

POINT REYES LIGHT

Volume LX No. 30/ Point Reyes Station, California

September 20, 2007



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Laotian fishermen are some of the most regular users of the Nicasio Reservoir. "Meat fishermen" prefer smaller fish that fry easily, while those fishing for sport look for largemouth bass. Photo by Jacoba Charles.

Hidalgo's cry trumps Cinco de Mayo

by Will Baker

If you thought that Mexican Independence Day came and went four months ago, you're not alone. In the United States, a lot of us look to May 5, or Cinco de Mayo, as the Mexican equivalent of the Fourth of July.

"Cinco de Mayo is a much more 'gringo-type' day," said Dolores Gonzales, a teacher at West Marin School in Point Reyes Station. "September 16 is about real independence."

At the Dance Palace in Point Reyes on Friday night, dancers shimmied to the salsa beats of Los Cambos. Gonzales and other revelers were getting an early start on Mexican Independence Day, which took place on Sunday. Around the dance

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Tagged godwit flaps the globe

by Jacoba Charles

The bar-tailed godwit could be described as spunky. A medium-sized shorebird with long legs and bill, it winters in New Zealand before flying, nearly non-stop, to breed on the open tundra of western Alaska.

This week one of these birds, a female named E7, has become the first shore bird to be tracked by satellite as she completed a 16,500-mile migratory

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Oysters don't hurt seals, airplanes do

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A good friend changed us for the better

Who planted pot in the Seashore?

by Ben Bombard

An outdoor pot plantation was discovered on Bolinas Ridge above Platform Bridge Road in the Point Reyes National Seashore on Monday. 3,500 pot plants were spotted during an aerial surveillance, said Lieutenant Sheriff Scott Anderson.

National Park Service officials and Marin sheriffs cut down the marijuana with machetes. It was then carried out on foot and incinerated.

Officials found recent footprints at the farm, as well as eggs and tortillas.

The unknown growers were most likely dropped off along Platform Bridge Road. From there they traipsed along

an overgrown deer trail, avoiding dense poison oak, until they arrived at the pot grove. Using a nearby creek as a water supply, the growers constructed a drip-irrigation system to hydrate their crop. They probably slept at the site, spending the chilly nights in sleeping bags on the dirt.

Anderson said the pot appeared to be organically produced.

"There was no evidence of fertilizer or pesticide use," he said. "But I don't know if I would smoke any of that dope. The plants were well-budded out, but it was grown close to a lot of poison oak. I don't know if that could affect the pot or not."

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>> Point Reyes woman gets called from bogus Social Security agents. She deflects the attempted identity theft.

>>Godwit

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cycle from one hemisphere to the other and back.

“The bar-taileds have the longest non-stop flights and one of the longest migrations of any bird in the world,” said Nils Warnock, a biologist with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) who is one of the lead scientists with the project. “They fly over 10,000 kilometers at a time, where they are in the air for seven or eight days straight.”

A team from the PRBO spent three weeks tagging the godwits in New Zealand last February, along with scientists from the US Geological Survey (USGS) and Massey University in New Zealand. Including E7, a total of 16 birds were tagged: 8 males and 8 females, half of which were from the North Island and half from the South. Some of the birds were caught in nearly invisible mist nets hung in a mangrove tree, while the rest were captured by a rocket net when they came in to roost.

A veterinarian with the USGS implanted tags into the female birds surgically. The scientists also experimented with attaching tags to the smaller male birds externally, using harnesses, but those were less successful. After several days of flight the signal disappeared from the harness tags, though the birds were seen later.

“They were fattened up for the flight

when we put the harnesses on,” said Lee Tibbitts, a scientist with the USGS working on the project in Alaska. “We think they just slipped off when they lost some weight.”

“We’re getting to see the incredible movements these birds are capable of,” said Warnock. “These are the kinds of things that have never been documented before.”

Many birds undergo yearly voyages from breeding to feeding grounds and back again. Migrations occur in all shapes and sizes, from penguins waddling across the Antarctic to curlew’s flight from Nevada to Mexico. Thousands of species, ranging from songbirds to storks, undertake journeys on the scale of thousands of miles across oceans and continents. Though the general itinerary of these flights has been known for over a century, the details have remained largely unknown, until now.

Satellite tags have become small enough – about the size of half a candy bar – that they won’t impair the flight of medium or large birds. Researchers can now monitor the birds’ flight path on a daily basis. “In the past you could put a leg-band on a bird in one place and then look for them to show up in the next,” Warnock said, “but you didn’t know what it did in between.”

For example, one tagged bird flew toward Alaska for five days and encountered intense headwinds when it was only 500 kilometers from shore – so it turned around and rested in Russia, before completing its journey.

The flight details are particularly relevant for establishing conservation priorities.



Godwits, which have one of the longest bird migrations, have now been tracked across two hemispheres using satellite tags. Photo by Jan Van de Kam.

“There’s a lot that goes on in migration,” said Melissa Pitken, also with PRBO. “With this tracking program, we can see where they stop to rest and refuel, and what chunks of wetland they are using.” In the course of the project PRBO learned that many godwits rely on a tidal flat in China that is slated for development.

On March 17, E7 flew from New Zealand to the Yellow Sea in China, where she spent almost a month before flying on to the breeding ground in the Yukon delta of western Alaska, Warnock said. When the days began to shorten toward winter, she took to the air again, flying south by an eastern route over the Pacific Ocean back to New Zealand. The return journey took her almost nine days,

flapping rather than gliding like some birds do, and without stopping to rest.

Warnock said that it was a lucky chance that the batteries in E7’s tag held out long enough to track her all the way through a complete migratory cycle. On September 7, she landed on the North Island near the Miranda Shorebird Center where she was first captured.

The most recent satellite reading, now growing weaker as the battery fades, showed that she was on the muddy shores of the Piako River. Members of the New Zealand ornithological society have rented a boat, and are going to the isolated area on Saturday to try and spot her. “She’s a big hero there right now,” Tibbitts said.

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