

Communications

To the Editor:

In comment on the November article on speciation by John T. Ratti, while I generally considered the article to be excellent, it seems to contain a basic contradiction. On page 861 it is stated, "We do not expect to observe species that are sympatric (especially during the reproductive season) because subspecific characters will quickly be lost via frequent interbreeding, i.e., *subspecies by definition can not be sympatric*." Yet in discussing the case of the Common Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), reference overlapping (sympatric) populations, and the three populations once considered to be species, *Colaptes auratus*, *C. cafer* and *C. chrysoides*, are called subspecies. As I see it, the example doesn't conform to the definition. If subspecies, by definition, can not be sympatric, and the three flickers are sympatric, it follows that they can not BE subspecies and some other term (polymorph?, morph?, race?, variety?) must be used. Perhaps, the fault was not in the example, but rather that the "lumping" of the three species was in error.

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—Karen Nickey
11141 E. Calle Vaqueros
Tucson, AZ 85715.

To the Editor:

I have read recently with interest the 1981 Blue List commentary by James Tate (*Am. Birds* 35). In 1978, I became interested in the fate of Bell's Vireos, and after uncovering an isolated population of the species in the Santa Ynez River drainage in Santa Barbara County, California, established a long-term population study of the subspecies *pusillus*, currently declined to the point of extirpation in the state.

I note with great alarm the continuing quest for an easy solution among those reporting on small bird populations in California. In Regional reports, and now in the 1981 Blue List, there is little or no mention of habitat loss for those small songbirds (e.g. Bell's Vireo and Yellow Warbler among those listed). Instead, *American Birds* persists in "blaming" the cowbird as either "a" cause, or worse, "the" cause of the decline of certain species. While it may be true that, in areas where blackbirds and cowbirds are the most obvious members of the bird community—most of California's former riparian zones now turned agricultural and urban—cowbirds therefore are the most easily recognized contributors to declines of songbird species, but loss of habitat is rarely mentioned any more.

In our research, we found considerable cowbird parasitism. But, we have not found it any greater in extent than in areas where Bell's Vireos are co-habitants historically with cowbirds (midwest and southwest), and, in fact, find less actual parasitism than often cited in literature. We have a unique situation, granted, in that our study site is virtually isolated from the effects of masses of cowbirds. Our study site is also in a rather pristine condition, under the control of the U.S. Forest Service, and thus better protected than other areas that are under local governmental or private management. Throughout the state, *the* cause of riparian songbird decline is alteration of stream courses for flood control practices, animal husbandry, and human recreation with the consequent beating down of vegetation, plowing of meandering streams into straight lines, and removal of *all* cover and vegetation for planting of crops, or for housing, creating *ideal* cowbird habitats!

For the sake of factual clarity, and haste in the "rescue" of species about to decline to the "panic stage", it would serve better to honestly recognize the *true* cause of all species now suffering the degradation of cowbird activities in California and elsewhere: we have met the enemy and he is us.

—Jim Greaves
6717 Abrego #5
Goleta, CA 93117.

To the Editor:

The headline ("Shooting Skylarks") for the letters of W.R.P Bourne and K.L. Garrett

(*AB* 34:831-832) was certainly unnecessarily inflammatory. Shooting was not mentioned by anyone concerned (*AB* 33:262,310,910), then introduced into the dialogue by Bourne. The operative gerund elsewhere throughout was collecting, not shooting.

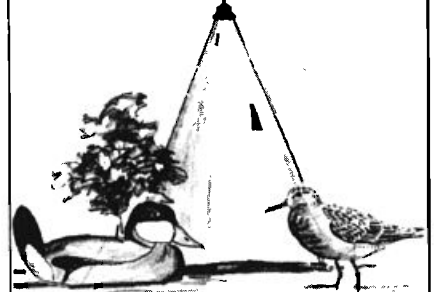
Although scientific collecting of wild birds often has involved and often continues to involve shooting, collecting is comprised of much more than an act of killing, in any fashion. Thus, in light of a negative public view of scientific collecting that all too often equates collecting with destroying, to imply editorially—and inaccurately—in *AMERICAN BIRDS* that shooting and collecting are simple synonyms is to do a serious disservice to the responsible scientific study of wild birds.

If W.R.P. Bourne ("If anyone wants a Skylark I am prepared to send them [sic] one") would send me a fresh autumn specimen with data, I would be delighted to receive it and to catalogue it in our collections for comparison with the migrant Skylarks that occur annually in Alaska and which, quite possibly, account for the California individual.

Daniel D. Gibson,
University of Alaska Museum,
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701.

In a letter of comment on the W.R.P. Bourne letter and the subject of collecting, Robert H. Day, P.O. Box 81920, College, Alaska 99708, expressed the same sentiments as those of Daniel D. Gibson.

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To the Editor

On February 20, 1981, on the west slope of the Andes above the town of Mindo in Ecuador, I made the following observation. Mindo is in northwestern Ecuador, elevation about 5000 feet.

Warbler: black throat, black through face. Underparts plain and light. Yellow on upper wing. Yellow crown. Back somewhat olive . . . Seen in small mixed flock.

This bird was observed in mid-level trees on the edge of a wet sub-tropical forest. Bamboo and tree ferns give the area on this hillside a cloud forest flavor.

The bird was a Golden-winged Warbler, in almost full breeding plumage. It was observed for approximately two minutes before it moved away from the road with the foraging flock. I have observed this species on its breeding grounds in the upper lower peninsula of Michigan. Only my wife, a casual birder, accompanied me. No other data from other observers is available on record.

I submit this record based on literature that I have that suggests that this may be a range extension.

—John Egbert
Nature History Services
Cliff, NM 88028.



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To the Editor

A recent article in *American Birds* (35: 9) concerning Blue-listed species raises again the question of why Blue-winged Warblers are displacing the Golden-winged Warbler over much of the latter's range. In this closely related pair there is often an interchange of the song between the species. It is possible that, for example, Blue-winged Warblers more often sing the Golden-winged song than vice-versa. This in turn might lead to more successful breeding of the former if Blue-winged males are able to attract and thereby mate with females of either species.

Perhaps some additional support for the hypothesis that song interchange may lead to the displacement of one closely allied species by the other is the success of the Willow Flycatcher compared to the Alder (*American Birds* 30: 956). That there is song "confusion" between the two "species" has been commented on in *American Birds* 32: 1145.

—Thomas Arny,
RD #3, Amherst, MA 01002.

Announcements

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER SIGHTINGS

The Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team is trying to assemble information on all observations of Kirtland's Warblers during spring and fall migrations. Details on sightings should include: date, location, habitat, sex of bird(s) observed, behavior, information on whether or not bird was singing, weather data, and comments on any other warbler species present. Send records to: Lawrence A. Ryel, Surveys and Statistics, Wildlife Division, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Box 30028, Lansing MI 48909.

PROJECT VIREO

Project VIREO has as its goal the first, major scientific collection of slides and photographs of birds of the world.

This project is being launched by The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. This collection will supplement the major specimen collections now curated by museums throughout the country. This central collection of visual resources for ornithology, from which comes the acronym VIREO, will be available for use by professional or amateur ornithologists for research, teaching, illustrating, or otherwise advancing the knowledge of birds. If you wish to participate in building the collection please contact: Frank B. Gill, The Academy of Natural Sciences, Nineteenth and The Parkway, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

RAPTOR SLIDE FILE


The Raptor Information Center of the National Wildlife Federation announces the establishment of The International Raptor Slide File. The purpose of the file is to make available slides of all species of birds of prey to researchers, educators, wildlife managers, and others. The Raptor Information Center wishes to solicit original slides of good quality, of all species of raptors in various plumages, at any age, and either perched or flying, at the nest or away from it. For additional information please contact: The Raptor Information Center, National Wildlife Federation, 1412 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

HAWK WATCHING WEEK

House Joint Resolution 241 was introduced to the United States Congress in April 1981. This resolution calls for the designation of the first week of October of each year as NATIONAL HAWK WATCHING WEEK. The week would begin on the first Sunday of October and its purpose would be to advance public interest in, and appreciation of, birds of prey. Readers are requested to write to their Congressmen on behalf of this resolution.

VACATION EXCHANGE

It has been suggested that *American Birds* initiate a new category of advertisement in its Market Place. The heading would be VACATION EXCHANGE and its function would be the listing of birders' homes/apartments/camps available for swapping with visiting/vacationing birders. Ads should list location, type of accommodation, dates available and perhaps swap area desired. Regular Market Place rates will apply.



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