

# The Changing Seasons

Dear Susan:

I've just finished nosing over the pile of regional reports. And though I would dearly love to tackle a *Changing Seasons*, though I found the opportunity to read the reports rewarding and enjoyable, Susan, I'm afraid that I just don't have the time and the wherewithal to pull it off right now. Sorry.

I know I don't have to explain myself to a workaholic like you, but I'm committed up to my adenoids in projects, the circling pack of disgruntled editors is beginning to get positively lupine and damn it, Susan, I haven't been birding since Galileo peeked through the wrong end of a microscope.

I simply can't do it.

## A chimera according to committee

It was strange and unnerving having an entire North American autumn stacked next to the reading table. I mean, *THERE IT WAS*, inviting appraisal—a million moments of excitement and discovery filtered through ten thousand eyes, sifted and crystallized through thoughtful minds. The prospect of teasing sense from it was frightening, alluring, exciting, daunting, challenging. And just a little too tempting.

All right, just one, I thought to myself. Just one. I leafed through the pack, pulled a random manuscript, and read about the influx of Black-vented Shearwaters, Red-billed Tropicbirds, Red-footed Boobies, Xantus and Craveri's murrelets; a bargain-basement landbird showing, the initiation of landbird counts by the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory and a record-count for migrating raptors.

Hmmmm, the old hawk watcher in me mused. Hmmmm, I wonder how Duluth fared this year.

I rummaged through the pile again, grabbed the Northern Great Plains Regional Report by mistake, got sucked in by David Lambeth's opening lines and fell under the spell of autumn in a distant land where eleven species of warblers set record arrival dates, and two adult and five immature Black-shouldered Kites were discovered 1500 miles from any known breeding site.

Firmly seduced by accounts from exotic places, I fell on the stack again, on the hunt for Chuck Sexton and Greg Lasley's tales from the South Texas Region. Enroute, I hit Bruce Peterjohn's Middlewestern Prairie Region (*Huh, wonder what happened in Bruce's fief*) and tabled it for "next."

I found Greg's . . . but not before being bushwhacked by Guy McCaskie and his Southern Pacific Coast chronicles . . . and then went back to Bruce and then realized that I hadn't even read my own region yet, and then . . .

Greg Lasley and Chuck Sexton used the term "mosaic" to describe conditions in southern Texas, but the term is apt and can be fairly applied to the entire *American Birds* reporting region. The fall was a mosaic of avian shortage and plenty. What kind of season it seemed to be depended on what part of the country you grabbed from the pile.

I was struck (bludgeoned by near—universal concensus) that with few exceptions regional reporters right across the continent expressed similar sentiments about the

weather. I can summarize it cleanly and you can check it against the vote of the committee: Autumn 1987 was hot and dry; a mosaic of parched land, mudflats, and dry fronts.

In many places, the warblers came early—"surprisingly early" was the way Daryl Tessen of the Western Great Lakes Region put it, with the migration already in motion by the time the season commenced.

How come? *¿Quién sabe?* Who knows? Maybe it was all because of the El Niño. Maybe it's as Dave Lambeth suggests, a mild spring permits early breeding permitting early departure. Maybe the destruction of tropical habitat selects in favor of early migration; first come, first served. Or maybe it was the French bomb tests, or sun spot activity or a poor shorebird migration that forced birders into the woodlands prematurely.

Maybe more and more birders are picking up on the fact that many species of warblers are on the move in the last third of July every year.

And in most places, the birds stayed late; "late records were too many to enumerate" in the Northern Great Plains, the extreme expression of a near-universal feeling. Only the Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain Region excused itself from the majority opinion—and even here, the dissent was factional.

When the votes were finally called to assess the migration, opinions were a little less uniform. In fact, the stable of editors turned in the usual eclectic mess. Words like: "lackluster," "unremarkable," "dull," and (shudder) "pathetic" vied with expressions like: "most exciting fall period in recent memory," and "a fall to remember."

Assessments were often less than clearcut even at the regional level. In Ontario, passerine groundings were few and gull numbers were down; but large concentrations of waterfowl and shorebirds were noted and raptor counts found niches in the record books.

Personal penchants notwithstanding, in the eyes of most birders, seasons rise or fall on the basis of the passerine flights and as R.D. Purrington put it: "the landbird migration was generally found to be unimpressive." Hawk flights, shorebirds, and rarities can shore up a season and stave off disaster. But, by and large, as go the passerines, so goes the season and in 1987, with few exceptions, passerines went somewhere else.

When the regional summations get plotted, the big picture shows wealth and plenty in the northeast and the nation's southwest corner; and an overriding sense of mild to rabid disgruntlement just about everywhere else.

But whatever your particular interest or geographic allegiance, no matter what region you turn to, every editor found something to boast about, and something to bitch about. And I, as reader, pouring through reports, I discovered exciting things, disturbing things, astounding things and thought-provoking things.

It's a chimera, Susan. It's an elephant and we are the blind men. Every time you look, the season looks like something different. Every region you read gives you a different feeling, a different story. Every regional assessment supports one region and contradicts another. Snowy Owls tumble out of Canada, hordes of siskins sweep across the continent, and a single sandpiper drops into Massachusetts and flips the earth on its axis.

I haven't got the time for this, Susan. It's fascinating. It's seductive and addictive, but it causes cavities in my productivity. I'd love to . . . but I just haven't got time to read it all and do it justice.

I stretch out my hand again. *Maybe I'll read just one more, I think. Maybe the next regional report is the catalyst, the missing link, the one that will draw it all into focus.*

I place a fresh report under the glow of the lamp.

I glance at the name and recall an old memory of mountains, dwarf willows, and courting Snow Buntings.

I turn the page.

## Abacus Rex

You know, Susan, I came to realize this fall just how fortunate we are in North America. We have so many species of birds and so many individuals that you can almost reach the point where you just take them for granted. Last October I hopped a little junket to the United Kingdom, a tidy, compelling but comparatively birdless place, and came away with a renewed appreciation for what we have here. The regional reports bear me out.

The rarities and the people who find them will command their fair share of interest in these pages whether attention is drawn to them or not. But numbers so rarely get boldfaced and the Dave Wardses, who conduct their own 109 hour sea watches, the Arthur Morriszes, Claudia Wildses or Tony Amoses who conduct their guerrilla shorebird surveys—and the hundreds of hawk watchers and bird observatory volunteers—sometimes fail to get a fair hearing.

Here's a sample of the wealth I panned from the reports. Just a sample. Imagine . . . seasonal counts of 22,700 loons (90% Red-throateds) and 20,470 Northern Gannets off New Jersey. Sound impressive? How about 107,000 Pacific Loons off Pigeon Point, San Mateo November 15? (They casually refer to this as: "a major migration" out there.)

There were 7200 Buller's (Buller's!) Shearwaters and 110,000 Surf Scoters off Point Reyes; 2500 Black-vented Shearwaters off Morro Bay.

The Northern Great Plains Region offers 100,000 Snow Geese, 30,000–60,000 Gadwalls; the Western Great Lakes Region had 50,000 Canada Geese in Horicon National Wildlife Refuge; the Northern Pacific Coast 5000 Redheads in Wanapum Pool in the Columbia River November 4; 10,000 Red-breasted Mergansers at Point Pelee, Ontario, November 1; 9000 Ring-necked Ducks in Minnesota; 300,000 American Coots at Tule Lake, California, September 7.

Well, waterfowl numbers are down, it's true.

Consider 200,000 Sandhill Cranes in Saskatchewan. Consider 35,000 Bonaparte's Gulls August 18 at Long Point.

When I saw a count of 15,000 Lesser Yellowlegs August 4 at Rice Lake Conservation Area, Illinois, I figured it for a typo. When I read down to the figure of 20,000 Pectoral Sandpipers I got up and mixed myself a drink.

Which was damn fortunate because without fortification when I hit the 257 Buff-breasted Sandpipers at Riverton Wildlife Management Area August 2, the shock might have killed me.

I loved Bruce Peterjohn's observation that they were scarce elsewhere.

**NOT ELSEWHERE, BRUCE, EVERYWHERE. THE GREEDY LITTLE PIGS AT RIVERTON TIED UP THE WHOLE CONTINENTAL QUOTA.**

There were 10,000 Long-billed Curlews at Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge, California October 24.

There were 134 Bar-tailed Godwits in Anchorage—the 4th–137th local records for the species and 201 Bristle-thighed Curlews on Palmyra Atoll (far outnumbering other migrating species there).

*Dear God: If it's not too late, I'd like to cancel my reservation for eternity and transfer it to a small atoll that lies . . .*

About 9496 Common Nighthawks went by Duluth August 21; 20,000 Chimney Swifts roosted in Washington, D.C.

Twenty-five thousand Bank Swallows were at Long Point August 18 (lower numbers than usual); 60,000 Tree Swallows at Lake Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge, Illinois; 10,000 Purple Martins in North Dakota and 8000 Cliff Swallows at Salyer National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota September 15.

Duluth scores again with 3400 Blue Jays September 8 and 10,247 American Robins September 30. Circa 6600 Swainson's Thrushes were recorded en passe the night of September 14-15 at Kingston, Ontario.

Five thousand Yellow-rumped Warblers went by Point Pelee in 2 hours October 11, and 500 Snow Buntings per hour passed Niagara-on-the-Lake November 13-20.

Susan, we have so, so much wealth here, why, we can get positively cavalier, even casual about it.

Ah, right, nearly forgot. One last number. A haunting specter that gives poignancy to all the rest.

California Condor: 0.

We have such wealth. It makes me proud.

### The wealth of regions

In any redistribution of wealth (which is, after all, what migration is all about) things don't get divvied up equally or everywhere the same. The migration of diurnal raptors probably offers the clearest example of this. Raptors have a big fan club. No group of migrating birds is covered more systematically or more widely or more enthusiastically. And the picture painted by this season's summaries is a patchwork of plenty and paucity—a mosaic in pure applied motion.

### The Haves

If fortune or inclination found you on the north shore of the Great Lakes, along the backbone of the Kittatinny Ridge, at Cape May, atop the Goshutes in Utah or standing among the faithful at the Golden Gate Hawk Watch, there was plenty to see and plenty to report on.

Holiday Beach, Ontario, set eight record high counts, in their 5th year, the Goshute Project tallied a record high . . . and at Golden Gate observers set (what else?) RECORD HIGHS for 11 species.

Venerable Hawk Mountain recorded 14 species of hawks (and both vultures) in one day—the greatest one-day species tally in its 54 year history! And the Golden Eagle count! In the East Golden Eagle counts went off the board from the Lakes to the Ridge.

### The Have Nots

But there is only a finite number of birds out there; someone wins; someone loses. Where Cape May's Peregrine count of 686 was a record; at Assateague Island, a short hop as Peregrines gauge things, the count was a dismal and inexplicable 381. In the Appalachian Region, hawk watchers had "an average season." At Hawk Ridge, Minnesota, it was disappointing—an all-time low. Along the Texas coast, there were some "good flights of Broad-wingeds" seen, but none of the spectacular numbers that have been reported in the past.

Somebody wins; somebody loses. Zero sum in a closed system.

### Invasions, incursions, dispersals

Pushed by El Niño, an impressive number of warm water pelagic species surged up the California coast. Roseate Spoonbills mustered an "exceptional dispersal" in the Central Southern Region that spilled over into the adjacent Southern Great Plains with a bird in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And five (perhaps six) Great Blue Herons reached Hawaii.

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks engaged in a scattering of sorts. The farthest flung were two in Minnesota (that remained until the opening day of hunting season) and a dead immature male in King William, Virginia.

Willow Ptarmigan inundated the lowlands in Alaska; Yellow-billed Cuckoos swarmed northward into Ontario and an auspicious push of Snowy Owls drifted across northern regions west to the Rockies. In Quebec, Ontario, and the Western Great Lakes, they enjoyed an entourage of Boreal Owls and Northern Hawk-Owls.

Rufous Hummingbirds peppered the country; Buff-bellied Hummingbirds inundated Louisiana (17 reported)—and Mississippi got its first. Eleven Vermilion Flycatchers were tallied in the Central South, five reached southern California. Singles were recorded in Colorado, Florida, Tennessee (1st state record) . . . and one even found its way to Jones Beach, New York (another first).

Thirteen Blue-winged Warblers on the Texas coast might deserve to be called an invasion.

In Arizona, New Mexico, and southern California corvidae quit the highlands and pitched into lowland areas. Pine Siskins engaged in a preemptive eruption over the eastern one-half of the country and Clay-colored Sparrows spread a wealth of sightings in California and the Hudson-Delaware Region.

### Expansions

Among those less itinerate species looking for more elbow room . . .

Black Vultures are increasing geometrically in Delaware. A late report documents the nesting of Herring Gulls in Wyoming for what may portend interesting times ahead for western observers.

Red-bellied Woodpeckers push deeper into Wisconsin. Brown-headed Cowbirds are spreading south into Florida where they may, conceivably, meet the invading Shiny Cowbird (trapping, as the compilers observe, the Prairie Warbler and Black-whiskered Vireo between a rock and a hard spot).

House Finches continued their drive to the West and are reported expanding rapidly in Wisconsin. And Great-tailed Grackles have produced a new breeding location in Missouri.

### Entrenchments

With the exception of siskins, finches and their northern allies sat this migration out.

### Some came early

Adult shorebirds arrived about one week early in the Hudson-Delaware Region. Ontario, the Western Great Lakes, the Central Southern Region, Northern Great Plains . . . in fact nearly everybody commented on the early arrival of passerines, particularly warblers and record early arrival dates were overturned in wholesale lots.

## Some stayed late

The overly warm season kept water open even in the northern reaches of the reporting area. Waterfowl were still present in abundance right to the end of the period in the Prairie Provinces Region (a Great Blue Heron was at Prince Albert November 29). Lingering passerines set "many record late dates" in Ontario . . . and the Great Lakes . . . and the Northern Great Plains . . .

One hundred Broad-winged Hawks October 24 at Cincinnati is one for the record books. The Hammond's Flycatcher in Juneau, Alaska, was one day off the departure record.

## Lost and found

As usual, generous attention was paid to birds that by dint of dyslexia, inner ear disorders, cosmic misfortune, predestination, or as an exercise of free will, wandered off to some place where, according to conventional wisdom, they don't belong.

Most notable are: Canada's (and Quebec's) second Bean Goose; a possible Gray Flycatcher in Ontario; Ontario's first (Canada's third) Great-tailed Grackle; a possible first Cassin's Finch for Minnesota; Indiana's first Mew Gull and Arctic Tern; Iowa's first Ancient Murrelet; a Groove-billed Ani for Iowa; a documented record of Purple Sandpiper for Mississippi plus first records of Black-chinned and Buff-bellied hummingbirds, and Painted Redstart.

A Grace's Warbler represented a first for the Upper Texas Coast (second for the Region); a Crimson-collared Grosbeak in Bentsen also made the Regional roster. A Pine Warbler staked a claim for an Arizona first (six turned up in California); Crested Caracara was new for California; a Dusky Warbler furnished California's and the lower 48's third record.

A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and an Alder Flycatcher would be firsts for southern California—but must withstand the test of the California Bird Records Committee (and time).

And though not necessarily lost, but undeniably found—a White-faced Storm-Petrel 80 miles off Montauk Point, New York.

Congratulations, Susan.

## Really lost

Reports from the frontier aren't easily juxtaposed with other regions, but sightings from Alaska, Hawaii, and the West Indies deserve their due. Alaska harvested a number of interesting records (in most cases literally) including the State's third Philadelphia Vireo; two Tennessee Warblers; a Northern Parula (first State record); one assailable and one unassailable Palm Warbler; a Mourning Warbler (first State record); a Swamp Sparrow and "a lone female House Sparrow observed feeding in a backyard duck pen in Petersburg October 23" that provided Alaska's first certain record of this family and species.

In peaceful Hawaii a female Common Merganser was only the second ever recorded; a South Polar Skua was the first skua ever pinned down to species. Black-rumped Waxbill, a species unreported in 10 years, was rediscovered.

In the West Indies, increased interest and coverage added a host of island firsts—including the first accipiter to ever turn up in the Virgin Islands, a possible Bald Eagle in the southern Bahamas and for the ultimate in sublime thrills—

the apparent establishment of European Starling in Puerto Rico.

While we are ranging far afield, autumn migration brushed even more distant shores depositing a surfeit of Yank goodies in the United Kingdom including: a Chimney Swift, two Yellow-billed Cuckoos, England's first Wood Thrush, it's third Hermit Thrush, three Swainson's Thrushes, one Veery (second record), five Red-eyed Vireos, one Philadelphia Vireo (first record), one Black-and-white Warbler, two Yellow-rumped Warblers, one Blackpoll Warbler, two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks . . . and a Bald Eagle in Ireland (*vide* Jeff Delve).

Susan, have you ever considered adding a U.K. region? If your budget can't accommodate it, maybe we could just tuck it into the Northeastern Maritime Region? What do you think?

Just short of fiction.

In a class by themselves—a Cox's Sandpiper in Massachusetts; a Green Violet-ear at a feeder in Ashville, North Carolina; and a Red-backed Buzzard in Colorado.

## Comparing apples and orange crates

Discovery is a sweet, sweet thing Susan, and it's all the more delicious if you've paid its price in frustration. Your reports brought me to an understanding of North American birding that I have walked the rim of for years, but never put into perspective.

God knows, I tried to beat the sundry reports into some semblance of rational conformity. I tried to find the magic formula that would put the season into perspective so I could tie a neat package labeled Autumn 1987 and leave it on your doorstep.

I tried spreading the reports out on the floor in a paper replication of North America and started reading east to west, sleuthing trends. This might have worked a whole heck of a lot better if migrations didn't run north to south.

Some expert, right?

Next, I tried comparing adjacent regions on the hunt for common denominators (but found that most of the common stuff had already been culled from the reports). Then I played leap-frog through the pack focusing on individual species . . . then groups of species. Still no soap. Couldn't find a binding thread anywhere.

It was Greg Lasley and Chuck Sexton's tales of Texas that produced the catalyst—that single word, again, that put it all in perspective: "mosaic."

Mosaic, I mused. *Mosaic*. A picture painted by independent elements. *Independent . . . autonomous . . . idiosyncratic . . .*

Different!

I reached for the Middle Atlantic Coast and I reached across the continent to southern California and read them back to back. Susan, the difference in focus and content wasn't a matter of apples and oranges—we're talking apples and orange crates.

I grabbed other regions, letting hunches and the limit of my reach guide selections. And where occasionally, regional differences were indiscernible, often the difference in the way birding is approached and executed in different parts of the country is stark and startling. It manifests itself in how people study birds—what they hope to see, what they do see, how they see it, what importance they accord it, how (whether?) they report it, and what regional editors find significant enough put in print.

It affects anyone who attempts to analyze and construct a *Changing Seasons* by reading these reports.

The Middlewestern Prairie Region offers a fine point of departure—a report that if representative of birding in the region as a whole bespeaks a nicely balanced, evenhanded approach. Fair attention is paid to early arrivals, late departures, and peak numbers for expected species. Rarities are flagged but not overworked. No group of species seems to have popular ascendancy over another but a concern for species whose numbers seem to be in decline is evident. The editor shows a keen depth of awareness for birds whose numbers fall below par for the season—a not so universal trait. And the text is laced with a sly brand of humor that makes you want to read close.

“Mimids elicited few comments” (*sic, sic, sic*).

The scope and tone of the Middle Atlantic Coast and the Appalachian regions are similar in many respects but differ in one major regard—they add and accent the quantitative perspective afforded by passerine banding stations.

In Ontario, so long as a bird moves in numbers it's got the popular vote. No region focuses greater emphasis upon quantification—waterfowl at Long Point, Niagara Falls, Pelee; raptors at Hawk Cliff and Holiday Beach; gulls along lakeshore points . . . and swallows, and corvids, and kinglets, and thrushes, and warblers. Is this Long Point Bird Observatory's influence or a little something picked up via the British Commonwealth?

And unless a disproportionate number of birds die in Ontario, few regions are more attentive to passively acquired specimens—64 Double-crested Cormorants stuffed into grain sacks; King Eiders in a hunter's bag; a window-killed Canada Warbler, a Summer Tanager killed by a car. Perhaps the bird observatory influence again.

Birders right-next-door, in Quebec, clearly do not share Ontario's fascination with numbers. The greatest number reported was an aggregate species total of 125 Snowy Owl sightings for the Region. The largest number of birds sitting in one place at one time was 24 Red-throated Loons. The average number of sightings per species is just about: one.

Arrival and departure dates are kept to a minimum. The principal focus appears to be occurrence. But two very thoughtful and thorough analyses, one on the Cap-Tourmente Bean Goose and one on a regional invasion of Yellow-billed Cuckoos belie any notion that this is a soup-bone region with all the meat trimmed off.

The focus of the Southern Pacific Coast is spelled out in the opening line: “This was the most exciting fall migration in recent memory with 445 species reported.”

Birders with the right stuff train their sights on finding and documenting species. If found, give its *age, sex, and subspecies classification*.

You get the impression that birding in Southern California is a solo effort. This seems to be a one bird: one observer credit society and the number of observers vying for credit is startling (not that a few names don't keep turning up). Compare this to the Hudson-Delaware where somebody named *et al.* gets in on almost everything and the compilers get their information second hand *via fide*.

Or compare it to the Central Southern Region where sightings may be hitched to a train of up to eight co-observers. (Is birding such a social thing in the Central Southern Region or are there just lots of researchers down there?)

Back to the Southern Pacific Coast Region. . . . I like the regional emphasis on aggregate sightings. “Nine Lucy's Warblers along the coast between August 30 and November 19 was more than expected. . . . Some 125 Palm Warblers were reported including an exceptionally early. . . .” It seems an attractive mechanism for monitoring species that fall in the lower range of frequency. And, I like the aggregate species total—a simple and effective measure of a season Robert Purrington's disclosure that 1500 record cards

were generated in his Central Southern Region serves the same function, but Guy McCaskie's system seems more tailored toward universal adoption.

And New England? What's the tone and focus and most distinguishing characteristic of down east birders? I don't know. I never got their report.

My favorite regional report? That's a tough one, but I think Greg Lasley and Chuck Sexton's South Texas chronicles edge out a tough pack. The editors weave a column that combines the best characteristics of other regional reports then add some engaging traits of their own.

They dealt handily and thoroughly with documentation of numbers, movements, rarities. They did not overlook passively acquired specimens (“. . . a dead Manx Shearwater was found on Mustang I. . .”).

Their focus included behavior (which did not seem to be a universal interest). Wait till you read their account of a Little Blue Heron dry gulched by Great-tailed Grackles Amazing!

They took pains to present trends in the light of history. “Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were reported in excellent numbers. This species began a range expansion nearly a decade ago that continues today.”

I think, though, that the element I found most compelling was the regional concern for the welfare of birds (which is a thinly disguised way of saying “conservation”). I shy from the term because it seems to have fallen out of vogue in many birding circles.

The report documents an oil spill that affected 10,000 shorebirds; voiced concern over the old (and presumed dead) hazard of “egging” and bemoaned the loss of critical habitat (e.g., the Mission and McAllen sewage ponds—cruel victims of technology).

No, nothing wrong with their sense of humor, either.

Only the West Indies Region lavished greater attention upon conservation. In fact, after reading that report you might almost conclude that the editor regards birding and a concern for bird preservation inseparable. What a novel idea.

In short, I found the Lasley/Sexton account interesting, all encompassing, and eminently readable. But a nagging question remains with regards to all the columns: Do the differences in the columns really reflect differences in the focus and nuances of bird study in a region or do they simply reflect the idiosyncracies of the authors?

The answer to that cannot be divined from the reports, but I think it is fair to say that cause and effect are hopelessly intertwined here. It is probably not just coincidence that the editor of the Appalachian Region is an avid bander; that the editor of the Southern Pacific Coast Region is a keen and enthusiastic lister; that one of the editors in Alaska shepherds the specimen collection at the University of Alaska. On the other hand, I cannot conceive of any editor, drawn from the ranks of a region, that does not reflect the interests, spirit and focus of that region. And if the focus of a particular editor actually modifies the way birding is conducted in a region—well, birding has been influenced by individuals before.

But this is the bottom line—though editors can (and will) emphasize facets of birding that they find particularly interesting and downplay others, they are still in the final analysis, only editors. The only material they have to work with is the material that they are given.

What does the future hold? In a birding society that is becoming increasingly mobile, what is going to happen to the regional focuses that I perceive and *American Birds'* columns seem to reflect? I don't know. Let's stick around and find out.

I think a certain amount of hybridization and conformity

is likely (though I doubt that fixed-point migration counts will ever be the rage in New Mexico or that atlasing will ever whip California birders into a fever pitch). But for me and for now, I love and applaud the diversity that characterizes birding in North America. We are richer for it and so are the pages of American Birds. Which brings me back to the purpose of this letter.

Damn. What do you do with all the left over parts?  
Susan, I'm really sorry to have dragged on so long with this. I really meant to write a quick apology, package up the reports and just send 'em back (and you're probably just as well have written the damn Changing Seasons right?).  
Well, perhaps, but I know I just can't do justice to all the nuances and nuggets buried in the text.

Wait till you read the account of "strange, long-legged creatures" lurking in the streets of a quiet Texas town. Some real Class A investigative reporting there. I'll bet American Birds even scoops the National Inquirer on this one.  
And it sure looks like rarities committees are in for some new problems, too. Ontario a Least Bittern was caught right on the Post Office door and there is a suspicious Burrowing Owl/UPS scam in Ohio. A freighter-hopping Boreal Owl landed in Holland. Long Point's first Yellow-breasted Chat is an obvious auto-assist and in Wyoming, a west-bound Northern Bobwhite is suspected of having ties to rails.

The more you look the more you find.  
Whip-poor-wills linger in the Hudson-Delaware Region and get stuck in the Central Southern Region. Red-shouldered Hawks eat suet in Pennsylvania and catfish in Texas. In the Mountain West Region, Swamp Sparrows "poured" into the region and "spilled" across the mountains while in the Middle Pacific Coast Region, grebes fly!  
In Wisconsin, observers who want to see an ani are going to have to wait till the cows come home and in the Central Southern Region, a vestigial population of Louisiana Herons (presumed extinct since 1982) lingers on . . . a condition that aptly applies to this letter.

So, Susan, thanks again for giving me the opportunity to preview the fall and like I said, I'm really sorry I can't field the Changing Seasons' editor is going to have loads of fun with it, and, just like everyone else, I'm really looking forward to seeing it set and bound.  
Thanks again.

Pete Dunne  
Director, Natural History Information  
New Jersey Audubon Society

P.S. Please ask me again sometime.  
P.P.S. If you have any seats left on the September Pelagic—could you put my name on one? Thanks.