

World Briefs

Horseshoe Crabs

The decline of horseshoe crabs in Delaware Bay, a critical food source for migrating shorebirds on the eastern seaboard, has alarmed many birders. But the ancient arthropod—and the Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones, and Sanderlings that rely on their eggs as nourishment—may soon receive a boost.

The New Jersey Division of Fish, Game & Wildlife will look at a proposed rule amendment Feb. 6 that could close the entire Delaware Bay beach front—from Cape May Canal to Stow Creek in Cumberland County—to horseshoe harvesting from May 1–31 each spring. Collecting by hand would be allowed two nights a week. The proposal would also allow harvesting in tidal creeks and back bays two nights a week during May.

Joan Walsh of the New Jersey Audubon Society, which has monitored the issue closely, estimated that although many horseshoe crabs are found in the salt marshes, the conditions there probably prevent many horseshoe crab eggs from developing into adults, and thus harvest there will not have a large impact. Separate from the proposed regulations, the New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council also agreed to develop a long term management plan for sustainable use of the horseshoe crabs. The proposal was published January 16, 1996 and will move through the comment period required under state law.

“We can’t claim victory yet,” said Rich Kane, president of New Jersey Audubon. “We have to see what the regulations say, how the hearings go, what comes in during comment period, and how the rules are implemented for the first time”

But he credits birders and conservation organizations such as the National Audubon Society with raising the level of public concern in the right direction.

“The solution is to protect not a remnant, but an abundance of shorebirds and horseshoe crabs,” said Kane. “The correct analogy here is with the Passenger Pigeon. Those who forget to remember are doomed to repeat.”

Condors in Grand Canyon

Nine captive-bred California Condors are scheduled to be released in the Grand Canyon area in April. The Peregrine Fund was selected by the federal Department of Interior to conduct the releases.

The release area is a former habitat of the California Condor, and will provide excellent viewing for the public. The site on federal lands in northern Arizona is about 30 miles north of Grand Canyon National Park. The birds slated to be released will come from the captive-breeding programs at the Los Angeles and San Diego zoos. There are currently 10 California Condors in the wild in California, all released from the same programs.

The release will come under the Endangered Species Act’s “non-essential, experimental population” program, allowing flexibility in the management of the released birds, which will be treated as Threatened rather than Endangered.

A Blip on the Screen?

Air traffic over the midwest United States stalled briefly Nov. 3 when a heavy flight of migrating birds—ducks and geese—knocked out the radar systems at three airports in Des Moines, IA, Omaha, NE, and Kansas City, MO.

Normally radar systems filter out echoes from birds by monitoring their speed. But the system apparently overloaded, either by the large numbers of birds or perhaps because winds allowed the birds to fly fast enough to pass for airplanes. The system can handle up to 700 aircraft echoes and 300 non-aircraft returns, but that evening there were about 900 non-aircraft echoes. No accidents were caused by the failures, but some flights were delayed.

Birds often appear on the screens of air traffic controllers, and appear identical to airplanes. Most airplanes carry transponders which send out a radio signal with identifying information. Small aircraft communicate by radio, and sometimes a controller will ask a pilot to turn to tell which blip is a plane. If controllers know a large flock of birds is on the way, they can also turn off the primary radar and rely on secondary radar and transponders. But the event in November happened so quickly that both primary and secondary radar were disabled.

Waterfowl in the upper Midwest and Canada experienced good production this summer, which led to a heavy fall flight. An early-season cold snap in the Dakotas prompted many birds in the prairie pothole region to begin migration *en masse*.

Avian Extortion

It may not be sheer bird brains that induces a host bird to raise a parasite bird’s young. In a study of Great Spotted Cuckoos and Black-billed Magpies in southern Spain, biologists reported that the magpies were forced to cooperate by “thuggish” cuckoos that periodically checked on the health of their offspring. If the magpies ejected the cuckoos eggs, the nest and remaining eggs or young were destroyed by the cuckoos.

“It’s an offer that the birds cannot refuse,” Anders Moller, an evolutionary biologist at the Copenhagen University in Denmark, told the *New York Times*. “It’s just the same as in the human mafia.” He coauthored the study with Manuel Soler, Juan Soler, and Juan Martinez, all of the University of Granada in Spain. It was reported in the

journal *Evolution*. The biologists tested the theory by removing cuckoo eggs from 29 nests and leaving them in 28 nests. The nests with the cuckoo eggs were left intact, while the magpie eggs or chicks in most of the other nests were killed. The same held true in nests that were monitored but not touched by the scientists.

Though it is difficult to witness most such attacks, the researchers were often scolded by cuckoos while they removed eggs, and the birds often checked the nests after. One female cuckoo with a radio transmitter did return to a nest from which her egg had been removed and destroyed it. Further, the attacked eggs and chicks were merely pecked but not eaten; most predators would remove and devour such victims.

Adopt-a-Puffin

Your favorite birder already has top-of-the-line binoculars, spotting scope, and a book case full of birding guides and references? Here is a gift to warm his or her heart: The National Audubon Society has begun an Adopt-A-Puffin program. For a \$100, the adoptive "parent" will receive a color photo, the bird's life story, an adoption certificate, and a subscription to Egg Rock Update, the periodic newsletter on the Society's preservation efforts off the coast of Maine. For information, call (607) 257-7308.

Yellowstone in Peril

UNESCO, a United Nation's organization, recently declared Yellowstone National Park an endangered place and put the oldest United States national park on its "red list" of particularly imperiled pieces of the world's heritage.

UNESCO members visited Yellowstone last summer to look at the proposed site of a gold mine near the park's northeastern corner in Montana. Opponents fear a tailings pond could fail and contaminate streams.

Tropical Flyways

Tropical Flyways, a land acquisition proposal in the Florida Keys originally submitted by the National Audubon Society in 1992 to the Florida Conservation and Recreation Lands Program, has again been ranked very high on the state's list of high priority purchases for 1996. Designed to ensure that representative samples of native Keys habitats will be saved from development, the Tropical Flyways proposal has been merged with a similar proposal called Hammocks of the Lower Keys into a new entity called Florida Keys Ecosystem. The combined proposal is ranked fifth out of nearly 100 projects statewide. Projects ranked in the top ten receive the best chance of funding during the next year.

The Keys are home to several rare species of plants and animals, including the White-crowned Pigeon and Mangrove Cuckoo. The string of islands leading into the Caribbean also provides important stepping stones for migratory birds.

This project has multiple sites distributed throughout the Keys, and most sites have multiple owners. Since land is extremely expensive in the Keys and the state can only allocate a certain amount per year for all its high ranking projects, this will be a multi-year acquisition process.

New Duck Stamp

Surf Scoters—and the historic Barnegat lighthouse in New Jersey—grace this year's Federal Duck Stamp sold by the United State's Fish and Wildlife Service. Painter Wilhelm J. Goebel of Somerset, New Jersey, entered the contest for nearly two decades before he took top honors. Waterfowl hunters must buy the stamp as part of their permit to hunt. It is also sought by stamp collectors and conservationists. Money from the stamps is used to acquire wetlands habitat for the national wildlife refuge system. More than 4.2 million acres have been purchased through the program.

Trinidad and Tobago

A Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee has been established to review and evaluate rare bird reports from the two islands. Birders are asked to submit reports of rare or unusual birds to Floyd Hayes, TTRBC Secretary, Department of Biology, Caribbean Union College, PO Box 175, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago; fax (809) 662-1197, or e-mail cuc1844@aol.com. Reports can also be sent to William Murphy, 1011 Ann St., Parkersburg, WV 26101, USA, or Richard French, Buscombe Noake, Stump Lane, Chosen Hill, Hucclecote, Gloucester, GL3 2LT, UK. Use of official Rare Bird Report Forms, available from members listed above, is requested. All submissions will be acknowledged.

Israel

Forty years ago the Israeli government drained the Hula Valley lake and marsh north of the Sea of Galilee, creating more agricultural land and killing malaria-carrying mosquitoes. By 1958, the Jordan River, which once meandered through the site, had been diverted to a vast system of canals. What was once a 15,000-acre wetland was reduced to 750 acres retained as the Hula Nature Reserve.

Today the government admits the project was a mistake, and a coalition of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Jewish National Fund, and the Israel Lands Administration

has allocated \$25 million into reclaiming another 1500 acres for a wildlife park.

When the land was transformed, a large number of fish, insects, herons, pelicans, cormorants, and stilts were lost. The high nitrate content of the peat meant that much of the land could not be farmed. Rodents moved in as the former bog sank. Dust clouds whirled into local settlements, and peat combusted, creating fires that spread *via* rodent tunnels.

Already a tributary of the Jordan River has been redirected into a new lake and marsh in the Hula Valley. Indigenous plants and wildlife will be reintroduced. If the project succeeds, more land will be inundated. Israeli officials say part of the park will be reserved for wildlife and part will be developed for tourism.

This column is devoted to conservation notes and announcements concerning birds and birding. We want it to be your forum, also. We invite our readers to contribute bird conservation news from your communities, essays on issues of controversy, or summaries of conservation victories. Please send items to Susan Roney Drennan, Editor-in-Chief, National Audubon Society Field Notes, 700 Broadway, NYC, NY 10003.



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