

# BIRD CONSERVATION

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## ON THE TRAIL OF THE ESKIMO CURLEW



**Track made by a bird that might have been an Eskimo Curlew.**

**O**ur most recent blog post highlighted this year's efforts to relocate surviving individuals of the extremely endangered Eskimo Curlew. It is an effort that for the first time may have yielded results.

An excerpt from the blog follows:

\*\*\*\*\*

It wasn't supposed to be curlew weather- stifling hot, dead calm, sun glaring through opaque late summer humidity. And yet, just like that, there it was- a phantom, slipping from a wet swale into surrounding dune grass- just the kind of spot where a century earlier Yankee gunners might have sought it. It indeed seemed odd that it should

slink away like some over-hunted, over-persecuted game bird rather than like a typical shorebird that explodes into the air when approached. It was a medium-sized brown thing, mottled with white, with a longish beak and a striking splash of cinnamon buff visible as it moved off- a glimpse, to be sure,

*(Continued on page 2)*

# ESKIMO CURLEW- CONTINUED



**The cinnamon-buff color, size and barring looked right but the black-and-white tip did not appear consistent with coloring on curlew feathers.**

**“Even a flock could come through some godforsaken spot on some improbable day and who would know?”**

*(Continued from page 1)*

but the cottony buzz filling my head told me I believed I'd actually seen it. I had been searching for three years, not nearly long or hard enough, I had thought, but just the same there it was. Wasn't it?

The fact is that Eskimo Curlews have been gone from the collective memories of hunters and birders for so long that it is no longer possible to be sure of what the right conditions for them might have been. If we can believe fragmentary 19th century reports, curlew weather occurred

when fall storms swept off the north Atlantic, carrying with them exhausted birds blown from pelagic routes that led from Labrador to the Argentine pampas. These were the days that into the 1880s brought flocks of curlews to Cape Cod, Massachusetts large enough to provide sport and meat for the New England market. A bird at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard, was purchased from the Boston game market as late as 1902.

The standard thinking is that curlews are now extinct or, even if they are not, they are for all in-

tents and purposes functionally extinct. And finding them? There is so much continent to look in that the probability of locating them must approach zero. So, why bother? Even a flock could come through some godforsaken spot on some improbable day and who would know? But- that's the point. We ought to know, and no one is out looking...

The entire text may be viewed at <http://birdconservationresearch.blogspot.com/2012/09/on-trail-of-eskimo-curlew.html>.

# CURLEW CONVERSATIONS



A fall female (upper) and male (lower) Eskimo Curlew, illustrating how similar the sexes of this species are.

An interesting correspondence developed between BCR and an observer working on the wintering grounds of the Eskimo Curlew in southern Argentina. Part of this discussion, all of which may be viewed at the Wildlife Society group on LinkedIn, is transcribed below:

\*\*\*\*\*

This bird caught my attention since many years ago as being an Agriculturalist I traveled and still travel quite often into the Pampas. Having seen some pictures of the bird and read some

very scarce locally available info, I decided whenever possible and especially when visiting native grasslands and grazing pastures to look for the bird. Alas! Always disappointed.

..... This year, while being in Chaco I was surveying some soybeans crops and at one of the fields a couple of waders behaved very warily, not allowing me to get closer to them than about 100 yds. They always moved over fast and after a short flight to keep distances would sort of sneak into the vegetation. I did not have my binocs with me, so I could

not have a distinct view of their feathering. Definitely they were not Whimbrels, birds that I know. What struck me was the birds' behavior. Their wariness was something absolutely uncommon to wintering waders over here. All the waders here are very tame allowing to look at them with a naked eye. Waders are not considered game birds, so they are safe at these latitudes....

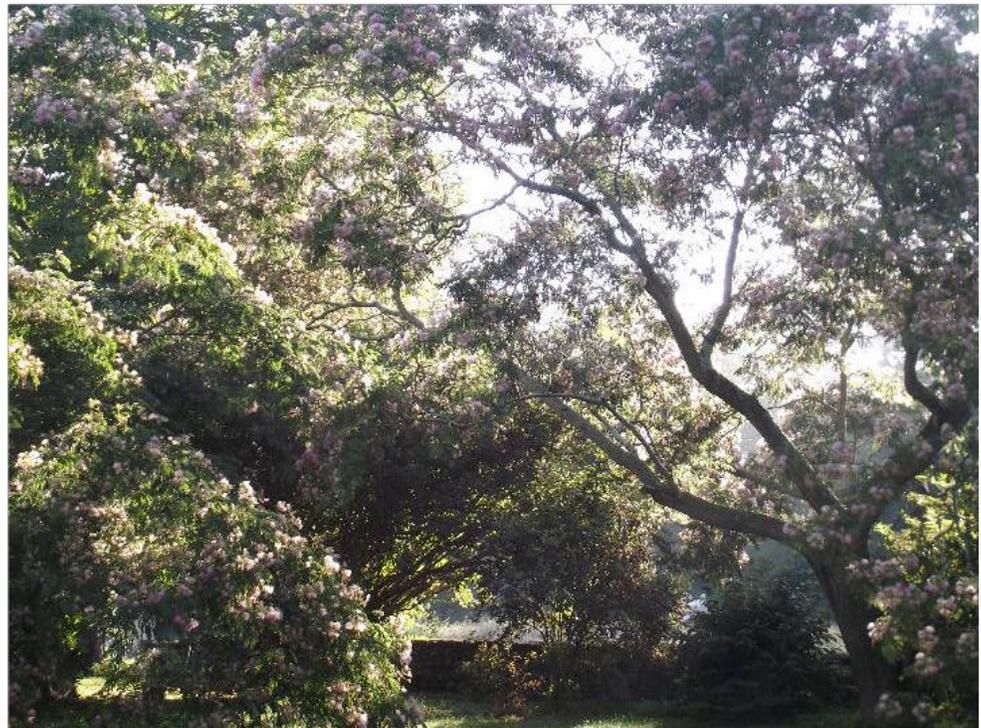
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Contributed by Sergio Corbet

***“What struck me was the birds’ behavior. Their wariness was something absolutely uncommon ...”***

# FOREST BIRD DIVERSITY STUDY PUBLISHED

“Ongoing analyses of our entire data set is leading to an atlas of forest bird distributions .  
”



**The showy Asian tree, Mimosa, sometimes escapes from cultivation into the coastal forests of southern New England. It is a favorite of hummingbirds here much as it is of honeyeaters in its native range.**

The highly regarded international scientific journal, *Ecography*, has accepted for publication our second major contribution on forest birds. This work, entitled *Factors influencing geographic patterns in diversity of forest bird communities in eastern Connecticut, USA*, will appear in volume 35.

This work deals with only

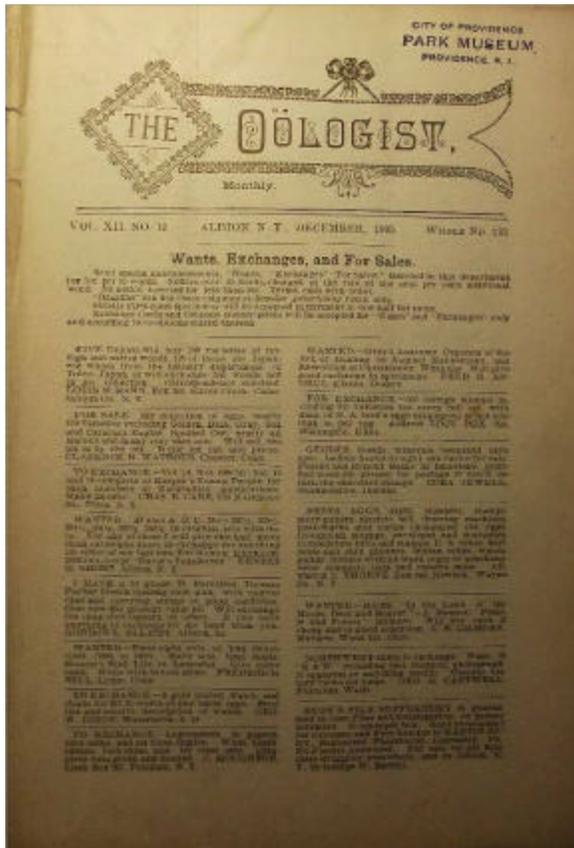
a portion of the enormous data volume gathered during the eight year long *Forest Bird Survey of Southern New England*. It focuses on the duplicated surveys of northeastern and southeastern Connecticut.

In this study, evidence gathered demonstrated that winter temperature strongly influenced winter geographic patterns in diversity. Habitat had

a secondary and much smaller effect on diversity- primarily in summer.

Ongoing analyses of our entire data set is leading to an atlas of forest bird distributions across Connecticut and Rhode Island. The data are being used as well to examine large scale diversity patterns in relation to regional forest fragmentation.

# THE OOLOGIST RECEIVED



**“Unlike many scientific periodicals, *The Oologist* is still unavailable through the internet.”**

**The Audubon Society of Rhode Island has generously donated their holdings of *The Oologist* to the BCR research library.**

The 19th and early 20th century periodical, *The Oologist*, was a forerunner of modern North American scientific journals. Although now largely forgotten, it was once a critical repository for information gathered by field observers of the time. Numerous early reports of bird distributions are contained within its pages.

The Audubon Society of Rhode Island possesses one of the most important and extensive libraries of bird material in southern New England. This past year, as they reviewed their holdings, they offered us this rare journal.

Unlike many scientific periodicals, *The Oologist* is still unavailable through the internet.

Hence, the only way to research its obscure references is to have original copies. We are currently studying these copies for lost references to sightings of Eskimo Curlews.

The Newsletter of  
Bird Conservation Research, Inc.

90 Liberty Highway  
Putnam, CT 06260

Web: [www.birdconservationresearch.org](http://www.birdconservationresearch.org)

E-mail: [mail@birdconservationresearch.org](mailto:mail@birdconservationresearch.org)

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public education activities. Membership applications and payment options are also available at [www.birdconservationresearch.org](http://www.birdconservationresearch.org)