

MIDDLE YELLOWLEGS

Tringa Intermedius

LEAST YELLOWLEGS

Tringa Minor

Existence of these two new species was substantiated only shortly before this manuscript went to press. Both are similar to the Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs; however, they are readily identified by the fact that the Middle Yellowlegs is smaller than the Greater Yellowlegs and larger than both the Lesser and Least Yellowlegs, while the Least Yellowlegs is smaller than the Greater, Middle, and Lesser Yellowlegs, but is larger than some smaller birds. Many ornithologists believe that a Slightly Lesser Yellowlegs, which is . . . , Oh, nevermind.

OBSERVATION HINT Yellowlegs flock together.

SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT In order to estimate sizes, it is helpful to insert a number of yardsticks in mudflats where Yellowlegs feed.

Reprinted from *A Field Guide to Little-Known & Seldom-Seen Birds of North America*, 1988, with permission.



Ben Sill



Cathryn Sill



John Sill

Photos by H. Sandhusen

MEET BEN, CATHY, AND JOHN SILL

Our readers are familiar with bird artist John Sill's exquisite watercolors, which have for years been the feature of the *Bird Identification Calendar*, and several—Chimney Swift, Eastern Kingbird, Evening Grosbeak, and White-breasted Nuthatch—have appeared in black-and-white on *Bird Observer* covers. Now we wish to acquaint you with other facets of Sill family creativity.

In 1988 three Sill family birders coauthored *A Field Guide to Little-Known & Seldom-Seen Birds of North America* (Peachtree Publishers, Ltd.), a hilarious and imaginative spoof of birding that described some extraordinary avian rarities. *Bird Observer's* current cover and the text on the facing page are excerpted, by permission of the Peachtree Publishers, the authors, and the artist, from that book, briefly reviewed in the December 1989 issue (p. 345). On March 15, 1990, *Another Field Guide to Little-Known & Seldom-Seen Birds of North America* was issued. The text is by Ben L. Sill, aerospace engineer and Clemson University professor, and Cathryn P. Sill, schoolteacher in Franklin, North Carolina, and the illustrations are by artist John C. Sill. Space here permits only brief mention of some of the giddy exotics to be found in *Another Field Guide*.

The High Diving Heron (*Kamakaze ichthygrabbus*) (pp. 2-3) spears bottom dwelling species by plummeting into shallow ponds "with total disregard for its own safety" and often disastrous results. The Mangrove Penguin (*Tuxedo verdantus*) (pp. 4-5) is a southern hemisphere bird now adapted to Florida swamps, but "occasionally a homesick bird will be seen in iceberg lettuce fields." The Duffer Shank (*Birdie impossibilus*) (pp. 14-15) frequents golf links, where it occasionally attempts to brood golf balls. The authors aver that the mortality rate is quite high. The Nearsighted Bat Owl (*Invertus myopius*) (pp. 24-25) roosts, batlike, upside down. Its nests are securely attached, but incubation success is low: "Every time the owl leaves the nest, the eggs fall out." The sensitive females of the Double-crested Impulse Layer (*Albuminus ejectus*) (pp. 42-43) react to environmental stress by depositing their eggs "rapidly and anywhere." This titlike bird is painted in the act of oviposition, eyeing with concern its fallen eggs, which lie broken on the ground or are draped surreally, like Dali watches, over the bare branches beneath her. The Greater Wandering Vagrant (*Casualus wanderii*) in the 1988 guide (pp. 58-59) was reputed to migrate with its nest looped over its bill. In *Another Field Guide* (pp. 46-47), we find that the name has been changed to *Marsupialus wanderii*. The bird is now thought to carry its young in a belly pouch!

No serious birder should be without these two unusual guides, guaranteed to enlarge one's birding horizons and to have a salubrious effect on the birding outlook.

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