



GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



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

12 February 2015

Revisiting Urban Interests

We have been here before

Today, we are witnessing a revival of "urban interest" when it comes to nature, wildlife, outdoor recreation, and environmental education. This is not necessarily in opposition to "wilderness" issues, but it is often presented as a corollary to broad, natural spaces and the wide-open outdoors. You don't have to look far to find this growing urban interest.



There is the [Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative](#) coming out of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has a decidedly strong orientation toward engagement with minorities. Also at USFWS, the [Urban Bird Treaties](#) continue to attract interest. Over at the National Park Service, there seems to be ongoing concern and activity [in this area](#). Also next month's North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference will have a [special session](#) on "Wildlife Conservation in Cities and Suburbs," emphasizing pollinators and the urban-ag interface. There have been a cluster of [Focus on Diversity](#) conferences over the past few years, on the need "to change the face of American birding." And The Nature Conservancy just revisited the issue with an [article](#) in their magazine by John Marzluff, from the University of Washington, author of [Welcome to Subirdia](#).

Almost everywhere you look you see this urban orientation, sometimes associated with the crucial message of connecting with communities of diversity, sometimes blissfully oblivious to that necessity.

In any case, the general urban interest goes back a long way in the U.S., especially to the decades following WWII. When it comes to funding and related support, one could pick any one of a number of starting points. One of them could be the influential 1962 report, [Outdoor Recreation for America](#), which inspired action from Congress and the Executive Branch, calling for more open space, park creation, and an urban emphasis. This, in turn, helped launch the congressionally authorized Bureau of Outdoor Recreation ([BOR](#)) which was assigned the task of developing a national recreation plan. Secretary Walter Hickel, in the Nixon Administration, even called this "parks to the people," promoting urban-centric outdoor recreation.



City Park, New Orleans
by Infrogmation

The sweeping BOR report of over 1,000 pages was completed in 1970, with cities at the core of the findings. The price tag (over \$6 billion) made it anathema to many politicians. So did its *de facto* benefits for urban dwellers.

The report was essentially suppressed, and it only appeared in a heavily edited form in 1972, without the associated sticker-shock. (It was only as a result of congressional action through the Senate Interior Committee under Sen. Henry Jackson [D-WA] that the original report was eventually released.)

This sad - if not sordid - story was summarized in December in [a fine essay](#) by Eleanor Mahoney, on the Living Landscape Observer website. Her recounting examines so many issues of concern today, suggesting, to this writer at least, that there may be "nothing new under the sun." The story intertwines cities, conservation, recreation, federal budgets, and a conveniently forgotten - if not suppressed - past.

If there are growing interests in these urban and near-urban issues today, there should be awareness of the backstory. In addition, the roles of the "stateside" portion of the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#) (expiring in September) and of the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery ([UPARR](#)) program (non-funded since 2002) need to be fully understood and appreciated.

Just as importantly, if there are new and growing concerns over the potential for creative park-making, nature-access, and nature-education in metropolitan areas, then the call for revisiting the spirit of the BOR initiative and support for stateside LWCF and for UPARR must surely accompany such action.

There is little need to reinvent the wheel, but a real necessity to pump some air in those deflated tires.

How Do You Sell a \$25 Stamp?

- Price increase presents opportunities and problems



In December, federal legislation was passed and signed to raise the price of the [Migratory Birding Hunting and Conservation \[Duck\] Stamp](#). The Federal Duck Stamp Act of 2014 will increase the price of the stamp from \$15 to \$25, with the \$10 increase dedicated to providing easements to enhance the National Wildlife Refuge System. (It has been estimated that this increase could result in an additional \$16 million per year for perpetual easements.) The next stamp - whose art with a pair of Ruddy Ducks by Jennifer Miller is shown to the left -

will carry a \$25 price-tag.

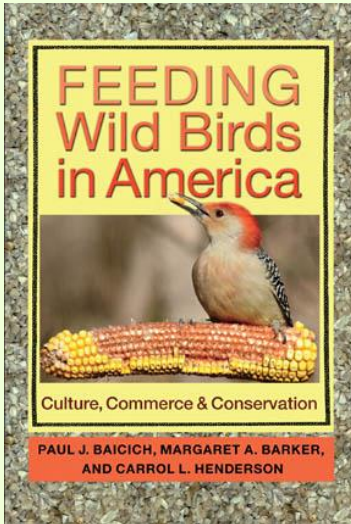
On the one hand, the price increase is very positive. There hasn't been a price increase since 1991, the purchasing value of \$15 in 1991 is equal to more than \$26 today, and, most importantly, there is a crying need today for more funds to save wetland and grassland habitats.

On the other hand, it will also be more difficult to pitch a stamp that costs another \$10. It's a tough sell, particularly if potential non-waterfowlers think that the stamp is, somehow, "just for ducks and just for waterfowl hunters." At \$25, the need to convince those who don't have to buy a Stamp - collectors, general conservationists, birders, wildlife photographers, non-waterfowl hunters - becomes greater. So does the difficulty.

What is required is a full-blown marketing campaign, to increase the appreciation of the need to save wetland and grassland habitats, to explain the role of easements at this time, and to appeal to conservation-oriented Americans not currently required to buy the stamps. People buying the stamps - hunters and non-hunters alike - should feel pride when they spend \$25 for the stamp, pride in contributing to habitat conservation.

One suggestion to draw attention to the new situation has been presented by the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp. The group has unveiled a concept to recognize the pending centennials of the Migratory Bird Treaty (2016 - 2020) in combination with the stamp. The treaty ([MBTA](#)) has protected *all* migratory birds, including, of course, waterfowl. The Friends proposal is to keep the waterfowl as the *dominant species shown on the stamp*, but to illustrate in the art a "secondary species" - a non-waterfowl migratory bird that *shares the same habitat* as the dominant waterfowl. The group has presented the concept in its national newsletter, [Wingtips](#), and has been [very specific](#) on how the art-rules could be updated, challenging wildlife artists and having the stamp appeal to outdoor recreationists, general conservationists, and environmentalists across the country.

There are other ways to make the new \$25-stamp more attractive, useful, and give it more value. The Friends group has raised [other ideas](#) for selling a \$25 stamp. The best approach would be to try some top options rather than simply relying, once again, on the waterfowl-hunting community to do the heavy lifting.



Coming Soon

- *The story of bird feeding*

Bird feeding in this country has been many things in the last 120 years. Depending on the time and place, this seemingly simple practice has been a social cause, a trendy curiosity, an agricultural obligation, a serious hobby, a billion-dollar industry, a basis for scientific study, a road to conservation, and pure entertainment. The story of bird feeding is one of invention and a reflection of our changing economic times, but it is also a story of how Americans have come to value the natural world.

A new book, scheduled to come out in late March, tells the historic tale. The book is by Paul J. Baicich, Margaret A. Barker, and Carrol L. Henderson.

Feeding Wild Birds in America - Culture, Commerce, and Conservation

6 x 9, 320 pp.

76 color illustrations, 37 b&w photos. 3 maps. 2 tables. Index.

Flexbound (with flaps)

Price: \$27.95

978-1-62349-211-3

Also available as e-book

You can find more details - including comments from early readers - from [Texas A&M University Press](#).

Words to Consider:

"Ecology is a new name for a very old subject... natural history."

- Charles S. Elton in *Animal Ecology* (1927)

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](#).

