



# GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



An approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing 9 September 2011

## *Will birding look like the rest of America?*

### Birding Diversity and the Future



Just about six weeks from now there will be a conference in Philadelphia designed to focus on birding and diverse audiences: "Focus on Diversity: Changing the Face of American Birding." It is to be held at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, all day on Saturday 22 October (with activities the previous evening, Friday, 21 October, and self-styled field trips on the following day, Sunday, 23 October).

In a nation with over 312 million people, where the combined "minority population" topped 100 million almost a half-decade ago, the American birding population is extraordinarily white.

Looking closer, we have heard (e.g., from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) that bird watching touches 48 million Americans, most of whom (88 percent or 42 million) are at least backyard enthusiasts. But almost 20 million of these also take trips away from home for the sole purpose of observing birds. That's an impressive number. From these figures we can extrapolate that the average birder is 50 years old or older, has a better than average income, is slightly more likely to be female than male, and is white. Very white.

Moreover, while the interest in birds may be very broad - touching at least 48 million fellow Americans - it is not correspondingly deep.

Quite frankly, birding needs to reach diverse audiences if it wishes to be "relevant" to important issues facing us all.

This is not a question of "political correctness." It is an issue of simple survival. If bird education and bird conservation - or environmentalism as a whole - does not "look like the rest of America" it will fail miserably as we get deeper into the 21st century.

Unfortunately, it does not seem that birding will get better on its own.

Birding needs pushing, proding, shoving, and pulling to deliver its greatest strength - the beauty and wonder of birds as an "ideal portal" to the world of nature - to many more Americans.

You can find details on the Philadelphia conference [here](#).

### **Some Avian Symbolism:**

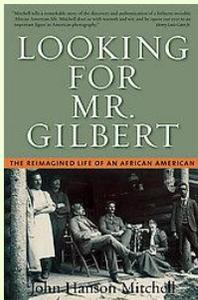
The diversity conference logo shown above actually incorporates a combination of bird symbols representing the blending of several cultures that make up our American population - symbolism using the eagle, the crane, and the goose.

The eagle is not only a revered U.S. symbol, it also symbolizes strength throughout Mexican and Hispanic cultures. Eagles, of course, are also considered sacred in various Native American cultures, representing courage, wisdom, and a special connection to creation.

The crane is a traditional symbol across many Asian cultures, often representing longevity, happiness, loyalty, and good fortune, as well as a symbol of solitude and independence in some Native American cultures. Cranes have captivated these peoples for centuries.

The goose comes from the Akan culture of Ghana, Africa. The Akan term "Sankofa" translates to "go back and take," and the symbol associated with this term is a goose removing an egg from its back, representing learning from the past and progressing into the future.

### Copies of *Looking for Mr Gilbert*:



At the conference, John Hanson Mitchell, author of *Looking for Mr. Gilbert*, will make a unique dinner presentation. His breakthrough book (2005, Shoemaker Hoard) reveals the life and contributions of Robert A. Gilbert (1870-1942), the African-American "man-servant" to the famous American ornithologist, William Brewster (1851-1919). Among other things, Brewster was a founder of the esteemed Nuttall Ornithological Club at Harvard and leader in the American Ornithologists' Union, and the Massachusetts Audubon Society. For much of Brewster's creative years, Robert Gilbert was at his side. Gilbert was the indispensable multi-skilled photographer/naturalist whose contribution to landscape

photography and bird-based natural history has been underappreciated, if not made invisible by the passage of time.

I have a small supply of copies of *Looking for Mr. Gilbert* by [John Hanson Mitchell](#). Some are used; some are new; most are paperback. If you are interested in a copy (for between \$6 and \$10), send me a note, and I'll let you know what's currently available:

[paul.baicich@verizon.net](mailto:paul.baicich@verizon.net)

### Words to Consider:

"I wanted to know the name of every stone and flower and insect and bird and beast. I wanted to know where it got its color, where it got its life - but there was no one to tell me."

- George Washington Carver - scientist, botanist, educator, and inventor - (1864-1943)

