Spring Convention Boasts Warbler Wonderland

By SAMANTHA SCHEIMAN
editor, Arkansas Birds

With laughter and animated conversations, the spring convention commenced Friday night in Jonesboro, bearing an uncanny resemblance to the noisy flocks of warblers we all hoped to encounter. As a participant on Saturday’s field trip to Craighead Forest Park, I was dumbfounded at the diversity of warblers present, including Magnolia Warblers acrobatically catching insects; Blackpoll Warblers singing in the noonday sun; an Ovenbird masquerading as a White-throated Sparrow; tail-wagging Palm Warblers; and a Golden-winged Warbler whose identity was revealed by bee buzz buzz buzz and separate, but telling, looks at golden wing panels and ebony auriculars. Baltimore and Orchard orioles accented the warbler sightings, as did a mewing of four Gray Catbirds—the most I’ve ever seen at one time—and lemon-yellow American Goldfinches. Birders on other field trips relished a Sandhill Crane flyover, chattering Bell’s Vireos, scores of Indigo Buntings and Prairie Warblers, American Golden-Plovers, and much more, resulting in a total of 146 species seen throughout the weekend.

Presentations delivered Saturday afternoon and Friday and Saturday evening highlighted facets of Arkansas’s incredible biodiversity. Friday evening’s speaker, Dr. Stanley Trauth of Arkansas State University, (continued on page 3)
90-For-90 Fundraiser to Benefit AAS Trust

By RAGUPATHY KANNAN, AAS Trustee

Two great Arkansas Auduboners attain a milestone this year. Professor Doug James starts his 90th year this July, and Thurman Jordan (past VP and President) turned 90 earlier this year. To honor these veterans, my fellow AAS Trustees and I have kicked off the “90-for-90” fundraiser for the Trust. At the spring convention, we made our own donations, as has Thurman. We encourage you to donate to the Trust in multiples of 90, or multiples of 9.0 if you prefer (really, any amount is appreciated).

Your donation will go into the Trust’s Endowment-Memorial Fund. Investment of those funds generates income used to fund grants for research, conservation, and education, primarily for birds. Three of the four student presenters at the convention were recipients of Trust grants. Your donation will be invested in full and only the income from the investment will be used.

Newsletter and Membership Information

The Arkansas Audubon Society Newsletter is a quarterly publication of Arkansas Audubon Society, Inc., a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization, P.O. Box 313, Pangburn, AR 72121. Issue dates are March, June, September, and December.

PLEASE NOTE: announcements, articles, information, and/or photographs to be considered for an upcoming edition of Arkansas Birds should be submitted to the editor no later than the 15th of the month prior to publication.

The newsletter is provided to those who pay membership dues to AAS.

Send newsletter submissions to samantha.scheiman@gmail.com.

Membership renewals are due Jan. 1 of each calendar year.

Please enter my membership in the Arkansas Audubon Society as a:

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*New Memberships paid in the last quarter (Oct. - Dec.) will include full membership for the following calendar year.

SPECIAL MEMBERSHIPS

Life Member of Arkansas Audubon Society (May be paid over a two-year period.) $250.00
Patron of Arkansas Audubon Society $500.00

Draw check to Arkansas Audubon Society and send to: Terry Butler, Treasurer, P.O. Box 313, Pangburn, AR 72121
revealed the fascinating ecology of hundreds of female western slimy salamanders nesting in an abandoned mineshaft within the Ouachita National Forest, an aggregation that even attracted a visit from Sir David Attenborough in 2006 for his *Life in Cold Blood* natural history documentary. The nesting salamanders’ behavior encompassed embracing their developing eggs in an array of seemingly motherly postures and fighting off marauding females that eat their own species’ eggs.

Saturday evening’s speaker, Dr. Than Boves of Arkansas State University, spoke about his experiences monitoring Cerulean Warblers and shared rare video footage of them building nests, incubating their eggs, and even puncturing the eggs of other nesting Cerulean Warblers in true tooth-and-claw fashion. Dr. Boves also highlighted his ongoing research that may reveal the habitat compositions that best support Cerulean Warblers and thereby help reverse the severe decline of this species.

Also Saturday, several biology students delivered illuminating presentations in their areas of study. Maiya Block and Meghan McFadden of Hendrix College demonstrated that chronic noise from gas extraction is changing the composition of bird species in the vicinity of gas-extraction sites, while Jessica Fowler of Arkansas State University shed light on the winter roosting behavior of Eastern Bluebirds, which sometimes entailed as many as 15 bluebirds crammed into a single nest box! Finally, Stephen Robertson shared his research delving into the Baltimore checkspot’s selection of certain qualities in its food plant, false foxglove.

In between presentations, convention-goers enjoyed friendly competition while bidding on the silent auction items and otherwise savored each other’s company, which ranged in age from a few months old to age 90, perhaps even a little beyond. Speaking of 90, Ragupathy Kannan of the Arkansas Audubon Society Trust announced a Trust fundraiser—dubbed 90-for-90—that honors two special Arkansas birders: Thurman Jordan, past vice president and president of the Arkansas Audubon Society, and Doug James, biology professor at the University of Arkansas. See more information about this wonderful fundraiser on page 2, and consider donating today!

The grand finale of the convention transpired Sunday morning at Craighead Forest Park, which remained a warbler wonderland and then some: Least Flycatchers called *chebeck*, Gray-cheeked and Swaison’s Thrushes afforded long looks, and Yellow-throated Vireos and Wood Thrushes sang from some unseen place. Oblivious to our cell phones and watches, we birders were cast under the spell of spring migration one last time before going our separate ways.

Field-trip-goers to Scatter Creek Wildlife Management Area saw a flyover Sandhill Crane and an abundance of Prairie Warblers and Bell’s Vireos. Photo: Cheryl Lavers

Mark your calendars: the next Arkansas Audubon Society convention will be held November 14 - 16 in Russellville.
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck reports from outside of southwestern AR continue, especially in the eastern counties. Two were reported from McRae, *White* 9 Aug; 4 were seen near Reed, *Desha* 24 Aug; 12 were counted near Carlisle, *Lonoke* 20 Aug and the exceptional count of 32 was noted on the south end of Grand Lake, *Chicot* 17 Aug (all Kenny & LaDonna Nichols).

The season’s only report of *Fulvous Whistling-Duck* was that of 4 adult birds on a drained minnow pond near Jerome, *Chicot* 17 Aug (K&LN).

An uncommon to rare migrant anywhere else in the state, *Eared Grebe* is annual at the Boyd Point Wastewater Treatment Facility in Pine Bluff, *Jefferson* and often in good numbers, as evidenced by the 20 counted 27 Sep (John Redman).

Wood Stork, an uncommon fall visitor, was reported from four locations: 150 near Arkansas City, *Desha* 10 Aug, 150 near Chicot Junction, *Chicot* 10 Aug, 50 at Grand Lake, *Chicot* 3 Aug and 50 were also at Wilmot, *Ashley* 24 Aug (all K&LN).

Rare but increasing, single adult *Neotropic Cormorants* were reported from Lake Dardanelle, *Yell* 26 Aug and near Portland, *Chicot* 6 Sep (both K&LN).

Tricolored Heron is a rare fall visitor. Two immatures were photographed near Wilmot, *Ashley* 24 Aug while a single immature was reported from Grand Lake, *Chicot* 17 Aug (both K&LN).

An immature *Black-crowned Night-Heron* photographed in northern *Poinsett* 21 Nov (Ron & Linda Howard) was considered late and possibly a county first.

The 200 immature *White Ibis* observed near Chicot Junction, *Chicot* 10 Aug (K&LN) was a good count for the Southeast.

**Glossy Ibis** is easily considered the rarest of the 3 ibis species in the state. Nonetheless, there were four reports, all from *Chicot*, with the 10 seen near Jerome 6 Sep (K&LN) the highest count.

**White-faced Ibis** are considered rare in any season. In the Northeast, singles were photographed at *Poinsett* 2 Nov and Mallard Lake, *Mississippi* 30 Sep (both R&LH). In the Southeast, 52 were counted at Grand Lake, *Chicot* 3 Aug while 53 also were noted near Jerome, *Chicot* 11 Aug (both K&LN).

Possibly the highest count ever for the state, 400 *Plegadis species ibis* were tallied near Jerome, *Chicot* 6 Sep (K&LN). Twelve were also noted at Bald Knob NWR, *White* 26 Oct (K&LN, Terry Butler).

There were 11 reports of *Roseate Spoonbill*, a rare fall visitor. Most notable were the 65 counted near Chicot Junction, *Chicot* 10 Aug (K&LN). Of these, 8 were thought to be in adult plumage.

An immature *Swallow-tailed Kite* photographed soaring over the highway at Chicot Junction, *Chicot* 17 Aug (K&LN) was the only report of this species.

Uncommon to rare during fall migration, 5 *Swainson’s Hawks* were observed soaring over Dardanelle, *Yell* 1 Sep (K&LN).

Very rare and most likely a returnee from the previous winter, a single adult *Ferruginous Hawk* was photographed near Cash, *Craighead* 11 Nov (K&LN).

Very rarely seen in migration, a single *Yellow Rail*, flushed by a combine, was observed near Amagon, *Jackson* 26 Oct (KN).

By far, the highest number ever recorded in the state, 1,000 *Black-necked Stilts* were counted in western *Chicot* 17 Aug (K&LN).

Also a new high for the state, 69 *American Avocets* were tallied near Jerome, *Chicot* 14 Sep (K&LN).

**Piping Plover** is a rare fall migrant. Two adults were observed at Saul’s Fish Farms, *Prairie* 27 Aug while a single juvenile was at the same location 11 Sep. A leg-banded immature (later determined to have been banded as a chick in 2013 at Lake Sakakawea, ND) was noted near Jerome, *Chicot* 11 Aug while another un-banded...
adult was at this location on 17 Aug (all K&LN).

**Sanderling** is a very uncommon and local fall migrant. Two in adult plumage were at Saul's Fish Farms, Prairie 20 Aug while singles were at Treadway's Minnow Farms, Prairie 4 Aug and near Jerome, Chicot 31 Aug. Additionally, 2 immature plumaged birds were at Saul's 18 Sep (all K&LN).

**Marbled Godwit** is a rare but annual fall migrant. Singles were noted from Saul's Fish Farms, Prairie 20 Sep (K&LN, Michael Linz) and Bald Knob NWR, White 18 Aug, while the exceptional count of 5 was made near Jerome, Chicot 31 Aug (both K&LN).

Considered a rare fall migrant, single adult **Ruddy Turnstones** were reported from Treadway's Minnow Farms, Prairie 4 Aug and Chicot Junction, Chicot 10 Aug (both K&LN).

Very rare in fall, a single **Red-necked Phalarope** was reported from Jerome, Chicot 24 Aug (K&LN).

Very rare and perhaps the eleventh occurrence for the state, a **Red Phalarope** was recorded on Lake Dardanelle, Yell 2 Nov (KN).

Rare and local but regular during fall migration, 2 juvenile **Sabine's Gulls**, in the company of a single juvenile plumaged **Laughing Gull**, were observed on Lake Dardanelle, Yell 19 Oct (all K&LN).

About the eighth Arkansas occurrence, an adult **California Gull** was observed on Lake Dardanelle, Yell 20 Sep (K&LN).

A rare and local winter resident, 2 adult **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were recorded on Lake Dardanelle, Yell 29 Nov (K&LN).

An amazing 500 **Least Terns** were counted near Jerome, Chicot 31 Aug (K&LN).

A **White-winged Dove** seen near the south end of Grand Lake, Chicot 3 Aug (K&LN) would be a county first. This species is very rare in eastern AR.

Marking the eleventh occurrence for the state, a female **Black-chinned Hummingbird** was photographed in Pine Bluff, Jefferson 18 Nov (Delos McCauley).

**Rufous Hummingbird**, a rare fall migrant, was well represented with four reports. Adult males were identified in Russellville, Pope 8 Aug (Leslie Conditt), Little Rock, Pulaski 16 Aug (Carol Meyerdirk, Donna Haynes, Becky Harrah), Greenbriar, Faulkner 19 Aug (DH, Peggy & Hugh Thompson) and Cherokee Village, Sharp 11 Oct (Rita Kenney).

Rare and seldom heard, a calling **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** was noted at Dardanelle, Yell 29 Aug (K&LN).

Rare and nearly annual, **Vermilion Flycatchers** were reported from Flippin, Baxter 4 Oct (Garry Ash) and DeWitt, Arkansas 14 Oct (Tim Tyler).

A calling **Bell's Vireo** at Two Rivers Park, Pulaski 22 Sep (Jim Dixon, Lenore Gifford, Adam Haynes, DH) was late.

Rare and possibly overlooked, **Cave Swallows** were reported from Chicot Junction, Chicot 10 Aug and Treadway's Minnow Farms, Prairie 2 Oct (both K&LN). Additionally, there was a report of 2 birds from First Old River Lake, Miller 4 Oct (Charles Mills, Michael Linz).

A **Mourning Warbler** seen at Two Rivers Park, Pulaski 6 Oct (JD) marks the latest sighting for the AAS files.

A pair of **Cerulean Warblers** at Craighead Forest Park, Craighead 22 Sep (Than & Emily Boves) were considered very late.

Three **Palm Warblers** identified at Bald Knob NWR, White 26 Oct (K&LN) were noteworthy.

Possibly the highest ever fall count for anywhere in the state, an amazing 11 **Clay-colored Sparrows** were counted at Woolsey Wet Prairie, Washington 25 Oct (MP).

**Nelson's Sparrow** is considered a rare fall migrant. Two birds were seen and photographed at Baker Prairie, Boone 29 Sep (Cindy Franklin, Dan & Samantha Scheiman), while singles were reported from Frog Bayou, Crawford 19 & 22 (K&LN, MP respectively).

A bird believed to be a hybrid between **White-throated Sparrow** and **Dark-eyed Junco** was photographed at Dardanelle, Yell 24 Oct (K&LN).

Rare away from the western counties, a first-winter **Harris's Sparrow** was reported from Central Arkansas Water Grass Farm, Pulaski 18 Nov (DS).

A very tardy female **Scarlet Tanager** was described from Ninestone Land Trust, Carroll 12 Nov (Judith Ann Griffith).

Rarely reported in the fall, 2 **Bobolinks** were seen along the edge of a rice field, east of England, Lonoke 17 Aug (K&LN).
Cache-Lower White Rivers IBA: The Big Woods is Getting Bigger

By DAN SCHEIMAN, Ph.D.
Bird Conservation Director, Audubon Arkansas

As iconic of Arkansas as the Buffalo National River, the rivers, sloughs, and bottomlands of the Cache-Lower White Rivers Important Bird Area (IBA) are a destination for birders, hunters, and anglers from across the country. The region is a treasure to be protected and promoted.

Site Description
This global IBA is also a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Its 241,000 acres includes two national wildlife refuges (Dale Bumpers White River and Cache River) and three wildlife management areas (Rex Hancock Black Swamp, Sheffield Nelson Dagmar, and Trusten Holder). At least half the area floods annually in late winter and spring. Historically most of the land was covered by bottomland hardwood forest, and it still contains the largest continuous expanse of this habitat remaining in the Lower Mississippi River Valley. Depending on flood regime, trees include bald cypress, tupelo, various oaks, sugarberry, honey locust, pecan, and water hickory. Many of the cleared areas are currently being reforested. Rivers, oxbows, sloughs, swamps, and beaver ponds are found throughout.

Ornithological Summary
Though the “Big Woods” became famous for sightings of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, the site was already designated as an IBA because it supports a variety of birds of conservation concern. This is the most likely area to support the return of the Swallow-tailed Kite to Arkansas; since 2002, a pair has nested nearly annually in Dale Bumpers White River NWR, the first attempts in over 100 years. This is the most important wintering area for Mallards in North America. Bald Eagles, Mississippi Kites, and Red-tailed, Red-shouldered, and Broad-winged Hawks migrate through and nest in the woods. It is a stronghold for wintering Wood Ducks and Rusty
Blackbirds. Hundreds of post-breeding Wood Storks visit every year. A variety of migratory songbirds breed here in good numbers, including Wood Thrush, Prothonotary Warbler, Hooded Warbler, and Swainson’s Warbler.

Conservation Issues
Despite the large area of bottomland hardwood forest, research by Arkansas State University (with support from the AAS Trust) on Swallow-tailed Kites, Mississippi Kites, Swainson’s Warblers, and other passerines shows that nest predation and cowbird parasitism are still high and hamper nest success. The quantity and quality of habitat continues to increase, however, through a variety of conservation efforts. The US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), Arkansas Game & Fish Commission, Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Ducks Unlimited, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are planting trees, managing forests, and restoring wetlands and prairies on public and private lands. Cache River NWR recently expanded its acquisition boundary by over 101,000 acres and currently has an active land acquisition program in progress. The US Army Corps of Engineers, in partnership with TNC, the City of Clarendon, USFWS, and others (including AAS and Audubon Arkansas) are undertaking a historic effort to restore seven miles of the Cache River that were channelized in the 1970s. Phase I of the project, redirecting the river back into 4.6 miles of meanders, is nearly done. Benefits of restoration include: improved habitat for fish, mussels, and birds; better growing conditions for bottomland forests and wetlands; and revitalization of the land for hunters, anglers, and birders. The partners are currently seeking funding for Phase II, which will complete restoration for the entire altered channel.

New Arkansas Audubon Society Members
- Ruth Garibay, Hot Springs
- Donna Haynes, Little Rock
- Nadine Woodard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- Randelin Burnett, Brookland
- Catherine Christie, Damascus
- Bari Nahas, North Little Rock

New Life Member
Leif Anderson #177

Donation to General Fund
Jeff, Mary, & Whit Hyde

Donation to AAS in Memory of Joyce Jones
Bob & Beverly Sullenger
Ecology Camp Donations
(Feb 18 - May 15, 2014)

Fall Appeal
Susan McNutt

Donations by Individuals
Susan & Jeffrey Hoeper
Christine & Ronald Cash

Scholarship & Tuition Assistance
Audubon Society of Central Arkansas
Cheryl & Norman Lavers
John & Donna Simpson
Audubon Society of No. Central Arkansas
Three Rivers Audubon Society
Foothills Plant Society
Garland County Audubon Society

Memorials & Honoraria
Claire Shaw for 50th anniversary of Mr. & Mrs. Robert Marshall

Camp Continues to Link Kids with Nature

By BARRY HAAS, Ecology Camp Treasurer

As this is being written in mid-May we are busy recruiting a total of 100 first-year campers, 50 for each session of the Halberg Ecology Camp. Invited back are twelve 2nd year campers for each session giving us a total capacity of 62 total campers each session. Add to that about 23 co-directors, instructors, nurse, activity director, kitchen staff, etc. and you have roughly 85 people who will be at Camp Clearfork for each camp session.

By the time you read this in mid-June we will already be midway through our two camp sessions, which begin on Sunday, June 8 and Sunday, June 15. Camp Clearfork is a busy place during those two weeks. Following camp each year we get a number of e-mails and notes from camper families thanking the Arkansas Audubon Society for offering this rich learning experience for their children. It takes a lot of people working throughout the year to ensure the camp sessions run smoothly.

We are fortunate to have so many generous financial supporters who know their donations support this exceptional opportunity to educate youth about the complex natural world that surrounds us. Those campers will grow up and as adults will be tasked with protecting the environment for future generations, just like us. They need an understanding of nature to protect it.

We have former campers who are now on staff as instructors. And we have former campers who are contributing to AAS's continued success. One example is Mitchell Pruitt who organized a calendar fundraiser last year with the proceeds used to bring former campers to AAS meetings. That fund had been depleted in recent years. The mixture of youth and adults at meetings is a sight to behold and an experience to relish.

Donations to the Halberg Ecology Camp are always welcome. They are acknowledged in writing by letter or e-mail and are fully tax deductible. Checks should be made payable “AAS Halberg Ecology Camp” or “Arkansas Audubon Society” and mailed to 804 Konrad Court, Little Rock, AR 72223-9201.
Your Trust at Work: AAS Trust Report

By DAN SCHEIMAN, Chair, AAS Trust

The Trust gives grants to research, conservation, and education projects. Trustees have the challenging but rewarding task of reviewing proposals. Thanks to your generous support, your Trust awarded grants to four applicants from the Spring 2014 round of proposals.

• Auriel Fournier (Ph.D., University of Arkansas at Fayetteville) received $1,200 for her project “Migratory stopover timing, survival and habitat use of fall migrating Sora in managed wetlands in Missouri.”

• John Herbert (M.S., University of Arkansas at Fayetteville), received $300 for “The role of surface water and food availability on the abundance and distribution of wintering waterfowl in the Arkansas Mississippi Alluvial Valley.”

• Joshua Hines (B.S. soon to be M.S., University of Central Arkansas) received $400 to get a headstart on his graduate project “Avian species and feral hog range surveys in the Camp Robinson Military Training Complex.”

• Mitchell Pruitt (B.S., University of Arkansas at Fayetteville) received $460 for his honors thesis investigating the “Possible occurrence of Northern Saw-whet Owls in winter in northwestern Arkansas.”

That’s $2,360 in grants. The Max Parker and Doug James Awards were not given this round. See the announcement on page 2 for the new 90-for-90 Fundraiser for the Trust launched at the Spring AAS convention.
100! Are You Ready For Numbers?

By ALLAN MUELLER
Immediate AAS Past President

The day started with a guided hike to see what was supposed to be my 100th bird in Hawai’i, the O’ahu ‘Elepaio. I thought it would be cool for my final sighting to be a native Hawaiian forest bird, but after four hours, I only heard it. Not good enough.

My guide put me on to a White-faced Ibis staked-out in a refuge out across Honolulu. The White-faced Ibis is an accidental species in Hawaii and, though it is not as classy as the O’ahu ‘Elepaio, it sounded like my best shot. So in the afternoon of the same day I took a drive out to the 37-acre Honouliuli Unit of Pearl Harbor National Wildlife Refuge.

The directions to the refuge led me to park on a residential cul-de-sac and walk to the locked refuge gate, then walk in the weeds and mud outside the refuge fence for a while, looking for a makeshift vantage point likely constructed by somebody else coming to see this very same bird. It is sad that our national wildlife refuges are so poorly funded that the managers are forced to reduce public access and use their limited budget to concentrate on their primary mission of wildlife management. I agree with that choice, it’s just a choice that they should not be forced to make.

Soon enough I found the spot and began the “finishing” search.

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It is not unusual for people to set irrational goals. To aim at something that has no good reason to be aimed at. It just feels good to go there. For instance, President John Kennedy set a goal for the United States to send a man to the moon and return him safely before the end of the 1960s. Now, going to the moon is an excellent goal that benefits the U.S. and all of humanity in ways we do not yet understand, and it points to the future direction of mankind, but doing it before the end of the 1960s was irrational. I can see no good reason to set that deadline, unless it had some obtuse Cold War implications. But once the president publically set that goal, the U.S. worked hard to meet it. Making that goal-setting speech was the equivalent of writing down that goal, and research shows that if you write down your goal you have a 90 percent better chance of achieving it than an unwritten goal (Okay, I made up that number, but the research does show that a written goal is a strong incentive).

Sometime in the 1980s (the actual date is lost to history) I decided to set the irrational goal of seeing 100 species of birds in each state and the District of Columbia. 100 is a good number to aim for only because the base 10 number system adds another digit at that point. It certainly has no biological significance. The American Birding Association (ABA) annually publishes a list of who saw the most species in each state. To be eligible to submit your number you must have seen at least ½ of the officially documented species for that state. Thus, many birders have adopted the ½ as the appropriate goal for each state. I do not know if the ABA established that ½ standard before or after I set my 100 goal, but I was not aware of it when I picked 100. If I had known about the ½ I may have set that as my target for each state, but by time I learned of the ½ I was already mentally set on 100 and was too stubborn to change.

As with all birding lists, ethics eventually becomes an issue. What counts and what does not? If I have seen a species, every time I heard it later counts. So I may not have seen a Wood Thrush in Tennessee, but if I hear one, it goes on the Tennessee list. Recently in Hawai’i a little different issue came up. A guide took me to a Pacific Ocean cliff where Red-tailed Tropicbirds nest. Most of the nests were hidden in rock crevices, but one was in the open, almost. Using a scope I could see the back half of the bird, including the red streamers that give the bird its name, while its head and neck were concealed in the cliff. Does that count? Yes, for not only a new Hawai’i bird, but also a lifer to complete all the tropicbirds. My list, my rules – after all if you cheat, who are you cheating?

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Seeing a lot of birds in different places means going to different places, which isn’t easy. I had a job. I had a family. The only way to do it is to take advantage of every chance. Almost all of our family vacations
were aimed at the state lists, as in “Wow, the Grand Canyon is beautiful—was that a Grace’s Warbler?” (I often tested the patience of my family). When vacations weren’t enough, business trips to needed states were opportunistically extended for one or more days to chase unseen birds. Upon retirement the chase became more serious. My wife and I took a 15-day trip to five New England states with a tight schedule of three days per state and succeeded in completing all states. Targeted trips were also made to Idaho, Ohio, Indiana, Hawaii, and others.

Kathleen, my wife, was with me on most of the trips, but many other birders traveled with me or acted as my guide. In North Dakota, I learned of a good Baird’s Sparrow spot on a Nature Conservancy property and stopped by the office to chat. The staff seemed reluctant to let me on the property until I informed them of my Nature Conservancy membership. The next morning I wore my Nature Conservancy hat, and they graciously led me right to the Baird’s. I was even able to identify a singing Sora for them in one of their potholes. In Colorado, I persuaded a local birder to take me on a two-mile hike to see a Northern Pygmy-Owl. After we encountered several mountain bikers on the trail, my guide became rather perturbed, and I received an extended lecture on the evils of bicycles on trails. Nevertheless, he maintained focus enough to get me to the owl. Also in Colorado on the way to the Gunnison’s Sage-Grouse, we spent a night in a cheap motel where we got locked inside the room. It took about 30 minutes to get us out, but the owner kindly gave us the room at no charge, despite his wife’s objections. Birders, and others, seem to always be ready to help a visitor, an essential ingredient of success.

The things of a lister were all part of the quest—many trips to sewer ponds, dumps, mountain tops, deserts, pelagic trips on all coasts, long drives to south Texas and south Arizona, stumbling around in the dark of a strange place, and the classic chaser/lister experience—the long, frantic, spur-of-the-moment drive to a staked-out bird followed by a long wait for it to show up.

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After the second scan through my scope, there was still no White-faced Ibis. I thought about packing up and trying out some other leads I had, but they were tenuous and I was losing daylight. It had to be the ibis.

I wished I could get into the refuge for another viewpoint. I wished I could be closer. But the limitations of circumstance, put me on the outside looking in.

I looked into the scope one more time.

There it was, so close it was hidden behind a stand of cattails and only appeared through the waving gaps in the greenery. That lost White-faced Ibis was the magic bird—the 100th species in the 50th state.

It felt good to meet this long written-down goal and prompted me to look back on why I did this. Yes, I like birding and it is fun to chase a goal that is difficult and also achievable (I certainly did not want a goal I would had no chance of reaching), but somehow that is not enough of a reason. There is no prize, and any recognition is fleeting (as is true of all recognition), so I don’t really know why, but I would do it again.

Hawaii was the last and one of the hardest states. The state list is small, with 237 the most reported seen by any birder on the American Birding Association website, and many of the birds are in hard-to-get-to locations (rainy mountain tops, distant islands). We made two trips, 9 days and 17 days, to four islands: Hawai‘i, O‘ahu, Maui, and Kaua‘I, to reach 102. I figured Vermont to be even harder because it is small and has no coast, but we did it on the “three days for each state” New England blitz. South Dakota comes the closest to the minimum with 101. Both the Dakotas were done on one wet spring trip when all the prairie potholes were full of water, and the national wildlife refuges provided very good birding. The District of Columbia was also tough because it is small, ultra-urban, and filled with cars on every road, but a peak spring-time trip did the trick to reach 104. Texas finished on top at 453 species, with Arkansas a distant second at 307. My list for the United States is 765, and my total tics (one bird in a state is a tic, the same bird in another state is another tic) for the country is 8,424.

In the end, they’re all just numbers, which is fine. I’m happy with them.

The Ibis never saw me. It never knew it was the 100th bird in the 50th state. I’m sure it wouldn’t have cared. It has its own goals and its own limits to worry about.
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