

CONTINENTAL BIRDLIFE

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Snap Judgment 8

While birding along the edge of a woodlot you suddenly spot a bird of prey perched in a nearby tree. Alerted, it may fly at any moment; you must look quickly for diagnostic characters. What is the bird?

The answer, a full discussion of the identification, and the name of the photographer will appear in the June 1981 issue of *Continental Birdlife*.





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A JOURNAL OF NORTH AMERICAN FIELD ORNITHOLOGY

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Drawings in this issue: Berylline Hummingbird *Amazilia beryllina* on p. 56 and Cave Swallow *Petrochelidon fulva* on p. 64 by Keith Hansen; Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis* on p. 51 by Marilyn Hoff Stewart; White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* on p. 37 by Kenn Kaufman. Map p. 40 by Wilma A. Cornell.

Cover photograph: Out of the mist flies a Greater Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*. This portrait was taken 3 June 1978 at Cox's Ledge — a favorite destination for pelagic trips from both Rhode Island and New York — by one of the Ledge's most devoted fans among the New York contingent, Thomas H. Davis.

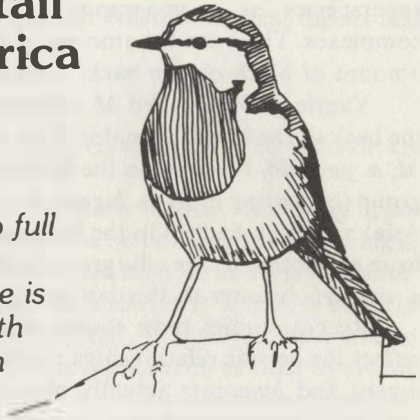
CONTINENTAL BIRDLIFE

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Status and Identification of forms of White Wagtail in Western North America

JOSEPH MORLAN

Two forms of White Wagtail (two full species, according to Soviet research) occur in Alaska: one breeds there, one is a rare stray. Which is more likely south of Alaska? This thorough investigation produced some astonishing answers



ON THE MORNING of 22 May 1980 Bill Lenarz and Sue Smith found a White Wagtail at the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries laboratory on Paradise Drive in Tiburon, Marin County, California. Bill called me in time, and I had an opportunity to observe the wagtail at very close range for more than an hour. I was astounded to see that its back was mostly black, a characteristic of the race *Motacilla alba lugens* which had never been positively recorded in North America south of Alaska. The gray-backed northeast Siberian race, *M. a. ocularis*, a rare breeder in western Alaska, had been reported several times on the west coast south of Alaska.

The Tiburon wagtail sang a long, elaborate, very soft song of mostly slurred notes while it fed among rotting planks of an old broken-down wharf. It fed slowly, picking insects, bobbing and wagging its tail. In flight it gave a loud penetrating "tchizzick" call. Leonard Compagno took many black-and-white photographs (Figure 1), and Phil Schaeffer took additional color photographs. The thin black line through the eye and the white face are found only in *lugens* and *ocularis*. No other races of *M. alba* show this feature. This, along with extensive black clouding on the scapulars and back, identified this bird as *lugens*.

I had seen one other White Wagtail in California, an adult at Watsonville, Santa Cruz County in August 1979, but I was not sure of its race (Laymon and Shuford 1980a). My doubts were based largely on comments of B.W. Tucker in Tyler (1950): "The (*lugens*) female and the male in winter have gray backs . . . and could not be distinguished from *ocularis* in the field; indeed many specimens in the hand appear . . . to be separable only with difficulty."

I thus resolved to review all records of White Wagtail in western North America and clarify their identification. Fortuitously, the Watsonville bird returned while I was preparing this paper and its racial identity proved to be the unexpected *lugens* also.

GEOGRAPHIC VARIATION

Various authorities differ in their taxonomic treatment of this complicated bird. Currently most authorities follow Peters (1960) in which eleven subspecies are recognized. *M. alba* is considered by Peters to form a superspecies with the Japanese Wagtail *M. grandis*, the Large Pied Wagtail *M. maderaspatensis* of India, and the African Pied Wagtail *M. aguimp*. Beregovoi (1965) interpreted variation within this superspecies as a geographical distribution of independently variable color-complexes. These are the amount of white on the chin, wing and side of neck; and the amount of black on the back, forehead and through the eye.

Vaurie (1959) divided *M. alba* into three subspecies groups based on the color of the back of the breeding males. Two of these groups, the *yarrellii* group (consisting of *M. a. yarrellii*, breeding in the British Isles, often called Pied Wagtail) and the *lugens* group (consisting of *M. a. lugens*, *M. a. leucopsis*, and *M. a. alboides* breeding in east Asia) are black-backed in the breeding male. These two groups are widely separated from each other by the *alba* group in which males are always gray-backed. The race *M. a. ocularis* belongs to this last group.

Recent studies have shown that Vaurie's "lugens group" may not accurately reflect the genetic relationships of the forms involved. Nazarenko (1968) showed that *lugens* and *leucopsis* actually nest side by side without interbreeding. *Leucopsis*, however, interbreeds freely with *M. a. baicalensis* which Vaurie placed in the *alba* group. *Baicalensis* in turn interbreeds freely with *M. a. ocularis* where they contact. *Lugens* also overlaps *ocularis* without interbreeding (Kistchinski and Lobkov 1979).

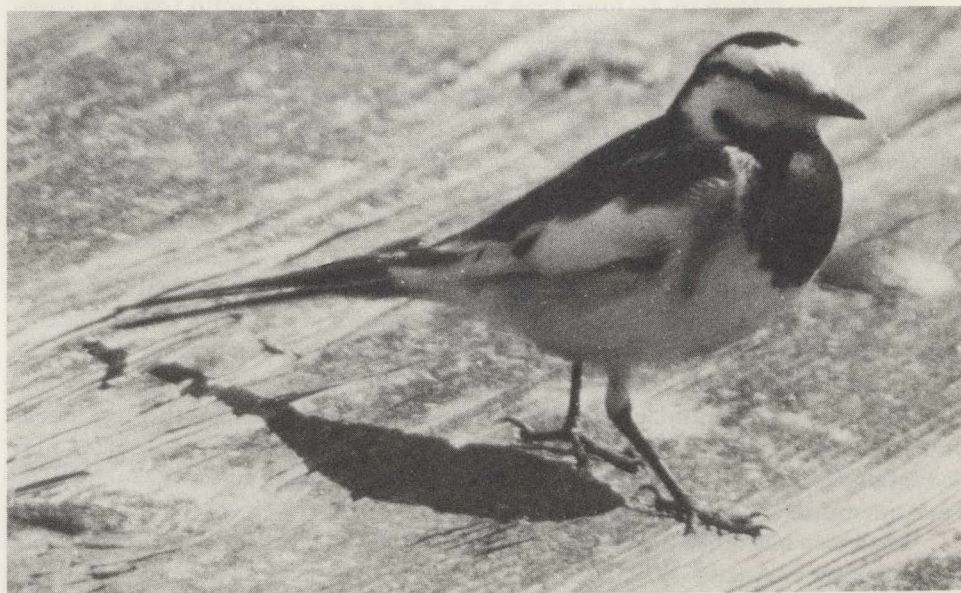


Figure 1. Adult male *Motacilla [alba] lugens* at Tiburon, Marin County, California, on 22 May 1980. Note the extensively black back and scapulars, white chin and broad white edges to the outermost tertiary. Photo by Leonard Compagno.

For more detail see section on interbreeding.

It may be of interest that the three forms mentioned above, *ocularis*, *baicalensis*, and *leucopsis*, which interbreed freely are all dark-winged subspecies, whereas *lugens* is a white-winged form. It seems that the color of the back may not have been the best criterion for dividing *M. alba* into subspecies groups and that the color of the wing may be more significant in determining true relationships.

Two forms usually considered subspecies, *personata* and *lugens*, were elevated to the status of full species in the most recent Soviet checklist (Stepanian 1978) based on the lack of interbreeding with other subspecies in areas where they overlap, Turkestan and Ussuriland respectively.

Only two forms have ever been found in western North America, *lugens* and *ocularis*. A third, *M. a. alba*, breeds in Greenland.

MIGRATION

Breeding ranges of White Wagtail forms in northeast Asia and Alaska are mapped in Figure 2.

Ocularis migrates inland across China and North Korea, wintering from Bangladesh to the Philippines. *Lugens* moves south of its breeding range, wintering in southern Japan and southeast China. In South Korea it is a migrant and winter visitor. It may be significant that I could find no true *ocularis* in the fairly extensive series of Korean specimens at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley. Those labeled *ocularis* were misidentified *lugens*. South Korean *ocularis* specimens cited by Austin (1948) should be rechecked. The mid-winter specimens are almost certainly erroneous.

Ocularis has only recently been validly recorded from Japan (Yada 1980). Banding data presented by McClure (1974) show that many *lugens* breeding in Sakhalin and southern Kamchatka winter in Japan.

Stejneger (1885) noted the absence of *ocularis* in southern Kamchatka and speculated that they take an inland route west of the Stanovoi Mountains. Thus the two races migrate along different paths. Both races are said to winter together in Taiwan and southeast China (Vaurie 1959).

Both races are spring migrants on the Commander Islands but they do not breed there (Johansen 1961). *Lugens* is usually considered regular there and Stejneger collected only one *ocularis*, but Hartert (1920) reports six additional spring and summer specimens of *ocularis* from the Commanders while only an equal number of *lugens* were taken.

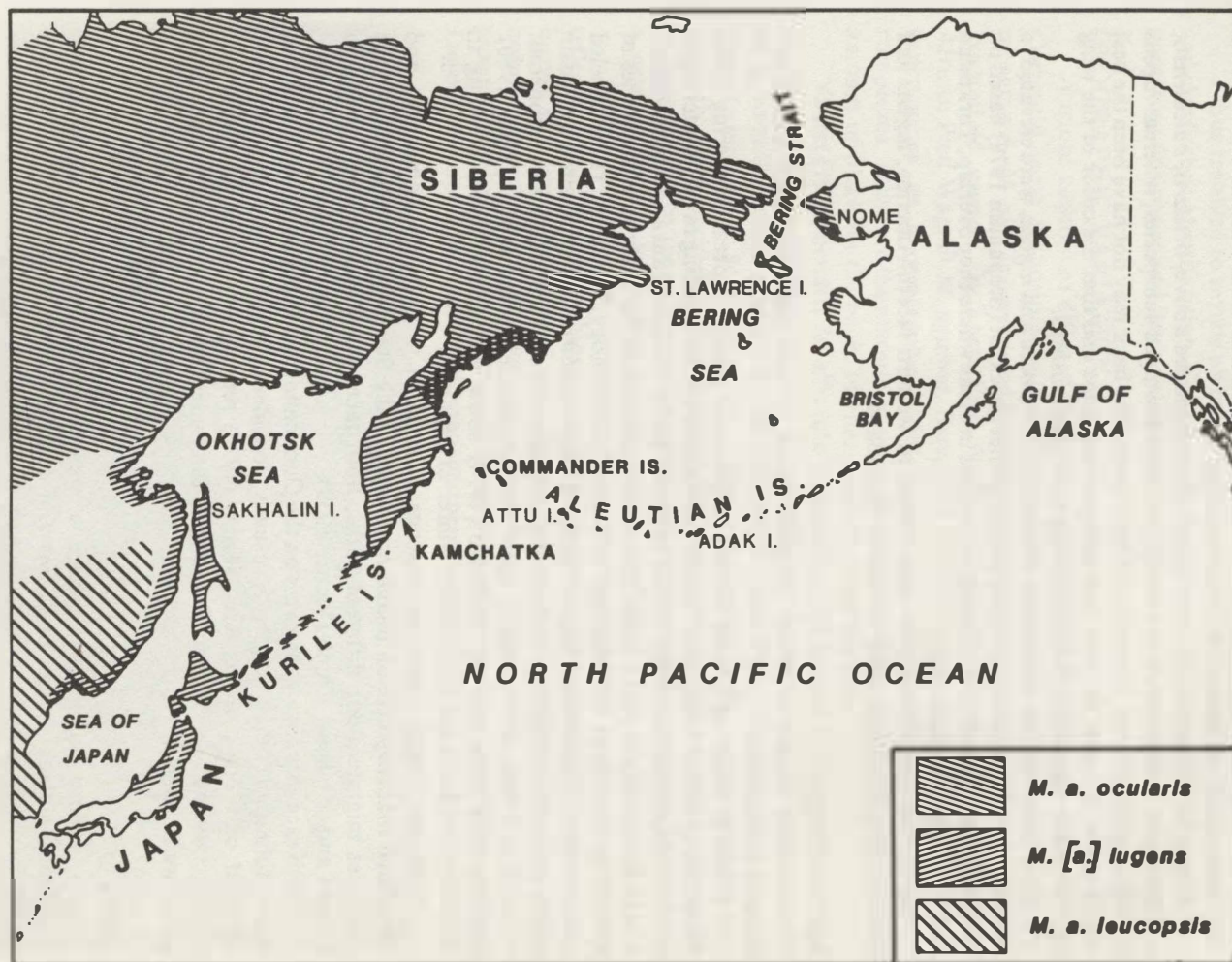
MOLT

An understanding of plumage sequences is important for identification. Analogous plumage stages of *lugens* and *ocularis* may resemble each other more closely than they resemble other plumages of their own form. The timing of molt may affect the timing and duration of extralimital occurrences.

Wagtails have two molts each year, a complete molt in fall and a partial molt in spring. The fall molt of White Wagtail has been studied by Baggott (1970) for the partially migratory *M. a. yarrellii* in England. His results agree with those for the migratory *M. a. alba* at Leningrad studied by Kukish (1974).

Persson (1977) found that adults in Sweden start to molt right after breeding, from 7 July to 10 August. In England the mean date of the onset of molt was 16 July with most adults not finishing molt until mid-October. In Leningrad adults averaged 60 to 70 days to complete fall molt.

Figure 2. Approximate breeding ranges of the forms of White Wagtail in northeast Asia showing areas of sympatry in southeast Ussuriland after Nazarenko (1968) and northeast Kamchatka after Kistchinski and Lobkov (1979). Recent range extension in Japan after Nakamura (1980).



In the following discussion, largely digested from the three sources listed above dealing with *M. a. alba* and *M. a. yarrellii*, I have adopted the term "tertiaries" as used by Dwight to mean the innermost three secondaries. In wagtails these feathers are very enlarged and extend almost to the tip of the folded wing. In the field they tend to hide the other remiges (primaries and secondaries).

The fall molt of juveniles never includes the primaries or the outer six secondaries; the tertiary, rectrices and greater secondary coverts are also usually retained. In most juveniles the distal two or three greater secondary coverts are kept but the others are replaced. Males molt more coverts than females and occasionally all coverts are replaced. In England the duration of post-juvinal molt varied from 60 days in early-hatched birds to 40 days in birds from the second brood. In Leningrad the post-juvinal molt lasted only 40-45 days.

A partial spring molt takes place in March and April. The body feathers and the central rectrices are molted. Usually the lesser coverts are replaced. Rarely the greater and median coverts and the tertiary are shed. Females seem to replace fewer feathers than males.

Wagtails have very soft plumage and to offset the effects of wear, some individuals have a partial molt during the winter which may include body feathers, some rectrices, tertiary, wing coverts and occasionally even primaries. This has been well documented in some pipits (Hall 1961). Yamashina (1933) found some *lugens* molting in December.

A gradual molt of all head feathers takes place during the first winter. The crown and throat feathers are gradually replaced beginning in October, becoming black by spring. The ear coverts are also gradually replaced, becoming whiter.

Lugens differs from other races in that it has a three year molt sequence (Sharpe 1885, Stejneger 1892). Full adults differ from second year birds in the greatly increased amount of white in their wing, the dark spots at the tips of the secondaries being lost. Individuals of *ocularis* achieve full adult plumage in their second winter.

IDENTIFICATION

Most of the detailed published descriptions of both races (Sharpe 1885, Stejneger 1885, Ridgway 1887 and 1904, La Touche 1930) are at least partially misleading. Sharpe's juvenal *ocularis* is a first-winter bird. Stejneger's adult female *lugens* could be an *ocularis* hybrid. Ridgway's adult female *ocularis* is in winter plumage. La Touche does not provide a complete plumage sequence.

The following is largely distilled from the excellent descriptions of Yamashina (1933) and the concise diagnosis of Hartert (1910). I hope it will help end the confusion.

In summer, White Wagtails arrive on their breeding grounds after completing their spring molt. The two races are then fairly easy to distinguish. All *ocularis* are gray-backed and the black bib on the chest extends all the way up to the base of the bill, white on the chin being very rare. This plumage is well illustrated by Singer in Robbins *et al.* (1966) pg. 239 and by Eckelberry in Pough (1957) pl. 23. Female and male *ocularis* are nearly identical in summer, but the black area on the back of the head is usually narrower in females.

At this time all male *lugens* have a great deal of black on the back and some older birds may become entirely black-backed. The chin is usually white but 20 out of 46 males examined by Kistchinski and Lobkov (1979) showed black on the chin. This plumage is illustrated by Peterson (1961) pg. 250 but the black bib should not extend

across the side of the neck to the back and the white edges on the wing should be broader. A slightly better plate can be found in Pough pl. 23, but the lesser coverts should be black not gray. Plate 9 in Kobayashi (1965) provides an accurate illustration of this plumage.

Female *lugens* in summer are gray-backed and may resemble *ocularis* particularly in the first year when the white in the wing is not yet fully developed. Most female *lugens* have more black on the nape and may show some dark shading on the back, but even lacking this they can be distinguished by their white chin and upper throat. Only 8 out of 24 females examined by Kistchinski and Lobkov (1979) showed any black on the chin. Females show a larger area of white than males. Virtually all *ocularis* exhibit a black chin at this season. An excellent drawing of the female *lugens* in summer can be found in Pough pg. 221.

By mid-summer juveniles may be seen, but the two races are virtually identical in this plumage. It is illustrated in Robbins *et al.* (1966) and Pough (1957).

Some adults may start molting as early as July but the black chin feathers of *ocularis* do not start to be replaced by white until August. After this time confusion with *lugens* is possible. In female *lugens* the tips of the back feathers are darker and give the back a slightly more bluish coloration than in *ocularis*. After the first year, adult *lugens* develop much more white on the remiges and the edges of the tertiaries become more broadly white than in *ocularis*. In the first year of both races the brown wings are retained from juvenal plumage and by summer these feathers become badly worn. The black chin and darker gray shading on the flanks and sides will distinguish *ocularis* from the white-chinned and pale gray-flanked *lugens* until wing molt begins.

After the fall molt, identification becomes much more difficult since both sexes of both races are gray-backed with a white throat and a black crescent-shaped band across the chest instead of a large black bib. In females of both races the black crescent is narrower and may be mixed with white, and the black on the crown becomes mixed extensively with gray. Adult *lugens* usually show some irregular black clouding on the back at this season, especially the males. Black feathers are often retained on the lesser coverts in *lugens* while these feathers are always gray in *ocularis*. In both forms the lower rump and upper tail coverts are black, but in *lugens* the black is more extensive and usually includes the upper rump. A good plate showing winter adult *lugens* male and female is Kobayashi pl. 9.

Adult *ocularis* have much narrower white edges to the remiges showing as a series of separate white lines on the folded wing. On *lugens* the edges are broader and the secondaries are white forming a solid white patch on the folded wing connecting to the solid white greater coverts. In flight the broad white inner webs of the primaries form a white "window" extending more than half way out from the base. In *ocularis*, the white at the base of the primaries tends to be hidden and the wing appears dark in flight.

First winter birds can be distinguished from adults by the brownish juvenal remiges. Usually the juvenal greater coverts are retained and these appear to be tipped narrowly with white forming white wing-bars rather than the solid white patch seen on adults of both races. The juvenal remiges are narrowly-edged whitish, somewhat darker and shaded more with brownish in *ocularis*. The juvenal wing pattern in both races is similar to that of adult *ocularis* but with much less contrast.

Most first winter birds cannot be safely identified to race outside their normal range. In the hand the culmen of *ocularis* averages slightly shorter: 10.1 mm to the nostril vs. an average of 10.3 mm for *lugens* in the specimens I measured. There is a great deal of overlap in all measurements, however, and only extreme examples can be

positively identified. The key given by Ridgway (1904) based on exposed culmen will not identify most specimens.

There seems to be a slight difference in bill shape. That of *ocularis* is more slender, tapered and delicate, while that of *lugens* is thicker, broader at the middle and stronger-looking.

SYNOPTIC KEY

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| A. Back black, or gray with black patches | <i>lugens</i> |
| AA. Back uniform gray | |
| B. Remiges mostly white, forming a large white patch visible easily in flight both from above and below | <i>lugens</i> (adult) |
| BB. Remiges mostly dark | |
| C. Remiges blackish sharply edged white | <i>ocularis</i> (adult) |
| CC. Remiges brownish, coverts usually forming wing-bars | |
| D. Bill smaller and more delicate, edges of remiges darker; see text | <i>ocularis</i> (1st year or juv.) |
| DD. Bill larger and stronger, edges of remiges lighter; see text | <i>lugens</i> (1st year or juv.) |

The differences in the last two choices, D and DD, are qualitative and I am not able to identify most individuals with certainty even in the hand, much less in the field. A detailed quantitative study of a large series of correctly identified specimens might help, but I have not had access to a sufficient number of *ocularis* skins to conduct such an investigation.

INTERBREEDING

Lugens breeds sympatrically with *ocularis* on the northeast coast of Kamchatka. Out of thirty White Wagtails collected in the zone of overlap, Kistchinski and Lobkov (1979) found only one hybrid. It was a male with a back pattern like that of *lugens* but with the black chin and wing pattern of *ocularis*. Because hybrids are so rare, they consider *lugens* to be a distinct species.

Their view is strongly supported by an earlier study at the opposite end of *lugens*'s range in coastal southern Ussuriland. There Nazarenko (1968) found *lugens* sympatric with another race of White Wagtail, *M. a. leucopsis*. Hybrids were rare, less viable than the parental types and were being rapidly eliminated. Isolating mechanisms were found involving differing habitats and breeding schedules.

The status of *lugens* as a full species was accepted in the most recent Soviet checklist (Stepanian 1978). Breeding ranges of the three forms and their areas of sympatry are shown in Figure 2. *Lugens* does seem to fit the criteria for a full species. The common name "Black-backed Wagtail" used by Tyler (1950) would be appropriate.

I have provided a translation of Kistchinski and Lobkov's paper to Dr. Eugene Eisenmann, Chairman of the A.O.U. Check-list Committee, at his request. I understand that this subject will definitely be considered by the A.O.U. Check-list Committee.

STATUS IN WESTERN NORTH AMERICA

The two forms separate geographically in Alaska. *Ocularis* migrates across the Bering Strait to St. Lawrence Island and to the Alaskan mainland, where it is a rare but regular breeder from Nome to Cape Lisburne (Fay and Cade 1959, Peyton 1963). It is much rarer elsewhere on the mainland where it has been found along the coast from Bristol Bay to Barrow. Individuals, presumably of this race, have straggled as far east as the Mackenzie delta in Canada (Weber and Shepard 1975), inland to central Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978), and south to the Pribilof Islands (Thompson and De Long 1969) and Adak in the Aleutians (Byrd *et al.* 1978).

Lugens is much less common, having been recorded in the western Aleutians mostly in spring where it has been found from Attu to Adak (Thayer and Bangs 1921, Byrd *et al.* 1978). Recently it has been recorded at Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, during the first week of June 1977 and 1979 with maxima of six in 1977 and two in 1979 (R. Stallcup and Will Russell pers. comm.), and one *lugens* there in late May 1978 (Jon Dunn pers. comm.). There is one record of a male far to the east at Glacier Bay 2 July 1969 (D. Gibson pers. comm.). It is not known to breed in Alaska. There are a few fall records, mostly of young birds of unknown race, from the western Aleutians and one from Juneau.

South of Alaska White Wagtails are casual, having been recorded eleven times: once in British Columbia, three times in Oregon, five times in California, and twice in Mexico.

British Columbia — A description of one at the mouth of the Coquitlam River about 14 miles east of Vancouver, 2-21 March 1973, has been published (Weber and Shepard 1975). These authors suggested it was *ocularis* mostly on geographic considerations. Wayne Weber kindly provided me with a detailed transcription of notes taken by G. Allen Poynter which indicates that this was a dark-winged bird. No contrasting edges were noted and I conclude that this individual was in first winter plumage. Thus the possibility that it might have been *lugens* cannot be eliminated.

Oregon — One was at Eugene from 3 February to 31 March 1974 (not 26 March 1974 as published in *American Birds*, Tom Lund pers. comm.). It was published as "evidently . . . *ocularis* . . . changing from juvenal to adult plumage" (Crowell and Nehls 1974) and a photograph was included in the published report. It and others which were sent to me by Larry McQueen show that it was actually a winter adult. The greater coverts have been replaced and form a solid white patch. The extent of white on the wing, the blackish rump and the dark scapulars evident on one photograph show that this bird was actually *lugens*. Unfortunately no written descriptions exist but all observers recall "a lot of white" in the wing in flight (Clarice Watson pers. comm.). Its cap was black on 31 March but it still had a gray back on that date (T. Lund pers. comm.). I judge that it was a female *lugens*.

One was seen 9 February 1975 at Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge, Morrow County, Oregon (Rogers 1975). Details provided by Craig Corder show that this was in first winter plumage. The subspecies is indeterminate.

Another was seen at Harris Beach State Park near Brookings, Oregon, 4 June 1980 by Dr. Robert Tweit. This was an adult bird with a solid white wing-patch and a lot of white in the wing in flight. These are Dr. Tweit's recollections and are not from notes. It was a gray-backed bird (R. Tweit pers. comm.). I consider that this was probably a female *lugens*, but the nature of the details makes a positive identification impossible.

California — One was described from McGrath State Park, Ventura County,

18-20 October 1972. It was accepted as the first state record (Winter 1973). I have reviewed the submitted details but they are much too sketchy to determine anything other than that it was probably a White Wagtail.

One in first winter plumage was photographed on Southeast Farallon Island 10 October 1974 (McCaskie *et al.* 1979). Juvenal wing coverts have been retained and its race is uncertain (Figure 3).

One in first winter plumage was photographed at Goleta, Santa Barbara County, 9-11 October 1978 (Webster *et al.* 1980). Although this was originally published as "apparently *M. a. ocularis*" (McCaskie 1979), this was based on a misunderstanding about the age of the bird combined with the conventional wisdom of the time that *ocularis* was more likely to occur (Louis Bevier pers. comm.). This individual resembled the Farallon bird in that the juvenal wing coverts produced wing-bars instead of a solid white patch. Also the dusky auricular feathers had not yet been shed. In this plumage the two forms are virtually indistinguishable. A photograph of this individual has been published (Roberson 1980).

Two photographs of an adult at Watsonville, Santa Cruz County, 7 August - 22 September 1979 have been published (Laymon and Shuford 1980a, Roberson 1980) and many excellent descriptions were submitted. I have examined other photographs of the bird in flight taken by Al Ghiorso which show that the secondaries were all white and the white bases of the primary feathers extended more than half-way out. Other photographs of the bird on the ground but with the folded wing exposed show such an extensive patch of white on the wing that *ocularis* could be ruled out. The back feathers did not show the slightest trace of dark clouding, and the possibility that the bird might have been a hybrid had to be considered. At the time *lugens* seemed a very unlikely candidate on the basis of past published records.



Figure 3. First winter White Wagtail at Southeast Farallon Island, California, 10 October 1974. The juvenal wing coverts form wing-bars, and the outer web of the outermost tertiary is only narrowly edged with whitish. The dusky auriculars have also been retained from juvenal plumage. Photo by Phil Henderson, courtesy PRBO.

The problem was simplified when the bird (undoubtedly the same individual, considering the circumstances) returned to the same place 20 July 1980 while this paper was in preparation. I saw the bird 25 July 1980 and it was definitely an adult female *lugens*. It was still in breeding plumage and the dark-gray back, black scapulars and white chin were clearly visible. The white pattern in the wing was the same as in 1979 with no visible dark spots at the tips of the secondaries. Thus this bird was already at least in its third year when it was first seen in 1979. The following description is from my 25 July 1980 notes:

Underparts white, slight gray tinge to flanks and sides. Back slate-gray mottled blackish. Scapulars and lesser coverts black. Crown from center of head to nape black. Forehead and cheeks white. Thin black line from bill through eye connecting to nape. Large black bib on upper breast and throat, but chin white. Greater wing coverts white; secondaries all white and primaries white on basal 3/4 with gray tips. Tail and rump black. Outer tail-feathers white. Side of neck white, but bib almost connecting to nape. Bill, legs, and eye black. Much smaller than nearby Killdeer. About length of nearby Spotted Sandpipers but much smaller body and very long tail. Walked with short darts and stops as it chased flies actively. Very wary.

By the first week of August the back was already light gray (Kem Hainebach pers. comm.), and it assumed the plumage in which it was originally found in 1979. It was last seen 21 September 1980 (S.F. Bailey pers. comm.).

A singing male *lugens* was photographed at Tiburon, Marin County, 22 May 1980. See Figure 1 and introductory discussion above. Two additional photographs have been published (Laymon and Shuford 1980b, Roberson 1980). Note that this individual was an adult and not a first-year male as stated in the *American Birds* photo caption.

Grinnell and Miller (1944) include *M. a. ocularis* in their supplementary list based on an old undated sight record from Santa Barbara.

One seen briefly in flight 2 March 1975 at Watsonville by a single observer was not accepted by the California Records Committee (Luther *et al.* 1979). This reported sighting was less than two kilometers from the location of the one in 1979 and 1980.

Mexico — The first North American record of White Wagtail was collected by L. Belding (1883) at La Paz, Lower California 9 January 1882. It was identified as *ocularis* by Ridgway (1882) but at the time Ridgway (1883) considered *lugens* a synonym. Stejneger (1885), after clarifying the true status of the two races, examined Belding's specimen and concluded that it was *ocularis* because of its short bill and a brownish tinge to its back.

The alleged distinction in brownish tinge is not visible to me in comparing skins, probably because the specimens I have seen are somewhat foxed. The difference may be valid in fresh or living birds. Ridgway (1883) described Belding's specimen as less brownish-gray above than fall specimens of true *ocularis* from northeast Siberia, however.

This specimen was next checked and "identification confirmed" in 1928 by J.H. Riley when it was mounted and on public display at the U.S. National Museum (Grinnell 1928).

Unfortunately this important specimen has since been lost (George Watson pers. comm.). A description was published (Ridgway 1883) and the bird was definitely in first winter plumage and not an adult as generally supposed. The culmen measurement is abnormally small even for a female *ocularis*, but the tail length suggests a male.

Nevertheless, the brownish edges to the wing feathers and the small bill do indicate that the bird was not *lugens*. I do not quarrel with the original identification of it as *ocularis*.

An adult was observed in Sonora 30 April 1974 (Alden and Mills 1974). It was in Arroyo Cajon Bonito in extreme northeast Sonora, less than 10km from the Arizona border. Details kindly supplied by Gale Monson show that this was a gray-backed bird with a black chin, and "black and white in the wing primaries." *Ocularis* has the black primaries narrowly edged with white and I consider this to have been most likely that form.

IMPORTATION

Some records have been questioned on the grounds that they could represent escapes from captivity. Relative numbers of captive birds in the United States which could produce such escapes can be estimated from the importation figures for 1968-1974 (Banks 1970, Banks and Clapp 1972, Clapp 1975, Clapp and Banks 1973a and 1973b, Greenhall 1977). Only one White Wagtail has been listed as imported and it was *M. a. alboides* from southeast Asia. No others were imported although eight of the related African Pied Wagtail *M. aguimp* were brought in. The possibility that any western North American records were escapes is extremely remote.

CONCLUSIONS

Although *ocularis* is much more common in Alaska and is a longer distance migrant than *lugens*, it seems that *lugens* may be more likely to occur south of Alaska. There are two possible explanations. *Ocularis* migrates to Alaska via an inland route so that it is oriented in an easterly direction by the time it reaches the Bering Strait. *Lugens* is a coastal bird, evidently arriving in the Aleutians over water from a land departure far to the southwest (Gibson in press). Overshoots such as the St. Lawrence Island records and the Glacier Bay record cited above may find it natural to return south following the coast of North America.

The other factor is the apparent rapid range extension of *lugens* in recent years. This has been well documented by Nakamura (1980) in Japan, and it is possible that a similar range extension is taking place in northeast Siberia. The St. Lawrence Island records may be an indication of such a range extension. This might also account for the sudden increase in records south of Alaska since 1972.

There is a clear correlation between individuals remaining at a locality over a period of time and the expected timing and duration of molt. Evidence of molt has been observed in all individuals which have remained in an area. Other individuals seen at times of the year when they would not be molting have never stayed in one area for more than a few days.

Of the eleven records south of Alaska, six were in spring, four were in fall and one was in winter. The dates of three of the records suggest that some individuals may summer south of Alaska.

SUMMARY

Eleven records of White Wagtail in western North America south of Alaska are evaluated. Three documented by photographs are clearly referable to the form *lugens*. One specimen, no longer extant, is considered *ocularis*. One sight record is considered probably *lugens* and another probably *ocularis*. Five other west-coast records cannot be assigned definitely to one or the other form. Four of these (two were photographed)

are indistinguishable in first-winter plumage. One was too poorly documented to evaluate.

Evidence is presented from Soviet literature that these forms are actually separate species. Criteria are presented for distinguishing adults of the two forms in the field with emphasis on females and winter plumage. Adults are most reliably identified by the much larger white wing-patch of *lugens*.

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MEETING NOTICE — A Joint Annual Convention of the Western Field Ornithologists and the Colorado Field Ornithologists will be held at Estes Park, Colorado, 26-28 June 1981. Meeting activities include presentation of papers dealing with bird identification and distribution. Field trips highlight tundra, montane, and grassland species. Convention details are available from Dr. Jeanne A. Conry, Biology Department, University of Colorado at Denver, 1100 Fourteenth Street, Denver, Colorado 80202.

A WORD NEW TO SCIENCE — Our chief typesetter, Pamela Pawlak, is a marvel of accuracy who breezes through page after page of text (including those horrible Latin names) with hardly a typographical error. But in a recent proofreading session we caught one typo that caught our imagination, in that it could have been invented intentionally by a skeptical birder: Pam typed "identification" without the "a," thus rendering it as "identifiction." Well, why not? Haven't we all seen dubious identifications that might best be considered as fiction?

The Eastern Bluebird in the Highlands of southeastern New York State

ROBERT SPEISER AND JOHN BENZINGER

*An intensive survey reveals
unexpected number of bluebirds
“. . . practically on the
doorstep of New York City”*



THE Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis* in New York State is usually thought of as being more prevalent in the “upstate” area, i.e. north of Albany. South of the Catskill Mountains, bluebirds rapidly dwindle in number especially as one approaches the New York City area. Although a few pairs of bluebirds are expected to breed in the Highlands each season, new evidence uncovered through vigorous field work demonstrates that this species is not as rare in the area as formerly supposed.

STUDY AREA

The authors' survey encompassed the Hudson Highlands west of the Hudson River in New York and a small part of the Ramapo Mountains in northern New Jersey, for a total of some 660 square kilometers. This study area is situated approximately 50 kilometers north-northwest of Manhattan. The Highlands are basically an area of low, rugged, rolling hills with occasional plateau-like sections and some wide but relatively deep valleys. State and township parklands and private forestland make up the bulk of the Highlands. Urbanization and forest disruption are slight to moderate and restricted mostly to the valley areas. However, the lowlands flanking the Highlands are moderately to heavily urbanized.

Forest vegetation consists primarily of oak *Quercus* species which dominate the ridgetops and upper slopes, while northern hardwoods such as American beech *Fagus grandifolia* and sugar maple *Acer saccharum* dominate the richer soils of valleys and plateau areas. Red maple *Acer rubrum* is an important dominant in areas, such as swamps, which are wet throughout most of the year.

METHODS

Our survey was conducted between early May and early August 1980 with the majority of the field work accomplished between 0500-1400 EST from late May to late July. Approximately 41 half-days or 246 man-hours were devoted to the survey. Field

methods consisted of checking on foot known or speculated bluebird habitats. A few of these were checked twice or more. U.S.G.S. and hikers' regional maps were often useful, especially in pointing out swamps and cleared areas. Thirteen bluebird nesting boxes placed in likely habitats by the authors the preceding season were also checked. Battery-operated cassette tape players with 7-centimeter speakers were used by each author. We worked singly and together approximately equal amounts of time, playing bluebird songs at the speculated and known habitats and then observing and listening for a reasonable amount of time for a responding bluebird. Usually 10-15 minutes (depending on habitat size) were spent at each suspected habitat before moving on to another. If a bluebird was discovered, we moved a significant distance (at least 400-500 meters) away before commencing to play the tape recorder again. Caution was used so as not to double count individuals, and rechecking by backtracking was sometimes necessary. Our main purpose was to document the number of territorial males but we also noted females and juveniles whenever encountered.

RESULTS

Sixty-six adult male bluebirds were observed on territory, and at least 25 of these were paired to females. The total number of individuals detected (males, females, and immatures) equaled 155. This breaks down to one territorial adult male per 10 square kilometers. It must be emphasized that these are minimum totals. At least a dozen more areas of "probable" bluebird occurrence were not inspected due to the large size of the survey area and private landholdings within. Also, it must be expected that a few individuals were missed in some of the habitats which were inspected.

A large majority occurred in the Harriman-Bear Mountain State Park. Only one adult male was located in the Ramapo Mountain section. Also, the Sterling Forest section, annually a major bluebird breeding ground, contained only one adult male.

While a few males reacted rather passively to our tape recorded songs, the usual result was an immediate positive reaction, followed by a close inspection and approach. The aroused male would fly back and forth below the treetops uttering the song and occasionally fluffing up his plumage. Vigorous branch pecking, indicative of redirected aggression, was often observed. These behaviors left no doubt that such a male was indeed "on territory." Males had no trouble discerning our recordings (at full volume) from as far a distance as at least 125 meters. Juveniles, but seldom adult females, were attracted to the tape recorded songs readily.

Adult males were found divided almost equally between two main habitat types: swamps and recent fire-burned areas, both quite different ecologically. The former is somewhat cool, moist, and humid; the latter is relatively hot and dry. The swamp habitats are primarily the result of beaver dams, man-made impoundments and roads, or of natural occurrence. Burned areas are almost always located on mountaintops and upper slopes and result from careless campers. Virtually all bluebird habitats were characterized by a large percentage of standing dead wood. Also important are available nesting cavities and an open floor or adjacent grassy clearing to allow foraging.

Other avian species commonly sharing the swamp habitats with bluebirds were the Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*, Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*, and Tree Swallow *Iridoprocne bicolor*. In fire-burned areas, the American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*, Common Flicker *Colaptes auratus*, and Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla* often occurred.

DISCUSSION

Such a relatively large number of breeding bluebirds have not been known to occur in the Hudson Highlands since at least the early part of this century. The history of the bluebird here has been sketchy. Mearns (1878) noted the bluebird to be an "abundant summer resident;" however, Carr (1940), approximately a half-century later, considered it to be "uncommon." Furthermore, he stated that there were "three nest sites in the (Harriman-Bear Mtn.) Park." Such a low total suggests Carr may have been in error. The local bluebird population remained at a fair level, at least in the lowland surrounding the Highlands, until the late 1950's according to Bull (1964). The over-use of insecticides and rampant land and housing development — along with their concomitant Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* populations — finally caught up with the bluebirds at the start of the 1960's, according to Deed (1968), who stated its status as "rare and local." However, he was more properly referring to the bluebird's status in lowland Rockland County, N.Y., just east of and adjacent to the Highlands. In the 1970's, reported observations of breeding bluebirds in the Highlands were scarce and a later account by Deed (1976) mentioned no positive change in the bluebird's status.

The results of our 1980 survey show that the bluebird's status is more properly "very uncommon" or "uncommon" (at least one individual per day in favorable habitat per locality). Furthermore, we have no reason to believe that the Highlands bluebird population has been significantly different from the 1980 level for the past couple of seasons and possibly the last decade. This finding strongly suggests that field observations made by "sport birders" cannot be relied upon to reflect the true status of a widely dispersed and relatively passive, soft-singing bird, such as the bluebird.

The observation of only one male bluebird in the Sterling Forest area, previously mentioned as a main habitat area, warrants further discussion. Such a scarcity of bluebirds here was completely unexpected, since this area contains many superb bluebird habitats. Yet, at the Harriman-Bear Mountain State Park, just a couple of kilometers to the east, bluebirds were found in virtually every habitat available to them.

Only one major difference between these two ecologically almost identical areas was apparent. The 1980 late spring and summer seasons in the Highlands were marked by a tremendous outbreak of Gypsy Moth *Porthetria (Lymantria) dispar* larvae but this outbreak was not uniform in extent and effect. The Sterling Forest area was severely affected with thousands of hectares of forest totally or partially defoliated by teeming millions of hungry "caterpillars." With the canopy layers gone, along with much of the understory, air and ground temperatures in the forest soared. Indeed, the authors conducted their field work here with much difficulty, as virtually no shade existed. The Harriman-Bear Mountain State Park, however, experienced only a small outbreak of *Porthetria* larvae and heavy defoliation was confined to a few small areas.

The authors speculate that the Sterling Forest bluebird population dispersed to other places where habitat was less affected, thus abandoning their territories. The nearby Harriman-Bear Mountain State Park, with its lush forests still intact, served as the major refuge — which accounts for the abnormally high bluebird count in that area. During the height of the defoliation (in mid-June), young produced from the first clutch would have been old enough to care for themselves, thus they would not be instrumental in bonding adults to their territory. Furthermore, very few second clutches would have been initiated at this particular time.

Dispersal of the Sterling Forest bluebirds was probably prompted by the lack of any shade; possibly they suffered some other secondary effect such as the dispersal or loss of a favored insect prey, or may even have been influenced through some negative psychological factor. No other explanation can account for such gross differences in the number of bluebirds between these two areas of the Highlands. Unfortunately the Sterling Forest area was not surveyed in late March and early April when bluebirds would have been on territory initially. But we can hardly conceive how they would not have been there during that time. At least the one male found in Sterling Forest in May, before the defoliation was advanced, could not be located in a recheck during the height of the defoliation.

The authors know of no other published information concerning forest defoliation effects on the dispersal of the bluebird or any other avian species. Not surprisingly, in many areas of total defoliation we noted a general scarcity of avian species. The negative effects of *Porthetria* forest defoliation on various birds, particularly on their reproductive success, is a subject which merits further study.

Ecologically, the Highlands bluebird population has come full circle. Before the arrival of the colonists the only habitats available to bluebirds must have been the various Beaver *Castor canadensis* swamps and old meadows, patches of forest killed by insects and disease, areas of oak mortality caused by drought, and areas disturbed by fire — either natural fires or those deliberately set during the slash-and-burn clearing practiced by native Americans. After colonists settled the area, great tracts of Highlands forest were cleared and burned, with an agricultural community flourishing in the surrounding lowlands. Gradually the bluebird adapted to new and more widely available habitat in the lowlands, nesting in fenceposts and other suitable structures throughout the rural countryside. Meanwhile, the Beaver (along with several other animal species) was being extirpated from the area.

With the introduction of the Starling and House Sparrow, coupled with an increasing human population, bluebird numbers gradually diminished in the lowlands. Fortunately, soon after the beginning of the twentieth century, a great portion of the Highlands was secured as either state parkland or private forest preserves. Shortly thereafter, beaver were introduced and their swamps once again began to appear. Also during this period, blight exterminated the American chestnut *Castanea* from the region, resulting in many dead trees to serve as nest sites.

As the momentum of land development and housing reached a peak in the surrounding lowlands, an agricultural mode of life, along with the bluebird, gave way to a suburban-urban existence. However, a small "relict" population of bluebirds continued to find refuge among the still undeveloped, relatively "wild" Highlands. The state parkland particularly, while protecting wildlife, also attracted many recreationalists and campers. Less knowledgeable campers often found their camp fires going out of control, burning and killing portions of the monotonous forest. The bluebird, as a result, benefited immensely as many more nesting and foraging habitats were made available. This is further proof that the ecological effects of fires are not all adverse.

The deep woods of the Highlands serve as a buffer from the high numbers of Starlings, House Sparrows, housecats, and people in the surrounding lowlands and developed montane valleys. The sprawling forest, with its occasional openings, is the entire reason why bluebirds persist here in some numbers. Zeleny (1976), Pinkowski (1979), and others have reported similar occurrences for other areas of the eastern United States. In the near future, the bluebird should continue to do well in the

Highlands, providing land development is wisely controlled. Ecological forest succession is not a serious threat to bluebird habitats upon the mountain summits and upper slopes, since successional processes in those areas are comparatively slow.

SUMMARY

New evidence secured in 1980 shows that the Eastern Bluebird is not rare in the Hudson Highlands and that a fair number exist here, previously overlooked, almost on the doorstep of New York City. Their existence here is made possible by a sprawling forest which provides the necessary isolation from Starlings and House Sparrows. Interspersed throughout the Highlands forest are swamps and burned-over areas which provide nesting habitat which meets the bluebirds' specific needs. Available evidence points to the dispersal of bluebirds from areas completely defoliated by gypsy moth *Porthetria* larvae. The greatest danger facing the bluebird in the Highlands is unrestricted land development.

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Berylline Hummingbirds Nest in Arizona

JAMES O. ANDERSON AND GALE MONSON



Will this Neotropical hummingbird establish itself as a regular breeder within the U.S.? Here is a progress report

THE Berylline Hummingbird *Amazilia beryllina*, previously unknown as a nesting bird in the United States and indeed not even recorded in this country until 1967 (Sheppard 1968), has recently nested twice in Arizona: at Cave Creek Canyon in the Chiricahua Mountains in 1976 and at Ramsey Canyon in the Huachuca Mountains in 1978. The species has been detected almost annually since 1967 at Ramsey Canyon, and was first found at Cave Creek Canyon in 1971.

Little is known of the breeding of this hummingbird in the adjacent Mexican state of Sonora. A male with enlarged testes was taken in June 1953 in the Sierra Huachinera only about 100km into Mexico (Marshall 1957). The species was "abundant" in June 1937 at Rancho Santa Barbara northeast of Alamos in extreme southeastern Sonora, about 460km south of the U.S. border (van Rossem 1945).

The Cave Creek nest was discovered on the grounds of the Southwestern Research Station of the American Museum of Natural History on 13 July 1976 by Scott Terrill, Salome Demaree, and Helen Longstreth. This followed the first sighting of an adult in the grounds on 20 June by William von Bergen and Eugene and Steven Cardiff. Feeding of young in the nest was noted on 22 July (C.S. Lawson, pers. comm.). The last feeding was observed on 10 August (Fred Ranson, pers. comm.). At the next observation 6 days later the nest was abandoned and it was speculated that a heavy rainstorm, or possibly predators, had destroyed the young (Ranson *op. cit.*). It was never clear that more than one young bird was in the nest. The nest was later collected and is deposited in the American Museum of Natural History, New York, N.Y. (Vincent Roth, pers. comm.). It was built on a slender branch of an Arizona sycamore *Platanus wrightii* in a riparian situation, and was about 7.5m above the ground. The site is about 1634m above sea level.

The Ramsey Canyon nest was found on the Ramsey Canyon Preserve of The Nature Conservancy on 8 August 1978 by a visitor but was not identified as being a Berylline Hummingbird nest until it was shown to Susan Anderson who recognized the sitting bird as such. Identification was later confirmed by James O. Anderson and

by Carroll and Joan Peabody. Adults had been seen on the Preserve regularly since 9 June that year. Nestlings first became visible on 20 August. One of the young fledged on 30 August and the other on 1 September. Both the young and the female were observed on the Preserve frequently in September until the last sighting, of a young bird, was made on 28 September by Dean Anderson. The nest was saddled in the crotch formed by two small Arizona sycamore branches, and was about 5.5m above the ground (which in this case was the bed of the stream in Ramsey Canyon). The site is about 1722m above sea level.

Both nests were in sycamore trees in riparian canyon sites, at similar elevations above sea level. Both were constructed of a thin-bladed grass, completely dried and held together with spider webbing. They were secured to their supporting branches with spider web material. The exteriors of both nests were decoratively and completely covered by green leaflike lichens *Parmelia hypoleucites*, a fairly common species in Arizona on rocks and trees. The nests when viewed from above were oval and measured 40 x 50mm with a cavity depth of 15mm.

THE RAMSEY CANYON NEST

Following its discovery, the senior author and Susan and Dean Anderson and Carroll and Joan Peabody were able to maintain some surveillance of the nest. The Peabodys observed the nest on 10 August for an extended period. The sitting bird appeared to be pushing something about in the bottom of the nest cavity, an action which was interpreted as possibly rolling eggs. From time to time, over a period of an hour, the bird would rise from the nest cavity, poke her bill into the depths of the nest, and slowly move her head from side to side. For more than 4 hours the bird did not



Adult female Berylline Hummingbird at nest with two nestlings in the Ramsey Canyon Preserve, Huachuca Mountains, Arizona, August 1978. Second documented U.S. nesting for the species. Photo by James O. Anderson.

leave the nest for longer than 3 minutes and upon returning settled down with just the slightest movement of her bill in the bottom of the nest. She would then assume the usual pose of an incubating bird.

The hatching date was thought to have been between 10 and 13 August, based on the 10 August activity of the female. On 13 August the bird was more active than on previous days. She left the nest at about 20 minute intervals, after which she would return, stand in the cavity, and place her bill in such a manner as to suggest feeding young.

On 20 August the bills of two nestlings were first seen. The tips of the bills appeared as tiny points. It was interesting to note that when the female arrived at the nest the two nestlings would "rise to the occasion" by making a higher profile with heads erect. After feeding they would slump back into the nest with only the bill tips showing above the rim.

On 22 August, the Peabodys and Douglas Danforth were watching the nest at about 1000 MST when a Huachuca Mountain Kingsnake *Lampropeltis pyromelana woodini* appeared on the nest tree, making slow but sure progress in the direction of the Berylline nest. Although the watchers realized it is usually unwise to disrupt the natural course of events in the wild, the unique status of this nest prompted them to intervene. Danforth picked up a long, dead, thin sycamore limb and laid it across the branch in front of the snake's path of travel. As the snake eased onto this limb, Danforth slowly raised it and by this means lowered the snake to the ground. Anderson released the snake at an old mine site about 2.25km upstream from the Preserve. There were no apparent later interruptions to the nestlings' progress, which no doubt would have come to an abrupt end had it not been for this "unnatural" interference.

On 27 August Anderson noted an interesting association between two large, black bugs (order Hemiptera) and the hummingbirds. The bugs when first observed were slowly making their way to the nest in such a manner as to cause the nestlings to squirm about and move away as far as possible from the nearest advancing bug. At first it seemed the bugs were going to make a predatory move, but after a while it appeared they were feeding on something, possibly the droppings of the nestlings which dotted the broad sycamore leaves beneath and alongside the nest. The bugs sometimes approached to within an inch of the nestlings.

The defensive behavior of the female as she chased the bugs away from the nest area was interesting. As the bugs approached she flew about the nest in an apparently agitated state. Then, as the bugs got to within an inch of the nest she pecked at them, sometimes while standing close by the nest and sometimes in flight. However, her defensive actions became confused, as when she had chased the bugs a foot or more from the nest, it seemed the chase became the most important part of the interaction as she would chase the bugs right back to the immediate area of the nest.

On the morning of 30 August Anderson spent an hour observing and photographing the nest. Later in the day, about 1330, he returned to photograph the female feeding the young. He returned a third time about 1410 when direct sunlight would be on the nest for a few moments. As he was taking the photographs he noted a great deal of movement by the larger of the nestlings. It was wiggling in the nest and slowly easing to a higher level in the cavity than its nest mate. By 1430 its activity had taken it to a point just below the rim of the nest. At no time did the bird attempt to use its wings nor did it show any signs of preparation for flight. At about 1445 the active nestling was almost perched on the rim, when the female came and fed both young, the



The adult female Berylline Hummingbird reacting to two large bugs (order Hemiptera) which were feeding near the nest. See p. 58 for a description of this odd interaction. Photo by James O. Anderson.



The Berylline Hummingbird nest from Ramsey Canyon, photographed at close range after the young had fledged. Note the leaflike lichens *Parmelia hypoleucites* covering the outside of the nest. Photo by James O. Anderson.



The Berylline Hummingbird nest built in Cave Creek Canyon, Chiricahua Mountains, Arizona, in 1976. The nest was abandoned sometime in mid-August, and it was later collected to document this first known nesting attempt in the United States. Photo by Gale Monson.

higher one first. Then, at 1455, without any indication that flight was imminent, the nestling suddenly flew off the nest. It had fledged. The event took place so quickly that it was almost missed. The newly fledged bird flew downstream and out of sight immediately. The remaining nestling showed no distress nor any desire to leave the nest cavity, but stayed deep within the cup with only its head and part of the shoulders showing.

At the moment the nestling left the nest the female returned and followed it downstream. Anderson wanted to know what communication might be taking place between the recently departed nestling and adult. The voice of the Berylline Hummingbird is almost outside of his hearing range unless he is within 4 to 5m of the bird. With the fledged bird and adult downstream he had no chance of hearing them. At about that moment Susan Anderson walked up and said she could hear the birds a short way downstream, making a series of high-pitched trumpet-like calls back and forth. The two birds were perched within 1.5m of each other on a limb of an Arizona walnut *Juglans major* about 45m downstream and about 7.5m above the stream.

On 1 September Anderson observed the remaining nestling still in the nest at 0700. At about 1000 the nest was empty. The bird apparently had fledged sometime between the two observations. A juvenile Berylline was observed at the feeders under the eaves of the Andersons' house and another at the feeders at the Preserve's headquarters throughout the rest of the day.

The two juvenile Berylline Hummingbirds and one adult female continued to be observed at these feeders until nearly the end of September, as noted earlier.

There are two distinct reasons for the success of the Berylline nest, aside from the ideal foraging conditions and other favorable habitat aspects. One was the complete protection afforded the nest from negative human disturbance and protection from

what might be observed as "normal" predation, as in the incident of the Huachuca Mountain Kingsnake. On days when summer rain storms were heavy, the Preserve's nature trail, directly below the nest, was closed to prevent anyone from inadvertently causing the female to abandon the nest and leave the eggs or nestlings exposed to weather. In addition to closing the trail during rain storms there was also a limit placed on the number of people using the trail at any given time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank for their cooperation all those persons noted in the text as contributing data. Appreciation is due Mason E. Hale of the National Herbarium for his identification of the lichen used to camouflage the Berylline Hummingbird nests.

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The February challenge featured this small bird, photographed just after it flew from a Date Palm in a southern botanical garden. Can you identify this bird to species?

Answer to Snap Judgment 7

KENN KAUFMAN



From the viewpoint of a standard "field marks" approach, this would be a nightmare i.d. problem: we can see no wing pattern, no head pattern, actually no pattern at all; this is just a little bird with some streaks on the underparts. How to identify it?

An essential first step in so many identification problems is to place the bird in the correct family. This bird is a warbler, as indicated by its evident small size, compact body, short tail, and particularly by the thin, pointed bill. To carry it a step further, the bird belongs to the genus *Dendroica*, since the only other North American warblers with streaked underparts are the Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* (which would have a distinctive face pattern in all plumages) and the waterthrushes and Ovenbird of the genus *Seiurus* (which would appear more elongated in body shape and would lack the deep notch in the tail and the fine point to the bill).

Having the bird narrowed down to genus it might seem we have reached an impasse, since so little can be seen of the plumage pattern. However, it is worth taking another look at those streaks on the underparts. From this low angle of view we can determine that the streaking is really quite extensive: long continuous streaks running from the chest far down the sides and flanks and across most of the breast, with something of a gap down the center of the underparts. The only *Dendroicae* that we might expect to display so much streaking are Palm *D. palmarum*, Cape May *D. tigrina*, Yellow-rumped *D. coronata*, and perhaps Magnolia *D. magnolia* or Prairie *D. discolor* warblers.

At this point the identification should become a simple one for anyone who knows all these warblers in the field, because among these species only the Cape May has such a short tail and such a spiky point to the bill. Actually, we brought up this very subject — the shape of this species — in the preceding issue, at the top of page 25. At least one reader (astute Stuart Tingley, who needs no extra clues for warbler identification) spotted this giveaway; if you noticed it, give yourself an additional five points for perception.

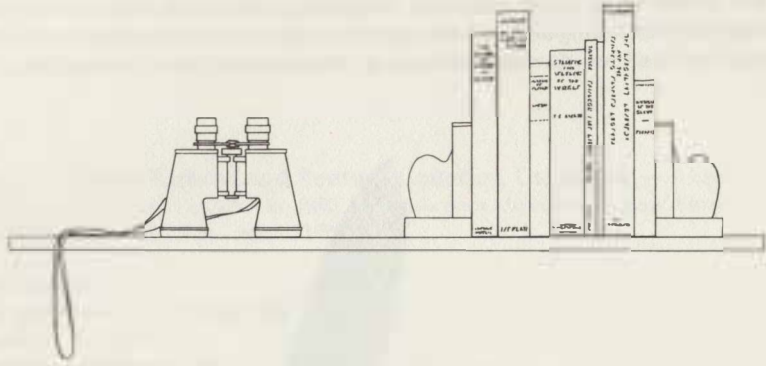
We couldn't resist giving away the identification in another way as well: by mentioning that the bird came out of a Date Palm. In the southern U.S., no birds are more typically associated with palms than the Yellow-throated Warbler *Dendroica dominica* (which was clearly not our Snap Judgment bird) and the Cape May Warbler. (The Palm Warbler, by contrast, is usually on or near the ground.) The Cape May in the photograph, one of the few ever recorded in Arizona, laid claim to a Date Palm in the Boyce Thompson Arboretum and spent November and December 1978 chasing away Gila Woodpeckers *Melanerpes uropygialis* and Curve-billed Thrashers *Toxostoma curvirostre* — a rare spectacle, indeed.

This photograph of the boisterous **Cape May Warbler** was taken by Kenneth V. Rosenberg.

Reviews

Edited by

ELAINE COOK



Call Collect, Ask for Birdman — James M. Vardaman. 1980. New York, New York: St. Martin's Press. 247 pp., photos, map. \$10.95.

Publisher's address:
St. Martin's Press
175 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10010

An interest in birds can be almost anything the observer wants it to be — a science, a sport, a passion, a skill, a lark. For many it is a combination of some or all of these elements. For Jim Vardaman in 1979 it was a sport and ultimately a race. The listing game drove this otherwise likeable and uncomplicated man to the outer limits of birding mania in an attempt to see 700 species of birds in North America in just one year. He was armed with good advice, competent guides, ample energy and a healthy expense account. Vardaman spent 159 days and \$44,507.35 and traveled over 161,000 miles pursuing this elusive goal.

This book is no *Wild America*, no journal full of commentaries on the natural history and birdlife of North America. Inevitable comparisons with that work, which took Peterson and Fisher in 1953 through 100 days and 30,000 miles of natural delights and which undoubtedly launched the "Big Year" competition, are unnecessary. Vardaman intends this book to be a recounting of a *lister's* Odyssey. His accomplishment is not one as a naturalist, but as an organizer, a talent amply demonstrated in the book and clearly acquired in his forestry management business. Skill as an organizer meant arranging for complicated schedules and being at the right place at the right time to try to see 700 species.

In the beginning, however, the book seems too rushed. Chapter three finds Vardaman shuttling quickly through four Western states — Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado and California. During this eight-day dash the reader gets little feel for the birds or the

places visited, only the list. There is a sense of "This is Thursday, we must be in the Rockies" about this part of the book.

Vardaman subsequently brings us through the Atlantic Provinces, Arizona, Florida, Alaska, Wyoming and elsewhere in a less hurried fashion. Many of his little adventures are quite entertaining and it is interesting to follow his luck — both good and bad — as the story progresses. Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 19, describing the search for birds on Attu, St. Lawrence Island and other Alaskan outposts unfamiliar to many observers, are among the more informative in the book. Yet, as we go through Vardaman's narrative there occurs little or no preparation for some of the rare birds seen in 1979 (e.g. Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, p. 24 or Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, p. 25) and there is no discussion of the factors which might contribute to their appearance. Similarly, many less rare, but still quite interesting birds are simply mentioned in the text without any further comment (e.g. Mexican Crow *Corvus imparatus*, p. 34 or Cave Swallow *Petrochelidon fulva*, p. 58).



While the importance of the list overshadows every other theme in the book, it might be interesting to note here that there were some byproducts of Vardaman's year that were of a more serious nature. For example, it was found that Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella ochotensis* may actually be regular on the outer Aleutians in the fall and that White-collared Seedeater *Sporophila torqueola*, though certainly down from former numbers, is still to be found in the Rio Grande Valley. We probably would not know this except for Vardaman's effort and the efforts of those helping him.

The most interesting part of the book is, perhaps, appendix A, in which 811 species are charted under fifteen key areas and each is given a coded rating, marking the likelihood of occurrence. The numbered codes range from #1, signifying the best likelihood of discovery, upwards to #7 which approaches the almost mythical. The system is ingenious and quite helpful. One could have some disagreement with the charts as they stand, however. White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus* is not charted under the North Carolina pelagic category, nor is Scarlet-headed (Streak-backed) Oriole *Icterus sclateri* charted under California. Why Ross' Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* is given a #1 code rating, while the Great Gray Owl *Strix nebulosa*, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl *Glaucidium brasilianum* and both the skuas *Catharacta* are listed as #2, escapes me. Still, these charts are quite well done.

Except for a short discussion on the speciation of orioles, some comments on a leucistic Black-capped Chickadee *Parus atricapillus* originally identified as a Siberian

(Gray-headed) Chickadee *P. cinctus*, and some notes on the Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* and on the problems of differentiating Magnificent and Great frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens*, *F. minor* (these last notes written by observers other than the author), there is little you can sink your teeth into in the way of bird identification in the text. This is probably because much of Vardaman's story is about the *people* who watch birds, rather than the birds themselves. It is no accident that the reader gets more of a feeling for some of the intrepid bird enthusiasts who appear through the text than for any of the birds themselves. Indeed, all the 13 photographs are of birders, not birds. (To see a photograph of a score of people observing Brown Noddies *Anous stolidus* on the Dry Tortugas when you are informed that they observed a Black Noddy *A. tenuirostris* among the Browns can be downright annoying.)

Still, if you want to partake in a little vicarious listing or look into the syndrome which makes birders tick, you could hardly do better than this book. — *Paul J. Baicich*

The Birds of Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, California — Richard Webster, Paul Lehman, and Louis Bevier. 1980. (*Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Occasional Paper*, No. 10) 43 pp., map. \$3.75.

Publisher's address:

Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History
2559 Puesta del Sol Road
Santa Barbara, California 93105

EVEN the California birders, who are so accustomed to the unusual that they expect it on every trip afield, have been impressed by the steady onslaught of rare birds reported from the Santa Barbara region in recent years. One factor in this stream of discoveries has been the quality of the area itself: something about the local vagrant traps not only attracts the lost strays but also, apparently, encourages them to remain for extended periods. However, an equally important factor has been the intensive, concentrated coverage which the area has received during the last decade from a band of talented young field ornithologists. Three of the leaders of this movement have now pooled their knowledge to produce an accurate, up-to-date reference work on the birds of the region.

The format is a familiar and very effective one featuring bar-graphs to indicate seasonal occurrence and relative abundance, number/letter codes for district and habitat, and facing-page notes giving further information. For the rarest vagrants, the latter notes list dates & places of all records. Commendably, however, the authors have also paid attention to the more common species, and interesting notes on their distribution are often included.

Needless to say, this attractively-produced work will be essential for anyone who birds in or near Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. It will also be an invaluable source of information for anyone interested in the details of western bird distribution, migration or patterns of vagrancy. — *K.K.*

Recent Literature in Field Ornithology

Greenberg, Russell S., and Judy A. Gradwohl. 1980. Observations of paired Canada Warblers *Wilsonia canadensis* during migration in Panama. *Ibis* 122 (4): 509-512.

These researchers, studying foraging flocks of antbirds in Panama, made incidental observations on the spring migrant Canada Warblers that associated with the antbird flocks. In a significantly high percentage of all cases, the Canada Warblers occurred in what appeared to be male-female pairs. There are several possible reasons for this, and proving or disproving any of them would be difficult; however, one potential explanation is that the birds are actually migrating north in pairs — a phenomenon which is generally unknown in passerines. Further observations along the Canada Warbler's migratory route or on the breeding grounds might shed more light on the question. — K.K.

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FULL TITLES, AND PLACES OF PUBLICATION, OF SERIALS CITED ABOVE

Birding American Birding Association, Austin, Texas. **Bird Study** British Trust for Ornithology, Tring, Hertfordshire, England. **British Birds** British Birds Ltd., Bedfordshire, England. **Bulletin of British Ornithologists' Club** British Ornithologists' Club, c/o British Ornithologists' Union, London, England. **Canadian Field-Naturalist** Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club, Ottawa, Ontario. **Condor** Cooper Ornithological Society, Los Angeles, California. **Journal of Field Ornithology** Northeastern Bird-Banding Association, Concord, Massachusetts. **Polar Record** Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, England. **Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington** Biological Society of Washington, Washington, D.C. **Southwestern Naturalist** Southwestern Association of Naturalists, Natchitoches, Louisiana. **Wilson Bulletin** Wilson Ornithological Society, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Latest Rumors . . .

... Wherein we mention some of the notable bird records that have come to our attention recently. The column's title is chosen intentionally; we cannot claim that this summary is complete — nor, perhaps, even completely accurate, since we have not checked out most of these reports personally. We sincerely hope that we'll never see this column quoted as a source of information. For more carefully-screened reports, see the appropriate regional publications, or the regional reports in *American Birds*.

Interesting birds converged upon Florida from all directions this winter. In Everglades National Park, a **Thick-billed Vireo** *Vireo crassirostris* was seen by the fortunate, and there were persistent rumors of another West Indian stray, the Black-faced Grassquit *Tiaris bicolor*. In the same area (but arriving from the opposite direction) were several Lesser Nighthawks — up to five or six individuals; this southwestern species may be a regular stray in the Southeast (perhaps overlooked at times?). The European contribution to the Floridian winter included numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus*, now regular, and also a **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* found in February at Merritt Island. But most unique of the lot was a **White-collared Swift** *Streptoprocne zonaris* found dying on the fifth floor of a condominium in extreme northwestern Florida in January. This big swift is common in parts of Mexico and the West Indies, so it seemed only a matter of time before the U.S. got a record; at least one sighting had already been reported in Texas. — In more northern climes, New York birders had a special treat (albeit an elusive one) with a **white-phased Gyrfalcon** on Long Island, and Ontario hosted a wintering **Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris*. — An odd immature gull detected at Anchorage, Alaska, was identified for some time as a Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris* from Asia, but subsequently doubts were raised: it may have been instead the Siberian race of the Mew Gull. — California had a parallel occurrence with a female hummingbird: it was first identified as a Ruby-throated (which would have been a first state record), but closer examination suggested it was a Black-chinned X Anna's hybrid. We mention these two cases of uncertainty not to cast aspersions upon anyone, but rather to applaud the efforts of the Californians and Alaskans in tackling these difficult identifications.

BIRD ARTISTS WANTED

Additional artists are needed to contribute to an "advanced field guide" now being prepared by Wings Inc. in collaboration with *Continental Birdlife*. Basic requirements for artists include a high degree of technical competence, familiarity with birds in the field, and a willingness to work closely with the authors. For further information on art requirements and on fees offered, contact Kenn Kaufman, Editor, *Continental Birdlife*, P.O. Box 43294, Tucson, Arizona 85733.

