

## The Changing Seasons

*The badly-named "Nesting Season"—June 1-July 31, 1982,  
with some rules to help you determine which way  
those June-July shorebirds are going*

*Don Roberson*

YES, I KNOW THIS is the "nesting season" report. And yes, I have read the sage advice of Bill Robertson warning those foolish enough to attempt this column to "follow the pedestrian road from twits to twites." But if I promise to say something marvelous about "northern birds moving south" and "southern birds moving north", will you forgive me for the heresy of speaking about fall migration later in these pages?

You and I both know that it is not entirely appropriate to label these two months (June/July) "the nesting season". Here in my neck of the woods Band-tailed Pigeons are hatching squabs by late November, the Allen's Hummingbird nesting is well underway by late February (and they are mostly finished before June!), while Pied-billed Grebes still have fuzzy young in September. Indeed, this is not an original thought; John Bull noted the same anomaly for the New York City region back in 1960 (*AFN* 14:428). Across much of the southern tier of the United States "the nesting season" is April-early June; in south Florida the editor even "pillages" the spring report to produce some semblance of a "nesting season". With that in mind, it should not be too surprising to find that much of what is found in the reams of records has nothing at all to do with nesting birds. So, however inappropriate it may be, I choose to divide this report into: 1) breeding birds, 2) summering birds; rarities; 3) fall migrant shorebirds and perhaps end with some general observations about *American Birds* and a pot-pourri of the strange and the bizarre.

### THE NESTING SEASON

I SUPPOSE ONE SHOULD say something about the weather, although it tends

to be as boring to read as it is to write. Much of the continent experienced a cool, wet June which dissolved into a hot, dry July, except for portions of the Southwest, Northwest and Canadian prairies, which were hot and dry throughout the period. Occasional gales and flood tides along the eastern seaboard damaged some coastal nesting, but for the most part it was an excellent nesting season. The cold wet weather did tend to make nesting late in some areas (*i.e.*, consistently three weeks late in Mountain West), but the propitious July enabled most broods to come off well. As has been noted before, macro-events—such as long-term warming or cooling trends, tropical deforestation, etc.—are likely to have much more an effect on breeding range and population strength than the microcosm of the daily weather.

It has also been noted before, but worth repeating, that the atlas projects underway in several states and provinces, the local breeding distribution research of government agencies, the annual Breeding Bird Censuses, and even an event like the "summer Christmas Bird Count" in Boulder, Colo., and elsewhere contain some information about breeding distribution that never reaches the pages of *American Birds*. But all that having been said, this summer was one that appeared to continue the trends described for the summers of the past decade. See Robertson's essay in *AB* 34:869-874 for a longer view of much of what follows.

### First State/Provincial Nests

UNLESS I HAVE OVERLOOKED some, it appears that 20 species were recorded nesting for the first time in the

various states and provinces, if one expands that description to include those nesting for the first time since the 1800s or first *successful* nest, as a "nesting record." Now at first blush a total of 20 seems low compared to the halcyon days of the 1970s when this number was usually in the thirties, but consider that many of those "firsts" were simply the filling in of blanks in unworked areas which were undoubtedly historic breeding ranges. This year only three species seem clearly to fit that pattern, confirming the nesting of widespread juniper-habitat species in southwestern Wyoming (Gray Flycatcher, Bushtit, Black-throated Gray Warbler, leaving possibly only the Scrub Jay left to be a proven nester). The following list appears to be that of species pushing out beyond the edges of the known recent range: Least Bittern (Nova Scotia), Turkey Vulture (Maine), White-tailed Kite (Washington—possible breeding only), Mississippi Kite (Oklahoma, first since 1860), Sharp-shinned Hawk (Massachusetts, first recent), Least Sandpiper (New Brunswick; Machias Seal Island), Black-headed Gull (Quebec, 5 nests!), Little Gull (Quebec), Royal Tern (southern California, first successful nest), Caspian Tern (Montana), Black Skimmer (Connecticut), Red-faced Warbler (New Mexico), Rusty Blackbird (Minnesota), Scott's Oriole (Wyoming), and Blue Grosbeak (New York). From the outposts of our reporting area come two other remarkable nesting records: in Hawaii, vagrant Blue-winged Teal from the winter remained to produced a brood, while in the U.S. Virgin Islands, West Indies, a Cayenne Tern, *Sterna eurygnathus*, paired and nested with a Sandwich Tern. How long will it be before one turns up along our Gulf Coast?

What goes unremarked in a list like this are those nesting records beyond the known ranges but within a state or region: the southernmost Swallow-tailed Kite nest in Florida, the northwesternmost Snowy Egret nest in Wyoming, the first coastal Washington Green-winged Teal nest, or Piping Plovers nesting at Lake Athabasca, some 400 miles north of the published range. The following pages are filled with this information, much too numerous to delineate here. But we might end this section by noting that while the Cattle Egret, with the most dynamic breeding range extension of them all, is finally stabilized in many areas (*i.e.*, Pennsylvania), it added yet another state—Oregon—to its breeding range.

### Range Expansions

**M**ANY OF THE TRENDS noted in previous summers continue. East of the Rockies, some southern species continue to expand their range northward, often following river valleys. These include Little Blue Heron, Chuck-will's-widow, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Orchard Oriole, both Great-tailed and Boat-tailed grackles, and Blue Grosbeak. Chuck-will's-widow made noise in several regions; not only is it expanding rapidly into the West Virginia sections of Appalachia and up the New Jersey coasts, but a vagrant reached Minnesota and another was singing along the Rio Grande in Texas on the startling date of July 11. Blue Grosbeak not only produced the first New York nest, but a vagrant wandered as far north as Quebec. West of the Rockies, other southern species did well. Caspian Tern is consolidating its northwestern range, becoming numerous along the Northern Pacific Coast; several overachievers reached Alaska. Little Blue Heron nested again in southern California, while Anna's Hummingbird continues to increase in Oregon and Washington.

Concurrent with the expansion of southern species north is the trend of some northern species to continue to move south, especially along mountain ridges, in planted coniferous forest, and perhaps helped by bird feeders. Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Pine Siskin are most prominent in this category. Veery also continues southward in the Middlewest-

ern Prairies, while singing birds in central British Columbia suggested a range expansion there as well. Some ducks, too, are breeding farther south: a half-grown Red-breasted Merganser in Cleveland, of all places, might be an example, and others were thought to have bred on Long Island and in New Jersey. Some waterfowl expansion, like Canada Goose which is now ubiquitous across much of the southeast originating with escaped or introduced birds, and Ruddy Ducks in the Central Southern Region may be of the same ilk. In the West, Barred Owl is consolidating its gains in western Washington and the hooting bird in northern California remained into the summer. A Great Gray Owl nest in Oregon provided the first confirmed breeding record in the southern Cascades.

Many of those species for which concern has been expressed (often translated into placing them on the Blue List) seem to be making comebacks this summer. Double-crested Cormorants are recovering well throughout the Great Lakes, the first recent Vermont nest was discovered, and they were increasing even in the Mountain West. Peregrine Falcon, Osprey, and Bald Eagle are all recovering, often with release programs (but one might note the depressing aspect in the Peregrine smuggling ring in Quebec). Opportunistic changes in breeding strategy has contributed to comebacks for Great Blue Heron, Least Tern, and American Oystercatcher—the first has moved from the peopled coast to upland forest in the Hudson-Delaware Region, while the last has forsaken those same beaches for marshes and bars. Gulls and terns seem to be doing well in the Great Lakes and areas north. Not only were there the Black-headed and Little gull nests in Quebec, but Bonaparte's Gull nested in Quebec for only the second time. Churchill had its first nests of California and Franklin's gulls (and Ross' Gull attempted to nest again, although flood waters did in this year's broods). Forster's Terns were doing well in Ontario while also establishing the first Illinois nest in recent history. Great Black-backed Gulls also were consolidating their Great Lakes hold, and vagrants wandered west to Wisconsin and Iowa. In the West, juvenile Swainson's Hawks in the Antelope Valley and coastal southern California raised hopes that they are coming back after a dreadful decline. New explorations along the

Kern River yielded high counts of Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Willow Flycatcher, both of which have been reduced to minimal populations in California. Loggerhead Shrike (although none was found in the Northeastern Maritime Region) seemed to be holding its own in many other regions for which there is concern. It appears that only one species—Common Nighthawk—had consistently bad reviews on a continentwide basis, described as declining from Northern Pacific Coast to the Northeastern Maritime Region.

Besides the Cattle Egret, two other species are experiencing large-scale and rapid range expansions. The House Finch, introduced in the East, continues to expand west without encountering any biological obstacles: this summer it was pressing beyond its boundaries in Ontario and the western Great Lakes and Iowa had its first record. In the Southwest, Indigo Bunting is booming. Last year it became the commonest bunting along the Big Bend Rio Grande; this summer it became the commonest bunting at Delta, Colorado, nested at Morongo Valley in southern California (and was suspected of nesting along the Colorado River and Kern River of California) and summered in central Oregon. Reports on the interaction between it and Lazuli Bunting are mixed, but so far it does seem that some ecological differences may keep the species apart. We might even mention Cave Swallow in these same phrases. It is thriving in south Texas; the vagrant in Tucson, Arizona, was gathering mud; and an extraordinary vagrant was recorded again in Nova Scotia.

### SUMMERING BIRDS, RARITIES, AND OTHER EXCITING EVENTS

**C**ONSIDERING THE NUMBER of vagrant eastern landbirds (especially warblers) that are recorded in the West each spring and fall, it is not too astonishing that a few might summer in areas approximating their breeding habitat, although far out of range. Neither should it be surprising that males will sing or that females will build nests. If a fortuitous stroke of good fortune should place one of each sex in the same area, they might even mate and raise young (such as Northern Parula did in northern California in 1952 and 1977). These isolated events should not be considered range extensions unless they be-

gin to occur with a frequency and consistency well beyond any that have happened, nor should they be confused with true range expansions (*i.e.*, American Redstart in Oregon and northwestern California) of birds at the edges of their range. So a Northern Parula building a nest in Colorado is not "a range extension west of 525 miles," but simply an interesting record associated with the known phenomenon of summering birds well out-of-range. It is also known that the West often receives a pulse of spring vagrants in June and even early July; these too are not summering birds. But once the underbrush has been cleared, there appears to have been an unusually high number of summering vagrants this year: White-eyed Vireo in southern California, Yellow-throated Warbler in Arizona (perhaps the same bird as last summer), Magnolia Warbler in Colorado, Black-throated Green Warblers in northern California, Oregon, and British Columbia, Bay-breasted Warbler in West Virginia, Prairie Warbler in Utah, American Redstart in Arizona, Canada Warbler in Nevada, and many Hooded Warblers (seven in Colorado, Nevada, and Arizona). A Scarlet Tanager on July 17 in southern California is similarly intriguing. Of course, the phenomenon of "summering" is not limited to landbirds. It is well known for shorebirds (more of that later) and various waterbirds: Whistling Swan summering in Arizona or the western Great Lakes is an example. Particularly intriguing is the number of summer reports of Eurasian Wigeon this year; males were found in June and July in Wyoming, Oregon, and New York.

**O**THER PHENOMENA account for the presence of birds which have nothing at all to do with either breeding or "summering." Seabird distribution is an example. The Atlantic Ocean was interesting this summer. Off Maryland were unprecedented numbers of Cory's Shearwater (1042 on June 26) and Leach's Storm-Petrel (35 on June 12) while South Polar Skua was reported there and off Florida. Along the coast came an "invasion" of Brown Pelicans to Virginia, Maryland, and New Jersey and one even reached Nova Scotia. Virginia had a Brown Booby. No attempt was made in the pages I read to explain these number, but from the far distance (California in this case) one wonders about water temperatures . . . we know

the distribution and number of some southern species of pelagics in the Pacific is tied to temperature and (less so) to salinity (see Ainley, *West. Birds* 7:33); what of the Atlantic?

Before we leave the subjects of breeding and summering well behind, it is interesting to read of two reports from eastern Oregon. Two Yellow Rails are said to have been tape-recorded in the Klamath Basin; there is but one previous Oregon record, but a century ago Yellow Rail nested in a similar habitat along the eastern edge of the Sierra in California. There is also a report of up to three Least Flycatchers in northeastern Oregon in an area which also has Gray Catbird and other species more eastern in distribution. If these reports are correct, one might suspect nesting in the future, as it has been suspected previously (without proof) in central Washington.

Two kites and a flycatcher provided much excitement with out-of-range records. Swallow-tailed Kite appeared in Ontario and Wisconsin, but it was the Mississippi Kite that went wild: extralimital birds appearing in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Missouri, and southern California. Consider all the Scissor-tailed Flycatchers: northern California, Idaho, Michigan, central Quebec, Virginia, New Jersey, and New York! Interesting first state/provincial (or at least first 20th century) records included these species: Magnificent Frigatebird (Kansas), Long-tailed Jaeger (Saskatchewan), Rivoli's Hummingbird (Wyoming), Fork-tailed Flycatcher (Quebec), Short-billed Marsh Wren (Wyoming), Gray Vireo (Wyoming), Great-tailed Grackle (Minnesota), Baird's Sparrow (Wisconsin), and McCown's Longspur (Minnesota). Long Island, N. Y., got another June Chestnut-collared Longspur. Other equally startling summer records were those of Black-legged Kittiwake in Alberta and Louisiana, and Sabine's Gull in Arizona.

If you are like me, half the time you scan the "Changing Seasons" summary first to find out which "really good" birds appeared in North America (what Bill Oddie describes as a "megatick"). Black-capped Gnatcatchers nesting again in Arizona are of that type (and truly I tried, spending two days in Chino Canyon in the grueling sun, only to find out others saw them 15 minutes after we left. So what is your sad story? . . .). So to you who have been skimming until

now, here they are. Harcourt's Storm-Petrel off Florida; Garganey in Alberta (June 12, exactly right for the known pattern; there is no doubt these are wild birds: see McCaskie in *Birding* 5:45 or the waterfowl discussion in *Rare Birds of the West Coast*); Buff-collared Nighthawk now in five Arizona canyons, two each of the following hummingbirds in Arizona: Plain-capped Starthroat, Berylline, Lucifer, White-eared, Bahama Mockingbird in the Florida Keys; and three, repeat *three* Aztec Thrushes: Garden and Madera canyons, Arizona, and Big Bend National Park, Texas. And we've already mentioned Fork-tailed Flycatcher in Quebec.

A number of exciting shorebirds were recorded, as well, some of which—Rufous-necked and Little stints—are mentioned later. Although the Middlewestern Prairies considered more Ruffs to be anticlimactic after the spring eruption, it is well worth noting that at least 14 individual Ruffs were reported during June and July. A couple were late spring migrants, but most, as we'll discuss later, were adults on fall migration in late June and July. Nearly ten were in the interior of North America. There is but one proven nesting of Ruff on this continent (*West. Birds* 8:25; Alaska), yet surely, considering the pattern and number of interior migrants, they must be nesting somewhere in North America each year. Perhaps in the high north of Canada, where the Baird's and Pectoral sandpipers play? I mention those species because they, too, have the interesting pattern of adults migrating through the interior while juveniles in the fall are regular on the coasts (which might explain the timing differential of coastal Ruffs—September/October in California, for example, noted by Lehman & Schram in *AB* 33:840). We don't yet know the answer, but the ground is certainly ripe for speculation.

**A**NOTHER THOUGHT - PROVOKING A question about vagrants was raised this season. McCaskie, in southern California, suggests that the Rufous-necked Sandpiper which appeared at McGrath State Beach in July may have been the same individual that was observed last July at the same spot. Kenneth P. Able has also recently raised this question in a different context (*Cont Birdlife* 2:104): "Do birds navigate with precision sufficient to allow them to re-

peat the route in detail, stopping at the same lay-over points *enroute?*” Certainly we know that many individual birds return to the same breeding (the American Robin in your backyard) and the same wintering areas. This appears to be true for some vagrants as well. Even birds summering far out-of-range (such as the Yellow-throated Warbler in Arizona) appear to return to the same summering area if they survive the winter. An individual vagrant Indigo Bunting at Point Reyes, California, returned for at least four straight summers (and eventually was thought to hybridize with a Lazuli). Wintering vagrants are even better known for this phenomenon. A number of West Coast records of Eastern Phoebes were of birds returning for more than one winter, a Brown Thrasher near San Francisco returned four successive winters, the incredibly out-of-range vagrant Eurasian Skylark at Point Reyes has returned four successive winters, and single Black-headed Gull and Little Gull have just returned (October 1982) for their fifth successive winter. You see the phenomenon cutting across all the phylogenetic lines.

But what of birds on migration? Do they use the very same stopping points each successive trip south? One definite “yes” example involving migrants comes to mind: an adult female Black-backed Wagtail, *Motacilla lugens*, appeared for two successive late summers at the same sewage pond in central California, where she molted into winter plumage, before departing again in September. McCaskie has now suggested this may happen with shorebirds as well, and there is prior evidence of birds on the East Coast (*i.e.*, Curlew Sandpiper) to support this theory. We don’t yet know the answer, but I suggest it would be wise for someone to, say, check Little Creek Wildlife Management Area, Delaware, for an adult Little Stint next July 25-29.

Before we leave this section, note also the good news from Hawaii on native species (O’o’a’a on Kauai, numbers of Crested Honeycreeper and Parrotbill on Maui), but compare that with the discouraging reports of more “exotic” species. Let us just hope they can keep all those intruders from the native forests!

## SHOREBIRD MIGRATION

**I**N READING ALL the regional reports, one is left with a clear picture of utter

confusion about the status of shorebirds in June and July. While a few regions are right on top of the situation, it seems that most of North America is left with a vague feeling of indecision. Is a Least Sandpiper on July 3 summering? Is it a late spring migrant? Is it an early fall migrant? And does it make a difference if the bird is a Wilson’s Phalarope? Does it make a difference if the bird is a Dunlin? The answers, of course, depend on where you are, but for much of our area the answers are no, no, no, no, and yes (if the bird is in breeding plumage) and yes, no, no, yes, and no (if it is in winter (=basic) plumage). Confused? Well then let’s start at the top.

### Plumages

Rule Number One (and learn it well!)—*All shorebirds have three distinct plumages:* juvenile, adult winter (=basic), and adult breeding (=alternate). Now it is true that with some shorebirds—turnstones, curlews, godwits, some plovers—it is not easy to separate juvenile from winter plumage, but for the vast majority, and for all those we are going to discuss, it is quite simple to separate the plumages. Alas, your handy field guide only shows two, usually labelled “summer” (=breeding) and “winter” (=basic), but even these are often incorrectly portrayed (*i.e.*, the painting of “winter” Western Sandpiper in both the Peterson and Robbins guides is of a juvenile in molt, acquiring first-winter plumage). This is neither the time nor the place to go into an identification discussion, but get yourself some literature that does (Prater *et al.*, *Guide to the identification and ageing of Holarctic Waders* may be the best currently available). The plumage the bird is wearing in June-July is often the best clue to its status.

### Migration Timing

Let’s get spring migration out of the way immediately. By June, most spring migrants have passed through and have arrived on the breeding grounds, but many individuals continue to straggle through during the first week of June, and even to the 11th or 12th of the month. All these birds are in breeding plumage. So a general rule might be that any shorebird in breeding plumage before June 10 is a late spring migrant.

So on to fall migration. Rule Number Two—With a few exceptions (Dunlin),

*adults migrate before juveniles*, often as much as a month earlier. Now the earliest juvenile does not arrive in populated North America until the last week of July (and even that is unusual). The vast bulk of what you consider “fall shorebird migration” is composed of juveniles in August and September. Applying the Rule #2 above, (and it is true) this means that the bulk of migration for *adult* shorebirds of most species is in July-August. So let’s consider Rule Number Three—*Each species of shorebird has a particular timing of its migration*, often without reference to other species. Indeed each subspecies may have a unique timing pattern. There is some excellent discussions of these matters in the literature: Jehl’s “An Investigation of Fall-migrating dowitchers in New Jersey”—*Wilson Bulletin* (1963—75:250), Page, Fearis, & Jurek’s “Age and Sex Composition of Western Sandpipers on Bolinas Lagoon” (1972—*Cal. Birds* 3:79), and Page’s “Age, Sex, Molt, and Migration of Dunlins at Bolinas Lagoon (1974—*West. Birds* 5:1). All these contain excellent information. Take dowitchers. The work of Jehl (and earlier Pitelka, 1950, *Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool.* 50:1-108) give us very clear evidence that the two dowitchers have different timing of fall migration, with Short-billeds preceding Long-billeds by about a month. Adult Long-billeds migrate in late July-August and juveniles in late August-September. So what does that mean? It means adult Short-billeds migrate in early-mid-July (and juveniles in August). Thus the major portion of migration for adult Short-billed Dowitchers occurs during the period under examination here!

Can we double-check this? Yes, for the following pages rather clearly lay out the migration pattern of Short-billed Dowitcher, although many editors professed knowing nothing about it. In the Middle Atlantic Coast Region some field work repeated the investigations of Jehl and came up with much of the same data. One can check back in *Audubon Field Notes* and find reports of 10,000 Short-billed Dowitchers on July 9, 1960. Wisconsin notes an arrival on June 29. Indeed, for Short-billed Dowitcher, a last week of June arrival is right on time for much of the country. However, two regions—Mountain West and Florida—mention a Long-billed Dowitcher in the first week of July. Does this make sense? No . . . not unless the bird summered. But alas there is no information

(what plumage it was in) available to attempt an answer (and that information may not have even been mentioned to the editor; indeed it may not even have been noted by the observer!). So we are left with reports that cause one to wonder.

Speaking of Short-billed Dowitchers, Jehl's work (and that of Page for Western Sandpiper) illuminated another point: females migrate earlier than males. This is also true for Wilson's Phalarope (noted by Lehman & Schram in *AB* 33:840), which, incidentally, can arrive as early as mid-June. Now what are phalaropes famous for? Ah yes, the female picks the mate and lays the eggs while the male does all the nest-building, incubating, and raising of the broods. This leads right into Rule Number Four—for species in which males have most or all of the chick-raising duties, *females migrate earlier than the males*. We have already described two migration peaks: adults first and juveniles a month later. Now we have, for *some* species, three peaks—adult females first, adult males a couple of weeks later, and juveniles several weeks after that. Indeed this is exactly the pattern found by Jehl in New Jersey dowitchers. There is little published on dowitcher biology, but it is now known (Jehl, *pers. comm.*) that in dowitchers it is the male that has primary brood-raising responsibilities. The data available also suggests this is the case for Western and Least sandpipers. An understanding of this pattern goes a long way towards explaining what the Middlewestern Prairie Region found as a mid-July shorebird peak and then a lull. Read through the regional reports; most report shorebirds in the last week of June-first week of July. The vast majority of these reports are of the same species: Short-billed Dowitcher, Marbled Godwit, Whimbrel, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, American Golden Plover, Solitary Sandpiper, and the stints—Least, Western, Semipalmated, and White-rumped sandpipers. These birds are not early (and they are certainly not, as an occasional editor may state, late!)—they are right on time for the normal pattern of migration. All are adults in breeding plumage.

#### Molts

Note that the birds migrating in late June and July are adults in breeding plumage. This is an important Rule

Number Five—*Except for Wilson's Phalarope, shorebirds that migrate early do not molt into winter plumage until the wintering grounds are reached*. There are a few species which molt on the breeding ground and migrate late (Dunlin is an obvious example) which do not arrive at mid-latitudes until the last week of September (which also means that adults and juveniles arrive at the same time). But this rule means it is no surprise that vagrant stints—such as Rufous-necked and Little—should be found almost entirely as vagrants in *adult breeding plumage* in June-July. This year is no exception, with two Rufous-neckeds in Oregon (June 20, July 3) and another in California (July 11-17) while Delaware had one or two Little Stints in late July. As both of these species can winter in as high a latitude as those along our southern coasts (Rufous-necked north to China, Little north to Arabia), we might occasionally find—in southern states—an adult molting or molted into winter plumage. And this, too, is true—a winter adult Rufous-necked has been collected in southern California (August 17, 1974) and this year's Little Stint was in molt. So note the corollary to Rule #5—adult shorebirds do molt into winter plumage when the wintering ground is reached. Note that “molts” here is used to describe the completion of body molt, very apparent in the field, and not wing molt which continues until mid-winter. Thus an observer in California or Virginia in late July-August might expect Western Sandpipers in three plumages: the breeding-plumaged adults (which will probably winter farther south), winter-plumaged adults or in molt (which will probably winter locally) and the first juveniles of the fall (which, incidentally, will molt into a first-winter plumage very like that of adult winter plumage in October-November). Also note another implication of Rule #5—those shorebirds which winter far to the south of us: White-rumped, Baird's, Pectoral, Sharp-tailed, and Curlew sandpipers, for example, are unlikely to be found in our area in anything but breeding adult (spring, and June-early August in fall) and juvenile plumages (late August-early November only). This too, with the exception of a couple of winter records of Pectoral and a molting few Curlew sandpipers, is true as well.

There has also been some work on summering shorebirds, that is, individuals which remain in wintering areas

throughout the summer and do not migrate north. Some species are more likely to indulge in this than others (Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Willet, American Golden and Black-bellied plovers come to mind) and a list of the summer's crop for the West Indies is found in that region's table. Research has shown these birds to be sexually immature (or they may be otherwise impaired), for the most part, and thus most remain in winter plumage, simply becoming more and more worn (some Marbled Godwits, for example, turn nearly white-bodied by July and have been called “Bar-tailed Godwits”). Thus we have Rule Number Six—*summering shorebirds remain in winter (=basic) plumage or in incomplete molts*. You can see the implications of this Rule. One can rather easily separate those birds suspected of summering in an area from the either late migrants (early June) or fall migrants (late June) by noting the plumage worn. Like all “Rules”, nothing is absolute and so one can find the exception here and there, but this is often an excellent way, with some high degree of accuracy, to separate “those summer shorebirds” from the fall migrants.

The summary above will not answer every summer shorebird question. But if observers and editors would place more emphasis on ageing and sexing (when possible), I believe the pieces of the puzzle would fit together much more easily.

#### ON EDITING

AS ONE WHO HAS PLOWED through countless pages of *American Birds* in order to compile a book of records (*Rare Birds of the West Coast*), I am left in some awe at the vast volunteer task undertaken each season. But at the same time I have come away with an opinion on the editors' efforts. While the quality of editing in *American Birds* has continued to improve over the years, there is still little uniformity among regions in which records are published and which are ignored, little consistency on the use of bold-facing for rarities, and, worst of all, a decided difference in the screening process prior to publication. Of course, each of us will have different opinions about what should be published. Some ornithologists would have us ignore the vagrant for more discussion of common species, and indeed some regions are full of ink



*Sandhill Cranes in flight, June 9, 1982, near St. John's, Nfld. Photo/W.A. Montevecchi.*

about this or that species "doing well" or "doing poorly". While this has its place here, it seems that the breeding distribution projects already alluded to, the Blue List comments, and breeding summaries published in *American Birds* and elsewhere can do a much more thorough job of this than the seasonal reports. On the other hand, *American Birds* is the *only* national publication with seasonal reports that can cover every unusual bird record and that is available to the researcher. While the vagrant may mean nothing biologically, the mere possibility of compiling those records over time can lead to much fruitful research. But when you publish these records, consider your national audience and please annotate them as much as possible. You may know why a White Pelican in Lesser Slobovia is worth mentioning—and perhaps worth boldfacing—but it is likely the rest of us do not. And consider what you deem worthy of boldfacing—there is no limit or necessary quota on each season. Consider the surrounding regions: northern California gets an average of nearly four Chestnut-sided Warblers each late May-June. Does a Chestnut-sided in coastal Oregon in early June deserve boldfacing? And certainly an

obvious escaped Mute Swan in New Mexico is not a boldfaced bird. . . . indeed it might even not be worth publishing. I don't mean to pick out any region for criticism—those examples just leaped out at me. Nearly every region could use a bit more thought on this question.

More important than these minor points are the acceptability of records published in *American Birds*. Remember that you are widely read and widely used as authoritative when records are compiled and analyzed for this or that article. While just reading through this single season, I have wished several times for the chance to place the Christmas Bird Counts infamous "(?-Ed.)" after sightings which are suspect on their face. Especially glaring are those labelled as "probable" this or that (suggesting there was some question about the identification being correct). Some of these records would be so preposterous, if correct, as to warrant an "S.A.". Without wanting to point fingers, these require better explanations: probable American Woodcock in New Mexico, probable five Lapland Longspurs in Wyoming at the end of May, two Olivaceous Flycatchers together in Colorado, alleged Caribbean Coot in Michigan (which mated with an American Coot and was obviously an over-endowed example of the latter species). The observers (usually quite unfamiliar with the species) are much more responsible than the editors for these mistakes. But editors can use greater care to reduce these to the minimum. As to observers, not only should you document unusual birds with careful notes or photos, but report them immediately to others who may be interested. All birding tourists should read the plea in the introduction to the Mountain West Region.

#### THE ODDBALL AND THE BIZARRE

**R**EADING PAGES AND PAGES of bird distribution, if attempted over long periods, tends to dull the mind and senses, as Darwin once said in another context. But then up pops some strange, improbable, or totally bizarre bit of bird trivia. These caught my fancy:

Among astonishing feats were a banded Rock Dove found in coastal Quebec which apparently was supposed to be on a race from France to Scotland ("Wrong Way Columbid"), a Masked

Booby banded in the U.S. Virgin Islands turned up in Bermuda, and Brown-headed Cowbirds were busily parasitizing Savannah Sparrows at 10,000 foot elevation in Colorado. A white American Coot at Moose Jaw in the Prairie Provinces must have turned a few heads. Barn Swallows successfully raised a brood aboard a working ferry in Ontario (did they cross any county lines and if so in which county did they nest?). Birds found a number of interesting ways to get killed; fire ants devastated a herony in south Texas while Black-crowned Night Herons destroyed a Least Tern colony on Long Island. Six of seven Eared Grebe nests on a Montana lake were abandoned because the weight of ducks perching on them caused them to sink. Gulls knocked down and killed a Snowy Owl attempting to cross a body of water in the Northeastern Maritime Region. I was particularly enchanted by the Biblical "eye for an eye" admonition involving Marsh Hawks and our paddling rails. You will recall the note in *Amer. Birds* 33:837 about a Marsh Hawk drowning a gallinule? This summer, in the Northern Rocky Mountain Inter-mountain Region, a Marsh Hawk which attempted to grab a coot chick was knocked into the water by the adult and, you guessed it, drowned. Now that's hard to beat, but what about that Purple Gallinule on Machias Seal Island, New Brunswick, which was discovered because it had gotten its head stuck in a storm-petrel burrow?

But enough from me. You have all the regional reports. Find your own favorite anecdote.

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