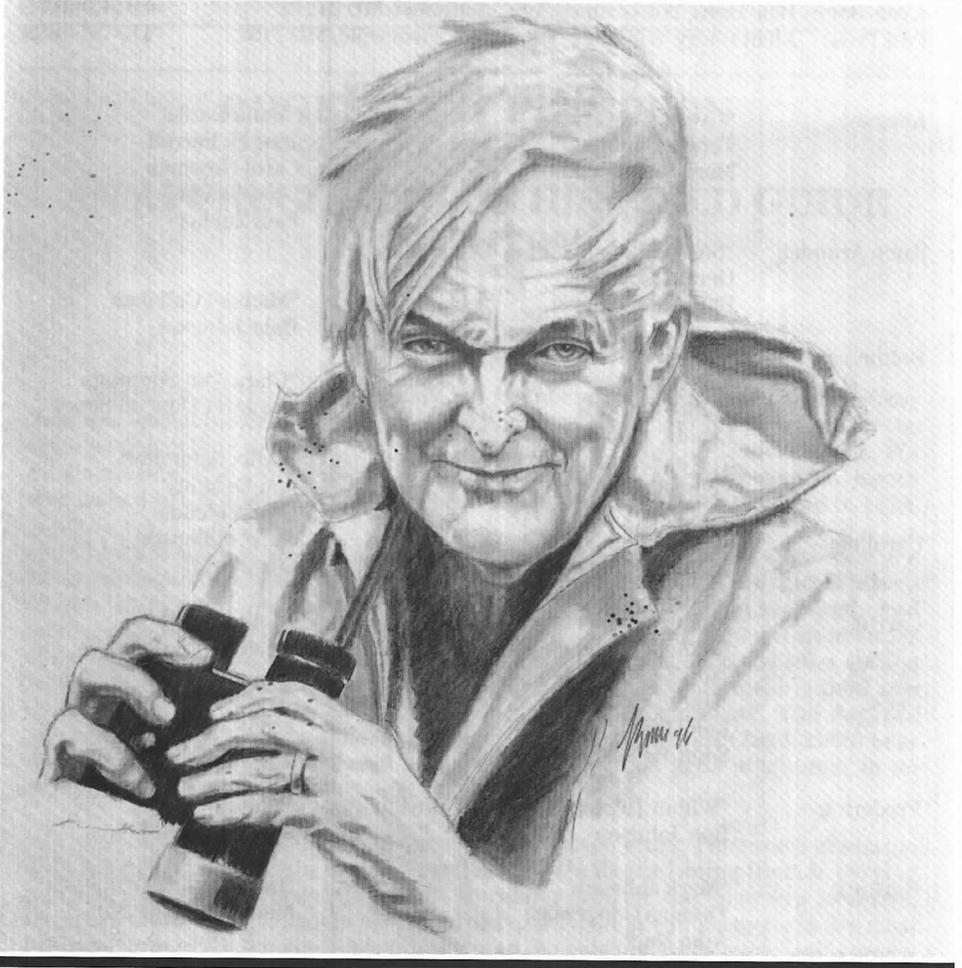


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# MARYLAND BIRDLIFE

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Cover: Roger Tory Peterson. Drawing by Jon Boone, 1996.



## ROGER TORY PETERSON

### AN APPRECIATION OF HIS FIELD GUIDE ARTISTRY

JON BOONE

Nearly 88, on the morning before the day of his unexpected death, Roger Tory Peterson was at his drawing table painting a plate on accidental flycatchers for the culmination of his *raison d'être*—the fifth edition of *A Field Guide to the Birds*. For all his considerable achievements, this prolific man surely knew his essential legacy was lashed to the quality of the familiar Baedeker for birds he introduced in 1934.

More than 20 years ago, after a public career spanning almost a half-century, Peterson began his charge into old age. “The last years of my life,” he said, “I intend to indulge myself.” He had just married Virginia Westervelt and seemingly had emancipated himself from field guide illustration by painting a magnificent series of Audubonesque canvases. Financially secure and famous, he could have settled into meta-retirement mode *carte blanche*. Yet, like moth to flame, his final two decades were enkindled by his passion to perfect his field guide art. The elegance and beauty of the last two editions of field guides *East* and *West* (1980, 1990) bear witness that his reach embraced his grasp: he achieved artistic triumph in an evergreen celebration of his genius.

Given the desire to indulge himself in his later years, Peterson’s obsession with his field guides seems curious, even ironic. He likened doing them to serving a prison sentence, to “sweating blood.” In reality much of the labor was iterative, the fabrication of caricature in service to didactic formula—in many ways the most limiting form of illustration. As a young man, he yearned to do more “self-expressive art,” work for the sake of itself unconnected to any other purpose; his ultimate goal, one he often confessed, was to create unfettered by any commercial direction. For a time, he did soar in the pursuit of this high artistic ambition. The paintings of Guy Coheleach, Robert Bateman, Fenwick Lansdowne, and Lars Jonsson encouraged his own series of more than 30 bird portraits, most of them painted between 1973 and 1978. All of these are magnificent; some are sublime, such as Snowy Owl (1976)<sup>1</sup>, Northern Mockingbird (1978), Barn Swallow (1974), and Brown Pelican (1986).

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<sup>1</sup>A watercolor masterpiece painted during Peterson’s courtship of Virginia. Through its early stages, he was dissatisfied with the composition. Finally, Virginia suggested that he rotate the female owl’s head so it directly faced the viewer. It was the ideal solution and Peterson wryly noted that it “improved the painting ten percent.”

Still, nothing in his entire repertoire of paintings, drawings, photographs, and prose translated his vision of birds more effectively or efficiently than the art of his field guides. Aided by improvements in binoculars and spotting scopes, the guides gave the ordinary individual access to an enormous range of information which could be used to make field identification immediate and accurate. Peterson came to realize his field guides on birds had become a talismanic symbol of the environmental movement itself.

The craftsman in Peterson (he painted furniture for a time to support himself after graduating from high school) required that he refine his handiwork continuously. His pride of work, spurred over the years by worthy competitors and by the growth of his own knowledge and artistic skill, compelled him to improve each new edition. Certainly, by the middle of the 1970's, the artistic reputation of Peterson's field guides did face serious challenges. Numerous high quality photographs of each species were now available for field guide illustration. Moreover, the popularity of "nature art" gave millions an exposure to the sophisticated realism of Bateman, Coheleach and Lansdowne, among many others, which in turn raised expectations about the quality of field guide illustration. Paradoxically, the success of the "Peterson system" itself helped cultivate a more discriminating, knowledgeable generation of birders. Finally, Arthur Singer's brilliant portrayal of the entire continent's avifauna in one portable volume, the *Birds of North America*, brought the standard of quality to an audacious new level. Singer's birds were presented in habitat with varying postures and a wide range of plumages—a friendly, in-your-face gauntlet thrown down by a considerable talent.

Before 1930, bird watching was a rather incipient, clubby affair. Questions about identification were typically resolved by gunshot. Most books on birds were multi-volume tomes suitable for the library, although the best of these were handsomely illustrated by such luminaries as Peterson's artistic inspiration, Louis Agassiz Fuertes, as well as Allan Brooks, George M. Sutton, Bruce Horsfall and Lawrence Sawyer, nearly all of whom did commissioned work for the National Association of Audubon Societies before their paintings became cobbled to books. In contrast to today's boutique field guide variety, there was little a birder could bring to verify identification except a gun and a good companion.

As a student of painting in New York City, Peterson met some of the best ornithologists and bird painters at the American Museum of Natural History and Linnaean Society of New York, including especially Ludlow Griscom, the acknowledged expert of identification through the use of field glasses—not guns. From Griscom, he learned the "philosophy of the fine points of field identification ... ." By 1930, in association with people in Griscom's circle, Peterson had formed a plan to do a basic identification book that people could easily carry to the field: It would be slender, similar to Chester Reed's *Bird Guide* (1906), the one Peterson himself used as a boy; systematic as Frank Chapman's *Handbook of Birds* (1930); and the "illustrations would be simple and patternistic, rather like the sketches that [Ernest Thompson] Seton had drawn in *Two Little Savages* (1903)."

### THE FIRST FIELD GUIDE

His "new plan" culminated in the April 1934 publication (Houghton Mifflin) of his eastern field guide, the first printing of which (over 2,000) sold out in two

weeks. By today's standards, it *was* crude, with only four single-sided color plates crowding an average of 20 birds on each. Black and white images dominated. This was, of course, a time for caution since the nation was in the very middle of the Great Depression. (The second edition in 1939 gained only four more black and white plates.) Nevertheless, Peterson did create a handbook that "boiled-down" matters so that generally any bird could be distinguished from any other at a glance or at a distance. And despite its embryonic nature, the book also showed evidence of what was to come later, ground as it was in a basic methodology.

That methodology remains "comparison and contrast:" Salient field marks were indicated by arrows; bird pictures were intentionally simplified and shown in the same view and posture, with any difference in stance deliberate, representing a useful recognition trait; and similar species were placed together on one or a few plates to enhance the process of elimination. The aim was to provide a quick uninterrupted visual reference that would establish the unique plumage identity of a bird. Peterson was concerned that detail would distract the beginner (at that time most of his readers were beginners) from zeroing-in upon highlights. Consequently, he abandoned the realistic portraiture techniques he learned from Fuertes and from studying the works of the 19th century Swedish artist/naturalist Bruno Liljefors. Instead, he experimented with the most effective method for displaying his drawings.

He began to organize space in a way reminiscent of Japanese scroll ink paintings in the *haiga* tradition, particularly the works of such masters as Niten (early 17th century) and Bundo (1763-1840). *Haiga* is the pictorial counterpoint to the allusive, epigrammatic verse form, *haiku*; it is the essence of graphic minimalism guided by the (very Japanese) principle of expressing the most by means of the least. Text and graphic image entwine to create and define the space which contains them. This elegant sense of design has become a Peterson hallmark. His use of space was extremely sophisticated; so much so that most readers are unaware of its powerful influence—only its effect. However, he constructed the bird images in his early field guides as if they were semaphoric patterns, for that was precisely how he wanted people to see as they used his system.

The two plates of warblers and particularly the plate on "Grosbeaks, Finches, and Buntings, Etc." pulsate with ordered color; the birds encased in their air-brushed backgrounds as if set there by the most skilled lapidary, with arrows and numbers unobtrusively accenting the illustrations. The effect makes for a gem-like quality, giving a sense of weight to the schematic image. By contrast, the plates on Flycatchers and Rails are an epigram of gray, the birds given shape by a subtle pattern of triangles and rectangles—all blended to inform just what we need to know. Finally, individual pen-and-ink drawings such as the Semipalmated and Wilson's Plover prefigure the basic iconography of his later work (most notably his 1979 *Penguins*).

### CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

The War Department assigned Peterson the task of designing training manuals using his system for the identification of enemy aircraft during World War II. Before he enlisted, he completed (1941) the first edition of his western guide, with more color plates and considerably more birds than for his eastern edition. Then, a year after the war's end in 1946, Doubleday and Company published its *Audubon*

*Land Bird Guide* written by Richard Pough and sponsored by the National Audubon Society. Don Eckelberry, Peterson's friend and fellow artist, contributed 48 exquisite color plates covering mainly eastern birds from cuckoos to longspurs. Beautifully painted, these were full portraits arrayed in related groups on one or several plates, with no more than ten species on each plate. Many species were shown in a variety of plumages—male, female, immature. Each bird seemed ready to spring into action; many appear in three-quarter view, balanced against the dominant profiles—all connected through comparable postures. The best of these illustrations continue to influence artists today—the roadrunner, the anis, owls, flycatchers, swallows, thrushes, warblers (especially plates 28 and 29), and sparrows. What a challenge to Peterson's artistic ego!

Within the limits of his system, however, he met his new rival with creative dispatch. The post-war economy brought Americans the discretionary income that would drive the mass market of the western world. Because of improvements in the economy and in the technology for color processing, Houghton Mifflin gave him a more generous forum for the third edition of his eastern field guide. By 1947, Peterson had completely revised his previous editions with 36 new color pages. Like Eckelberry, he represented the range from cuckoos to longspurs, but then added a color plate for mergansers, hawks, the bills of terns, and several for gallinaceous, wading and shore birds. Since he included the latter, he painted twice the number of birds featured in the Audubon guide, yet fashioned a more compact handbook.

Recognizing the increasing sophistication of his readers, Peterson made extensive use of subtle highlights and shadow to give more of the illusion of solid form. As a result, there was a sharpness, a clarity which defined the birds of this new edition, rivaling the work of Eckelberry and in some cases surpassing it. Keep in mind that Peterson, as his many illustrations for *Life* magazine and for the national nature organizations in the 1940's bore witness, could do highly detailed bird portraiture. But he felt that his method of bird identification would not be nearly as effective if the birds in his field guides were rendered in detail: "As they are not intended to be pictures or portraits, modeling of forms and feathering is often subordinated to simple contour and pattern. Some birds are better adapted than others to this simplified handling, hence the variation in treatment. Even color is sometime unnecessary, if not, indeed, confusing."

His work in this edition is of very high quality, beginning with the deceptively effective roadside and flight silhouettes. Note again the way this master used negative space—the space around the bird images. Everything seemed to fit harmoniously, the birds floating on the page yet anchored to it. His ducks remain decoy-like figures to acknowledge their heritage from *Two Little Savages*. But his owls have the grace and authority to compare favorably with those of Eckelberry. His swallows were based upon crude wash drawings in his first edition, yet they have a small-scale majesty that demands attention. His thrushes are awash in browns and grays, yet almost glow with dimensionality.

Many people, such as the South Carolina artist, John Henry Dick, continue to believe these are among the finest of all bird illustration. Dick felt that Peterson's field guide drawings themselves had "arrived at a new art form," blending the impressionistic with the proper level of detail, harmonizing line, color, form, and space to create the perfect medium for communicating the wonder of nature. Dick never tired of Peterson's field guide plates—and hung them on his walls.

Peterson's third edition of his eastern guide remained unrevised for 33 years. Over those years, he moved his genre incrementally along by illustrating the *Birds of Britain and Europe* (1952), a second edition of his *Western Birds* (1961) and the *Birds of Texas* (1963), along with numerous other books, articles, wildlife stamps, and formal paintings. His reputation as an influential illustrator remained secure, and there was general acknowledgment among the elite bird art community that he was one among them.

In 1966, however, Arthur Singer raised the bar again with Chandler Robbins' Golden Press edition. Robbins wanted a guide for nearly all the birds of North America above the Mexican border in one volume. To get it, he crafted a model of efficiency and compactness. As a complement, Singer's plates shimmer with intelligence; his birds are essentially quick studies yet have a remarkable verisimilitude. They seem to burst out of the habitats in which he placed them. As Eckelberry did, he grouped relatively few birds to a page and presented them in many postures, picturing relevant plumage differences for each species. Like those of Peterson, the plates maintained a consistent quality, for they were the creation of one man, not a committee. Because all the birds of the northern continent were presented in phylogenetic order, one could see relationships between genera and families. In addition, the concise text and the range maps were placed on the left-hand page, providing an enormous amount of visual stimuli. The artistry of Singer's paintings was a perfect match for the resourceful editing.

The ornithological community soon embraced (if not adopted) the Robbins' guide. The "experts," many of whom started with Peterson, preferred the new comprehensive treatment; many also enjoyed the detail of Singer's birds in habitat. While Peterson had enormous respect (and affection) for Singer, his competitive spirit was awakened by Singer's achievement and by a growing criticism that his system was too limited and limiting. Peterson now had to prove his artistry anew.

After finishing the color plates for his wildflower guide (with Margaret McKenny) in 1968, he began a collaboration with Edward Chalif for *A Field Guide to Mexican Birds* (1973). With this book, he not only responded to Singer's challenge, he turned up the volume, revealing astonishing skills. Working as the Scholar in Residence of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in the seclusion of Frank Lloyd Wright's "Fallingwater," he distilled the knowledge which came from 50 years of observation and practice. Because of his own workload and the large number of birds to be included, he asked both George Sutton, the dean of American bird portraiture, and Don Eckelberry (who was increasingly interested in the birds of the tropics) to share the illustration work. After initially accepting, both eventually withdrew, leaving Peterson alone with the task of painting nearly 550 species and over 1,000 birds.

The bold, dramatic colors and shapes of the Mexican guide, barely contained in such compressed space, almost slash their way across the pages. Notice the plates on swifts, trogons, toucans, jays, oropendolas, and orioles. For the first time in his field guide format, he painted birds as "... portraits and at the same time somewhat schematic ..." While still in profile and with recognizable, easily comparable features, the birds were no longer two dimensional decals. Rather, many have distinct personas, like those grizzled veterans, the large birds of prey, and the presidential Jabiru. There is a voluptuous quality to these plates appropriate to life in the tropics. The intensity of the images is such that on occasion they overcrowd themselves on the page, weakening the image-space harmony characteristic

of his best work. Nonetheless, this was a profound affirmation of Peterson's skills, demonstrating that he belonged among the first rank of bird illustrators. There was to be much more.

### THE LEGACY

*Mexican Birds* foreshadowed the brilliance of the fourth edition of *A Field Guide to the Birds* (1980) and, a decade later, the third edition of *Western Birds*. Both represent Peterson's nature art at the apex of his creative powers. One can almost feel the cascade of his energy and vision as he worked out the design of each plate with paper cut-outs, crafted his final drawings, then laid in varying washes of watercolor and gouache, sealing the work in acrylic glaze. His art, of course, continued to be linked to his method. In these editions he seems to have resolved paradox, giving structure to gesture with consistent eloquence, harmonizing line, shape, color, space in contexts both subtle and intense. Nearly every bird is a nuanced portrait; even though they remain in profile, with similar sizes and contours, he captured their characteristic posture and traits—going beyond the form of the bird to reveal an almost intimate personality. For example, note the Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, Wood Thrush, Eastern Bluebird (that round-shouldered look!), Boat-tailed Grackle, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Wild Turkey, Wood Stork, King Rail, and the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in the eastern guide. See how he softens edges and gives texture in just the right places while, at the same time, he uses hard, daring line to secure the bird, holding it for a frozen moment in time. His astute modeling of form allows shadows to chase the light in an animating dance around his best portrayals—*viz.*, the Black-billed Magpie, Say's Phoebe, Clapper Rail, and Mountain Plover in the western guide.

Along with brilliant individual portraits, there are also dozens of whole plates that showcase a tapestry of consonant beauty. Consider just a few: the pelicans, woodcock and sandpipers, large shorebirds in flight, the red-headed woodpeckers, tyrant flycatchers, jays, nuthatches (*very haiga!*), tanagers, and, of course, the blue finches—all from the eastern guide, and from the western guide, cormorants, eiders and oystercatchers.

Strangely, the ducks continue to appear as if they are decoys. Though their form is modeled, they are presented rather stiffly and cut off abruptly at imaginary water lines. Why? In the first three editions of these works, Peterson's preface recounted how, in Seton's semiautobiographical story, *Two Little Savages*, the young hero, Yan, discovered some mounted ducks in a dusty cabinet, then made sketches of their patterns.

This lad had a book which showed him how to tell ducks when they were in the hand, but since he only saw live ducks at a distance, he was usually at a loss for their names. He noticed that all the ducks in the showcase were different—all had blotches or streaks that were their labels or identification tags. He decided that if he could put their labels or "uniforms" down on paper, he would know these same ducks as soon as he saw them at a distance on the water.

This is, of course, the genesis of the Peterson method of identification, a system that launched seemingly a thousand books (now over 50 in Houghton Mifflin's series) in pursuit of classifying nature. In his latest version of this edition, however, Peterson omitted any written acknowledgement to Seton. Instead, he paid

tribute visually, his ducks resembling Yan's decoy sketches made so long ago, stylistically separate from yet informing all the work to follow. A fitting, moving credit recognizing his intellectual origins.

For these recent bird guides, Peterson made some difficult decisions flowing from his notion of pedagogy as it influenced his strategy of illustration. First, some time ago, he concluded that drawings emphasized field marks much more effectively than photographs. Graphic artists can, in a variety of ways, edit the bird to best advantage: "Whereas a photograph can have a living immediacy, a good drawing is really more instructive." Consequently, while Peterson became an obsessive photographer, he decided not to rely on photographs of birds in his guides. Despite an explosion of field guides in the last 20 years which do feature photography (including recent volumes by Donald and Lillian Stokes), it is clear he was correct.

Second, by the mid 1970's, galvanized by the success of the Singer/Robbins' guide, Peterson continued to struggle with genuine "threshold" issues. Should he attempt a single handbook combining eastern and western birds? Should he, as growing numbers of critics demanded, provide illustrations for a substantial range of plumage variation, especially in such groups as gulls, water and shore birds? And should all relevant material about the bird, including range maps, be contained on a facing page? How much was too much? By 1983, the National Geographic Society published *Birds of North America*, with Eirik Blom as one of the senior consultants. This large, single volume answered all of these questions affirmatively. Peterson, however, chose not to do so, although he did make some practical concessions.

He ardently believed that too much detail created a visual overload, undermining the goal of more certain identification. This was true for beginners as well as for most experts. He thought there were diminishing returns in attempts to pinpoint nearly imperceptible differences between such species as, say, the Sharpshinned and Cooper's Hawks. Better to use supplementary reference guides (which have recently appeared on the market). Otherwise, whole pages could be devoted to sorting out plumage distinctions for a single species. Even if this were economically feasible, such a situation would create a significant barrier for most readers.

Fundamental to Peterson's pedagogy was the stark image of a bird turned to expose sufficient markers of its identity and arranged with birds of similar appearance so that direct comparison could take place. For optimum learning efficiency, he limited the number of field mark arrows (no more than four, typically two) and, for his recent guides, featured an average of four species to a plate, rather than the 10 or 12 as in previous editions. Further, he purposefully restricted such background detail as foliage because he felt it distracted from the bird itself. Of course, years before he determined that a single book for all the continent's birds was unwieldy, making nimble field identification less practicable.

He did accept a reasonable balance. Consequently, while he now brought the text together on the facing page with the drawing, he relegated the range maps to their own section, concluding they were too detailed to be generalized, then pinched within or around the text. In his *Western Birds*, he also significantly expanded his coverage of gulls and shore birds, though he fell far short of the comprehensive analysis some experts had desired. Again, he sought to reward the increased awareness of his readers but was unwilling to clutter his work with a seemingly endless potpourri of arcane distinctions.

Peterson generated hundreds of field guide plates of birds, just birds by themselves in all their shapes and sizes—large, small, slender, angular, rotund. That he was able to make each plate a lively festival of interest, giving his birds individuality and a proper sense of scale, is a tribute to his considerable abilities. There were occasional lapses: he sometimes misfired in getting the correct alignment of a bird's eye and bill (viz., the chickadees in the eastern guide, among others) and, in *Western Birds*, his addition of a sub-par painting of the Varied Bunting diminishes the perfection of the original blue finches plate. These are small matters when scored against the panoply of riches throughout.

Field guides have evolved since 1934 as a series of reciprocities among advancing technologies, skilled international organizations, and the expectations of a public largely made more knowledgeable about the natural world through each iteration of the guides themselves. At their core, however, resides the coordinated talents of remarkable individuals. Each produced wonderful publications. But Peterson was more than the flagship or the King Penguin of this enterprise. His art made him *nonpareil*. He wrote in the introduction to the fourth edition that *A Field Guide to the Birds* finally “has come of age.” Indeed, like its author, it will endure for the ages.

1022 Cedar Ridge Court, Annapolis, Md. 21403

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## TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE IN HARFORD COUNTY, THE FIRST FOR MARYLAND

DEBORAH BOWERS

On the morning of March 22, 1996, I was looking out my office window—something I do a lot as part of my profession (I'm a writer). Drinking at our bird bath was a plain gray bird, much smaller and slimmer than a Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), and, I thought, also smaller than a catbird and not as dark. I got my binoculars and returned in time to see it fly into the tree above the bath.

It sat with its side turned to me. I first noted its size and shape, and its coloring—all gray, with no white breast like the mockingbird—then its small, black, sharp bill like that of a flycatcher. Then I noted a distinctive white ring around the black eye. At this point the lightcolored marking on the wing seemed indistinguishable—only that there was some marking there. When the bird turned toward me I could see a white streak on the underside of the tail.

Amazingly, the stranger continued to perch and I fetched my Peterson's Eastern Field Guide. I turned to the mockingbird, page 219, and there directly beneath the illustration of the mocker, was the exact bird I was looking at: the Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*), “a thrush.” Each of the distinguishing marks I had noted was described, even the slight resemblance to the mockingbird “but note the eye-ring, darker breast, and buff wing patches.”

Feeling a great sense of relief on having identified this odd bird, I almost neglected to check its range, but then read it was a "rare or casual winter visitor" in the east "to the Maritime Provinces and New England." Thinking only that it was unusual for this bird to be here, and excited that I had never seen it before, I wrote to Dave Webb, Harford Bird Club's field reporter. I mailed my brief note that day, adding the solitaire to a short list of birds I had seen recently and stating I was positive about the identification.

### INQUIRY AND CONFIRMATION

The very next afternoon, my phone rang. It was Dave Webb. He had received my note already and asked me to describe the bird. He asked me to call him if I saw it again, and as we spoke, the solitaire landed at the bath. Dave was on his way, and said he would stop in Bel Air to have an expert birder, Rick Blom, follow him. New to birding, and a member of the Harford County Bird Club for less than two years, I only vaguely realized the significance of my sighting and had no idea of the excitement it would cause.

My family lives adjacent to Rocks State Park, on its north side, about five miles south of the Pennsylvania line and about 12 miles north of Bel Air. We have about 75 acres of mixed woodlands and 20 acres of open fields of mixed grasses. Our house, and the brushy south-facing hillside of mixed conifers where the solitaire spent most of its time, is about 500 feet above Deer Creek.

Dave and Rick arrived, and within a half hour the solitaire landed at the bath and both Dave and Rick confirmed its identity. It stayed for only a few moments and then flew off toward the hillside. Within a few minutes we spotted it perched in a cedar tree, where it would spend a great deal of time over the next two weeks. We all watched it again through binoculars and scopes as it ate juniper berries and fluttered about like a flycatcher.

### OBSERVERS

Over the next 22 days about 100 people in small groups, coordinated by the Harford Bird Club, came to the hillside to see the solitaire. Everyone saw the bird, often for extended periods. Many members of the state Records Committee and birders from several states visited. Because of its feeding habits, and the particular trees it favored, the solitaire was visible during most hours and was seen many times at the bath. I now believe even more strongly in the advantage of having a bird bath to attract birds. I would never have noticed the solitaire without the bath, because solitaires do not eat seeds, and it never came to the adjacent feeders.

### DEPARTURE

There was only one day of the 22 that I didn't see the solitaire, I believe because it was raining all day and insect feeding was nil. Therefore, when a sunny day came that I didn't see it (April 14), I knew it was gone. I last saw it in the very top of an oak tree in our side yard, sitting a long time, on the evening of April 13. Temperatures in the region that night were in the low 50s.

## ACTIVITIES, BEHAVIOR

Observers saw the solitaire engage in activities at many different heights, from the ground, hopping around on a log, to the very top of a mature hickory (about 70 feet). While spending a great deal of time inside or on the outer branches of the cedar trees where it gobbled juniper berries, it also sprang out to catch insects, fluttering briefly like a flycatcher and then returning into the cedar or perching in an adjacent young poplar. It also ate holly berries.

The solitaire would always perch and observe the area prior to descending to the bath in our yard. Once when it descended to a branch just 10 feet above the bath and people were too close, it eyed us curiously while camera shutters were snapping and decided to postpone its drink.

Once the solitaire flew in a tight criss-cross pattern over the house and into a grove of cherry trees on the hillside. I assumed it was flying through a swarm of insects, as many were hovering in the air in the 60-degree temperature. The same day it used a fallen limb as a base for catching insects near the ground, alighting into the grass and quickly out again with prey.

The silhouette, flight pattern and wing and tail movements were immediately distinguishable from other birds, enabling me to spot the solitaire without binoculars. It could often be seen in a seemingly agitated state, shallowly and rapidly flicking its wings and shaking its tail like an Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*). The flight pattern was direct and swift.

The solitaire typically took long drinks at the bird bath, always in the morning and as late as dusk. I observed it 35 times at the bath during its 22-day stay, but on only one of these visits did it bathe. If disturbed it often would return within a few minutes to finish its drink.

### **Solitaire watches squirrel, is wary of cat**

The solitaire was very wary on its approaches to the bath, and made obvious judgments about when to land at the water. One afternoon it perched above the bath and observed the area. When a squirrel hopped onto the bath, the solitaire flew into the nearby holly tree as if to hide. But almost immediately following the squirrel's departure, and while the animal was still on the ground underneath the bath, the thirsty solitaire descended to drink.

However, the solitaire would not descend to the bath when our big white cat was sitting beneath it. When I called the cat into the house, the solitaire descended within seconds. The cat has snagged birds off the rim of the bath.

## SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

The solitaire seemed bothered by other birds coming too close when it was perching, but its annoyance seemed to be selective. On a day that it postponed use of the water because of people too close, it later returned to a limb near the bath to find a Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) at the water. It watched only briefly, grew

impatient, chased the jay away, and at last got an apparently overdue drink. But not for long. An American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) landed and the solitaire backed off, perched a few feet away, attempted again but fell back with the robin didn't move, and finally waited for its turn. The solitaire didn't mind joining other, smaller birds at the bath.

### **Curious Companion**

On a gray and chilly morning, the solitaire flew from the bath to the top of a hardwood tree on the hillside and sat for about ten minutes only about one foot away from a black bird I couldn't identify. When the solitaire flew off to the top of a nearby hickory tree, the black bird followed and perched near the solitaire.

### **Camaraderie with Eastern Bluebirds**

At the edge of an oak-dominated woodland not far from the mixed hillside, the solitaire perched briefly on top of a bluebird box where a pair of Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) quickly responded. The male bluebird appeared to defend the box, but there appeared not to be any actual annoyance at the presence of the solitaire. In fact, later the same evening, as the sun was setting, the solitaire seemed to be enjoying some camaraderie with the same pair of bluebirds, which had taken up hunting insects in a field about 200 feet away. Using a large fallen limb to perch upon, the three birds flitted from snag to snag catching insects.

### **Calling all Solitaires**

On April 9 when I came home from errands, I heard a complex and beautiful song in the side yard. It was the solitaire atop a budding lilac bush. He wasn't bothered by my approach and continued to sing. The song is described in the Audubon Land Bird Guide as "one of the finest of bird songs, with clear, brilliant, ringing notes that rise and fall in pitch and volume as the bird warbles and trills."

### **The Solitaire and People**

The solitaire did not seem at all bothered by people unless they were too close to the bath when he came to drink. Often people were present in the yard about 25 to 30 feet away when he approached the bath and he was not bothered, but 15 feet was too close.

One evening on the hillside as I was returning from a walk in the woods, I decided to try to see him close up. I found him perching on the limb of a small hardwood tree beside one of his favored cedars and I slowly approached. As I continued to move closer, he simply watched me. I stopped at a distance of about 20 feet. He didn't flinch, but sat on the bare limb calmly staring at me. Even when I turned to go, making a lot of commotion picking my way through the thicket, he remained on the limb.

Everyone agreed the solitaire was a most accommodating subject.

900 La Grange Road, Street, MD 21154

Received May 14, 1996

# STATEWIDE MAY COUNT, 1995

LEANNE J. PEMBURN

Most of Maryland was blessed with beautiful weather and a very good warbler flight this year. Some of the better finds included an Anhinga in Wicomico County, a Surf Scoter in Garrett, a Black Tern in Harford, and an American Pipit in Frederick County. With only one "county" (District of Columbia) yet to file results, we have a total of 250 species, with 185,817 individuals counted. The high number for individuals of one species was Common Grackle, with 12,570 individuals, edging out European Starling, with 11,450 individuals.

To date 529 people are listed as participating in the May Count. Thanks to everyone, once again. We wouldn't have all this lovely data without you. District of Columbia, and Somerset and Worcester are crying out for counters. We're missing some great species and great birding out there. Maybe next year...

Table 1. Statewide May Count, 1995

	Alleg.	A.A.	Balt.	Calvt.	Crln.	Carr.	Cecil.	Chas	Dorch.	Fredk.	Garr.
Common Loon	5	8	4	-	-	-	-	7	21	-	3
Pied-billed Grebe	2	-	-	4	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
Horned Grebe	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Double-crested Cormorant	-	38	147	-	13	-	404	94	88	15	1
Anhinga**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
American Bittern	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Least Bittern	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	-
Great Blue Heron	1	47	169	43	32	3	64	167	86	24	5
Great Egret	-	1	3	6	-	-	4	-	48	-	-
Snowy Egret	-	5	11	-	-	-	1	-	57	-	-
Little Blue Heron	-	-	-	1	-	-	10	-	-	-	-
Cattle Egret	-	-	-	-	-	-	32	-	2	-	-
Green Heron	3	10	12	7	3	3	5	11	6	16	9
Black-crowned Night-Heron	-	3	7	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	-
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glossy Ibis	-	1	-	-	-	-	10	-	6	-	-
Tundra Swan	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-
Mute Swan	-	6	-	7	1	-	-	1	29	-	-
Snow Goose*	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	2	-	-
Canada Goose	50	79	274	38	41	107	37	205	93	492	123
Wood Duck	58	13	54	31	18	7	11	39	25	33	65
Green-winged Teal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
American Black Duck	-	-	4	5	-	-	-	-	27	-	-
Mallard	40	216	186	92	132	36	32	115	115	107	199
Northern Pintail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Blue-winged Teal	3	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	6	-	2
Northern Shoveler	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gadwall	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Canvasback	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Ring-necked Duck	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Lesser Scaup	-	5	30	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-
Oldsquaw	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Surf Scoter	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Scoter sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	9	-	-
Clapper Rail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	-	-



*Garrett County Observers: Front Row, Connie Skipper, Bill Pope, Kevin Dodge, Connie Beachy, Fran Pope. Back Row, Jeff Opel, Danny Quinn, Gerry Lawton, Jeff Shenot, Judy Sconyers, Ken Bauer, Shiela Hughes. Photo by Craig Phillips.*

**Table 1 (cont'd). Statewide May Count, 1995**

Harfd.	Howd.	Kent.	Mont.	P.G.	Q.A.	St.M	Somt.	Talb.	Wash.	Wico.	Worc.	Total
3	9	6	-	2	-	10	-	2	-	-	-	80
-	2	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
62	13	22	74	25	35	70	7	5	2	84	26	1225
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
196	40	99	39	94	44	42	-	24	8	22	3	1252
1	2	4	2	4	1	4	5	3	-	1	5	94
-	-	1	-	2	3	3	2	6	-	1	1	93
1	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	1	17
27	3	9	-	1	45	24	1	22	-	5	11	182
12	24	13	24	14	4	6	6	3	9	4	0	204
3	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	22
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	31
-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
-	2	72	-	-	14	19	-	12	-	-	-	163
-	-	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	31
409	500	142	522	400	22	28	138	9	210	155	21	409
20	40	30	79	151	7	7	-	10	61	3	8	770
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
9	-	4	1	5	-	1	-	1	-	5	-	62
99	189	93	138	416	86	51	30	10	223	70	9	2684
-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
-	-	-	2	6	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	24
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	40
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	2	-	17

Table 1 (cont'd). Statewide May Count, 1995

	Alleg.	A.A.	Balt.	Calvt.	Crln.	Carr.	Cecil.	Chas	Dorch.	Fredk.	Garr.
King Rail	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-
Virginia Rail	-	-	35	-	-	-	1	5	66	-	-
Sora	-	1	4	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-
Common Moorhen	-	-	-	1	8	-	-	-	8	-	-
American Coot	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	1	2
Black-bellied Plover	1	-	60	-	-	-	20	-	6	2	-
Semipalmated Plover	1	-	6	7	61	-	47	-	27	13	-
Killdeer	25	38	28	8	41	15	25	23	73	21	43
American Oystercatcher	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Greater Yellowlegs	3	18	-	2	7	-	8	1	68	1	-
Lesser Yellowlegs	10	19	270	10	14	1	9	5	8	48	1
Solitary Sandpiper	13	24	39	2	2	15	8	13	9	63	11
Willet	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29	-	-
Spotted Sandpiper	30	40	57	38	30	17	22	35	29	49	30
Upland Sandpiper*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Ruddy Turnstone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	-	-
Sanderling	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	-
Semipalmated Sandpiper	2	4	1362	10	67	-	40	1	23	5	3
Least Sandpiper	28	31	27	1	66	-	29	1	151	62	-
White-rumped Sandpiper	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Peep sp.	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pectoral Sandpiper	-	1	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	2	-
Dunlin	-	-	227	-	-	-	1	-	229	-	-
Short-billed Dowitcher	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Common Snipe	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
American Woodcock	3	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	11	-	18
Laughing Gull	-	242	-	263	424	-	1	15	635	-	-
Bonaparte's Gull	1	-	184	1	-	-	18	2	-	-	3
Ring-billed Gull	11	33	197	65	9	-	358	94	56	-	1
Herring Gull	1	28	239	43	-	-	32	28	246	-	-
Great Black-backed Gull	-	10	137	2	-	-	42	15	12	-	-
Gull sp.	-	-	140	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Caspian Tern	-	1	-	-	-	-	85	3	2	-	-
Royal Tern	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	35	3	-	-
Common Tern	-	-	-	13	-	-	-	-	5	-	-
Forster's Tern	-	17	4	14	32	-	27	3	121	-	-
Sterna sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Least Tern	-	7	22	4	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Black Tern*	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Rock Dove	321	93	282	6	68	67	65	57	24	170	97
Mourning Dove	95	191	444	156	90	135	111	165	37	202	116
Black-billed Cuckoo	10	-	2	1	-	-	1	1	4	8	2
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	38	16	22	-	29	5	10	49	39	43	5
Barn Owl	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	-	1	3	-	-	1	3	6	6	1
Great Horned Owl	-	-	2	2	2	-	4	-	5	2	2
Barred Owl	1	3	10	3	2	1	2	8	3	8	6
Northern Saw-whet Owl	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Common Nighthawk	3	4	3	-	-	-	6	-	2	3	-
Chuck-will's-widow	-	-	-	5	-	-	2	7	11	-	-
Whip-poor-will	9	-	7	6	6	-	16	9	15	-	2
Chimney Swift	123	149	265	105	37	105	146	79	62	160	27
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	13	8	26	38	19	9	5	11	3	11	51
Belted Kingfisher	5	11	18	9	4	10	2	4	1	11	4
Red-headed Woodpecker	-	-	1	1	-	9	-	13	4	12	1
Red-bellied Woodpecker	50	71	178	41	44	65	38	81	25	100	14
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Downy Woodpecker	36	35	74	27	9	15	21	18	16	48	36
Hairy Woodpecker	14	6	22	7	2	3	5	7	6	7	23

Table 1 (cont'd). Statewide May Count, 1995

Harfd.	Howd.	Kent.	Mont.	P.G.	Q.A.	St.M	Somt.	Talb.	Wash.	Wico.	Worc.	Total
3	-	1	-	1	-	1	2	1	-	-	-	11
2	-	6	-	1	-	2	1	16	-	-	-	135
2	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	12
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17
-	1	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
-	-	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	103
-	-	1	-	15	7	7	-	-	-	86	-	278
37	53	30	9	47	37	47	7	20	53	46	3	729
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
11	7	12	3	35	5	3	-	2	3	7	-	196
11	3	11	2	18	2	6	0	8	-	-	-	456
24	85	5	15	11	8	8	-	7	16	4	-	382
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	3	1	37
39	66	7	48	70	7	64	-	11	44	7	1	741
-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	-	-	16
-	-	-	-	-	3	6	-	-	-	-	-	14
2	2	7	5	6	-	14	-	4	-	11	-	1568
43	37	360	4	2	4	37	-	-	-	5	-	888
-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
-	3	-	-	-	10	3	-	-	-	-	-	116
1	-	2	-	-	1	4	-	2	-	-	-	16
-	-	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	474
-	-	-	-	3	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	8
1	-	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	7
12	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	49
2	-	68	-	178	109	224	96	234	-	267	7	2765
4	-	23	-	-	-	38	-	2	-	-	-	276
190	40	783	12	29	191	158	-	8	2	41	-	276
7	34	114	8	5	3	86	-	1	-	13	1	889
5	-	9	-	1	-	24	-	3	-	6	-	266
-	13	-	-	-	36	-	-	-	-	-	-	49
40	-	7	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	49
-	-	1	-	-	-	11	2	1	-	47	-	101
-	-	-	-	-	2	7	-	-	-	-	-	27
9	-	22	-	42	22	44	1	-	-	18	-	376
-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
25	-	-	-	-	9	2	-	9	-	-	7	87
1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
64	281	36	45	116	22	13	3	7	146	23	13	2019
274	481	19	130	279	68	178	19	67	175	57	10	3499
1	4	4	3	2	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	49
16	19	9	94	42	14	13	6	23	17	41	9	559
-	-	2	-	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24
15	1	7	-	-	-	6	-	1	3	-	-	55
18	10	6	-	3	1	6	-	6	3	-	-	72
6	10	8	5	11	6	3	0	4	12	1	0	113
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
5	198	1	9	4	-	-	-	-	30	-	-	268
-	-	1	-	3	-	24	1	7	-	1	-	62
32	-	-	1	2	1	18	2	2	-	-	-	128
99	409	137	132	159	37	168	-	27	071	40	9	2746
23	24	19	9	22	3	17	18	5	14	10	1	359
10	17	4	9	12	3	8	1	2	18	1	-	164
1	-	1	-	-	-	7	-	-	5	-	-	55
110	280	56	127	144	39	41	2	13	74	21	5	1649
-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	4
45	128	35	38	34	19	30	-	6	48	16	-	734
9	25	8	12	14	9	6	-	5	7	6	2	205









Table 1 (cont'd). Statewide May Count, 1995

	Alleg.	AA.	Balt.	Calvt.	Crln.	Carr.	Cecil.	Chas	Dorch.	Fredk.	Garr.
Swamp Sparrow	3	19	59	4	-	1	4	5	-	3	34
White-throated Sparrow	9	30	64	17	2	17	6	1	2	5	4
White-crowned Sparrow	6	-	2	-	-	7	-	-	-	5	4
Dark-eyed Junco	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Bobolink	19	88	389	51	100	62	11	127	8	185	136
Red-winged Blackbird	91	578	739	236	467	229	276	332	635	466	374
Eastern Meadowlark	25	7	8	6	10	17	18	23	43	68	49
Rusty Blackbird*	16	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Boat-tailed Grackle	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	-	-
Common Grackle	251	533	643	449	949	480	342	477	735	991	261
Brown-headed Cowbird	64	77	182	152	106	46	101	35	77	65	116
Blackbird sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Orchard Oriole	15	27	33	10	80	7	28	29	46	11	6
Northern Oriole	-	-	-	-	54	-	-	-	-	-	-
Purple Finch	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14
House Finch	81	237	356	139	63	126	64	70	23	267	77
Pine Siskin	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
American Goldfinch	84	106	329	110	41	88	87	36	30	240	180
House Sparrow	73	93	239	52	232	242	38	57	26	317	71
Total Species:	144	149	169	145	120	110	146	137	177	147	150
Total Individuals:	5324	8349	19621	5687	6601	5391	6373	6126	7757	10441	7662
Party-hours:	67.5	75	178	69	54	36	36	67	45.5	98	147.5
Observers:	15	25	58	20	15	14	10	11	8	22	38
Parties:	11	10	28	121	7	7	5	6	3	-	-

## OBSERVERS

Burton Alexander, Corey Alexander, Prisca Anamalechi, Carmen Anderson, Ron Anderson, Dennis Andrzejewski, George Armistead, Henry T. Armistead, Jean Artes, Linda Baker, Marge Baldwin, Maud Banks, Andre Barbeau, John Barber, Julia Barber, Peg Barber, Tony Barbour, Joe Barcikowski, Wain Barnes, Marty Barron, Polly Batchelder, Ken Bauer, Ken Baxter, Carl Beachy, Connie Beachy, Tom Beal, Genevieve Beck, Virginia Beitzel, Tyler Bell, Debby Bennett, Eila Bennett, John Bennett, Mike Berry, Penny Besa, Tim Bethke, Mary-Jo Betts, Carol Beyna, Ron Beyna, Bonnie Bick, Lisa Bierer, Marcia Bilestri, Anne Bishop, John Bjerke, John Blake, John Blake, Judith Blake, Larry Bliver, Bill Blum, Karan Blum, Connie Bockstie, Harold Boling Jr, Larry Bonham, Alma W. Bowen, Jeanne Bowman, Bob Boxwell, Jim Boxwell, Frank Boyle, Gwen Brewer, Carol Broderick, Donald Broderick, Judy Bromely, Andrew Brown, Jeff Brown, Roy Brown, Carol Bult, Judy Burdette, Gwen Burkhardt, Mary Joyce Burns, Renee Burns, Betty Butler, Doug Butler, Brent Byers, Melinda Byrd, Paul Bystrak, Hobson Calhoun, Michael Callahan, Lynn Callan, Kathy Calvert, Mr. Campbell, Barbara Canfield, Annie Carpenter, Chris Carson, Linda Cashman, Ellen Caswell, Robert Caswell, Vivian Cawood, Frank Cavarich, Marty Chestem, Betty Christopher, Bob Christopher, Dan Collins, Nancy Congersky, Tom Congersky, Andrew Cooper, Barry Cooper, Pamela Cooper, M. Cowenhaven, Patty Craig, Bryce Cramer, Lisa Crawford, Marty Cribb, Randy Crook, Richard Crook, Ralph Cullison, Barbara Cupp, Bridgit Cupp, Jon Cupp, Jr, Jon Cupp, Sr, Sharon Cushman, Ellen Dashner, Andy Davis, Phil Davis, Ed DeBellvue, Lou DeMouy, Carolyn Deverse, Robert Dixon, Kevin Dodge, Bob Donaldson, Linda Donaldson, Alyson Dorsey, Malcolm Doying, JoAnn Dreyer, Ken Drier, Cindy Driscoll, Lauren Duff, Les Eastman, Ward Ebert, Darius Ecker, Paula Ecker, Anne Efland, Bill Efland, Graham Egerton, Betty Elsroad, Will Elsroad, Ethel Engle, Wilber Engle, Muffin Evander, John H. Fales, Frederick Fallon, Jane Fallon, Jane Farber, Jane Farrell, Grace Fields, Charles Finley, Portia Finley, Robert Finley, Leslie Fisher, Carol Flora, Harold Fogleman Jr, Harold Fogleman Sr, Charlotte Folk, Tom Ford, Elizabeth Forrester, Doug Forsel, Emily Francis, Gail Frantz, Jenny French, Laura French, Linda Friedland, Jean Fry, Larry Fry, Cora Fulton, Barbara Gaffney, George Gaffney, Becky Garling, Chris Garrett, Shirley Geddes, Stacy Gelhaus, Jane Geuder, Ralph Geuder, Carol Ghebelian, Rich Giannola, Betty Goldman, Luther Goldman, Nancy Goldman, Nancy

Table 1 (cont'd). Statewide May Count, 1995

Harfd.	Howd.	Kent.	Mont.	P.G.	Q.A.	St.M	Somt.	Talb.	Wash.	Wico.	Worc.	Total
10	28	2	-	4	1	4	-	1	1	-	-	183
21	103	12	9	19	15	-	-	4	21	-	-	361
3	9	8	4	1	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	52
-	-	4	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	14
396	455	15	36	20	11	265	-	-	14	-	1	2389
409	803	1539	129	557	297	576	49	126	242	3087	19	947
34	23	30	2	13	18	61	5	18	54	5	2	539
-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	8	-	4	4	32
1190	663	1189	302	386	349	1078	78	214	566	369	75	125
110	244	102	86	97	74	86	-	35	76	113	1	2045
-	2	-	-	-	35	-	-	-	-	-	-	37
52	55	56	14	30	38	17	17	17	17	44	-	649
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	54
-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19
177	440	295	109	291	73	158	11	51	185	69	2	3364
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
185	430	87	166	165	43	84	20	26	297	45	16	2895
155	226	255	79	155	36	208	9	32	243	40	5	2883
163	146	165	142	159	133	159	82	131	142	124	82	250
13199	21280	11306	7904	10805	4154	10211	927	2539	8523	4997	640	185817
122	250	46	106	175	40.5	92	12	23	123	36.5	8.5	1908
43	63	18	45	51	12	18	3	4	25	8	3	529
17	39	6	21	23	9	11	2	4	14	5	3	244

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## BREWER'S BLACKBIRDS IN DORCHESTER COUNTY

MICHAEL O'BRIEN

On February 28, 1991, I observed five female Brewer's Blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) in a flock of ten to twelve Rusty Blackbirds (*E. carolinensis*) along Shorter's Wharf Road in Dorchester County, Maryland. One or more males, heard singing, may also have been Brewer's Blackbirds.

The birds were observed sitting in a dead tree about 15 feet (4.6 meters) high and about 50 yards (45 meters) from where I was standing. The light conditions were good. It was approximately 45 minutes before sunset when I first saw the birds, and the sun was directly behind me but still high enough in the sky so there was no bias toward warm colors. I watched the birds through a Kowa TSN2 telescope with a 20-60X zoom eyepiece and 10X Zeiss binoculars.

The size and shape were very similar to Rusty Blackbirds but the chest was fuller and the abdomen was slimmer. This difference in body shape seemed responsible for a slightly smaller-headed and longer-tailed appearance in the female Brewer's. The iris was dark brown. The length and depth of the bill were not noticeably different than a Rusty Blackbird's, and therefore very different from the

bill of a cowbird (*Molothrus* sp.). The bill of the Brewer's had a perfectly straight culmen, however, lacking the subtle but visible curve seen on the bill of a Rusty.

The plumage was drab gray-brown, paler on the head and underparts and darker on the wings and tail. This pattern is similar to that of a female Brown-headed Cowbird (*M. ater*), but lacked any pattern on the throat and underparts. The color and pattern were very unlike the dark slate gray typical of the female Rusty Blackbird.

In addition to the three birds I studied closely, two other females were in the tree. Owing to the angle at which they were sitting, or because they were partly obscured by branches, they were not studied as closely. On one it was possible to see the dark eye, but not on the other, and culmen shape was not observed on either. Both had the distinctive body shape and plumage of the first three birds.

My attention was drawn to the flock when I heard a song that seemed similar to that of a Rusty Blackbird but was not quite as high-pitched and squeaky. It seemed intermediate between the song of a Rusty Blackbird and that of a Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*). In retrospect it seemed possible that this had been a male Brewer's Blackbird. I did not have the time to study all the male blackbirds present, and did not see a male Brewer's. Possibly I missed one or more male Brewer's in the flock.

The flock appeared to be working its way toward a roost along with large numbers of other blackbirds. The tree in which they were seen was part of a small island of pines in an extensive marsh. The observation lasted about three minutes.

The two previous reports of Brewer's Blackbirds for Dorchester County were published in *Maryland Birdlife* (12:91; 34:83): four at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge headquarters on April 8, 1956 and one on the Southern Dorchester County Christmas Bird Count on December 30, 1977.

12 Duke St. South, Rockville, MD 20850

## YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERONS NEST IN TAKOMA PARK

LOLA OBERMAN

Here is a happy sequel to the report in *Maryland Birdlife* (51:147148), "Yellow-crowned Night-Herons Attempt Nesting in Takoma Park." It is worthwhile to bring the story up to date because Yellow-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax violaceus*) are rare in Montgomery County, and breeding records are few. A nest with eggs was reported at Seneca in 1939, and another in 1953. No further records occurred until 1969 when two nests were found 1 1/2 miles west of Seneca.

The birds had nested within the District of Columbia in 1951, 1952, and 1955, but had never been reported in Takoma Park before. Their presence adjacent to Sligo Creek might be attributable to the intensive cleanup efforts that rehabilitated the polluted stream and brought back fish and other aquatic life attractive to herons.

April 14, when the pair was first reported on a nest near Sligo Creek in the spring of 1995, was early in the year for nesting. The earliest Maryland date for viable eggs is April 21 (Iliff et al., *Field List of the Birds of Maryland*, Third Ed., MOS 1996). It was disappointing but not too surprising when the pair abandoned the nest.

A few days later, on April 18, the two birds appeared on the opposite side of Sligo Creek and were observed by a resident, Kate Britton, in apparent courtship behavior. When I arrived on the scene at dusk, she pointed out a haphazard collection of sticks that could have been a nest, and we saw one of the herons fly into the tree and perch. Within a few days this site was also abandoned and no further sightings of the birds were reported.

Then on an evening in mid-July 1995, we received a telephone call from Kate Britton, who announced with some excitement that while jogging in the park she had discovered the Yellow crowned Night-Herons again, and that they had a new nest in a different location, nor far from where she had first seen them.

My husband Ted and I hurried to the site she described and found the nest about 50 feet up in a sycamore tree alongside Sligo Creek. This time the birds had chosen a sturdier branch, one that hung directly above the well-traveled Sligo Creek Parkway. A prominent circle of droppings on the pavement beneath the nest was a helpful clue to its location.

Arriving after sundown, we were just in time to observe the changing of the guard, as one parent flew in to relieve the other at the nest where two fuzzy chicks raised their heads. Since the average clutch of Yellow crowned Night-Heron eggs is from three to five, it seemed likely that there were others on the nest that we could not see from the ground.

Returning on August 16, we found four young birds, now well feathered and flapping their well-developed wings, ready to take off. Other birders visiting the site a few days later saw neither adults nor young in the tree, but in subsequent weeks there were occasional reports of adults and immature birds perched singly on rocks in the creek.

There are no prior records of young Yellow-crowned Night-Herons on the nest this late in the season, July 14 being the latest date recorded in the Maryland-DC Atlas. The unsuccessful earlier attempts made by this pair could account for the late date of the final nest.

We entertained some hope that this success might encourage the birds to return to Sligo Creek and become the nucleus of a colony. That hope was fanned when Kate Britton called on March 30, 1996. The Yellow-crowned Night-Herons—surely the same pair—had put in an early appearance in the same sycamore tree alongside Sligo Creek and seemed to be taking possession of the old nest. Ted and I went over the following day and quickly spotted the two birds, huddled close together near last year's nest, a very promising sight.

We were out of town during most of April and did not return to Sligo Creek Parkway until May 8. To our dismay, we couldn't even find the nest, although we thought we knew the location very well. Walking up and down the parkway in our



*Photo by Ted Oberman.*

futile search, we met a birder who had just seen an adult heron on a rock in the creek, but we failed to find it.

Later we learned that a violent storm had swept through the area while we were away, felling trees and doing considerable damage. The sycamore limb on which the herons had nested had been broken off and the nest scattered.

No further reports of the unlucky birds arrived until August 4, when Kate Britton located them a quarter of a mile from the old site. They had built "a huge nest," she said, high above Park Crest Drive, and she had seen three young birds. On August 7, I had no trouble finding the nest, about 50 feet up in an oak tree. No adults were in sight at 11:00 a.m., but two young were in the nest, another perched on its rim, and a fourth was two feet out on the limb, flapping its wings experimentally.

Once again, this was a late date for young on the nest, but in both years the destruction of the first nest could account for the delay. It seems that the herons have found a favorable location in the Sligo Creek vicinity, and we have good reason to hope for their return in 1997.

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