

Announcing — *The Blue List:* an “early warning system” for birds

With this issue AMERICAN BIRDS inaugurates the maintenance of a list of North American bird species which are of especial concern, and of which observers are asked to take particular note. The species named to this list are ones which have recently or are currently giving indications of non-cyclical population declines or range contractions, either locally or widespread.

Blue List birds are not to be confused with the very rare or “officially” endangered species, although some of them may be rare and local, while others may be rapidly approaching the endangered status. The Blue List will exclude those species already proclaimed to be endangered, and those extreme rarities, every sighting of which is reported, such as Whooping Crane, Eskimo Curlew, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, or Bachman’s Warbler.

This is the list for species more common and usually more widespread — perhaps even still abundant — which for reasons of effects of chemicals on breeding biology, reduction of breeding or wintering habitat, predator problems (including man) or other causes, are now — or seem to be — substantially reduced in numbers, either regionally or throughout their range.

Since the line between what is endangered and what is as yet merely showing a decline may be somewhat blurred, a few species already listed on the endangered category may be included on the Blue List. Thus the Peregrine Falcon, endangered if not extirpated from the East, would be Blue Listed in the West, where it survives in greatly reduced numbers. Brown Pelican would be on the Blue list for eastern and Gulf coast areas, although it is an endangered species along the Pacific coast. Species like the Red-shouldered and Cooper’s Hawks are typical Blue List birds, since they seem to be almost everywhere declining in numbers.

When a species is added to the Blue List, that is a signal to observers everywhere to be

aware that observations (*or the lack of them*) of that species are especially wanted, and valuable. Observers should make a special effort to report on these birds to their regional editors, to be incorporated in their seasonal summaries. Regional editors too, should solicit information on these species, summarizing in their reports the latest known status of the species listed.

The Blue List is essentially an “early warning system.” In itself it cannot prevent the decline of any species in trouble. But by focusing the attention of our thousands of observers on problem species, it cannot help but improve our understanding of their changing status, and alert the scientific community, governmental agencies, and the general public to situations that need action. If successful, Blue List data can help prevent these species from silently slipping onto the endangered list.

Observers are encouraged to suggest additions or deletions to the list, but recommendations should be backed by responsible field work, not merely by superficial impressions.

Finally, there is no significance to the choice of the name. Probably amber, for “caution”, would be more appropriate, but “Amber List” has a weak sound; Red List would confuse this list with species in the Red Data Book. Blue List is about as concise and memorable as we can devise.

THE BLUE LIST, JANUARY 1, 1972

(Preliminary — Tentative)

- ✓ Brown Pelican — *undangered!*
- White Pelican
- Double-crested Cormorant
(inland populations only).
- Great White Heron *endangered!*
- Reddish Egret
- ✓ Black-crowned Night Heron
- White-faced Ibis
- Wood Ibis — *endangered!*

What about the Green Heron, and the Yellow Crowned Night Heron
 and maybe the King Rail? White-tailed Kite?
 Exactly what criteria, what data - set up for assignment to Blue list?

White Ibis

Fulvous Tree Duck

Mexican Duck

Turkey Vulture

• Black Vulture

Swallow-tailed Kite

✓ Sharp-shinned Hawk

✓ Cooper's Hawk

✓ Red-shouldered Hawk

✓ Ferruginous Hawk

✓ Harris' Hawk

✓ Marsh Hawk *abundant!*

✓ Osprey *where are they?*

✓ Caracara - *endangered.*

Prairie Falcon

✓ Pigeon Hawk - *endangered?*

Sparrow Hawk (Florida). *Wow!*

Sharp-tailed Grouse

Sage Grouse

✓ Limpkin - *endangered?*

Snowy Plover

Am. Oystercatcher

Least Tern

Barn Owl?

✓ Burrowing Owl

✓ Red-cockaded Woodpecker

Gila Woodpecker

✓ Red-headed Woodpecker

Bewick's Wren

✓ E. Bluebird

W. Bluebird

Mountain Bluebird

Loggerhead Shrike - *???! abundant!*

Gray Vireo

Bachman's Sparrow *endangered?*



Caracara. Photo: Allan D. Cruickshank from N. A. S.

The Centers of Learning

5. THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN by Robert W. Storer

Most of our studies of birds are aimed at a better understanding of evolution - systematics in the broadest sense. Our students are working on a spectrum of problems ranging from functional anatomy to behavior, ecology, and environmental physiology.

The facilities open to graduate students at the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology include a world bird collection of approximately 20,000 study skins, representing 60% of the world's species, and over 11,000 skeletons, a major ornithological library including the Wilson Ornithological Society library, facilities for keeping live birds indoors and out, photo-period rooms, environmental chambers, and acoustical equipment. The Edwin S. George Reserve (approximately 25 miles from the campus), the Botanical Gardens, other University-owned properties near Ann Arbor, The

The following birds have been reported declining in numbers in certain parts of their range and are being considered as possible additions to The Blue List.

Great Blue Heron (Midwest). *abundant*

Swainson's Hawk (S. California).

Clapper Rail (California).

Roseate Tern (Gulf Coast). ?

Yellow-billed Cuckoo (California).

Short-eared Owl (Central Rockies).

Red-shafted Flicker (S. California, Central Rockies).

Red-headed Woodpecker (Florida).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (S. Plains).

House Wren (S. Atlantic, Midwest, N. Rockies).

Bell's Vireo (S. California).

Yellow Warbler (Colorado).

Le Conte's Sparrow (Gulf Coast).

Fox Sparrow. (N. Rockies).