

The newsletter of the Baltimore Bird Club

December 2004/January 2005 -- Online Edition

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Deadline for next *CHIP NOTES*: December 26, 2004 (the next issue will be February/March 2005). If possible, please email material to guineabird@aol.com

Otherwise, Send material to:

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Please help *CHIP NOTES* get out on time.

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Conservation Corner

Lake Roland Rezoned and Reopened

By Carol Schreter

Baltimore County Council voted to rezone Lake Roland from DR-1 (residential, one house per acre) to RC-7 (rural conservation, one house per 25 acres) on August 31, 2004.

This occurred because the bridge below the dam needs repair. The City, which owns Lake Roland, lacked sufficient funds. So Baltimore County agreed to share the \$800,000 cost of bridge repair, and then rezoned the property to protect its investment.

This is a BIG WIN for BBC! We have sought this zoning change for years. We feared that Baltimore City, in need of cash, might sell parts of Lake Roland because it is located in the County. Three times during the past five years (in October 1999, September 2001 and May 2004) we wrote all County Council people requesting a zoning change. In March 2004 our Board meeting was postponed so that BBC could attend and speak out at a County zoning hearing.

Bridge Repairs Postponed

As the annual program booklet shows, BBC moved our Tuesday morning migration walks to Cyburn this year because Lake Roland bridge repairs were to start by October 2004, and the park would be closed. However, the park has re-opened and will stay open for at least a year, according to Mr. Connie Brown, Chief of Parks for the Baltimore City Dept. of Recreation and Parks. He says that when the County had its money ready, the City did not. Now the situation is reversed and "the whole package is being renegotiated." Mr. Brown is confident that Robert E. Lee Park (i.e., Lake Roland) will be open during the Spring of 2005.

Spring Migration Walks at Lake Roland Resumed

So, BBC will resume our Tuesday morning Spring Migration Walks at Lake Roland, where they have occurred since 1945. Even better, the Light Rail crossing will be open!

In a "Robert E. Lee Park Concept Plan" distributed by Recreation & Parks in November 2003, we first learned that the Light Rail crossing would be closed, permanently. At public hearings with Recreation & Parks in January, March and May, 2004, BBC challenged the proposed closure, which would make the bulk of the park inaccessible. We asked for documentation showing that MTA was requesting this. It seems that John Newton, Office of Planning for MTA, which controls the light rail line, agreed with our position. He told Recreation and Parks that MTA has no problem with this crossing. So the City has backed-off, for now.

Next Steps for BBC

- Lobby for a revised "Robert E. Lee Park Concept Plan" from the Baltimore City Dept. of Recreation and Parks, showing that they no longer intend to close off the Light Rail crossing. What remains on paper, remains a risk.
- Help Mr. Connie Brown, Chief of Parks for the Baltimore City Dept of Recreation & Parks understand how birdwatchers use Robert E. Lee Park. If he understood birdwatching better, he could plan with our needs in mind.

BBC members are invited to write Mr. Connie Brown, and tell him how you use Lake Roland (or Robert E. Lee Park), and how he could help us. Really, even 6 or 7 letters would be helpful! Write to him at:

Mr. Connie Brown,
Assoc. Dir. of Parks
Baltimore City Dept. of Recreation & Parks
2600 Madison Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21217

(410) 396-7931.

connie.brown@baltimorecity.gov

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Board of Directors Meetings

By Carol Schreter, Recording Secretary

The Board met on September 14 and October 12, 2004. An ad hoc group met on July 22 to review results from BBC's Spring 2004 Membership Survey.

Nine attended the July Ad Hoc meeting. Of the 71 responses to our Membership Survey, only 4 or 6% stated that dues were too high. But a small vocal group of active members insists that we lower BBC dues. So the Ad Hoc group recommended and the Board is discussing:

1. Reducing BBC dues by \$5-\$10 next year to make our dues in line with other MOS chapters;
2. Restructuring expenditures for 2005-6 guided by results of the Spring membership survey;
3. Streamlining our structure (By-laws and Manual of Operations) based on review of other MOS club processes; and
4. Determining how new members find out about the club.

Other News:

Robert Dwight, who used to host BBC club trips at Gibson Island, gave \$20,000 to the Cyburn Arboretum Association (CAA), earmarked for moving BBC's Bird Museum into the Carriage House. CAA is trying to raise \$400,000 over the next three years to renovate Cyburn's Carriage House.

In honor of Cyburn's 50th Anniversary Celebration, and to assist with the CAA fundraising, the BBC Board voted to give CAA a gift of \$5,000 from the Museum Self-Insurance Fund.

Lake Roland was re-zoned on August 31, 2004 from DR-1, one house per acre, to RC-7, one house per 25 acres. This is a big win for BBC, an issue we have dogged for years! (See related Conservation Corner article "Lake Roland Rezoned and Reopened" for more details.)

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130,000 Broadwings

By Steve Sanford

A highlight of September birding is the big push of migrating Broad-winged Hawks that comes through about the 20th. You may recall how we had about 1000 Broadwings over Cyburn on two Sunday walks in the last 5 years. It crossed my mind that one of the best sites in the nation for seeing Broadwing migration is Lake Erie Metropark south of Detroit. And, of course, our good BBC birding buddy, Cathy Carroll, just happens to have moved out there last July. Why not combine a visit with some potentially great hawk-watching?

So I got in touch with Cathy and on September 16 Gail Frantz and I set off for Detroit. It appeared a front would be coming through by the 17th, setting up good conditions for a migration push, especially since there had been a long period of stagnant weather and few hawks. The only complication was that Hurricane Ivan was on its way north. However, it appeared it would go well east of Detroit.

On the 17th Cathy, Gail, and I went to the hawkwatch. It was cold with strong north winds, which was good, but quite cloudy from the edges of Ivan, which was ominous. A few blocks before we got there, we were delighted by a mass of warblers -- 11 species -- in a hedgerow. Despite the clouds there were indeed a lot of Broadwings. Bunches of 50, 100 or more hawks would stream in over the edge of Lake Erie and then form kettles above us. We were quite pleased. The official count of Broadwings for the day was 3715.

September 18 was very sunny and warmer with moderate northwinds. It was also the first day of a hawk festival and a Saturday so there were lots of people. We arrived around 9:00 and masses of Broadwings were already coming. And they came, and came all day long. Usually they would stream in from the northeast over the edge of Lake Erie, then form enormous swirling kettles of hundreds, if not thousands of birds over our heads. Some of the birds were little more than specks, but often they were reasonably close. In contrast to the day before, it was easy to see the markings of the closer birds.

We enjoyed the spectacle until about 4:00 PM. The official total of Broadwings for the day was 131,126! Of these, we personally saw 101,126 -- give or take 30,000. Interestingly, in the next two weeks daily totals averaged only about 20 Broadwings except for October 3 when there were 42,312. In other words, we hit the jackpot.

So, there's more to the Detroit area than auto plants and urban congestion! When we weren't hawk-watching, Cathy showed us various other good birding areas. We had a total of 15 warbler species for our 4-day visit. The whole area has a good mix of fields, woods, and freshwater marshland.

For more information about the hawk-watch, see <http://www.smrr.net/index.shtml>.

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Letter from Cathy Carroll

Editor's Note: Cathy was very active for the last few years in the Baltimore Bird Club. She moved to the Detroit area this summer.

You'll read Steve Sanford's account of his and Gail Frantz's September trip to Michigan for the Lake Erie Metropark hawkwatch for Broadwings in this issue. Gosh, it was wonderful to see them both again and we had so much fun - bird, bird, bird, the whole weekend. When they left I went into withdrawal and it was a reminder of how much I miss the BBC and my Maryland birding friends.

So, on the heels of their visit, I took a solo trip to Michigan's Upper Peninsula for a live visit to Whitefish Point Bird Observatory to shake off my doldrums. I arrived Monday evening, September 27th and did little more than settle into a motel after the long drive. Tuesday morning I arrived at WPBO at 7:00am and the first bird I saw was a Cape May Warbler. I saw four Cape May's for the day. I spent the entire day at WPBO and saw many great birds. It's hard to know what to think when Red-breasted Nuthatches are literally everywhere, but there are no White-breasted Nuthatches. Other contrasts include Purple Finches but no House Finches and Pine Siskins but no American Goldfinches. I spent time at the waterfowl count and began the arduous process of learning to identify distant waterfowl on the wing from Karl Barden and Chris Neri, the official counters for the WPBO. Here I also saw birds flying in off Lake Superior that included Lapland Longspur, American Pipit, Horned Lark, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk. The most riveting sight after the lake was seeing a Swamp Sparrow attacked by Ring-billed Gulls as it approached the beach. I am happy to report that this little bird made it through to safety and hid in beach grass near the corners' hut.

Tired from a long day of birding I thought I would relax after dinner with an easy trip to nearby Lower Tahquamenon Falls about ten miles south of Paradise, Michigan where I was staying. One of the wonderful things I experienced at the time of my visit was that it was almost free of other visitors so the roads were often open for long stretches. About five miles south of the Paradise fish restaurant on M-123, I drove by a large, black bird partially hidden in the grass and pecking in the gravel at the roadside. They wait a minute! A quick glance in the rearview mirror revealed an empty road. I reversed the car in the road. The bird still had not flown and I drove very carefully. Then, calmly pecking in the gravel, was a beautiful male Spruce Grouse that even my dirty windshield could not diminish. Thankfully, the road continued to be free of traffic and I watched the bird for several minutes before deciding to drive on and leave it alone. As I slowly drove forward, the bird flew up to a nearby tree with tail spread and orange tail tips clearly seen. Blissful, dumb, beginner's luck for my life Spruce Grouse. Earlier in the day I had been up and down Vermilion Road where they are often found and had had no luck.

A Black-billed Woodpecker had been seen at the Point on Tuesday, and again on Wednesday morning near the hawkwatch tower. I was at the waterfowl count when I heard this and went off to search for it. On a path just off the boardwalk to the hawk tower, I met up with Chris Neri, WPBO staff member, out doing his daily survey. I told him about the Black-backed Woodpecker having been seen again and Chris offered to help me find it. For the next hour we hiked a large area and were encouraged by a couple of hopeful sounds. Occasionally, we stopped to eat handfuls of wild blueberries which were at their peak and were irresistible. Finally, Chris heard the call close by and we found the bird, a male, about 20 feet up shredding the bark on the tree. We caught it for several minutes and got good views as it silled around the tree with its yellow forehead patch brilliantly illuminated in the sun. When the bird flew off, it gave a couple of calls that I hope I will remember.

I left WPBO around 2pm on Wednesday to go to Hulbert's Bog for Gray Jay and Boreal Chickadee. Again, on M-123, about 12-15 miles south of Paradise, a bird flew up from the roadside showing plain, uniform gray back and top of wings and spread tail with white wing tips. Gray Jay, I could not stop to chase this bird because there was a large truck behind me. At Hulbert's Bog, (the dogleg road along the M-28), I only found two American Pipits walking in the dirt road. These birds are fun to watch with their exaggerated Cattle Egret imitation walk. No Gray Jays or Boreal Chickadees. Because I did not see the head or front of the roadside Gray Jay I did not count it on my life list. I did, however, take the liberty to count it on my trip list.

An Invitation ...

I so enjoyed this trip that on my six hour drive back to Detroit I thought up scenarios of how I could organize a spring time BBC trip to the Midwest that would include Point Pelee, the Kirtland's Warbler and end up in the Upper Peninsula at Whitefish Point. Take a look at an atlas and locate Paradise, Michigan and Whitefish Point. It's remote! Scenarios are quite basic and the food is unlikely to be memorable, but if anyone is interested in great birding this is a good place. Let me know and I'll work on it.

Miss you all,

Cathy Carroll

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Field Trip Reports

Compiled by Mary Chetelat

Sept 11 - **Turkey Point** - 3 birders from Baltimore and 3 from Cecil got a taste of "Warbler Pandemonium," as trip leader Joel Martin put it. 14 warbler species were listed, including American Redstarts and Black-and-white Warblers in great numbers. Tennessee and Blackburnian Warblers were noted, along with 4 species of vireo, 4 hawk species, and on and on. 68 species total.

Sept 11 - **Hart-Miller** was shorebird heaven. At least 21 species of shorebird, including American Avocet, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalarope, and many sandpiper species and Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs were listed. Six duck species, too. Gene Scarpulla and Mark England had a very good day. Don't we all wish we had been at either place that day, too?

Sept 14 - **Cyburn** - This first reported trip of the "Tuesday Morning" series took place on a cool, overcast morning at Cyburn. Adelaide Rackemann and 7 other birders viewed 28 species. Highlights included Scarlet Tanagers (always a treat) and a female Yellowthroat looking like a male!

Sept 21 - **Cyburn** - Nine birders met at Cyburn and came up with Eastern Towhee, large flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds flying overhead, and a Wood Thrush calling. Leader Debbie Terry informed the group that Lake Roland was open, so in hopes of adding some "watery-environment" birds to the list, they left and were rewarded with an assortment of shorebirds at the "mudflat" area. "Best birds" included "all the shorebirds" - Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted and Semipalmated Sandpipers, and other "peeps" - and great views of a Blue-headed Vireo, 51 species.

September 25 - **Fort McHenry** - On this sunny, mild morning, Jim Peters ledged 2 birders from Manchester, England with a walk around the wetlands and the viewing of 32 species in all. The numerous Common Yellowthroat and Song Sparrow were "lifers" for the British birders. 4 participants.

September 29 - **Hampton** - 5 birders, 4 from Baltimore and 1 from Newfoundland, covered the Hampton grounds, viewing a good variety of migrants and resident birds including Scarlet Tanagers, Cedar Waxwings, Bluebirds, Brown Thrashers, 3 hawk species and 4 woodpecker species. 38 species total.

Oct 5 - **Cyburn & Lake Roland** - Of note: Nashville Warbler. Also, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Thrasher, Great Egret, and waders, waterfowl and shorebirds at Lake Roland. 12 participants, 42 species total.

Oct 11 - **Hart-Miller Island** - 13 people enjoyed the luxury of birding the island by bus on a state-sponsored tour. At one point a parade of close-up, well-lit shorebirds provided an excellent opportunity to study some of their subtle distinctions with the aid of commentary by Gene Scarpulla. Some special species were Eurasian Wigeon, American Golden Plover, Still Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, and Black Tern. Trip arranged by Gail Frantz.

Oct 12 - **Cyburn & Lake Roland** - Of note: Glossy Ibis; also, Swainson's Thrush, 5 species of woodpecker. 5 Sandpipers, 40 species total.

Oct 13 - **Hampton** - "The level of bird activity was so high that it was difficult to know which bird to look at first." Of note: 6 woodpecker species, Blue-headed Vireo, 6 sparrow species, including White-crowned Sparrow. 6 participants, 43 species.

Oct 16 - **Fort McHenry** - Again, Jim Peters provided some Baltimore Birding hospitality to a foreign guest: Christine from Scotland. They got excellent views of all 34 species seen that day, including 4 gull species, 5 sparrow species and a juvenile Cape May Warbler.

Oct 19 - **Cyburn & Lake Roland** - A rainy, cool day. Ruth Culbertson and Paul Noell were the 2 hardy birders who braved the dreary weather. Ruth reported lots of White-throated Sparrow activity at Cyburn and Paul spotted American Black Duck, Wood Duck and a very dark Winter Wren at Lake Roland. 2 participants, 33 species total.

Oct 23 - **Norhampton Furnace Trail** - An immature Red-headed Woodpecker and great viewing of 4 Hermit Thrushes highlighted this walk. 4 participants including leader Joy Wheeler had a "beautiful" day. 34 species total.

Oct 26 - **Cyburn & Lake Roland** - 7 participants, 44 species including a Merlin, Pintail Duck and Wood Duck, and "3 Pileated Woodpeckers at one time".

Cyburn Sundays

By Joseph Lewandowski

Sept 5 - Welcome to the Fall series of walks at Cyburn. With temperatures in the 70's, a warm and sunny day greeted the 15 birders that walked the paths of the Arboretum. The gardens looked great and 27 birds dotted our species list. Some notables included the Baltimore Oriole, Black-throated Green Warbler, Redstart, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Pileated Woodpecker, and Scarlet Tanager. Can't wait till next week.

Sept 12 - While warm, the overcast skies kept many birders indoors. Only five birders walked the grounds and only 17 birds were seen. Notables - none. But we all enjoyed the common birds that graced the skies of Cyburn.

Sept 19 - I was out volunteering at another natural history event this Sunday but I did receive a report that eight birders came out to enjoy the day. Thirty-six species of birds were seen. This included both vultures, Osprey, Brown Thrasher, Black-and White Warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, Nashville Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Black-throated green Warbler, and two species of hawk. Sounded like a great day at the Arboretum.

Sept 26 - returned to Cyburn and another mild, cloudy day greeted the 11 birders. My list however, came up with only 9 species. The Wood Thrush was the only notable bird. Where are the birds!!!

Oct 10 - I was working last weekend, so no report came to me. This week, eight birders braved overcast skies with temperatures in the 50's. Sixteen birds hit the old list. We did get a Western Palm Warbler, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Hairy Woodpecker. Good birds to warm the heart of any birder.

Oct 17 - One lone birder trudged along - solitude and birds, plants and sky, in communion with nature. He saw 24 species, mostly common, with the exception of the Winter Wren and Carolina Wren as being "good looking" birds.

Oct 24 - Yes, this is the last Fall walk at Cyburn and it is a rainy, dreary day. Three birders walked the paths and spotted 19 bird species. We saw many House Sparrows, Robins, Junco, Grackle, and White-throated Sparrows. Canada Geese flew overhead and seemed to be fitting as our departure from the Arboretum for this time of year. I must say that birding was slow, an open, or a respite: only time will tell. Till Spring.

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AN ALASKAN ADVENTURE: PART II

By Jim Peters

On June 20, we caught a plane full of Anchorage for Kotzebue and Nome. The plane's cabin had been reconfigured to accommodate cargo by removing two thirds of the seats. A temporary bulkhead was installed so that twenty passengers could sit together in the tail. The rest of the space was filled with large aluminum containers which held food items, ATVs, medical supplies, etc. Anything you can think of that might be needed by Alaska's northern inhabitants.

Since it was mostly cloudy as we left Anchorage, I anticipated that we might not see much of the terrain. However, as we leveled off around 36,000 feet, the cloud cover began to thin and we had excellent views of the Alaskan range and Mt. Denali in all its snow-covered splendor. We were fortunate to get these outstanding views since this mountain is shrouded in storm clouds for at least 70% of the year.

In a short time, the terrain beneath us changed from mountains spruce to tundra. Braided river courses criss-crossed the open lands above. After two hours of flight, we began our descent into Kotzebue, some 33 miles inside the Arctic circle. No roads or human habitation were visible from the time we passed over the Denali until we arrived in the vicinity of Kotzebue.

As we landed, I observed Greater Scaup and Long-tailed Ducks along with many marshy tundra. Yellow wagtails and Lapland Longspurs flushed up from the grassy areas next to the taxiway as we made our way to the terminal. An hour later we were on our way to Nome.

Nome is a settlement of 3500 people, most of whom are native Inupiat. When planes arrive, most of the towns people come to the terminal to either pick up cargo or greet friends and relatives. We met our host, John Earthman, and immediately set out over the tundra via gravel roads, for the interior of the Seward Peninsula.

John, in addition to his Assistant D.A. duties in Nome, monitors Gyrfalcons, Peregrines, Golden Eagles and other raptors as well as big game animals in the Nome area. He took us to several Gyrfalcon aeries where he and I watched food transfers between the adult male and female. The male does most of the hunting which include ground squirrels and ptarmigan. When he's been successful, he approaches the nest site at an extremely high altitude. The female hears his call and spirals upward to catch the prey as the male drops it to her. She returns to the nest, tears off morsels, then feeds them to the chicks. Only one of the half dozen nests we observed had a pure white male mated with a gray female, the others were all gray.

Later, we found that an aerie of Peregrines in Nome is not faring as well as the Gyrfalcons. The town is building a jetty to protect the harbor and the stone is being quarried from the same cliff on which the Peregrines have chosen to build their nest. John was negotiating with the Army Corps of Engineers to stop all blasting until the young fledged. After I returned home, I received a note from John indicating that the Corps did stop blasting long enough so that the two young Peregrines were able to fledge successfully.

During the time we explored the countryside, we were in a true wilderness. We often traveled 50 to 75 miles into the interior and never saw another human being. I found Wandering Tattler along stream courses, Arctic Warblers in willow shrubs, Rock and Willow Ptarmigan on the tundra. Big game such as moose, musk oxen and caribou wandered within our sight. We carried a high-powered rifle and ammunition with us at all times in case of a run-in with an angry bull or grizzly bear.

I searched, unsuccessfully, for Northern Wheatear along high ridges and rock outcroppings. Golden-crowned Sparrows and Yellow Wagtails were common. Along the beach road between Nome and Safety Sound, we saw Pacific and Red-throated Loons, Common Eider, and Red-breasted Mergansers. Long-tailed Jaegers were everywhere on the tundra and beach. We even saw several Parasitic Jaegers. In the marshes bordering the Bering Sea we found large numbers of Red-necked Phalarope and Semipalmated Sandpipers.

In Nome, Ravens could be found around the waterfront and city dump along with Greater Scaup, Long-tailed Ducks, Glaucous-winged and Mew Gulls and Arctic Terns.

Traveling in Alaska is expensive. The gas for our vehicle in Nome cost \$3.51 per gallon. Our round trip air fares to Nome cost \$500. However, I'm told that "You can't take it with you", so I decided to enjoy it while I'm still here!

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Florida Before Ivan

By Joel Martin

In early July I had the chance to attend a work-related conference in Orlando, Florida. Trips like this are, for now, my only means to visit distant states. So with my wife's blessing I arranged to go two days before the conference for some intensive birding. My efforts were focused on a list of 12 species that I'd missed on an earlier trip and wanted badly to see this time. To avoid the mistakes of previous do-it-yourself tours I contacted many Florida birders for specific advice, and most importantly, researched the fastest driving routes. Luckily I had mostly great weather, and when it was all over I had found 10 of my target birds while putting 800+ miles on the rental car.

I got out of the Orlando airport and on the road around 2 PM on July 11, heading west to Hernando Beach, where the last few wild **Budgerigars** still persist. A flyover **Swallow-tailed Kite** on the way was nice. I arrived around 4 PM and began cruising the residential streets where **Budgies** are often seen. Eventually I heard some raptor-like chattering and found a flock of maybe 20 **Budgerigars** foraging on a brushy roadside. It was a great show. I shot one video and got back on the road before 5 PM, on- and on- one bird. **Black Skimmer** and a couple of **Marbled Godwits**. Crossing the Sunshine Skyway in a thunderstorm was going to be interesting. As I approached the big bridge, a large black bird over the water caught my attention -- **Magnificent Frigatebird**, lifer #2.

The rain continued as I hurried down to Sarasota, where **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** have a summer established. It was still drizzling as I arrived in the waning light, but I managed good looks at the watercaugh of the ducks in flight for life bird #3. A pretty sunset was a fitting end to the day as I headed to Fort Myers for the night.

The next morning started early at Ding Darling NWR. There was a nice, close group of waders along the wildlife drive, including **Reddish Egret** and **Roseate Spoonbill**, but the lack of passerine song in the mangroves was discouraging. I parked at the Red Mangrove Overlook and began walking the road in hopes of at least hearing Black-whiskered Vireo and the mythically elusive Mangrove Cuckoo. A noisy pair of **Gray Kingbirds** became life bird #4, but it was already getting hot and things weren't looking good... until a short burst of "gaw gaw gaw" notes came from the mangroves. This bird was cool! Miraculously, two **Mangrove Cuckoos** (#5) simply materialized in the tree over my head, slipping through the branches like snakes. If I hadn't captured them on video I'd still think it was "dawning. A **White-winged Dove** and **Common Ground-Dove** were pleasant surprises along the drive, and Prairie Warblers sang here and there. But as much as I wanted to keep looking for the BW Vireo, I had to let it go and move on to Cape Coral, a bit behind schedule. Fortunately I had excellent directions and easily found **Burrowing Owl** (#6) and **Monk Parakeet** (#7).

It was with some relief that I left the congested coast and headed east through the prairie region toward Lake Okeechobee. I'd allowed a couple of hours to look for Caracara. Usually when the book says, "drive the roads and you'll find this bird easily" it's the kiss of death, and it was beginning to look that way as I drove through good habitat without success. Then, just outside of Moore Haven, I nearly drove past a large raptor in a dead tree beside the highway. A quick U-ie and I soon had great looks at a posing, preening **Crested Caracara**, lifer #8. This was a pivotal point in the trip, as it freed me for the rest of the day to chase the last two birds on my list. A stop for lunch at the McDonald's in Clewiston produced **Chicken McGrill** and a **Common Myna** (not countable).

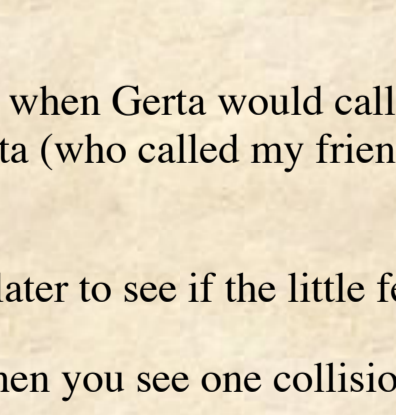
At around 3 PM I left South Bay for Fort Lauderdale, one hour and a whole universe away. The rare **Smooth-billed Ani** had been seen long, but with many recent sightings at the Ft. Lauderdale International Airport it soon seemed tantalizingly close. The first pass along the airport's perimeter road came up empty, so I went back outside the gate where a good view of the road can be had on a foot. One minute there was nothing there, and then a **Smooth-billed Ani** (#9) appeared in the fence, followed by two others. Even better, they flew over to the tress next to me, where I got close-up views (and more video) of two of the birds interacting. It was one of those World-Can-End-November moments. But before Armageddon I still had one more goal for the day and plenty of time left. I'd planned to cruise the US-27 corridor until dark if necessary for **Fulvous Whistling-Duck**, but it didn't take that long. Just below South Bay was a flooded field with some interesting activity going on. Three **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** (#10) were resting and preening in the marshy field edge, in beautiful evening light. I felt like the only person in the world.

The 4-hour drive back to Orlando was uneventful, except for another Caracara hunting on the median. But it gave me lots of time to ponder the last two days. The combination of solitude, exhaustion and euphoria produces a strange kind of clarity. I felt privileged to have seen so much of Florida and its birdlife, but also aware that habitat continues to disappear and that I may never see some of these declining species again. It was also an unforgettable trip, successful beyond my expectations. Now if I can just find a convenience to attend in Tucson ...

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Back Yard Birding and Beyond

By Gail Frantz



Perry Hall

From Georgia McDonald: We had a few warblers drift through our yard the first week of Sept. Best one was a Nashville, new bird for the yard. I also saw some Redstarts, a Scarlet Tanager and a Common Nighthawk. The Nighthawk roosted on a tree branch over our yard for the entire day, even waiting for Dan to come home from work for a view. Took some digiscope photos that came out rather well. It was also fortunate enough to be out in the yard when our nesting House Wrens decided it was fledging day. My previously invisible young were very active at the opening to the box and I remember thinking if they weren't careful, one was going to fall out. Then I realized that the bird on the tree trunk wasn't a parent, but a fledgling who already WAS out. I got some great photos. The little fella inside the hole and entire bodies perched in the hole itself. When they came out, they flew helter-s