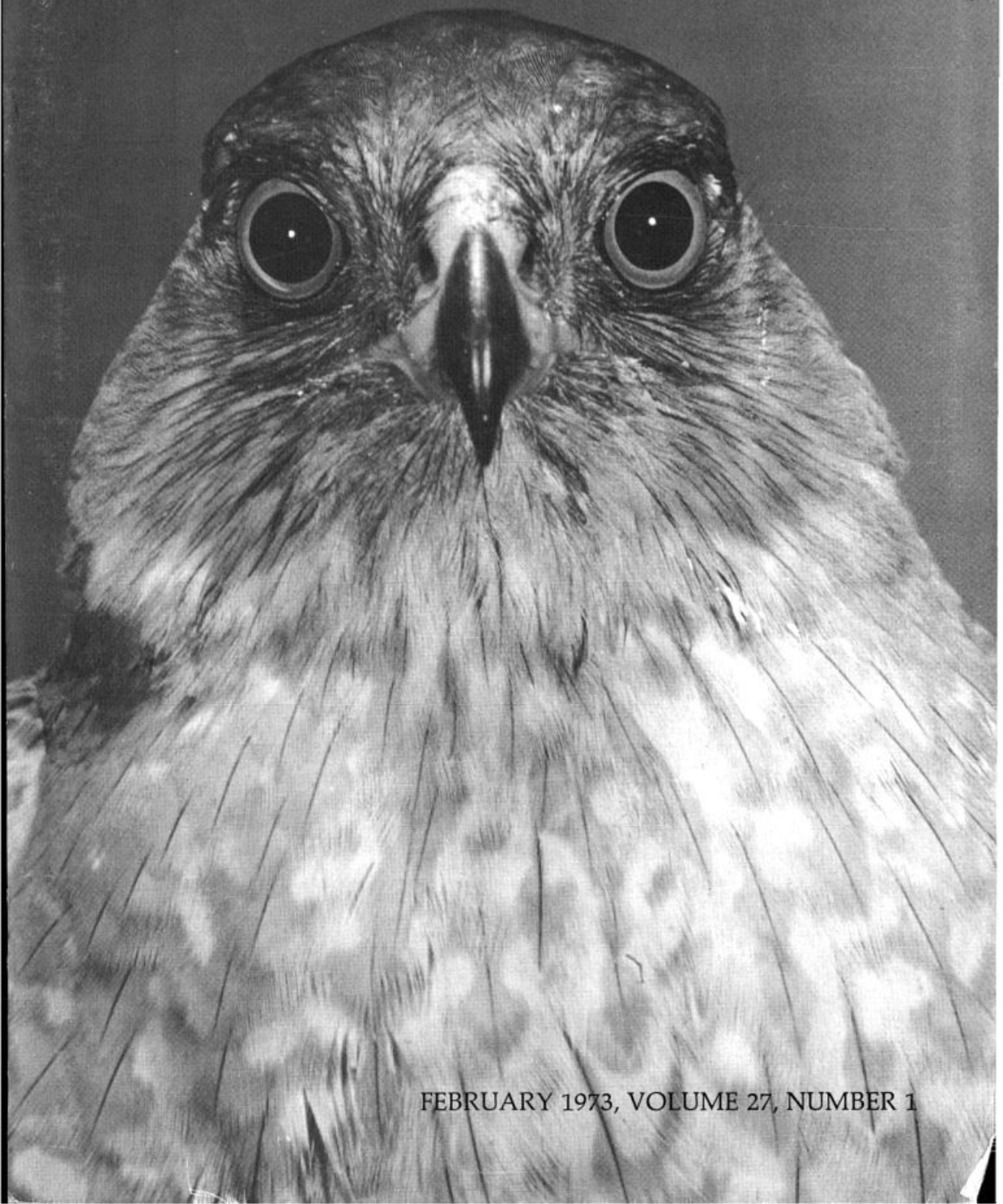


AMERICAN BIRDS

incorporating Audubon Field Notes



FEBRUARY 1973, VOLUME 27, NUMBER 1



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A bimonthly journal devoted to the birds of North America

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The Centers of Learning

Museum of Comparative Zoology
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by Raymond A. Paynter, Jr.

Research on these rich resources is greatly facilitated by Harvard's superb libraries. In the Bird Department there is a working library of major journals and frequently consulted monographs, plus about 25,000 reprints. Two floors below is the quarter-million volume MCZ library, which has complete runs of most museum, society, and ornithological journals, and roughly 5,000 ornithological monographs, including a collection of Japanese literature gathered by Oliver L. Austin, Jr., which is unsurpassed outside of Japan. Here also are housed the museum's archives with thousands of letters, personal journals, and memorabilia concerned with ornithology. Very rare volumes, manuscripts, and similar material, including splendid collections of Auduboniana and Wilsoniana, are kept in the Houghton Library, a facility devoted to the preservation of such treasures, which is a short distance away in the Harvard "Yard".

Teaching was the prime function of the MCZ in its earliest days, but after the death of Agassiz the emphasis moved toward research, until eventually instruction was limited to a few graduate students. Twenty-five years ago there began a shift again toward teaching, which was greatly accelerated by the arrival in 1953 of Ernst Mayr, an outstanding ornithologist and leader in evolutionary theory. Later Prof. Mayr became director of the MCZ and the museum's ties with the Biology Department were further strengthened until now instruction and research take about equal parts of a curator's time.

An intermediate level course entitled "Biology of Birds", with strong emphasis on evolution, behavior, and physiology is offered to undergraduates by R. A. Paynter, Jr. In addition to this course there are several research courses and seminars on specialized aspects of avian biology, some of which are taught by senior members of the research staff of the Hathaway School of Conservation Education at the Massachusetts Audubon Society. These groups are small and meet in an informal and relaxed atmosphere, which belies the seriousness and depth of the research or discussions.

Graduate students are enrolled in the Department of Biology through the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, meaning that the ornithologist must compete for acceptance with all other candidates in the area of organismic biology. The number of graduate students "in birds" has, therefore, always been small and doubtless will be smaller if the current reduced availability of financial support continues and the university's planned shrinkage of the graduate school is implemented. Recent graduate students, some of whom have worked at the museum's newly established 700-acre field station in nearby Concord, have investigated a diverse array of ornithologically oriented problems ranging from observational learning and South American zoogeography to food niche utilization by gulls and warbler vocalization.

The Museum of Comparative Zoology ("MCZ") is the oldest university museum in the country, having been founded in 1859 by the indefatigable collector and popular teacher Louis Agassiz. The choice of its awkward and inappropriate name seems to have been the consequence of Agassiz's attempt at modesty. There is a story that when Agassiz was soliciting funds to establish a museum he told a rich friend that the institution was to be named after his teaching method—"comparative zoology", but he confided to other friends that, after his death, it would surely be known as "the Agassiz Museum". A short time later the friend died leaving a substantial bequest toward the building of a museum, with the condition that the recipient institution should be known by the name "Museum of Comparative Zoology" and "by no other name". Agassiz's response when he heard the restriction is unrecorded, but succeeding generations have often wished that he had not been uncharacteristically modest on that one occasion.

For the first 40 years of the MCZ's existence the bird collection was small and consisted mainly of skins of local species and a series of anatomical specimens of foreign forms. During the next 40 years, which were the heydays of the private collector and the dilettante, the skin collection grew enormously under the curatorship of Outram Bangs (1900-1932) and later James L. Peters (1932-1952), and with the enthusiastic support of the museum's colorful and persuasive director Thomas Barbour (1927-1946). Much effort was made to build a balanced representation of the world's avifauna, to acquire historically important collections, and to preserve rare and extinct species. At the same time some geographical areas and certain families

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Market Place

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