



## LEGACYLINE NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 2018

Guiding birdwatchers for two-thirds of my adult life has evoked one question more often than any other... "What is your favorite bird?" It is a question for which I have no answer... no favorites... no bucket-list... not one species that rises above the others. However, I do have a favorite 'day' of birding, and I would never have guessed it possible on the first day of October 2005 when twenty-seven enthusiastic birders gathered at first light on the observation deck of the *Cruise Ship Norwegian Star*. Having left for Mexican waters from Los Angeles toward nightfall the previous day we had eagerly assembled in anticipation of 'rafts and flights' of tropical seabirds. Not to be, however, as the lack of seabird activity resulted in nearly all observers abandoning the 13th-deck for their tiny cabins, over-the-top meal service, and non-stop activity famously offered by the modern cruise lines. Birding that first day was so abysmal that it was not until 4:00PM when a *Red-billed Tropicbird* flew by, the first and only bird to be tallied during the 10-hour watch. Laying my head on the pillow that night I pondered a troubled; "What have I gotten them into?"

Forcing myself out of bed before sunrise on October 2nd I returned to the upper deck with the sure knowledge that birding could scarcely be any worse, yet unaware that I was at the dawn of life's single most superb day of birding. Two ever-hopeful women had arrived before me, dutifully reporting a *tropicbird* soaring overhead in the lights of the ship. To my happy surprise the bird gliding above was a *Red-tailed Tropicbird* of the eastern Pacific Ocean. With first light came 'three white birds', the first of several hundred *Masked Boobies* that would spend the entire noisy day just a handful of feet away as they hunted flying fish churned up by the speeding vessel's bow. The hurried pace of activity awakened the seas from every direction, and soon we were surrounded by four species *each* of *boobies*, *pteredroma* petrels, *shearwaters*, and *storm-petrels*. Twice during the day an individual *Great Frigatebird* passed overhead, the first of these birds being my one-thousandth species observed in Mexico. A small flock of *Arctic Terns*, and desperate singles of *Great-blue Heron*, and *Mourning Dove* rounded out the list of 21 species recorded for the day.

Concurrent to the ship's departure from Los Angeles a tropical storm moved north along the west coast of Mexico to burn itself out in the Gulf of California. The ship's captain routed the vessel due south for the better part of two days rather than the usual course that hugged the Baja California coast. At dawn on October 2nd, 2005 the *Norwegian Star* was near the *Revillagigedo Islands* heading east toward the mouth of the Gulf of California. The vessel crossed paths with birds pushed ahead of

the tropical storm now returning to the eastern Pacific, as well as seabirds pulled into Mexican waters by the hurricane's powerful churning winds. The magic was made wondrous by the *surprise* of it all... of the 21 species seen nine were new for my Mexico bird-list, this with nearly 1,000 species recorded during 35 years of Mexico birding. Other elements of this most astonishing day included the close proximity of the birds, the sheer number of individuals, the cacophony of sound that accompanied their feeding, and, of course, the near complete dearth of birds just one day before. Awakening in near hopelessness, initially transformed, and then overwhelmed, by our collective dreams of 'rafts and flights' of tropical seabirds.

#### CALENDAR

Kindly forgive the extended introduction to the *LegacyLine NewsLetter* as a vivid image of that unique day required context in which to view it... besides the current calendar of tours has few remaining opportunities. Our 2018 programs offer 112 spaces for participants, all of which have found a home. We are in the process of tweaking the 2019 calendar, and developing the tour calendar for 2020. Later this spring we plan to make available dates and details for both of the upcoming years.

#### MY HEALTH

Many of you are aware that I was 'surprised' by a quintuple arterial bi-pass this past fall. Though the story itself reads like a thriller, the epilogue is what makes this tale a classic with surgeons, rehabilitation staffs, and my wife all rightfully taking a bow. Exactly 60 days away from a six-hour surgery I was on a plane heading to the birds once again, spending the past 25 days in Mexico guiding six British birders to a record 571 species seen, 9 additional birds heard - 65 IOC Mexican endemics.

#### MEXICAN ISLAND ENDEMICS

The December 1st surgery caused me to miss an incredible visit to Socorro Island organized by Legacy Tours. I *hope* to return to that island with a small party for a two-day visit in early December 2018. In addition, I *hope* to receive permission to visit Guadalupe Island for a short visit in mid-October 2018. Participation is limited by available seats on the charter airplanes so I anticipate a 'sweet dance' between your desires and flexibility and Legacy's openings and client histories. For now please let us know if you have an interest in either one of these two short trips.

#### THANK YOU

With true gratitude we express our thanks for your thoughts and prayers during a critical time for Legacy Tours, as well as your continued support for our programs.

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