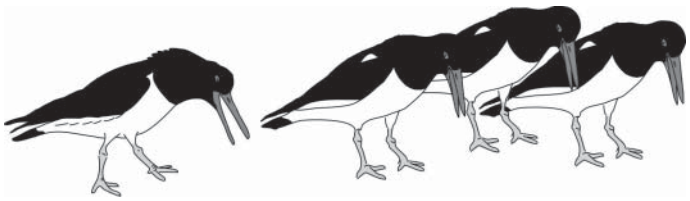
NOTES & *NEWS*



Notes *& News* is compiled by Silke Nebel to whom contributions should be sent.
(School of Biological, Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of New South Wales, Kensington, Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia; fax: +61-2-9385-1558; email: *silke.nebel@unsw.edu.au*).

PROJECT NEWS

Birds of North America now online!

In two centuries of American ornithology, The Birds of North America (BNA) is only the fourth comprehensive reference covering the life histories of North American birds. Following in the footsteps of Wilson, Audubon, and Bent, BNA makes a quantum leap in information beyond what these historic figures were able to provide. Edited by Drs. Alan Poole and Frank Gill, this series provides detailed scientific information (18 volumes, 18,000 pages in total) for each of the 716 species of birds nesting in the USA and Canada. The print version of BNA was completed in 2002, a joint 10 year project of the American Ornithologists' Union, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the Academy of Natural Sciences.

Now as an online project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, BNA is poised to become a living resource. Account contents will be updated frequently, with online-coordinated contributions from researchers, citizen scientists, and designated reviewers and editors. In addition, BNA Online will build image and video galleries showing behaviours, habitat, nests, eggs and nestlings, and more. And each online species account will contain recordings of that bird's songs and calls, selected from the extensive collection in Cornell's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds.

Personal subscriptions are US$40 per year. For more information, check *http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/BNA/*

The WSG Colour-Marking Register – Recent developments

I am pleased to say that the computerisation of the Wader Study Group Colour-marking Register is well underway. This electronic database has recently been developed to ensure that the register is used to its full potential in preventing the duplication of schemes and enabling sightings to be traced. The electronic database also allows much more information to be held about each scheme, and this is proving to be of immense value.

The importance of holding details about schemes is becoming more and more relevant as the development of new marking techniques evolves. One example is the use of inscribed leg flags. Leg flags have been used for sometime, often in conjunction with conventional colour-rings, however, the use of uniquely inscribed flags has not previously been extensive. Because of the potentially large number of codes that can be used on a single flag colour (a three character code yields over 15,000 individual combinations) the Wader Study Group has developed a protocol for coordinating such schemes. This protocol is designed to maximise the number of schemes from the limited number of combinations available, prevent scheme duplication, as well as increase the value of sightings, even when a code is not read. Anyone wishing to use inscribed flags needs to inform the Colour-marking Register, who will issue a coding scheme and a list of codes that can be used.

It is important to be aware that inscribed flags are not suitable for every project as there are some disadvantages over conventional colour-rings. These include a shorter distance over which the code can be read as well as potentially higher rates of misreading. Furthermore, some reports will simply give the flag and ring colour without an inscription, with the result that individuals cannot be identified. A colour-ring scheme will always be more suitable for most projects. For advice about colour-marking schemes please contact the Colour-marking Register.

By 10 February, as many as eight new colour marking schemes had been agreed for 2005; one for each of the following species: Northern Lapwing, Red Knot, Little Stint, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Redshank and Ruddy Turnstone.
Wader Study Group Colour-marking Register: *wsg@bto.org*

Mark Collier, Wader Study Group Colour-marking Register, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU, UK.

Inventory and assessment of waterbird habitat availability in the southern altiplano of South America

The southern altiplano of South America supports a number of endemic and migratory waterbirds. These include endangered endemic flamingos and shorebirds that nest in North America and winter in the altiplano. New research developed maps from nine Landsat images to provide an inventory of aquatic waterbird habitats in the altiplano, using training data sets from field work referenced with a highly accurate global positioning system receiver. An image processing system produced a map with a classification of wetlands according to the habitat requirements of different types of waterbirds. This information is now contributing to the conservation and management of these habitats and species by the High Andes Flamingo Conservation Group and serves a tool for risk assessment in relation to future development.

The interactive habitat map of the southern altiplano is at: *http://rockys20.cr.usgs.gov/argentina/initialpg.htm*

Information on Australia's estuaries now online

Coastal environments are among Australia's most important natural resources, with some 85% of the population living on the coast or in coastal catchments. The collaborative efforts of more than 100 coastal scientists from a range of government agencies and universities have produced the definitive OzEstuaries database on Australia's estuaries. Initially developed in 1997 as part of the National Land & Water Resources Audit, OzEstuaries incorporate existing estuarine datasets and information. As part of this project, the Geoscience Australia OzEstuaries website *www.ozestuaries.org* has recently been enhanced to include additional datasets and information. Coastal scientists, planners, managers and the community can use OzEstuaries to find comprehensive information about Australia's estuaries and coastal waterways. The OzEstuaries Database provides the community with comprehensive information about Australia's estuaries. This information includes the following: (1) condition assessment of almost 1,000 of Australia's estuaries and coastal waterways; (2) conceptual models that illustrate the biophysical processes; (3) fact sheets on biophysical health, with relevant state and national indicators; (4) online GIS containing data for Australia's estuaries and oceans on geomorphic habitat.

Source:
Australian Wetlands Alliance Newsletter Dec. 2004

CONSERVATION NEWS

Victory for the Saemangeum wetland – Seoul Administration Court rules in favour of environmental concerns

On 4 February 2005, the Seoul Administrative Court ruled in favour of environmental conservation in a legal suit challenging the controversial Saemangeum Reclamation Project brought by environmental groups and local people living around the Saemangeum tidal-flats. The court ruled that no economic benefits can be expected from the Saemangeum reclamation project because of the anticipated economic losses caused by water pollution in the proposed reclamation reservoir, and by the destruction of the tidal-flat ecosystem. The court ruled therefore that it is necessary to cancel or change the permit to reclaim the public water area, because the environmental, ecological and economic damage to be expected from the project is huge and irreversible. They listed the following reasons to support their ruling to change or cancel the original permit: the possibility of using land reclaimed through the project for agriculture is very low; it is anticipated that the water quality in the reclamation reservoir will be too poor to use for agriculture; estimates of economic benefits to be derived from converting the existing area to agriculture are flawed; and massive damage will be caused to the tidal-flat ecosystem.

The court added that no decision has yet been made on the end-use of the land to be reclaimed, but reiterated that it cannot be used for agriculture as water in the reclamation reservoir created for that purpose will be too polluted. The court did not rule against continuing work to reinforce the existing sea-wall, but did rule against construction of any further sea-wall required to close the remaining 2.7 km stretch that remains open. Yet again therefore the massive and controversial reclamation project along the southwestern coastline of North Jeolla Province has run into another major hurdle.

Earlier, the court had tried to suggest a way forward by recommending that further research be conducted before their final ruling was made. It also recommended that the government should halt the project and set up a committee of experts to review fully the potential environmental and economic consequences of the reclamation. The court also suggested that parliament should enact a special law to help iron out such issues. Although environmental groups and local fishermen had welcomed these recommendations, the government and the ruling Uri Party openly rejected them on January 28th. As the court has now ruled in favour of environmental conservation, the government will bring the case to the Seoul High Court.

For more information on the issue, please go to *http://www.birdskorea.org/saemref.asp*

Shorebird conservation in southern South America: the role of rice cultivation

Migratory shorebirds use rice fields as an alternative habitat providing food and shelter in many parts of the world. Preliminary data strongly suggest that hundreds of thousands of nearctic shorebirds spend the non-breeding season in the rice fields of southern South America.

In 2004, Wetlands International South America (Argentina Office), with the valuable support of Migratory Bird Conservation Act (USF&WS), started a project in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, in partnership with local researchers and governmental agencies. The aim of this project is to assess the value of rice fields for shorebirds and potential threats to the nearctic shorebirds that use them during the non-breeding season. The main objective is to investigate how shorebirds use rice fields during the austral spring-summer season and how this use changes with the rice cultivation cycle.

After a review of existing information, in November 2004 field work was started in all three countries. Preliminary results confirm that important numbers of non-breeding shorebirds of about 10 species use rice fields in southern South America, including the near-threatened Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*.

In November 2004, we carried out a survey in the east of Santa Fe province in northern Argentina. We sampled 14 rice fields using 106 circular plot samples (150 m radius). Over all 106 plots we counted 1,220 Pectoral Sandpipers, 432 Southern Lapwings, 319 Lesser Yellowlegs and 58 American Golden Plovers. Other less numerous species included Upland Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs and Solitary Sandpiper. These data, together with the data from Uruguay and Brazil, will be used to investigate how shorebird use changes with the rice cycle as well as to calculate densities for the most numerous species.

We are planning to use our results to prepare a list of recommendations to the state conservation authorities and to promote a campaign directed at local communities against the abusive use of pesticides. As a final output we will develop a technical publication in both Spanish and English, which will be widely distributed within the region by the end of 2005.

Daniel Blanco,
Wetlands International
dblanco@wamani.wamani.apc.org

New Ramsar site: Chile designates Bahía Lomas, a large tidal flat in Tierra del Fuego

Bahía Lomas becomes the next to southernmost Ramsar site (no. 1430) in the world after the neighbouring Reserva Costa Atlantica de Tierra del Fuego in Argentina. The designation is the first legal measure of protection granted to the site, which is expected to be nominated as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve shortly.

Site description: Bahía Lomas, Región de Magallanes y Antártica Chilena, 58,946 ha; 52°38'S 069°10'W. Located in the north of the main island of Tierra del Fuego on the Straits of Magellan, the site lies on the border with Argentina. It features the largest intertidal flats in Chile, fronting a 69 km long beach and several salt marshes. The bay is renowned for its high concentrations of migratory shorebirds from October to March, with past records of more than 41,000 Red Knots *Calidris canutus*, over 88% of the population in the Americas; 4,500 Hudsonian Godwits *Limosa haemastica*, 23% of the global population; 12,000 White-rumped Sandpipers *Calidris fuscicollis*, 3% of global population, as well as near threatened species such as the Magellanic Plover *Pluvianellus socialis* and the Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus chilensis*. Precipitation is scarce and vegetation is typical of the Patagonian steppe, dominated by the grasses *Festuca pallescens* and *Festuca gracillima*. Large cetaceans have frequently stranded in the flats, with 21 species recorded. Human population is very scarce and sheep grazing is the main activity, as well as oil extraction from two platforms within the flats. The impact of pollution from oil spills from large vessels as well as from the platforms is a concern, but fortunately there is large recirculation of water thanks to the prevailing currents.

New Ramsar site: Madagascar designates the Marais de Torotorofotsy

The Ramsar Secretariat is very pleased to announce that Madagascar has designated its fourth Wetland of International Importance on the occasion of World Wetlands Day 2005. The "Marais de Torotorofotsy avec leurs bassins versants" (9,993 ha, 18°52'S 048°22'E) in Toamasina Province is a near-natural permanent marsh and temporary marshes with their catchments of primary rainforest fragmented by agricultural zones and secondary forest. A number of gravely threatened species are present, including the Golden Frog (*Mantella aurantiaca*) and the Yellow or Eastern Mantella (*Mantella crocea*), along with at least 40 additional endemic amphibians, and it is one of only two known sites that support the Slender-Billed Flufftail (*Sarothrura watersi*). The threatened Meller's Duck (*Anas melleri*) nests in the site, and both the Serpent Eagle (*Eutriorchis astur*) and the Madagascar Grass Owl (*Tyto soumagnei*), both very rare, have been recorded; four endangered species of lemurs are also supported. The site plays an important hydrological role in flood control in the Andasibe region. Artisanal fishing employs customs that protect against overexploitation. A mining project in the vicinity and siltation of the marsh caused by deforestation in the region are seen as the chief threats to the site. The Wildlife Conservation Society – Madagascar and Association MITSINJO have been helpful to the authorities in preparing for this site designation.

Dwight Peck
Communications Officer, The Convention on Wetlands

Wader watching in Dubai: ecotourism *par excellence*

While driving out of Dubai in November 2004, I noticed a newly erected hide overlooking a section of the Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary. I have seen the sanctuary's extensive mud and sand flats on previous visits, but signposts indicated that one could not get close to the area. The hide was closed, but flocks of waders in front of a magnificent backdrop of Dubai's skyline enticed me to investigate. Mr Mohd Abdul Rahman Hassan, Head of the Marine Environment & Sanctuaries Unit at Dubai Municipality's Environment Department, kindly had an open ear for my curiosity and gave me details about the past and the future. He also arranged a guided visit to the area.

The sanctuary has been a protected area for the last 18 years. Previously it had been affected by dredging. Since then the municipality has been pro-active: an anti-pollution boom across the water prevents oil-slicks and debris reaching the sensitive tidal area at the end of the Creek, while regular policing keeps intruders at bay. The sanctuary is 6.2 km^2 in extent, surrounded by a buffer zone with sparse, low-growing vegetation. Extensive tidal mud and sand flats support a rich invertebrate fauna, which attract a large number of wintering and migratory birds. The density of waders is about 21 birds per hectare in spring and autumn, and 60 per hectare in winter. Positioned along the flyway between the Caspian Sea and the east coast of Africa, there is little doubt that the Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary is an important stopover and wintering ground. Up to 25,000 birds use the sanctuary in January. More than 88 bird species have been recorded. It is also a breeding site for Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus*. Locally the site is best known for its flocks of several hundred Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber*.

Coming from South Africa, it was a joy to see large flocks of Dunlins *Calidris alpina*, Broad-billed Sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus*, Redshanks *Tringa totanus* and even Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata*. More familiar to me were Terek Sandpipers *Xenus cinereus*, Spotted Redshanks *Tringa erythropus* and Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialus fulva*. Apart from the large numbers of waders, the birding was enhanced by ducks, gulls, terns, herons, kingfishers as well as raptors, such as Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* and Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*.

Mr. Hassan mentioned the municipality's plans to use the Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary to promote ecotourism. This is good news for waders, especially as, in my opinion, an excellent compromise was being made between conservation and access for visitors. The construction of three cleverly situated hides has been completed, which with minimum disturbance allow observation over three slightly different habitats (sand flats, mudflats and the water's edge of the Creek). One can therefore expect to see a great variety of species. The hides will be open to the public as from February of 2005. I was assured that the impact of ecotourism on the sanctuary will be monitored and adjustments made, should need arise. Access is controlled and permission to visit the hides must be obtained. Permits can be applied for, prior to entering Dubai, from the following web-site: *http:\\environment.dm.gov.ae*. Allow 2–3 working days for processing the permit.

During migration and winter, golf courses and Al Safa Park are good places to see waders, as are several places

along the Gulf coast. Near Umm Al Quwain, one hour's drive from Dubai, I saw 17 waterbird species from one spot. Most were waders, including Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*. During a visit in mid May I saw Sanderlings *Calidris alba* feeding frantically at the waters edge near Dibba. The birds were clearly plump and a quick inspection of the sand where they were feeding indicated an ample food supply. I wondered if any had come from South Africa where Sanderling is one of the last high-arctic breeding waders to leave. As late as the beginning of May, Sanderlings have been netted in departure condition, at Langebaan Lagoon, South Africa.

Every time I visit the Arabian Peninsula my perception it as a crucial area for migrant and wintering waders (my favourite group of birds) is reinforced.

I would like to thank Mr Mohd Abdul Rahman Hassan for discussions on Dubai' s conservation plans and access to the Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary, and Mr Kais Al Yamour for his patience while showing me the sanctuary.

Manfred Waltner
5 Montagu Way, Pinelands, 7405, South Africa;
mwalt@mweb.co.za

Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Conference update

Since the successful Western Hemisphere Migratory Bird Conference in October 2003 in Termas de Puyehue, Chile, there has been a considerable amount of follow-up activity. The Interim Steering Committee created by the conference met for the first time during 10–13 August 2004 to take forward charges tasked to it in Chile. The meeting took place in Sarapiqui, Costa Rica. The main outcome was a draft document describing the vision, mission, guiding principles, objectives, Steering Committee structure, membership, and other elements of the initiative. Based upon guidance from the Chile conference, the initiative will include all migratory species, covering taxa as diverse as birds, marine turtles, marine and terrestrial mammals, fishes and invertebrates. The Western Hemisphere Migratory Species draft document addresses how the effort seeks to contribute towards the conservation of the Western Hemisphere's migratory species by strengthening cooperation among nations, international agreements and civil society, and by expanding constituencies and political support. All entities that support the vision, mission and objectives of this initiative will be invited to be partners in its implementation.

Proceedings, Future Plans and other important information about the conference and the resulting draft can be found at: *http://international.fws.gov/whc.html*

Success Stories in Shorebird Conservation in Australia

Case studies on success stories in shorebird conservation in Australia have been developed as part of a National Shorebird Conservation Project that is funded by the Natural Heritage Trust and managed by WWF Australia. The nine case studies include: (1) Robbins Passage/Boullanger Bay Wetlands area: Values Mapping Project (TAS); (2) Protecting Shorebirds from Introduced Pests: The Corner Inlet Fox Control Project (VIC); (3) Protecting Shorebirds from Human Disturbance: The NSW South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program (NSW); (4) Protecting Shorebirds from Human Disturbance: The Mornington Peninsula National Park Hooded Plover Recovery Program (VIC); (5) Protecting Shorebirds from Human Disturbance: The Friends of Attadale Foreshore and Dog Control (WA); (6) Conserving Shorebird Habitat: The Milang Wetland Project (SA); (7) Conserving Shorebird Habitat: The Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamp Wetland Restoration and Management Project (NSW); (8) Conserving Shorebird Habitat: The Kakadu Beach Artificial Wader Roost Project (QLD); (9) Improving Awareness and Understanding of Shorebirds: The Moreton Bay Shorebird Management Strategy (QLD).

The case studies are available at *www.wwf.org.au* (follow links to publications and fact sheets). If you would like hard copies of all nine case studies, or an individual case study, please contact Bianca Priest, Shorebird Conservation Officer: *bpriest@wwf.org.au*

Source:
Australian Wetlands Alliance Newsletter Dec. 04

CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENTS

5th European Ornithologists' Union conference, France, August 2005

The meeting will take place in Strasbourg, France from 20 to 23 August 2005. The mandate of the congress is to promote the exchange of ideas between people working in different disciplines and between basic and applied research. Besides being a meeting place for ornithologists from 'East and West', it is also hoped that it will become *the* meeting place for PhD students and other young scientists working on any aspect of bird biology throughout Europe.

The following list of symposia has been selected by the Scientific Programme Committee: (1) Using trace element analysis of feathers to determine migration patterns; (2) Migratory birds and parasites; (3) Migration across ecological barriers; (4) Genetic of behaviour; (5) Foraging ecology of seabirds; (6) Small scale anthropogenic effects on the breeding performance of birds; (7) Environmental change and ecological traps; (8) Measuring natal dispersal: current approaches and future challenges; (9) Processes in the periphery of bird's distribution area; (10) Learning in song/interspecies acoustic communication; (11) Hybridisation and Systematics; (12) Population alerts from trend analyses.

For more information, please see: *http://www.eou.at.*

Workshop on the evolution of sexual size dimorphism, Switzerland, August 2005

Workshop organized by Wolf Blanckenhorn, Tamás Székely and Daphne Fairbairn near Locarno, Switzerland (21–26 August 2005). The objectives of the Workshop are to (1) bring together researchers working on various aspects of SSD; (2) overview the pattern of SSD in major animal and plant taxa; (3) investigate the function and mechanisms of SSD.

Our main goal is to adopt a truly interdisciplinary approach, and encourage all participants to go beyond his/her specific research field.

We have invited a group of internationally renowned researchers to the Workshop. In addition, we have space for approximately 35 junior researchers including post-graduate students and post-docs. The scientific program will consist of about 10 plenary lectures given by invited speakers. There will further be contributed oral and poster presentations, and discussion in groups. We welcome post-docs, MSc and Diploma students, and PhD students. Participants are expected to attend the entire 5-day workshop, and their number is limited to 60.

More information is available at:
http://www.bath.ac.uk/bio-sci/szekely/workshop/SSD%20Workshop2%20webmod.htm

11th Meeting of PhD Students in Evolutionary Biology, France, September 2005

The 11th Meeting of PhD Students in Evolutionary Biology will take place in Bordeaux, France, from 5 to 9 September 2005. This meeting gives the opportunity to 100 PhD students working in European laboratories to present and discuss their work and to participate in lively discussions on hot topics of evolutionary biology today. Eight sessions are scheduled: Population genetics; Phylogenetics/phylogeograph /Macro-evolution; Coevolution; Experimental and microbial evolution; Life history traits; Behavioral ecology; Conservation ecology; Evo-Devo / Evolutionary genomics.

The website of the previous meeting can be found at: *http://students.bath.ac.uk/bspght/index.html*

Ninth Ramsar Conference of the Contracting Parties, Uganda, November 2005

The Ramsar Convention was the first inter-governmental treaty between nations for the conservation of natural resources. There are over 140 Contracting Parties to the Convention who have designated more than 1,300 wetland sites throughout the world to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. The Ninth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (COP9) will be held in Kampala, Uganda 7–15 November 2005. The Contracting Parties meet every three years at Conferences of Contracting Parties to discuss policy issues and to report on the activities of the previous triennium through National Reports.

For further information on the Convention on Wetlands and COP9 visit the Ramsar Bureau website *www.ramsar.org*

VACANCIES

Bird jobs online

Looking for that summer job that pays you for watching birds? Need a volunteer to sort out your benthos samples? Trying to find a faculty position that has the word 'avian' in the job description?

Then you might want to sign up for "ORNITHOLOGICAL JOBS: Positions and Opportunities Available On-line", which is distributing information from the Ornithological Societies of North America. Jobs are mostly offered in, but not restricted to, North America. Job news arrives about once a week in a 'digest' format, so you inbox will not be overly burdened. Check out *http://www.birds.cornell.edu/OSNA/ornjobs.htm* for more information.

AWARDS

AOU student membership awards

The Council of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) offers student membership awards in the form of a three-year AOU membership to qualified undergraduate or graduate students interested in pursuing a career in ornithology. To qualify, students must: (1) Have no current or prior membership in the AOU; (2) Provide a résumé or curriculum vitae describing the current degree program, the expected date of completion and the candidate's academic and/or work experience, and interests in ornithology; (3) Provide a brief letter of sponsorship from an academic advisor on letterhead from the institution in which the student is currently enrolled.

Membership grants will provide full membership in the AOU (including subscription to *The Auk*) for three consecutive years and are not renewable. Although students may send materials at any time during the academic year, they are encouraged to send them prior to 1 January 2006 to receive their first issue of the *Auk* in January. See *http://www.aou.org/* for application details.

NEW INITIATIVE: WESTERN HEMISPHERE SHOREBIRD GROUP

The first Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group meeting will be held in Denver, Colorado, USA, in late February 2006. The purposes of the meeting are to (1) bring together biologists studying breeding, staging and wintering shorebirds throughout the Western Hemisphere in one location, (2) promote information-sharing on methodologies and study design among biologists working on different shorebird species, (3) to promote range-wide studies of shorebirds by fostering collaborations among biologists interested in particular species, (4) integrate science into the implementation of various shorebird conservation plans, and (5) to generate enthusiasm among the shorebird community to conduct additional studies of shorebirds in the future. Additional details of the meeting will be forthcoming in the next issue of the *Wader Study Group Bulletin*. Please mark your calendars now and plan on attending. Initial contact for the meeting is Rick Lanctot at richard_lanctot@fws.gov, telephone: 907-786-3609.