

Latest Rumors

December 1978 / January-February 1979

This is a brief recounting of some of the exciting bird occurrences that have come to our attention recently. We make no claims for the completeness of this summary. Although we believe that all of the records cited here are probably correct, we have not been able to check most of them out personally; readers desiring further information should consult the appropriate regional publications, or the regional reports in *American Birds*.

Reports trickled in during the season; by late February it had become, in retrospect, an exciting winter. Clearly, however, no one area had a monopoly on the action. — The **White-cheeked Pintail** *Anas bahamensis* that drew crowds to Laguna Atascosa, Texas, until its disappearance in December, must have remained somewhere in the general area: it was reported again in February. Also of interest in southern Texas was the continued presence of Hook-billed Kites *Chondrohierax uncinatus* at Santa Ana Refuge. — The remainder of the Mexican border area was quiet; Arizona noted only two Rufous-backed Robins *Turdus rufopalliatu*s for the entire season. — California birders flocked to Point Reyes for a bird first thought to be a Smith's Longspur *Calcarius pictus*, later re-identified (at least tentatively) as a **Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* which was theorized to have strayed from the northeast Asian population. Offshore in Monterey Bay, a Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini* was considered exceptional for the season in mid-February, but it was eclipsed later in the month by a report of a **Greater Shearwater** *Puffinus gravis* — possibly a first for the North Pacific. — A **Gray-headed Chickadee** *Parus cinctus* visiting a feeder in Edmonton, Alberta, was probably the best find in the northern interior of the continent, although a possible Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* in Montana could have offered stiff competition had it been confirmed. — Minnesota's great Boreal Owl *Aegolius funereus* flight of the previous winter was evidently not repeated, but **Great Gray Owls** *Strix nebulosa* made headlines farther east, with record numbers of individuals scattered across New England, upstate New York, and parts of southeastern Canada; one that reached Long Island, New York, was the first there in decades. Small numbers of Hawk Owls *Surnia ulula* and Boreals moved south along with the Great Grays. — This clockwise tour of the perimeter of the continent ends in Florida with what was perhaps the single most spectacular bird of the winter: a **Key West Quail-Dove** *Geotrygon chrysis*, probably only the second U.S. record for the 20th century, found on the Snake Bight Trail in Everglades N.P. in late January and seen by hundreds of visiting birders at least through late February.

Belated report from Alaska: among the highlights of fall 1978 were the recurrence of **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus*, a first Alaskan record of **Eurasian Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*, and a first North American record of **Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, the latter being a considerable distance outside its normal range.

