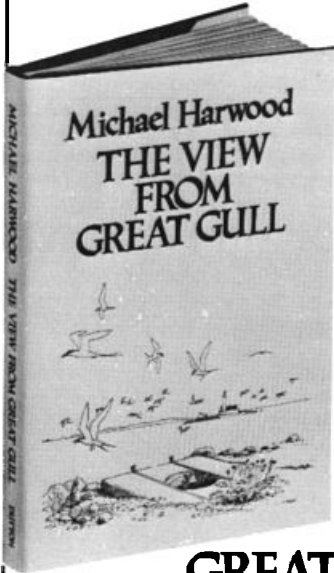


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## The Last Word

During the month of August, 1976, some 1600 persons in the United States and Canada received lengthy questionnaires designed to determine their interests in birds and more specifically what their ideal bird magazine would be, what they liked or disliked about *AMERICAN BIRDS* and how they might respond to various possible changes in the magazine. Five hundred of the questionnaires went to our current readers, another five hundred went to members of the National Audubon Society who do not receive *AMERICAN BIRDS*, and two hundred each went to former *AMERICAN BIRDS* subscribers, readers of *SMITHSONIAN*, and of *NATURAL HISTORY*.

As expected, the biggest response came from our own readers, who returned 67 per cent of the questionnaires. From this sample we can make some educated deductions about our readers: who you are, what you are interested in, and how devoted to birds and birding you are.

Sixty-five per cent of our readers are male, 33 per cent are female, and two per cent didn't know or weren't telling. Your age breakdown is: under 20 — three per cent, 20-34 — 27 per cent, 35-49 — 25 per cent, and 50-64 — 31 per cent, over 65 — 11 per cent. The average age of our readers comes to about 44. Average income from the answers given is difficult to compute, but seems to be over \$25,000 a year.

Our readers tell us that on average they spend about \$525 each year on bird-related activities. We find this difficult to believe: When one adds up the cost of transportation, lodging, and meals on trips, books, periodicals, optical equipment, film, clothing and footwear, dues, telephone, and all the other expenses the average would seem to be at least double this figure. We suspect that you simply forgot many of the expenses that are indirectly attributable to your interest in birds. Seventy-nine per cent of our readers have a college degree or higher; of these 38 per cent graduate degrees.

When asked how interested they are in birds, 86 per cent stated that they were very interested, but even more, 89 per cent, said they were interested in all natural history, but especially birds. Seventy-seven per cent of our readers consider themselves “serious amateurs,” nine per cent are professional ornithologists, and 14 per cent classify themselves as novices. In the survey of how many hours our readers devote to birding afield each month, the average is a rather surprising 22. These same subscribers spend about eleven hours each month reading about birds, and more than 20 hours each

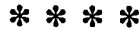
month at other bird related activities. When it comes to longer-than-weekend birding trips, one third of our readers have taken 3-4 of them in the last three years, 12 per cent have taken 5-6, and 14 per cent seven or more.

In the area of reading matter, subscribers were asked to evaluate 21 different subject categories, ranging from "detailed bird identification" to "letters to the editor." For each category, readers were asked to give a rating from: 1 — very interested, 2 — moderately interested, 3 — mildly interested, and 4 — not interested. Among our own readers, every category scored better than a three average: the lowest score for any category was a 2.8, or in other words, our readers are somewhat more than mildly interested in every subject related to birds, (of the 21 suggested). The subjects with the highest ratings averaged 1.4 scores, and the overall average for the top ten subjects was a high 1.6. There were some surprises in the results: several categories which we had presumed to be popular, particularly of the "service" type, drew relatively high (poor) scores; we interpret this to mean that while there may be great interest in these subjects, it is among a relatively small segment of our readership. We're not going

to publish the list of categories or how they rated however your views will influence the content of AMERICAN BIRDS in the months to come.

One interesting statistic can be extrapolated from the questionnaire returns. We have an average of 1.6 readers per copy, not counting those that go to libraries. With about 12,000 copies going to these subscribers, we estimate 19,200 readership. Another thousand, roughly, go to libraries, and we conservatively guess that a minimum average for each library copy might be ten readers. Our total readership, then, very roughly indeed, may be 29,200 — not too bad for a bird journal. And it's quite a sizable audience for our authors, editors, and contributors.

There is no space here to quote or even summarize the valuable commentary many of the responses brought forth under the heading of "Your Ideas." In a forthcoming issue we will sample this commentary, and further quote the many thoughtful, lengthy, and useful letters on our future path that resulted from our two recent requests. We are grateful to each of you who took the time and effort, some of it quite remarkable, to contribute your views.



For the coming year a new schedule of publication dates and of content for American Birds has been planned. Beginning in 1977, each issue will be designated one month later than it has been in the past. Thus, the February issue becomes March, the April issue becomes May, the June issue becomes July, the August issue September, and the October issue November, and the December issue becomes January. The question of what happens to the last issue (December), of 1976 has been solved in the following way: Our next issue, December 1976, Volume 30, number 6, will contain the Blue List, several short articles, the Winter Bird Population Studies, and the Index. A January issue, which will follow shortly thereafter, will contain, in addition to several articles, the Breeding Bird Census compilation that normally

appears in the December issue. We thus avoid the problem of a five-issue year, which would occur if we merely moved this December issue to January. The March issue will contain the Autumn Migration reports and other content that will represent an important step forward in our promised "new approach."

One other pragmatic change will switch contents between the former April and June (now May and July) issues. The Christmas Bird Count issue will now be dated a more realistic July, and thus will no longer roadblock the following issues.

In accordance with the new schedule, the seasons will be altered slightly to provide a more even division of the time. Our tentative schedule for these seasons is now as follows:

<i>Season</i>	<i>Issue Name</i>	<i>Issue Date</i>	<i>Field Notes Due Reg. Ed.</i>
AUTUMN Aug. 1-Nov. 30	MARCH	Mar. 30	Dec. 10
WINTER Dec. 1-Feb. 28	MAY	May 31	Mar. 10
SPRING Mar. 1-May 31	SEPTEMBER	Sept. 30	June 10
SUMMER June 1-July 31	NOVEMBER	Nov. 15	Aug. 10

The new schedule, more realistic in several ways than previously, and of considerable help to our Regional Editors, will also, it is hoped, let us get

back on schedule. As before, contributors can help by forwarding their field reports promptly. — R A