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Witt's End

Turn Them In ... – by *Clyde Witt, editor*

He didn't look like a criminal. I knew his whereabouts, however, was important and needed to be reported to the proper authorities. He wasn't even acting like a bad guy, yet, I knew it was my civic duty to report his location, even if I had to take time from my hectic schedule that included a nap and catching up on that stack of magazines on the table.

He was hanging out with a bunch of his type, all wearing the same colors. They hadn't spotted Susan and I as we used the car as a blind. Or, maybe they had spotted us and, because they're such a rough bunch, ignored us, knowing their superior numbers made it a certain victory for their side should we attempt anything funny—like a citizen's arrest for example.

Susan lowered her window. Chilling wind and rain whipped her in the face. She raised her binocular and gave me the description. I took extensive notes on the back of a freebie parking pass from the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. "It's white," she said softly as she strained to see through the lashing drizzle, trying to read the numbers. "Okay, got it. It's 2E1R, black letters arranged vertically."

Who was 2E1R? This much we could discern: He was a Canada Goose, most likely from the Common population (of which there are at least six recognizable populations), and he was big. He looked to be the full 45 inches in length and his wingspan of 60 inches fit the pattern.

The white collar on his neck looked like a soda can. In fact, the first time I saw one of these tags on a goose, way back in the last century when I was a beginning birder, it was red and I thought it was a soda can.

So there he was, grazing with about 300 of his kind. His tag, or collar, attracted about as much attention as a tattoo on a human these days. The more I looked at the goose and thought about him carrying that tag for life, the more it did seem like a tattoo, only this marking has a purpose attached; it's not a wannabe fashion statement.



He's part of someone's research project and needed to be reported. The way to do it, should you encounter a goose with a collar or any bird with a band on its leg, is to go to www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/homepage/call800.cfm, the Web site of Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, where data is collected. If you leave your e-mail address they might get back to you with information about the bird you've seen. I'm hoping to learn more about 2E1R. If I do, I'll let you know. In the meantime, feed the birds. It's cold out there.

And as for you 2E1R, you're now in the computer, buster, so just watch your step, or where others might step.

Program Schedule

The chapter holds meetings on the fourth Tuesday of the month, except for December when we do the Christmas Count. June is our annual picnic, so the meeting place is not always the same. There are no meetings in July and August. Meetings are held at the Mingo Shelter in Sand Run MetroPark in the Merriman Valley. The entrance is off Sand Run Parkway, east of the ford and east of the Shady Hollow Pavilion. Check MetroParks maps at www.summitmetroparks.org for a map of Sand Run Park. The doors open at 6:30 and the meeting starts at 7:00. We usually start with a short business session before the main program. Meetings are open to the public so bring a friend. Refreshments are served by our outstanding hospitality committee.

For an up-to-the-minute schedule stay tuned and keep your eye on the Web site (www.akronaudubon.org) and the Newsletter. Things are going to be a bit different in March and April. Because of scheduling conflicts, we will hold our meetings in the nearby Shady Hollow Pavilion. It is on the same road and the entrance driveway is immediately east of stream ford. Hopefully, we'll have signs posted.

The **January 27th** meeting will be an African adventure as we go birding with Akron's own, Ann and Dwight Chasar, in Kenya. This outstanding program features not only birds, but other flora and fauna. It will be a great way to shake off the winter chills.

On **February 24th** we'll catch up on what's happening around the state and learn what we can do to help make our spot a little bit more ecologically attractive. Our guest speaker will be Bridget McDaniel, grassroots coordinator for

Audubon Ohio. She will present a program focused on two critical issues: Great Lakes Initiatives and Global Warming. This will be a great opportunity to learn how you can become an activist for the Audubon cause.

March 24th we'll get ready for Spring. At least we'll do some planning on how to use native plants to enhance the landscape.

What a Long, Strange Trip

By Dave Hansford, Wellington, New Zealand.

A female shorebird was recently found to have flown 7,145 miles (11,500 kilometers) nonstop from Alaska to New Zealand—without taking a break for food or drink. It's the longest nonstop bird migration ever measured, according to biologists who tracked the flight using satellite tags.

The bird, a Bar-tailed Godwit, completed the journey in nine days. In addition to demonstrating the bird's surprising endurance, the trek confirms that godwits make the southbound trip of their annual migration directly across the vast Pacific rather than along the East Asian coast, scientists said.

"This shows how incredible and extreme birds can be," said Phil Battley of New Zealand's Massey University, who took part in the study. "The prospect of a bird flying all the way across the Pacific was so much further than what we thought possible, it seemed ludicrous," he said.

The long haul was documented during a study of godwit migration conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey and PRBO Conservation Science, a California-based nonprofit dedicated to bird research. Some 70,000 godwits make the epic journey from their northern summer breeding grounds in Alaska down to New Zealand each September, before flying all the way back the following March. To study this annual trek north, Battley and his colleagues fitted satellite transmitters to 16 godwits at two locations in New Zealand last summer. Battley was amazed, he said, to find that one of the birds, dubbed E7, flew some 6,340 miles (10,200 kilometers) directly to a wetland on the North Korea-China border. After feeding and resting there, she continued another 3,000 miles (5,000 kilometers) to Alaska. The flock's arrival in the U.S. was supposed to mark the end the study, but some of the tags' transmitters continued to send data, giving scientists the unexpected bonus of tracking the birds' return trip.

Scientists found that, on E7's way back south, with the help of tailwinds, she made the epic 7,145-mile (11,500-kilometer) flight to New Zealand uninterrupted. "This organism is absolutely outstanding," said Rob Schuckard, a team leader at the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, which helped with the migration research. "It's the equivalent of a human running at 70 kilometers an hour [43.5 miles an hour] for more than seven days."

According to satellite data, E7 flew at an average speed of 34.8 miles an hour (56 kilometers an hour), seeking favorable winds at elevations between 1.85 miles (3 kilometers) and 2.5 miles (4 kilometers). Along the way, the bird "slept" by shutting down one side of her brain at a time and burned up the huge stores of fat—more than 50% of her body weight—that she had piled on in Alaska. E7 found her way by analyzing polarized light to get a fix on the sun by day, even in heavy clouds, and by following the stars at night, Battley said. "They learn the rotation of the sky when they're young," he explained. "They can work out where north is, but presumably they have to learn a Southern Hemisphere compass as well. It's no good looking for the North Star in New Zealand."

Despite the birds' hearty endurance, Schuckard fears for the godwits. The number of birds successfully reaching New Zealand each year has fallen sharply, he said, from around 155,000 in the mid-1990s to just 70,000 today.

"Something is seriously wrong," he said. He suspects that widespread development along the Yellow Sea, which sits between China and North and South Korea, is depriving the birds of vital food sources, as mudflats and wetlands there

are drained. At one such site, the Saemangeum wetlands of South Korea, recognized as a crucial staging site for waders, a 20.5-mile (33-kilometer) seawall built last year has drained 154 square miles (400 square kilometers) of tidal flats. "That's equal to the entire New Zealand estuarine habitat," Schuckard said.

Battley agreed that godwits and other migrating waders face serious threats, as their feeding and resting grounds dwindle. "Loss of habitat on the staging grounds is a real concern," he said. "The Yellow Sea is a

particular problem, because virtually every godwit from New Zealand will go through there. If you look at South Korea, it's full of seawalls—they reclaim entire estuaries at a go." Some mudflat loss has been offset by increased sediment loads dumped by China's Yellow and Yangtze rivers, he added. "[But] the problem now is that with all the dams on those rivers, the Yellow River is running dry half the year, and the Three Gorges Dam is trapping most of the sediment that came down the Yangtze," Battley said. "Shorebird migrants, through the Yellow Sea at least, have a very tough time coming up [north]," he said.

(Thanks to member Pat Coy for bringing this article from National Geographic News to our attention.)

2008: Good for Conservation

The cause of conservation moved forward in Ohio during 2008, thanks in no small part to the efforts of Audubon Ohio and you—its supporters.

The highlight of our year was the Earth Day groundbreaking of the Grange Insurance Audubon Center in Columbus. In an event attended by more than 200 community leaders, we finally began construction on this unique project after



seven years of effort to plan it, develop community support, provide pre-opening programs and raise the necessary funds. Symbolically, we did not mark the occasion by shoveling dirt out of the ground, but rather planted a tree to symbolize the ongoing transformation of this former brownfield site.

The building's foundation, exterior structure and roof deck are now firmly in place. The building design won sustainability awards in 2008 from the Columbus and Cincinnati chapters of the American Institute of Architects, so the finished product promises quickly to become a new landmark in Central Ohio. The doors will open this summer.

The Center conducted its fourth year of programming, serving children and adults alike. We worked with students both in their classroom and on our site, and had programs during the school day, after school and during the summer. We engaged a growing number of students in monitoring the flora and fauna near our site, part of a conservation planning effort that encompasses not only the site but the surrounding Scioto River/Green Lawn Important Bird Area.

Other educational activities included our second summer camp at the Rockefeller Park Greenhouse in the Glenville neighborhood of Cleveland and the completion of an Ohio Supplement to the popular Audubon Adventures classroom kit. The latter project was managed by volunteers from the Education Committee of the Audubon Ohio Advisory Board.

Our advocacy program continued to recruit, train and motivate grassroots volunteers who promoted Great Lakes restoration and worked to prevent the worst effects of Global Warming. We were a major player in the successful effort to ratify the Great Lakes Basin Water Resources Compact. The Compact, ratified despite fierce opposition in the Ohio Senate, provides new authority to secure the waters of the Great Lakes from efforts to divert them elsewhere, and to promote water conservation within the Basin. Preserving the quantity of Great Lakes water is critical to maintaining coastal shoreline and wetland habitat that migratory birds, particularly waterfowl, depend on.

Audubon Ohio was also a major player in successful efforts to upgrade state and federal energy programs to promote increased fuel economy, energy efficiency and greater use of renewable power sources such as geothermal, wind and solar. These efforts included training workshops we conducted in Athens, Youngstown and Toledo for new Global Warming activists.

For more information on the activities of Audubon Ohio, visit www.audubonohio.org.

(This article was submitted by Audubon Ohio Executive Director Jerry Tinianow.)

Count for Fun, Count for the Future

Bird and nature fans throughout North America are invited to join tens of thousands of everyday bird watchers for the 12th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), February 13-16. A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this free event is an opportunity for families, students, and people of all ages to discover the wonders of nature in backyards, schoolyards, and local parks, and, at the same time, make an important contribution to conservation. Participants count birds and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org.

"The Great Backyard Bird Count benefits both birds and people. It's a great example of citizen science: Anyone who can identify even a few species can contribute to the body of knowledge that is used to inform conservation efforts to protect birds and biodiversity," says Audubon Education VP, Judy Braus. "Families, teachers, children and all those who take part in GBBC get a chance to improve their observation skills, enjoy nature, and have a great time counting for fun, counting for the future."

Anyone can take part, from novice bird watchers to experts, by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and reporting their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. Participants can also explore what birds others are finding in their backyards—whether in their own neighborhood or thousands of miles away. Additional online resources include tips to help identify birds, a photo gallery, and special materials for educators.

The data these "citizen scientists" collect helps researchers understand bird population trends, information that is critical for effective conservation. Their efforts enable everyone to see what would otherwise be impossible: a comprehensive picture of where birds are in late winter and how their numbers and distribution compare with previous years. In 2008, participants submitted more than 85,000 checklists.

"The GBBC has become a vital link in the arsenal of continent-wide bird-monitoring projects," said Cornell Lab of Ornithology director, John Fitzpatrick. "With more than a decade of data now in hand, the GBBC has documented the fine-grained details of late-winter bird distributions better than any project in history, including some truly striking changes just over the past decade."

Each year, in addition to entering their tallies, participants submit thousands of digital images for the GBBC photo contest. Many are featured in the popular online gallery. Participants in the 2009 count are also invited to upload their bird videos to YouTube; some will also be featured on the GBBC web site. Businesses, schools, nature clubs, Scout troops, and other community organizations interested in the GBBC can contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at (800) 843-2473, or Audubon at citizenscience@audubon.org or (215) 355-9588, Ext 16.

