



# GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



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

*23 May 2016*

## *The Thrill of the Thaw More on Cuba, birds, and us*



Cuban Trogon - Laura Gooch

There isn't a week that goes by that we don't witness some changes in U.S.-Cuban relations. Indeed, in the last two weeks relating to Havana alone, we have seen the first high-end Miami-based cruise initiated, movie and TV filming, and even an elite fashion-design event (Channel). But there is a lot underway apart from Havana, and these are taking place in parts of Cuba where visitors can get a better understanding of the real Cuba. Increased U.S.-Cuban bird-connections through people-to-people and research-based bird activities have been underway and have actually been increasing. This is all very healthy.

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 much-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, at Topes in the Sierra del Escambray. This could represent another real breakthrough in dialogue and cooperation.

Cuba is instrumental for inter-American bird populations. Over 370 species of birds have been recorded on the island, including over two dozen species which are endemic to Cuba. 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.

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



National Botanic Garden (Havana)  
- Paul J. Baicich

Conservation Trust. (If you want more specific details, including hints on alternate trips, e-mail [Paul Baicich](mailto:Paul.Baicich@conservationtrust.org).)

At the same time, the wonderful book by Nils Navarro, *Endemic Birds of Cuba: A Comprehensive Field Guide*, was published last year and is available through [Ediciones Nuevos Mundos](http://www.edicionesnuevosmundos.com).

## ***Hemp History Week - Next Month - from oddity to commodity and a bird connection***

There was a time when hemp was a very common birdseed. In fact, 100 years ago, hemp achieved the status of a bird-feeding standard. "Hemp seed and Japanese millet are among the best seeds to offer the birds in winter," wrote Ernest Harold Baynes in *Wild Bird Guests* (1915). In *The Bird Study Book* (1917), T. Gilbert Pearson, president of the National Association of Audubon Societies, advocated feeding land birds hemp seed, as well as cracked corn, wheat, rice, and sunflower seeds because these foods could be "purchased readily in any town."



Hemp Harvest in France by Aleks

The problem was that a variety of hemp could be psychoactive, and that particular form was easily confused with industrial hemp. Frankly, it's not that hemp fell out of favor with birds or with the bird-feeding public, but confusing and misunderstanding in the 20th century made hemp scarce in the bird-feeding marketplace. We wrote about this [hemp history and potential](#) last August.

These factors may be in flux, and harvested industrial hemp, common in many countries (see photo above from France) outside the U.S., could return to this country. Hemp may yet move from the status of American oddity to the reality of American commodity.

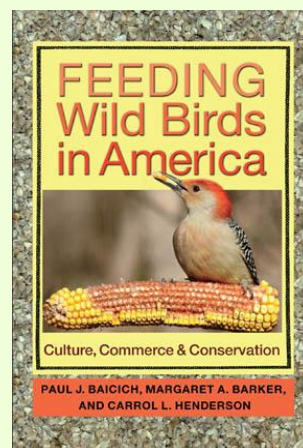
Industrial hemp can play a role in health food and body care products, as well as eco-friendly textiles, clothing, auto parts, building materials, and, of course, birdseed. Hemp even has an impressive profile that shows some promise for regenerating depleted soils, sequestering carbon dioxide, and preventing erosion.

This is all part of the effort in the upcoming [Hemp History Week](#), to be celebrated early next month (6-12 June). There is a short video associated with the effort that you can [view](#) on the importance of industrial hemp.

## *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 even covers the rise and fall of hemp as a birdseed. (See the story above describing the possible reemergence of hemp in the near future.)



A recent blog entry by two of the book's co-authors can be found at the [blog of the Library of Congress](#). This is connected to the Science, Technology, and Business Division at the library and announces a presentation by these two co-authors to be held on Thursday, 26 May.

The multi-decade bird-feeding story also explains how we Americans have come to value the natural world close to home. 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 find a special order form [here](#).

If you wish to host one of the co-authors as a speaker at your event, contact [Margaret A. Barker](#).

## *American Bison Becomes the National Mammal*



American Bison  
Jesse Achtenbach/USFWS

President Barack Obama signed the National Bison Legacy Act into law on 9 May, after House and Senate passage of the bill. The move to make North America's bison the national mammal followed lobbying from a varied coalition of conservationists, tribal groups, and ranchers. The four-year push for national mammal designation was led by the Wildlife Conservation Society, associated with the famous Bronx Zoo in New York City. (In 1907, the zoo actually sent 15 captive-bred and rare, native bison to the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Oklahoma.)

This National Bison Legacy Act puts the bison on equal footing with the Bald Eagle as an official symbol of the U.S.

We have written about the importance of making the American bison our national mammal in the past, including in [May 2013](#) and [March of this year](#).

These iconic bison - pictured on our coins, federal seals, and team logos - also represent a species whose presence in the American West was a factor in creating an environment of long-term sustainability, especially for soil, vegetation, and vibrant birdlife. Our prairie birds co-existed with bison for eons, and they benefited accordingly.

Finally, one excellent way to support the survival of prairie birds, is to include range-fed American bison in your diet!

### Words to Consider:

"The world is full of signals that we don't perceive."  
~ Stephen Jay Gould (1941-2002)

### 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](#).

