

OVERVIEW

Yet Another New Antpitta

Most of the antpittas of the genus *Grallaria* are subtly-colored birds of the forest floor in the American tropics. Their elusive nature is reflected in the fact that many of them are still poorly known, and several remained unknown to science until quite recently. Now another new antpitta has been found, in the Colombian Andes, at a site only 50 kilometers from the center of the nation's largest city, Bogota. Discovered by the American diplomat and birder Peter G. Kaestner, it was named *Grallaria kaestneri* in his honor and was formally described by F. Gary Stiles (*Wilson Bull.*, Vol. 104, No. 3). Its English name, Cundinamarca Antpitta, reflects the department (political division) in which it was found. This is apparently the fourth new *Grallaria* described to science since 1968. Although the bird's locality is published with the description, it is not available for immediate ticking by world birders: Stiles reports that an outbreak of guerrilla activity has made further fieldwork there inadvisable.

Birds and Chilies

Hot chili peppers may burn people's tongues. But apparently they do not have the same effect on birds. Recent studies of Cedar Waxwings and House Finches by Donald Norman and colleagues (*Wilson Bull.* Vol. 104: 549—551) reveal an ecological link



Cedar Waxwings

between birds and chili peppers. The active chemical agent in chilies, called capsaicins, have that familiar, flaming effect on mammals' taste buds. But the normal concentration of capsaicin, which repels rodents, does not make the

food distasteful to birds. The birds are attracted to wild capsicum fruits because they are high in vitamins, protein, and lipids. One hypothesis is that capsaicins protect the pepper seed from consumption by rodents, while allowing and even attracting birds to eat the fruits and disperse the seeds.

Bird Brains

Where were those famous fact-checkers at the *New Yorker* magazine? Birders around the country this past fall were astonished to read, in a short story by respected author John Updike, about a "warbler" with a "stone-colored head" that attempted to nest in a niche above a pillar on the protagonist's porch. The trouble is, warbler species almost never nest in places like porches or barns or anywhere very near human settlements. Most warblers prefer nests high in trees, deep in bushes, or on the ground in forests.

Readers with a rudimentary knowledge of birds recognized a very different species from

Bird Brains II

In October, the *New York Times* trumpeted that penguins once swam in the Mediterranean, a surprise to many who know that the only penguin to occur near the Northern Hemisphere is the Galapagos Penguin, which resides in the Galapagos Islands off the Pacific coast of South America. The otherwise fascinating article followed the discovery of prehistoric drawings in caves in the Mediterranean, which included the "penguin." In a letter to the *Times*, one ornithologist pointed out that the creature was most likely the extinct Great Auk, a flightless alcid whose fossils have been found in the Mediterranean. The word penguin was the colloquial term for the Great Auk used by early European explorers, formed from two Welsh words: *pen* (head) and *gwyn* (white). Later, the unrelated family in the Southern hemisphere received the name because of its similar appearance.

Turbine Trouble

Developers of wind-generated electricity have been touted as environmental angels, working to lessen the nation's dependence on expensive, polluting fossil fuels. But the whirling blades that harness the wind at the giant turbines have had a not-so-benign effect on birds in the areas that have pioneered the technology. *Backpacker* magazine reports that at Altamont Pass east of San Francisco, as many as 300 birds of prey, including 60 Golden Eagles, have been killed by flying into the turbines, or electrocuted by power lines erected in their territory. Now a similar project in Montana is under question because it is near the upper Yellowstone River basin, where Bald and Golden eagles, hawks, owls, and waterfowl fly. The land being considered by



Golden Eagle

wind companies is private and outside government authority, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has put interested firms on notice. If threatened or endangered species are killed, says an assistant regional director in Denver, "adjudicative action will be taken."

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Honeycreeper Nests Found in Maui Mountains

The rare and endangered Crested Honeycreeper, endemic to the Hawaiian Islands, has long been an elusive nester. Naturalists have been eager to gather information on the bird, known locally as 'Akohekohe, in order to protect it.

Last year two San Francisco State University researchers discovered 10 nests of the Crested Honeycreeper at the Waikamoi Preserve on Maui. It was the first confirmation of nests in over a century. The Crested Honeycreeper lives in remote forests in the mountains on Maui, and fewer than 4500 birds exist. Though the nests were more than 60 feet up in the trees, the researchers were able to observe and gather valuable data about the species, providing the first comprehensive life history of the honeycreeper.

The information will be used to help identify factors effecting the bird's nesting biology, particularly factors limiting the honeycreeper's breeding success.

Rare Sighting

The 1992-93 duck stamp, issued by the U.S. Department of Interior and sold to hunters, featured the Spectacled Eider, an Asiatic and North American sea duck whose breeding range includes the Arctic coast of Alaska. But the stamp is as close to the duck as most people will get: The eider species has experienced dramatic population declines in the United States during the past 20 years. *National Geographic* reports that at the eiders' main nesting grounds on the continent, the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, there were 50,000 to 70,000 pairs in 1971. In recent years, researchers have only seen 2700 pairs. No one has determined the cause of the decline, but the U.S. Fish



Spectacled Eider

and Wildlife Service has proposed listing the species as threatened.

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Migratory Bird Day

The warblers, hawks, and ducks that cross the North American continent every fall and spring will be recognized in 1993. International Migratory Bird Day will be observed Saturday, May 8, throughout the Western Hemisphere. Individuals and organizations will take part in activities, from migration counts to town meetings to beach clean-ups. The day will recognize conservation efforts by Partners in Flight—Aves de las Americas Program. Citing the decline of some passerine, shorebird, raptor, and waterfowl populations due to the destruction of habitat through-

out the Americas, the organizers hope to inspire new action. The National Audubon Society's Birds in the Balance program will encourage local events. Contact Jamie Doyle, Bird Conservation Specialist, The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, National Zoological Park, Washington, D.C., 20008, for information.

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Oil Spill in Shetland Islands

Biologists will closely monitor seabird populations in the southern Shetland Islands this spring and summer after 26 million gallons of light crude oil spilled from a grounded tanker in January. Many seabirds were wintering offshore, but more than 1400 dead birds have been picked up, according to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The hardest hit have been Shags and Black Guillemots. It is uncertain how the spill has affected fish stocks on which the seabirds feed. The Shetland Shag colonies have decreased in the past decade, and if the marine environment is severely damaged, the population could have difficulty rebounding.

UPDATE

Connecticut Waterbirds

For over 10 years, a survey of nesting colonial waterbirds on the Connecticut coastline has helped conservationists monitor the health of Long Island Sound. The populations are "exceedingly dynamic," reports the Connecticut Audubon

Society, a sponsor of the survey. For example, Least Terns will nest along a beach for years, and then abandon it. Herons, egrets, and ibises will nest on one island for several years, and then "hop" to a nearby island to establish a new colony. Herring Gulls have increased their numbers, in some instances driving off colonies of Common and Roseate terns. The tremendous increase in gulls on Long Island Sound can be attributed in large part to coastal landfills developed over the last 100 years. In recent years, gull populations have stabilized—at the same time that landfills are being closed. Further waterbird surveys will play a role in testing the theory that gull populations might decline as more landfills are closed.

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Six Condors Released

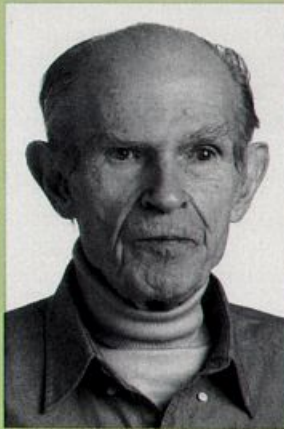
Six captive-bred California Condors were released into the wild in Ventura County, California, on December 1, joining Xewe, the female condor who had been released into the same area almost 10 months earlier. A male condor, who had been released with Xewe, was found dead in October, a victim of poisoning from ethylene and propylene glycol. These toxins are found in anti-freeze, but scientists are not certain of the source of the poison ingested by the condor. Xewe seemed to welcome the company of the additional condors, which were kept in a large release pen on the mountainside for nearly two months before being freed, reports



Least Tern

BIRDER OF NOTE

Alger Hiss



Age: 88

Home: Manhattan, New York

Profession: Retired lawyer and diplomat

How long birding? I began as a boy at summer camp nearly 80 years ago. But when I was a young lawyer, I had a revelation. I was visiting a friend in Topsfield, Massachusetts, on a spring morning. We sat in a room with French doors that opened onto a garden. An American Goldfinch hopped into the room, and I looked at it with pleasure and excitement. Then my friend handed me a pair of binoculars—I'd never used them before. That beautiful creature was brought up so close! That was the real beginning.

What fields guides have you used? I began with *What Bird is That?* and graduated to guides by Roger Tory Peterson.

Binoculars? My first pair, when I was living on a limited budget, was a pair of Navy surplus 7 power binoculars. I'm birding now by ear, since my eyesight is not good.

Favorite life bird? The Prothonotary Warbler, without question. The first time I saw one was when it had come unexpectedly to a park in the Bronx. Later, in Washington, I saw it nesting on the Virginia side of the Potomac River.

Favorite birding habitat? I suppose the best birding I did regularly was at Rock Creek Park in Washington, which was an extensive wooded area. I saw owls there, such as the Great Horned Owl. There was a great variety of birds during migration. That's where I saw my first Cerulean Warbler. I would go to Rock Creek Park to bird winter and summer.

Other favorite spots? Central Park in New York City is a great place for migratory birds. I've done some birding in the West—Arizona and New Mexico, where I saw Greater Roadrunners and quails. I also enjoyed seeing Pileated Woodpeckers in Vermont.

What is your favorite birding method? On foot. I have done a great deal of birding by car, but it is not normal and relaxed.

Today I rely on the birds to come to me at my country home. I was surprised when I first heard the Carolina Wren on Long Island, for example.

Why am I a birder? I constantly think about birds. I love the beauty of nature. I also try to encourage young people, by telling them about the birds in their own area.



Five of the six California Condors released in December

Michael P. Wallace, Curator of Birds at the Los Angeles Zoo, where the six condors were hatched and raised. Xewé joined the others regularly during the transition, touching them through the net. On the day of their release, she was seen roosting and allopreening with the others, says Wallace.

Despite the death of the male condor, Wallace is optimistic. "The good news is that he was not shot, and he didn't collide into a cliff or power line. The bad news is there is yet one more thing to worry about out there." If the captive breeding programs at the Los Angeles and the San Diego zoos have another successful reproductive year, more condors will be released roughly the same time next winter. Birders may be able to view the released birds *via* spotting scope from Dough Flats near Fillmore, California, in the next two months.

A Million and Counting

Birdwatchers at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania popped bottles of champagne and tossed bird seed when a Sharp-shinned Hawk flew swiftly by the sanctuary's North Lookout in the early afternoon on October 8. The accipiter was the millionth raptor to wing past the sanctuary since the first recording of a Broad-winged Hawk

by ornithologist Maurice Broun in 1934. Since then, hundreds of researchers, preservationists and visitors have witnessed the autumnal migration each year. Observations at Hawk Mountain have been used as indicators of the environment's health. In Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, the author cited the dip in Hawk Mountain's Bald Eagle migrants. Such evidence helped lead to the banning of the pesticide DDT in 1972. Scientists have also used information gathered there to learn about raptor migration and the effect of wind and weather. The sanctuary was started in the 1930s after New York con-



Sharp-shinned Hawk

servationist Rosalie Edge, who had seen photographs of the slaughter of birds of prey by hunters along the ridge, enrolled Broun in an effort to the protect the migrants.

SOS for an Alcid

The Marbled Murrelet, a seabird that nests in ancient forests near the coast from northern California through Pacific Northwest, has been declared a Threatened species by the U.S. government. The move makes it illegal to harm the bird, and also requires federal agencies to act to protect the bird under the Endangered Species Act. There are roughly 5000 Marbled Murrelets in Washington State, and about 2000 each in Oregon and California. The move will effect logging restrictions in the Northwest, prohibiting logging in areas where the bird is known to nest. Scientists from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration recently reported satellite photos showing that the forests of the Pacific Northwest have been more severely damaged and fragmented than those of the Brazilian Amazon. Only 10 percent of the Northwest's forests remain undisturbed, leaving few large segments to maintain biological diversity.

Polly Does Not Want a Cracker

There is good news for endangered exotic birds captured in the wild and imported to the United States for the pet trade. In October, Congress passed and President Bush signed a bill that will sharply reduce the number of birds allowed into the country. An immediate ban was placed on 10 species in danger of extinction: Yellow-headed Amazon, Fischer's Lovebird, Gray-cheeked Parakeet, Green-cheeked (Mexican Red-headed) Amazon, Chattering Lory, Golden-capped Conure,

White (Umbrella) Cockatoo, Goffin's Cockatoo, Lesser Sulfur-crested Cockatoo, and Red-vented Cockatoo. In October, the ban will extend to several hundred other species listed under the



Sulfur-crested Cockatoo

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Importers can lobby to keep birds off this list if they can prove the trade is not detrimental to the species and that strict conservation measures are being taken. The over-harvesting of wild birds from Latin America, Africa, and Asia has decimated some bird populations. Australia has banned the exporting of wild birds like the Sulfur-crested Cockatoo. In 1991, 400,000 birds were legally imported into the United States, making it the world's largest importer of birds. Twice that number may have been harvested, since as many as 60 percent of captured birds are believed to die in transit. The bill doesn't address the smuggling of birds into the United States.

AUDUBON REPORT

Tropical Flyways

The rare White-crowned Pigeon and other birds in the Florida Keys will be more secure, thanks to hard work by the National Audubon Society's Science Division and other conservationists.

The state of Florida will commit more than \$20 million toward the acquisition of critical habitat in the Keys, targeted by the Tropical Flyways program. The properties are hammocks with intact forests and mangroves in the middle portion of the Keys, where development has fragmented the forests and threatened species such as the Mangrove Cuckoo and White-crowned Pigeon.

Audubon research highlighted the importance of these areas to the pigeon, which nests in a relatively small area in the Keys. Adults often go to mainland Florida to feed, but juvenile birds travel short distances to closer, undeveloped hammocks. The state ranked Tropical Flyways 11th on a list of projects for its Conservation and Recreational Lands program, aimed at preserving sensitive areas, thus increasing the chances of survival for birds and other wildlife.

Audubon's Tom Bancroft



Double-crested Cormorants

says the funding will be used to buy hammocks of larger than 12 acres from Central Key Largo to Marathon. In addition to nesting species, the land is also critical for neotropical migrants.

Cormorant Competitors?

The good news is that Double-crested Cormorants, benefiting from a region wide ban on chlorinated hydrocarbon pesti-

cides, have seen a strong increase in the Great Lakes region. The bad news is that fishermen in the northeastern Lake Ontario area regard the fish-eating cormorants as competitors. Complicating the picture is the expected recommendation by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to reduce the number of brown trout stocked in the lake. Representatives of the Onondaga Audubon Society of New York and other conservationists fear that efforts to legalize cormorant kills will intensify. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is trying to decide what, if anything, should be done to stop the proliferation of cormorants in the Great Lakes.

"No scientific evidence currently exists indicating that Double-crested Cormorants

are adversely impacting any fish populations in Lake Ontario," says Norman Shapiro, chairman of the Audubon Council of New York. "Calling for cormorant population control at this time is clearly premature."

The Council is requesting that DEC studies be continued to assess whether or not these colonial waterbirds are having a detrimental effect on the fish population in Lake Ontario.

QUOTES

"All over the country, some of our best and most effective volunteers [in the campaign] were environmentalists. They were extremely determined, very committed, and very savvy."

Al Gore Jr., Vice President of the United States

"The Clinton Administration will have to address the full force of the Endangered Species Act. It will be interesting to see if the environmentalists are still their best friends in four years."

Steven Goldstein, chief spokesman for the Department of the Interior in the Bush Administration

DIRECTIONS

Awards

Frank A. Pitelka of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley, received the 1992 Eminent Ecologist Award from the Ecological Society of America. He was honored for significant contributions spanning more than half a century in ecological science. Pitelka's work in behavioral ecology has included studies of hummingbirds, Acorn Woodpeckers, Sanderlings, Pectoral Sandpipers and the mating system of shorebirds generally. His studies of the Arctic ecology of birds and mammals spawned seminal papers that advanced theoretical understanding of population cycles and behavioral ecology.

Pitelka perceived, long before behavioral ecology was



Frank A. Pitelka

fashionable, that behavior and ecology were inextricably intertwined; that to ask question of behavior absent its ecological context was folly, and to examine the ecological phenomena ignorant of behavior was misguided.

Roger Tory Peterson has received the 1992 Conservationist of the Year Award from *Wildlife Art News*.

Transitions

Gregory Butcher is the new Executive Director of the American Birding Association. Butcher was Director of Bird Population Studies at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

Lloyd F. Kiff, Director of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, has retired as team leader of the California Condor Recovery Team.

Deaths

Merrill Wood, an avid bird bander and pioneer in establishing criteria for aging and sexing species, died September 23 in State College, Pennsylvania, at the age of 84. Wood taught in the zoology department of Pennsylvania State University for 38 years.

Frances Hames died

December 2 at her home in the Florida Keys. Hames, a life-long birder, frequently accompanied visiting ornithologists in the Keys, showing them specialties such as Burrowing Owls at Marathon or nesting Brown Boobies.

WORLD BRIEFS

Great Britain

The Red Kite bred successfully in England and Scotland for the first time in a century, says the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. At least nine young fledged in July. The parents were birds that had been released over the last three years. In Wales, one of the last native strongholds of the raptor in Great Britain, 79 breeding pairs raised 93 chicks under the watchful eye of volunteers—including farmers and military personnel—who sought to protect the kites.

Nicaragua

Throughout the decade of political turmoil in Nicaragua, biologists longed to survey the country's Caribbean lowlands, called the Miskito Coast. Inhabited by Miskito and other indigenous groups, the coast is a relatively untouched wonderland of wetlands, lagoons, pine savannahs, large blocks of rain-forest, coral reef, and story-book islets. As part of a team working with indigenous people to establish the Miskito Cays Marine Reserve, Charles Luthin was one of the first biologists to explore the region in 1991 after the Contra war ended. "La Mosquita is a land of superlatives," reports



Jabiru

Luthin. "It has the biggest, the best, and the most of everything." In the "most" department, Luthin and two biologists from the University of Florida discovered that the Miskito Coast has been an undiscovered stronghold for the rare Jabiru stork. During aerial surveys in March 1992, the biologists spotted 74 storks and six nests in just a dozen hours of flying.

"That is an extraordinary concentration of Jabirus," says Luthin. The Jabiru ranges from southern Mexico to the wetlands of Venezuela, Colombia and northern Argentina, but never in large numbers. The famous Jabiru population in Belize has 20 to 30 birds. The Miskito Coast clearly has the largest population in Central America, according to Luthin.

In addition to the Jabiru, the biologists found breeding colonies of Wood Storks and Roseate Spoonbills in Nicaragua, and "concentrations of waterbirds two to four times greater than those found in the Everglades," says Luthin.

American Birds extends an invitation to all of its readers to contribute items to our 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*, 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003

BEHAVIOR WATCH

Blackcap Migration

A population of Blackcaps, a European wood warbler, has changed migration routes over the last 40 years in what some researchers believe is an act of rapid evolution (*Nature*, Vol. 360: pp. 668-669). Most Blackcaps breed in northern Europe and winter in southern Europe and northern Africa. But an increasing number winter in England. Blackcaps captured there were brought to Germany, where Peter Berthold, A.J. Helbig and colleagues bred young over two seasons. Along with a control group of Blackcaps caught in Germany, the researchers tested the birds' preferred migratory direction. The birds were put in covered cups lined with typewriter correction paper, which recorded their movements. The offspring of birds that wintered in England attempted to take off toward England. The others headed on the standard route toward the Mediterranean. The scientists concluded that the differing directions were determined by genetic change. (See commentary by J.P. Myers, page 1082)

Meadowlark Predators

To study nest predation, Jaroslav Picman put out artificial nests baited with quail eggs in fields in Ontario (*Wilson Bull.*,



Eastern Meadowlark

Vol. 104, No. 3). Cameras were set up at the nests, triggered when something disturbed the eggs. The most frequent predator was the striped skunk. But, surprisingly, the second-place culprit was the Eastern Meadowlark. The birds usually just punctured the eggs, without eating the contents, so the cause of this behavior must be something more complicated than simple predation. Egg-destroying had been documented in Western Meadowlarks previously, but was only recently recognized in the eastern species.

Wrens Destroy Nests

Many species of wrens are known to destroy the eggs or



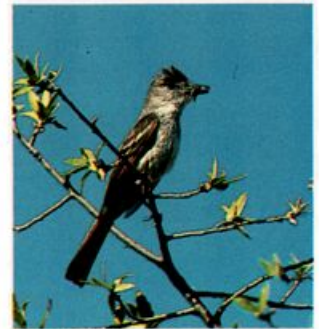
Cactus Wren

nestlings of other birds. This habit is hard to explain, since the wrens apparently don't eat the eggs or young. In *Condor* for November 1990, Laurie and Lee Simons reported on this behavior in Cactus Wrens. Artificial nests (with clutches of quail eggs) placed in Cactus Wren territories were almost all found and destroyed by wrens. Experiments suggest two possible reasons: Predators (especially snakes) are more likely to specialize in nest-raiding when nests are common, so wrens destroying nests may discourage snakes from seeking further and finding the wren's own eggs. Or, food may be in limited supply, and there may be more available for nesting Cactus Wrens if there are

fewer young birds being fed in the territory at the same time.

White Pelicans Feeding at Night

American White Pelicans, which are among the largest of fish-eating birds, do most of their foraging by dipping their bills in the water while swimming. In a study on the Dauphin River in southern Manitoba (*Condor* Vol. 94, No. 1), Blair McMahon and Roger Evans found that many pelicans foraged at night—two to three times as many as in the day. At night, the pelicans caught far fewer fish for the same amount of effort, but they caught a higher proportion of large fish. Many of the large fish in that region come



Ash-throated Flycatcher

two eggs, but in the other case the bluebirds placed an egg in the nest after the flycatchers had begun laying.

Whimbrel Umbrella

Whimbrels and Bar-tailed Godwits are large shorebirds that nest on Arctic tundra. Their nests are vulnerable to predation, but the two species use different defense tactics. Whimbrels usually attack any predators that venture near, while the godwits tend to show little reaction, as if relying on their chances of remaining unnoticed. Tore Larsen and Jostein Moldsvor found that, in northern Norway, godwit nests were usually much closer to Whimbrel nests than could be expected by chance (*Auk* Vol. 109, No. 3). The godwits began nesting a few days after the Whimbrels; they appeared to be choosing neighbors, perhaps gaining an advantage from the anti-predator behavior of the more aggressive bird.

Correction

In the Fall Issue of *American Birds*, the article on "Birding the Venezuelan Llanos" should have included the following: The llanos' dry season is from October through April. The rainy season is May through October. The seasons were switched in the story. We regret any confusion this or other errors may have caused.

PHOTOGRAPHS LEFT COLUMN TO RIGHT: A. MORRIS/VIEWO T.J. ULRICH/VIEWO W.S. CLARK/VIEWO