

OVERVIEW

P is for Peregrines

Peregrine Falcons have again made front-page news—this time in the New York tabloids. The September 5, 1992 front page of the *New York Post* was dominated not by presidential candidates, but the plight of one family of New York City's



Peregrine Falcons. For three years one of the nine pairs breeding in the area has nested behind the "P" of the Pan Am sign on the building formerly owned by that now-defunct airline. MetLife is the new building owner, and the name needs changing.

The insurance company is well aware of the need to protect the birds, and is consulting with state and local authorities on the best time to replace

the sign. If the letters are replaced in late fall or early winter when the Peregrines are not in residence, the only hardship to the birds may be adapting to a letter other than "P" hiding their nest, when they return.

Novel Nesting Sites Offer Oystercatcher Reprieve

In the 1930s, American Oystercatchers (*Haematopus palliatus*) were a common sight along the Florida coast. Today, however, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission lists these waders as a species of "special concern." The birds' natural nesting area is being overrun by a more common species, the tourist, which has claimed that beach niche for its own.



American Oystercatcher

However, the oystercatchers are adapting to this encroachment by expanding their choices of nesting sites. Pairs of oystercatchers have been spotted breeding on piles of dredged material in the Indian River Lagoon near Vero Beach, Florida. However, the birds are often unable to fledge their young because of boat traffic and fishermen. But last year, a member of the Commission found oystercatchers nesting in island communities of mature Australian pine trees. It was the first time the birds have been found in a woodland habitat, and it seems to be hospitable. All the birds nesting in the area successfully fledged their young.

Hide and Hatch

Female Wood Ducks will "dump" their eggs in any available nest if they spot another



Female Wood Duck

female entering a nest. This egg-laying response, which can result from poorly placed nesting boxes, results in fewer eggs hatching. Paul Sherman, a behavioral biologist, has found nests containing 30-40 eggs piled four and five layers deep. When this occurs, the eggs at the bottom of the nest receive insufficient warmth to develop, or they may get crushed and spread bacteria to other eggs. One way to reduce the amount of egg-dumping in an area, says Sherman, is to make sure that nest boxes are in the woods, well concealed from

each other. When boxes are properly hidden, the rate of dumping is reduced to about the same level as in natural nests.

Hawaii Mobilizes Against Snake Invasion from Guam

Fearing the decimation of the state's bird population, Hawaii is enlisting snake-sniffing dogs and the military in a prevention effort directed at the brown tree snake. A plague of the reptiles has wiped out most of the forest bird species on Guam and is now threatening Hawaii. Native to the Solomon Islands, New Guinea and the northern coast of Australia, brown tree snakes apparently hitchhiked to Guam on military planes. Once established, the snakes bred prodigiously, unchallenged by any natural predators. In Hawaii, which has no native snakes,

the discovery of six brown tree snakes at airports around the state has spurred officials into action. In addition to a public awareness program designed to enlist state residents in the battle to keep the snakes out, Hawaiian officials are urging naturalists around the country to consider the snakes a national problem. The state is home to many birds found nowhere else including the Hawaiian Stilt, the Hawaiian Duck and many species of honeycreepers. The avian population has already been hurt by imported animals like

the Indian mongoose and feral cats, with some species becoming extinct due to predation.

Urban Wildlife Refuge Takes Shape

The Nature Conservancy has secured 417 acres of wetlands



Greater Sandhill Crane

in Portland, Oregon. The parcel, Burlington Bottoms, runs along a channel of the Willamette. The area contains ponds, marshes, grasslands and woods, and supports populations of Trumpeter Swans, Peregrine Falcons and Bald Eagles. It is also a stopover point on the Pacific flyway for the Greater Sandhill Crane and over 100 migratory bird species. The refuge will offer great opportunities for wildlife viewing and education. Along with The Nature Conservancy, the project will include the Bonneville Power Administration which funds wildlife projects in the area; as well as city and state officials.

Proposal to List Mexican Spotted Owls as Threatened

The Mexican Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) has been proposed as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Compared to its cousin, the Northern Spotted Owl, the Mexican Spotted Owl has darker background plumage and more obvious white spots. It makes its home in dense mixed-age forests in mountain and canyon areas from Utah and Colorado to northwestern

Mexico. While the size of the Mexican population is unknown, about 2,160 remain in the United States. National forests in southern Arizona and New Mexico are home to about 90% of the U.S. population. The major threats to the owls are habitat-loss due to

logging and forest fires, and predation by Great Horned Owls and hawks, a pressure which is increasing as the protective cover is lost.

Gene Activated by Bird Song is Discovered

In a study that links behavior and biology, Dr. Claudio V. Mello and his colleagues at Rockefeller University in New York City have pinpointed a gene which is activated when a male songbird hears the song of another bird. The gene, referred to as ZENK, is believed to cause other genes to alter neurons in the brain. The alteration is thought to be part of the process by which long-term memory is created. The ZENK gene showed the



Zebra Finch

strongest response when male Canaries and Zebra Finches heard taped songs of other males of the same species. The

response was weaker when the birds heard calls of different songbirds, and there was no response when they were exposed to tones that were not part of bird songs. Female songbirds in the study showed some gene activity, leading researchers to surmise that the gene was necessary for females to recognize their own species' songs. Dr. Peter Marler, an authority on the behavior of bird song at the University of California at Davis, said of the discovery of the gene's action, "It's probably not an exaggeration to call this the dawning of a new era in research on the development of behavior."

Conservation Group Negotiates Stricter Penalty

When the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ordered Lowndes County, Georgia to pay \$30,000 to the U.S. Treasury as a fine for damaging 70 acres of wetlands—habitat for three endangered and one threatened species, including the Wood Stork—the National Wildlife Federation felt the fine was too low to act as a deterrent to others or to compensate for the damage that had been done. After negotiations, it was decided that the county will pay \$10,000 in fines, spend \$18,000 on wetlands education for teachers in the state, and purchase \$93,000 worth of area wetlands for preservation in the damaged area.

Tattle-tale Taxidermy

The nineteenth-century passion for collecting bird skins and feathers, and for taxidermy is yielding a clear picture of rising environmental mercury levels since the 1830's. Researchers at the University of Glasgow have developed a way to determine a bird's organic mercury level from as few as three feathers. The same

method is being applied to feathers from birds stuffed as far back as the 1830s providing a record of mercury in the environment. Modern-day puffins and Manx Shearwaters showed two and three times the mercury levels of their ancestors, but interestingly, the Northern Fulmars showed no increase. This may be because fulmars of the past ate primarily whale scraps, a by-product of the whaling industry. Whale offal is high in mercury. When the whaling fleet ceased its activity, the fulmars' diet shifted to sand eels and finfish scraps which don't contain so much accumulated mercury. In the southern hemisphere, the researchers have checked levels in albatrosses and found no change over the past 100 years, indicating that mercury pollution has not spread south from the northern hemisphere.

UPDATE

Bird-killing Pesticide Banned in Virginia

The Bald Eagle was dead, but

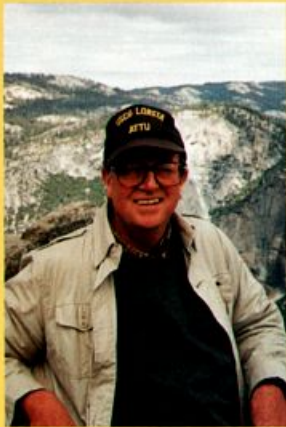


Bald Eagle

its death was not in vain. Five years after the discovery of the carcass in Henrico County, Virginia, that state became the first to ban a pesticide simply because it posed a threat to wildlife. When the bird's autopsy revealed that it had died from exposure to granulated carbofuran, an agricultural pesticide marketed as

BIRDER OF NOTE

John Leo



Age: 57

Home: Manhattan, New York

Profession: Currently: The "On Society" columnist for *U.S. News & World Report*. His column is syndicated nationally by Universal Press Syndicate and appears in 40 newspapers. Formerly: Prior to 1988, he covered the social sciences and intellectual trends for *Time Magazine* and *The New York Times*. He is also the author of "How the Russians Invented Baseball and Other Essays of Enlightenment," a book of humor.

How long birding? 11 years.

What field guides do you use? I use all of them; I collect them. My favorite is the National Geographic.

Binoculars: B & L Elite 8x42

Life list? Yes, presently with 675 North American birds.

Latest life bird: Little Egret in Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Virginia.

Any comments about it? It was more of a hassle than I expected. We had to pick it out of a large group of Snowy Egrets, all of whom were trying to pretend they were rare birds.

My favorite birding habitat is any remote wilderness that is reachable by car. Death marches in remote canyons do not fit my lifestyle.

My favorite place to bird is Cave Creek, Arizona.

My most spectacular bird sighting in North America was in June of 1992 when I saw a Stonechat in Gambell, Alaska.

My favorite North American species is the Great Gray Owl.

The most interesting place I have ever birded is in Arizona, at Cave Creek or in the Chiricahuas in general.

My favorite birding companion is Rudy Hoglund, the Art Director of *Time Magazine*.

Why do I bird? I bird because I am totally addicted; I can't help myself! I would say I am a maniacal birder, but controlled.

My biggest birding thrill was my very first birding trip to Cave Creek; it was the best of all.

The area in the United States I would like to bird next is: Arizona, again. I have made a total of six trips so far.

Quote: Birders must absolutely retain the ability to simulate interest in other things, so non-birders consider them normal!

Furadan, a group of conservationists began fighting to ban the substance in their home state. In 1990, Virginia's Pesticide Control Board decided to test the manufacturer's claim that proper use would reduce the deadly effects on the state's bird population. During the 1991 planting season, the company, FMC Corp. of Philadelphia, launched a publicity campaign to alert farmers to new application guidelines. State-trained monitors followed up, searching treated fields for dead birds which were sent to labs to determine cause of death. Despite the new techniques, carbofuran was responsible for tens of thousands of bird deaths. On the eve of the Pesticide Control Board decision, FMC announced that it would voluntarily stop selling Furadan in Virginia. The Board accepted FMC's decision, but in what the Board chairman called a "belts-and-suspenders approach," it also imposed an emergency ban on the chemical effective June 1, 1991. Perhaps inspired by Virginia's decisiveness, the EPA announced an agreement with FMC to phase out U.S. distribution of Furadan over a period of years. However, an FMC spokesman says exports of the pesticide will likely be increased to offset the loss in the domestic market.

Pilot Plan to Guide Swans

15,000 Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) spend the summer in Alaska, Canada and the Western United States, but their range used to extend across North America until they were wiped out east of the Rockies by settlers. Attempts at reestablishing these largest-of-all-waterfowl in the east have been unsuccessful because the swans have forgotten the migration routes; some of them don't migrate at all. Now an Ontario waterfowl



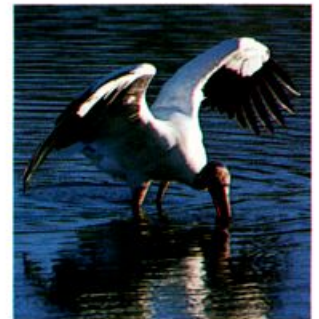
Trumpeter Swan

enthusiast named Bill Lishman is proposing a unique method to show the swans the way: lead them himself. Lishman pilots an ultralight plane and has already trained Canada Geese to follow him as he flies. If the swans can be enticed to do the same, Lishman will guide them to a 3,000-acre site in Virginia where wildlife researcher Bill Sladen has 35 resident swans to welcome the newcomers.

AUDUBON REPORT

Wood Storks in Stormy Florida

Tom Bancroft, Audubon field biologist, reports that Wood Stork feeding habitat in mangroves was "chewed up by winds and high water," and that as a result of Hurricane Andrew, some breeding and foraging Wood Storks will



Wood Stork

likely shift to other available habitats. The hurricane did not disturb the areas where the largest colonies breed, but feeding habitat and areas where smaller colonies breed were affected.

The quality and availability of alternate habitats will be important factors in the future

success of the Wood Storks in storm-torn Florida, as will changes in water management by the Army Corps of Engineers, South Florida Water Management District, and Everglades National Park. Wood Storks are listed by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an endangered species in Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and Florida.

The Amur-Platte Project

When Sergei Smirensky, ornithologist from Moscow State University and authority on Siberia's cranes, led a delegation of five Russians to Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary on the Platte River in Nebraska, they were struck by the similarities between the Platte and the Amur River. Like the Platte, Amur is in the heart of a vast wetlands complex which supports the greatest diversity of cranes (6 species) in the world, including four that are endangered—the Red-Crowned, Siberian, White-naped and Hooded Cranes. The area faces the threat of major damage from proposed dams. The Amur River serves as the international border between Russia and China. Recently, negotiations between the Russians and Chinese culminated in the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement which calls for the Russian and Chinese governments to protect the Amur and carry out an environmental-impact assessment of the dam. A resolution was also passed protecting the Platter River.

DIRECTIONS

William D. Hubbard has been named Executive Director of the Loon Preservation Committee. The appointment follows the resignation of 10-year veteran Jeff Fair. Hubbard has served as a director of the Merrimack



William D. Hubbard

River Watershed Council, on the executive committee of the Atlantic Salmon Federation, and was founder and executive director of Friends of the Merrimack.

Gen. Norman Schwartzkopf retired from the U.S. Army following Operation Desert Storm and joined The Nature Conservancy's national board of governors in September. Says the General: "I've had a fulfilling military career, and now I want to serve society in other ways—especially in the areas of the environment and education. Working with an effective group like The Nature Conservancy is something that will be both rewarding and challenging to me."

The American Ornithologists' Union held its 110th Stated Meeting in Ames, Iowa at the end of June. At the conclusion of the meeting **Brina Kessel** assumed presidency. Other officials elected/re-elected at this meeting included **Richard C. Banks**, president elect; **Erica H. Dunn**, vice president; **Mary V. McDonald**, secretary and **Marion A. Jenkinson** as



Ned K. Johnson

treasurer.

Honored

Ned K. Johnson, of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California in Berkely, received the William Brewster Memorial Medal at the American Ornithologists' Union meeting in June. The award was presented to him for his important work in establishing species limits in western American birds.

Frances C. James, of Florida State University at Tallahassee, received the Eliot Coues Award at the American Ornithologists' Union meeting in June. She was awarded this for her studies of factors related to variation in birds.

Deaths

Joseph W. Taylor, president of the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association for 26 years, died on September 25 at his home in Honeoye, New York. He was 78 years old.



Joseph W. Taylor

Taylor was a founding member of the American Birding Association, and served as its president from 1979-1983. Indeed, he was the first birder to join its "700 Club" which meant he had seen his 700th North American bird species. Taylor was also former treasurer of the Hawk Migration Association of North America, an editor of *The Kingbird*, and a member of the board of directors for Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

Environmental activist **Anthony Wayne Smith**,

who served as counsel and president of National Parks and Conservation Association, died of cancer on February 29. He was 86. Smith was active in the creation of Point Reyes National Seashore in California, Padre Island National Seashore in Texas, Fire Island National Seashore in New York, Assateague Island National Seashore in Maryland and Virginia, and Cape Cod National Seashore in Massachusetts. He was active in organizing the Citizen's Permanent Conference on the Potomac River Basin and directed that group's efforts to halt proposed construction of 16 dams and reservoirs along the river by the Army Corps of Engineers.

WORLD BRIEFS

Southern Africa

Egyptian vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) once widespread in southern Africa, are being bred in captivity for eventual reintroduction in that area. The last breeding record was from the Transkei in 1923. The effort recently took an international turn with the arrival of four captive-bred vul-



Egyptian Vulture

tures from Israel, flown in free of charge by El Al Airlines and donated by Professor Heinrich Mendelssohn of Tel Aviv University. The breeding pro-

QUOTES

"The Endangered Species Act is the pit-bull of environmental laws. It's short, compact, and has a hell of a set of teeth."

Donald Barry, *a vice president of the World Wildlife Fund.*

"...Look for a small, chunky bird with short but fast stubby wing beats, flying like a giant bumblebee or a football with wings."

Rose Borzik, *narrator for Hardy Boat Cruise in North Edgecomb, Maine, describing a Puffin to birdwatchers.*

"They just keep going. No one knows where they go to...Maybe there's a Bermuda Triangle for Pelicans."

Larry Penny, *director of natural resources in East Hampton explaining how the Brown Pelican flies east out to Montauk and seems to vanish as it glides out to sea.*

ject is being jointly run by the Endangered Wildlife Trust, Vulture Study Group, and World of Birds.

Madagascar

From Lake Alaotra in north-east Madagascar comes news of the first sighting in 32 years of the Madagascar Pochard (*Aythya innitata*). Last August a male pochard was caught in a fisherman's net. The bird survived and is now living in captivity in the Botanical Garden in the capital city of Antananarivo.

Mongolia

The endangered White-naped Crane will be only one of many beneficiaries of the proposed international crane reserve to be located on the borders between Mongolia, Russia and China. Representatives from the three countries met with members of the International

Crane Foundation to discuss plans for the area. The new reserve would comprise the Dalainor Nature Reserve (nearly 4050 square kilometers) in inner Mongolia, China, and Dauriski Nature Reserve (2068 square kilometers) in Russia. Mongolia would add 1032 square kilometers adjacent to Dauriski.

French Guiana

Police in French Guiana are taking action against hunters of Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*). Although the birds are supposed to be legally protected, ibis meat is served in restaurants and the birds' plumes are used to make artificial flowers. In 1990, police confiscated a number of illegally-obtained birds, and the two breeding colonies suffered less disturbance the following year. About 500 pairs nested at Pointe



Scarlet Ibis

Behague and 1200 pairs at Karouabo.

The Gambia, West Africa

Birders who travel to this small country on Africa's Atlantic coast have only a short walk from their hotel to the newly



Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu

opened Bijilo Forest Park, home to over 130 species of birds, including the Ground Hornbill, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Senegalese Fire Finch, Violet Touraco, Little and Swallow-tailed bee eaters, Barbary Shrike, Long-tailed Glossy Starling, and Splendid Sunbird. The Gambia is a poor country, and the government is hoping that its investment in the park's development, done in conjunction with the German government's technical cooperation agency, will pay off in the form of eco-tourism while providing a haven for wildlife.

OVERVIEW

Australia

American attorneys who have worked on the Spotted Owl controversy in the Northwest used their experience to help environmental lawyers Down Under protect their sooty owls. Invoking Australia's Endangered Species Act, a judge ordered a stop to logging in public forests which provide habitat for the owls.

New Zealand

The future may be brightening for kiwis, whose numbers have been declining. The Little Spotted Kiwi (*Apteryx owenii*) is now thought to occur exclusively on offshore islands, the Great Spotted Kiwi (*A. haastii*) is limited to South island woods, and Brown Kiwi (*A. australis*) populations are thin-



Great Spotted Kiwi

ning. But in 1991, a five-year recovery plan was begun by the Threatened Species Trust of New Zealand and backed by the Bank of New Zealand.

American Birds extends an invitation to all of its readers to contribute items to our new Overview department. Tell us about something of particular interest to birders: new products, relevant legislation, exhibits, grants, awards, honors, career transitions, or interesting quotes about birds and ecology taken from articles and speeches. Use this issue as a model for items we'd be likely to publish. Send items to: Overview, *American Birds*, 950 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022

BEHAVIOR WATCH

Any Old Port After A Storm

Euphonias are small tropical tanagers that specialize in eating mistletoe berries. In Puerto Rico, the Antillean Euphonia reportedly feeds exclusively at mistletoe in the tops of trees. However, after Hurricane Hugo played havoc with habitat in September 1989, Raúl A. Pérez-Rivera noted changes in behavior by the euphonias on his study sites (*J. Field Ornithol.* Vol. 62, No. 4). The birds were feeding on fruits of other plants down in the shrub layer, and even gleaning insects from the undersides of leaves. Apparently, mistletoe berries were temporarily scarce in the wake of the storm. On tropical islands where major storms are frequent, even "specialists" may evolve the ability to adapt quickly to changes in diet.

Big Raven Roosts

Many birders have seen evening flights of crows heading to a communal roosting site. Roosts of ravens are not so familiar, although they've been recorded in several countries. Now, Kathleen Engel and others have documented



Common Raven

the largest known Common Raven roosts in the world (*Wilson Bull.* Vol. 104, No. 1), on towers of a major powerline in southwestern Idaho and adjacent Oregon. During a five-year study, 13 separate roosts were identified. Numbers of ravens peaked in

late summer, and the largest roost held over 2000 birds (spread over six kilometers of towers). Raven roosts reported previously have been occupied mainly in fall and winter, and few have been on manmade structures.

Moving Owls Out-wit Marten Memories

Boreal Owls using nestboxes in Norway often fall prey to pine martens, tree-climbing members of the weasel family. Geir Sonerud reports (*Animal Behaviour* Vol. 37, No. 3) that the martens apparently remember nest sites from year to year, and will re-check those they have raided before. In Sonerud's study, nestboxes that had been moved to new locations were less likely to be raided by martens. Boreal Owls familiar with the area tended to choose boxes placed in new locations, rather than those left in long-established sites. This preference for new sites, which also occurs in some other birds, may give experienced cavity-nesters an edge in avoiding predators.

Mud-slinging Nuthatches

In a nesting pair of White-breasted Nuthatches observed in North Carolina, the male regularly brought pellets of dirt to smear under the entrance to the nesting cavity. The bird also stored dirt pellets in nearby trees. As reported by Bill Duyck, Douglas McNair, and Charles Nicholson (*Wilson Bull.* Vol. 103, No. 2), this odd behavior was carried on for two nesting seasons, and persisted as late as five days before the young fledged. Nuthatches will sometimes use dirt or mud to make their nest entrances smaller, perhaps to keep out intruders. In this case, however, the actions did not make the nest entrance smaller, so the reasons behind the actions were unclear.

Egg-laying Times for Robins

Everyone knows the color called robin's-egg-blue, but little is known about what time of day American Robins usually lay their eggs. Egg-laying times are poorly known for most wild birds, but early morning is thought to be the preferred time for many, especially songbirds. Patrick



White-breasted Nuthatch

Weatherhead, Robert Montgomerie, and Susan McRae studied robins nesting in eastern Ontario, and found that they were laying eggs closer to midday than to dawn—on average, about 11:30 a.m. (*Auk* Vol. 108, No. 4). But as daylength changed through the season, there was a correlation between the time of sunrise and the time, several hours later, when each egg would be laid.

Youthful Deception Fails to Turn away Rathfull Redstarts

Among American Redstarts, as with many other birds, one-year-old males look similar to adult females, while the older males are quite different. One theory suggests that the young males, by looking like females, may evade the aggression of adult males of their own species during the breeding season. Elizabeth Procter-



American Redstart

OVERVIEW

Gray tried to test this by placing stuffed, mounted redstarts in the territories of adult males (*Auk* Vol. 108, No. 4). These models remained unnoticed until tape-recorded songs were played nearby; then the territorial males usually attacked the models, often standing on them and pecking them. Whether the model represented a bright adult male or a duller female-plumaged bird, the territory-holder would attack with the same gusto. Since the attacks were triggered by recorded songs, it remains unclear how a young male might fare if it did not "blow its cover" by singing.

Colonies of Orioles

Most bird species of the blackbird tribe are sociable for part of the year; many even nest in groups—grackles, Tricolored



Orange Oriole

Blackbirds, and the tropical oropendolas. Such colonial nesting is almost unknown among the related American orioles, however. In the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, Steve Howell, Sophie Webb, and Barbara de Montes found two colonies of Orange Orioles (*Wilson Bull.* Vol. 104, No. 1). Each colony contained 25-35 nests in an area of less than 80x30 meters; in one case, a tree held five nests. In the larger colony, the Orange Orioles were joined by a few Hooded Orioles, Black-cowled Orioles, and Black Catbirds.