



GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



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

22 April 2014

Disempowering Environmentalism

When good intentions backfire

In recognition of Earth Day, we focus on the impact of environmental and bird images, of environmental art that presents hard-hitting choices to be made by Americans today, choices that will either drive us to address the problems at hand or, perhaps, to flee from them.



Of course, much of our current environmental art is uplifting, showing beautiful and grand images of the natural world - habitat, birds, other wildlife, nature in balance. But there is this other side, an important tradition that features stark pictures and conjures up bleak scenarios of nature under assault.

Earlier this month, a photo-art show at the Baltimore Art Museum closed after a month and a half exhibition. It involved the work of the Baltimore-based artist, photographer, and bird enthusiast, Lynne Parks. It was called, "[Lights Out Baltimore, Downtown Fatalities](#)," and it featured photos of wild birds that had been killed by collisions with glass in windows and tall buildings.

This approach, documenting bird fatalities in Baltimore, may not be "pretty" to some folks, but it is one real way to come face-to-face with a stark reality in our modern society. Parks herself affirms, "Birds are the jewels of our world and we need to adjust how we live in order to ensure their survival." She hopes that her photographs will inspire more bird-friendly design for buildings.

Pictures of oil-coated murrelets and puffins after the notorious *Exon Valdez* oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska, over a quarter century ago are still intended to evoke a cry for serious environmental responsibility and a call for justice. So are similar and more recent images of oil-covered Brown Pelicans, cormorants, and other waterbirds after the BP 2010 oil blowout on the Gulf Coast.

Such examples of art can be dramatic and impressive, but can they actually inspire people to do something about the issue? Do people actually call for change?

"Fear Won't Do It" is the title of [an article](#) by Saffron O'Neill and Sophie Nicholson-Cole of the University of East Anglia (UK) published in 2009 in the journal, *Science*

Communication. The authors report on a study where they analyzed people's reactions to images related to an environmental problem, in this case climate change. The pictures ranged from the stark (starving children and a dried-up lake bed with dead fish) to the more positive (a cyclist and the use of solar power).

The results were clear. Pictures that instilled fear tended to get the participants to see the issue as "important," but also made them feel hopeless, tending to "distance and disempower individuals in terms of their sense of personal engagement with the issue."

Instead of engaging the participant in such a way as to call for a change in policies, priorities, and public and individual behaviors, such stark images could actually be counterproductive and discouraging.

A short clip, a dramatic image, a bleak prediction may be effective for those already outraged, but alone and without a hint of a positive alternatives, such imagery can be disheartening and disempowering.

We are regularly dealing with complicated issues - e.g., bird-friendly building design, shade-grown coffee, wetland losses, invasive species, nature education, wind-and-solar power, sustainable farm policy, diversity and environmental justice - and they all deserve thoughtful solutions. These solutions usually require more than a photo or more than 140 characters to explain. Positive solutions will need to accompany any visions of outrage, positive solutions that can actually encourage a sense of hope. Perhaps that is an appropriate message for this Earth Day, 2014.

The Disappearing American Vacation-goer *Looking at a recent survey*

On average, Americans are using only half of their earned vacation-time. This is according to [survey results](#) announced earlier this month by Harris Poll for the jobs website, Glassdoor.

Moreover, those Americans taking no vacation whatsoever in the last 12 months account for 15 percent of U.S. working adults 18+ years of age.

The disappearing vacation is just a subset of the decline of leisure time in general in the U.S., but the specific vacation issue deserves special consideration.

Clearly, the very concept of the "work week" and "work life" has been drastically altered in the U.S. "Before technology allowed us to be connected 24/7, we were more likely to have actually 'vacated' our work for a couple of weeks a year, but now, it appears one full day away is a luxury," said Rusty Rueff, Glassdoor career and workplace expert. "While there is always work to be done, employees should be conscious of using time off they've earned to recharge. In turn, employers should consider being more clear to everyone about what it means to be on vacation," he continued. "Some real rest and relaxation will help employees return to work energized, ready to contribute and make them less susceptible to 'burn out.'"

One of the precepts of this newsletter, of GBP, is that quality outdoor time in natural environments is of great value, whether that time is spent hiking, biking, camping, fishing, hunting, canoeing, kayaking, in wildlife photography, or, especially, birding. But the Harris/Glassdoor report paints a grim picture of overall free time, vacation time, let alone time spent outdoors in these specific "quality" endeavors.



This past weekend, Easter weekend, the U.S. Department of the Interior announced that all 401 of America's National Parks would have free admission. While this effort was wonderful, it can't come close to addressing the underlying problem with free time and the pressing demands of the modern American workplace. It's a bigger problem.

The Harris/Glassdoor report went on to elaborate on the situation, stating that taking time off doesn't does not always really mean "vacation." Eleven percent of employees said that they used time off to interview for another job, while 61 percent said that they did at least some work while they were away from their jobs.

If there was a positive side to this report, a flip side; it was that 85 percent of working Americans took at least some time off of work in the past 12 months and that 25 percent of the survey respondents took all their eligible time off. Yes, it's positive, but it's not nearly enough.

Is Birding "New"?

A timeline to consider

Some birders today insist that birding as an active pastime is "new" or that it is breaking new ground. Of course, with 17.8 million adult American leaving their homes every year to watch birds, there is certainly some new discoveries made all the time, but the birding traditions are long-held and continuing to accumulate. You can't get to points **D**, **E**, and **F**, unless you've already gone through experiences **A**, **B**, and **C**!

To help illustrate that reality, below is a short historic timeline for American birding, a list of highlights basically for the 20th century, assembled for this issue of *GBP*. Many of the dates refer to key books published about birds and birding, but other vital experiential mile-markers for birding are raised.

The list is not intended to cover bird conservation, although the timeline does touch on a couple of outstanding conservation issues, but basically covers the growth of our birding recreational experience, mostly over the last century.

- 1896** Harriet Hemenway and Mina Hall decide to launch a feather boycott.
- 1900** Frank M. Chapman runs the first Christmas Bird Count.

- 1905** Chester Reed bird guide to *Eastern Birds* is published.
National Association of Audubon Societies incorporated.
- 1906** Reed's *Water Bird* guide appears.
- 1910** Junior Audubon classes begin.
- 1934** After multiple rejections, Roger Tory Peterson gets his *Field Guide to the Birds* published.
Rosalie Edge buys Hawk Mountain, establishes Hawk Mountain Association two years later.
- 1936** Hog Island established as a summer Audubon camp.
- 1940** Ira N. Gabrielson, dedicated birder, becomes the first head of the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- 1941** Roger Tory Peterson has his first *Western Guide* published.
- 1946** First Richard Pough guide (*Audubon Land Bird Guide*), illustrated by Don Eckleberry, appears.
- 1948** Roger Tory Peterson writes *Birds Over America*.
- 1951** Olin Sewall Pettingill has published his *Bird-finding East of the Mississippi*.
Pough's Audubon *Water Bird Guide* appears.
Arthur A. Allen has published *Stalking Birds with Color Camera*.
- 1953** Pettingill's next book appears, *Bird-finding West of the Mississippi*.
Peterson and Fisher take off on their big year and *Wild America* appears in 1955.
- 1954** First telephone Rare Bird Alert (RBA) established in Boston.
- 1957** *Western Pough* guide published (all three guides sold over 1 million copies).
- 1961** *Finding Birds in South Florida*, by Ira Joel Abramson appears; it is the first modern local birdfinding guide.
- 1963** Ira N. Gabrielson has biggest North American lifelist (669), Peterson is #2 (638).
- 1965** The first Lane Guide by Jim Lane published. It was for southeast Arizona.
- 1966** The Golden Guide *Birds of North America* by Chan Robbins, Bertel Bruun, Herbert S. Zim and illustrated by Arthur Singer is published.
- 1969** American Birding Association founded.
- 1973** Kenn Kaufman takes off on his "big year" (book published in 1997).
- 1975** Ross's Gull in found in Newburyport, Massachusetts, with media coverage in *The New York Times* and *NBC Nightly News*.
- 1978** *Bird Watcher's Digest* started by Thompson family.
- 1981** Wild birds Unlimited begins out of Indianapolis, Indiana.
- 1983** First National Geographic *Guide to the Birds of North America* released.
- 1984** The first World Series of Birding is launched out of Cape May, New Jersey.
- 1985** Recorded RBAs reach 52 in number across 29 states and one province in Canada.
Wild Bird Centers of America starts out of Cabin John, Maryland.
- 1986** *Birder's World* launched (followed soon thereafter by *WildBird*).
- 1988** First Festival of the Cranes at Bosque del Apache NWR takes place . (See 1994.)
- 1990** E-mail subscription lists, birding listservs, start to spread. Originally begun as computer bulletin boards and ways to post telephone RBA transcripts, they grow as versatile instruments of information sharing.
- 1993** The first birding trail begins, The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail.
- 1994** The first Rio Grande Birding Festival is launched out of Harlingen, Texas. Not the first festival, of course, it still becomes emblematic of the



larger, successful, and long-term festivals. (Also see 1988.)

2000 *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, by David A. Sibley, is published.

Stopping this timeline at 2000, with the start of the 21st century, seemed to be a good idea. Obviously, birding is not new, but it actually builds on a set of accumulated experiences over a century old.

2014 Wetland Conservation Award *... for Communications*

Ducks Unlimited announced the six winners of their 2014 Wetland Conservation Achievement Awards during the 79th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference held in Denver in mid-March. [This year's recipient](#) in the "Communications" category was Paul J. Baicich, for his promotion of bird and wetland conservation.

Words to Consider:

"The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, not the other way around."

- Gaylord Nelson (1916-2005), Governor and Senator from Wisconsin, primary leader in launching Earth Day

GBP Bulletin Archives

Great Birding Projects is a vehicle to promote a creative approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing. GBP functions as a bridge to an innovative engagement between people and birds. You can access all previous issues of the *GBP* bulletin on the GBP website [here](#).

