



**THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN**

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June 2010  
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This Birding Community E-bulletin is being distributed to active and concerned birders, those dedicated to the joys of birding and the protection of birds and their habitats.

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**RARITY FOCUS**

On Thursday, 13 May, Chris Rasmussen found a Bahama Mockingbird at Fort DeSoto County Park, St. Petersburg, Florida. The bird was also observed by several others the same day.

The next day the cooperative bird allowed close observations and even sang. It continued to be seen for the next two days and was observed by many Florida and out-of-state birders. It may have been last seen on the morning of 17 May.

If you are unfamiliar with this species, check a National Geographic guide (fifth edition pages 362-363), Kaufman's Focus Guide (pages 256-257), or the "large" Sibley (page 411).

The first Bahama Mockingbird ever found in the U.S. was at the Dry Tortugas in 1973. A resident of the Bahamas, Jamaica, and small islands off the coast of Cuba, Bahama Mockingbirds have been reported in the U.S. at least a dozen times into the early 1990s, and approximately an equal number of times since. Most of these observations have been in Florida from early April to mid-June, mainly between the Dry Tortugas and West Palm Beach. The Fort Desoto Park bird was unique in that it was discovered on the west coast of Florida.

**AND THE RUNNER UP IS...**

A runner-up and contender for rarity honors this past month was Kirtland's Warbler. While Kirtland's Warblers can readily be observed during their nesting season in central Michigan, the species is seldom seen during migration, since there are so few of these birds in existence (perhaps 3,700). Finding a Kirtland's Warbler during migration is truly like finding a needle in the proverbial haystack. Despite this fact, on Friday, 14 May, Kenn Kaufman found a male Kirtland's Warbler in the East Beach shrubbery at Massena Marsh in northwest Ohio. Over 800 birders participating in the Biggest Week in

the East Beach snrubbery at Magee Marsh in northwest Ohio. Over 800 birders participating in the biggest week in American Birding event were estimated to have seen this bird throughout the day. This is perhaps the record for a single Kirtland's Warbler being seen by so many people in one day outside of Michigan. Remarkably, another male Kirtland's Warbler appeared in the very same area one week later, where it was also observed by scores of birders.

## **GULF COAST OIL SPILL: THE BIRDS AND BEYOND**

The tragic explosion and catastrophic underwater oil gusher off the coast of Louisiana has been a sobering reminder of the price we pay by continuing to rely on oil and other fossil fuels as a primary sources of energy. This situation now threatens the rich salt-water and coastal ecosystems that support enormous and unique concentrations of birds and other wildlife as well as helping to sustain the economic well-being for many local residents.

At the end of May, the spill stretches across a 180-mile swath, from beyond Dauphin Island, Alabama, to Grand Isle, Louisiana. Birds, turtles, and dolphins are being carefully watched for signs of oiling. Brown Pelicans have been seen landing in the oil as it comes ashore on their nesting islands. Terns, Laughing Gulls, egrets, Roseate Spoonbills, and shorebirds are all being put at risk along shorelines and in wetlands.

Current fears are that the oil could eventually invade fragile wetlands and beaches from Texas to Florida.

If there is any good news, it is that people want to help, and people also want answers.

Some Americans seem to think that handing out paper towels and Handi-wipes will help address the immediate situation. Others are crying out to punish and boycott BP in order to damage their bottom line. There are now dozens of informational websites offering details about the disaster, suggestions about how to "fix" its, and pleas for fund-raising. Some of these are excellent and helpful, while others are simply misguided. Accordingly, your editors will not make recommendations about which websites are best and which ones are less helpful.

While the public's short-term preoccupation has revolved around plugging the oil gusher and monitoring the spread of the oil, two things are certain.

First, the syrupy muck invading the imperiled coastal habitats along the Gulf shores will leave a toxic residue exceedingly difficult to remove. Officials on site are considering some dramatic and even untried solutions. One would be to set the wetlands on fire. Under the right conditions, crews could literally set fire to oil-coated plants. Needless to say, this would not be easy. If the marshes are too wet, the oil won't burn, and if it's too dry, the plant roots could burn and the marsh would be ruined. Any overly-aggressive action could ruin the marshes for an indefinite period of time, doing more harm than good, especially since these marshes, among other things, provide a vital line of defense against Gulf storms. Cutting and removing oiled vegetation (e.g., taking it to a landfill) can work for small spills, but with vegetation extracted over broad areas, water from the Gulf could enter the marshes and wash away the plant roots, thereby accelerating the transformation of wetlands to open water. "Bioremediation" - letting oil-eating microbes do the work - has also been discussed. And finally, over time, weather and natural microbes could break down the oil. Regardless, the crude oil will surely continue to poison plants and wildlife in the months (and possibly years) ahead during the period it would take for the oil to dissipate. Obviously, the cleanup is going to take a long time and a great deal of money.

Second, the BP oil disaster is only the most recent evidence of a much larger crisis - our dependence on fossil fuels is bringing the United States to the brink of an ecological, economic, and geopolitical disaster. Fortunately we still have the opportunity to create the foundation for cleaner energy and to reduce our dependence on oil, and oil from hostile regimes in particular. Smarter cars, more efficient local power sources, lights out campaigns, and basic conservation savings are essential to the bigger issue. This does not mean that as we continue to explore innovative new forms of energy production and management, all alternatives are equally beneficial. For example, fast-tracking each and every wind-power plan or nuclear power alternative would clearly be a risky proposition.

While contemplating the current mess along the Gulf Coast and working on longer-term green-energy solutions, we need to also recognize that it is impossible to shift our nation's infrastructure away from a petroleum-based economy overnight. There are currently two Obama Administration limits on oil exploration: one on opening up new zones for drilling, and one on current drilling operations, at least until the President's commission on the BP incident has completed its review. This moratorium, however, will not affect current and ongoing production.

In the interim, it is important to insist on a "conservation royalty" that all offshore oil and gas companies should pay, so that revenue can be "recycled" into land-preservation and habitat security. This type of funding should go to the states and to the federal agencies that are able to work toward building a more secure future for biodiversity and, yes, bird habitat.

Wait a minute!

Aren't oil and gas fees already going into the U.S. Treasury that are intended to support federal land acquisition and significant stateside acquisition and other stateside conservation? Every year \$450 million federal and \$450 million stateside (ergo: \$900 million total) is made available through the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The problem is that Congress rarely fully appropriates this "conservation royalty."

The BP aftermath is an ideal time to call once again for the "full funding for LWCF." This is a bona fide mitigation fund to compensate states for ongoing offshore drilling. It's a tool ready to be used.

Indeed, it would seem that this is the time when the \$900 million ceiling should be raised. The \$900 million cap was established in 1977. In 2010 dollars that would be approximately \$3.2 billion. Now, here is an opportunity to "recycle" oil and gas revenue to a serious conservation end.

We have previously written about the LWCF and the great bird habitat secured through that funding vehicle, so you may want to revisit what we wrote in the January E-bulletin:  
[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/janSBC10.html#TOC10](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/janSBC10.html#TOC10)

## **OIL APPENDIX: BOLO**

We have been specifically asked to spread the word about one aspect of the current BP-oil issue.

Birders have a special opportunity to "be on the lookout" (BOLO) for oil slicks and oiled birds outside the area of direct impact. Pelagic birders and folks watching shorebirds might even take photos and make reports of oiled birds from as wide an area as possible, not just in the Gulf area, but along Atlantic Coast as well.

Even anecdotal reports will help to determine the extent of oiling geographically. It would be particularly significant if any oiled birds or remote slicks were observed in the Gulf Stream.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has told us that oiled wildlife should be reported to a BP hot line set up for this purpose at 866-557-1401.

## **CAPE WIND: A FIRST FOR THE COUNTRY**

As mentioned last month in the E-bulletin, "the other" major coastal energy issue, the Cape Wind Project in Nantucket Sound (Massachusetts), deserves an update. In late April, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced federal approval for this, the country's first large-scale offshore wind farm, while also requiring additional measures to be initiated. See the DOI announcement here:

[www.doi.gov/news/doinews/Secretary-Salazar-Announces-Approval-of-Cape-Wind-Energy-Project-on-Outer-Continental-Shelf-off-Massachusetts.cfm](http://www.doi.gov/news/doinews/Secretary-Salazar-Announces-Approval-of-Cape-Wind-Energy-Project-on-Outer-Continental-Shelf-off-Massachusetts.cfm)

The announcement ended a nearly nine-year review process, clearing the way for the eventual development of 130 wind turbines in Nantucket Sound. In the quest for "green energy," this project could serve as a model effort for obtaining clean, renewable energy in America, at the same time working toward reducing global warming pollution, promoting economic growth and jobs, reducing regional dependence on fossil fuels, and promoting energy independence.

Leading environmental and conservation organizations such as Mass Audubon, The Conservation Law Foundation, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Union of Concerned Scientists, supported the final decision. Mass Audubon specifically concluded that the project would not pose an ecologically significant threat to the birds and associated marine habitat of the area. Continued extensive monitoring of wildlife and habitat was stressed in their support.

As previously noted in the E-bulletin, the potential impact to birds created by any wind power project is ultimately determined by specific choices in siting locations. If Cape Wind is able to effectively minimize the impact on birds and the environment in this location, there will be clear benefits to people and birds.

At the same time that state organizations were satisfied with the Cape Wind plan, some organizations were disappointed, suggesting that the science collected for the project on bird collision threats was inadequate, that the site could reduce prime offshore sea-duck foraging habitat, and that the project could still be a threat to other species. The American Bird Conservancy expressed their disapproval here:

[www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/stories/birds\\_forever.html](http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/stories/birds_forever.html)

To access statements of support for the Cape Wind effort from Mass Audubon, the Conservation Law Foundation, and the Union of Concerned Scientists, see:

[www.masscaudubon.org/news/index.php?id=1429&type=press](http://www.masscaudubon.org/news/index.php?id=1429&type=press)

and

[www.ucsusa.org/news/press\\_release/salazar-approves-cape-wind-energy-project-380.html](http://www.ucsusa.org/news/press_release/salazar-approves-cape-wind-energy-project-380.html)

## **WILL VOLUNTARY WIND-FARM GUIDELINES WORK?**

While on the subject of the impact of wind-power on birds, we thought readers might be interested in the final recommendations of the Wind Turbine Guidelines Federal Advisory Committee, released in mid-April and sent to the Secretary of the Interior. An announcement can be found here:

[www.fws.gov/habitatconservation/windpower/Service\\_Transmits\\_Wind\\_Turbine\\_Recommendations\\_NR\\_PressRelease.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/habitatconservation/windpower/Service_Transmits_Wind_Turbine_Recommendations_NR_PressRelease.pdf)

The full 157-page document, as well as a complete list of the 22 review committee members, can be accessed here:

[www.fws.gov/habitatconservation/windpower/wind\\_turbine\\_advisory\\_committee.html](http://www.fws.gov/habitatconservation/windpower/wind_turbine_advisory_committee.html)

Highlights of the committee's findings include:

1. A decision-making framework that guides all stages of wind energy development
2. Reliance on the best available science when assessing renewable energy projects and their potential environmental impact
3. Use of landscape-scaled planning that recognizes the need to think long-term about protecting our nation's economic and natural resources.

While the committee made some fine recommendations concerning the generation of wind power on public lands, a major shortcoming is that they are only recommendations. These are proposed as voluntary recommendations, rather than required. As such, these recommendations may do little to curb unacceptable levels of bird mortality and habitat loss.

Fortunately there is still time to re-direct the recommendations, potentially putting them on the road to becoming mandatory. One would hope that the Secretary of the Interior makes that happen.

## **SHEARWATER GAUNTLET**

Last month we focused on the work of Bob Pyle and the online Version 1 of "Birds of the Hawaiian Islands: Occurrence, History, Distribution, and Status" by Robert L. Pyle and Peter Pyle:

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/maySBC10.html#TOC06](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/maySBC10.html#TOC06)

One special Hawaiian bird, Newell's Shearwater, breeds only in the southeastern Hawaiian Islands. While it is considered a subspecies of the Townsend Shearwater by the American Ornithologists' Union, other taxonomists regard it as a separate species.

Each fall, young Newell's Shearwaters (and also Hawaiian Petrels) heading from mountain-slope nesting sites to the sea are attracted to the bright lights of Kaua'i. Unfortunately, hundreds - and sometimes thousands, of Newell's Shearwaters, collide with power cables or other manmade structures after becoming disorientated by urban lighting. Many are killed, but thanks to an island-wide initiative (Save Our Shearwaters) many injured birds are collected, rehabilitated, and released into the wild.

In early May, four groups - Conservation Council for Hawai'i, Earthjustice, Center for Biological Diversity, Hui Ho'omalu i Ka 'Äina, and the American Bird Conservancy - sued a luxury resort on the island as a consequence of these seabird deaths. They filed suit against the St. Regis Princeville Resort over the luxury resort's failure to help in the prevention of the ongoing deaths of these seabirds, a violation of the federal Endangered Species Act. (The St. Regis is a property of Starwood Hotels and Resorts, which also owns the Westin, Sheraton, Four Points, W Hotels, and Le Meridien brands.)

This story offers a new twist to growing "lights out" efforts to save birds.

The resort is responsible for the greatest number of deaths and injuries of imperiled seabirds on Kaua'i due to its extensive use of artificial lights. Data from the Save Our Shearwaters (SOS) program indicate that, from 2000 to 2008, over one-quarter of the total number of shearwaters downed by artificial lights on Kaua'i went down at that one resort. Figures for the 2009 fallout season show a similar trend, with about 60 birds involved.

The St. Regis recently completed a \$100 million renovation that included some lighting changes, and reportedly employees have been told that in order to improve the guests' experience, they were under orders to keep the resort lights on and the shades up. Reportedly, the glass-glare problem continues.

For more information on the situation and lawsuit see this article from Honolulu:

[www.starbulletin.com/news/20100507\\_Lawsuit\\_contends\\_hotels\\_lights\\_put\\_rare\\_Hawaiian\\_birds\\_at\\_risk.html](http://www.starbulletin.com/news/20100507_Lawsuit_contends_hotels_lights_put_rare_Hawaiian_birds_at_risk.html)

and this press release from the four groups:

[www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/100511.html](http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/100511.html)

## **INITIAL RED KNOT NEWS**

Readers are probably well aware of the amazing connection between the arrival of migratory Red Knots on Delaware Bay shores and the emergence of Horseshoe Crabs from the briny depths to lay their eggs.

The decades-long struggle to preserve a balance between maintaining sufficient numbers of Horseshoe Crabs to generate enough crab eggs to sustain the thousands of Red Knots that depend upon the eggs to fatten up for their trip to the Canadian Arctic, and the efforts to maintain shoreline habitat is not over.

We have reported on the inter-American situation multiple times, including in January 2010

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/janSBC10.html#TOC08](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/janSBC10.html#TOC08)

and January 2009:

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/janSBC09.html#TOC03](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/janSBC09.html#TOC03)

Over-harvesting of Horseshoe Crabs for bait used to catch conchs and eels has seriously reduced the Delaware Bay crab population since the 1990s. Last month's initial reports offer a mixed review - a drop in adult horseshoe crabs, but a slight increase in the numbers of younger crabs, resulting in perhaps the best crab numbers in 15 years. At the same time, Red Knots, numbering up to 50,000 in the late 1990s had dropped precipitously over the past few years, but crept back up to about 23,000 last year. This year numbers were estimated to be approximately 17,000. This is believed to be a stable number, but certainly not an increase.

Because last month's tallies have not yet been analyzed or finalized, these numbers are interim figures at best, so stand by for a more thorough total and future report.

In the meantime, see a video of the scene at Reeds Beach, New Jersey, taken on 22 May. The video was taken by Shawn Carey and Jim Grady (Migration Productions):

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHVhFLf\\_vDo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHVhFLf_vDo)

## **IBA NEWS AND BOOK NOTES: PDF DOWNLOADS FOR THE AMERICAS**

The new Americas IBA directory provides a concise summary of 2,450 Important Bird Areas described throughout the Americas through 2009. This inventory, prepared by BirdLife International, follows similar regional IBA directories developed this past decade for Africa (2001) and Asia (2004) and represents a powerful overview of the most important sites for bird conservation in our hemisphere. Starting with the beginning of the IBA Program in North America in 1994, sites have now been identified in all 57 countries or territories in the region. The results are impressive and are organized as free pdf downloads.

You can find summaries for all 57 countries or territories in the Hemisphere at:

[www.birdlife.org/action/science/sites/american\\_ibas/americas-ibas-downloads.html](http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/sites/american_ibas/americas-ibas-downloads.html)

There are also a number of individual national and regional directories that have additional details. For more information about IBA programs across the U.S., check the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Area program web site at:

[www.audubon.org/bird/iba/](http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/)

If you prefer a hard-copy of the book, it is also available through BirdLife. It's handy in both formats, and some birders and conservationists will want access to both versions. The standard book copy is available (for about \$70) here:

[www.nhbs.com/title.php?tefno=172848](http://www.nhbs.com/title.php?tefno=172848)

BirdLife is to be commended for its good effort in making this project available

BirdLife is to be congratulated for its grand effort in pulling this project together.

### **TIP OF THE MONTH: IT'S TIME FOR THOSE HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS**

While some locations (e.g., California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida) are ideal for year-round hummingbird feeding, other locations to the north don't become hummingbird-ready until spring and early summer. A clear plastic feeder with an attractive red opening should do the trick. Some hints are in order:

- Use a standard 4:1 water-to sugar ratio
- Putting red food-coloring is unnecessary
- Put up more than one feeder
- Locate feeders near bright red native flowering plants (e.g., bee-balm)
- Fill and clean the feeders regularly

Whether you entertain one hummingbird species in your area or many, your hummer-hosting can be a delight to behold. Hummingbirds of all species are among the jewels of bird world!

### **THIS MONTH'S QUIZ FOR A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC BIRD BOOK**

To mark National Geographic's recent support of the E-bulletin, we have some fine National Geographic books to distribute to E-bulletin readers. Readers who choose to enter our quick-and-easy contest have the chance to win one of

these books. Our little contest and quiz questions will run for the next couple of months. Each monthly quiz question will either relate to one of our news items for the previous month, or it will relate to some event or experience that is due to occur during the current month.

For more on the excellent NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC books, see:

[www.shopng.com/birdbooks](http://www.shopng.com/birdbooks)

There will undoubtedly be multiple readers who answer our monthly question correctly, so we will only be able to distribute a few copies to readers whose names are picked at random from all those submitting correct answers. Because of shipping constraints only folks residing in the U.S. or Canada are eligible.

Last month's question was linked to the historic predecessor of International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD), initiated in 1894 as "Bird Day" by the superintendent of schools for Oil City, Pennsylvania. What was the superintendent's name?

Answer: Charles A. Babcock

Last month's five winners were: Bob Bushnell of Onset, MA; John Cornely of Littleton, CO; Jennifer Smith-Castro of Columbus, OH; Michael Clay of Greenwood IN; and Eric L. Kershner of Carlsbad, CA.

The prize this month will be your choice of either the Eastern or Western National Geographic Field Guide. A total of 10 field guides will be sent to winners of our quiz.

For more on these two books, see here for the Eastern Guide:

<http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/ngs/product/birding-books/national-geographic-field-guide-to-the-birds-of-eastern-north-america>

and the Western Guide:

<http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/ngs/product/birding-books/national-geographic-field-guide-to-the-birds-of-western-north-america>

This month's question deals with the Kirtland's Warbler, a species whose breeding range is concentrated in central Michigan: The Kirtland's Warbler has restrictive habitat requirements characterized by what species of tree?

Please send your answer by 18 June to:

[birdingbulletin1@verizon.net](mailto:birdingbulletin1@verizon.net)

Make the subject line "QUIZ! " Tell us if you want the Eastern or Western Guide, and please include your full name and mailing address along with your answer so that we can send you a book in the mail should you be a fortunate winner. We will also provide the correct answer next month.

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You can access past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website:

[www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html](http://www.refugeassociation.org/birding/birding5.html)

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

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

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