

Photographs in the Regional Reports

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In each seasonal issue we publish many photographs that represent notable bird occurrences. These photos add immensely to the attractiveness and interest of the Regional Reports, and they also add to the information content; many birders (including the editors) study them avidly.

Unfortunately, *American Birds* is not in a position to pay for use of these photographs. However, their appearance in these pages guarantees that they will be widely noted and appreciated by the community of field ornithologists.

If you have taken a sharp, attractive photo of some out-of-range bird, and would like to contribute it to *American Birds*, please send it to your Regional Editor. He or she is in a better position than we are to judge the significance of each photo and to act as a clearing-house for the best pictures of the season. In addition, your photo may provide the evidence that the Regional Editor needs to be convinced of a particular record that involves a tricky identification.

We ask that you do the following, to make things easier for your Regional Editor and for us:

1. Send photos promptly at the end of the reporting season, or before. The Regional Editors are working on very short deadlines, and photographs that they receive more than a month after the end of the reporting period are likely to miss the seasonal issue.

Season	Ends	photos due no later than
Winter	Feb. 28/29	March 25
Spring	May 31	June 25
Summer	July 31	August 25
Fall	November 30	December 25

2. Send either slides or small to medium-sized prints. Slides are definitely

the easiest medium for us to work with, and they often produce the sharpest reproductions in the magazine. Large prints are more awkward to handle.

3. Label each photograph *legibly*. Minimum information should include the species, the location (this can be heavily abbreviated if the record is such an unusual one that we will receive that information anyway), the date on which the photo was taken (a bird present for an extended period may change in appearance, through molt or plumage wear, and its looks on a particular date may be of significance), and your name. Please be sure to spell your name out very legibly—we want to be sure to give you proper credit for your photos.

4. Label each photo in a *non-damaging* way. Occasionally, distressingly, we have received series of prints crammed together in envelopes with the ink from the back of each print marring the face of the next. If prints must be sent instead of slides, please label each in a non-smearing ink, and/or separate the prints with small sheets of paper. Writing on the back of a print with ballpoint pen may break the emulsion on the front, further damaging the photo, so the best way to mark any print is to write the information on an adhesive label and then stick it on. Again, these problems can be avoided by sending slides instead.

We take every precaution in handling photographs. But because these pictures must pass through so many steps before they can be returned, neither *American Birds* nor our Regional Editors can assume full responsibility for irreplaceable photos. Photographers should be aware that it will be a period of at least several months be-

fore photos will be returned.

If, however, rather than having your rarity photos returned, you would like to contribute them to a major documentary collection where they will be permanently available to researchers, please read on.

Rare Bird Photographs and VIREO

Most readers of *American Birds* are undoubtedly aware of VIREO (Visual Resources for Ornithology), at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. The world's foremost scientific collection of bird photographs, VIREO was profiled in our May-June 1984 issue, and it is now featured in our column "The Practiced Eye" in each seasonal issue. Still barely a decade old, VIREO has firmly established its value for education and reference.

One of the ways in which bird photos can have major scientific value is when they document out-of-range occurrences. In most regions of North America, photography has replaced specimen collecting as the means of documenting rarities. For most birds, a series of photos can prove a record just as well as a museum skin could. But a problem remains: while specimens have always tended to wind up in museums, photographs tend to scatter to a million private collections, eventually to disappear. The researcher who wishes to follow up on a particular record may have major difficulties trying to find the photos.

VIREO has been addressing this problem recently by developing a collection of such rare bird documentary photographs, accessed through a computerized database. Several organizations have aided in this project: the American Birding Association provided initial funding, the Point Reyes

Bird Observatory contributed many vagrant shots from fabled Southeast Farallon Island, and Hawaii's Bishop Museum (through the efforts of Robert L. Pyle) is furnishing copies of numerous record photos from the 50th state. A number of individuals, including several of *American Birds*' Regional Editors, have provided many of their own rarity photos. But there is clearly room to make the collection far more comprehensive.

So in addition to the main VIREO collection, which serves a multitude of purposes (scientific, educational, artistic, commercial, and so on), VIREO has established a supplementary collection that will serve solely to document rarities.

Limits of the rarities file: Photos in the main VIREO collection are made available for commercial use and for duplication for a variety of non-profit and educational purposes. Photos in the rarities file, however, are being archived only for documentation. Researchers will have access to the collection by visiting VIREO, or they may arrange to obtain duplicates of specific photos at cost. Copies deposited will become property of VIREO; otherwise, the photographer will retain all rights to the photos.

Criteria: Some rare birds are less rare than others, of course, and the VIREO rarities file cannot embrace every record of minor local interest, so we must be selective in soliciting these photos. In general, the rarities file would like to receive photos of (A) any species for which the state or provincial records committee demands details; (B) for areas without such records committees, any species that occurs in the state or province fewer than three times per year on average; (C) for large or diverse states/provinces, any species remarkably far from expected areas (a common offshore bird like Greater Shearwater in the mountains of western Virginia would be an example); (D) any species occurring completely outside the expected seasonal pattern (a Bay-breasted Warbler in Manitoba in January would be an example). Particularly desired are photos of birds that are not only rare, but also difficult to identify and controversial in status: examples would include Swainson's Hawks and Swainson's Thrushes anywhere in North America in winter, Iceland Gulls in the West, Bell's Vi-



reos in the East, and so on. Such photos are likely to be of continued interest to researchers many years hence.

How to submit photos: Contributors to *American Birds* who are willing to have their photos archived in this supplementary file of rarities can do so by taking a couple of additional steps when sending the slides to their Regional Editor.

First, send slides that you do *not* need to have returned. These could be the originals (preferably), after you have had duplicates made to keep for yourself; or spare originals if you have taken numerous similar photos of the same bird; or high-quality duplicates. (Note that this arrangement differs from that of the standard VIREO collection, in which photographers are asked to contribute their originals and receive duplicates made by VIREO. For the main collection, that procedure will continue unchanged.)

Second—because the subject of rights and permissions for photographs can be complicated at times—we need something in writing to show that you are willing to have your slides archived in the VIREO rarities collection. This “something in writing” need not be very elaborate. It would suffice to write:

Clay-colored Sparrow at Point Reyes, California, October 16, 1988. Photograph/Peter LaTourrette.

“I am donating the enclosed rare bird photos of mine, sent to *American Birds*, to be archived permanently in the rarities collection at VIREO, as described in *American Birds* Volume 43, Number 1.”

Follow this with your name, address, date, and signature. This can be sent along with your photos to your Regional Editor.

The VIREO rarities file is not placing itself under an obligation to accept all such photos submitted, but every contribution will be very much appreciated, and those that are not accessioned into the rarities file will be returned to the photographer.

Although VIREO is still a young collection, it has the advantage of being a part of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, the longest-established natural history museum in the New World. The slide storage techniques used by VIREO have the ultimate goal of long-term preservation. The key word here is “longevity.” Designate your rarity slides to be given to VIREO and they will become a part of the permanent record, destined to be available for reference more than a century from now. ■