

The Changing Seasons

A fine spring for rarities

Don Roberson

IT IS WHEN one sits down to write this summary that one realizes just what an exceptionally large and varied continent this is. There just are no generalizations to be made. Back East it was wet and cold, with some places experiencing March blizzards and a drenched May separated by a decent April. The volatile situation contributed to unexpected instances of downed migrants, such as Red-necked Grebes in western Massachusetts, which apparently normally overfly the region. But in other areas, such as Florida and eastern Texas, the lack of weather fronts brought what many saw as a "silent spring." Heavy precipitation in the northern Rockies may have flooded out nesting Black-necked Stilts and contributed to unprecedented numbers in central Washington; sleet storms in the Northern Great Plains affected many species. Out West it was warm and dry and the best birds seemed to originate out of the dry Southwest. Our coverage outposts—Hawaii and the West Indies—both faced severe droughts. Indeed there is little in common amongst reports from sea to shining sea. So rather than attempt the ultimate summary, I'd like to pick and choose some points of interest, throw in some gratuitous commentary, and direct the reader to topics for further reading. It was a very fine spring for rarities, including four new North American records which seem acceptable and several others that remain controversial, so my emphasis will be in that direction. Besides vagrants, two new nesting species

were added to the lower 48 list: Common Black-headed Gull (Monomoy, Massachusetts) and Masked Booby (Dry Tortugas, Florida).

THE SIBERIAN CABOOSE

A FITTING TRAILER to the "Siberian Express" of Winter 1983-1984 is found in Gibson's report from Alaska. You will recall the plethora of Bramblings and the odd Rustic Bunting and Siberian Accentor which were the talk of the winter. These émigrés departed northward this spring (*i.e.*, the Boulder, Colorado, Brambling on March 14), and lo and behold, some were noted on their spring migration in deepest interior Alaska—a Siberian Accentor near Fairbanks on April 17, a Brambling in Anchorage on May 13, and a Common Black-headed Gull along the Alaska Highway. The odds of one of the lower 48's feeder Bramblings stopping at a birder's feeder in Alaska seem ridiculously low. An explanation which contends that the "Siberian Express" was boarded by many more Bramblings (and who knows what else!) than were discovered here in the states seems a more likely hypothesis.

AN ATTU SPRING

RECENTLY IT SEEMS that each even-numbered spring on Attu Island in the western Aleutians produces a "Can you top this?" challenge. Well, they were

at it again: Far Eastern Curlew, White-throated Needletail (2), Red-breasted Flycatcher (2), Brown Shrike, Eurasian Kestrel. Oh, and the obligatory first North American record this time was Lanceolated Warbler. But not just a cringing hermit skulking through the tussocks glimpsed by the fortunate few, but 25 or more singing and carrying on everywhere! Can you top that?

OUT ON THE LOW SEAS

DO YOU RECALL those days of yore when one, with seasick pill in hand, boarded a tiny boat inevitably run on diesel fumes to search the High Seas in hopes of a pelagic bird or two? A pelagic trip off southern California on which one notched Arctic Tern, Heermann's Gull, Parasitic and Pomarine jaegers, and, wonder of wonders, a Laysan Albatross, would rank right up there with the best of them. This spring was a good time for such a trip, but boarding that boat would have been a mistake. Better to have stood, scope in hand, in the hot desert sun on a barren jetty looking out over the blank face of the Salton Sea. Read Guy McCaskie's report is you don't believe me. And these incredible happenings of spring were just a foreshadow of the summer to come (or have I let too much out of the bag?). Along these same lines, note that the hot spot this spring for Red-billed Tropicbird was a farmer's field in Arizona.

SOUTHERN STRAGGLERS

IF THERE WAS a thread to tie together this vast land this spring, it was that many regions were treated to southern species well north of their usual ranges. Minnesota had an Anhinga, Michigan a Mississippi Kite, and Colorado an American Swallow-tailed Kite. There were Black Vultures in central New York and in Ontario, and Swainson's Hawks in Maryland, New York, and possibly New Hampshire. A White-faced Ibis reached Massachusetts and several southern herons came aboard the Canadian Coast Guard ship "Dawson" somewhere off Nova Scotia. Particularly intriguing were the widespread vagrant records of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons: nesting in Tennessee and nest-building in Denver, Colorado (!), plus records from Nova Scotia, Vermont, Saskatchewan, South Dakota, Arizona, and southern California.

A number of species associated with the Great Basin and deserts of the West scattered to locales far afield. Perhaps most dramatic was Cassin's Sparrow, noted at Pt. Pelee, Ontario, and in extreme northwest California. A Black-throated Sparrow in British Columbia was far removed, but this species, Sage Sparrow, and Black-chinned Sparrow were present in "invasion" numbers in northern California. Two Sage Sparrows reached Oregon, as did a Costa's Hummingbird, a species also present in the northern areas of its range in record high numbers. Rounding out this trend were a Bendire's Thrasher on S.E. Farallon I., off San Francisco, and (perhaps unrelated) Rock Wrens in Iowa and Minnesota.

All those birds were good, but the southern tier of states had even more exciting birds of Mexican and Caribbean origin. In Arizona were one of the northernmost White-eared Hummingbirds on record (in the Santa Ritas), a new locality for Black-capped Gnatcatcher (Florida Wash, below Madera Canyon), and the 2nd and 3rd U.S. records, respectively, of Crescent-chested Warbler (Ramsey Canyon) and Fan-tailed Warbler (Garden Canyon). Continuing this review eastward, especially interesting southern species included a Black-capped Vireo at Rattlesnake Springs, New Mexico, a reported Couch's Kingbird in Big Bend, Texas, and some intriguing parrot sightings in South Texas, some of which may pertain to wild vagrants. It is unfortunate that this spring reports were received,

without details, of Ruddy Ground-Doves, White-throated Robin, and Blue Bunting. The local editors cannot evaluate these reports without written details, so all of them are best left ignored for the present.

Much more encouraging were very well-documented first U.S. records in eastern Texas: a Yucatan Vireo and a Greenish Elaenia. Both birds were netted, measured, photographed, and released, later to be seen by scores of birders. Both birds are thought to be primarily resident, and although the elaenia occurs as nearby as southern Tamaulipas, the vireo occurs no closer than the Yucatan Peninsula. If these "resident" species can reach the upper Texas coast, our list of possible vagrants needs to expand to include numerous other tropical specialties. The Yucatan Vireo might be considered conspecific with the Black-whiskered Vireo in the future, but the elaenia opens up an entirely different can of worms. If you thought *Empidonax* flycatchers were difficult, just wait until you look at elaenias! And indeed that day is already here, for an elaenia heard calling and photographed along the Gulf coast of Florida was thought by the observers to be a Caribbean Elaenia (which would be yet another first North American record, if accepted). I'll touch a bit more on that bird later, but let me finish this round-up of southern species. Grand Isle, Louisiana, saw an epic battle between a Gray Kingbird and a Tropical Kingbird, the latter collected as a first state record (there is also one Louisiana record of Couch's Kingbird). This difficult pair—Tropical and Couch's kingbirds—gave observers difficulties when dealing with one in Florida and another on the upper-Texas coast. Louisiana also recorded a Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Alabama had a Cave Swallow, and Georgia turned in first records of Say's Phoebe and Painted Redstart. In all, a banner year for southern vagrants.

"OLD WORLD" WADERS

WE USED TO THINK of Eurasian shorebirds like Curlew Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Ruff, and Mongolian Plover as rare visitors to Alaska, but no more. Curlew Sandpipers were found this spring in Maryland, Michigan (2nd state record), Ohio (1st record), and Texas (1st documented). Sharp-tailed Sandpipers have become regular in small numbers in fall on the West Coast, but

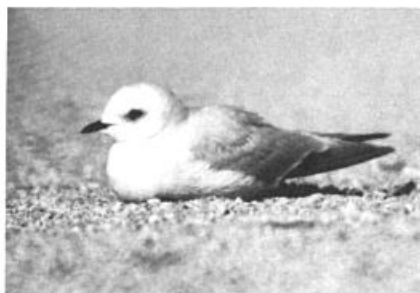
spring birds are virtually unknown. Thus a breeding-plumaged bird at the south end of California's Central Valley was quite a surprise. The Ruff must now be breeding in North America outside of Alaska, considering the numbers migrating through the Great Lakes area this spring: one each in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, and at least 11 in Ontario. See Ron Weir's account for some thoughts on possible nesting locations. But the shorebird of the spring has to be a breeding-plumaged Mongolian Plover at Presqu'île Provincial Park, Ontario, on May 4, a first for Canada.

IF I NEVER SEE ANOTHER GULL

WHAT DID WE ARGUE about before there were gulls? There seems to be a great problem with the Iceland/Thayer's/Herring/Lesser Black-backed/Western-type gulls from such far-flung regions as Niagara-Champlain, Appalachian, Central Southern, South Texas, and Northern Pacific Coast. Thomas Imhof in Central Southern gives us some interesting taxonomic theories in his account, including the surprising statement that Thayer's and Herring don't each have a distinctive jizz (I guess we're all misreading the thin-billed, round-headed look of putative Thayer's out here in the West). But Imhof certainly has one point that is right on the mark: it is likely that pioneering Lesser Black-backs are hybridizing with other species and producing the odd gulls now recorded throughout the East. He very correctly notes that "old One-foot", very unfortunately and prematurely published in this journal as a first Gulf Coast record of Western Gull (AB 36:899), is certainly not a Western Gull (whatever it may truly be). I had never heard of the record before publication of the article just noted, but one look at the photograph was enough to convince me, who lives daily with abundant Western Gulls, that the bird had the wrong "jizz". While we're on the subject of Western Gull, it bears pointing out again that Western Gull is an extremely coastal gull throughout its range, that it is unrecorded east of the Colorado River border of California and Arizona, that a bird this spring on Lake Elsinore, southern California, is correctly noted by Guy McCaskie as very unusual that far inland (about 30 miles as the gull flies), and that reports of this species anywhere truly inland, such as Idaho or Colorado, require the utmost in documentation and are

much more likely to be Lesser Black-backed Gulls or hybrids than they are to be Western Gulls. Get the message? Lesser Black-backs do continue their wandering, with birds this spring in Kentucky, Wisconsin, and at Winnipeg, Manitoba. Note also Kentucky's first California Gull, which seems to be expanding in the opposite direction.

Thayer's and Iceland gulls do seem to form a spectrum of pale, small gulls that might be identifiable at the extremes, but birds in the middle can defy identification. Therefore a reportedly well-documented report of an Iceland Gull in British Columbia would be, if acceptable, most unusual. These two "species" may yet prove to be conspecific and I look forward to reading the full details on this extraordinary sighting.



Adult Ross' Gull at Agassiz N.W.R., Minn., Apr. 9, 1984. First for Minnesota and for the Western Great Lakes Region. Photo/Warren Nelson.

After trying to sort out the larger *Larus* gulls, it must be pleasant to see a Ross' Gull. An adult closely associated with ice at Agassiz N.W.R. for ten days this April provided the excitement in Minnesota, as well as a first state record.

THE ROLE OF *AMERICAN BIRDS* AND THE PROBLEM OF RECORDS

TRY AS IT MIGHT, this magazine can never become all things to all birders. These seasonal summaries are often spiced by an author's personal preferences in coverage. Some would like a more thorough discussion of common species, their breeding and wintering ranges, their migratory routes, and their population dynamics. A slice of a spring report from my region, designed to meet those requests, might read:

"Rock Wrens were noted in all their regular locations in April from Marin to Monterey Cos.

and numbers appeared stable (JM, m.ob.). Canyon Wren numbers were down by 4% according to surveys in western San Joaquin Co. (DY). Bewick's Wrens were said to be abundant in Del Norte Co. (RAE), but were missing from a Pacific Grove yard for the first year in the last five (DR). House Wrens arrived one week early along the Nacimiento River (KH), but were thought to be late in Livermore (BR). Nevertheless, by May stable numbers were reported from Yreka (DD) and Napa (BDP, LCB *et al.*)"

I recall when my local Regional Editor made a statement along the lines of "only one W. Screech-Owl was reported this spring—isn't anybody owling?". In truth, of course, plenty of birders were owling and hearing screech-owls, they were at all their normal spots, and nobody thought that worth reporting. And those birders were right. *American Birds* is not the place for a repetitious list of the resident species that are doing just fine to all appearances. I would much prefer to see the space used to tell us about the unusual, about noted declines or increases (particularly about Blue-Listed or endangered species), and with commentary on their potential meaning. There are numerous government and privately sponsored surveys of local regular avifaunas that provide a long-term database for population studies (not to mention the Christmas counts). This magazine is not the place to say "Rock Wrens are doing well, Canyon Wrens are doing well, Bewick's Wrens are doing well . . ." and on and on. If there are no reports of common, widespread, resident species (like my local screech-owls), so much the better. No news, in this case, is good news.

What *American Birds* does very well and what makes it unique is its regional summaries of the unusual, the rarities and the notable changes in range, status, and migration routes and timing. The more editors can squeeze commentary on these oddities and vagrants into the limited space they have, the better the magazine serves its primary purpose. But emphasizing the rare and the unusual is not without dangers, most specifically the evaluation of the sightings used to form the basis of published records. *British Birds*, undoubtedly the world's finest

bird magazine aimed at the audience interested in identification and distribution, also has regular summaries (monthly rather than seasonally) of the rarities and unusual birds reported from throughout Britain. But each report opens with a bold-faced warning that we would do well to paste on the front of this magazine: "**These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records**". No Regional Editor can even begin to evaluate carefully every report he or she receives—time would not allow it. Rather, an editor must make a judgment based on his knowledge of the observer or, lacking such knowledge, on any written documentation that might be received. This works very well and with a high degree of accuracy (>95%, I would guess) for those vagrants, early or late dates, slight range expansions or reductions, that are of birds which, while rare, are within the known pattern of the species. For example, it is well known in California that the Solitary Sandpiper is a rare but regular migrant throughout in April-May. Thus an editor can, with confidence of high accuracy, accept reports of this species during migration by observers with experience. These can be passed on in *American Birds* as "records" and might form some of the database for a researcher in the migration of this species. However, a mid-winter report of a Solitary Sandpiper would require good written details, and, lacking them, should not be published at all. Indeed there are several mid-winter reports of this species published in old issues of *Audubon Field Notes* that now must be disregarded (Garrett & Dunn, 1981, *Birds of Southern California*) because they lack details. There is a clear distinction between accepting additional records of rare but regular species and dealing with the very rare and the extraordinary.

We have in this spring report records of birds which are very unusual in a local area (Ross' Gull in Minnesota, White-faced Ibis in Massachusetts) and those which are extraordinary on a continental basis (Lanceolated Warbler, Jackdaw, Spoonbill Sandpiper). These are the kind of records for which *American Birds* serves only as a headline service, to brighten our reading and to whet our appetites. But publication in *American Birds* of these records does NOT serve to authenticate them. The birds are too unusual, too far outside the realm of their normal migratory range, to be authenticated by being reviewed by a single Re-

gional Editor. These are those records which cry out for review by a regional or national records committee.

The examples just listed serve as illustrations. Certainly there is every reason to believe that the reports of Minnesota's Ross' Gull, Massachusetts' White-faced Ibis, and Attu's Lanceolated Warbler are accurate. Blair Nikula in the Northeastern Maritime Region has even provided us with very pertinent details on the ibis—red iris, red "knees", and the width of the white on the face. It certainly sounds like the observers knew what to look for and provided good details. I would bet it was correctly identified. But my opinion, or that of any Regional Editor, is not enough to authenticate the record. It would require the vote of a properly organized and well-respected rarities committee to afford that sighting the authentication that science requires.

We are long past the days when a specimen is appropriate for the vast majority of rarity records. I must differ with another writer in this space on this question. Paul DeBenedictis is one of my favorite authors, but in his Fall 1983 summary (*AB* 38:173), speaking on the same general topic, he notes: "A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was finally collected in California; unfortunately an Eastern Wood-Pewee there could not be similarly substantiated." I'll get back to these birds in a moment, but it is clear that DeBenedictis is commenting upon the same point I am belaboring here—that *American Birds* published records that are not substantiated. This is very much the attitude of many professional ornithologists and a fair number of others, like myself, who might be thought of as serious birders (or, euphemistically, "field ornithologists"). The problem of authenticating records can be met by: a) collecting the bird or b) the review of the details (and photos, if any) by a committee of respected birders using regular procedures and taking their task seriously. The new AOU *Check-list* takes the first route and relegates perfectly verifiable sight records to an Appendix. The British Ornithologists' Union, and the vast British birding community, use the second alternative. The British have outlawed collecting entirely and instead rely on banding, photography, and, most importantly, accurate and careful descriptions of rarities reviewed by the British rarities committee (and for first records for Britain and Ireland, a second BOU committee, as well). Indeed a recent British review of the AOU

Check-list takes the Americans to task in no uncertain words:

"One does feel, however, that the AOU is dodging the issue of sight-records and one's unease is enhanced by the unambiguous statement in the Preface that 'The Committee feels strongly and unanimously the need for continued collection of specimens to resolve unsettled questions of relationship and distribution' On this evidence, the United States remains 50 to 60 years behind us (in Britain). How many more years will have to pass—and how many more birds will be collected—before this fossilised attitude is revised?" (M.A. Ogilvie in *British Birds* 77:390, August 1984).

Now one does not have to feel that strongly about collecting (indeed I'm somewhere in between the attitudes of the AOU and Mr. Ogilvie) to note that the American birding public and its publications are only hurting their own cause by continuing to cite *American Birds* publication of super-rarities as authoritative. How often have I seen in these, or similar, pages an article reviewing the status of this or that bird relying totally and uncritically on records gleaned from *American Birds*? The time-frame demands of *American Birds* require publication of records without careful, critical, and dispassionate review. Such a review is provided only by well-run rarities committees. Such committees serve as a repository of information for future researchers, must have their records and reasoning open to inspection by the interested public, must require a high degree of concurrence to provide authentication (both the British and the California committees, for example, have ten voting members and require positive votes of 10-0 or 9-1 to authenticate the identification of a record), and must publish their findings in a journal which is available to interested parties across the country. The British go even further than this. Not only does the rarities committee review all records of rarities and report its findings (a record is either accepted or rejected and published as such), but *British Birds* regularly publishes a full account of each bird new to Britain and Ireland, including a full description of the bird, photos if

available, and committee comments on the problems of escapism or other unnatural transportation to Britain if that is a possible factor.

This is the proper way to deal with records. Report them in the *American Birds* regional summaries and then later have them authenticated by a well-respected regional rarities committee. DeBenedictis is bemoaning the wrong records. He says that "at last" a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was collected in California, apparently unaware that the first California record was banded and photographed in the hand, that the diagnostic wing formula can be seen in those photos (the same wing formula he would use on specimens; see Phillips, Howe and Lanyon in *Bird-Banding* 37:153), that the photos and extensive comments on wing formula and tail length were reviewed by a museum scientist (Allan Phillips), and that, just like a specimen, all that information and all committee comments are on file and available to anyone who wishes to restudy them in the future. Certainly records committees can err (as they did in originally rejecting this very record before it was recirculated with extensive notes on wing formula), but so can scientists who are identifying specimens (I need only note the personal example of my re-identification of an Arctic Warbler at Pt. Barrow, Alaska, which had for years been accepted as North America's only Willow Warbler, including by the 5th edition AOU *Check-list*; see *Condor* 85:258). The important similarity between specimens housed in a major museum and the work of a records committee is that both provide a repository for information that can be re-examined by future researchers. Both types of records—specimens and committee-accepted sight records—are equally worthy of respect and both serve equally well to authenticate a record. Indeed, sometimes the rarities committee authenticates the record much more adequately and a case in point is the very Eastern Wood-Pewee that DeBenedictis complains was not collected. This bird was a worn adult singing a typical song, was viewed by most of the California birding community with an interest in state rarities, and was tape-recorded. This record was recently accepted by the California Bird Records Committee by a 10-0 vote, based upon an evaluation of the song. If the bird had been collected without accurate descriptions and proper recording of the song, it is unlikely that it could have been identified

as a specimen. The date was in August-early September, the bird was worn, and, as noted in Phillips, Howe and Lanyon's classic article, "after July the task of identification [of birds in the hand] becomes hopeless" (*Bird-Banding* 37:169). Collecting that particular bird would have been a mistake.

But though DeBenedictis may have chosen the wrong examples, his basic point has much merit. Each season we see published numerous records of extreme rarities in *American Birds* which will never be properly evaluated. They will remain "unsubstantiated" because we lack any national records committee of substance and most regions do not yet have an active and well-run rarities system. Nationally, the AOU chooses not to deal with sight records. The American Birding Association has had a Checklist Committee to review first North American records, but its procedures have been less than satisfactory in the past. There is hope, however, that a newly formed committee chaired by Frank Gill will achieve better results. Their first bird under review is the very same Caribbean Elaenia already discussed and I am told that they are sending information on the report, quite properly, to authorities on neotropical flycatchers. Should a record receive appropriate review and be accepted, it is also highly desirable to have the details published in a national journal. Therefore it is with great pleasure that we read that the Texas reports of Greenish Elaenia and Yucatan Vireo will be published with complete details.

This spring saw a perfect example of a species that needs full and fair review. There were Jackdaws in the Northeastern Maritime Region. Again, this is a bird normally thought of as resident and not much of a candidate for long-distance vagrancy. Certainly a 1962 report from Florida can be dismissed as an obvious escape. But there may have been five or more in the Maritimes this spring (and more to follow in summer) and there is a pattern of recent records from Iceland and of birds landing on boats in the North Atlantic, sometimes in flocks. Jackdaws were thought of as rare on England's outer islands, but last fall there were an estimated 4000 on the Scilly Isles (*British Birds* 77:40), which was most unusual. Certainly something strange is occurring in Jackdaw populations (and, incidentally, in some other European corvids such as the Carrion Crow and Eurasian Jay). There is every reason to believe that the

maritime birds this spring were wild and constitute yet another first North American record. I trust we shall see a full and thorough article on this event in the future.

American Birds is a perfect place for such publications of national interest. Observers should be encouraged to write up their sightings for publication. I would very much enjoy seeing the details, for example, on the two Spoonbill Sandpipers reported from Alberta this spring. If correct, they might qualify as the "Bird of the Season". We are told only in the Prairie Provinces report that they were "drawn and described in detail". Might I encourage the publication of those details? One would hope they prove correctly identified, but one must recall that previous reports of Spoonbill Sandpiper south of Alaska proved (with photos) to be Western Sandpipers with mud on their bills! At this point, we have no way of knowing, and any researcher citing this published report as an "authenticated record" does so at his or her peril. Partly because we have no method currently of evaluating records of significance in some parts of the country, we are sometimes treated to major articles on distributional records, even in these pages, which prove to be incorrect. One might note the "Western Gull" on the Gulf Coast previously mentioned, or the "Curlew Sandpiper" in Utah (*AB* 32:1065), which turned out to be a deformed Wilson's Phalarope, as examples. And unfortunately even well-written articles on the discovery and identification of a rarity can omit important facets that a records committee would review in detail. Examples are the otherwise excellent notes on the occurrence of Western Reef-Herons in Massachusetts (*AB* 37:827) and in Barbados (*AB* 38:254) that completely ignore the problem of ship-riding herons (see the Northeastern Maritime report for more examples of this well-documented phenomenon) and that overlook the fact that numerous recent European records of this species were rejected by national committees as escapes. During 1980-82 two to three hundred Western Reef-Herons were imported into Austria and Germany from Pakistan and at least eight were known to have been released by the dealer (*AB* 37:1032). Those factors needed balancing in any evaluation of North American records.

The professional skepticism of sight records is hardly assuaged by the publication of "possible" and "probable" rec-

ords. This spring we have a probable Chimney Swift in Utah, a possible Ash-throated Flycatcher in Nova Scotia, and a possible Louisiana Waterthrush in New Mexico. If the observer and/or editor isn't sure what the bird was, how can one expect the scientific community to place much store in our identifications? Only in rare situations—the possible Alder Flycatcher identified by call notes in Arizona or a White/Black-backed Wagtail in the Pacific Northwest—are identification problems so poorly understood that we are warranted in using caution when publishing the reports. Other "possibles" and "probables" are best left unpublished as "birds that got away".

We could use a national records committee of substance. We need many more local and regional records committees based upon the British model. There are several in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, New York, among others, that work well. But too many among the vast storehouse of reports which appear in *American Birds* begin and end there, unauthenticated and subject to the various interpretations of future authors, some careful and some not.

These committees should feel obligated to have reports on rare birds about which the reviewers know little sent to appropriate authorities elsewhere in the world for comment. They should also strive to see the larger national picture when dealing with difficult concepts. We read this spring about a Garganey in British Columbia on May 23-24. Garganeys are kept in captivity, so a reviewer must evaluate the possibility of it being an escape from captivity. But when one reviews the record with an eye to the larger area, where there is now a very well-documented pattern of Garganeys about 30 degrees north in March, about 40 degrees north in April, and about 50 degrees north in May (latitude of British Columbia), we find this record fits perfectly in the pattern and the balance must tip toward its being a genuine vagrant. On the other hand, a complete review of all North American records of the Barnacle Goose and a comparison of its status in Europe and in captivity (which I have just completed) leaves one in a position to comment that this spring's records of the species from upstate New York and Ontario are, without a shadow of a doubt, escapes from captivity. But what of a Cinnamon Teal in Pennsylvania, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in the Central Southern Region and Fulvous Whistling-

Ducks in Hawaii? These require a careful and a wide-view analysis. On what basis was Washington's Bean Goose considered an escape, when the winter brought numerous other species of Siberian origin to this part of the continent? These questions are not answered here.

I realize that all these words are likely to have little effect upon how North America's birding community operates. But they might awaken a thought or two. Interested parties are directed to the secretary of any of the established rarities committees for details on operation, or one might read a summary of the operation of the BOU committee in *British Birds* 77:247. But enough of this nonsense . . .

I suppose I read this seasonal summary as much for clues on interesting areas to read more about as anything else. If you like the slightly off-center type of report, you might enjoy the marvelous way in which J. B. Gollop covers, in taxonomic order, the entire spectrum from Glaucous-winged Gull to Band-tailed Pigeon in a single sentence (Prairie Provinces) or take a guess at what bird you'd look for on top of telephone booths in the snow at Crater Lake, Oregon. There is the sad but strange story of Hawaii's only Golden Eagle, related by Bob Pyle, and from South Texas comes word that both Red-tailed and Ferruginous hawks are evolving into creatures reminiscent of Africa's Bat Hawk. And I must admit I had to

chuckle when Richard Yank and Yves Aubry tell us that a Ringed Turtle-Dove in Quebec was "undoubtedly of captive origin". Now an over-abundance of caution has merit, but since the RTD never existed in the wild state, they would have been safe even with a ringing characterization. But such is the birding world. You can never get anyone to agree on anything except that it is all fun. So here's to some 80 pages of fun to follow!

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Western Meadowlark/Drawing by David Plank