

The Last Word

The attentive reader may note that in this and the last issues, the features entitled "The Centers of Learning," and "In Other Journals" have been missing, and that there have been very little of the "Controversy" feature, of book reviews, and letters. There has been no change in policy; we hope to resume publication of these and other features on a regular basis. Our problem has been lack of space. The basic limitation on the number of pages we can print is economic; this in turn depends on such factors as manufacturing cost, and income from subscriptions and advertising.

When the name and format of the magazine were revised in February, 1971, it was our goal to roughly hold the seasonal reports to 80 pages, and then add as many pages as possible of feature material. But the reader will note that this issue has no less than 93 pages, the most ever published, of regional reports. The major reasons for this trend are two: our very success in reaching twice as many readers (and observers) has caused a positive inundation of records; our regional editors are in turn producing far more comprehensive and meaningful summaries than ever.

The analyst of trends can easily foresee what is coming. The day is not too far off when each season our editors will be getting reports from 4000 contributors, in place of the current 2000. Our editors will be swamped, the absolutely essential records will be doubled, and *American Birds* will be forced to revert to an all-field-note publication. We do not believe that this would be a popular move.

There would seem to be one possible way to reduce the length of these reports, apart from asking our editors to more stringently summarise, excise, and edit. And that would be if, for the less important trend and pattern observations, to omit names and initials of observers. Guy McCaskie, for example, on p. 123, lists some 32 separate records for Am. Redstart in S. California last fall. These are required if each record must be attributed. But the entire picture could be summarized in about nine lines of type, if no observer names were required.

Part of the problem, it would seem, is that observers want to get credit, in print, for their records. (Regional editors could keep all observations on file so that authors of important records could be determined by anyone seeking data). Are names necessary? *British Birds*, which publishes a quarterly seasonal summary,

uses no observer names whatsoever, although the original observers' names are kept on file. Would North American observers assent to this kind of anonymity?

Aside from its problems, we feel that the seasonal report in the pages that precede this page is quite the best ever presented in any journal anywhere. It represents the most observers, the most observations (anyone want to count them one by one?) and more light on distribution, populations, migration, trends and portents than ever. In his Able summary, our Changing Seasons editor could no more than skim the highlights; the reader is urged (after he has checked all his own records and read his own region) to browse farther afield and note all the infinite details that add up to a truly gigantic picture of North American bird life in autumn 1971.

For those to whom such things are important, the pages above list no less than 24 species new to provincial or state lists, three "farthest north in North America" records (Purple Gallinule, Am. Coot, and Xantus' Murrelet) one species new to Canada, one (and possibly two) bird new to the United States, and one bird new, at least onshore, to the continent!

Note to contributors of Breeding Bird Censuses. A revised and clarified set of instructions has just been prepared and will appear in an early issue. If you plan to contribute such a study this year, even if you are an old hand at it, please write for a copy, to *American Birds*, 950 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

This year some 966 Christmas Bird Counts have been received — a record — and are now being processed and edited. The total number of observers participating in these counts was well over 18,000 — another new record. The Christmas Bird Count issue of *American Birds*, normally the April issue, (well over 400 pages in content) cannot reach subscribers during April, but we hope to have it in the mail earlier this year than in recent history. One new feature will be added: R. Ross Anderson, of Halifax, has volunteered to draw up a list of species high counts for Canada similar to the one compiled continent-wide by Burt Monroe.

—Robert S. Arbib, Jr.

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