

The Changing Seasons

*Spring, 1981—a “dull, uneventful” spring migration
turns out to be anything but*

Robert Arbib

FOR MANY OF US, spring is the most satisfying, if not the most exciting, certainly the most anticipated, season of the year. No matter where we call home in North America, we are fascinated witnesses to one of the most splendid and spectacular of earth's natural events, the migration of two billion birds, as they sweep northward across lands and seas from the Americas to the south, from the West Indies, from our own southern regions—and for Hawaii and Alaska—from the South Seas and from Asia. No matter that much of this movement is nocturnal; if fair winds and favoring weather combine, these night flights may bring morning's treasure: a fallout that festoons the trees with birds, the beaches and marshes with restless hordes of shorebirds. But fair weather is not a requirement; along the Gulf coast fallouts most often occur when migrating birds meet adverse weather as they cross the coast, and this may happen to migrating flocks anywhere.

All the migrants, of course, are not weather dependent in their migrations. If ever proof were needed that birds do not need following winds throughout their travels, the spring of 1981 gave it, amply. In most regions few if any “wave” days were noted, and even where concentrations of birds were found, most seemed related more to the calendar or to local influences than to the larger continental weather patterns. There were exceptions, to be noted below. But in the main, traditional patterns were observed. Some species followed their accustomed narrow flyways, others advanced on broad fronts. Some strayed, wandered, and turned up in bizarre places; others suffered malad-

justed timeclocks or misread external cues, arriving earlier or later than we expect them to. Some seemed to miss us altogether, and we began to ponder the predictions in Rachel Carson's “Silent Spring”, and to reflect upon the depletion of the South American rainforests.

But migration seasons are not the best times of year to judge how species populations are faring: the variables of weather, fallouts, birders afield, and chance make year-to-year comparisons highly risky. But long-term data should provide reliable trends for some species, especially those with restricted flyways and traditional stopovers. Breeding season data is more reliable, and indeed often may support our migration season impressions.

Spring 1981 was, then, not unusual. Although most reporters and regional editors dismissed it as dull, uneventful, lackluster, dismal, or worse, the reactions were much more to personal experiences and dashed expectations (and perhaps to a dearth of mid-week birding) than to what might have actually been happening above us, or beyond us. Casting pejoratives aside, careful reading of the following regional summaries will give ample evidence that the birds did arrive on breeding grounds on rather normal dates. Although fallout concentrations were rarely noted, a few of heroic proportions were encountered; a consensus seems to indicate that, with the exception of South Texas, the continental weather was so lacking in *sturm und drang* that many birds filtered through continuously and inconspicuously—the earlier-scheduled species arriving early, followed by a mid-season lull, with the later-scheduled species

either late or (mostly) on time. In deciduous forest areas early leafing out of foliage, with its hide-and-seek effect, contributed to the season's frustrations. But the birds came through. Very few were transmitted from south to north by Telstar satellite.

THIS SEASONAL REPORT has traditionally been titled “Spring Migration,” but during the months of March, April, and May, on a continent where we are reporting a 55° range of latitude, breeding activities are of equal importance, especially in the southern latitudes, and some regional reports devote almost as much space to breeding activities as they do to migration. In fact, while there are fewer “first state or regional” breeding records reported herein than first occurrences, these are arguably of greater significance. Space limitations prevent listing them here: most are boldfaced in the reports, or the subjects of S.A.s. They are truly, among the most significant facts we publish—the ones that change the range maps and the breeding bird atlases, and provide us with the basis for our knowledge of species dynamics. The spread of the House Finch, for example, (now established in Nova Scotia, new in North Dakota) from pinpointed eastern introductions in 1941 to its anticipated meeting with western populations can be traced, year by year, in the pages of *American Birds*. And why, someone ought to be asking, is the eastern population so rampantly dynamic, while the native western population remains static in its traditional range? Habitat barriers? Interspecific competition? An unoccupied niche in the East? Other population-limiting factors?

Does *American Birds*, with its 26 reporting regions (24 of them continental) provide a reasonable overview of the season's avifaunal activities in North America? We think so. This issue, for example, utilizes the reported observations of at least 2,816 observers in every province and state, with an unknown additional number concealed anonymously as members of quoted organizations, or as part of a "m.ob.". Thirty-three clubs are credited in this issue, and if we arbitrarily add six more observers for each (some may represent 50-100) our reporting network for spring is well over 3,000 persons. Some regions, of course, are much larger or better represented than others, but considering that we now know, and frequently visit, many of the continent's best birding areas, concentration points, rest-stops, and flightline lookouts, a respectable sampling must result. No other continent, and in no other single publication, is a migration so thoroughly monitored, documented, and analysed.

That the gathering of these data is important and vital to our understanding of what is happening to our migratory birds should be obvious. But in-depth studies of continental bird migration, over a period of years, or even for one season, are simply not being done. In fact, bird migration as a topic for learned investigation is out of style. At the recent annual meeting of the A.O.U. in Edmonton, a program of 100+ presented and poster papers included not a single paper even remotely concerned with any aspect of migration, although a series of presentations by bird observatories did. Biology and behavior are in; migration is left largely to us: the field observers who report to *American Birds*, and the regional editors and these few professionals—members of a "Blue List" category of ornithologists, who are concerned. That the pendulum will swing back, we are confident. Ph.D. theses are being written on aspects of ethology that will, at best, furnish footnotes to life histories, while we still do not know how or why Veeries get to the Farallons.

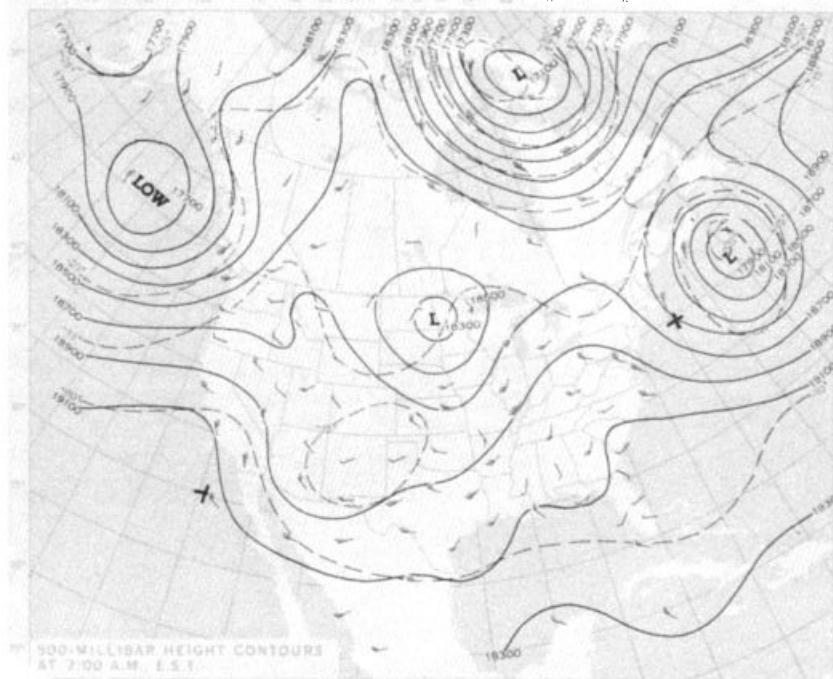
Readers of this synopsis and of the reports that follow, who fail to find therein information known to them that might add facets to our mosaic of knowledge, might remember the oft-repeated words of Arthur Cleveland Bent (here adapted in brackets): "The reader is reminded again that this is a coopera-

tive work; if he fails to find in these [pages] anything he knows about [the birds of this season], he can blame himself for not having sent the information to [his Regional Editor, Sub-editor, or Area Coordinator]."

WEATHER

IN REGION AFTER REGION, editors voiced the opinion that the weather in this period was so uneventful that it seemed to have little bearing on bird migration. A study of weather maps for the three-month period shows that March brought an easing of the severe drought that had marked the winter months almost everywhere. The entire continent west of the Mississippi River was warmer and wetter than normal, while the drought continued in the Northeast and Western Great Lakes regions. Fickle is the word for April, with above-normal temperatures generally continent-wide, above-average rainfall in three irregular areas: the Northeast and upper Midwest, the Northwest, and western Texas. Drought conditions continued in Florida, Hawaii, and in a belt across southern California, Arizona and New Mexico. The Maritime Provinces were blasted by two late winter storms on April 14 and 17, with 60 m.p.h. winds, snow and freezing rain. May was cooler than normal except for New England, the northwestern prairies, and the Southwest. The precipi-

tation map for May is a jigsaw puzzle, with drought continuing in Florida, record rains in Southern California, and flooding in South Texas. Attempts to correlate wind directions with the few major "wave" dates reported produce some anomalies. The May 24-25 precipitation in the Northeast seems to have come on the heels of several days of strong, adverse (NW) winds extending from the Great Lakes to Florida, with winds strongly N on the day—and night before—the biggest precipitation, all of it strictly coastal. Possible explanation: birds long delayed by adverse weather simply reached critical deadlines in their migratory calendars, and bucked headwinds until dawn dropped them to land. Another explanation is possible: upper air flow at some altitude was from a more helpful direction. That the waves were coastal on Long Island and in New England suggests a possible nocturnal sea drift, with survivors beating back to the coast at dawn. In the upper Midwest, where the same days brought a fallout, the situation was quite different, with a steady airflow from the SW. In South Texas, where three strong wave days were recorded, each was a classic weather-related phenomenon, with a low-pressure trough and a trailing cold front sweeping across coastal areas following fair weather and southerly winds. For details, see Arvin (p. 841). In spite of the regional demurrals, there were in-



Weather map showing lows, highs, and wind directions, 7:00 a.m. May 24, 1981. Flags point in direction of wind, pennants (1-4) indicate wind speed. Note strong N winds over northeastern coastal regions. Daily weather maps from U.S. Dept. of Commerce, NOAA.

deed days in every region on which migratory birds were found *in numbers*: many of these were recorded from a single location only, or for a single group of birds. March 21 was a big waterfowl day in Appalachia, March 26 for geese in the Northern Great Plains, March 29 for Snow Geese in the Northeastern Maritime Region, April 4 brought the only concentration of Broad-winged noted in Texas (Beeville), April 5 geese through the Northern Great Plains. California saw strong landbird movement April 14-19, the 18th was one peak of shorebird movement in Massachusetts. Broad-winged showed numbers in Appalachia April 19 (two weeks later than Texas), and South Texas had a wave of landbirds April 23. Warblers moved in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region April 28-29, as did Accipiters, a day that was big for shorebirds at Anahuac. Two days later, shorebirds massed again in New England.

May's concentrations were similarly lacking in pattern. Utah noted shorebirds on the first, Wisconsin landbirds on May 3. Passerines moved through the Northern Great Plains May 3-13. Brant were numerous in Ontario on May 7, and 14-15, California's major warbler period was May 8-12. Shorebirds were abundant in Calgary May 9. South Texas had passerine fallouts May 9-10. Passerine movements were noted in the Northern Pacific Coast May 3-13, with May 8 big in Oregon and May 13 in Washington. May 16 was the day in Minnesota, May 17 for warblers in Bismarck, May 20 for swallows in northeastern Arizona. And many areas reported birds in large numbers May 23-29.

EARLY ARRIVALS

IN THE PAGES that follow there are scores of reports of remarkably early, or earliest-ever arrivals of migrants. Twelve of our reporting regions include mention of these events. While these records are less than earthshaking, they do help (with those of late departures) to expand our known time-frames, and those local or regional bar graphs with dotted lines for scarce periods and tapered solid lines for normal periods are thus refined over the years, becoming ever more confident. Thus the more input, the better understanding we have of each species' migratory parameters: what may appear to be abnormal today may actually, with increased data, be the norm.

A well-recognized problem with some of the records is that we cannot always be certain whether an observation represents a truly early spring arrival, or merely the appearance of a hitherto undiscovered local overwinterer. Some species, especially conspicuous ones that haunt open habitats, will often be *bona fide* seasonal "pioneers", as would be most soft-billed species in frigid regions. But occasionally, in all probability, that "earliest ever" appearance is that of an individual that wintered unnoticed somewhere nearby, encouraged to move by a change in the weather.

It is not easy to select outstanding records in this category; editors listing earliest dates rarely say by how much. A Great Egret in northernmost Nova Scotia March 19 sounds very early—but is it by 3 weeks, 3 days, or 3 hours? Herewith are records selected by Regional Editors as being very early or earliest.

Gannets March 9 in Quebec, Rough-winged Swallows April 14, a Winter Wren March 1, and a Bobolink April 7 there all sound impressive. A Cory's Shearwater off Muskeget Island, Massachusetts May 31 set a record. The Middle Atlantic Coast Region had Red Knot at Ocean City May 1. The Southern Atlantic Coast Region reported three records for North Carolina: Black-capped Petrel March 27, Wilson's Storm-Petrel April 2 and Curlew Sandpiper April 11 and Chimney Swift in South Carolina March 14. Florida's mentions are for Blue-faced Booby (Tallahassee Div.) April 5, Black-necked Stilt March 27, and Worm-eating Warbler March 23. Ontario's March 13 Broad-winged Hawk was truly early. Minnesota had Black-crowned Night Herons March 8. Michigan's first Solitary Sandpiper arrived March 31, Wisconsin's first Cliff Swallow March 30 and Sharp-tailed Sparrow April 4. Equally startling were Barn Swallow in Missouri March 1, and Indigo Bunting in Kentucky March 17. Whip-poor-will was in Louisville April 12 and in Minnesota the same day. We wonder what the survival rate of these venturesome individuals might be? The Central Southern Region, which keeps voluminous records, listed five "earlies." Magnificent Frigatebird off Mississippi March 28, Long-billed Curlew on March 5 was "earliest ever" for Alabama but note Rough-winged Swallow again listed March 3 in Gulf Shores, Florida, an early Marbled Godwit at Wheeler N.W.R.

March 19 and finally Bay-breasted Warbler in Alabama April 14.

May 18 doesn't seem early anywhere, but it was for Ruby-crowned Kinglet at Churchill, Manitoba. A Swainson's Hawk in Randall County, Texas on March 15 set a record, and another Indigo Bunting checked in at Montgomery County, Texas on March 5. Alaska registered a Townsend's Warbler on April 14. Rough-winged Swallow rates a third mention, from Oregon; apparently this species' premature migration was widespread. The Middle Pacific Coast Region listed an earliest-ever Western Wood Pewee April 19, and Grasshopper Sparrow April 1, among others conveniently listed by Editors Evens and LeValley on p. 857. I invite anyone to propose a rational theory that will tie together these assorted species, places, and dates, except for the fact that the winter was mild almost everywhere, as was the month of March.

LATE ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

THIS IS THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN, more meaningful for our warmer regions, because migration is not completed by May 31 farther north. But this is an often-neglected statistic; many observers eagerly record first dates because these are the dates the species go on the year list, but last dates are either not recorded or buried in daily field cards or notebooks. Many of the "late" records reported for this season are of lingering *winter visitors*, and here again these records may tell us more about the ills and injuries, senility or malfunction, than about true migratory parameters. Virtually every migrant in North America, if it is in breeding condition, should be on breeding grounds by the first week in June. But more and more, we are recording northward migration in some numbers *during* June.

Lingering *winter visitants or migrants* were widely reported: Common Redpolls, Monhegan Island, Maine, May 25; Yellow-headed Blackbird, New Jersey, late May; Red-breasted Merganser, Lake Anna, Va., May 30; Broad-winged Hawk June 4 and Osprey June 5 passing a hawk watch near Baltimore; Dark-eyed Junco, Maryland, May 15. In the Southern Atlantic Coast Region, Rough-legged Hawk in Georgia April 5 was very late, as was a Common Snipe May 29. Short-eared Owl in North

Carolina April 6 was late and Water Pipit at Charleston May 7 was the latest ever. Evening Grosbeak at Chapel Hill May 17 was late. Lapland Longspur in North California May 9 set a record, as did Savannah Sparrow in Georgia May 25. In Florida, Black-legged Kittiwake April 25 set a record for the Southern Peninsula as did Lark Sparrow April 26. In southern Ontario, Pine Grosbeaks lingered late. Niagara-Champlain Region noted Purple Sandpiper April 20. Snow Bunting in Wisconsin May 25 set a record, while a Lapland Longspur in Chicago May 27 was considered very late. Central Southern Region's charts added new late dates: Harlan's Hawk March 24, Peregrine Falcon May 5 and Bonaparte's Gull May 25 in Alabama; Bufflehead April 25, Dickcissel May 9 and Savannah Sparrow May 14 in Mississippi, Sprague's Pipit May 2 in Louisiana, most of these the latest ever, and finally a Tree Sparrow at Fort Morgan, Alabama, that won three medals—latest ever, farthest south, and first Gulf coastal occurrence for that species!

Late departure notes thin out westward, where the migration seemed better managed. South Texas' Mexican Crows departed—*southward*—the last May 1. A Sharp-tailed Sparrow was late in Bolivar May 20. Rusty Blackbird in Arizona May 21 was displaced—and late. Purple Finches in northeastern Arizona May 31 set tardiness records. Harris' Sparrows in Arizona April 23-27 were late. In northern California, Varied Thrush in Marin County May 9, and Water Pipit in Palo Alto May 31 were very late. Short-eared Owl at Point Mugu April 25 was very late, as was a Swamp Sparrow at Furnace Creek Ranch May 23. Finally, an Indigo Bunting May 1 at Caneel Bay, U.S.V.I., must have been sleeping when the others left. Species that were widely reported as lingering later than usual included Red-breasted Nuthatch and—coast-to-coast—Pine Siskin.

Numerous notations of regional late records mention the possibility of local breeding, citing "male singing in suitable habitat," or some such intriguing speculation. Some of these may presage, or actually record, breeding range extensions and are worth remarking. We have omitted these from this summary. A bird that sets a lateness record by staying to breed is hardly on a migration timetable.

SALIENT TRENDS

THE DYNAMICS of American bird distribution is never better illustrated than by the notations of species new to states, provinces, or entire regions. I apologize herewith, for two obvious reminders. Birds categorized as "new" to somewhere or anywhere are only "new" as *records*. We will never know whether the species may have appeared—unrecorded—some time or many times in the past, or even whether the present occurrence is unique. Was that White-collared Swift found dead on a Florida porch screen a solitary wanderer, or part of a group, only one of which was encountered by a bird-watcher? So when we write—and read—that a species *occurred for the first time* in that part of North America now called Arizona, remember that it is only *to our knowledge*, and that the chances are at least fair that it isn't.

This season saw 26 species added to state or provincial lists (including those that are also regions—Quebec, Ontario, Alaska, Hawaii), three species added to regional lists, four species added to West Indian island lists, one species (and genus) added to the North America north of Mexico list. Two birds new to Ontario await confirmation, as does one pelagic offshore of the Middle Pacific Coast Region. Numerous other *second* or other similar records are boldfaced in the reports, and worth your perusal. Seven species are new for spring in their regions, and another is only the second record since 1850!

New records include Hermit Warbler in Ontario, Smith's Longspur in Vermont, White-winged Dove in New Jersey, Eared Grebe (first documented) in Maryland, Mississippi Kite and McCown's Longspur in Michigan, White-tailed Kite in Indiana, Thayer's Gull in Iowa, Louisiana Heron and Bewick's "type" Swans in Alberta and Barnacle Goose and Cassin's Finch in Manitoba. Arctic Tern in North Dakota, Lucifer Hummingbird, Golden-winged and Worm-eating warblers in New Mexico, a Royal or Elegant tern (either one new) in Arizona, Philadelphia Vireo in Nevada. Newly investigated Yukon Territory listed European Wigeon, "Baltimore" Oriole (1980) and Clay-colored Sparrow, and Alaska White Pelican, Black-crowned Night Heron, Common Pochard (mainland), American Avocet and Caspian Tern.

A first for the continent north of Mex-

ico was that White-collared Swift found dead in northwestern Florida; a Sotolander's Petrel reported off the Middle Pacific Coast Region awaits confirmation. New to regions were Saw-whet Owl in Northwestern Canada, Common Cuckoo, a possible escape, to Northeastern Maritime, Laysan Albatross to the Southwest Region, and Common Gallinule to the Northern Pacific Coast. In the West Indies, Double-crested Cormorant on Anegada, B.V.I., Swallow-tailed Kite in the Bahamas, Bay-breasted Warbler on Hispaniola, and Common Yellowthroats on Anegada, were all firsts. Finally, awaiting confirmation (or rejection), were a Redshank, and a Baird's Sparrow in Ontario. It was an "average" season!

First *breeding* records reported include Black Vulture New Jersey, House Finch Indiana, Tree Swallows in Oklahoma, Anna's Hummingbird Oregon, Boreal Owl Colorado, Common Grackle Utah and Rose-ringed Parakeet in Hawaii.

First *spring* records include Say's Phoebe in Nova Scotia, Mountain Plover and Ash-throated Flycatcher in Florida, European Kestrel in Alaska, Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Washington, and Veery (record pending) in California.

NOTABLE NUMBERS

SELECTING NOTEWORTHY aggregations of birds from our huge spring array depends largely on your point of view. To a Pennsylvania observer, a single Kirtland's Warbler is an exciting number, and the number 5, the total population of Dusky Seaside Sparrows—all males—is at least memorable. The 23 Eskimo Curlews reported from the Texas coast in a single flock—more than all recent records put together—if accurate is surely our most significant number. But the selection that follows will highlight larger orders of numbers, especially those with some migration or population significance.

Eared Grebe heads the list, with 100,000 reported for Great Salt Lake May 31. Great Cormorant, with 1445 counted March 8 in Boston harbor, displays its growing population on the Atlantic coast. Double-crested Cormorant numbers appear to be continuing an upward climb: 53,000 moving northward in Rhode Island April 25 alone being greater than the total con-

tinental population of 40,000 estimated in 1960. All the eastern and midcontinent regions reported increases, and we can anticipate renewed efforts by fishermen for some form of control. Ten thousand Cattle Egrets in Oklahoma May 25 confounds our wishful thinking that the species' population explosion is over.

Canada Geese were in normal numbers (85,000 at Montezuma Refuge, New York, the largest concentration reported) but a count of the rare Aleutian race, *leucopareia*, of 1932 at Lake Talawa, California, is encouraging. A Snow Goose count of 360,000 at Sand Lake Refuge March 29, sounds fantastic to this easterner, where the same day saw about 4,000 crossing lower New England. White-fronted Geese were at Sand Lake on April 5 where 20,000 were counted, while 9600 Brant crossed southern Ontario May 8-15, and 4000 staged on James Bay May 26. In the west, "Black" Brant flocks of 10,000 at Willapa Bay, Washington, April 11-12 and 2272 in Drake's Estero April 17 seemed to confirm that the western race migrates earlier than the eastern. A total of 336,185 waterfowl (precisely?) (40% Pintail) in Utah refuges March 1-15 gives hint of the magnitude of western waterfowl movements.

Raptor totals leave something (comprehensive hawkwatch numbers) to be desired, but Braddock Bay and Derby Hill, New York, Whitefish Point, Michigan, a new lookout in Maryland, and a transect count in Utah, all supplied interesting numbers. Braddock's Bay's 1694 Turkey Vultures is graphic proof of the species continuing surge into the Northeast; 622 Rough-legged Hawks prove it was a Rough-legged winter, and 326 Ospreys are encouraging. Whitefish Point listed 10,000 Sharp-shinned Hawks, and 1080 Rough-leggeds. South Texas had a veritable invasion of Swallow-tailed Kites—a species on an upward dynamic, but in Florida a winter census showing 700 Everglade Kites in residence led to false hopes, and a disappointing, diffused breeding season, owing to drought conditions and a dearth of apple snails.

Finally, a total of about 150 Peregrine Falcons from 16 Regions was reported, not including known breeding pairs, with some sightings deliberately unreported.

Perhaps more interesting than all other reports were those of shorebirds. Peter Vickery's "S.A." on the great

Pectoral Sandpiper flight found concurrence from other regions as far west as the Great Plains. The Massachusetts one-day high was 1000 on Apr. 20; Pedericktown, N.J. had 350 April 11, the Southern Atlantic Region reported totals "much higher than usual" Ontario had "hundreds everywhere" and 1000 at Southville April 25. Niagara-Champlain reported a major grounding, and the Appalachian Region reported 1700 at Wooster, Ohio, April 18. There were 500+ at Point Mouillee, Michigan, the third week of April, and 3000-5000 in Newton County, Indiana, April 29. Calgary had 600 May 10, and Tulsa 500 April 18. Western regions reported smaller numbers of a species uncommon there in spring.

Even more exciting, perhaps more for future potential than for today's statistics, was the discovery by aerial survey of a fantastic shorebird staging area on both sides of Delaware Bay. Marshes and mudflats there hosted 318,000 shorebirds the third week of May; observers estimated more than half a million birds, mostly Semipalmated Sandpipers, turnstones—and including 60,000 Red Knots could have been present! The mystery is why this area has not been discovered earlier, and the question will be whether this is an annual or a one-time phenomenon.

Other shorebird multitudes included 10-20,000 Semipalmated Sandpipers at Monomoy, Mass., May 25, 4000 Black-bellied Plovers on the Virginia's eastern shore, May 18. A huge concentration at Calgary May 9 including 600 Hudsonian Godwits, 7000 White-rumped Sandpipers, and 6000 Semis, another concentration at James Bay, Hudson's Bay, May 25-26, and 750 Buff-breasted Sandpipers—which had a very good spring—in Harris County, Texas, on May 10. Lastly, 3000-5000 American Golden Plovers at Fargo, North Dakota, would seem to indicate where the northbound route was centered. Thousands of Marbled Godwits April 16-19 at the mouth of the Mad River in California must have been a sight. See our cover for a glimpse.

A scattering of totals: in the Gulf Stream off Cape Hatteras, 207 unprecedented Northern Fulmars March 26. In the San Luis Valley, Colorado, March 13, 17,000 Sandhill Cranes. At a feeder at Zion National Park, Utah, 240 hummingbirds. And at Estes Park, Colorado, May 9, no fewer than 3200 Brown-

capped Rosy Finches. Finally, most puzzling of all, an incredible passage at Presque Isle Park, Ontario, of 2250 Golden-crowned Kinglets. No other region reports this species in any numbers. From whence cometh they?

The pages that follow list hundreds of others; I have probably overlooked some important ones. A thought to remember: the estimation of large numbers is one of our more shaky arts; a figure of 336,185 waterfowl, unless actually counted from aerial photographs, is no more accurate than a rounded estimate of 350,000. Accurate estimating can be learned.

We have neither the time, intention, or space to mention all the absorbing nuggets of information you will find in these 26 regional reports, for this "dismal" season. But here is a selection of headlines.

EYEBROW RAISERS

Western Grebe—Observers are becoming aware that there are two color phases or forms of the Western Grebe. Hugh Kingery summarizes the differences (p. 847), and asks observers everywhere to attempt to separate them in the field, and report them. As yet we do not know whether there are allopatric breeding ranges, which would suggest subspecific or even specific separation, or substantial range overlap, suggesting a form of color phase.

Laysan Albatross—The discovery of a live Laysan Albatross on a Yuma, Arizona street May 14 is a perfect example of why birdwatching is so fascinating: anything can turn up almost anywhere! Weather maps show strong W winds from the coast inland in the days before this discovery, particularly on May 12, when high winds seemed to be heading straight from Hawaii. The species, "struggling" in Hawaii, is the subject of a discouraging note from Hawaii Island, where pet and people control is the problem. Another record is listed from off Vancouver Island, British Columbia

Mute Swan—Once confined to the Northeast, more recently including Michigan, we are now seeing records from Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and even Nebraska. Deliberate introductions, or recent wanderlust?



Common Cuckoo, Martha's Vineyard, Mass., May 4, 1981. Photo/Bruce A. Sorrie.

friendly Whip-poor-will slept the night of April 12 on a bed in an apartment of its own choosing in Louisville, Kentucky.

White-collared Swift—See the S.A. on page 833, for a summary of this bird's appearance in western Florida. It would surely be the bird of the season, if it had not happened in mid-winter—January 25, 1981.

Vermilion Flycatcher—A failed breeding attempt at Akron, Colorado, 500 miles north of its known breeding range, was but one of a number of unusual records of this species, one to be watched.

Black-capped Gnatcatcher—The second known nesting of this species north of Mexico added excitement to the season for Southwestern birders. Happily, the project was successful, which would lead us to the encouraging conclusion that the hordes of visiting observers were circumspect and respectful. An example for us all.

Grasshopper Sparrow—Reported in unusual numbers from a widespread selection of Regions, this Blue-listed species may well be on a recovery population cycle.

Alaska—As readers of *American Birds* know, Alaska is a different and tremendously interesting world, almost as much Asiatic as American. We sometimes forget that Attu Island is almost directly north of New Zealand and closer to Japan than it is to the North American mainland. Dan Gibson's report of shorebirds alone lists more Palearctic species than Holarctic or Nearctic ones together, and his report is peppered with exotics (to us non-Alaskans) from Common Pochard to Rustic Bunting.

Hawaii—Read with interest and sadness Pyle and Ralph's updating of the status of some of the rarest of our endemic species, including the 'O'o'a'a, possibly down to one breeding pair.



Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Chino Canyon, Ariz., May 18, 1981. Photo/G. Scott Mills.

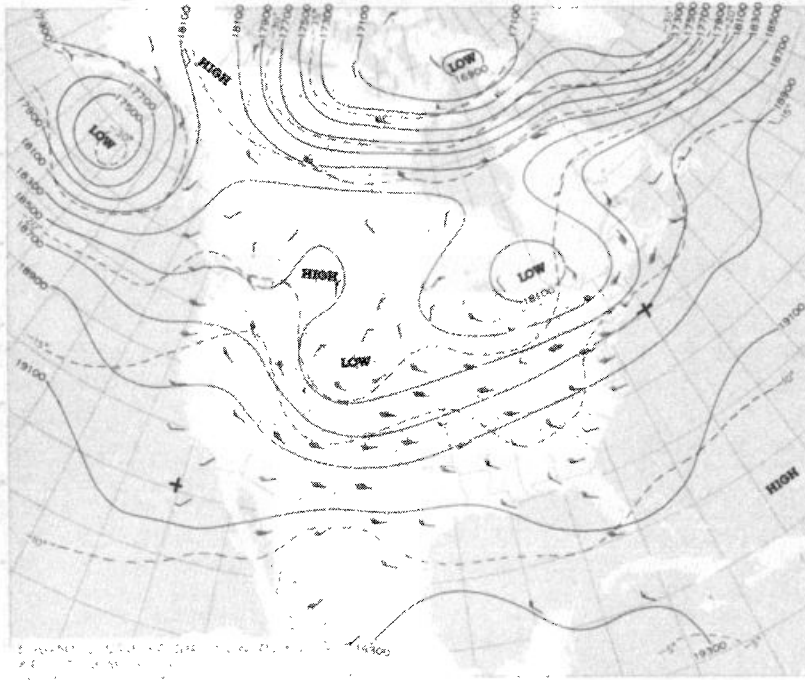
A basket of goodies—These caught our attention: Steve Laymon's northern California owl survey, with surprising totals; encouraging Bald Eagle reports, especially from eastern regions, 150 Black Rails estimated in

one marsh in Contra Costa County, California, a Black-necked Stilt eruption in the Northern Pacific Coast Region, where there was an unprecedented Tennessee Warbler fallout around Portland, Oregon. An ani, species undetermined, in Nova Scotia (in 1980) was not a little confused, and finally, that 16-year-old Hairy Woodpecker in South Dakota wins the longevity award of the season.

Dusky Seaside Sparrow—Finally, in more ways than one, a report on the present unhappy status of the Dusky Seaside, whose entire remaining population (5 males) is being allowed to go extinct [extaille?] because the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has decided that—to crossbreed with *A.m. peninsulae*, would be to introduce un-Dusky genes into the population, thus perpetuating an artificial population. (This is exactly what has been done with the Peregrine Recovery program—in which not merely closely related races [*tundrius*] have been bred with eastern race *anatum*, but even races from Europe and Africa are said to have been bred into the pool,) but then, the Peregrine is a glamor bird, much in demand for falconry (damn the genes, full speed ahead!) and the sparrow is an orphan. The plot for an ornithological thriller suggests itself: cabal of scientists breaks into DSS cage, kidnaps the five males, whisks them to a laboratory deep in the Florida outback, breeds them successfully with *Ammospiza maritima peninsulae*, reestablishes them once again in native habitat, is arrested for thwarting government policy, or theft of government property (are they?), or whatever, arouses public opinion against a proposed capture and extermination of the newly released "hybrids", and in the end, emerges victorious.

Pure fantasy, of course. Respectable ornithologists breaking and entering? Never!

—950 Third Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10022.



Weather map for 7:00 a.m. May 13, 1981, the day before the discovery of the Laysan Albatross in Yuma, Arizona. Note strong W winds across the Southwest Region, originating beyond the map over the Pacific Ocean.



Laysan Albatross, Yuma, Ariz., May 14, 1981. Photographer not noted.

Solander (Providence) Petrel *Pterodroma solandri*, or *melanopus*, also called Bird of Providence, is a gadfly-petrel that breeds on Lord Howe Island, east of Australia. It has been recorded as far north as Japan, and possibly Hawaii. The report of a shipboard sighting west of mid-California is fascinating—and if confirmed, would add another species to the ever-growing list of pelagics that visit North American waters.

European Wigeon—There are two reports, without comment, from Southern California and Quebec of sightings of birds that appear to be hybrids of American and European wigeons, and numerous other reports of the Eurasian form in what appears to be increasing numbers. Since the breeding ranges of the two species do not, to our knowledge, overlap, where do these hybrids originate? We can think of three possible explana-

tions 1) from captive birds 2) from sporadic instances of individuals of one or the other species displaced into the wrong breeding grounds or 3) an unknown area of overlapping range. The first is most likely, the third most provocative. A mystery to be solved.

Eskimo Curlew—The flock of 23, at an appropriate date, at Akinson's Island, Texas, by two conservative observers, is an undeniable eyebrow-raiser. The species is not hard to identify, but this is the first number larger than two reported in at least 50 years. Of all our Endangered Species, the little curlew, with its elusive "now you see it now you don't" habits is the most tantalizing. Is this flock, if indeed correctly identified, the first signal of a population increase? Could it have been the entire world population of the species?

Ruff—Occurrences of the Ruff in North America south of Alaska, where it breeds, are now so frequent that the species is no longer boldfaced in most regional reports. Thirty-two individuals are reported from the West Indies to the Southern Pacific Coast, with 22 alone in the Northeast. Some of the sightings may be duplications, but there must be a good reason why this conspicuous species, listed as casual or accidental as late as 1957 (A.O.U., 1957) is now a regular migrant. Does the fact that so few males in breeding plumage are recorded tell us something?

Common Cuckoo—The first eastern North America sighting of this Old World species on oft-blessed Martha's Vineyard on May 4 qualifies as the bird of the season. The nearest breeding grounds of the species appear to be western Europe. If the bird made it on his own, his was a monumental wrong-way flight. Ship-, or even aircraft-assisted passage is not impossible, as would be an escape from captivity. But why are so many suspected escapes discovered in coastal areas?

Caprimulgids—The subject of two happy inconsequential notes. Birders at the Kansas Ornithological Society convention May 2 chalked up all four possible species on one evening on the banks of the Smoky Hill River including the rare Poor-will, and a