

Southern Great Plains



Joseph A. Grzybowski

715 Elmwood Drive

Norman, Oklahoma 73072

(jgrzybowski@ucok.edu)

W. Ross Silcock

P. O. Box 57

Tabor, Iowa 51653

(silcock@rosssilcock.com)

While the recurrent theme from the 1990s was a wet cycle, we have for a few years now experienced the xeric end of the spectrum. Covering both periods, however, are clear warming trends. Across the Region this season, there were more dry areas than wet, and the general patterns were of ever fewer waterbirds counted and of increasingly early arrivals. Dry conditions may be to blame for the lower numbers of some migratory waterfowl species such as Ring-necked Ducks and Red-head. Species such as Black-necked Stilt, grebes, rails, gallinules, and even some gulls appear to be in lower numbers than in recent memory. At the same time, it seemed like a better-than-average season for exceptional vagrants.

Abbreviations: Cheyenne Bottoms (Cheyenne Bottoms W.M.A., Barton, KS); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith, NE); L. Ogallala (Lake Ogallala, Keith, NE); Quivira (Quivira N.W.R., Stafford,

KS); Red Slough (Red Slough W.M.A., McCurtain, OK).

LOONS THROUGH DUCKS

The last Red-throated Loon noted at L. Tenkiller was 21 Mar (JWA, m. ob.). Two molting Red-throateds were present in Lancaster, NE 10–20 May (LE, JM). Up to 4 Pacific Loons were at L. Tenkiller through 17 Apr, and a Yellow-billed Loon wintering there was last seen 17 Apr (JWA, m. ob.). Perhaps coincidentally, one appeared in *Pottawatomie*, KS 24 Apr (DR et al.).

An Eared Grebe documented in Tulsa, OK 3 Mar (JL, PS) was quite early. Many apparent Mar records of Eared Grebes in the Region may in fact refer to Horned Grebes in the middle of spring molt. Western Grebes were not very widely reported this season; the 3–4 noted at Quivira 11 & 21 May (MT, PJ) were the only ones reported from Oklahoma and Kansas. Two Clark's Grebes were reported from L. Ogallala from early Apr through mid-May (WRS), with up to 2 at Cheyenne Bottoms 3 (MP) & 13 May (MRo et al.) and singles in *Sheridan*, NE 25 Apr (BW, DW) and *Phelps*, NE 27 Apr–6 May (LR, RH, RG).

Surprising was the appearance of a Brown Pelican in Oklahoma City 10–31 May (DWO, MO, m. ob.). Neotropical Cormorants arrived at Red Slough by 1 Apr (DA, BH). Two Neotropics appeared in Kansas, one in *Coffey* 5 Apr (ML) and another at Quivira 26 Apr (WnW). The only Anhinga reported was one documented quite far n. in *Leavenworth*, KS 3 May (RMC, MR, CA).

With drying conditions, some marsh birds become scarce. The only Least Bittern reported was at its range limit in *Keith/Garden*, NE 14 May (WRS, SJD, AB). Early for Nebraska was a Great Egret in *Lancaster* 17 Mar (LE). Two Yellow-crowned Night-Herons wandered n. to *Fillmore*, NE 4 May (JGJ). Becoming more expected but still rare was the Tricolored Heron 26 May at Red Slough (DA). A Cattle Egret 17 Mar in *McCurtain*, OK (DA, MRo) provided an early date for this species. Among a growing collection of records for Glossy Ibis in the Region were birds in *Cimarron*, OK 27 Apr (JWA), *Alfalfa*, OK 13 May (CW), and at Cheyenne Bottoms 14 May (RMC et al.). A handful of extralimital Black Vultures included one in Tulsa 14 & 18 Mar (JF, TM, DWd), 11 in *Garvin*, OK 16 Mar (JS), one in *Cleveland*, OK 16 Mar (JAG et al.), and up to 2 in *Cherokee*, KS 26 Apr–9 May (RM, SP, m. ob.).

Recently invading the se. corner of the Region, 7 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks arrived 24 Apr at Red Slough (DA). Estimates of 1,000,000 Snow Geese in the *Kearney*, NE area (CNK) and "millions" (as it were) flying northeastward over *Wayne*, NE 21 Mar (NP) hinted at the species' tremen-

dous population increases in recent years. Quite exceptional was a **Black Brant** noted at Quivira 29 Mar (SS et al.). Away from w. Nebraska, 2 Trumpeter Swans were identified in Jefferson, KS 13 Mar (PH). Five Tundra Swans were noted at Quivira 8–13 Mar (SS, m. ob.).

Among the record counts of Northern Pintail were the 200,000 in Harlan, NE 9 Mar (LR, RH). While possibly heartening, this may represent a drought-induced concentration (fide WRS). Greater Scaup concentrations appeared lower than in recent years, with the high counts a meager 15 in Coffey, KS 11 Mar (DG, GK). Rather incredibly, the male **Tufted Duck** that has been a fixture at L. Ogallala each winter beginning 1999–2000 was still there as late as 14–16 May (SJD, AB, WRS).

Rather late were one to 3 Common Goldeneyes at L. Ogallala through 16 May (SJD). Among a very small collection of scoters this season were a Surf in Alfalfa, OK 9–16 Apr (AW), 2 Surfs at Quivira 10–19 May (SS, m. ob.), and a White-winged in Johnson, KS 8–15 Mar (GP, m. ob.). Long-tailed Ducks were spotted in Tulsa 1–18 Mar (JWA, JL, m. ob.) and Douglas, KS 8 Apr (GPa). Another record-high count was the “giant raft” of 200,000 Common Mergansers in Harlan, NE 14 Mar (LR, RH). They were certainly not noted farther south.

DIURNAL RAPTORS THOUGH TERNS

Four Northern Goshawks were reported from Nebraska (but with no details; fide WRS). Reports of Merlin seemed lower this season, but the number of Peregrine reports continues to rise, with about 18 reported from Nebraska (fide WRS) and 15 from Kansas (fide LM). A pair of Peregrines was nesting on the Capitol Building in Lincoln, NE (JD, TEL, KP). Others were noted at nest-boxes in Wichita, KS 27 Apr (DV, FV) and Topeka, KS in late Mar (JB). One captured a European Starling on a junk-food restaurant strip in Norman, OK 1 May (JAG).

Quivira continues to host Black Rails (fide LM), and Red and Grassy Sloughs in McCurtain, OK have small numbers of Purple Gallinule (DA). Snowy Plovers took advantage of sand flats at McConaughy to extend their breeding range, with at least one pair laying 3 eggs (16 May; SJD); this represents only the 4th nesting record for Nebraska. Low water may be benefiting Piping Plovers at McConaughy, where 34 were counted 15 May (SJD, AB). However,

migrants were tougher to find, with only 4 singles reported from Nebraska (fide WRS), 3 from Kansas (fide LM), and none from Oklahoma. Among the more difficult-to-interpret records was that of 110 Mountain Plovers in Kimball, NE during May (fide NGP); this high count may represent birds displaced from Pawnee National Grasslands in neighboring Colorado, where “numbers have dropped off dramatically” (fide JGJ).

Black-necked Stilts arriving as early as 24 Mar in Tillman, OK (L&MT) found poor nesting conditions in the drying landscape. A small population of stilts appears to be sustaining itself in Scotts Bluff, NE where up to 6 birds were present (HW, KD, AK).

About 300 American Golden-Plovers were in Muskogee, OK by 7 Mar (JM). Among exceptionally early arrival dates for shorebirds were a Lesser Yellowlegs 14 Mar in Buffalo, NE (CNK) and Spotted Sandpiper in Scotts Bluff, NE 13 Mar (HW). Whimbrels generally appeared in the typical window 13–26 May, with exceptions of one in Stafford, KS 26 Apr (SS, m. ob.) and 14 in Texas, OK 28 Apr (JWA, DWG). Long-billed Curlews were e. to Fillmore, NE 27 Apr (JGJ) and Pawnee, OK 12 May (DM). Ruddy Turnstones appeared 9–30 May, with exceptional counts of 50 at Cheyenne Bottoms 20 May (GP) and 60+ at Quivira 24 May (SS).

Red Knots are quite rare in the Region during spring. Two were noted at McConaughy 15 May (SJD, AB), with 2 at Quivira 24 May (SS). Amazing Regional counts of

man, OK, with 2–15 present there 24 Mar–26 Apr (L&MT) and one at Red Slough 30 Mar–1 Apr (DA, BH). In contrast, 38 were reported during the typical period 5–20 May in Nebraska (fide WRS). Perhaps only weakly, this suggests the potential of birds being from two wintering areas.

Buff-breasted Sandpipers in spring are found along a narrow corridor to the e. of the Region's center. In the Rainwater Basin of se. Nebraska, 777 were found 4–17 May, 343 of these in Seward 10 May (JGJ). The next highest count was still a nice 76 in Tulsa 16 May (JWA). Top that with an attractive 20,000+ Wilson's Phalaropes at Quivira 11 May (MT). Exceptionally early was a Wilson's in Muskogee, OK 15 Mar (JM). Red-necked Phalaropes typically nip the nw. corner of the Region during their May migration, and this season up to 8 were noted s. to Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira (fide LM), with one e. to Washington, KS 14 May (DT).

There was a weaker-than-normal showing of gulls this season. Only 2 Laughing Gulls were reported, from Linn, KS 10 May (CW) and Douglas, KS 11 May (AS). Fewer California Gulls were reported from Nebraska than during the wet cycles of the 1990s, this season including only about 12 birds (fide WRS). A California Gull was noted in Sequoyah, OK 9 Mar (CC). Thayer's Gulls were reported from Harlan, NE 9–14 Mar (up to 3 birds; LR, RH), and Glaucous Gulls were present in Douglas, KS 2 (ad.; AP) & 9

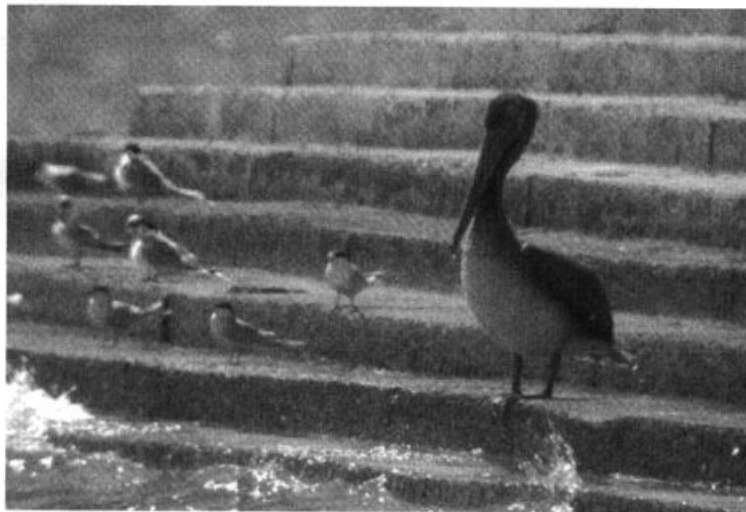
Mar (second-winter bird; DG). The real surprise was an ad. Sabine's Gull 12 May in Kay/Osage, OK (JN).

Among terns was an exceptionally early Caspian Tern 26 (JWA) & 29 Mar (JH) in Wagoner, OK. Ten ad. Common Terns were located at three locations in Nebraska 14–25 May, including 6 at McConaughy 14 May (SJD, WRS, AB). One Common was at Quivira (PJ) and 2 in Comanche, OK (JAG et al.), all 21 May. Single Arctic Terns at Quivira 12 May (CW, MR) and McConaughy 16 (SJD, AB) & 19 May (MB) could represent the same individual. A count of 1500 Black Terns

was grand at L. Ogallala 26 May (LR, RH).

DOVES THROUGH THRASHERS

Reports continue of Eurasian Collared-Doves, White-winged Doves, and Inca Doves. Still rare in Nebraska and Kansas, one White-winged was in Scotts Bluff, NE 15 Apr (KD), with one in Morton, KS 25–27



A Brown Pelican at Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 10–31 (here 11) May 2003 continued the pattern of extralimital appearances in the Southern Great Plains Region and beyond. Photograph by Mitchell Oliphant.

Sanderlings were the 150 at Cheyenne Bottoms 13 May (MRo et al.) and 372+ at McConaughy 15 May (SJD, AB). Perplexing is the apparent bimodal spring pattern of Dunlin appearances; some birds appear in Mar and early Apr, with the more significant and typical peak in mid- to late May. A single Dunlin was documented 8 Mar in Till-

Apr (SP, CH, CG) and 2 in *Finney*, KS 28 Apr (T&SS). Inca Doves were found n. to *Finney*, KS 31 Mar (DB) and *Sedgwick*, KS 12 May (BM).

Early were 4 White-throated Swifts in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 18 Apr (AK) and a Whip-poor-will 2 Apr in *Osage*, OK (BG). A surprise for date and location was a male **Calliope Hummingbird** in *Finney*, KS 4–8 Apr (MOs). But then again, who would have thought that a 2nd **Broad-billed Hummingbird** in a year (although possibly the same bird) would appear in *Roger Mills*, OK 14–16 May (EA, PV, TU). A Rufous Hummingbird was present in *Comanche*, OK 28–29 Apr (KM).

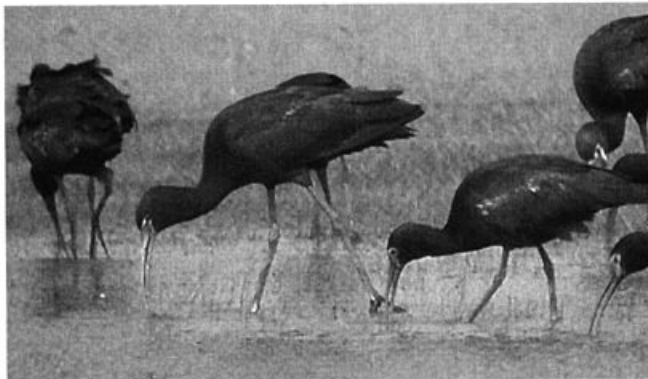
A Lewis's Woodpecker was found in *Buffalo*, NE 11–16 May (LR, RH). Quite far e. for the species were one or 2 female Ladder-backed Woodpeckers in *Riley*, KS 10 Mar (JR) and 8 May (LJ, m. ob.).

This may have been a better-than-average year for *Empidonax* flycatchers, many or most of them Least Flycatchers. But among them were a few less expected migrants, including a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher w. in *Comanche*, OK 19 May (JAG) and an apparent Gray Flycatcher documented in *Cimarron*, OK 20 May (JM, BH). A male Vermilion Flycatcher appeared in *Oklahoma* 18–20 Mar (TN, PV, JAG, TU), with pairs at two locations in *Cimarron*, OK beginning 24 Apr (JWA, DWg, JL, PS, m. ob.).

Northern Shrikes lingered to 15 Mar in *Cimarron*, OK (L&MT) and 25 Mar in *Harlan*, NE (GH, WH). Early was a White-eyed Vireo in *McCurtain*, OK 19 Mar (JAG). Field crews located over 1000 Black-capped Vireo territories in the Wichita Mountains, OK during May (JAG, SW), a testimony to the difference management efforts can make for an Endangered species; however, fewer than 20 pairs may be present in the rest of Oklahoma. Yellow-throated Vireos were noted w. to *Seward*, NE 23 May (JG) and exceptionally to *Cimarron*, OK 7 May (PS, JL). Plumbeous Vireos were found in *Kimball* and *Scotts Bluff*, NE 17 May (SJD). About 12 Philadelphia Vireos were reported from the e. stretches of the Region 5–29 May (fide WRS, JWA).

The winter's jay saga continued into spring. Steller's Jays were present in *Meade*, KS 24 Apr (TF) and *Cimarron*, OK 24–28 Apr (JWA et al.). Western Scrub-Jays remained to at least 24 Apr in *Stevens*, KS (5 birds; SP, CH), and *Morton*, KS 25–26 Apr (3–8 birds; SP, CH, CG). Five Pinyon Jays were in *Keith*, NE through 16 May (CWH),

with 5–12 in *Cheyenne*, KS 10 Mar (HA). Early swallow arrivals included state record or near-record dates for Tree Swallow in *Lancaster*, NE 18 Mar (MU), Northern Rough-winged Swallow in *Harlan*, NE 1 Apr (GH),



Also increasing in the Southern Great Plains Region are records for Glossy Ibis. This bird (left center) was found near Salt Plains N.W.R. in Alfalfa County, Oklahoma 13 May 2003. Photograph by Christopher L. Wood.

WH), and Barn Swallow at *Buffalo*, NE 18 Mar (MM).

A Mountain Chickadee wintering in *Keith*, NE was last seen 12 Apr (CWH). Easterly was a Townsend's Solitaire 9 Apr in *Russell*, KS (MR). The w. race of Veery was in *Cheyenne*, NE 1 May (AS), *Cimarron*, OK 20 May (JM, BH), and in *Kimball*, NE 17 May (SJD). A Curve-billed Thrasher wintering in *Sioux*, NE was still present 26 May (fide AK).

WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Few Blue-winged Warblers were found, those being in *Knox*, NE 24 May (MB), *Wyandotte*, KS 11 May (CW), and *Cherokee*,



Quite a surprise was this Broad-billed Hummingbird 15 May 2003 south of Durham, Roger Mills County, Oklahoma. It provided the second record for the Region, although a remote possibility exists that it was the same bird as found into January 2003 in southwestern Oklahoma. Photograph by Patricia Velte.

OK 19 Apr (DVa). The even rarer Golden-winged Warbler appeared in *Lancaster*, NE 4 May (JM), *Sarpy*, NE 8 May (2 birds; JGJ), *Wyandotte*, KS 11 May (CW), and *Johnson*, KS 19 May (GP, DS). Tennessee Warblers were found w. to *L. Ogallala* 16 May (2; SJD), and *Cimarron*, OK 20 May (JM, BH).

Among the "zooties," Cape May Warblers

were noted in *Madison*, NE 10 May (MB), *Johnson*, KS 12 May (AS), *Riley*, KS 16 May (GS), *Leavenworth*, KS 17 May (DWI), and *Cherokee*, KS 18 May (SS, MR). Reports of Black-throated Blue Warbler came from *Sedgwick*, KS 4 May (RB), *Cherokee*, OK 7 May (JWA, SM, JH), *Leavenworth*, KS 17 May (DWI), and *Hayes*, NE 26 May (DF). Among w. warblers e. of normal were a Black-throated Gray Warbler in *Morton*, KS 26 Apr (CG) and a Townsend's Warbler in *Finney*, KS 30 Apr (DB, T&SS, MRa).

Chestnut-sided Warblers were noted w. to *Comanche*, OK 8 May (JAG, SG) and *Cimarron*, OK 20 May (JM, BH). Pine Warblers, quite rare in Nebraska, were located in *Otoe*, NE 13 Apr (JK, SK) and *Washington*, NE 26 May (JT, LW). One Pine Warbler was located w. to *Sedgwick*, KS (ST, DV), and *Palm Warblers* were found w. to *Keith/Garden*, NE 14 May (SJD, AB, WRS) and

Dawson, NE 3 May (LR, RH). Other e. warblers a bit out of range were single Magnolia and Black-throated Green Warblers in *Cimarron*, OK 14 May (PS, JL), single Prairie Warblers in *Morton*, KS 27 Apr (CG) and *Quivira* 3 May (RW), a Worm-eating Warbler in *Finney*, KS 30 Apr (DB), and single Hooded Warblers in *Furnas*, NE 23–27 Apr (LO) and *Sedgwick*, KS 2 May (PJ). Bay-breasted Warblers made their best showing in e. Kansas, with reports of 11 birds (fide LM); only 2 were noted from Nebraska, both in *Lancaster* (LE), with one other in *Tulsa* (TM). Beyond the normal migration corridor were single MacGillivray's Warblers in *Lincoln*, NE 14 May (LE) and *Cheyenne*, KS 25 May (HA).

Quite easterly was a male Western Tanager in *Pontotoc*, OK 13 May (MBa). As many as 5 Henslow's Sparrows were located in *Washington*, NE 22–31 May (JT, CNK), and an early Henslow's was in *Pawnee*, NE 20 Apr (WRS). A spring treat were single Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows in *Johnson*, NE 4 May (TEL) and in *Washington*, NE 22 May (JT). The Golden-crowned Sparrow at *Quivira* 27 Apr (GF) should have been in Alaska by that date.

Several McCown's Longspurs were located in *Box Butte*, NE 16 May (HW). An easterly Chestnut-collared Longspur in *Knox*, NE 7 Apr provided the happy observer's 300th species for the county (MB). Two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were in *Cheyenne*, NE 15 May (AS). A Black-headed Grosbeak made it e. to *Washington*, KS 6 May (DT). A surprising array of Lazuli Buntings was reported, although there is evidence that some were hybrids with Indigo Bunting. Most easterly were those in *Tulsa* 1 May (BC), *Johnson*, KS 3 May (NC), *Lancaster*, NE 14 May (JLL), and *Washington*, NE 26

May (LE). Hybrid Lazuli x Indigo Buntings were noted in *Blaine* and *Comanche*, OK (JAG); 2 hybrids were banded in *Sarry*, NE 14 May (RG). An Indigo Bunting in *Scotts Bluff*, w. NE 28 Apr was likely a first-summer male (KD). Painted Buntings were noted n. to *Geary* (C&JO), *Riley* (TC), and *Douglas*, KS (GPa). The first documented **Bronzed Cowbird** for the Region was a male briefly videotaped in *Cimarron*, OK 18 May (JM, BH).

Only two reports of Purple Finch were received for Nebraska, one a female that wintered in *Dixon* through 20 Mar (JJ), and the other in *Lancaster* 2 May (LG). One was also reported in *Cimarron*, OK 27-28 May (JWA et al.), a westerly location.

Cited observers (area editors in boldface):

KANSAS: Henry Armknecht, Charles Anderson, Dan Baffa, Roy Beckemeyer, Joanne Brier, Ted Cable, Nancy Clark, Tom Flowers, Greg Friesen, Dan Gish, Chet Gresham, Chris Hobbs, Pete Janzen, Lowell Johnson, Glen Koontz, Mark Land, Bert McClard, Robert Mangile, Roger McNeill (RMc), Lloyd Moore, Marie Osterbuhr (MOs), Chuck & Jaye Otte, Gerry Parkinson (GPa), Michael Patten, Sebastian Patti, Galen Pittman, Alexis Powell, Mike Rader, Mike Ramsey (MRa), David Rintoul, Mark Robbins (MRo), Jethro Runco, Greg Schrott, David Seibel, Scott Seltman, Tom & Sara Shane, Art Swalwell, Dan Thalmann, Sandra Tholen, Max Thompson, Don Vannoy, Fran Vannoy, Ron Wedel, Dave Williams (DWI), Wings n Wetland (WnW), Chris Wood.
NEBRASKA: Aaron Brees, Mark Brogie, Kathy DeLara, John Dinan, Stephen J. Dinsmore, Larry Einemann, Doug Faulkner, Linda Gardina, Ruth Green, Joe Gubanyi, Robin Harding, C.W. Huntley, Glen Hoge, Wanda Hoge, Jan Johnson, Joel G. Jorgensen, Alice Kenitz, Clem N. Klaphake, Jim Kovanda, Sandy Kovanda, Thomas E. Labeledz, Jeanine L. Lackey, Marty Mathieson, Jeff Meyer, Nebraska Game and Parks (NGP), Linda Ollinger, Don Paseka, Jan Paseka, Kevin Poague, Neva Pruess, Lanny Randolph, W. Ross Silcock, Audrey Sterkel, Jerry Toll, Moni Usasz, Bruce Walgren, Donna Walgren, Harley Winfrey, LaReesa Wolfenbarger,
OKLAHOMA: Dave Arbour, James W. Arterburn, Eddie Adams, Michael Bay (MBa), Cameron Cox, Bill Carrell, J. Fischer, Bonnie Gall, Joseph A. Grzybowski, Santiago Guallar, Jim Harman, Berlin Heck, Jo Loyd, Doug McGee, Jeri McMahan, Kurt Meisenzahl, Steve Metz, Terry Mitchell, T. Nelson, John Northrup, Mitchell Oliphant, M. Resch (MRc), Pat Seibert, John Sterling, Lou & Mary Truex, T. Underhill, Don Varner (DVa), Patricia Velte, Sam Waldstein, David Wiggins (DWg), Ann Wilber, Don Wolfinger (DWo), Chris Wood, Don Woodfin (DWd). ☉

King Bird Tours

P.O. BOX 196
 PLANETARIUM STATION
 NEW YORK, NY
 10024 U.S.A.
 (212) 866-7923

"the greatest
 operator of
 ornithological
 tours on
 earth"
 Arthur
 Frommer

The Asia Specialists

website:
www.kingbirdtours.com
 email:
kingbirdtours@earthlink.net

2003 BIRDING TOURS

MALAYSIA
 Malaya, Borneo (Mt. Kinabalu)
 4-27 July

**NORTH BURMA
 EXPEDITION**
 SE Himalayas
 1-30 November

MALAYSIA

Malaya,
 Borneo,
 Mt. Kinabalu
 3-25 July

**SOUTH
 SUMATRA**
 30 July-22 August

2004 BIRDING TOURS

VIETNAM
 North, South
 2-25 January

THAILAND
 Northwest, Central,
 Peninsular
 3-25 January

PHILIPPINES
 Luzon, Mindanao, Cebu,
 Palawan, Bohol, Negros
 30 January-1 March

WEST BURMA
 Mt. Victoria, Pagan
 5-28 March

BHUTAN
 2-25 April

NW CHINA
 Xinjiang Province
 21 May-13 June

TIBET TRAVERSE
 12 June-13 July

Looking for a Birding Adventure?

Go offshore with Seabirding



© 2002 Brian Patteson, Inc.

For more information contact

Brian Patteson
Seabirding
 P.O. Box 772
 Hatteras NC 27943

(252) 986-1363

<http://www.seabirding.com>

- Pelagic trips since 1986
- Departures from
 Virginia Beach, VA
 Oregon Inlet, NC
 Hatteras, NC
 aboard the best & fastest
 boats available
- Friendly knowledgeable leaders
 with extensive offshore
 experience
- Chum for bringing the birds close
- Winter trips for Great Skua
 and alcid
- Spring & summer trips for
 Gulf Stream specialties
 including rare *Pterodromas*
 and tropicbirds
- Late summer trips for White-faced
 Storm-Petrel