



# GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



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

*18 March 2016*

## ***Moving Well Beyond Ping-Pong Diplomacy Cuba, birds, and us***



**Cuban Emerald**  
Photo: Paul J. Baicich

When relations between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China were in their earliest stages, in the early 1970s, the phenomenon of "ping-pong diplomacy" emerged when U.S. ping-pong players visited China and broke exciting new ground.

Similar, but more fast-moving, developments have occurred over the past few years when it comes to relations with Cuba. President Obama is even planning a historic trip to Cuba, starting this weekend.

We have not had "ping-pong diplomacy" with Cuba, but there have been fascinating developments brewing between the U.S. and Cuba. It's not through ping-pong; some of it is actually through birds. Increased U.S.-Cuban bird-connections through people-to-people and research-based bird activities have been underway and have actually been increasing over the last few years.

The interplay takes many forms, often focusing on this shared natural resource: birds. Not only have there been regular mutual visits between ornithologists and conservationists, there have been creative exchanges dealing with raptor and songbird monitoring, youth education, feeder-interest, and needed field-equipment transfer. In fact, the next [BirdCaribbean](#) meeting - to be held in the summer of 2017 - is scheduled to take place in Cuba. This could represent another real breakthrough.

Cuba is very important to inter-American bird populations. Over 370 species of birds have been recorded in Cuba, including over two dozen species which are endemic to the island. Due to its large land area and geographical position within the Caribbean, Cuba is a real stand-out. More than 160 species will pass through the island during migration or spend the winter on the island. Indeed, last November, the U.S. Department of State and Cuba even signed [a formal agreement](#) to facilitate environmental cooperation including the protection of endangered and migratory bird species.

If you are interested in a bird-study trip to Cuba later this year (3-15 November), a trip designed for 14 people and led by excellent leaders, check out [an itinerary](#) developed by the Caribbean Conservation Trust. (If you want more details, e-mail [Paul Baicich](#).)

At the same time, the superb book by Nils Navarro, *Endemic Birds of Cuba; A Comprehensive Field Guide*, recently was published and is available through [Ediciones Nuevos Mundos](#).

## **Show Support for Birds and Rice - and buy a t-shirt**



Shade-grown coffee may be [the prime bird-compatible crop with ecological benefits](#) in Latin America and the Caribbean, but in the United States today, there is one vital "bird-friendly" crop grown on a large scale. *It's rice.*

Our six largest rice-producing states are Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas. These are places where waterfowl, shorebirds, long-legged waders, rails, raptors, and wetland-favoring songbirds co-exist with agriculture. American ricelands account for about three million acres of land which otherwise might be virtually devoid of birds. It's just that simple.

If you want to literally wear your support for bird-friendly rice, consider this t-shirt. It delivers a simple message: "Buy American RICE - Preserve Bird Habitat." So far, the shirts are available in men's sizes (S, M, L, XL, 2XL). These shirts are 100% cotton.

The first shirt costs \$20, and any additional shirts sent to the same address will cost \$15 each. (Maryland residents should add \$0.90 tax per shirt.)

You can order shirts [here](#).



## **Will American Bison Become the American Mammal?**



American Bison  
Jesse Achtenbach/USFWS

In early December, without much fanfare, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed bipartisan legislation to designate the American bison as the country's national mammal. "The bison, like the Bald Eagle, has for many years been a symbol of America for its strength, endurance and dignity, reflecting the pioneer spirit of our country," North Dakota Sen. John Hoeven commented at the time.

New Mexico Democrat Martin Heinrich joined Hoeven in sponsoring the legislation, and in championing its passage, he heralded the bison's importance to Native Americans. "Bison hold a rich historic and cultural significance for the United States, and in particular for our tribal nations," Heinrich said. "Recognition of our new national mammal will bring greater attention to the ongoing effort to conserve this unique species."

The U.S. House of Representatives has yet to act on this piece of legislation.

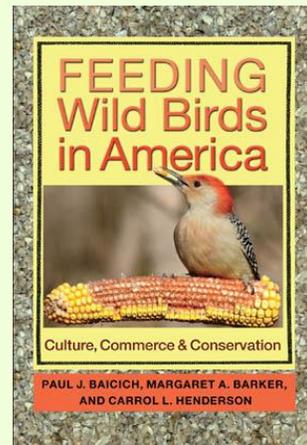
We have written about the importance of making the American bison our national mammal [before](#).

These are iconic mammals, depicted on our coins, federal seals, and sports team logos, also represents a species whose presence on the landscape was a factor in creating an environment of sustainability, especially for soil, vegetation, and birdlife. (Indeed, one fine way to support the survival of prairie birds, is to include in one's diet range-fed American bison!)

## *The History of Backyard Bird Feeding*

The seemingly simple practice of bird feeding in America has been many things over the last 120 years. It has been a social cause, a trendy curiosity, an agricultural obligation, a serious hobby, a billion-dollar industry, a basis for scientific study, a pathway to conservation, and pure entertainment.

The story is described in *Feeding Wild Birds in America: Culture, Commerce, and Conservation* (Texas A & M University Press), by Paul J. Baicich, Margaret A. Barker, and Carrol L. Henderson. The book covers our pioneer bird-protection foremothers, the do-it-yourself origins of early feeding, the devices and appliances invented in the roaring '20s, hard times and bird feeding in the Depression, war rationing and feeding during WWII, the post-war suburban growth and the parallel role of feeding in the backyard, the experimentation with new seeds and products, the rise of all-year feeding, and 21st century experiences.



The multi-decade story is also a story of how we Americans have come to value the natural world. This is a story that has never been presented in book-form until now. The book puts *bird feeding in context*, and it tells an important tale.

The book can be found at many bookstores across the country, including bird-specialty stores and nature-centers, and can be found on-line. You can also find a special order form [here](#).

## Words to Consider:

"Few of us can hope to leave a poem or a work of art to posterity; but working together or apart, we can yet save meadows, marshes, strips of seashore, and stream valleys as a green legacy for the centuries."

~ Stewart Udall (1920-2010), Secretary of the Interior, 1961-1969

## 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](#).

