

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

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Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

PERU!

By Nancy Halliday

When Libby Hill invited me on a Wild-side Nature Tours trip to southeastern Peru in October 2010, I couldn't say no. Peru has over 1800 species of birds, second only to Columbia for highest number of bird species, and a new comprehensive bird guide for the nation had just been published.

We arrived in Lima, where we experienced the coastal climate and received a valuable introduction to Peru's history. Our group of ten then flew over the Andes to Cuzco, the ancient capital of the Inca Empire, for an afternoon of bird seeking at 11,000 feet elevation.

The next day, our bus topped a 14,000-foot pass and threaded its way down the eastern flank of the Andes into the

cloud forest. Only later did I discover that the route is nicknamed "The Road of Death." The Manu Road is a one lane, two-way dirt track, carved like a terrace snaking around every curve of steep, landslide prone mountains. On one side is a sheer cliff, on the other, a straight drop off of thousands of feet.

"Only later did I discover that the route is nicknamed 'The Road of Death.'"

As the only connection between Cuzco and the Amazon basin, the road is heavily traveled by trucks day and night. If two vehicles met, one backs up (guess who?) to the edge of any slight widening portion of road to let the other squeeze by on the inside. It took us twelve hours to drive less than 100 miles (as the condor flies).

WILD THINGS CONFERENCE

By Eleonora di Liscia

Curtis Meine, author of the book *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work*, will give the keynote speech at the fourth biennial Wild Things, A Chicago Wilderness Conference for People and Nature on Saturday, March 5, 2011. Meine will discuss Leopold's role in ecosystem conservation and his legacy in the Chicago region. He will also present a sneak peak at a new documentary film on Leopold's life.

Any one interested in learning more about local conservation issues and how to help is encouraged to attend the all-day conference. The conference features a variety of small group sessions on natural areas conservation, wildlife protection and monitoring.

The conference begins with registration at 8 a.m. at the University of Illinois Student Center East, 750 S. Halstead in Chicago and runs until 4:45 p.m. For more information and to register, visit <http://www.habitatproject.org/WildThings2011/index.html>.

Attendees can select from a variety of topics ranging from tracking turtles to endangered orchid recovery to stalking the region's mythological wildlife. Frequent ENSBC guest program speaker Doug Stoltz will talk on important landbird migration areas in Chicago and on climate change impacts on wildlife. Other bird-related themes include 'Why do Yellow-breasted Chats Sing at Night,' 'Breeding Birds of Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie,' 'Birds in Poetry,' 'Using Bird Monitoring Results to Improve Grassland Restoration,' Chicago Bird Collision Monitors Migratory Bird Rescue, and 'Using Monitoring Results to Increase Bird Populations in Kane County.'

The conference is organized by Audubon Chicago Region in cooperation with the Habitat Project and the Volunteer Stewardship Network and Chicago Wilderness.

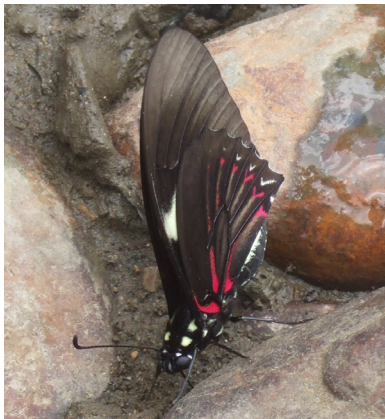


Red and Green Macaws at Claylick
photo by Libby Hill

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PERU! CONTINUED FROM COVER

The Cock of the Rock Lodge in the cloud forest (5000 feet elevation) had no electricity, nor had our lodge in the Amazon basin. Generators run at certain hours to provide power for cooking and battery-charging. Nevertheless, the cabins were comfortable and well equipped. Dinners by candlelight added to the ambience. Breakfasts were by candlelight, too, as we arose every morning at 4:30 a.m. to either breakfast there or picnic at a birding destination.



One of Peru's many butterflies
by Libby Hill

We barely had absorbed the names of the hummingbirds, quetzals and tanagers we saw before our bus was back on the tortuous Manu Road, heading down to our next location: the Amazon basin. At Atalaya (elevation 1600 feet), we boarded a boat outfitted with padded seats, a canopy and a powerful outboard motor that transported us six hours down the Madre de Dios

River to Manu Wildlife Center at 500 feet elevation. The rivers in the Amazon are twisting, shallow, muddy and choked with dead branches, often hidden just beneath the surface. My experience as a white water paddler gave me keen appreciation of our young boatman's skill as he navigated the treacherous currents.

The differences between the bioregions of Peru are striking. The coast and western Andes are dry desert. The high Andes have been so impacted by thousands of years of human civilizations that little native vegetation remains. In stark contrast to the dry scrub of the high Andes, the cloud forest on the eastern flanks smothers the mountains with such a thick coat of vegetation that it resembles plush green carpeting at a distance. Every branch is crowded with orchids and epiphytes, dripping sparkling rain drops from the drifting mists. Little fern-rimmed waterfalls seem to be around every bend in the road, and one always hears the sound of rushing water from the rivers far, far below. The Amazon forest is hot, humid and flat. Ferns are replaced by ground palm and vines.

While the cloud forest is relatively silent, our nights in the Amazon resonated with chirps, squeaks, growls and peeps. One very loud Ferruginous Pygmy Owl kept most of us awake counting how many "toots" it could repeat between pauses. The manager likes to tell the story of an irate visitor who demanded that the noisy bird be shot, but of course, the manager refused.

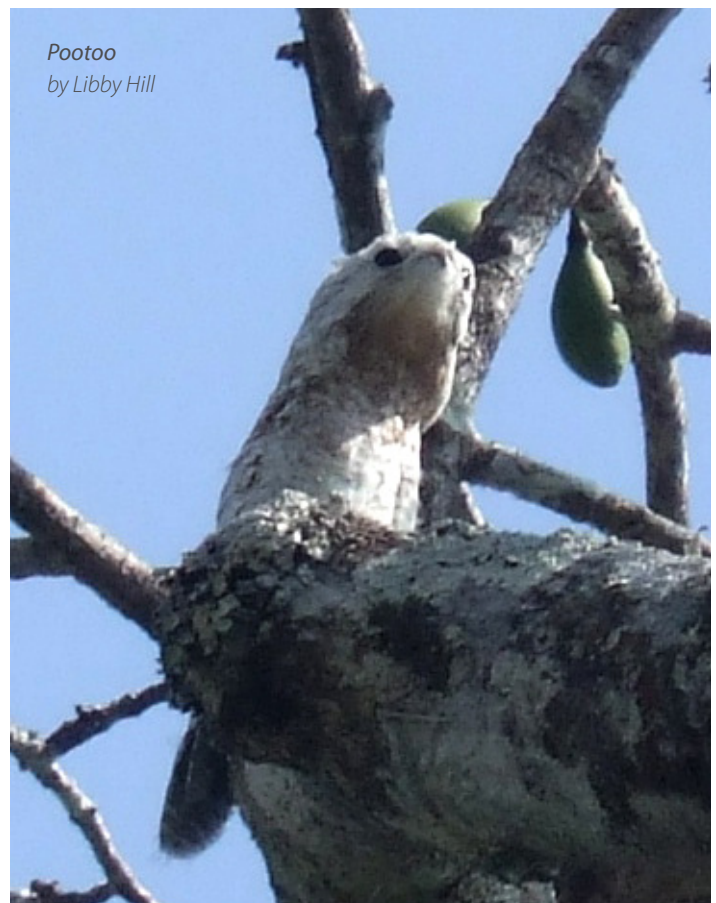
Birding in closed canopy tropics can be frustrating. Small birds gave us only the briefest of glimpses through the thick foliage. We were more

successful in open spaces. One memorable morning was spent paddling on a secluded oxbow lake where the hoatzins were literally falling out of the trees, and jacanas walked right alongside our canoe. Manu Wildlife Center has built platforms, where we could look down on birds rather than craning our necks looking up. The Center is also well known for its Blanquillo Macaw Lick, where we delighted in the crowds of Red and Green Macaws gathering to ingest the yellow mineral soil.

Although we didn't see as many birds as I had hoped, we were endlessly dazzled by the butterflies. There were hundreds every size, shape and color imaginable. They gathered in flocks to sip minerals from the gravel or mud right at our feet. We were also fascinated by the primates six species, some seen very close. In fact, my most exciting sights were not birds: the huge Bird eating Tarantula teased out of its hole, the Fer de lance (a deadly poisonous viper) coiled up in a buttress root, and the rare Spectacled Bear high in a tree, tipping bromeliads and eating the tender bottoms.

We ended our trip at Machu Picchu. But first we had to get there. Our leader decided on a daring cross country taxi ride, which took us through much slashed and burned land, which was a shock to our senses after being immersed in the protected parts of the Amazon.

P.S. The group total was 379 birds. The most remarkable bird was the one we didn't see: No House Sparrows! Not one!



Pootoo
by Libby Hill

A NATURE LOVER FOR ALL SEASONS

By Eleonora di Liscia

When you ask Ken Oberlander if he has lived in Chicago all his life, he replies: "No. I still have some time to go."

A long-time ENSBC member, Oberlander has a passion for photography and all varieties of nature. His photos graced the Wilmette Park District's Magazine for ten years as well as appearing on the covers of Evanston Park District publications. He also will do exhibits "if somebody has the good taste to show my photographs," he says.

Oberlander was born in Chicago in 1914. He credits his interest in birding as part of a natural progression that began when his mother placed him at Lawrence Hall, a boy's school for those who had either lost a parent or had a parent on the road. A grammar school teacher had wanted to send him to the Art Institute to study until the Depression intervened.

"I was raised at a fabulous boy's school, and every summer we went up to our camp in Michigan and stayed there all summer and ran around without shoes. Then, of course, you're interested in everything. There might be a loon on the lake, but you didn't have field glasses or an instructor," said Oberlander.

After he turned 18, Oberlander had to leave the school. His first job in 1933 was unloading freight cars for Montgomery Ward at 33 cents per hour. He eventually spent "two fabulous years" in Montana working as a sales representative for Kendall Company, a surgical dressing manufacturer.

"I covered the whole state, and it took six weeks. You lived out of your suitcase like a musician, and it was fabulous country to travel through. Two weeks in the plains and four weeks in the mountain area," he said.

Oberlander was no more conscious of becoming interested in birding "than you become interested in breathing. That's why I loved Montana so much. I've always been interested in nature and that ties in with being interested in birds," he said.

Oberlander continued to work for Kendall Company for the next 33 years as his main job. After returning to Chicago, "I met my wife and she talked me into marrying her," he said. That marriage lasted 35 years until her death in 1986.

"She was not like me, but anything I liked, she would back me 100%. She was a fabulous nurse. Not a real outdoor person, but she liked the

outdoors. My wife and I traveled extensively. Started out with canoes and ended up on cruise ships," he said.

When on trips, Oberlander would photograph everything. "Unfortunately, then we ended up without any friends. They would ask 'Where have you been?' And we would tell them. Then they would say, 'We're going to be busy for the next six months,' so as not to come over and look at those slides."

Oberlander cannot explain what drives his photography. "What motivates a boy of 20 towards girls? You can't explain it. It's just there," he said.

Oberlander does not keep a life list, but does check off birds in the Peterson guide. He thinks he's seen at least 150 to 200 species,

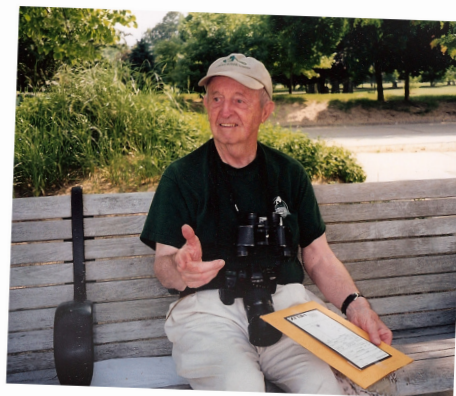
including some rare ones "like house sparrows," he says. "When you see a rare bird, it's wonderful. And if you see a rare bird and report it, you think, oh my, am I good!"

Oberlander now lives at Westminster Place, an assisted living facility near Perkins Woods, which he frequently visits. Until his legs began giving out, Oberlander went out seven days a week.

"I didn't mind if the weather was bad. Your best photographs are in the most horrible weather," he said.

Besides nature, Oberlander is passionate about music. He quips that he likes both girls and dogs, but had to give them up when he moved. He will, however, consider dating. "I won't go out with a girl unless she has a credit card. I'm modern," he says. (Oberlander says a girl is any female up to the age of 81.)

"I'm into everything. That's what I do. I have fun. I enjoy living, and I still got the beat," he said.



*The photographer and his work
Courtesy of Ken Oberlander*

PROGRAM NIGHTS

Club programs are held on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. at the Evanston Ecology Center, 2024 McCormick Blvd., Evanston.

February 22, 2011 – Matthew Cvetas : “Birding goes high-tech.”

Matthew covers the wealth of resources available to birders on the internet and via technology.

March 22, 2011 – Walter Marcisz: “Shorebird Identification.”

Walter gives us an in-depth discussion on the different shorebird species that migrate through the Chicago region.

FIELD TRIPS

FEBRUARY 19, 2011 – SATURDAY, 8:00 A.M.

Tenth Annual IOS Gull Frolic. Winthrop Harbor Yacht Club.

Preregistration required and limited to first 150 people. Contact Brian at wrybill@sbglobal.net to register and for further information.

MARCH 19, 2011 – SUNDAY

2nd Annual Memorial Ralph Herbst Duck Trip. Bird the lakes and ponds of the Palos region for a variety of spring waterfowl. Meet at 7:30 a.m. From I-55, exit south on to US Rte. 45/LaGrange Rd. Head straight south to the McGinnis Slough parking lot on the west side of LaGrange Rd. Leader: Jeff Sanders.

APRIL 2, 2011 – SATURDAY

Looney Trip, Lake County. A Dave Johnson specialty. Loads of loons and lots of lakes. Expect other birds as well. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Illinois Beach State Park. From Sheridan Rd. follow Wadsworth Rd. east into the park and follow signs to the Il Beach Resort and Conference Center. Park in the northernmost parking lot. Leader: David B. Johnson.

APRIL 16, 2011 – SATURDAY

North Glenview. A tour through the better birding areas that North Glenview has to offer by local birder, Sulli Gibson. We will most likely bird Techny Basin Conservation Area, Lake Glenview, and The Air Station Prairie for early migrants and lingering waterfowl. Techny Basin is located west of Waukegan Rd., south of Willow Rd., and east of Ravine Way in Glenview. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the gravel parking lot on Ravine Way. The trip will last approximately 3.5 hours but you are welcome to leave at any time. Leader: Sulli Gibson.

BIRDING BLOOPERS

By Eleonora di Liscia

Those who bird with me know that I am emphatically not a morning person. In fact, I am congenitally unable to rise from bed unless my dearly beloved husband rouses me first by pouring a freshly steamed cappuccino down my gullet.



*Unsafe at any speed:
Eastern Bluebird
Photo by Ken Oberlander*

Members are invited to submit their own birding bloopers to Bird Calls for future publication. Email the editor at diliscialaw@comcast.net or call **847-679-1936**.

So perhaps it was a bit unwise for same husband to suggest that I should get up and go bird by myself one morning when we were visiting the Shawnee National Forest.

I started that Sunday morning by heading off to Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge headquarters. I birded the parking lot and then started down a trail. There I came across a pond with three fishermen waist-deep in the water. Being a somewhat paranoid city dweller, I will say in my defense that I distinctly heard the theme from Deliverance wafting through the air, so I turned back.

In my car, I drove out of the parking lot, turning onto the main road. At that point, I noticed a seemingly unusual bird, on the utility wires across from the Refuge. “What is that?” I thought as I turned my car left toward the bird.

And forced an oncoming van to swerve off the road.

Hearing the horn, I gunned the engine to avoid the van and pulled over, my heart racing.

After I had stopped hyperventilating, I decided I really was going to have to apologize, so I sincerely hoped the van owner didn’t have a gun. I paused to ID the wire bird, an Eastern Bluebird for which I had almost given my life, then pulled up next to the van, which had parked several hundred yards down the road.

I rolled down my window. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry,” I said sheepishly.

The van occupants turned out to be two middle-aged women. “You gave me a bit of a scare there,” said the driver.

“I’m sorry,” I resumed sheepishly. “I’m not usually that stupid.”

I did not tell them that I had been engaged in the dangerous activity of birding without my morning coffee. But they did accept my apology. They were really rather nice about the whole thing. My husband, of course, blames himself. He should have known this would happen.