OVER VIEW

By a Whisker

North America's first Whiskered Tern created excitement on the East Coast this summer; it may have been the biggest birding news since the Ross' Gull first occurred in the lower 48 states in 1975. Sighted in mid-July at Cape May, New Jersey, the tern's presence set birding hotlines and computer networks ablaze. By the time the bird crossed to Delaware a week later, chasers had descended from around the country. When first seen, the Whiskered Tern was in nearly full breeding plumage, easily distinguished by its gray chest, black cap, and "whisker" of white on its cheek. The bird began to molt in late July, but continued to thrill birders through August as it fed in impoundments at Little Creek Wildlife Area in Delaware.

Whiskered Tern at Cape May, New Jersey

Superior Eagles

Bald Eagles have rebounded on the Wisconsin shores of Lake Superior. But they have a higher blood level of two toxic chemicals, DDE and PCB, than inland birds. The eagles are also having more trouble reproducing. A study in Wisconsin, funded by the National Park Service, is seeking an answer to why the birds are contaminated, and whether the toxic pollution is the cause of the nesting failures. In Michigan, four deformed eagles were found on nests near Lakes Erie, Huron and Michigan. Regional activists point to contaminants in fish.

Native Heritage

The Navajo Nation has opened its first official wildlife refuge near Winslow, Arizona. The one-square mile Hugo Meadows, which includes a spring-fed wetlands, is home to egrets, ibises, avocets, waterfowl, and raptors. This past summer, the Navajo Natural Heritage Program joined with Northern Arizona University to host Native American, Anglo, and Hispanic high school students in a plant and animal survey of the refuge. Navajo biologist Steven Chischilly hopes the refuge will help the connection of young Navajos with nature.

Night Vision

Sandhill Cranes staging along the Platte River in the spring prefer night roosts on channels about 500 feet wide, habitat that is disappearing because of water projects along the river. How did biologists arrive at this conclusion? John Sidle of the United States Fish & Wildlife service worked with the Nebraska Air National Guard, whose pilots fly night missions using infrared sensors. The sensors detected the cranes' body heat, enabling Sidle to map the birds favorite roosting areas. The finding provides another piece of evidence favoring reclamation of the river for wildlife.

Disney Wilderness?

The ever-expanding Disney Company has purchased 8500 acres in central Florida to create a wilderness preserve. In return, the company will be allowed to build on 340 acres of wetlands near Orlando. The preserve will provide habitat for Bald Eagles, Wood Storks, Sandhill Cranes, and other species. Disney will pay for the restoration, management, and educational efforts for the preserve, which will be donated to the Nature Conservancy.

American Avocet

UPDATE

Hawaiian Crows

Five young captive-bred 'Alala (Hawaiian Crows) were released on the island of Hawaii this past summer, raising the wild population of the Endangered bird to 17. The 'Alala are endemic to the island, where they dwell in upland forests between 3000 and 6000 feet.

Tiny radio transmitters were attached to central tail feathers on the young birds, in order to track them. The birds will drop the transmitters during their molt next year.

The release was done through the cooperative efforts of The Peregrine Fund, Greenfalk Consultants, the Zoological Society of San Diego, the State of Hawaii, the

PHOTOGRAPHS (LEFT COLUMN TO RIGHT): DAVE WARD, STEVEN HOLLYWELL

United States Fish & Wildlife Service, and local landowners.

Eider Mystery

Two handfuls of state-of-the-art satellite transmitters, each roughly the size of a AA battery, may reveal clues to one of ornithology's most pressing mysteries: What is exterminating the Spectacled Eider?

The big sea duck breeds on the North Slope and Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta of Alaska, and on Siberia's northern coast. Never common, its nesting populations have fallen 96 percent since 1971. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the bird as threatened in June. Biologists believe the eiders are being poisoned by heavy metals. They aren't sure how or where. Consistently high levels of cadmium and selenium is found in the eiders blood.

"We're really looking at Russia. There are all kinds of horror stories about contamination coming out of there," says Jean Cochrane, a Fish and Wildlife Service endangered species specialist in Anchorage. Aware of atmospheric studies suggesting that the Arctic may be a repository for pollution throughout the northern hemisphere, she says the eider may be the proverbial canary in a coal mine.

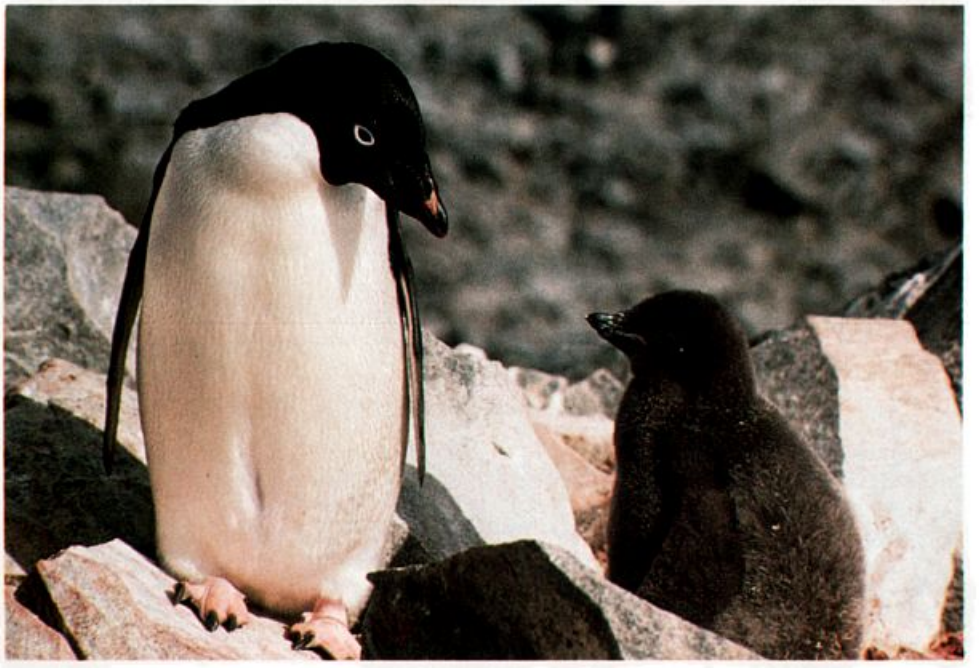
The brutal Arctic winter has meant that biologists could only speculate on where the birds went after breeding. This summer, 15 Yukon and six North Slope birds were fitted with miniature tracking devices. By early August, telemetry revealed intriguing surprises: As soon as their mates laid on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, four males flew to Kamchatka to molt. Two males that bred on the North Slope lingered along the coast of Beaufort Sea. If the transmitters last the winter, scientists may finally close the circle of the Spectacled Eider's life.

—James R. Polson

Mind Your P's & Q's

Booming tourism to the Antarctic has raised questions about how visitors will affect wildlife on the continent. Last year more than 8400 United States citizens visited on some 64 cruises to the region.

The National Science Foundation argues that strict regulations will keep the impact of tourism at a manageable level. The foundation, therefore, is funding a long-term study to measure the impact of tourists visiting Torgersen Island, which has large colonies of Adélie Penguins.



Adélie Penguin

Remembering Drury

"Chance and Change" was the topic as family, friends, and colleagues of the late Dr. William H. Drury gathered to discuss his work and ideas on May 29 at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine. Ornithologists, conservationists, and evolutionary biologists from across the country participated, illustrating the influence of Drury's ideas on the biological community.

The vagaries of chance and the inevitability of change were consistent themes in Drury's teaching and thought; he was instrumental in bringing such ideas to the forefront of modern ecological thinking.

Speakers included Erica Dunn, Bob Trivers, Ian Nisbet, and Ernst Mayr, all of whom referred to the influence Drury's elegantly simple thinking and common sense had on their own work. Many attendees were former students of Drury's, and the atmosphere was reminiscent of his classes as discussions developed about the importance of the individual in selection, chaos theory, succession, open populations, and chance and change.

Those who worked with Drury in the field remembered him as not only a superlative teacher, but a first-rate field observer and student of animal behavior. Trivers described three themes in Drury's thought: conflict, the importance of beauty, and the importance of viewing the world through others' perspectives. Participants from conservation groups and governmental organizations agreed that it was this ability to identify and understand other perspectives that made Drury not only an influential biologist, but an effective conservationist.

The study and conservation of seabirds was one of Drury's principal interests; he brought all his talents to bear in the reestablishment of Petit Manan Island as a major seabird colony in Maine. At the colloquium, Fish and Wildlife Service officials dedicated the island's building complex as the William H. Drury Biological Research Station. Few who had ever studied with him could fail to recognize the most appropriate quote chosen for the plaque to be placed on the island: "When your views on the world and your intellect are being challenged, and you begin to feel uncomfortable because of a contradiction you have detected that is threatening your current model of the world or some aspect of it, pay attention—you are about to learn something."

—Matthew P. Drennan

New York's Harbor

The 1992-93 winter brought several major storms to the East Coast, underlining the need for natural buffer sites to protect New York City's bird- and wildlife-rich Jamaica Bay. The Bay is home to more than 12,000 acres of parkland in the

PHOTOGRAPH S LIPSCHUTZ/VIREO

BIRDER OF NOTE

Cortez C. Austin, Jr.

Age: 45

Home: Upper Marlboro, Md.

Career: Dispute Resolution Center, Library of Congress.

How long have you been birding? I first birded from age nine until I was 12. I resumed birding about 16 years ago.

Why do you bird? Since childhood, I've had an unrelenting fascination with animals. Birds are the most easily observed wildlife in Washington, D.C., where I grew up. Now, birding and bird photography keep me active in the outdoors.

Do you keep a life list? No. But the last life birds I saw were Quetzals at Monteverde Biological Reserve in Costa Rica. I saw three males and a female in heavy mist. I was only able to photograph the female, so I have to go back!

What was your most spectacular bird sighting in North America? How can you have just one? I love the unexpected: A Snowy Owl in Delaware, Lewis' Woodpecker in Virginia, or two juvenile Northern Sawwhet Owls perched in a tree that I paused to rest beneath in South Dakota.

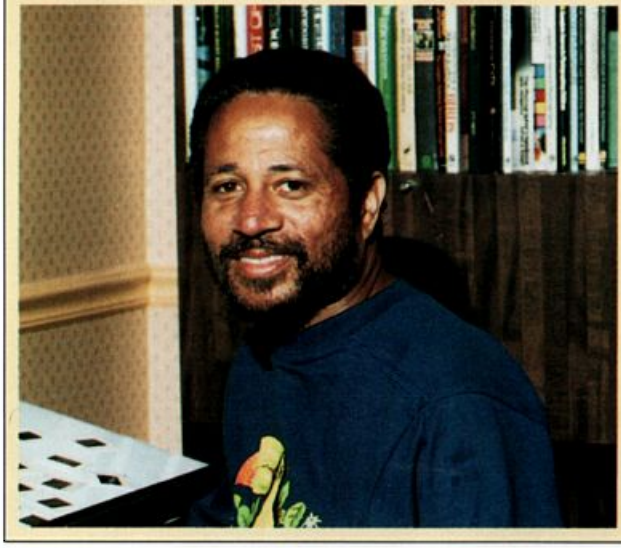
What are your favorite species? The Least Bittern, and all owls.

What is your favorite birding method? I prefer to be on foot, although the car is an effective blind for bird photography.

What was your biggest thrill in birding? There just isn't any "biggest thrill." I'm thrilled to see species like the Scarlet Ibis in Trinidad that I traveled halfway around the world to see. And I'm thrilled by unexpected finds, like the juvenile Martial Eagle I saw in Tanzania but couldn't identify until after I got back home.

Where in the United States would you like to bird next? Alaska.

Why is birding important to you? Birding and bird photography—which has become my final objective—are the only things I do that engross me to the point that I forget about life's many problems. I feel indebted to wild things for the respite they offer. I—and we—have to remember that the absolute value of birds and other wild things is not solely in what they offer for us, but simply that they exist. We have the wherewithal to protect them from encroaching development, and we must.



PHOTOGRAPHS LEFT COLUMN TO RIGHT CORTEZ C. AUSTIN JR A FORBES WATSON/VIREO

city, including the Jamaica Bay wildlife refuge, with over 330 bird species recorded.

In a recent report, The New York City Audubon Society and the Trust for Public Land calls for the preservation of 14 buffer sites. Since 1987, nearly 440 acres have been, or are in the process of being, designated as parkland. But the report says that 479 acres on critical sites remain unprotected. Buffer lands help alleviate water surges during storms, and absorb pollution. Preservation will also enhance wildlife in the bay. Currently, some of the buffer land is being used as illegal dump sites or spillover from private industry.

Whooper Update

Captive breeding of the Endangered Whooping Crane has advanced from experiment to production, but building a flock—a long-range goal—remains a process of trial and error. Some 24 chicks were fledged in captivity last fall—more than triple the previous year—and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expects similar success this year.

But scientists are debating the lessons from the latest field test. Earlier this year 14 juvenile Whoopers were released in central Florida. It was expected they would form a resident flock—easy to study, more likely to mate, and safe from migratory attrition.

The captive-raised birds proved tragically naive. They wandered into brush that could conceal a predator, and often ignored the most crane-like defense, roosting on submerged sandbars yards from shore. By August, bobcats had killed nine of the birds.

"It was not survival of the fittest," said Steve Nesbitt, a state biologist. "Some of the birds we lost were the most vigorous in the flock." Further introductions to the flock have been put on hold.

Hawaiian Report

The Puaiohi Thrush, one of six Endangered birds on the Hawaiian island of Kaua'i, survived last fall's hurricane *Iniki.*

Reliable observers have reported sightings, including one of a juvenile presumably fledged after the storm, says Tom Telfer, Kaua'i district wildlife biologist for the Hawaii Deparment of Laned and Natural Resoucres.

But no one has seen a Kaua'i 'O'oa'a Honeyeater since the storm. Likewise, state and federal biologists who combed Alaka'i Swamp in February heard nothing from the O'u Finch. Also missing: the Crescent-billed Nukipu'u and Akialoa honeycreepers, and the Kama'o Thrush.

Scientists blame the decline of Hawaii's endemics on introduced diseases and species.

WORLD BRIEFS

Mauritius

A weeding project on Round Island off Mauritius in the Indian Ocean is the first phase of a 10-year management program to create a haven for

Herald Petrel

endangered species. The island is the only known breeding ground in the Indian Ocean for a population of the Herald Petrel (*Pterodroma arminjoniana*), and it is important for other seabirds. It is one of the few islands in the region free of introduced mammals, and one of the only tropical islands without rodents. The plan was prepared by the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust, a member of IUCN, the World Conservation Union.

Red and Blue Lory

Indonesia

The exotic bird trade has taken a large toll on Indonesia's Red and Blue Lory, which until recently was more severely impacted by habitat loss. Until 1990, no more than 10 of the rare bird were exported each year, according to TRAFFIC International, which monitors trade for the World Wide Fund for Nature. Numbers shot up after the Indonesian government authorized the capture of lories.

In 1990, 90 birds were exported, and in 1992, close to 500 birds were sent out of the country (though the government only issued export permits for 300). An estimated 200 died at an Indonesian export house.

Japan

Japan's first endangered species law went into effect in April. The law is designed to protect domestic endangered species, prohibiting the capture, harvest, sale, import, or export of endangered species without government permission.

Russia

Interest in the export of rare raptors from the Kamchatka peninsula has prompted ornithologists there to propose measures to stop the illegal trade. But even legislation seems no match for high-paying buyers interested in

Steller's Sea-Eagle

Russia's rare birds and animals.

Kamchatka has the largest population of Gyrfalcons in Russia, with between 150-200 pairs. Half of the world's Steller's Sea-Eagle population lives there. The whitish Northern Goshawk, prized by falconers, also breeds there.

The opening of trade links between Russia and the West has made these birds a quick and easy source of hard currency.

Eugeniy G. Lobkov of the Kronok State Reserve reports in *Raptor Link*, a Russian birds of prey newsletter, that even he has been approached by colleagues asking if animals could be made available for export. No fewer than 15 speculators have been dealing in rare raptors, he reports. While two dealers from St. Petersburg were caught and heavily fined last year, they apparently returned to Kamchatka.

AUDUBON REPORT

Florida Victory

The White Ibis and Black Skimmer were designated as species of special concern by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission in July, thanks in part to work by National Audubon Society scientists and field workers. This listing will make both birds eligible for additional state protection.

The White Ibis has declined by 75 to 90 percent in the Everglades and Tampa Bay areas in the last 50 years. Much of the decline is irreversible because of development. But in some areas—particularly the Everglades and Kissimmee River systems—restoration of natural water flows offers potential for population recovery.

Listing of the White Ibis strengthens efforts by National Audubon in its Everglades Campaign. Designation now—while a viable population still exists—provides the best hope for designing and implementing measures to protect and restore foraging habitat.

Nesting Black Skimmers in Florida are vulnerable to disturbance from human beachgoers and their pets. There are some 1800 breeding pairs of skimmers in 20-25 colonies statewide. Wintering populations have declined about 35 percent in 10 years.

Expert information from National Audubon Society scientists and sanctuary managers on the status and ecology of these vulnerable species was key to the listing decisions.

Gnatcatcher Promises

Federal approval of a tollroad through the largest remaining areas of California Gnatcatcher habitat is being protested in court by the National Audubon Society and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The northern subspecies of the California Gnatcatcher was listed as threatened in March.

"The Deparment of the Interior's failure to designate critical habitat violates the Endangered Species Act and casts doubt on the survival of the gnatcatcher," says Kathleen Rogers, Audubon's Wildlife Counsel.

Bilateral Birding

Nesting White Pelicans, a large colony of Reddish Egrets, and abundant Snowy Egrets, Roseate Spoonbills, and other wading birds were found in a summer survey of the Mexican portion of the Laguna Madre that straddles the Texas-Mexico border on the Gulf Coast. National Audubon Society sanctuary managers Mike and Rose Farmer joined with researchers from the University of Tamaulipas to document the birds.

The ecosystem is the proposed site of an intercoastal waterway, which would link Mexican ports with the network of waterways in the United States.

More than 7500 pairs of nesting birds were counted in the survey. On one island, there were nearly 40 fledgling Reddish Egrets. The 100 or more White Pelican nestlings found are part of only the second nesting colony of the species documented on the Gulf Coast.

The ten-day survey, the first on-the-ground study of bird species on the Mexican side of the lagoon, will be delivered to the U.S.-Mexico Joint Committee on Conservation of Wildlife. Sponsored by

PHOTOGRAPHS LEFT COLUMN TO RIGHT HORST MUELLER/VIREO W S CLARK/VIREO

QUOTES

"If you come to see the rain forest, to watch birds, and to enjoy tranquility, you can't imagine what it is like to wake up and see dump trucks and bulldozers."

Pieter Jan Brouwer, an ecotourism operator in Ecuador who has sparred with oil companies drilling in the Amazon region.

"When you or I say 'park,' we imagine monkey bars, swings, see-saws and basketball courts... When environmentalists say 'park,' they mean a wilderness area with a high fence and big sign that says 'KEEP OUT.' "

Vincent Castellano, a community board chairman in Queens, New York, and real estate broker.

Audubon, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the University of Tamaulipas, it also has the approval of SEDESOL, the Mexican environmental agency.

The study may be one of only a few opportunities to make a case for protection of the lagoon. Participants noted that one island with a large bird population was directly in the path of the proposed dredging.

DIRECTIONS

Honors

The Cooper Ornithological Society gave its first Miller Award for lifetime achievement in ornithological research to **George A. Bartholomew**. The award is named in honor of Loye H. and Alden H. Miller. The Society also gave its 1993 Harry R. Painton Award to **Martin L. Morton** for his paper on the Mountain White-crowned Sparrow.

Raymond J. O'Connor received a National Research Council Fellowship for his research in biodiversity analysis. He is a Senior Research Associate at the federal Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Research Laboratory in Corvallis, Oregon, through August 1994.

Transitions

Reuven Yosef is now the Director and Senior Research Biologist at the International Birding Center in Eilat, Israel.

Thomas E. Lovejoy is serving as a Scientific Advisor to Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt. He will work on the proposed National Biological Survey.

The recently appointed Associate Curator in the Section of Birds at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History is **Bradley C. Livezey**.

Obituary

M.E. "Pete" Isleib died June 18 in a commercial fishing accident in Naknek, Alaska. Isleib, a regional and Christmas Bird Count editor for *American Birds*, was known for his ornithological skills and his conservation work in Alaska. He was 55-years-old.

"We have lost a truly great person," said Dave Cline, Alaska regional vice-president for the National Audubon Society. "Many of us regret that his sudden death did not give us the opportunity to thank Pete for his generosity and for all that he did for Alaska conservation."

T. G. Tobish Jr., coeditor of the Alaska Regional Reports for *American Birds*, added: "Pete's death is a significant loss to Alaskan ornithology, and birding in this region. [His contributions] span both the scientific and recreational realms. Pete's tireless and contagious searchings for 'that one good bird out there' made many of our trips to Alaska's outposts the most rewarding of our lives."

Isleib first began birding as a Boy Scout in Connecticut, where he caught the attention of naturalists such as Roger Tory Peterson, Ludlow Griscom, and Allan D.

M.E. "Pete" Isleib

Cruickshank. He continued birding when he moved to Alaska in the early 1960s, as a commercial fisherman. During the off-season, Isleib was involved in environmental education and film making. He produced "Alaska's Wilderness Wildlife" and "Follow the Frontier" for the Audubon Wildlife Film series. Isleib also regularly participated in ornithological expeditions to Attu in the Aleutian Island chain with the University of Alaska Museum.

Isleib was an activist. He was a city councilor in Cordova, and was appointed by the governor to the Alaska Board of Fisheries, Board of Forestry, Coastal Policy Council, and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. He also served on the Stellar Sea Lion Recovery Team. Isleib was active in the Alaska Center for the Environment, the American Birding Association, and the Juneau Audubon Society.

One of Isleib's greatest contributions was his study of birds in the Copper River Delta/Prince William Sound area. His book authored with Brina Kessel, *Birds of the North*

Reddish Egret

PHOTOGRAPHS LEFT COLUMN TO RIGHT A & E MORRIS/VIREO DAVE SONNENBORN

Gulf Coast-Prince William Sound Region, Alaska, provided some of the only seabird surveys of the area done before the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. When his fishery was closed because of the spill, he went temporarily to Washington, D.C., as an advisor to the State Department for the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission. He testified at the first congressional hearing on the oil spill.

Isleib spoke eloquently about birds in Ron Strickland's book, *Alaskans: Life on the Last Frontier*: "Millions of people around the world depend on birds for food or for recreation—whether observing them or hunting them or for income as a tourist attraction.... I am only one of the millions who lives wouldn't be the same without birds."

A memorial service was held on September 18 in Alaska. A boardwalk through the wetlands at the Alaganik Slough of the Copper River Delta was dedicated to Isleib's memory.

"We will miss Pete as our birding companion, as a scientist and conservationist, and as an energetic friend," said Tobish.

Dr. Joseph J. Hickey died August 31 in Madison, Wisconsin. He was 86-years-old. Hickey was a major figure in North American environmentalism in its early stages, and leaves a long, distinguished history of accomplishments in ornithology and conservation.

Hickey's research in the field of organochlorine pesticides on birds demonstrated their widespread and ominous potential. His prolific and influential reports relating wildlife and DDE, long-lived breakdown product of DDT, were among the early warnings to ornithologists and environmentalists of the plight of endangered birds. He appeared publicly at every opportunity, and waged a crusade to get the message outabout pesticides. Hickey was organizer and chairman of an international scientific conference on the Peregrine Falcon when that species was in its greatest difficulty, and editor of *Peregrine Falcon Populations: Their Biology and Decline*, a book that designed the scheme for the Peregrine's recovery.

Hickey wrote *A Guide to Birdwatching in 1943*, which outlined useful studies specifically for amateur ornithologists. In 1948, Hickey joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin in the Department of Wildlife Management under Aldo Leopold, and taught wildlife ecology and ornithology there for 29 years.

He was a Guggenheim Fellow; a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; president of the American Ornithologists' Union, the Linnaean Society of New York, and the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology; and editor of the *Journal of Wildlife Management*.

Dr. Joseph J. Hickey

Hickey was awarded the Leopold Medal by the Wildlife Society in 1972, the Chancellor's Award for Excellent Teaching at the University of Wisconsin in 1976, and the Arthur A. Allen Medal from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in 1976.

Hickey was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Audubon Society in 1974; he served as a valuable member through 1983.

PHOTOGRAPHS: LEFT COLUMN TO RIGHT: COURTESY OF MRS. JOSEPH J. HICKEY; P. DAVEY/VIREO

BEHAVIOR WATCH

Wild Mimics

Everyone knows that some caged parrots can imitate sounds. But such mimicry is not so well-known in wild parrots. Surprisingly, very few cases have been proven. Vocal mimicry now has been noted in wild African Gray Parrots, the same species involved in Irene Pepperberg's landmark studies of communication in captivity. In recordings of Gray Parrots from three African countries, analysis by Alick Cruickshank, Jean-Pierre Gautier, and Claude Chappuis found the parrots mimicking at least ten other species (*Ibis* Vol. 135, No. 2).

African Gray Parrot

It might seem odd that this phenomenon has not been noted before. However, it can be hard to pick out single voices from the babble of a parrot flock, and harder still to get clear recordings of single parrots. Besides, to recognize mimicry, one must know the calls of the other birds in the region—hence the essential involvement of Claude Chappuis, a leading expert on African bird voices.

Reconnaissance Flights

During the nesting season, not all adult birds are nesting. Some—unmated and holding no territories—are wandering the countryside. Such birds have been called "floaters" in the past, but some may deserve a more active term than that. As part of a long-term study of Spotted Sandpipers on an island in Minnesota, J. Michael Reed and Lewis W. Oring kept tabs on the non-breeders that visited during the summer. Some of those sandpipers came back and nested on the island in subsequent years. Conditions on the island at the time an individual paid a visit had a measurable effect on the likelihood that this bird would return to nest. In other words, it appeared that the "floaters" were not just wandering at random, but were actively scouting for future breeding sites (*Behavioral Ecology* Vol. 3, No. 4).

The Importance Of Vantage Points

What limits the size of a bird's territory? In theory, the territory should be large enough to provide enough food and shelter for the bird. Studying Northern Shrikes in the Negev Desert, however, Reuven Yosef found a simpler factor that affected territory size—the shrikes needed good perches from which to hunt.

When Yosef added simple fence posts to the landscape, the shrikes' average territory size decreased, meaning that each bird could make a living on a smaller piece of land (*Wilson Bull.* Vol. 105, No. 1).

Various shrikes around the world are declining or threatened, and this information could offer a simple way to improve habitat quality for some of them.

Impatient Usurpers Take Over Crow Nests

Long-eared Owls use old nests of other birds rather than building their own. The nests of American Crows seem to be the ideal size. In a Manitoba study, Brian D. Sullivan sometimes found the two species nesting peacefully in the same woodlots, with the crows tending their new nests while the nearby owls used crow nests from previous years.

But not always. Sullivan noted three instances in which the owls usurped brand-new crow nests, apparently taking them over in the brief time between nest completion and the beginning of egg-laying by the crows (*Journal of Raptor Research* Vol. 26, No. 2). In each of these cases, there were no old nests in the vicinity.

Band On The Run

How often do banded birds remove their bands? Studying House Finches in Tennessee, Stephen J. Stedman found a way to find out: He marked each bird in a second way, by clipping a corner of one tail feather. This didn't hurt the bird, but made it recognizable (until the next molt) as one that had been banded.

Out of 230 finches recaptured during the study, 72—nearly one-third—had partly opened their bands, and one had removed the band entirely (*N. Am. Bird Bander* Vol. 15, No. 4).

The good news was that, judging from those recaptured more than once, the finches stopped trying to open their bands after a few days or weeks. Evidently the birds grow accustomed to the bands rather quickly.

Long-eared Owl

Gulls *vs.* Rhinos

Rhinoceros Auklets nest in burrows on North Pacific islands, and many of those islands are shared by Glaucous-winged Gulls. Adult "Rhinos," returning with food for their young, often are robbed of their catch by the gulls. On Protection Island, Washington, Ulrich Wilson monitored 20 burrows for Rhinos in the midst of a gull colony, and 20 more in a gull-free part of the island (*Journal of Field Ornithology* Vol. 64, No. 2).

The burrows in the gull-free and gull-occupied zones were used equally often, and the auklets had about the same overall breeding success in both areas. But young auklets raised within the gull colony grew more slowly, suggesting that the gulls were taking a significant amount of food away from the incoming adult Rhinos in those areas.

Apparently the gulls posed a nuisance to the Rhinos, but not a threat to their survival.

Tropical Nectar

For Temperate Starlings Christopher J. Feare is an authority on the European Starling, and has even written a book about the species. But he saw something new on a recent trip to California. The starlings in Newport Beach were visiting flowers of some introduced trees, and the ones visiting Erythrina were clearly taking nectar (*Wilson Bull.* Vol. 105, No. 1). Most ornamental Erythrina in California are from Africa or the American tropics, and the starlings of course are from Europe, having reached California within the last fifty years. This is one more example of the adaptability that has made the starling such a success.

Polar Vision

Birds navigating during migration may make use of more than meets the human eye—literally. A paper by Kenneth P. Able and Mary A. Able published in *Nature* suggests that the Savannah Sparrow can see the earth's magnetic field using the energy of daylight to sensitize a chemical in the bird's retina to the earth's polarity.

In the experiment, the sparrows, which migrate from the north to the southern United States and Mexico, were kept in cages exposed to the sky. Their movements at migration time were recorded on paper on the floor of the cage; the birds feet were smeared with ink. With no interference, the birds faced the direction they would naturally migrate if free.

But in some tests the Ables used a large electromagnet to shift the magnetic field. In others, a plastic filter removing polarization from daylight was placed over the cage. When the filter was used, the birds would shift direction. Without the filter—even with the misleading magnetic field—the Savannah Sparrows oriented themselves toward true South, as indicated by naturally polarized daylight.

OVERVIEW

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

PHOTOGRAPH W. BREENE/VIREO