

# AMERICAN BIRDS

*incorporating Audubon Field Notes*

DECEMBER 1974, VOLUME 28, NUMBER 6



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DECEMBER 1974, VOLUME 28, NUMBER 6  
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*A bimonthly journal devoted to the birds of North America*

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## INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

AMERICAN BIRDS welcomes the submission of articles and photographs for publication.

Our major areas of interest are the changing distribution, population, migration, and rare occurrence of the avifauna of North America, including Middle America and the West Indies. We solicit articles on problems in field identification, in our "Site Guide" series of birding locales, in our "Centers of Learning" series that profiles institutions concerned with ornithology, photo essays of unusual interest, or single photographs illustrating identification features, rare occurrence, unusual locale or habitat.

For a "Work in Progress" column, we welcome notices of research projects seeking field reports or other collaboration; we publish advance notices of important conventions, meetings, symposia, seminars, and conferences or other ornithological news. We are looking for more articles on the techniques of birding, bird photography or sound-recording, on the order of "On the Art of Estimating Numbers," (AB 26: 706-12).

All submissions will be carefully considered, but authors considering major submissions should correspond with the editor first. AMERICAN BIRDS publishes papers of a technical nature but only when written in a less-than-technical, easily readable style: i.e., no complicated equations, lengthy tables, or complex graphs. Major articles should be limited to 3000 words; exceptions may be agreed upon after consultation. Prospective authors should consult the index of articles in this issue and recent issues for an understanding of our interests. All material submitted should be original, and previously unpublished. Manuscripts should follow accepted rules of format and style, be typewritten, double-spaced, on white paper, with generous margins. Photographs should be glossy black-and-white or color prints, clearly marked with author's name and address. We require the original typescript and one carbon copy. All manuscripts will be acknowledged, but authors must recognise that a backlog exists which may entail delayed publication after acceptance.

For further information address the editor at the American Birds offices, 950 Third Avenue, New York, N Y 10022

## *Why Falconry Now? An Editorial*

For some months the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been in the process of writing and revising federal regulations for the practice of falconry. These regulations would not only endorse falconry as a "sport," but legitimize it throughout the United States — wherever it was not specifically banned by a particular state. The regulations are merely minimum standards for raptor taking and keeping, and individual states may enforce more stringent regulations of their own, or ban falconry completely if they so choose.

When the original version of the regulations was circulated for comment, your editor wrote to Mr. Lynn Greenwalt, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, objecting strenuously to the issuance of any regulations, and proposing instead a ten-year moratorium on falconry everywhere at the end of which time, hopefully, we would have reliable data on continental raptor populations, and an evaluation of population trends in the various species.

It is the editor's conviction that there could hardly be a worse time than today for the promulgation of any set of regulations that will give legality to falconry. The result can only be an increased interest in the pastime and a vastly increased drain on a resource already — in many respects — in serious trouble.

It is further the editor's opinion, and one shared by many environmentalists, that falconry is a useless and in some aspects inhumane activity attractive largely because it is persistently promoted as a glamorous activity associated with medieval nobility, with an arcane vocabulary and antique furnishings — all of which add to the ego gratification of the "sport."

Some serious and expert falconers can be found, but unfortunately a majority of the so-called falconers are merely pet-keepers, unable to successfully train birds and fearful of flying them.

However, each time an expert — who is often a master propagandist with thrilling flight films and beautiful captive birds to exhibit — stages a performance, the audience is aroused, and a dozen or a hundred youths crave hawks and instant glamor. The machismo factor is high. But there are no statistics indicating what percentage of birds taken from the wild die quickly in captivity, how many are successfully trained and hunted, or how many escape, hampered by trailing jesses or being man-dependent and vulnerable. We have evidence that man-acclimated raptors are more likely to be less wary after release than truly wild birds.

The proposed federal regulations were written with the active participation of the falconers — and with little opportunity for conservationists to contribute. But if falconry is federally approved now, the result will be the permitting of an annual harvest of a wildlife resource at a time when there is no accurate data on the size of the resource (raptor populations), or any real estimate of the size of the harvest (falconry drain). This same Service, which regulates the annual waterfowl harvest, would never issue its annual regulations without first censusing the resource, and then carefully controlling the harvest.

The arguments against sport falconry should not be construed or misused as opposition to experimental breeding programs conducted by responsible institutions. While we believe that successful introduction of cage-bred birds into the wild is still unproved, it should have every chance to prove itself. For this purpose, limited taking of unthreatened races, where they exist, should be permitted under strict controls. But even if falconry techniques may be used in repopulation research, this is not a valid argument in favor of sport falconry.

Falconers are well organized and vocal. Until now, everything has gone their way. It is time that public officials know the size, intensity, and cogent reasons for the opposition.

Those readers who agree with the arguments presented here might let Mr. Greenwalt, Mr. Rogers C.B. Morton, Secretary of the Interior, and their own state conservation departments know their sentiments.

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