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Gateway General Management Plan Update Robert Bate

The big news in conservation in our area continues to be the General Management Plan for the Gateway National Recreation Area.

http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=16091

The National Park Service is soon to make a final determination between the three alternatives proposed in the GMP: A- Make no changes to existing conditions and practices; B - Develop Gateway with significant increases in recreational activities (this is called the "preferred plan"), and C- Constrain recreational development and concentrate on significant habitat restoration and wildlife protection (this is called the "environmentally preferred plan"). The comments period for the GMP is over. The NPS is reviewing comments and they will be making their final "record of decision," regarding the use and development of Gateway NRA for the foreseeable future.

Though the membership of the BBC may not have had absolute unanimity in our outlook, we all support habitat restoration and wish to see the impact of recreational activities upon wildlife and habitat minimized. To that end, Sandy Paci and I have attended the meetings and supported the efforts of a coalition of area bird clubs and wildlife organizations—spearheaded by Glenn Phillips, Susan Elbin and Harry Maas of New York City Audubon—in responding to the General Management Plan and the specific points it addresses, especially concerning the greater Jamaica Bay area. The coalition met with Joshua Laird, Commissioner of Parks for New York Harbor, and Jennifer Nersesian, newly appointed Superintendent of Gateway National Recreation Area. Additionally, we've attended Jamaica Bay Task Force meetings and expressed our joint concerns regarding wildlife and habitat issues. Protection of habitat and wildlife is an ongoing process and even after the NPS makes their final determination, we must

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The Brooklyn Bird Club

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The Clapper Rail

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continue to be involved as each individual part of Jamaica Bay is developed.

Since the shoreline of Jamaica Bay has historically been developed for human use, the availability of fresh water habitat in the area has virtually been reduced to zero. The East and West Ponds of Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, though man made, have, since their inception, filled a need for the waterfowl migrating into and through our area. The East Pond, breached during Hurricane Sandy, has been repaired but the water remains very salty. The West Pond, also breached, remains unrestored as of this date, though the NPS is developing alternatives for restoration strategies. The restoration will require a significant logistical effort building berms, excavating future wetland areas and hopefully building wetland trails. The monies dedicated by congress for Hurricane Sandy relief are set to expire relatively quickly, so continued pressure on public officials to expedite this process is needed. If the restoration of the West Pond is of concern to you, know that no letter, email or phone call is a waste of time-your voice matters.

The preservation and restoration of habitat in Jamaica Bay is really an international issue as this area is a pivotal part of the ancient Atlantic Flyway. It would be a shame if personal and local political interests held sway over the future development of this natural resource. Please stay involved.

And now for a late breaking news flash! The US Fish and Wildlife Service has taken a strong stand against the NPS plan to increase human impact on the Jamaica Bay Habitat. In a letter they submitted to the NPS calling for stronger protections than are called for in Alternative C of the NPS General Management Plan, they have cited the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Endangered Species Act and several other federal laws which call for protection of threatened species and threatened habitat. As a result, the NPS has postponed their decision-making process and seems to be reconsidering the plans for Gateway NRA and Jamaica Bay. USF&WS took a stronger stand than we could have possibly hoped for.

Lookout Hill Restoration & Thank You!

This past spring brought us the BBC's hugely successful Birdathon, which was held on International Migratory Bird Day, May 11, 2013. As usual, we outdid ourselves.

Hoping to raise enough pledges to plant two Pin Oaks to replace the mature trees on Lookout Hill felled during Hurricane Sandy, we actually raised enough money to plant three of the soon to be mighty Pin Oaks, as well as two smaller Serviceberry trees which, when full grown, will serve as understory to the oaks.

Many thanks to Birdathon Director Bobbi Manian. Thanks goes to Eric Landau, John Jordan, the Prospect Park Alliance and their Natural Resources Crew as well. All the Birdathon teams and their financial supporters and the entire membership of the Brooklyn Bird Club played their part in this big day.

Special thanks goes to Susan Scioli, whose generous matching fund helped us exceed our wildest expectations. Of course, deep and continued thanks goes to Peter Dorosh, whose years of BBC leadership helped established the Brooklyn Bird Club's tradition of conservation. Prospect Park has provided us all with many wonderful memories and rich experiences—our Lookout Hill efforts are a small token of our gratitude.



On another note related to the BBC's continued care for Prospect Park, the Wednesday Weeding Volunteers, headed by Janet Zinn, cleared mugwort and other invasives in Butterfly Meadow in preparation for the tree planting. This committed group is ensuring that this natural area will flourish for years to come.

As of Nov 13th, the trees are in the ground, the bubbly (non-alcoholic in line with park policy) was passed around, toasts were made and the ribbon was cut. The Butterfly Meadow is back in business and recovering well after the devastation from from Hurricane Sandy. We can all look forward to our migrating friends making use of this healthy habitat come this spring. see on their face that they get it. I have met many people that have become good friends as well as great birders.



NYS Ornithological Association 66th Annual Meeting/NY Birders Conference, November 1 -3, 2013

Last November the Queens County Bird Club bravely sponsored the 66th NYSOA/New York Birders Conference in Uniondale, Long Island (http://nybirdersconference.wordpress.com). Normally this conference is held upstate and, though lodging and other expenses are more reasonable in rural locales, many birders had expressed interest in holding the event downstate to give our upstate colleagues an opportunity to explore the abundant fall birdlife along our waterfronts and barrier islands. Seth Ausubel, Pat Aiken, Arie Gilbert, and all the other QCBC members and NYSOA event planners are to be commended for a successful and productive conference that came off without a hitch.

Friday's list of conference speakers included Brooklyn's own Tom Stephenson. Tom and Scott Whittle presented on their recently published *The Warbler Guide* and some of the finer warbler identification points. Brooklyn's Doug Gotchfeld, a new member of the NYSOA Records Committee, gave a presentation on the New York State Bird List with a focus on how rarities are verified and added to the permanent record. Sean Mahar of NY State Audubon gave a wonderful presentation on environmental advocacy and is one of the few people to come out publicly as a "lobbyist."

Saturday included well attended trips all over Long Island and Queens at Jones Beach, Sunken Meadow State Park, Kissena Park, Alley Pond Park and Robert Moses State Park, affording upstate birders the chance to explore the great locations we all know so well.

Saturday evening was the conference banquet and presentation of honors and awards. Later, keynote speaker James Currie of Birding Adventures TV gave a rousing travelogue including some of the more extreme examples of the lengths we will go to catch sight of a rare bird. One incident included a close encounter with a hunting pride of lions in Africa.

Sunday's field trips largely duplicated Saturday's but included a long jaunt all the way out to Montauk led by conference organizer Seth Ausubel, a nice and exhausting way to end a successful conference.

Everyone had a great time at the conference and many of us look forward to a repeat performance in the not too distant future. Thanks again to the Queens County Bird Club for hosting this year's NYSOA conference their service to the NY State birding community is greatly appreciated.



Sparks!

A daughter and her father get hooked on birding, by Eliesabeth Gasser & Klemens Gasser

Birding. For me birding used to be dreadful hours walking with my dad in Central Park. I was never really *good* at using binoculars, and my dad tried to help me by making me practice. We used to go to Central Park and he would make me try to read the words on a sign from far away. The first five signs were fun, but usually once you have read 20 signs about not feeding the ducks it gets kind of monotonous. Then there were the Goldfinches. My dad would find one in a tree and I would try to follow it. You might not think so, but for an eight year old, not being able to find a bright yellow bird was pretty frustrating. You can ask anyone, whenever it was the weekend and my dad mentioned the words Central Park. I would break down in a full-on tantrum. Central Park wasn't the only place where I had to experience the former dread of birding. We had a weekend house in South Hampton and my dad just LOVED to go Mashomack Park and walk along the bird paths. These bird paths took hours to finish, especially with two kids (including me, who the whole time was trying to make as big a scene as possible).

One year we stopped renting our house in South Hampton and the birding in our family was at an alltime low. That is, until last summer when we moved to Lefferts Gardens. My dad started going to Prospect Park to bird, and one day I went with him. Then slowly

but surely my obsession with birding began. I took my dad's Sibley book when he was out and made myself flashcards with the traits of birds on one side and the name of the birds on the other. I guizzed myself over and over. When my dad came home I told him I had to show him something. I asked him to quiz me with the flashcard and the answers flew out... "Black-throated Blue! Common Yellow-throat! American Redstart!" and so on. My dad was amazed and I was so proud. We started going out at five in the morning to see the warblers. Waking up so early during summer vacation was miserable, but "anything for the warblers." The craziness continued: me and my dad would leave the house at six and be back in two hours which everyone knew would become at least five hours. But sadly when school started my birding was back at a minimum. I can't bird during the week and don't have much time on weekends. But I still enjoy hearing my dad's excitement whenever he comes home from seeing a new bird. My dad has an enthusiasm for birding that I can't explain. When he talks about birds there is a pure happiness in him, like a little boy talking about his Legos. I try to get out and bird with him when I can, not only for the birds but for the enjoyment of seeing his reaction to them. Birding. Birding is more than a hobby; birding is part of my life. More importantly, birding is something I enjoy sharing with my dad.

Dad here: How could anybody not be a birder? At least since binoculars are mass produced, at least for certain periods of one's life, at least on weekends, at least every day for 10 minutes. My current state of mind is that birding with related studies and activities is the most exiting occupation one could dream of, so much so that sometime I start so early in the morning that there is no light to see anything, so much that I would bird all the time and do nothing else. Either the addiction slows down soon or I find a legitimate way to integrate birding into my art – make it my art: I am taking many photos but they just look like wildlife photography to me so there is some pressure to come up with a result and a practice that works.

Love of nature was always a big thing in my family when I grew up in Bolzano, South Tirol in the Italian Alps. Sunday meant hiking day, for hours outdoors and the kids had to come along. Then mass on Saturday evening and the hike on Sunday—sometimes we liked it, sometimes we hated it; my parents are still going with their friends, every Sunday.

During childhood I bought myself a field guide which contained hundreds of similar looking shorebirds of which I had never seen a single one; I looked at birds from time to time but did not become a birder. Then studies in Rome, a gallery in Bolzano and Cologne with little interest for nature. Then Alban, our first child, and the move to New York in 1998 and wanting to spend more time outdoors with the baby, a Northern Cardinal in Patchogue, a Blue Jay in Irving place, low on a small tree, I could not believe my eyes that such beauty could be seen in a metropolis. I pointed the bird out in ecstasy to passersby's but they just mumbled it's a Blue Jay and moved on. And hooked I was in addition to wanting to write an illustrated children book with a story about a Cardinal. So I looked for books with Cardinal images to base my drawings on but couldn't find one and ended up buying the Sibley's guide that just had come out. I love this book! Binoculars, spotting scope and moderate birding, mostly on the weekends in Southampton at Mecox Bay. One day a guy walks up to me and points away from the beach to the back and shows me a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, one of the most beautiful birds I have ever seen. Hugh McGuinnes put me on his weekly East End bird sighting e-mail list and I realized how organized birding could be and how passionate and knowledgeable birders are. But the birding slowed down until last summer when we moved from Chelsea to Lefferts Gardens in Brooklyn, steps from Prospect Park. We sat in the backvard when Tanja (my wife) noticed a small bird flying from a low tree to the Magnolia to the driveway and back up to the tree again. I ran for the binoculars + Siblev and got a good look at the bird. It looked like a Waterthrush and I remember that there was a more common one that I had seen at Long Pond and a less common one that I had never seen. Sibley - look at the bird again - and Sibley again - and it was a Louisiana Waterthrush! In our backyard and I was hooked again.

And I think the next day we were off to the Park and it has been a sequence of great new birds and wonderful and helpful people: I look at Binnen Water and somebody directs me to Lookout Hill, birders there tell me about the Brooklyn Bird Club walks and Peter's blog. These two Brooklyn institutions, the walks and the Prospect Sightings Blog are responsible for my current addiction: Peter's blog is like a home, a big mamma where everybody, super-birder or beginner like me can come to, share his list, be taken seriously and warmly welcomed. Most importantly you understand what is going on, which birds are around, which birds could be seen, where in the Park they are and this helps the confidence and identification process immensely. The pleasure of having one of my photos published on Peter's blog is as immense as is meeting his passion. I learned a lot by copying what big local birders are doing: I saw that people send in ebird checklists and started doing that too, I became an avid reader of other birders' checklists using ebirds barcharts and putting in Starling to find all the checklists for a certain location. I love Keir Randall's observations and his English; Doug Gochfeld's observations read as if the almighty himself is talking.

But it is great learning: if he gets so many birds in flight I better start looking at them through the binoculars and don't wait for them to perch to check them out, etc. I saw tweets published on Peter's blog and realized that that was a very fast way to hear about an uncommon bird and I opened an account and started following the Brooklyn birders, tweeting myself sometimes. My first ever bird walk, on which Eliesabeth joined me, was with Dennis Hrehowsik: it was an astonishing experience. I had never thought that so many species could be seen in such a short time. I learned a lot from Dennis, heard how much he knew, saw how he moved and where he looked. One thing I had not known is that good birders look at every bird, check out everything that moves and that they do it fast, they are not relaxingly enjoying the landscape. Then a walk with Tom Stevenson and he was like a crazy street musician playing several instruments at once: leading the walk and talking about subtle differences in Black-and-white Warbler plumage on one side, photographing a Robin. yes, a Robin, surprisingly tame in his eyes, and recording a Carolina Wren's song while being surprised about the small head of a Mourning Dove. I was totally impressed, mostly by the fact that an authority that had just written The Warbler Guide would be so passionate about common birds. Several more walks since then with Rob Bate, Sandy Paci, Bobbi Manian, all extraordinary in different ways.

I enjoy reading City Birder, participated in my first Christmas Bird Count, usually walk alone, but sometimes with my daughter or Peter Colen, a great photographer; and I take a lot of photographs. My big passion right now is Gulls. I missed several good ones this winter but I believe that if you study them well on paper and put a lot of homework in you will eventually be rewarded with seeing one. Or better, if you see it you might actually recognize it.



Resources for Young Birders by Ann Murray

Children and bird watching seem like a natural match, given the curious nature of

children and the ability of bird watching to engage and inspire people of all ages. But how do you help a child or young person get started, and stay involved, in birding? There are a number of resources and ideas for helping young birders pursue their hobby, and with luck, turn it into a lifetime passion.

Getting Started

There are a couple of things you will want to think about as you help a child or young person get started: a pair of binoculars and a field guide.

Binoculars for Children

An easy to use pair of binoculars is essential for children. They should be lightweight made for either children or adults. Younger children may benefit from binoculars made specifically for children, which can be less expensive than adult binoculars. However, it may be worth buying an older child adult binoculars that can be used for a number of years.

Eagle Optics has guidance on buying binoculars for children: http://tinyurl.com/muzjb44 There are also a number of web articles that offer guidance and advice, including Go Explore Nature, http://tinyurl.com/mv4gxmd, and Optics4Birding http://www.optics4birding.com/chkids.aspx

Field Guides and Other Books for Children

An engaging and easy to use field guide is also essential for helping children learn about birds. There are a number of field guides that are written specifically for children of different ages, but many young people can learn the essential features of the birds they are seeing by using a field guides adult birders use regularly, such as the *Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*.

Some field guides designed specifically for children and young people include, *The Young Birder's Guide to Birds of Eastern North America* (A Peterson Field Guide), by Bill Thompson, which is written for children ages 7 to

14 years old; and the *National Geographic Kids Bird Guide of North America*, by Jonathan Alderfer.

There are also general interest books such as *About Birds: A Guide for Children*, by Cathryn Sill, which gives general information about birds and bird behavior, and activity books, such as *Bird Log Kids: A Kid's Journal to Record Their Birding Experiences*, by Deanna Brandt.

Backyard Birding

Many of us who are now avid birders started by observing the ordinary birds in own backyards. The House Sparrow pecking around the front stoop, the American Robin building its nest in the spring, and the Downy Woodpecker tapping on the bark of a tree can all inspire wonder in a child. That wonder can be easily encouraged by helping a child observe the birds' behaviors and discussing the differences among birds. If practical, putting up bird feeders during the winter can help attract birds to your backyard and further encourage a child or young person to learn how to observe birds.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology has an article called *How to Attract Birds to your Yard* http://www.allaboutbirds.org/attractingbirds on its All About Birds page. It includes information on feeders, food, nest boxes and other ideas to attract birds to your backyard.

Field Trips

The Prospect Park Weekly Beginning Bird Walks

Getting out and observing birds on a group walk is a great way to help a child get started in learning about birds. These walks have leaders who not only locate birds and help participants "get on the bird," but the leaders also teach about birds, what to look for, different habitats and what different birds like to eat. Additionally, the participants help and learn from one another.

The Beginning Bird Walks offered by Michele Dreger every Saturday at Noon (for nearly 12 years) are a wonderful resource for children. Michele has a talent for taking things back to square one with new birders. Her first question to everyone is always "Do you know anything about birds?" While most people quickly answer no to that question, Michele points out just as quickly that, "You know what a Robin (or a House Sparrow, or Pigeon) looks like, don't you?" Once she has gotten the newbies to understand that they do have some knowledge about birds, she builds on that knowledge and helps the newbies start to look at new birds and compare them to ones they have already seen, noting what makes them different. Children start to pick this up quickly because they are already learning about how things are alike and different. This opens the door to learning more about new birds and offers young people an opportunity to feel like they are really part of the group.

The Beginning Bird Walks leave from the Prospect Park Audubon Center every Saturday at 12:00 Noon. The walk lasts about an hour and a half and participants are directed or led back to the Audubon Center at the end of the walk. All participants should have their own binoculars for this walk.

First Sunday of the Month Bird Walks

Michele also leads a monthly bird walk in Prospect Park that is geared toward intermediate birders, but is still appropriate for young people. These walks take place on the first Sunday of every month at 8:00 am (10:00 am during December, January and February). The walks leave from the Prospect Park Audubon Center and participants should have their own binoculars.

Young Birders Associations and Clubs

The New York State Young Birders Club

The New York State Young Birders Club is a project of the New York State Ornithological Association and is for birders between the ages of 10 and 19 years old. The club offers trips, meetings, discussion groups and other events geared toward younger birders. Young members are encouraged to get involved by running for leadership positions.

The club offers a full schedule of day, overnight and weekend field trips throughout New York State. Members are also encouraged to participate in their annual meeting and the Christmas Bird Count in their areas. The website offers trip reports, photography, resources and downloads.

More information can be found on their website at <u>http://www.nysyoungbirders.org/.</u>

ABA Young Birders Club

The American Birding Association sponsors a Young Birders Club that is open to young birders from across the United States and Canada. The Club sponsors a number of events throughout the year, including summer-time Young Birder Camps. These camps are open to birders ages 13-18 years old and provide a wide-range of birding and educational activities. Past Young Birder camps have included Camp Avocet at Cape Henlopen State Park in Delaware, and Camp Colorado in Rocky Mountain National Park and the Pawnee National Grassland.

The ABA Young Birders Club also sponsors the Young Birder of the Year Contest which is open to birders ages 10 to 18 years old. The contest runs from April 1 through October 1 of each year and is broken up into two age groups. It tests young birders skills in five areas: taking notes and making sketches and records in field notebooks; conservation and community leadership activities; illustrations involving birds; writing about birds; and photography.

The Young Birders Club also has a website with a blog and links to local resources. More information can be found on their website at http://www.aba.org/yb/

EBird Young Birders Network

EBird's Young Birders Network provides resources for young birders to connect and learn about birds and birding. The network is geared toward young people ages 12-18 years old and is coordinated by the Black Swamp Bird Observatory http://www.bsbobird.org in Ohio and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology http://www.birds.cornell.edu/. The network gives young birders access to a variety of resource, event announcements and EBird data.

More information can be found on their website at http://ebird.org/content/ybn/

Educational Programs

Audubon New York's For the Birds!

Audubon New York's For the Birds! is an educational program that teaches environmental awareness through the study of birds. It is open to elementary school children in grades two through four. Sessions are available for 4, 8 or 16-weeks, and are designed to teach about their local, natural environment through classroom lessons, outdoor field trips, and a conservation project. Each student maintains a journal throughout the length of the program where they write about the concepts they are learning about and the experiences they encounter through their local bird walks, as well as draw pictures of the birds they find. More information can be found on their website at http://ny.audubon.org/birds-1.

General Resources

<u>The Brooklyn Bird Club</u> http://www.brooklynbirdclub.org

NY State Audubon http://ny.audubon.org/

Linnaean Society of New York http://linnaeannewyork.org/

Cornell Lab of Ornithology – <u>All About Birds</u> http://www.allaboutbirds.org/Page.aspx?pid=1189

Birdwatchers Digest – <u>Getting Youth Involved in</u> <u>Birdwatching!</u> http://tinyurl.com/kbnkpds

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The Unfeathered Bird by Katrina van Grouw (Princeton University, 2013)

A review by Matthew Wills

This remarkable book goes well with chicken and, I would think, a nice dry

white wine that hasn't seen the inside of an oak barrel. Because a chicken is the closest most of us ever get to a featherless bird. Or, given the season just past, it could be a turkey. Both of these cooking birds are usually served upside down, which has always disorientated me. But, with the legs, thighs, wings, breastbone, back, wishbone ... if you're a poultry eater, you're half-way to being an avian anatomist. It's still hard to imagine these cooked carcasses as a bird, though, isn't it? They have been manipulated by domestication to become ridiculously breast-heavy, and, plucked, they look like that old union-busting troll Frank Perdue. But the basics are right there on your charger.

And yet, how astonishingly plastic those basics turn out to be....

Katrina van Grouw's book is a labor of love, an epic, illustrated-indeed, hand drawn-examination of the variety of forms found underneath feathers, skin, and organs. She is mostly, but not solely, concerned with the skeleton: in birds, these are generally light and airy structures on a chickeny plan, but with an astonishing number of variations. The breast-bone, for instance: strong fliers need a deep keel to attach those breast muscles to, weak fliers not so much, and flightless birds look completely different again. Then there's the number and placement of toes (those tiny, scaly, graspy things most people call bird feet are actually just the toes): we classify the song birds, passerines, not only because of their syrinx, but by their three forward/one back toe plan, good for grasping branches to perch upon. The location of the legs, too: for instance, out on the sides for loons, who are excellent swimmers but unable to do anything much on land but awkwardly crawl.

Did you know that, in categorizing birds, the great Linnaeus commented on the taste of their flesh?

Katrina van Grouw also draws some interior views of pigeons: the so-called fancy pigeons (I think some of them are Frankenstein-fancy, if you know what I mean), bred for generations for certain characteristics like tiny or enormous bills, or enormous crops as in the case of the "English Pouters." Yet all are *Columba livia*, the "same" rock dove/feral pigeon we see on our streets (and sidewalks and awnings and bridges and...). Darwin was another person amazed by the variety of manipulations unnatural selection wrought on the shape, form, skeleton of a species—something we can



also see in domestic dogs, where breeds and mutts span a mindbending gamut. The very bones, which seem so solid, can change, and rather surprisingly quickly, too. There is much in this book about evolution, taxonomy, and the always shifting ground that are species, which all goes to illustrate the illustrations.

In November, the Club hosted Van Grouw at its monthly meeting. It was standing-room only as some

thirty people gathered to hear her discuss her large book and its long gestation. She amusingly related the effort—and all the boiling bird carcasses, a task set to her husband—it took to complete this magisterial work. With her distinctive British accent and humor, she was one of the most enjoyable presenters we have ever had. I bet a number of members received or gave the book as a holiday present.

Matthew Wills blogs about nature and city at *Backyard & Beyond* http://matthewwills.com

South of the Border Birding: Oaxaca, Mexico by Sandra Paci



Landscape near Teotitlan, © Sandra Paci

Oaxaca state in southern Mexico, which at 36,200 square miles is approximately the size of the U.S. state of Indiana, boasts 791 species of birds (per Clements 6th edition, 2013). This is more than any other state in an incredibly bio-diverse country and almost as many as in the entire United States. It hosts a number of range-restricted Mexican and regional endemics, and in winter Oaxaca gets migrants from both the Eastern and Western U.S. in addition to its resident breeding birds. The state sits at the southern limit for many northern birds and at the northern limit for many Central American species and possesses a wide range of habitats and elevations. I'd visited several times before for general tourism and been extremely impressed with Oaxaca's natural beauty, its abundance of beautiful Spanish Colonial art and architecture, its wealth of indigenous cultures, and the delicious food. In short, Oaxaca seemed like a great destination for a one-week birding trip and in December of 2009, Kellie Quinones and I decided to check it out.

DAY ONE: Sunday, December 27

The trip began before dawn with a visit to the Botanical Gardens in Oaxaca City, where our guide, French ornithologist and photographer Manuel Grosselet, oversees a bird-banding program. For several hours we birded the gardens, helped Manuel collect birds from the mist nets, and looked on as his assistant banded and then released them. This was a great way to get warmed up with some good, close looks at a number of mostly fairly common species. Resident Mexican birds such as Rufous-backed and Clay-colored Robins were caught in the mist nets as were migrants like Orchard Oriole, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Audubon's (Western form of Yellow-rumped) Warbler.



Bird Banding: Rufous-Backed Robin, © Sandra Paci

Around mid-morning we drove north of the city along Highway 175 to Ixtlan de Juarez, leaving behind the dry central valley and heading up into the Sierra de Aloapaneca, the first of two mountain ranges we would cross before descending on day three down to the Tuxtepec area and sea level. Ixtlan is only a few hours from Oaxaca City, so we were able to make a few extended birding stops along the way. Memorable sightings were a dark morph Red-tailed Hawk and a Red Warbler (all red with a large white spot on the face. No photo, sorry!) in pine-oak forest, Western Scrub Jay and MacGillivray's Warbler along a small stream, and a stop just outside of Ixtlan, where we picked up Acorn Woodpecker, Red-faced Warbler and the spectacular Chestnut-sided Shrike Vireo in quick succession. We were staying the night in cabins run by the local Zapoteca community and while exploring the grounds there before dinner we found a female Mountain Trogon. Nice first day indeed!

DAY TWO: Monday, December 28

Continuing on Route 175 from Ixtlan, we reached cloud forest habitat after passing the highest point on the road (approximately 3,000 meters or 9,800 feet), then began our descent into the upper tropical zone. Cloud forests can be a little quiet sometimes in terms of bird activity, but looking through my photos and bird-list I see that we did have a gorgeous male Red-capped Manikin, Emerald Toucanet, Brown-hooded Parrot, Grey-breasted Wood-Wren and several species of Hummingbirds on what seemed like a somewhat slow day. Towards evening we arrived at San Mateo Yetla, just outside Valle Nacional, where we spent the next two nights.

DAY THREE: Tuesday, December 29

Leaving quite early, we continued along Route 175, descending in elevation down the Atlantic Slope to the city of Tuxtepec in the tropical lowlands. We birded the road west of Tuxtepec as far as Miguel Alemán reservoir. The habitat was a patchwork of small farms and fields, sugar cane, and lowland tropical forest. Despite a steady drizzle that persisted for most of the day, this was an extremely birdy day, with 106 species recorded, including Olive Sparrow, Groove-billed Ani, Ruddy Ground-Dove, a juvenile Laughing Falcon, and some friends from home such as Yellow-breasted Chat, Osprey and Cattle Egret.

A big disappointment on this day was our miss of the extremely range restricted Sumichrast's Wren, which can be found only in a small area northwest of Tuxtepec in the states of Oaxaca, Veracruz and Puebla. This species prefers forested limestone outcrops, which are supposedly poor for cultivation, but when we approached the first area where Manuel wanted to try for the birds, we were disturbed to see that the local farmers had cleared and planted much of the land going up the hillside. We found no sign of the Wrens and this habitat destruction did not bode well for their future at this location. After lunch we checked another spot near the Miguel Alemán reservoir but had no luck there either. I'd be curious to know how more recent searchers have fared.

Honorable mention on this day goes to the incredible chicken soup we had for lunch at a nameless little roadside fonda west of Tuxtepec. The Doña (and her noble chickens) went way beyond the call of duty, and Kellie and I still remember this soup with "ohhhhs" and "ahhhhs" of pleasure even now, four years later. Thumb's up!

DAY FOUR: Wednesday, December 30

Today we backtracked along Route 175, birding our way back to Oaxaca City. Highlights included fantastic looks at a pair of Blue-crowned Chlorophonias and a Unicolored Jay. We also had a very far off look at a Black Hawk-Eagle. When coming out from the trail after seeing it, we had a dodgy moment that fortunately did not result in anything. I was ahead of Kellie and Manuel and ran into some "hombres," who had seen our car parked on the road and decided to look for us on the trail. They looked pleasantly surprised to see me, but not necessarily in a good way as far as I was concerned. Luckily, Kellie and Manuel appeared after a few minutes and Manuel was able to smile and chat our way past them into the relative safety of our vehicle and the road ahead. This was the only moment of the trip where I felt something bad could easily have happened if luck had not been with us.



Oaxaca Sparrow, © Sandra Paci

DAY FIVE: Thursday, December 31

Today we birded the foothills to the north of the city along the road to Etla and Guacamayas. At one of our first stops, we had fantastic looks at the endemic Oaxaca Sparrow (found mostly only in Oaxaca state, with a small population in neighboring Puebla), followed by a nice Lincoln's Sparrow. Heading further up towards Guacamayas, Stellar's Jays made an appearance as did a wintering male Rose-breasted Grosbeak – somewhat of a surprise. Even though it was New Year's Eve and we had planned to knock off early so that Manuel could spend the evening with his wife, he (and we!) did not quit until we found another Oaxaca state endemic, Dwarf Jay, in the pine-oak forest at our furthest point along the road. This bird has a very small range and is found only in the sierras directly north of Oaxaca City. As this was our last

chance to get it on this trip, it was a very satisfying way to end the day and the year.

DAY SIX: Friday, January 1

Today we headed southeast of the city, into the dry central valley near the rug-making town of Teotitlan del Valle. This was a very different habitat then we had experienced up until now: dry scrub dotted with cactuses. Everywhere we stopped was extremely birdy and what quality birds they were! Right off the bat we had Loggerhead Shrike, a male Vermilion Flycatcher and crippling looks at a male Townsend's Warbler eating berries. We moved on to some cactus perched birds: the Mexican endemic White-throated Towhee (found only in the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla), Curve-billed Thrasher and Lark Sparrow.

Then, walking down a dirt path near the dam, Kellie called out a White-crowned Sparrow perched on a dead snag. Manuel smirked and said, "I don't think so." But when we got him on the bird, his face turned white. He started running back to the van to get his camera, shouting over his shoulder, "Sandy, get a picture!" The bird then promptly disappeared into a bush. When Manuel returned he explained breathlessly that the southernmost limit for White-Crowned Sparrow is several hundred miles to the north around Mexico City and that this would possibly be the first record ever for Oaxaca state. Luckily, the bird reappeared on the dead snag and Manuel and I both got pictures. The status as a first state record was later confirmed. Very exciting to get a state record on a trip like this!



Townsend's Warbler, © Sandra Paci

At the dam, more great birds were found, including Hooded Oriole, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Ashthroated Flycatcher, Rufous-crowned Warbler and Thick-billed Kingbird. Quite a morning!

to try again, and the bird responded immediately to

playback, popping up on a branch a few feet in front of us, just long enough for me to get off a burst of five

shots. The last one was the "keeper." Our time running

short, in late afternoon we headed to El Tequio near the

Caracara and Vesper Sparrow. Our final bird, back in

the city while heading out to dinner, was a Barn Owl

that Manuel knew liked to hang out in the alcoves of

worked on the final list. But after the dust settled and

some taxonomic issues, I came up with a total of 291

airport, where we added a few birds like Crested

Post-trip, there was a lot of back and forth as we

we got everything straightened out and cleared up

species seen and heard during our seven days of

birding in Oaxaca, including 19 Mexican country

endemics and an additional 16 regional (Northern

Central America and Southern Mexico) endemics. The

the façade of Santo Domingo Church.

After a delicious lunch in the market town of Tlacolula (I had lamb birreria, a flavorful stew cooked in parchment paper), we continued southeast to the archeological site of Yagul, where two more Mexican endemics found only in the states of Oaxaca, Puebla and Guerrero awaited us: Boucard's Wren and Greybreasted Woodpecker. Working our way back to the city in the late afternoon, we made a few more stops and picked up another endemic - Dusky Hummingbird.

DAY SEVEN: Saturday, January 2

We started our final day with a visit to the archeological site of Monte Alban, perched on a flat hilltop just outside the city. In the faint light of dawn we had a Virginia's Warbler in bushes along one of the approach roads and then proceeded up to the site itself, where we had a very colorful male Elegant Euphonia, Nutting's Flycatcher (one of those difficult to tell apart Myiarchus types), and enjoyed the sight of a Rock Wren chowing down on a large Grasshopper.

Taking into account what we were still missing, we decided to head outside the city to Cerro San Felipe,

where we were richly rewarded with Blackheaded Grosbeak. a wintering Louisiana Waterthrush and an **Orange-billed** Nightingale-Thrush, a bird I had seen before in Mexico but which Manuel seemed to think was a good find this far south. Our supreme prize though, was a fine male Slaty Vireo, another Mexican endemic from the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Michoacan. This is one of those birds that the field guide illustration does not really do justice to. It is really quite spectacular. Our first look was very

brief as Manuel scared it off with the first burst of his huge flash set-up. This is a pet peeve of mine, when bird guides who are also photographers prioritize their own shooting over that of their clients. Needless to say, I was furious at not having had a chance to get my own shot. Coming back down the trail, however, we decided

Slaty Vireo © Sandra Paci

Art Exhibits in Brooklyn

Two recent exhibits featuring birds were presented at the Callahan Center, an art exhibition space at St. Francis College. The first included Brooklyn Bird Club member and former BBC President, Paul Keim, and featured watercolors and other works by 22 members of the Brooklyn Watercolor Society. Many of the pieces



Great-horned Owl, © Paul Keim

were focused on nature and included birds or familiar birding spots such as the Audubon Boathouse in Prospect Park. Two of the three pieces shown by Paul Keim were of birds, a beautiful Ruby-Throated Hummingbird (called Jeweled Elegance), and an American Avocet (called On the Wing). The third was an acrylic painting of a Red Fox.

The Brooklyn Watercolor Society has been around since 1971 and is an organization of professional watercolorists. The group meets regularly and plans trips, group exhibitions and watercolor demonstrations. Many members teach watercolor painting, including Paul Keim, who holds a BFA from the Pratt Institute, and has taught classes through the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. His bird paintings also adorn the Brooklyn Bird Club website.

The second exhibition featured bird illustrations by Pieter Prall, illustrator, co-author and editor of *The Easy Bird Guide - Eastern Region*, John and Edith Bull, Gerald Gold and Pieter D. Prall (The Globe Pequot Press, 2006). Mr. Prall's drawings featured several owls, including Long-Eared, Barred and Barn, an American Woodcock, a Brant, a Common Loon and a variety of Plovers. His co-exhibitors also had several nature and bird inspired pieces. Mr. Prall is an accomplished bird watcher, naturalist, artist and author. He is a former Audubon Society Artist-in-Residence, and his illustrations have appeared in *American Birds Magazine, New Jersey Audubon Magazine, Amicus Journal* and other publications. He also has a Brooklyn connection, having spent time bird watching in Prospect Park with John Yrizarry and Bernie Brennan. He is the co-founder of the Highlands Conservation Initiative and the founder of The Farny Highlands Project, two conservation organizations which have saved tens of thousands of acres in northern New Jersey.

Audubon's Aviary: Parts Unknown (Part II of The Complete Flock) March 21 - May 26, 2014

The New York Historical Society will present the second of three exhibitions featuring the watercolors of John James Audubon. This second exhibition runs from Friday, March 21st through Monday, May 26th and will showcase masterpieces from the New York Historical Society's collection of John James Audubon's



preparatory watercolors for the print edition of *The Birds of America*.

The three-part exhibition is unique because it allows visitors to view the watercolors in their entirety and in the order in which they were engraved, like Audubon's original subscribers. Audubon did not organize *The Birds of America* by traditional taxonomic order but according to his

aesthetic and practical judgments. He believed this presentation was closer to nature's own.

The exhibition is curated by Dr. Roberta J.M. Olson, Curator of Drawings at the New-York Historical Society, and features highlights such as the Atlantic Puffin, the Snowy Egret and the Golden Eagle. Group visits may be arranged by contacting Ben Levinsohn at (212) 873-3400 x352 or ben.levinsohn@nyhistory.org. More information can be found on the New York Historical Society's website at http://www.nyhistory.org.

Winter/Early Spring 2014 Schedule

Information and Registration

No registration is required for Prospect Park or Green-Wood Cemetery trips. For all other trips, advance registration is required; exact location and time of meeting will be provided at time of registration. Car pool fees are required for some trips and should be paid directly to your driver.

In noting the need to make trip registrations more manageable and fair, the BBC council has imposed these guidelines:

• With the exception of Prospect Park and Green-wood Cemetery trips, a TWO-WEEK registration period will precede all trips.

• Club members will be given first-priority for all trips except Prospect and Green-wood Cemetery. Nonmembers and guests are welcome on BBC trips but only if there is available space at the end of the



registration period. Drivers, whether members or not, will normally have priority over non-drivers.

• All trips have a limit of 18 people except weekend trips, which are limited to 12 unless otherwise noted. In addition, most car trips require lunch, water, appropriate clothes for seasonal weather, and all the essentials you require for day trips.

• Please call registrars as early as possible within the registration period, and before 9 p.m. When registering by phone or email, please be sure to leave your phone number(s) so that we may contact you in the event of a schedule change.

Prospect Park Bird 2-hour Sunday Walks: In addition to the trips listed below, the first Sunday of every month the Brooklyn Bird Club participates in the Prospect Park Audubon Center's "First Sunday" two-hour walks. All walks leave from the Prospect Park Audubon Center at the Boathouse at 8 a.m. (10 a.m. in January and February; check http://www.prospectpark.org/calendar to confirm times.)

Tuesday and Thursday Seasonal Prospect Park Walks

No registration is required for these weekly walks in Prospect Park during migration season.

TUESDAYS: April 8th, April 15th, April 22nd, April 29th, May 6th, May 13th, May 20th

Leader: Rob Bate. Meet at Bartel Pritchard Square park entrance at **7:30** a.m.

THURSDAYS: April 17th, April, 24th, May 1st, May 8th, May 15th, and May 22nd

Leader: Tom Stephenson. Meet at the Stranahan Statue, Grand Army Plaza, at **7:15** a.m.

(**Note:** due to possible scheduling conflicts, leader substitutions may be made for some dates.)

*Saturday, February 15th, Winter Waterfowl Photography Trip

Trip Leader: Rusty Harold Car Fee: To be determined by leader Focus: photography of winter waterfowl Registrar: Rusty Harold, email (preferred) elharo@macfaq.com or call 1-347-899-1287 before 9PM

Registration period: Feb. 4th - Feb.13th **Note:** Location(s) will be announced by leader during registration; Recommended to bring: tripod and your longest lens

*Sunday, February 16th Prospect Park during the Great Backyard Bird Count

http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc

Meet 8 am at Grand Army Plaza park entrance "Stranahan "Statue

Leader: Dennis Hrehowsik

Note: In case of inclement weather, call or text Dennis 1-347-981-5361; walk participants should submit observations to the above link "Submit your bird checklist "

^{*}March 1st & 2nd Overnight Weekend: Montauk Point, Long Island East End Leader: Rob Bate

Focus: late winter specialties at NY's premier sea watch site: raptors, passerines, waterfowl, grassland and marsh species

Car Fee: \$85.00

Registrar: Sandy Paci, email

sandypaci@earthlink.net (preferred) or call 1-347-834-5881 before 9PM

Registration Period: Early January to February 15th

^{**}Saturday, March 8th Pelham Bay Park, Bronx

Leader: Sandy Paci Focus: Raptors, late winter species, waterfowl and ducks Car Fee: \$22.00 Registrar: Donna Evans email devansny@earthlink.net Registration Period: February 25th - March 6th Mar 4 - Mar 13

🏲 Saturday, March 15th A Riis Sea Watch

Leader: Peter Dorosh

Focus: Ocean waterfowl during a big sit at Jacob Riis Beach Park; later Fort Tilden and Breezy

Point birding post sea watch **Car Fee:** \$12.00 **Registrar:** Peter Dorosh, email (preferred) prosbird@aol.com or text message to 1-347-622-3559 **Registration Period:** March 4th - March 13th Mar 4 - Mar 13 **Note:** bring beach/camp chair

^{**}Saturday, March 22nd Brooklyn "Wildcard"

Leader: Keir Randall

Focus: Best birding activity location(s) cluster or pursuit of rare birds will be determined by the week's listserve reports for Brooklyn area **Car Fee:** \$10 if car pool; otherwise travel determined by the leader if public transportation **Registrar:** Dennis Hrehowsik, email deepseagangster@gmail.com **Registration Period:** March 11th - March 20th

Saturday, March 29th Floyd Bennett Field

Focus: Raptors, grassland species, open field species, waterbirds and ducks Car Fee: \$10.00 Registrar: Mike Yuan, email mjyuan@gmail.com Registration Period: March 18th - March 27th

^{**}Sunday, April 6th Flushing Meadows Park, Queens

Leader: Peter Dorosh Focus: sparrows, open field species, waterbirds, shorebirds, raptors Car Fee: \$12.00 Registrar: Peter Dorosh, email (preferred) prosbird@aol.com or text message to 1-347-622-3559 Registration Period: March 25th - April 3rd

Registration Period: March 25th - April 3rd **Note:** this is the first BBC visit to this location in decades; there will be extensive walking

* Saturday, April 12th Brooklyn Botanic Garden, "A Short Birding Stroll for Spring's Delights"

Meet: No registration necessary. Meet 10:00 am at the Eastern Parkway entrance Leader: Nancy Tim Note: BBG is free from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturdays

⁷Saturday, April 19th Brooklyn Bridge Park & Red Hook Waterfront

Meet: No registration necessary. Meet 7:30 am at Northeast corner of Pier One near the Barge Music boat

Leader: Mike Yuan

Focus: sparrows, wrens, early spring land passerines, some waterfowl **Note:** In case of inclement weather, call or text leader at 1-917-647-3396 (preferred)

^{*}Saturday, April 26th Prospect Park

Meet: No registration necessary. Meet 7:30 am at Bartel Pritchard Square entrance Leader: Steve Nanz Note: In case of inclement weather, call or text leader at 1-646-522-0716

*Saturday, May 3rd Prospect Park

Meet: No registration necessary. Meet 7:00 am at Grand Army Plaza Stranahan Statue Leader: Paul Keim Directions: Nearest subway is 2 or 3 line to Grand Army Plaza

^{*}Sunday, May 4th Greenwood Cemetery

Meet: No registration necessary. Meet 8:00 am at the cemetery's 25th Street /5th Ave entrance Arch Castle

Leader: Peter Dorosh

Note: In case of inclement weather, call or text leader at 347-622-3559

Directions: Nearest train is the R line to 25th St; There is a Baked in Brooklyn bakery for coffee and pastries outside the main gate. http://www.green-wood.com/

* Saturday May 10th International Bird Migratory Day "The Birdathon"

A global event celebrating the beauty of birds and habitats. This event encourages fundraising for conservation causes. For this year, a cause/theme will be discussed and adopted by the Birdathon team members under the club's auspices, and posted on the BBC Facebook webpage and Prospect Sightings blog prior to the event (see http://www.brooklynbirdclub.org).

If you are interested in forming a team with members or friends, need more information, or details on the Prospect Park walk, please contact the BBC Birdathon coordinator Bobbi Manian by email bobbi.manian@alumni.lafayette.edu **Event Profile:** http://www.birdday.org Theme: "Why Birds Matter"

^{**}Sunday, May 11th Prospect Park "Big Sit" in Butterfly Meadow

Meet: No registration necessary. Meet 7:30 am at Lookout Hill's Butterfly Meadow, http://tinyurl.com/BigSitMay11PP Leader: Dennis Hrehowsik Note: In case of inclement weather, call or text leader at 1-347-981-5361

^{*}Saturday, May 17th Ridgewood

Reservoir, Brooklyn/Queens Border Leader: Peter Dorosh Focus: peak of migratory birds Car Fee: \$10.00 Registrar: Peter Dorosh, email (preferred) prosbird@aol.com or text message to 1-347-622-3559 Registration Period: May 6th-May 15th

^{*}Sunday, May 18th Greenwood Cemetery

NOTE NEW MEETING SPOT: 8 am at the east GWC entrance at 20th Street & Prospect Park West Ave (formerly 9th Ave) http://tinyurl.com/GWCBBCmay18 Leader: Ed Crowne Focus: peak of migratory birds Directions: Nearest train is F or G lines to 15th St/Prospect Park stop. Walk west 4 blocks on Prospect Park West. http://www.greenwood.com

Saturday, May 24th Doodletown & Sterling Forest

Leader: Tom Preston Focus: migration peak and early breeding birds Car Fee: \$35.00 Registrar: JoAnn Preston, email (preferred) jocrochet@verizon.net or call 1-718-344-8420 before 9PM Registration Period: May 13th - May 22nd

Registration Period: May 13th - May 22nd **Note:** group limited to 16 participants



Brooklyn Bird Club, Spring 2014 Thursday Evening Programs

BBC Programs are held at Litchfield Villa in Prospect Park, unless otherwise noted. For directions, go to the BBC website:

http://www.brooklynbirdclub.org/meetings.htm

All programs start at 6:30 pm with club social time; speakers begin at 7:00 pm.

February 13: The American Southwest: Utah and Nevada Presenters: Steve Nanz and Heidi Steiner

Heidi Steiner and Steve Nanz will present a photographic journal of their spring 2013 trip to the national parks and monuments of southern Utah and Nevada, including Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, as well as other nature preserves and conservation areas.

Heidi, a retired art and photography teacher, is an accomplished photographer of urban street life and natural scenery, while Steve is well known in the New York community for his wonderful bird and insect photography. Come journey with them through the spectacular scenery and wildlife of our American Southwest.

March 12: A New System For Learning and Identifying Warbler Vocalizations Presenter: Tom Stephenson

Take note: this program will take place **Wednesday** evening at the **Brooklyn Public Library**, Central Branch, 10 Grand Army Plaza (718-230-2191)

Last year, Tom Stephenson and Scott Whittle introduced the birding world to a new approach to warbler identification in *The Warbler Guide*. In this presentation, Tom will cover many new techniques that make it easier to identify singing warblers and other species. Based on a new system outlined in *The Warbler Guide*, Tom will explain and demonstrate how to understand a song's structure, the characteristics that make up the song, and how to use a song finder to quickly identify a singing warbler.

Tom Stephenson has been birding since he was a kid. His articles have appeared in many publications, including *Birding*, *Birdwatcher's Digest*, *Handbook of the Birds of the World, and Guide to the Birds of SE* *Brazil.* He has lectured and guided many groups across the US as well as in Asia, where he has trained guides for the government of Bhutan. In 2013, Princeton University Press published *The Warbler Guide*.

April 17: Birds of Central America Presenter: Dale Dyer

Brooklyn birder Dale Dyer is a gifted artist and a scientific illustrator specializing in birds. Over the last 20 years he has produced illustrations for books on birds of Peru, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, North America, and New York State. He is currently painting all of the illustrations for a book on the birds of Central America, a massive undertaking projected to take 8 years.

At our April program, Dale will give a preview of the book, bringing along original paintings. He'll talk about the process involved in researching and executing the work, as well as about the birding experiences that inspire and inform it. Come join Dale in a conversation with birders about bird books.

May 15: Ecuador: East Slope/West Slope Presenter: Sandra Paci

The avifauna of the small South American country of Ecuador is largely defined by the mighty Andes Mountains, which run like a spine down the center of the country, sloping in the East down to the Amazon Basin and in the West to the Pacific Ocean. BBC member Sandra Paci will discuss the bird life of this fascinating, easily accessible Neotropical region and present photography from two recent visits. Sandy is an enthusiast of Latin American art and culture and has traveled there regularly since the mid-1980s—long before she knew a Tanager from an Antpitta.

June 5: The Birds and Beasts of Tanzania Presenter: Janet Zinn

Come on safari with photographer Janet Zinn as she presents images from her recent birding and wildlife expedition to northern Tanzania. Experience the thrill of Africa's predators and the beauty of its avian inhabitants while picking up some useful tips for planning your own trip of a lifetime. Janet picked up her first camera at age 8 and has never looked back. Her work has appeared in National Geographic's *Global Birding*, in print and web advertising, and in literature for non-profit organizations such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, International Rivers, Audubon, and the Sierra Club. To see her work, visit her website at http://www.jczinn.com/