



## THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

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June 2009

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This Birding Community E-bulletin is being distributed through the generous support of Steiner Binoculars as a service to active and concerned birders, those dedicated to the joys of birding and the protection of birds and their habitats. You can access an archive of past E-bulletins on [on the birding pages of the National Wildlife Refuge Association \(NWRA\) website](#) OR on [the birding webpages for Steiner Binoculars](#).

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### RARITY FOCUS

On the morning of May 14, park survey volunteers Doris Leary, Lesley Royce, and Carole Adams discovered a Greater Sand-Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) in breeding plumage at Huguenot Memorial Park in Jacksonville, Florida.

This species regularly breeds from Turkey to western Mongolia and southern Siberia, and winters in the southeastern Mediterranean area, South Africa, and Australasia. There is one previous record for this accidental species in North America - a bird at Bolinas Lagoon, Marin County, California, 29 January to 8 April 2001. The Jacksonville bird appears to be only the second record for the Western Hemisphere.

The Greater Sand-Plover was initially seen at Huguenot lagoon. Later, it was located closer to the park's family beach, where it was observed a number of times chasing away Wilson's Plovers.

Hundreds of observers went to the park to see the sand-plover, with some flying into the Jacksonville airport, or else driving to the park from far away out-of-state locations.

The bird was seen through 26 May, except for a couple of days when extreme weather conditions, including wind, rain, and severe storm surges made observations impossible.

To see a photo of the bird taken by Roger Clark, see:

[http://www.southfloridabirding.com/images/tasphotos/Greater\\_Sandplover.jpg](http://www.southfloridabirding.com/images/tasphotos/Greater_Sandplover.jpg)

For an article on the sand-plover in the ORLANDO SENTINEL, click [here](#).

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#### **IBA NEWS: CHEASAPEAKE BAY PROTECTION**

The Chesapeake Bay embraces multiple Important Bird Areas (IBAs) within the states of Maryland and Virginia. The bay is the largest estuary on the U.S. Atlantic Coast, and although its waters immediately touch only two states, its overall watershed includes six states. Needless to say, Chesapeake Bay is a crucial area for many species of waterfowl, shorebirds, and landbirds.

Consequently it is significant that on 12 May, President Obama signed an Executive Order establishing the Chesapeake Bay as a "National Treasure." The Executive Order mandates that various federal agencies carry out specific conservation activities within the next few months. Among these, the Executive Order requires development of a climate change strategy for the bay, reduction of water pollution from federal property, improved agricultural conservation practices, and expansion of public access to the bay. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has also been charged to "examine how to make full use of its authorities under the Clean Water Act to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay and its tributary waters."

This is all good news. In addition to the federal announcement, involved states also released various commitments for which they will be held accountable over the next two years. What remains is to put actions in place behind these words of commitment.

For additional information about worldwide IBA programs, and those across the U.S., check the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Area program web site at: <http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/>

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#### **SPECIES AT RISK IN CANADA: TWO MORE BIRDS RECOMMENDED**

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) recently recommended that two more birds be added to Canada's list of species at risk: Horned Grebe and Whip-poor-will. (Roseate Tern and Least Bittern were assessed by COSEWIC 10 years ago, and have recently been reconfirmed as Endangered and Threatened, respectively.)

Over 90 percent of the Horned Grebe's North American breeding range is in Canada. Loss of wetland habitat, coupled with coastal threats in staging areas and the wintering grounds are thought to be responsible for the decline seen in this species.

A decline in Canadian Whip-poor-will populations could be due to loss and degradation of habitat and/or wide-scale changes in the species' insect prey base. The species joins a growing list of other aerial insectivores designated as at risk in Canada: Common Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Acadian Flycatcher. Jon McCracken, Bird Studies Canada Director of National Programs and co-chair of COSEWIC's Birds Specialist Subcommittee, says the Whip-poor-will's decline is "widespread, severe, and quite inexplicable."

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#### **SPRING CONDOR ARIZONA SUMMARY**

While we do not pass on all the ongoing information concerning California Condors, we continue our condor watch with this latest report from northern Arizona. A recent Peregrine Fund field report is significant not only because of the few nesting failures, but also because it documents some of the remarkable and encouraging success among certain condor pairs in the experimental population flying over northern Arizona, and also southern Utah.

For details see [here](#).

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#### **OPEN FIELDS: NOT NECESSARILY ON THE EDGE**

Our regular readers may remember our past coverage of "Open Fields," a new element in the most recent Farm Bill intended to increase public access on private lands. To see this item from last November, check: <http://www.refugenet.org/birding/novSBC08.html#TOC06>

Formally known as the Voluntary Public Access and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (VPA), Open Fields is going to be funded to the tune of \$50 million over four years to enhance or create public access for wildlife-dependent recreation through grants to states (and tribal governments).

Consistent with the Bush Administration's announced program last October to open lands to the public,

Somewhat confusingly, the Bush Administration announced a program last October to open lands to the public under the Conservation Reserve Program (and using current CRP dollars) for "hunting, fishing, bird-watching, and other recreational activities." This CRP public access incentive would provide an additional \$3 per acre to CRP participants that open their CRP lands to the public (limited to the 21 states already with public access programs) over five years and with a ceiling of seven million acres.

The Obama Administration's 2010 budget has moved to discontinue this second CRP program, while supporting the Open Fields-VPA effort. This has created some confusion among supporters of public access, because the two programs often get confused, and because on the surface it appears that the administration is pulling away from funding for public access efforts.

Seemingly, there should be more interest in expanding and supporting the Open Fields effort; however, there are three potential problems: 1) the Farm Services Agency (FSA) has yet to publish a program rule and define the selection criteria for grant proposals, 2) frequently too little is known about these public access programs, especially outside the 21 states with current programs, and 3) the existing dedication to Open Fields is coming mainly from concerned hunting and fishing interests, and not the vocal hiking, wildlife photography, and birding constituencies, suggesting that it is a narrower issue than it is.

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### **TIP OF THE MONTH: TAKE A FRIEND TO A BIRDING FESTIVAL**

Increasingly, birding festivals have become THE gateway to birding experience for many new observers. Festivals are overwhelmingly family-friendly, welcoming, and geared to introducing budding new bird watchers to the birding experience.

As such, it's a good time for all of us to consider taking a mildly bird-curious friend to a local birding festival in the next few months.

We are not promoting any particular festivals – large or small – in the E-bulletin for obvious reasons. There are many deserving attention, but we simply don't have the space to give them all adequate exposure. Nonetheless, there are a number of interesting-looking festivals coming up in the next few months which certainly deserve your attention. The states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, South Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Washington all have some great birding festivals, but there are even more. We urge you to explore some of them online, but more importantly, support them by going to one, and by all means bring a friend.

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### **BOOK NOTES: A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF EAST AFRICA**

No, this is not a field guide, it is a novel. In case you missed it when it was originally published, A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF EAST AFRICA (Houghton Mifflin 2008) by Nicholas Drayson has been winning kudos around the world.

The lovelorn and unassuming Mr. Malik of Nairobi, Kenya, is besotted by the leader of his local birding club, Rose Mbikwa, the Scottish widow of a Kenyan politician. Just when Malik builds up the courage to ask Rose to the annual Hunt Club Ball, a rival from years past, the insincere and flashy Harry Kahn, appears on the scene. Kahn immediately also takes a liking to Rose Mbikwa, and a new rivalry soon develops over her attention. Friends of Malik and Kahn suggest that the two engage in a contest: the man who spots the most bird species in one week will have the right to ask Rose to the ball.

The charming story thus unfolds with insight into differing personalities and birding techniques, Kenyan life and culture, varied misadventures, and the politics and journalism of the region. There are a few ornithological discrepancies in the story, all mistakes that nonetheless can be forgiven. Finally, although one does not have to be a birder to appreciate this light romance, it will certainly add to one's enjoyment.

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### **NWRA PHOTO CONTEST**

The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) has announced its 4th annual digital photo contest which will once again showcase America's National Wildlife Refuges. Entries can be submitted until 15 July 2009, with results to be announced in October 2009 during National Refuge Week.

Images submitted for the photo contest may be of birds, mammals, insects, fish, other animals, plants, people, or scenery, however, all must be on Refuge System lands.

For 2009 Refuge Photo Contest details, requirements, procedures, and prizes (from ATP Oil and Gas, Southwest Airlines, Barbara's Bakery, Wild Bird Centers of America, and Houghton Mifflin), see:

<http://www.refugeassociation.org/contact/ContactHome.html>

<http://www.refugeassociation.org/contest/contesthome.html>

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## **BRAZEN SELF-PROMOTION**

As the Birding Community E-bulletin enters its sixth year, we are sharing a few comments from a selection of our readers. We will perhaps include a couple comments each month this year. We are placing these comments at the very end of the E-bulletin so you can simply stop reading here if you so wish!

"It's always a welcome sight to see the Birding Community E-bulletin in my email queue. I subscribe to several bird-related listservs but this one document not only pulls together the most current conservation news on issues I work on but it also covers other issues that are of great interest. The information is always detailed, substantive, and easy to read. I don't hesitate to immediately forward to Defenders' internal bird listserv since I know my colleagues will find it interesting and helpful as well."

- Caroline Kennedy, Senior Director of Field Conservation, Defenders of Wildlife

"THE most valuable and eagerly-awaited communication in birding, the Birding Community E-Bulletin always provides up-to-date, novel, insightful, comprehensive and indispensable news on birds and their protection."

- James A. Kushlan, Past President, AOU (2004-2006)

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If you wish to distribute all or parts of any of the E-bulletins, we request that you mention the source of any material used. (Include the URL for the E-Bulletin archives if possible).

If you have friends or co-workers who want to get onto the monthly E-bulletin mailing list, have them contact either:

- Wayne R. Peterson, Director, Massachusetts Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program, Mass Audubon, 718/534-2046, [wpetersen@massaudubon.org](mailto:wpetersen@massaudubon.org) OR
- Paul Baicich 410/992-9736, [paul.baicich@verizon.net](mailto:paul.baicich@verizon.net)

If you DON'T wish to receive these E-bulletins, contact either of us, and we will take you off our mailing list IMMEDIATELY.