

LETTERS

Early Birder

On the matter of the oldest occurrence of the word "birder," which you raised in ". . . from the editor's desk" (Spring 1988), both the year of birth and the year of death of John Heywood (1497?-1580?) are uncertain, but the year of his epigram *Of Byrdes and Byrders* evidently is not: it is given without qualification as 1546 by *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (third edition, 1970). By the way, the original form of the epigram (fide B. A. Milligran) is:

Better one byrde in hand, then ten
in the wood.

Better for byrders, but for byrdes
not so good.

There is, however, an earlier occurrence of the word "birder" or "byder." One day in 1482 ("the xxij yer of the kyng"), a member of the household of John Howard, soon to become the first duke of Norfolk and Earl Marshal of England, recorded in his ledger:

Item, the v. day of Aprill, my Lord
gaff to a byder of the Quenes xx.d.

The Howard household books remained in manuscript until 1844, when they were published in Lon-

don by the Roxburge Club. We are not told why John Howard "gaff" 20 pence to Her Majesty's birder, but the "Quene" was Elizabeth Woodville, whose two young sons, Edward V and the Duke of York, were murdered in 1483 in the Tower of London after the death of their father Edward VI, by someone anxious to remove them from the succession. Some people (see William Shakespeare, *Richard III*) think this crime was perpetrated by the boys' uncle who thereby became Richard III. Others (see Josephine Tey, *The Daughter of Time*) now blame the first Tudor king, Henry VII, who succeeded in 1485, and by marrying the daughter of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville, united the houses of Lancaster and York and ended the Wars of the Roses.

But I digress. The date of "birder" is thus pushed back from 1546 to 1482. In these early instances of the word, what was meant was hunter, trapper, or killer of birds, a usage that had become obsolete by the first half of the 17th century. A "birder" could also be a breeder of birds, and the word was a vernacular name of the European Wild Cat (*Felis catus*). The modern meaning—"One who observes or identifies birds in their natural surroundings"—arose only in this century. It has supplanted "birdwatcher," leaving the latter free to develop a new and more specialized meaning (at the expense of "ornithologist").

—John Farrand, Jr.,
New York, NY.

I was intrigued by your challenge to find the oldest source of the word "birder." (Though in its early form it meant hunter of birds, not watcher.)

I suspect my candidate may be less comely, because it has an obsolete spelling, but I wish to suggest it for what it is worth: the date given is 1481-1490, which makes it earlier than the John Heywood poem. There is no individual name appended to it, as it is an excerpt from a series of

Household Books, where, presumably, records of castle life were kept: "My Lord gaff to a byrder of the Quenes." (I'm not at all sure what "gaff" means in that context.) This brief note is from the Household Books of John Duke of Norfolk, and Thomas Earl of Surrey.

I suspect many readers may have sent this example to you. It did not take immense erudition to locate, as I simply turned to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Of course, birder is spelled with a "y", and there may be an earlier instance yet . . .

American Birds has been a very enjoyable magazine. I began my subscription this year, and have returned to active birding after a hiatus of nearly a decade. I look forward to every issue. It has brought an old pleasure back into my life.

—K. E. Duffin,
Cambridge, MA.

I read with interest your query about first use of "birder" in literary history.

I believe the first recorded use was in the year 1481, and the first use of the word "birder" applied to a "fowler" or bird catcher in the year 1622.

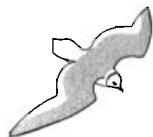
—John K. Terres,
New Canaan, CT.

Juvenile Cox's Sandpiper Update

The editing of our article "Juvenile Cox's Sandpiper" (Winter 1987) changed carefully chosen wording and deleted several sentences to the point where the article lost some of its clarity. I would like to re-iterate some of these points.

1. Our investigation of juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper (*C. melanotos*) and Curlew Sandpiper (*C. ferruginea*) plumage features revealed several characters on Cox's Sandpiper which fell beyond the range of either putative genotype. These need not

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be restated here. The important point is that these characters do not represent either phenotype, nor do they represent any intermediate feature between the two phenotypes. Presumably hybridization does not lead to a series of characters that fall beyond the range of either genotype.

2. Cox (1987) was the first to thoroughly examine possible hybrid combinations and was the first to narrow the hybrid question to Pectoral Sandpiper \times Curlew Sandpiper. This was acknowledged in the original manuscript but unfortunately deleted from the printed article.

3. Personal communication with Ralph S. Palmer and Kenneth C. Parkes and review of the literature, notably Gray (1958), helped us establish the virtual absence of reported hybridization in the genus *Calidris*. These sources were acknowledged in the original manuscript, but deleted from the printed article.

4. Nomenclature of body parts and plumage characters follows (Johnson and Grant 1984). This was referenced in the original manuscript, but deleted from the printed article.

5. The Literature Cited should read as follows:

- COX, J. B. 1987. Some notes on the perplexing Cox's Sandpiper. *S. Aust. Ornith.* 30:85-97.
- GRAY, A. P. 1958. Bird Hybrids. Tech. Comm. No. 13, Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau, Bucks, England.
- HAYMAN, P., J. MARCHANT, and T. PRATER. 1986. Shorebirds, an identification guide to the waders of the world. Houghton-Mifflin Co., Boston.
- JONSSON, N. K., and P. J. GRANT. 1984. Identification of stints and peeps. *Brit. Birds* 77:293-315.
- PARKER, S. A. 1982. A new sandpiper of the genus *Calidris*. *S. Australian Naturalist*. 56:63.

— Peter D. Vickery,
Lincoln, MA.

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