

Birding Briefs

Updates on conservation, research, and organizations. . .



Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Trans-Gulf Migration

Recent research indicates that more than half a billion birds fly over the Gulf of Mexico and enter the United States along the Gulf Coast each spring, according to the Louisiana State University News Service. With grants from the Minerals Management Service and matching funds from several major oil companies, ornithologists are studying migration from offshore oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. Bob Russell, a researcher with LSU's Museum of Natural Science, states that the migration is largely invisible to people because the birds fly at altitudes of 2,000 to 5,000 feet, and usually do not stop on the coast. It takes most birds eleven to eighteen hours to cross the roughly

600 miles of the Gulf from Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, where many of them stage before the crossing. Their high flight gives them the advantage of tailwinds, which may boost their flight speeds to nearly fifty miles per hour. Seven full-time observers working offshore have identified 170 species, most of which fly in small, mixed-species flocks of twenty-five to 100 birds. Observers have also discovered that large numbers of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds fly across the Gulf, laying to rest a long-standing debate about whether hummingbirds were capable of flying so far without refueling. Even more surprising, several species of dragonflies have also been identified as trans-Gulf migrants.

Aid for Neotropical Migrants

A new Neotropical migratory bird program, the TransAmerica Migratory Bird Fund (TAMBF), has been launched to help sustain populations of migratory birds in the Western Hemisphere. Under the auspices of the Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation, the program is designed to fund habitat development and research and community awareness projects to protect migrating songbirds and shorebirds, predominantly in their wintering areas. Its primary focus is on key habitats in Mexico and Central and South America. The goal of TAMBF is to produce global benefits through local action, giving local communities an opportunity for economic and ecological benefits, as well as support the needs of migratory birds. To find out more about the program, contact Sharon Rodenbush, International Programs Coordinator, at 306-787-0913.

Kirtland's Comeback

The population of endangered Kirtland's Warblers gained some ground this spring as a record 805 singing males were counted by biologists and volunteers, according to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The count represents the highest total since the first census was conducted in 1951. The previous high was 766 in 1995, and the lowest count was 167 in 1987. The Kirtland's breeds in young stands of jack pines in the northern parts of Michigan's lower peninsula. An intensive program of clearcutting, burning, and replanting of jack pines by state and federal agencies ensures the availability of prime nesting habitat in future years.

