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## SWAROVSKI BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE NORTH AMERICAN SWAROVSKI BIRDING COMMUNITY

**\*Information, communication, and inspiration on birds, wildlife, and nature\***

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September 2004

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### **GREETINGS!**

"Our remnants of wilderness will yield bigger values to the nation's character and health than they will to its pocketbook, and to destroy them will be to admit that the latter are the only values that interest us."

- Aldo Leopold: "A Plea for Wilderness Hunting Grounds," OUTDOOR LIFE, November 1925

We present this, our fifth monthly "Swarovski Birding Community E-bulletin" for North America as we ready for "Wilderness Week," scheduled to be celebrated on 18-22 September. We also note that the 40th

for wilderness week, scheduled to be celebrated on 10-22 September. We also note that the 40th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act is 3 September 2004. The 40th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act is a time for us not only to celebrate the official wilderness areas protected this month, but also to celebrate more than 40 years of people working to protect places we cherish.

However you choose to celebrate the anniversary - and highlight current efforts to protect more of our nation's invaluable forests, deserts, grasslands, mountains, coastlines, and tundra - is up to you. You may want to use one of these anniversary dates as a way to participate in a wilderness event. Help celebrate 40 years of protecting wild places by visiting [this site](#).

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## **RARITY FOCUS**

The "Rarity Focus" for August is the photogenic and much-publicized Red-footed Falcon found in early August at the Katama Airpark on Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. In the first few days that the word was spread about this North American first, the local and national media quickly seized on the event. The falcon instantly created a birding and media frenzy. Thousands of birders, tourists, and curious locals gathered for two weeks to see the bird. An accounting of the occurrence of the Red-footed Falcon, along with the excitement that it created, appeared in such high profile venues as THE NEW YORK TIMES and NEWSWEEK and TIME magazines.

Vern Laux, the island birder who first found the bird, and who was later assisted by Jeremiah Trimble in identifying it, could not possibly have suspected that the falcon would attract such national attention.

Fortunately the vast number of people who came to see the bird, many from areas all over North America, displayed nearly perfect birding etiquette during their brief visit to Martha's Vineyard. The locals were delighted with the attention created by the bird, and a grand time was had by all. The airpark, which is owned by the town of Edgartown, but managed by The Nature Conservancy, has for years been a fine site for grassland birds and other locally unusual fauna and flora.

For a fascinating report focusing on Vern Laux as the ABC News "Person of the Week," [see the transcript](#) for 27 August (Click on "Watching the Skies").

To have the ABC "Person of the Week" be a birder, not an Olympic athlete, since the Olympics were taking place at the same time, says a great deal about the current status of birding in America!

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## **"SWIFT NIGHT OUT" IN SEPTEMBER**

As the nesting season for swifts draws to a close and pre-migratory roosting flocks are beginning to congregate, a number of thoughtful birders are attempting to raise awareness of Chimney Swifts and Vaux's Swifts by coordinating an annual event called, "A Swift Night Out."

John Connors, a Research Associate with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, North Carolina, conceived of this idea in 2001, and others thought it had great potential as a way to increase an interest in Chimney Swift and Vaux's Swift conservation. Since that seminal year, regular swift-monitoring events have grown across the country.

The Driftwood Wildlife Association in Austin, Texas, has proposed that interested volunteers locate a Chimney Swift or Vaux's Swift roost in their area and participate in this coordinated effort this year. The coordinated swift watch this year will take place on 10-12 September.

Participation is simple: observe a local swift roost, starting about 30 minutes before dusk, and carefully estimate the number of swifts that enter the chimney or structure that serves as the roost site. For more details and information on reporting results, visit the [Driftwood Wildlife Association](#).

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## **AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENTS HELP BIRDS**

In early August the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that it would fully implement directives to sustain the environmental benefits of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) by offering early re-enrollments and contract extensions for acres that will expire in 2007. In addition, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman announced the dates for a CRP general sign-up along with inviting public comments on other

Ann Veneman announced the dates for a CRP general sign up, along with inviting public comments on other issues essential to the future of the program. One new initiative is intended to create increased habitat for Northern Bobwhite, a species that has suffered serious population declines throughout large parts of its range.

The CRP Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat Initiative introduces a conservation practice intended to create 250,000 acres of early-succession grass buffers along agricultural field borders. USDA estimates this nesting and brood-rearing cover will increase Northern Bobwhite numbers by 750,000 birds annually. Planted buffers will also benefit other species and will reduce soil erosion and protect water quality by trapping field sediments and nutrients.

Another adjustment will allow landowners to enroll large wetland complexes and playa lakes located outside the 100-year floodplain in the program. Restoring these systems will provide vital habitat for many wildlife species, including multiple species of waterfowl, Sandhill Cranes, and songbirds.

Public comments are invited through 8 December, and informed observers see this as a prelude to the expected Farm Bill reauthorization for 2007. Bird conservationists are particularly taking note of the potential and the importance of this effort.

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## **NEW RAIL DISCOVERED IN PHILIPPINES**

An international expedition recently found a rail species new to science on a remote island (with a human population of about 8,500) in the northern Philippines. A team of Filipino and British researchers discovered the bird living by a stream in the forests on the island of Calayan. The flightless, or nearly flightless, rail is thought to number only about 200 pairs. The UK-based Oriental Bird Club (OBC) and the Rufford Small Grant Committee funded the expedition. The discovery of the Calayan Rail (*Gallirallus calayanensis*) this past spring was announced in FORKTAIL, a journal of Asian ornithology published by the OBC. Unlike many aquatic rails, this species is a forest-dwelling bird.

A BirdLife International representative told reporters that "The Calayan Rail has never been seen to fly, but it may be like the Okinawa Rail, which flutters up into the trees like a chicken in order to roost." Of the 20 species or subspecies of rail that have become extinct since 1600, 90% have been flightless.

Genevieve Broad, co-leader of the expedition, said, "I felt sure the Babuyan Islands would hold some interesting discoveries, but I didn't expect to find a totally new species. I hope this will bring the recognition these islands deserve as an important site of biological diversity."

There is thought to be no imminent threat to the rails, but conservationists say that new roads could lead to new settlements, habitat loss, and introduced predators - like cats and rats. These are factors that have been implicated in the previous extinction of many rails worldwide.

For more details (and photos) of the Calayan Rail view click [here](#) and [here](#).

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## **FLORIDA CATS INDOORS**

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has launched a new stewardship project as a key strategy in implementing a policy that will "protect native wildlife from predation, disease and other impacts presented by feral and free-ranging cats." The program encourages cat owners to keep their cats indoors, to spay or neuter their cats before a litter is produced, and to never abandon cats. The new education materials include a color poster, printed brochures, a PowerPoint presentation, and radio and TV Public Service Announcements. All of these excellent materials can be downloaded [here](#). They were produced in collaboration with American Bird Conservancy (ABC). The state of Florida has taken a national lead on this important conservation and animal-welfare issue. Most importantly, the FWC effort serves as a fine model for other states in dealing with this question.

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## **AMBITIOUS EFFORT UNDERWAY AT SAN FRANCISCO BAY**

In late July, one of the nation's most ambitious environmental projects got underway in San Francisco Bay.

Known as the "South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project," the restoration involves draining 1,350 acres of salt ponds around the southern tip of San Francisco Bay.

The USFWS and the California Department of Fish and Game, with the assistance of several foundations, purchased 16,500 acres of salt ponds from Cargill, Inc. for \$100 million last year. The ponds, built approximately 60 years ago, produced salt for various uses. The majority of the property will become part of Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, while about 7,000 acres will be managed by California as a wildlife reserve. This will now put into public hands the largest parcel of privately-owned shoreline in San Francisco Bay. Moreover, this large wetlands restoration is particularly interesting because it lies within a heavily urbanized and suburbanized area.

This effort will particularly benefit the "Northern California" Clapper Rail, "California" Least Tern, "Western" Snowy Plover, and various other bird species and subspecies of conservation concern. Many species of birds utilize the salt ponds as habitat, including ducks, cormorants, terns, and gulls. Shorebirds are especially expected to benefit.

As part of the overall restoration, some areas will remain ponds while others will be restored to tidal marsh. Before the areas can be restored to tidal marsh, wildlife officials must open them and circulate bay water through them, thereby stopping the production of salt. The manager of the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex, said it would take five years to create enough natural tidal flow to cleanse the ponds, and it will take at least 20 years for full restoration.

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## **BIG CANS MOVE TOWARD SUSTAINABLE COFFEE**

Giant companies involved in mass-produced coffees (e.g., Phillip Morris, Nestle, and Procter & Gamble) have been reluctant to confront the issue of sustainable, fair-trade, organic, and shade-grown coffees. This may be changing with an announcement from Procter & Gamble in early August.

P&G has been marketing its "Signature Collection" (Millstone) online and through phone orders since September 2003. Now it is about to introduce two of these specialty coffees into grocery and retail stores throughout the country, starting this fall. Their "Millstone Organic Mountain Moonlight" will be Fair Trade Certified and their "Millstone Rainforest Reserve" will be Rainforest Alliance Certified.

Fair Trade Certification ensures that coffee-growing communities are paid a fair, living wage. Rainforest Alliance Certification works to protect the environment. Does that mean that both of the P&G coffees are "bird-compatible?" Well, almost. Fair Trade coffees are estimated to be 80%-likely to be shade-grown. Similarly, the Rainforest Alliance certification is not as strict as other standards for shade, but it is a huge step in the right direction.

For more information on bird-compatible, shade-grown coffee, see the following two sites from the [National Zoo](#) and [American Birding](#).

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## **NORTH AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVATION INITIATIVE (NABCI) NOTES**

The August 2004 issue of the NABCI-focused "All-Bird Bulletin" has recently been made available on the Web. Inside the bulletin are reports on:

- \* Central Hardwoods Joint Venture Approved
- \* Mexican Regional Alliances Taking Shape
- \* Scientists Propose New Tools for Landbird Conservation Planning and Assessment
- \* Gulf Coast Joint Venture Goes All-Bird
- \* Ontario Holds Landbird Planning Workshops

To see this issue and all back issues of this publication, [click here](#).

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**BIRDING IN ART EXHIBIT**

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The Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum will shortly open its 29th "Birds in Art" annual exhibit. Running since 1976, the exhibit is designed to present some of the best contemporary artistic interpretations of birds and related subject matter in the world. More than 115 artists will present 130 paintings and sculptures at the museum in Wausau, Wisconsin. This year's exhibit will run from 11 September through 14 November and presents a look into bird life from around the world. For more details, [visit the museum site](#).

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*We welcome your distribution of all or parts of this E-bulletin, only requesting mention of the material's SBC origins.*

*If you have a friend who wants to get future copies of the North American Swarovski Birding E-bulletin, have them contact:*

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