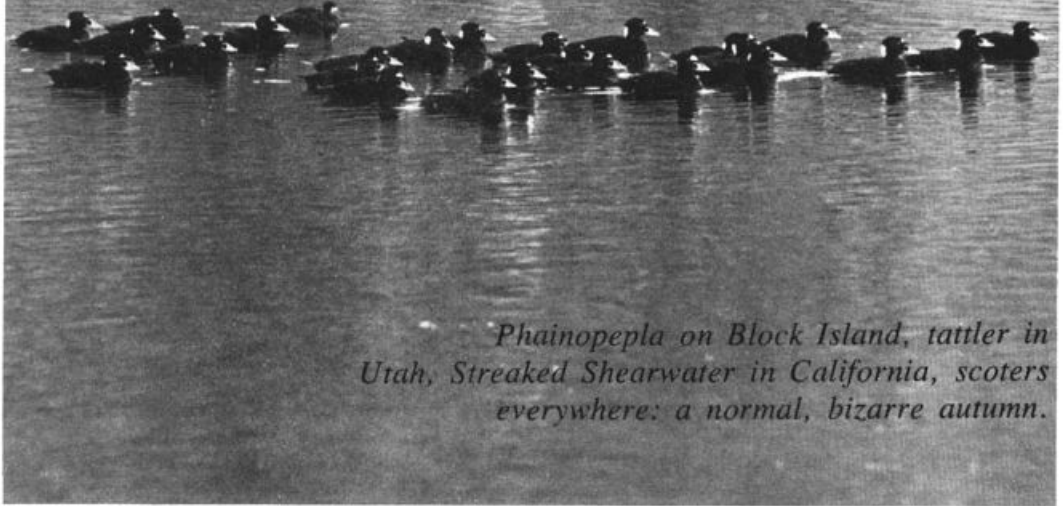


# The Changing Seasons

Paul A. DeBenedictis\*



*Phainopepla on Block Island, tattler in Utah, Streaked Shearwater in California, scoters everywhere: a normal, bizarre autumn.*

*Surf Scoters. Photo/Leonard Lee Rue III, from N.A.S*

Probably the most difficult aspect of writing the Changing Seasons is deciding how to approach it. Eight years ago in this column I indicated my mistrust of relating migration to weather from *American Birds* Regional reports, and nothing since has changed my mind. I then noted the primary value of *American Birds* is its continent-wide view of the dynamics of the North American avifauna, and this autumn's reports add further testimony to that opinion. Different readers look for different things in *American Birds*. Foremost to me are the pleasures of seeing what happened in places I have birded myself and the discovery of patterns hidden among seemingly scattered, unrelated records of birds. The first aspect always makes me ask myself - where would I have liked to have birded that season? Unlike last year, Autumn 1975 was not dominated by events in any one part of the continent, and the westward flight of "eastern" passerines this year was balanced by widespread irruptions of "northern" species through much of eastern North America. To find patterns one must search through the reports, keeping alert for those records that make you feel that you have seen them

before. Although I will first summarize weather trends as seen by the Regional editors, in fact I do this last because I want what I have learned from the birds to tell me what to look for in the weather, rather than *vice versa*. Then I will go through the cast of characters, the birds themselves, in detail because the patterns that are hardest to find are those that produce but a few records per Region. It is impossible to do this without other ideas and questions coming to mind, which I will inject where appropriate. Finally, I will look back on everything to see how my initial impressions held up.

## THE SEASON

Probably the most universal description of the season was "mild." Winter hit Alaska in late October and most of Canada and the extreme northern United States by mid-November. The Southwest was warm throughout the period and California experienced drought conditions. The Pacific Northwest, particularly Oregon, was hit by a severe early November storm which drove many oceanic birds inland. The Rocky Mountain and Great Plains states experienced a major late November storm system which brought numbers of water birds to Arizona and cold temperatures to south Texas. The eastern half of the United

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States experienced a very wet August, a wet cool September, but October and November were warm and dry. The only tropical storm of ornithological note was *Eloise*, which moved from the Gulf of Mexico on September 23 north along the Atlantic coast to northeast Canada through September 28, downing a variety of migrants in its path. Several Regional reports noted the association of migratory movements with the passage of frontal systems, something most observers who experience such climates come to expect. I cannot add to these Editors' comments.

## THE BIRDS

Three Yellow-billed Loons in coastal Washington between mid-September and late November follow the pattern of records recently noted by J. V. Remsen, Jr. and L. C. Binford (*Western Birds* 6: 7-20; 1975), but another at Calgary, Alberta, on November 3 was unusual. Red-throated Loons were found at scattered inland localities from coast to coast, but Arctic Loons were noted inland only in California (9 reports), e. Washington (3), Colorado (5), Nevada (1), and one strangely isolated bird in Illinois. Many of these reports antedate the major November storm systems that struck the Pacific Northwest, casting doubt on the proximate cause of their appearance.

The 30 Eared Grebes (7 each from Missouri and Iowa, 3 Ontario, 2 western New York, 1 each from Illinois, Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee, and Michigan, and 6 from Florida) reported from eastern North America were about the normal numbers reported there. A Western Grebe photographed in Alabama was the first substantiated record for that state; the only others reported from the East were in Indiana and Illinois.

All coastal regional reports reflect the continued interest in pelagic birds. Along the Atlantic coast the regular species were found in average or slightly better numbers. Fulmars showed continued increase in the northwest Atlantic. Trips to Gulf Stream waters yielded Audubon's Shearwater as far north as Delaware, single Black-capped Petrels off Cape Hatteras and off Virginia, and a Harcourt's (or Band-rumped) Storm-Petrel was collected, along with a Leach's, 73 miles off Delaware for the first respective state (?) records. Most remarkable was an Audubon's Shearwater found dead in Ontario on September 8 after a southern storm. An addition to the Canadian list, it is one of the few inland records of *Puffinus* shearwaters anywhere in North America.

Birders now invading the Gulf of Mexico found a few Greater and Cory's Shearwaters on a body

of water where this group is notorious for poor showings.

On the Pacific coast there were mixed indications of a Fulmar flight and better than average numbers of Buller's (New Zealand) Shearwaters were found. Manx Shearwaters pushed only as far north as Monterey Bay, Calif., and only five Least Storm-Petrels were noted off southern California. Normally the Laysan Albatross off northern California in mid-November, or the 100+ Leach's Storm-Petrels blown inland to eastern Oregon by the November 10 storm would have been the outstanding tube-nose records from the Pacific coast, but a Streaked Shearwater (*Calonectris leucomelas*) from Japanese waters collected on Monterey Bay, Calif., October 3 eclipsed them all. Not only is it an addition to the North American list, it is one of the few new California birds which involved neither Point Reyes Bird Observatory nor Guy McCaskie!

In connection with this record a point of scientific nomenclature should be mentioned for the benefit of non-professional ornithologists who use *American Birds* to keep track of additions to the North American list when compiling various check-lists. The various tube-noses popularly called "shearwaters" commonly are now placed either in a single genus, *Puffinus*, or are divided into two genera, *Puffinus* and *Calonectris*, for reasons described in Volume I of the *Handbook of North American Birds*. While both are acceptable classifications, the A.O.U. Committee on Classification and Nomenclature, at least as yet, has not adopted the latter classification. Therefore, if one adheres to the A.O.U. Check-list, the proper scientific name of the Streaked Shearwater is *Puffinus leucomelas*. Contrarily, if one prefers to recognize the two genera, the proper scientific name of Cory's Shearwater is *Calonectris diomedea*.

If the four Red-billed Tropicbirds found off southern California were exciting, the individual photographed in Florida is remarkable. It is only the third or fourth reported from eastern North America. The Red-footed Booby was added to the California list when Point Reyes Bird Observatory personnel (see!) captured one on South Farallon Island, where its presence is all the more unusual in view of the cool surrounding waters. The absence of other Pacific coast records of boobies and the scarcity of warm water birds off southern California suggests that its origin is somehow tied to that of the Streaked Shearwater mentioned above, since both breed in the west tropical Pacific. Seven plus Brown Boobies, including two plus from Long Island, N.Y., and six plus Blue-faced (or Masked) Boobies were disco-

vered along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts. Brown Pelicans show continued increase on the Pacific coast, surely one of the beneficiaries of the ban on DDT.

The annual northward movement of herons and egrets brought Louisiana Herons to northern Arizona and to Michigan, and a Little Blue Heron to South Dakota. When I left California ten years ago, the first Cattle Egrets were being found in southern California. The species now nests in the hundreds at the Salton Sea, and Roger Peterson's foresight in including it in his Western Field Guide in 1960 is fully evident by this autumn's reports of five from the Northern Pacific Coast Region, 44 from the Middle Pacific Coast Region, 50+ from coastal southern California, six from Colorado, two from Nevada and "scattered flocks" from Arizona and New Mexico.

Reports of waterfowl, with one exception, showed little pattern. The Garganey from the Pribolofs, the Fulvous Tree Ducks in North Dakota, the Common Eider in Michigan (most Great Lakes eiders are Kings), and the Masked Ducks at Key West were probably the greatest oddities. However, the waterfowl that caused the most consistent mention were scoters. Scoters breed across the arctic and migrate mainly along the coast and evidently down James Bay and across Lake Ontario to the Atlantic (as do Brant). While they are not unusual on the other Great Lakes, scoters were mentioned from there and from most other inland regions in numbers per each species more typical of the seasonal totals for all three. The flight provided first state records of Black Scoter from Wyoming, Arizona and New Mexico. The records span a long time interval, but generally coincide with usual passage dates. Only in Arizona were *some* records clearly storm related, and these reports occurred after the main passage was completed. To a coastal based observer, four scoters is nothing, but the roster of inland reports this fall will impress any land-locked observer: eastern British Columbia — 6 White-winged, 1 Surf; eastern Washington — 14 White-winged, 6 Surf; California — 4 White-winged, 5 Surf; Nevada — 1 White-winged, 3-4 Surf; Montana — 5 White-winged, 1 Surf, Wyoming — 1 Black; Colorado — 2 White-winged, 4 Surf, 6 Black; Arizona — 6 Surf, 3 Black. (also 41 Surf later storm-driven from the south); New Mexico — 1 Surf, 2 Black; Saskatchewan — 7 White-winged, 10 Surf, 5 Black, South Dakota — 10 White-winged, 3 Surf, 5 Black, Kansas — 1 White-winged; Texas — 3 White-winged, 5 Surf, 2 Black; Minnesota — 2 White-winged, 14 Surf, 3 Black; Wisconsin — "many" White-winged, 4 Surf, 15+ Black; Il-

linois — 1+ White-winged, 9 Surf, 1 Black, Iowa — 2 White-winged; Missouri — 1 White-winged, 7 Surf, 1 Black; Michigan — "many" White-winged, 11 Surf, 58 Black; Tennessee — 5 Surf; Louisiana — 1 White-winged; and Alabama — 1 Surf. Overall the records, especially of Black Scoters, seem to suggest a flight from central Canada southwestward to west Mexico!

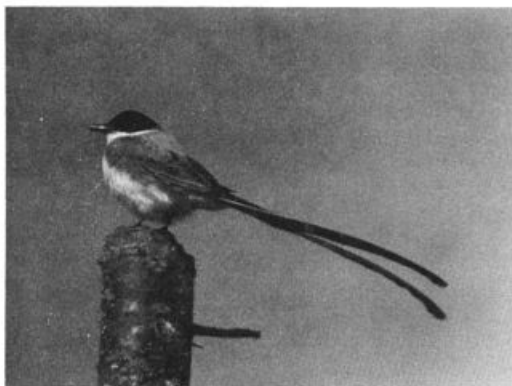
Hawk watching has tended to mean different things to observers from the East, the Great Lakes and the Gulf Coast as compared to observers from the rest of North America. In the first named areas hawk watching is practiced at favored look-outs where raptors, primarily Broad-winged Hawks and accipiters, may pass in the thousands. Elsewhere hawk watching means looking at individual hawks, with the hope of finding the occasional migratory flock. This autumn's reports suggest that this geographical distinction is gradually disappearing. Observers in Arizona appear to have discovered a vantage point that will merit future coverage. Counts of Turkey Vulture from southern Vancouver Island, B.C., suggest that there is a good observation area there also, but the full story awaits development in a future issue of *American Birds*. Finally, the Middle Pacific Coast Region again reports on Pt. Diablo, north of San Francisco, discovered by L. C. Binford in 1973. This year 15 hours of observation produced 400+ hawks, which is comparable to many eastern vantage points except on peak Broad-winged days. The most amazing part of that story is that some displaced eastern hawk-watcher hasn't taken over the place, for it appears to have great potential.

Nonetheless, the difference in orientation makes reports hard to interpret. The most unusual record I noted was a Mississippi Kite, new to northern California. Swainson's Hawks and, to a lesser extent, Ferruginous Hawks were noted at several points east of their usual range, while, in opposition, Broad-winged Hawks were noted west to the Pacific coast. None of these records was without precedent of sorts. Only Goshawks and Rough-legged Hawks regularly irrupt, but there was general agreement that both species stayed north this autumn. Encouraging is a general consensus from almost every region that both Merlins and Peregrines seemed to be present in slightly improved numbers, but lacking inventories of breeding stocks and nesting success, it is hard to be optimistic. See the South Texas report in particular for relevant comments.

The most encouraging event of the season has to be the nesting success of Whooping Cranes, both on their own in Canada and with the aid of



*Whooping Cranes, photo/U.S. Department of Fish & Wildlife, Region 6*



*Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Whiting, Me., Sept. 1975. Photo/Davis W. Finch*

Sandhill Cranes in Idaho. Full accounts are in the Northern Rocky Mountain and the Southwest Regional reports.

Purple Gallinules made news on the Atlantic coast by nesting as far north as Delaware and straggling to Long Island, N.Y., and in the West by straggling from western Mexico to Arizona. A most disoriented Yellow Rail was noted in Milwaukee, Wis., seemingly having first made the rounds of the local breweries.

Shorebirds staged a mixed flight but several broad patterns were evident. In the Northeast good numbers of American Golden Plover, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, and possibly Baird's Sandpiper were widely reported, especially in conjunction with tropical storm *Eloise*. While totals for all these species were high, only the 55 Baird's Sandpipers from Wisconsin appeared to be a record count. As usual, some reports antedated any of the storms. Most accounts are so sketchy that quantitative insight as to the magnitude of the flight is difficult to obtain. Better coverage of Buff-breasted Sandpiper would have been interesting because about 30 were found in Great Britain this Fall. Only Hudsonian Godwits attracted enough attention to merit detailed summary: 43+ from Michigan, 7 from Illinois, 143 from Ohio, 149 from Ontario, 20 (+17 unreported to Doug Kibbe) from western New York, 13 from western Pennsylvania, about 80 from the Hudson-Delaware Region, and about 120 from the Middle Atlantic Coast Region were specifically mentioned.

The mild fall resulted in many delayed departures, with scattered reports of many species present into early November in the northern United States and southern Canada, and a few birds

lingered to the end of the month in these areas. A Long-billed Curlew on Long Island may be a holdover from the summer, and Purple Sandpipers in Michigan and on Lake Champlain were noted at dates coincident with their usual passage dates on Lake Ontario, where the species is rare but regular. American Avocets were reported in exceptional numbers in much of the Southeast.

Observers along the Great Lakes are accustomed to finding phalaropes in small numbers. Typically the pattern is August-September appearances of Wilson's and Northern Phalaropes, followed by Reds between October and freeze-up. Inland records tend to show less pattern, because birds are scarcer. This fall Red Phalaropes made widespread Great Lakes and inland appearances, with records concentrated in September. Scattered in various Regional reports I noted records from Québec (1), Ontario (15), western New York (4, and I know of 3 others unreported), western Pennsylvania (2), Michigan (2), Indiana (1), Illinois (2), Oklahoma (1), Texas (4), Colorado (2), New Mexico (1), Nevada (1), and Arizona (5). In contrast, observers along the Pacific Coast found Red Phalaropes in exceptionally small numbers; fortunately the Pacific Ocean is large enough to hide a lot of phalaropes, so concern is as yet unwarranted.

A Utah Wandering Tattler is one of a handful of inland records anywhere in North America, and Buff-breasted and Semipalmated Sandpipers were noted in all Pacific Coast Regions, where they are quite unusual. Field identification of Western/Semipalmated Sandpipers in winter (basic) plumage is one of the most challenging (and probably unsolved) problems of field identification, and even juveniles and breeding adults can be quite similar. As noted by Allan Phillips in these pages (*Am. Birds* 29:799-806; 1975), al-

though most female Western Sandpipers have longer bills than do any Semipalmated Sandpipers and also most male Westerns, only some male Semipalmated Sandpipers are shorter billed than are all Westerns. Thus, many individuals are not separable by bill length in the field, long-billed female Westerns being the most distinctive. Plumage is no help when Westerns lack the rusty feathering that sometimes set them off. Thus, it will be interesting to learn what criteria are being used to separate the two on the Pacific Coast, where bill length is almost useless as a field character.

Another report along these lines is of a dowitcher collected in Québec which is reputed to have given "Short-billed calls" but was found to be a Long-billed in hand. I find that most observers do not appreciate the full variety of dowitcher calls and that there is widespread confusion as to the field marks of the two, partly because some field guides are erroneous. Because I have never heard certain Short-billeds giving Long-billed calls, or *vice versa* (most problems are silent winter birds), I am suspicious of the report. Nonetheless, this report indicates a still current problem in field identification — it has never been proved that the calls are species diagnostic.

Excepting the usual scattering of Ruffs and Curlew Sandpipers, Palaearctic waders were almost absent from the Atlantic Coast, and away from Alaska, only three Ruffs, a Bar-tailed Godwit, and a Nevada (!) Spotted Redshank were noted on the Pacific Coast. Even Alaska, with only (!) a Mongolian Plover, two each of Long-toed Stint, Rufous-necked Sandpiper, and Green-shank, single Curlew and Terek Sandpipers, and three plus each of Wood Sandpiper and Polynesian Tattler seemed ordinary after recent seasons, but who would have expected half that list only five years ago?

When I last wrote the Changing Seasons in 1967 a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper collected in Florida was the first substantiated North American record away from the Pacific Coast. Since then an additional specimen from Massachusetts, one photographed in Arizona, and a rash of sight records have made it *the* shorebird to find. This fall reports from Ontario, eastern Washington, Colorado, Wyoming and Nevada add to the list of sightings. The few substantiated reports only lend plausibility to these sightings, as there is clearly much confusion as to its field marks. Several recent field guides depict it wearing a plumage almost never seen in North America, and even paintings of juveniles are quite variable. Since I have never seen one in life, I am unqualified to

comment on the merits of the various illustrations; a reliable informant favors Eckelberry's rendition in Pough's *Western Bird Guide*. While similarity to Pectoral Sandpipers is always stressed, I believe confusion with Ruff, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, and even Least Sandpiper is equally likely. Few birders realize how rusty juvenile Pectoral Sandpipers are; while most fade or molt before migrating south, some rusty-marked Pectorals can be found in any large group of immatures. To see how Ruff might be confused, compare the figure and caption in *Am Birds* 27:88; 1973 with that on 29:100; 1975 (which is correct). The distinctly two-toned ventral pattern of immature Buff-breasted Sandpiper could well confuse anyone relying on field guide illustrations. A very experienced California birder once brought me a bird thought possibly to be a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, which turned out to be an *adult* Baird's Sandpiper, something neither of us had ever seen before and again quite unlike the bird shown in field guides. Until sizes are straightened out Least Sandpipers are easily confused with Pectorals and the corresponding error with Sharp-taileds is equally possible. Finally, although hybrid waders are almost unknown, hybrids involving Pectoral Sandpiper, Ruff, and/or Buff-breasted Sandpiper are especially plausible on biological grounds and could closely resemble a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. This is a hint a portfolio of immature Sharp-tailed Sandpiper by one of the talented bird photographers from the Pacific Northwest would be a much appreciated future feature in *American Birds*.

Several regional reports now cautiously report Skua. All skuas collected in the North Pacific are now believed to be only the Antarctic form, *mac-cormickii*, which is commonly treated as a species based, as far as I can determine, on almost anecdotal evidence. In the North Atlantic, all specimens appear to be the breeding form *skua*, but at least one *lonnbergii* from the southern hemisphere has been collected in the Caribbean. Identifying the large skuas is particularly difficult in the absence of a recent, comprehensive systematic review of this group, leaving one unsure of what the actual diagnostic features of the various forms are, whether they be one species or several. The most noteworthy coastal observations of jaegers were the high counts of Long-tailed off Washington. In addition to the usual reports of all three species from the Great Lakes, where they are regular, inland jaegers included Pomarines in West Virginia and in Oklahoma; Parasitics at the Salton Sea, Calif., in Nevada, and in Minnesota, and Long-tailed in South Dakota and in south Texas.

Sabine's Gulls showed a similar pattern of reports, and were noted on Lake Champlain, in Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois (2), Texas (4), eastern Washington, eastern Oregon, New Mexico, Arizona (3), and the Salton Sea (2). Two storm-blown to western Oregon in November were very late. The few inland kittiwake reports were almost all from the Great Lakes.

As usual there were a number of unusual gull records. A Slaty-backed Gull was noted in Alaska. A Thayer's Gull on the Illinois/Missouri border simultaneously enriched two state lists! Lesser Black-backed Gulls are being noted with increasing frequency, and were reported from Québec, New York, Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina and Florida. Mew Gulls were reported from Québec and possibly the District of Columbia, past specimen evidence indicates the New World race *brachyrhynchus* is the more likely to occur in the Northeast, and one of the Québec records is almost certainly that race as well. Prior California records suggest that Oregon's first Laughing Gull came north along the Pacific from western Mexico, but the cluster of reports from the western Great Lakes is so outlandish that I usually dismiss them because confusion with Franklin's Gull is so easy. To my chagrin I was shown one of the birds in Milwaukee, and birders in Minnesota finally added it to their state list. Where on earth do they come from? Recent records of Little Gull from the western Great Lakes, as well as this season's report from Saskatchewan, probably point to the source of the Pacific coast records, this autumn augmented by three from the Northern Pacific Coast Region. Finally, even if many birders have now seen it, Ross' Gull is still a bird of mystery, to which this fall's observations from northern Alaska shed little new light; their migration past Point Barrow once again sends them on to obscurity.

Northeastern birders soon learn that Arctic Terns are exceptionally hard to locate after the first week of August; thus, a November report from Long Island, N.Y., is extraordinary both as to locality and date. Two White-winged Black Terns extended their Virginia sojourn into the Fall. Lastly, to point out the problems even photographs sometimes cause, I mention that to me, in comparison with my side-by-side photographs, the "unquestionable" "Black Noddy" from south Texas appears to be a Brown Noddy *Am Birds* 29:1004 and 30:97; unless its bill is distorted in the photograph, it is too short and thick for a Black Noddy.

Three exceptional reports were made of alcids. A Black Guillemot was found on an Alaskan lake 450 miles inland. A Craver's Murrelet from Ore-

gon was the northernmost report of this bird, although its relative, Xantus' Murrelet, has occurred as far north as British Columbia. An Ancient Murrelet from Wisconsin adds to the number of records from the Great Lakes.

Snowy Owls at best staged a moderate early flight. Only about half a dozen were noted from the Rocky Mountains west. Moderately large numbers were found in the northern Great Plains east to Ontario, and smaller numbers were found east to the Atlantic coast, and south to Pennsylvania and Long Island, N.Y. Saw-whet Owls appear to have staged a flight from east-central Canada. Large numbers were noted in Ontario and smaller numbers were recorded south to the northern Midwest and to northern New Jersey. The isolated reports from the South Central Region possibly originated from Appalachian populations. There was no clear evidence of flights of any of the other northern owls. Golfers should note the account of Burrowing Owl in the Southern Great Plains Report.

Black and Vaux's Swifts made good showings in the Northern and Middle Pacific Coast Regions. The latter was again noted in Louisiana. Chimney Swifts were noted straggling into October and sometimes November in almost all Eastern regions, a trend associated with the season's mild weather; a few were also noted in Arizona and in southern California. The now recurrent reports of displaced *Chaetura* swifts suggests that all exceptionally late individuals be carefully scrutinized as to species; most late specimens are Vaux's Swift.

The South Texas Region again saw records of Green Violet-ear and of Black-crested Coquette, hopefully the latter will be photographed on a future sojourn to substantiate its inclusion in the North American (A.O.U. area) avifauna. A Rivoli's Hummingbird was new to Nevada. Rufous Hummingbirds turned up widely, and early, in the Southeast, and an exceptional bird in Pennsylvania was the northeasternmost substantiated record of the species. Rufous Hummingbirds in Louisiana were accompanied by a few Black-chinned Hummingbirds, suggesting that caution is in order when identifying wintering "females" in the Southeast. Anna's Hummingbirds continued to demonstrate their migratory propensity by appearing as far north as Oregon and Montana, and as far east as the Houston, Texas area. No doubt, one will eventually reach the Atlantic.

Both Three-toed Woodpeckers evidenced light flights in Ontario and Québec, but nothing on the order of last winter's incursion.

Scissor-tailed Flycatchers winter regularly but

in variable numbers in south Florida. If this autumn's reports are indicative, they have a most circuitous route for getting there, for they were noted in Minnesota, Ontario, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey and North Carolina. Other notable reports of flycatchers were a Tropical Kingbird in north-west Florida, Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers evidently nesting in south Texas, an Olivaceous Flycatcher in southern California, and Say's Phoebes in Minnesota, New Jersey, and Florida.

Blue Jays appeared in small numbers in the Northwest, being noted in southwest British Columbia, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Wyoming, and New Mexico. This may prove to be an annual event. Failure of the Arizona-New Mexico pinyon crop lead to a marked southward exodus of Piñon Jays, and a few were also noted in the Southern Great Plains Region. Brown Jays appear to be holding their own in South Texas, but Mexican Crows seemingly have dropped out of sight. Gray Jays were especially numerous in Ontario and in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and a straggler found in southern New York suggests a small incursion from northeastern Canada.

Both Black-capped and Boreal Chickadees staged major flights in the Northeast. Black-capped Chickadees were specifically noted to have migrated in heavy numbers in the Ontario, Niagara-Champlain and Hudson-Delaware Regions and were noted unusually far south in the Middle Western Prairie, Appalachian, and Hudson-Delaware Regions. Boreal Chickadees were noted from southern Saskatchewan, Michigan, central Pennsylvania and New Jersey northeast, usually accompanying Black-capped Chickadees. Numbers were greatest along the Atlantic coast, where the flight was the best since 1961.

Red-breasted Nuthatches were noted showing a strong September flight from the Northern Great Plains Region east to the Hudson-Delaware Region and south to the Appalachian Region. Throughout this area, numbers diminished in October and few were to be found come winter. Simultaneously they began to appear in the southern Atlantic coastal plain and in the lower Mississippi River Valley west into the Southern Great Plains. Only the Middle Pacific Coast Region hinted of a possible flight in western North America.

Gray Catbirds were noted in southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and west Texas, where fall migrants are usually scarce. A Bendire's Thrasher on the Farallon Islands was the northernmost record of this species for the second year since 1973.

Townsend's Solitaires made a strong showing in the central Rocky Mountains. A few were

noted in coastal California, and they were present through the Northern Great Plains Region, with a few noted south to Oklahoma and eastward to Minnesota, Ontario, and Québec. On their heels, Bohemian Waxwings made a good showing in the Northwest and smaller numbers had penetrated to southern California, northern New York by November. These seemed to be the only flights originating from the Northwest part of the continent this season.

Reports of wood warblers and vireos from the West continue to be dominated by records of "eastern" species, some of which now appear to outnumber "western" species. Note especially the comments on Blackpoll in the Middle Pacific Coast Region! While there was universal agreement that 1975 was not up to 1974, as more observers hunt them the rarer species are being found in greater numbers. Nonetheless, the patterns noted by G. T. Austin (*Condor* 73:455-461, 1971) and myself (*California Birds* 2:111-128, 1971) remain unchanged. The increasing number of reports of "eastern" species from the North Pacific Coast, the two Rocky Mountain, and the Southwest Regions seem to fall into patterns similar to those already described from California

Because there are not so many western vireos or warblers to stray eastward, eastern Regional reports tend to emphasize late or early dates, both of which were obtained in numbers in this mild season. In the Northeast Cape May, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle), and Bay-breasted Warblers were generally felt to have had excellent migrations, probably in response to a Canadian spruce budworm outbreak. A banded Kirtland's Warbler recovered in Ohio was probably more remarkable just for being found, since a high percentage of Kirtland's Warblers must now be banded. A few Black-throated Gray Warblers were noted along the Atlantic coast, and a possible Hermit Warbler in southern New York, if the report is accepted, is probably the outstanding warbler record of the autumn. However, the most misguided warbler must have been the poor Townsend's Warbler found at Point Barrow, Alaska, because it had to be going north to get there.

Common Grackles were found unusually far west in northern California and Nevada, while a Scott's Oriole reportedly was photographed in northeast Ontario, where it would add to the Canadian list if accepted; however, this fantastic record was topped in November by a Phainopepla in Rhode Island (netted, delivered alive to the Bronx Zoo), and one in December in Ontario to be detailed in the forthcoming Winter Season report!

Several cardueline finches made widespread if not good showings in eastern North America. Evening Grosbeaks appeared early, often in late August and early September, in southern Ontario and Québec and in the northeastern United States. However, they mostly seemed to move through these areas, leaving only small to moderate numbers to overwinter. Toward the end of the season, Evening Grosbeaks were being noted in good numbers along the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, in the southern Midwestern Prairie and Appalachian Regions, and had penetrated to Pensacola, Florida, by late November. There was no suggestion to a flight in the western half of the continent. Pine Grosbeaks appeared in most regions bordering the Great Lakes in November, too late to indicate the magnitude of the flight. Purple Finches and Pine Siskin were mentioned mainly in the southeastern United States, where numbers were up. Redpolls were noted in the two Rocky Mountain Regions but not elsewhere in the West. They were widely mentioned but not common by the end of the season in the Northeast, but had been found as far south as Kansas and the northern Midwest Prairie Region.

There was no pattern in the typically scattered reports of vagrant sparrows anywhere in the continent. However, patterns are harder to recognize in sparrows because the different species are not all equally likely to frequent feeders, where they are most likely to be noted. The only consistent pattern noted was a markedly early southward movement of Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting east of the Rocky Mountains. Most northern Regions noted first arrivals of the longspur in mid-September and of Snow Bunting by early October, and flights were often characterized as massive. Both species penetrated unusually far south, Lapland Longspurs being noted south to Kansas, Tennessee and Florida; and Snow Buntings to Kansas, Tennessee and Georgia by the end of the Season.

## AFTERTHOUGHTS

After putting all this information together, two thoughts remained foremost in my mind. The first is a partial answer to those editors who ask what weather factor can bring together at one place and one time the strange assemblages of birds that sometimes appear. The answer is that it is not one factor, but a whole series of patterns operating simultaneously. Somehow, this just seems clearer in this busy Autumn season, when in overview, the many patterns seem to collapse into just a few, a mild flight from the Northwest of berry-feeding birds, notably Townsend's Solitaire and Bohemian Waxwing; a strong flight from north-

east Canada of a series of landbirds that seem to have in common seed-eating as a major component of their winter diet, such as Gray Jay, chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and finches, and third, what seems to be a cross-continental movement of various water birds which one usually thinks of as being happiest on salt water, such as scoters, Red Phalarope and jaegers. This last pattern is confused by frequency records of these species from the northern Great Basin, from which may also eventually become Southwestern records. This pattern is hardest to understand both because the number of individuals involved is small and because conventional wisdom has dictated that these birds are moving south to the Gulf of Mexico. However, the generally more productive waters off the Pacific coast would seem to be more attractive, and certainly are known wintering areas of many of these species, so the idea deserves more investigation. I have little doubt that birds crossing the eastern Great Lakes are headed for the Atlantic, and point to some conspicuous differences in species compositions in the avifaunas of the western versus eastern Great Lakes in support of the idea that they have different destinations as well.

The two landbird patterns lead neatly to the second thought. This basically is the frustration of writing the Changing Seasons that comes from failing to find the key information needed to tie a story together, which information was lacking because the Regional editors weren't omniscient after all. Rather than belabor this, let me second W. B. Robertson, Jr.'s closing remarks in *American Birds* 29:266; 1975, and add my own random observations to this season's events. Everywhere I have been in the northeastern United States this fall, cones are hard to find and seed crops are not large and sometimes small. It is not surprising, if these conditions are general, that the birds which came south just kept on going.

Records of rarities are fun, and all of us, enjoy reading them. However, in the long run it is those data that fall into patterns, or which reveal the reasons for patterns, that give the most enduring value to *American Birds*, and by which all of us, contributors and editors alike, make our best contribution to the sport of birding and the science of ornithology. One cannot ignore rarities as long as we are not sure from which records patterns will emerge, but to the extent we can recognize the potential significance of what we observe, it behooves us to emphasize those records which have pattern. *American Birds* can continue as this invaluable repository of data only to the extent that its contributors take the effort to report them