any time in the morning.
Birds are identified by sight and/or sound. The goal is to find as many different species as possible. At 12:00 PM, all teams gather at the Upper Main Line YMCA (Berwyn, PA) to report results, determine the winning team, have a (free) lunch, and receive a 2007 Bird Quest t-shirt.

COST?
There is a $16 per person cost to participate in the Bird Quest.
Participants MUST register in advance.
If your team includes persons under the age of 18, you must obtain parental permission and include one adult as part of your team.
Every year, in mid-February, my husband Bob and I become “snow birds” and set out, with bikes on the back of the van or car, for Georgia and Florida. The basic structure of the trip stays the same: we make a stop in either Statesville or Salisbury, North Carolina, and then head either southwest toward Atlanta, Georgia or south towards Naples, Florida. Although the focus of each trip is wildlife, we do manage to fit in some other activities, especially when visiting friends and relatives. On the winter trip we have gone as far west as New Orleans and come back to Naples along Florida’s panhandle, eating oysters at Apalachicola on the way. This is an outline of this winter’s trip.

Day 1: Sunday, February 18: Home to Salisbury, NC

We set out from home in our Toyota Matrix, two bikes on the back, at 7:30 AM. We drove straight down I-95. Because it was early Sunday morning there was hardly any traffic. We made one mistake – we took the circumferential route around Richmond and missed the connection with I-85 to Salisbury. We discovered our mistake right away, and cut across Route 40, a lovely country road. We stopped with friends in Salisbury, North Carolina, had dinner at an Italian restaurant, and got to see their collection of all of the Lenox songbirds. So this was the unofficial start of our birding, social adventure.

Day 2: Monday, February 19: Salisbury, NC to Decatur, GA

After spending the night at our friends’ house, we got back on I-95 with no problem, and set out on our way south. We stopped for a quick breakfast and a quicker lunch. The Matrix was white with salt from up north, so we visited a carwash before arriving at our next destination: a private home which has been designated a wildlife preserve in Decatur, Georgia. We watched their bird feeders for a while before dinner.

Day 3: Tuesday, February 20: Decatur, GA

Our host, Rafe, works on a River Blindness project for the Carter Center, so we made a visit there in the morning. In the afternoon we visited the Clyde Shepherd wildlife refuge. The first bird we heard, and then tracked down, was a Pileated Woodpecker. Rafe picked up the sound of Sandhill Cranes, and, when we looked up, we saw a skein of maybe 150 birds altogether. It was a very dramatic moment. We spent the rest of the afternoon watching feeders at the house. They get an amazing assortment of birds – Hermit Thrush, Pine Warbler, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Bluebird. We watched a Brown-headed Nuthatch from our bathroom window. Before dinner we sat in the downstairs room from which we could watch “Screech”, their resident Eastern Screech Owl, performing his evening antics. He took off pretty much on schedule for his nightly hunting activities.

Day 4: Wednesday, February 21: Decatur to Sarasota

We left around 8:30 in the pouring rain. After about an hour and half the rain stopped, and it got sunny as we went south. We drove right down I-75, and got to our next stop, Sarasota, FL, around 5:00 PM. Our host and hostess, Naish and Sheila McHugh, whom we’d met on a birding trip in Costa Rica, greeted us warmly. They live in Toronto, and rent this same house for three months every year.

Day 5: Thursday, February 22: Sarasota

After breakfast, we left for the day at 8:00 AM. We started out at St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church and birded the wet fields there. We had Loggerhead Shrike, one Sandhill Crane, Wilson’s Snipe, Short-billed Dowitcher, immature Black-crowned Night-heron. Our next stop was the park at Myakka River, a really great place. We had warblers (Northern Parula, Yellow-throated, Palm, Yellow-rumped), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Blue-headed Vireo. We didn’t see much from the canopy tower, but it has potential. After a picnic lunch we went to the weir and had Limpkin, Black-necked Stilt and a few waders. Just outside the park, near the river, we saw six immature Bald Eagles and more Limpkins. Our last stop was the Celery Fields where we saw Savannah Sparrows, Northern Harrier, White and Brown Pelicans. I took a lot of pictures.
Day 6: Friday, February 23: Sarasota

We left here at 8:00 AM and went to Oscar Scherer State Park in search of Florida Scrub Jays. We had collected some live oak acorns to get them to come in, and with little effort we found several. But the first bird we saw when we got to the park was a Common Ground Dove, one of my “best birds” for the trip. I hadn’t seen one in North America for many years. While having lunch at a picnic table overlooking a lake we saw an Armadillo, two Bald Eagles (one adult) and a Swallow-tailed Kite. We went from there to Lido Beach where we saw Sandwich and Royal Terns, and Black-bellied Plovers. We took a walk through the long-leaf pine woods and found a Western Kingbird, which Naish had seen with birding friends a few days before.

Day 7: Saturday, February 24: Sarasota to Naples

We had breakfast with Naish and Sheila, and then took off. We stopped again at St. Margaret’s and found Eastern Meadowlarks this time. Then we set out on I-75 south. We turned up in Naples around noon, and had lunch with in-laws Tom and Mary. We took a walk on the Naples pier after lunch and found Brown Pelicans competing with fishermen.

Day 8: Sunday, February 25: Naples

Mostly social activities on this day. We watched a couple of hours of the Oscars.

Day 9: Monday, February 26: Naples

We all went to Ding Darling. The traffic on the way was horrible and it was foggy as well, but we finally got there. There weren’t a lot of birds, but there were some good ones: White Pelican, Loggerhead Shrike and American Kestrel on the way, Marbled Godwit among the dowitches, Willets and Dunlin, Blue-winged Teal, Common Ground-dove, Prairie Warbler heard, Ospreys, Roseate Spoonbills in the refuge.

Day 10: Tuesday, February 27: Naples

We took lunch to one of the Naples beaches and stayed there till about 3:00 PM. I took a long walk by myself and got some decent bird pictures: Sandwich and Royal Terns, Black-bellied Plover, Black Skimmer, Willet. Bob and Tom took Bob’s bike to a Naples bike shop to get the gear shift fixed.

Day 11: Wednesday, February 28: Naples

Bob and I left the house at 7:45 AM and set out for Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. As always, we had a great day there. Highlights were: Barred Owl, Great-crested Flycatcher, male and female Painted Bunting, Swallow-tailed Kite. We went all around once, had lunch at a picnic table, and then did a short trip around again. It was hot (90F) but really wonderful. The warblers got going in the early afternoon.

Day 12: Thursday, March 1: Naples to Hollywood via Shark Valley

We packed up the car and left Tom & Mary’s around 8:00 AM, earlier than usual. We counted over 25 Belted Kingfishers along the way eastward on the Tamiami Trail, Route 41. We got to Shark Valley around 10:00. It’s about 75 miles from Naples. We got ourselves organized and on the bikes, with picnic lunches, and were out at the tower, against a stiff wind, at 11:30. There were very few people on the trail that day. We sat on benches opposite the bathrooms and ate. It wasn’t a glamorous lunch spot, but it was out of the wind. We took the long way back, after some discussion about it, and this time the wind was with us, at 11:30. There were very few people on the trail that day. We sat on benches opposite the bathrooms and ate. It wasn’t a glamorous lunch spot, but it was out of the wind. We took the long way back, after some discussion about it, and this time the wind was with us, so it wasn’t a hard ride at all. It’s a fifteen-mile loop. There were more birds on this side than usual: Red-shouldered Hawks, White-eyed Vireos and yellow-rumps singing, Eastern Phoebe and, of course, lots and lots of
alligators. There are trams that make the loop every 20 minutes or so. We’ve done that, but we see much more from the bikes. When we’d finished the loop we stopped at a couple of places across the road at airboat launch sites, and finally found what we were looking for: a couple of Snail Kites in the distance. For some reason, they are seldom found within the refuge. Continuing east on the Tamiami Trail, we stopped at Brian Piccolo Park for Burrowing Owls. We found 12 burrows, marked off by police tape, and 7 pairs of owls.

**Day 13: Friday, March 2, 2007: Hollywood to Titusville via Wakodahatchee**

We left Hollywood at 8:30 and drove through heavy traffic on I-95 to Wakodahatchee Wetlands. We saw two Limpkins on what appeared to be a nest in some tall grass. Also Blue-winged Teal, Wilson’s Snipe, Purple Martin, Purple Gallinule. We left there around 11:30 and continued driving north on I-95. There was more traffic, road construction, lane closures. We had lunch at a picnic table at a rest stop, with Common Grackles for company. We got to Merritt Island at 2:30 and drove around Black Point Drive. At first it was very slow. But about halfway around we started to see lots of birds: Blue-winged Teal, Dowitchers, Yellowlegs, Dunlin, Black-necked Stilts, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbills. It was great. We made a stop at the Manatee overlook, and found one manatee swimming around, covered with barnacles. We checked into the Hampton Inn, one of the better Titusville possibilities, around 5:30. The Hampton Inn is very nice – white duvet, thick towels, but we couldn’t get the advertised “High Speed Internet” to work in our room. Can’t have everything, I guess.

**Day 14: Saturday, March 3, 2007: Titusville to Jekyll Island**

Our next stop, before leaving the Titusville area, was the entrance to Canaveral National Seashore, where three Florida Scrub Jays came out of hiding right after we arrived. Then we went back to Black Point Drive. We saw several Reddish Egrets, a Wilson’s Snipe, loads of shorebirds, coots, herons and egrets. We checked in at the Days Inn on Jekyll Island at 5:30 and went for a short bike ride south to St. Andrews, a rather remote part of the island where there are plans to build huge beach-front hotels and many upscale houses. Bye-bye American Oystercatchers and Wilson’s Plovers, and maybe the sea turtles as well, I’m afraid.

**Day 15: Sunday, March 4, 2007: Jekyll Island**

In the morning we biked again towards St. Andrews. It was terribly windy: 35 mph with stronger gusts. We saw and heard assorted warblers: Pine, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated and zillions of Yellow-rumps. After lunch we drove north on I-95 to Harris Neck Refuge, an abandoned airfield. We hoped it would be less windy there. It was. The bad part that day: Bob lost his binoculars, and was very sad about it. We looked everywhere for them, and made several inquiries at the lost and found. No luck. It must have happened when he was loading the bikes on the car. The good part that day: we saw some good birds: Hermit Thrush, Eastern Bluebirds, Black-crowned Night-herons, Lesser Scaup, Hooded Merganser. We biked a bit around the refuge – the first time on all our trips that we’ve managed to find time to do that.

**Day 16: Monday, March 5, 2007: Jekyll Island**

We spent most of the day on bikes; about 20 miles all told. This time we biked the northern part of the island – part before lunch and part afterwards. It was a really great day, though not a particularly birdy day. On the salt marshes there were numerous White Ibis and Little Blue Herons. Along the shore we saw Royal Terns and assorted gulls. We looked for Northern Gannets, but this year we didn’t see any. We had a Loggerhead Shrike on a wire near the golf course.

**Day 17: Tuesday, March 6, 2007: Jekyll Island to Home**

We got to talking about the weather – it was supposed to snow at home the next day – and finally decided to bag Tybee Island (where there would have been loons and gannets) and head straight home to beat the predicted snow. I called the Dunes Motel on Tybee and canceled. We’ll get there next winter, and to Savannah NWR as well. We drove straight up I-95 and pulled into our own driveway around 11:15 PM after dinner at a Cracker Barrel and a stop at Wawa for milk and orange juice. It was another wonderful trip.
The winter of 2006 – 2007 was a good one for certain seed crops up north in Canada which meant certain winter finch species were quite abundant in Algonquin. Red and White-winged Crossbills, Evening Grosbeaks, and Pine Siskins were basically everywhere in the park and on the outskirts. Throw in a relatively mild winter with half the normal snow fall and we had the makings of a great first trip to the area.

Participants – The “Canada” Gang - Sandra Keller, Diane Boyd, David and Inga LaPuma, and our hosts for two nights in Kingston – Joel and Marian Ellis. We missed Chris and Ben from our last trip up here for the owl invasion two winters ago. Both had commitments they couldn’t change. And let’s not forget Diane’s Dodge Caravan. It performed quite well on the drive and in the snow. We were thinking of renting a 4-wheel drive vehicle, but decided Diane’s van should do fine. And it did.

Directions – Algonquin Park is about three hours northwest of Kingston, Ontario. We did the trip in two days, staying overnight at Joel and Marian’s place both coming and going. For those driving directly from the Delaware Valley region, the trip is probably 9 or 10 hours at least depending on stops and road conditions. We encountered lake effect snow along Route 81 both and that delayed us. The most direct route from the Philadelphia area would probably be to take the Pennsylvania Turnpike north to Route 81 north and across the border. Note that a passport is required. Then take 401 west to Route 62 north. Get onto Route 127 north to Route 60 west. There’s also the option of crossing near Toronto and driving east to the park. A Google maps search can be helpful.

Accommodations – We didn’t find much close to the park in Whitney so reservations are highly recommended. We were going to stay in a heated yurt inside the park, but they were all reserved. David did a great job finding us the Mad Musher. There were many food choices and there’s a gas station in town. Bancroft – a town about an hour south – had more hotel and restaurant choices.

Weather – This year’s weather was not the norm. Anyone going on a winter trip to Algonquin would be wise to prepare for temperatures that are well below freezing and lots of snow.

Web links – additional information:
- [http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/index.html](http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/index.html) - this is the official park web site. It has lots of info on travel conditions, fees, books, nature, motels, restaurants, maps, etc.
- [http://www.ofo.ca/](http://www.ofo.ca/) - the Ontario Field Ornithologist’s web site provides lots of info. Regional books and checklists are also available on this site.
- [http://birdingontheline.net/mailinglists/ONTB.html](http://birdingontheline.net/mailinglists/ONTB.html) - this is the link to the Ontario Birds Listserv. Look for Ron Tozer’s reports. He is a retired park naturalist and knows the birds and area very well.
- [http://www.ofo.ca/2006-7winterfinchforecast.htm](http://www.ofo.ca/2006-7winterfinchforecast.htm) - Follow this link for the winter finch forecast from Ron Pittaway. He does one every year in September or so and he also provides info on bumper cone crops and how crossbills find them. It’s fascinating reading even if you are not planning a trip to Algonquin.

Photography Opportunities – Photo ops can be good. We had Evening Grosbeaks and White-winged Crossbills singing atop trees. The mixed feeding flocks at the visitor’s center provides one of the best areas to do photography. The staff at the center allows you to walk behind the building. This has advantages over standing up on the deck and shooting over the railing.

Cell Phone Notes – I could not access my voicemail from Canada and my missed calls list was a bit messed up also. I have no idea what was going on but as soon as we crossed the border, everything was working fine again. I have Verizon and roaming charges were in affect in Canada for my plan. A friend of ours who was up there two days later than we were also had this problem.

The Trip - We stayed with friends in Kingston – Joel and Marian Ellis – both before and after our birding at Algonquin. We are very grateful for their hospitality and looking forward to another visit when we go back to Algonquin in a year or two. Marian makes the best oatmeal cookies and peanut butter and butter sandwiches. That last is a Canadian staple. Needed calories I presume for the long, cold winters! Give it a try!

Algonquin is a long drive so it’s worthwhile to bird other areas before and/or after doing the park. We hit Wolf Island on Lake Ontario on Sunday after doing Algonquin and had three Rough-legged Hawks. We missed Snowy Owl but they can usually be found on this island although some years more than others. The ferry to Wolf Island is free. Check online for a timetable, directions, and maps. [http://](http://)
Friday – Feb. 16, 2007:
We left Joel and Marian’s early in the morning for the three hour drive northwest to the park. Birding on the way was very slow. There were no Red-tailed Hawks like back in NJ along the highways. American Crows in the towns and Common Ravens much nearer the park itself caused some debate as one of the bird books I brought said that crows were not around in the winter! We all know how bird distribution can change, but this book was referring to the birds in Algonquin proper and not the outlying areas. No, we weren’t wrong with our ids! We were just wondering for a bit there. Not to be missed was the coffee and egg biscuits at Tim Horton’s - the local doughnut joint. And yes, they take American money.

Our first real birding stop was along Old Highway Route 127. It was plowed, so we decided to try it. All the reports indicated that Red and White-winged Crossbills were coming to the shoulder along the roads to get the sand and salt that had been put down by the road crews. We witnessed this behavior as we drove along Route 127 but we couldn’t stop since it is a main road. The same was true on Route 60 which goes through the park. Along Old Highway 127 we could safely watch some birds coming to the road to feed. Our first winter finch was White-winged Crossbill. It was followed quickly by Red Crossbill and flocks of Pine Siskins which was by far our most numerous winter finch. It became a quest toward the end to find American Goldfinch. They were being reported and we managed to track some down at feeders.

Our afternoon began at the east gate for our park permit - $10.00 a day and, yes, they take American money. I bought three books – Birds of Algonquin Park, Mammals of Algonquin Park, and Trees of Algonquin Park at $2.95 each. The detail in each is great and I highly recommend this whole series which is published by the Friends of Algonquin Park. Also, pick up the newsletter which has a detailed park map on the back. Since we were unfamiliar with the area, we first hit spots in the park that Ron Tozer had written about in his weekly posts.

The Spruce Bog Trail
A pair of Evening Grosbeaks was vocalizing right at the parking lot which was a great start. The boardwalk trails weren’t plowed, but birders and hikers are in the area all winter and they keep them open. Listen for the flocks. Even if you don’t know the call notes, the flocks are noisy enough. With the bumper seed crop in Algonquin, White-Winged Crossbills were plentiful. Look on spruce and tamarack trees where they feed on the cones. When in these bog areas, the White-winged Crossbills were always high in the trees but in more open areas we had them at eye-level feeding on cattail seed heads. Gray Jays are found mainly in the black spruce trees of these Algonquin Bogs. They weren’t that common when we visited but once we found them, they came to within five feet of us. They were storing food.

We missed Spruce Grouse. They are basically restricted to the mature black spruce forests where they quietly feed on the tree needles. We searched and searched. This big bird can actually be hidden high in those conifers.

Two Rivers Campground
A Black-backed Woodpecker was flaking bark from a spruce tree at campsite number 94. We learned of this from a local birder and we found the bird right where he said it would be. We watched it for a good 10 to 15 minutes. It just stayed in that tree. More Pine Siskins, a Brown Creeper, a Downy Woodpecker, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Black-capped Chickadees were in the area. The feeding flocks that we encountered everywhere were made up of these species. Our search for Boreal Chickadee was unsuccessful. That’s a tough bird. It’s best to listen for that nasal call while you are searching. It was hard to search for the woodpeckers because it is difficult to hear soft tapping and noises when bundled up in cold weather gear. Alas, none of us clicked off a photo of what the spruce tree looked like after the woodpecker was done flaking the bark off of it.

Whiskey Rapids Trail
David was in love with this trail as we had a steep descent from the road and down to a ravine. It wasn’t the steep descent that he loved; it
was us getting away from traffic so he could record those White-winged Crossbills without background noise. Check out his web site - http://www.woodcreeper.com/ and scroll down to the winter finch trip report that he posted. He has links to some of the sounds he recorded up there. Check out that moose yodel! We had a family group of a male, female, and young moose as we were driving back along Rt. 60 at dusk. Dawn and dusk are the times to see them. None of us noted a mileage marker but these groups move around a lot anyway.

The Mad Musher
Our hostel for Friday night was called the Mad Musher. It was close to the east gate, very convenient, and clean with shared baths and a full kitchen. We booked all four of us in one room since it was just for one night! The rooms were well heated. I didn’t think about the thermostat being in Celsius when I put the heat up.

Saturday – Feb. 17, 2007:
After a quick breakfast in the kitchen we packed the van and headed back to the park. We wanted to hit new areas and if time permitted, search some of the places we had been the day before.

Lake Opeongo Road:
We had Pileated Woodpecker, White-winged Crossbills feeding on cattails, Blue Jays plus the usual flock along the main road. David had good success here with his recordings. There was no car noise. We walked the main road and a side road listening for the feeding flocks and for crossbills. Most of our White-winged Crossbill sightings were either along the side of the road or in spruce trees.

Visitor’s Center
Give yourself at least two hours at the center. The exhibits on the natural history of Algonquin are a must and the gift shop is huge. Throw in the feeders and a small snack bar and you’ll need the time.

I wish I could have spent more time on the Red Crossbills when we had them feeding on the trees. This bird has eight sub-species that could be split. Each has developed a bill based on the type of cone it feeds on. Well, it shouldn’t be any problem seeing them up there when they are in, just watch the various pines, hemlocks, feeders, and road sides. David did get some tape of flying Red Crossbills along Old Route 127. Apparently the flight call is the best way to tell which sub-species you have. See “The Sibley Guide to Birds” – the big book – page 531 for a start on this.

Our bird species total was 35 – not bad for the season and area. Our mammal list included red squirrel, gray squirrel, moose, both eastern and least chipmunks, and wolf tracks.

I welcome any comments and questions regarding our trip. David’s email can be found at his website posted above. Mine is sandrakeller@verizon.net
The DVOC/Nikon team, the Lagerhead Shrikes, has raised its level of competition to an art over the last several years and we have every reason to believe that they will deliver again this year. It is great fun to root for the team and to win. Certainly their efforts reflect well on the club. But the most important component of this effort is that it raises funds for worthwhile conservation efforts.

We need everyone’s support in the form of pledges and contributions to make our team’s effort the most successful ever. Please get involved by using this form to make a pledge or a direct contribution.

This year’s WSB funds will be used to establish a DVOC internship that will allow a student to study and work during the summer in the Bird Department of Philadelphia’s Academy of Natural Sciences. This is a great opportunity for a qualified young person to learn more about the science and conservation of birds. If we raise enough money this year, the proceeds will enable us to fund such a summer internship not only for 2007, but for 2008 and 2009 as well. Please send in your pledge and be as generous as possible.

**Contributions are tax deductible.**

Here is my pledge!

Per species sighted:

$1.00 ___ 50¢ ___ 25¢ ___ 10¢ ___ Other ___

Or I am contributing $ ______________ to our team’s effort.

Name ____________________________________________________
Street Address _______________________________________________
City __________________________ State _________ Zip ___________
Phone ____________ E-mail Address_____________________________

**Send to:** Naomi Murphy  
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Visit www.dvoc.org for more information.