

# Birding Catastrophe

BY RICK WRIGHT, *WINGING IT* EDITOR

I was in Manhattan that beautiful September 11, and still feel the occasional pang of guilt that one of my clearest memories of that catastrophic day should be of a male American Kestrel floating south through the still-blue sky over Lincoln Center. I've been distracted at funerals by noisy Dickcissels in prairie graveyards, and have had earnest encounters of the relationship kind interrupted by the sudden appearance of a Black-tailed Godwit. I guess some of us really are "never not a birder."

The last days of August 2005 found me birding hard in southeast Arizona, up too early and back too late to turn on the television. Glimpses of dire headlines at gas stations and convenience stores simply made me envy birders in the southeast, who would be out checking their local reservoirs at dawn: what wonders would this latest hurricane with the cutesy name bring?

Katrina wrought wonders and portents indeed. As I write, refugees—strange word!—are seeking shelter all over the country; even here in Tucson, preparations are being made for a thousand of the newly homeless, a tiny percentage of those whose lives have been ruined, whose lives have been lost, in this calamity. New

Orleans is submerged behind its broken levees, and the receding flood can only reveal new horrors, human and environmental.

In those first days, the birding world, like all the world, held its breath. Even the electronic lists fell briefly silent, first in shock at the enormity of the disaster and then in respect for its victims; when the chatter resumed, birding reports were outnumbered on many lists by messages seeking missing friends—or, in some cases, confirming the worst.

But by Labor Day, a week after Katrina's landfall in Mississippi, the mood in cyberspace was changing. Even correspondents from the most severely devastated areas were once again mentioning birds in their reports, and the heartbreaking pleas for contact with lost relatives were slowly but surely being replaced by news of arriving western hummingbirds and digiscoping queries.

Catastrophe makes us question the meaning of much of what we do, and birding's significance pales in the face of a hurricane's devastation. But for many of the birders who were directly affected, and for many of the rest of us who looked on from a distance in shock and disbelief, birding is an important part of the normality we crave, a way to overcome the grief of disaster. Are we heartless, those of us who are "never not birders"? Far from it. But we are fortunate enough to have something else to turn to, even in the face of an event as horrible as Katrina.

## Pelagic Trip Operators!

The annual Directory of Pelagic Trips is planned for the January/February 2006 issue of *Winging It*.

Please send information about pelagic birding opportunities from North American ports to the Editor at [winging@aba.org](mailto:winging@aba.org), fax 520 544-7502.

**Editor:**

Rick Wright

**Design:**

Ed Rother

**Production:**

Bryan Patrick

Address editorial correspondence to:

*Winging It*

251 E. Rudasill Rd.

Tucson, AZ 85704-6024

[winging@aba.org](mailto:winging@aba.org)

(520) 544-7502

You can join the ABA, learn more about us and our programs, and access a wide range of birding links on our website:

<[www.americanbirding.org](http://www.americanbirding.org)>

Copyright © 2005 by the American Birding Association, Inc. All rights reserved. The opinions expressed by authors do not necessarily represent the views of this publication or of the ABA.

*Winging It* (ISSN #1042-511X) (USPS 003-289) is published bimonthly by the American Birding Association, Inc., 720 W. Monument St., Colorado Springs, CO 80904-3624. Periodicals postage paid at Lebanon Junction, KY, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Winging It*, PO Box 6599, Colorado Springs, CO 80934. (Individual membership: \$45 per year; includes \$12 for *Winging It* and \$33 for *Birding* magazine.)

*Winging It* is printed on 100% post-consumer, chlorine-free recycled paper.



- The American Birding Association aims to inspire all people to enjoy and protect wild birds.
- The American Birding Association represents the North American birding community and supports birders through publications, conferences, workshops, tours, partnerships, and networks.
- The ABA's education programs promote birding skills, ornithological knowledge, and the development of a conservation ethic.
- The ABA encourages birders to apply their skills to help conserve birds and their habitats, and we represent the interests of birders in planning and legislative arenas.
- ABA Sales, (800) 634-7736, supplies birders with tools, equipment, and accessories to make their birding more enjoyable.

We welcome all birders as members.