

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

MAY 2012 www.ensbc.org



Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

OUT OF AFRICA

By Jennifer Schmidt

This past January I traveled to the tiny east African country of Djibouti. The trip was primarily a research expedition, working with the Marine Conservation Society Seychelles to census whale sharks in the Gulf of Tadjoura. My first trip bird was en route, a Pied Crow during a connection in Addis Ababa. Once in Djibouti, Ruppell's Weavers were abundant around town, and House Crows and Rose-ringed Parakeets buzzed the trees outside my hotel. I learned later that these latter two species lived a contentious coexistence. After an initial decline when the House Crows first proliferated, the feisty parakeets had now learned to stand their ground against the much larger corvids.



White Eyed Gulls.
Photo by Jennifer Schmidt.

Brown Boobies spent their days on a buoy near Ras Corali. Surveying Arta Beach one day in a small skiff I noticed a number of gulls resting on a floating platform. They were a species I didn't recognize, and I snapped a few photos for identification. It was only later that I was able to determine they were juvenile White-eyed Gulls, a species endemic to the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea.

Back on land, I had arranged one marathon day of birding the area around Djibouti City. My guide was Houssein Rayaleh, Djibouti's premier ornithologist and the founder and director of the conservation organization Djibouti Nature. We started our day at Haramous, a large shallow bay along the southeastern shore of

the country. The dramatic tides in the region mean that the water-filled bay in the morning becomes an expansive mud flat during the afternoon low tide. The area draws large and varied concentrations of shorebirds at both high and low tide, and we found Crab Plover (my main target bird at the first stop!), Sacred Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Spur-winged Plover, Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers, Terek Sandpiper, Eurasian Oystercatcher and Eurasian Curlew, along with the familiar Cattle Egret, Ruddy Turnstone and Grey (Black-bellied) Plover.

Leaving Haramous, we birded the edges of the military bases south of the city, finding Somali Sparrow, African Silverbill and Red-billed Firefinch. Arabian Golden Sparrow is normally abundant in the region, but would elude us the entire day. We continued southeast toward the Somali border, driving through wadis, dry riverbeds sparsely vegetated with drought tolerant acacia and the invasive shrub Prosopis. There was much bird life to be found in this hostile environment if you knew where to look. Southern Grey Shrikes perched in the tops of trees, Spotted Thick-knees roosted silently underneath, Rosy-patched Bush-shrikes scurried through the brush, Rufous and Black Scrub Robins hid in low acacia branches, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters dashed out to catch insects, and Nile Valley and Shining Sunbirds hovered brilliantly at the few nectar-bearing plants. Greater Hoopoe-lark was a terrific find, running back and forth between bits of scrub and performing his aerial song display. Perhaps the most surprising flighted creature though wasn't a bird at all, but one of the US drones that patrol the Somali border, buzzing overhead like an enormous long-legged wasp.

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BIRD CALLS GOING QUARTERLY.

Beginning this summer, Bird Calls will be coming out quarterly instead of bimonthly. We hope you will continue to enjoy the newsletter. If possible, subscribe to the email edition, which saves paper and funds and looks a whole lot prettier in color. If you would like to submit an article, photo or item to Bird Calls, please contact Bird Calls Editor Eleonora di Liscia at diliscialaw@comcast.net or 847-568-0160.

OUT OF AFRICA CONTINUED FROM COVER

Humans inhabit this harsh land as well, and the poverty of the rural Djiboutians and Somali refugees inhabiting the area is overwhelming. Agriculture is virtually impossible in the arid climate, where the invasive *Prosopis* takes what little water the soil has. Most people keep cows and goats for food, and we visited an immense landfill that was also the dumping site for a local slaughterhouse. Dumps and landfills are always great spots for birds, and at this site Sacred Ibis, Abdim's Storks and Cattle and Little Egrets were present in huge numbers, along with a single Speckled Pigeon. The sight and smell of these birds, picking their way through smoldering heaps of trash and animal carcasses is not something I will soon forget. Surprisingly, though Djibouti hosts several vulture species, none were present at this scavenger buffet.

Returning to Haramous at low tide, we saw many of the same birds, now ranging across the vast mudflat. A human-sized figure in the distance turned out not to be one of the locals collecting sea cucumbers, but rather an enormous Goliath Heron. Just as we were calling it a day, shorebirds by the dozens took flight. A Lanner Falcon soared in to perch on a low rock, making for a great end to the day.

On the drive back to town we stopped at the urban wetlands of the Ambouli area, where we added Pink-backed Pelican, Black Heron (a striking bird doing a Reddish egret-like wing spread), Yellow-billed Stork and Sooty Gull. In all the week yielded 63 species, 55 of these on the final day, with 31 life birds.

Not bad for a shark trip!



Sacred Ibis Photo by Jennifer Schmidt.

THE TROUBLE WITH MIXED MARRIAGES: THE HOMEFRONT

By Eleonora DiLiscia

One of the most bewildering aspects of a mixed marriage (the birder/non-birder variety) is the enthusiasm gap. While you, the birder, are enraptured with the awesome power and beauty of nature, your non-birder spouse is trying to stifle a yawn.

This was particularly apparent one Mother's Day. I, the mother, got to choose what to do with my "special" day. I wanted nothing more than to take my husband and daughter to see the Peregrine Falcons on top of the Evanston library. We arrived and after a few moments located a falcon.

Me: See that! See that!

My husband: Uh. Uh huh.

My daughter: Can we go now?

It wasn't until a few weeks later that my husband happened to be reading the paper.

My husband: Hon, have you seen a Peregrine Falcon before?

Me: Yes, dear. Why?

My husband: They were endangered, and they have come back.

Me: Remember that bird I took you to see on Mother's Day? That was a Peregrine!

My husband: Uh. Uh huh.

Some time later, I was looking out my back window when, to my surprise, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird was hovering by my lilac bush. Now, my husband has shown a glimmer of interest in hummingbirds so I beckoned him to come see. He ambled over slowly by which time the hummingbird had disappeared.

Me: Oh, no! You missed it!

My husband: Are you sure it was a hummingbird?

Me: Yes. I'm sure.

The enthusiasm gap is one thing but having your birding skills called into doubt was adding insult to injury. I felt my fingers clenching in that 'I don't know what got in to me, but when I came to I was strangling him' kind of way. I did manage to shake off the feeling, although I am quite sure that I would have been acquitted by a jury of my birder peers.

Another time, I was watching a hawk on my brush pile trying to determine if it was a Cooper's or a Sharp-shinned.

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Peregrine Falcon Photo by Tim Wallace.

NATURAL WONDERS OF WILMETTE'S ELMWOOD STREET BEACH

By Charlotte Adelman

During the summer of 2011, local attention turned to a forgotten 1-acre beach-front property at the corner of Elmwood and Michigan Avenues acquired by Wilmette in the early 1900s as a public right-of-way. Following acquisition of the larger and heavily used Gilson Park, a 6-foot-tall stockade fence erected more than 20 years ago effectively prevented lakefront access from the street, causing the residents to literally lose sight of Elmwood Street Beach.

The beach regained the spotlight when rumors (denied by the village) spread that the Village was selling it to the adjoining property owners. Truth prevailed when an adjoining property owner showed up uninvited at a Village Board meeting to protest the sale's delay, as Village cameras recorded the incident for posterity.

A grassroots campaign argued against selling the beach, asserting Wilmette's environmental responsibility to protect the land and urging that the site be turned into a passive use nature park. The adjoining property owners and their allies disagreed saying this would create parking problems and congestion, lead to injuries and that the site was already attracting outsiders "from the city." Public pressure, an excessive asking price, or other reasons caused Wilmette to abandon the sale, at least temporarily.

The beach is an environmental treasure. Alexander H. "Sandy" Faurot and I accompanied Susanne Masi, the Manager of Regional Floristics at the Chicago Botanic Garden on a site tour. Suzanne identified vegetation growing in the Bluff zone, Transition zone, and native dune grasses growing in the upper Dune zone, which are similar to Illinois Beach State Park or the Indiana Dunes. She identified a potentially rambunctious native sandbar willow that remained well behaved for 70 years. In the lower Dune zone she identified two species on Illinois's endangered plant list: tall silky Marram grass and a small ground hugging plant called Seaside Spurge along with nonnative invasive Lyme Grass (*lymus arenarius*) which Chicago has outlawed. Suzanne suggested seeking grant money from the Illinois DNR Wildlife Preservation Fund, the state financed Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) and the federal Land & Water Conservation

Fund program (known as both LWCF and LAWCON).

Below Photographs with permission of Alexander H. "Sandy" Faurot, AIA, ACHA, LEED AP Vice President | RTKL Associates Inc.)

In her capacity as Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon, Chicago Region, (Evanston, Illinois), Judy Pollock visited Elmwood Street Beach. She advised Wilmette officials that the beach serves

as a stopover site for migrating birds, which is defined as a safe location where tired migrating birds can pause for food, shelter and rest. Factors like development have made stopover site locations increasingly scarce.

Judy reported that Elmwood Avenue Beach qualifies for the highest rating (Very High) given by a Chicago Wilderness Study that examined, identified, prioritized, and ranked Chicago-area stopover sites according to the relative importance of a suite of beneficial attributes to migrating landbirds.

Wilmette's temporary reprieve comes too late to prevent the construction by one adjoining property owner of a huge beach house (see below) connected by a bridge to the main house and the consequent beach damage. Elmwood Street Beach is a unique and fragile asset that should be permanently protected for the benefit of the entire Lake Michigan ecosystem.

Is there anything that should be done now? The beach has been saved for the moment. Wilmette residents in the know state there seems to be no imminent danger of loss. They have heard no whispers of a fence going up to prevent

public access. The issue is currently dormant, but local residents should remain vigilant.

Charlotte Adelman is co-author of *The Midwestern Native Garden-Native Alternatives to Nonnative Flowers and Plants, An Illustrated Guide*.

See: <http://www.ohioswallow.com/book/The+Midwestern+Native+Garden>



Rare Plants of Elm Street Beach.
Photo by Alexander "Sandy" Faurot.



FIELD TRIPS

MAY 11, MAY 18, 2012 – FRIDAYS

Fridays at Skokie Lagoons. These Friday trips pack a great list of warbler species during spring migration. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Forest Preserve parking lot north of Willow Rd. just east of the Edens Expressway. Leader: Lynne Carpenter on 4th and 11th. Joel Greenberg on 18th

MAY 12, MAY 19, 2012 – SATURDAYS

Spring Saturday mornings at Northwestern Lakefill and Sailing Beach.

This area has long been a stopover for migrants of all kinds headed north. Park on the lakeside of the upper deck of the south parking lot off of Sheridan Rd. and Clark St., north of Clark St. beach, at 8:30 a.m. Leaders: Libby Hill and Wayne Svoboda on 5th. Sue Robert and Libby Hill on 12th. Leader on 19th: TBA

MAY 10, MAY 17 AND MAY 24, 2012 - THURSDAYS

Ryerson Woods. Check out the spring migrants and returning breeders at this beautiful Lake County forest preserve. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Brushwood parking lot. Ryerson Woods is on Riverwoods Rd, northwest of Deerfield. Leader: Gary Hantsbarger.

MAY 20, 2012 - SUNDAY

Jackson Park and Lakefront – Wooded Isle. We will be looking for migrating passerines at this park. Meet at 7:00 a.m. Park south of the Museum of Science and Industry after driving on the east side of the building. Leader: Dick Young.

May 21, 2012 – Monday (PLEASE NOTE DATE HAS CHANGED)

Emily Oaks Nature Center (Skokie). Meet at Emily Oaks Nature Center (Skokie) at 5:30 in the parking lot. Turn north on Knox (east of Skokie Blvd.) and make a left at the T intersection to the Emily Oaks parking lot. Leader: Sulli Gibson

June 9, 2012 – Saturday (PLEASE NOTE DATE HAS CHANGED.)

Illinois Beach State Park Whip-poor-wills. NEW TRIP! - This unique trip will allow you a great chance to see Whip-poor-wills, a bird in serious decline, after hours in the South Unit of the State Park. Meet at 7pm at the Nature Center parking lot to bird the area for local nesters prior to looking for the Whip-poor-wills. The Nature Center entrance is just west of the Illinois Beach Resort in the South Unit. Leader: Sulli Gibson and Joel Greenberg.

JUNE 10, 2012 - SUNDAY

Swallow Cliff Woods, Palos This half-day walk will target summer specialties such as Hooded, Blue-winged, and Chestnut-sided Warblers in addition to Acadian Flycatchers, White-eyed Vireos, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Summer Tanagers. The entrance is on LaGrange Rd. (Route 45) south of the intersection of LaGrange and Route 83. Meet at 7:00 a.m. in the first parking lot as you enter the park. Leader: Amar Ayyash.

JULY 22, 2012 - SUNDAY

Rollins Savanna This area is one of Lake County's hottest birding spots and is home to many nesters such as Least Bitterns, Sedge Wrens, Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows, and Bobolinks. There also may be early shorebirds. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at the Washington Road parking area. The trip will last 4 hours and water and sun protection are good ideas. Leader: Beau Schaefer.

AUGUST 2012 – SUNDAY

Lake Calumet Sewage Ponds Don't miss this special opportunity to visit the region's premier shorebird site. Meet at Sewage Ponds at 7:15 a.m. Directions: From I-94, exit at 130th St. Go west about ¼ mile to the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District sign. Turn right on the paved road and proceed to the guard house. Trip ends around 11 a.m. Limit: 20. Sign-up for this field trip is required. Registration forms will be available through Libby Hill, 847-475-2096 or libby-hill@comcast.net. Completed forms must be turned in by July 10. Forms must be sent by snail mail to 2715 Woodland Rd, Evanston, IL 60201 and must include a copy of a government-issued photo ID.

MIXED MARRIAGES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

My husband: You've been looking at that thing for 20 minutes. Haven't you figured out what it is yet?

Patently, I got out my bird guides.

Me: See this Coopers. See the Sharp-shinned. I think it's a Sharp-shinned because the tail is straight, and Coopers is rounded, but then feathers can get worn. The Coopers is bigger, but a male Coopers can be about the same size as a female Sharp-shinned...

My husband: Stop! You're giving me a headache.

But there was one moment of hope. Last spring, my husband was looking out our

kitchen window when he noticed a small yellow and black bird.

My husband: What's that?

Me: Oh, it's a Magnolia Warbler.

My husband: Wow!

Wow? Did he just say 'Wow!'? "Wow! I dared not comment upon it for fear the moment would disappear.

My husband: It must be a common bird. You don't sound that excited.

Me, restrainedly: Oh, I am excited.

But not for the same reason he was.



Peregrine Falcon Photo by Tim Wallace.