

OVERVIEW

Harpy Eagle Shot

A rare Harpy Eagle, equipped with a transmitter as part of a project to research habitat use of the powerful raptor species, was shot in the mountains of Venezuela recently. Venezu-

elan National Guard troops discovered the bird being skinned by individuals who now face charges under a new environmental law in that country. The eagle, one of five banded and equipped with



Harpy Eagle

transmitters in The Peregrine Fund's Harpy Eagle program, was being tracked by biologists via satellites and computers.

The Harpy Eagle is vulnerable because of its low reproduction rate, which includes one of the longest rearing periods of any raptor. After the production of a chick, a Harpy may not attempt to renest for up to three years while raising its young. Two-year-old Harpies, such as the one killed, are still dependent upon adults for food.

Diving Ducks' Delight

The rapid and extensive spread of Zebra Mussels in the Great Lakes region could affect the distribution of diving ducks, according to a study on Lake Erie in Ontario. The invasion of the European mollusk, presumably brought to North America in ship ballast water, has caught the eye of worried biologists concerned about water quality.

But Alan Wormington and J.H. Leach report in *Canadian Field-Naturalist* that larger numbers of diving ducks have been noted during fall migration at Point Pelee. Observation of feeding behavior and examination of the gizzards of eight ducks caught in fishing nets indicate that the birds are dining on the Zebra Mussels.

Several diving ducks have shown new maximum one-day counts since the mussel was first noticed in 1988, including Greater Scaup and Black and Surf scoters. But the most significant increase has occurred in Lesser Scaup, which expanded from 20 birds in 1987 to 13,500 in 1989.

The study indicates that the ducks may take advantage of the new food source, and could be a factor in efforts to control the mollusk naturally. But the paper also notes that there is likely to be little effect on diving duck populations

Whistling-Duck Alert

The West Indian Whistling-Duck has been targeted for conservation efforts by the RARE Center for tropical conservation. The rarest antid in North America was once common throughout the Bahamas and Greater Antilles. Today it is reduced to small, scattered, relict populations. Efforts at establishing protection throughout its dozen-nation range are underway. The West Indian Whistling-Duck is the largest of the world's eight whistling-duck species.



West Indian Whistling-Duck

Building Refuges

Three national wildlife refuges in the United States will expand, thanks to the approved purchase of 2333 acres by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, chaired by Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt. The additions include 796 acres at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge in Delaware; 36 acres at Back Bay N.W.R. in Virginia; and 1501 acres at the Roanoke River N.W.R. in North Carolina.

The commission also approved more than \$5.3 million in grants for 14 wetland conservation projects in Canada and Mexico, according to the *Ornithological Newsletter*. Eight of the Canadian grants will assist projects in eastern provinces, and four in the prairie pothole region. Two grants are earmarked for

projects in Mexico, in the states of Yucatan and Sonora.

The grants are provided under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, which includes funding for Mexico and Canada in recognition of important breeding and wintering habitat for migratory birds in those countries. The grants will be matched by nearly \$8.8 million in funds and services from both public and private partners.

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Museum Musings

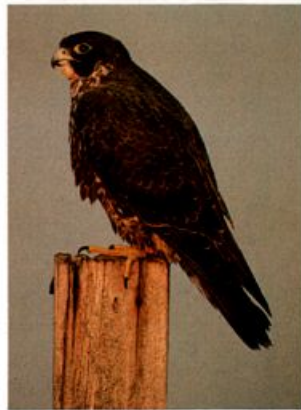
Staff reductions and a significant change in mission at the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa will effectively end research in ornithology and six other disciplines. Technical support for four collections has been eliminated, as well as support for bird specimen preparation. Collections will be regionalized and classified by "levels of importance," and some speculate that collection reviews will result in the disposal of "surplus" specimens. Taxon-oriented research will be replaced by interdisciplinary "solution-oriented research," according to the new mandate set forth by the director of the museum and the board of trustees.

A network of staff, environmental organizations, museum professionals, and concerned citizens are calling for a halt to the restructuring. Comments can be sent to Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien in Ottawa. Coordinators True Friends of Nature would like copies of letters at: 1 Nicholas St., Suite 620, Ottawa, ON K1N 7B7 Canada.

UPDATE

Peregrine's Progress

The Arctic subspecies of the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus tundrius*) will be down-listed under the Endangered Species Act. Peregrines in eastern North America, including



Peregrine Falcon

tundrius, had nearly disappeared by the 1970s, victims of pesticides containing DDT. Populations have since rebounded, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed delisting. The Peregrine migrates long distances from its Arctic breeding grounds, and restrictions on pesticides in the United States and Canada beyond its breeding range are in part responsible for the success of the bird. Two other races of the falcon (*pealei* and *anatum*) remain on the Endangered Species list.

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Raptors in Malta

Migrating birds of prey continued to be targeted by sportsmen on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean (See *American Birds* Vol. 47, No. 1). On November 10, 1993, a flock of 50 Short-toed Eagles was spotted over Malta, a record count. In less than 24 hours, all 50 had been shot. The massacre was covered by the Maltese media, but no legal action was taken. Such shootings are illegal in Malta.

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Take the Lead Out!

British Columbia has banned lead shot for waterfowl hunting, beginning in 1995. Examination of gizzards from dead birds collected in the southern part of the province showed that significant numbers were poisoned by lead

Hunters will instead use steel shot. This is the first province-wide ban on lead shot, though some areas in B.C., Manitoba, and Ontario have taken the step independently.

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Good News

Incompatible uses at national wildlife refuges will cease under a settlement reached between the United States Department of Interior and environmental groups, including the National Audubon Society. Activities such as cattle grazing, power boating, and off-road vehicle use will be halted at the eight refuges cited in the suit, unless the United States Fish and Wildlife Service can demonstrate that these uses are compatible with wildlife protection.

At a ninth refuge, Cabeza Prieta in Arizona, the Interior Department will evaluate its legal options for halting low-flying military missions. Interior will also evaluate all so-called secondary uses at its 491 wildlife refuges. These include fishing, boating, hunting, farming, and other recreational pursuits.

"With our wetlands and forests being destroyed all around us, America needs a national wildlife refuge system

aged under an inappropriate multiple-use philosophy."

WORLD BRIEFS

Mexico

A highland hardwood forest in the state of Guanajuato is the subject of preservation efforts by the Fundación Ecológica de Guanajuato. Fundación workers and volunteers have begun censusing the bird population in the 80,000 hectare forest near Santa Rosa four times a year. The habitat is critical for both resident birds and neotropical migrants, including Townsend's, Hermit, and Black-throated Gray warblers. A survey in October 1993 found 70 species. The preserve is one of the few intact forests in an area that has suffered disturbance and deforestation for over 400 years, when Spanish colonialists began mining silver in the region.

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New Guinea

Crater Mountain in Papua, New Guinea, has been declared a wildlife management area, a move that will protect hundreds of bird species in a pristine and biologically diverse habitat. The 1000 square mile reserve was



Indigenous clansman in New Guinea

where wildlife takes precedence," said John Echeverria, Audubon chief counsel. "Too many refuges have been man-

made possible by the donation of lands by members of twenty indigenous clans, according to NYZS/The Wildlife

BIRDER OF NOTE

Richard Homan



Age: 57

Home: Bethesda, Maryland

Profession: Journalist, assistant foreign editor for the Middle East at the *Washington Post*.

How long birding? Six years.

What field guides do you use? I carry a well-worn *Robbins Golden Guide* and keep a *National Geographic* and a *Peterson's* in the car. Sometimes I use all three.

What binoculars do you use? Swift Audubon 8.5 x 44.

Life list? Yes. I have 538 North American Birds, and a couple hundred western palearctic birds that I saw in Europe and the Middle East.

What was your most recent life bird? A Chestnut-collared Longspur. I was in Nebraska, where I grew up. It was August, when only fools look for longspurs. I was torn

between studying it on the fence in front of me or a Ferruginous Hawk that appeared at the same moment overhead. As a lifer, the longspur won out.

Favorite birding spot? Cape May, New Jersey, spring and fall.

Most interesting birding spot? In the United States, Big Bend National Park; abroad, Eilat, Israel, at the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba.

What is your favorite North American species? The Northern Saw-whet Owl. It's a challenge to find, but rewards the birder by staying to be looked at.

Why do you bird? I like the solitude of most birding habitats. I marvel at the regularity with which so many species come and go seasonally in places I've gotten to know. Most of all, I'm lured out by the possibility, each time, of the unexpected.

What has been your biggest thrill? I saw a Ross's Gull in a sewage tank in Baltimore—a sighting that cost me \$1 for a bridge toll.

Where do you want to bird next? The life lister in me says Duluth in the winter, or even Alaska, once I've gotten my kids through college.

What is the importance of birding to you? When I head out for a morning of birding, I may get a raised eyebrow from my non-birding wife Mary Lou. I'll remind her that she urged me to get a hobby, and she'll respond, "Yes, but not with a vengeance." I wish I'd started as a teenager, as so many of my birding friends did—then I'd have a broader perspective on the toll that development has taken on birds and the environment.

Conservation Society.

The local clans did not want to see their land destroyed through deforestation and development, as has happened elsewhere.

Economic incentives were also used to gain the people's cooperation; a research and visitor center will encourage tourism and employ local residents, and researchers working within the preserve will pay fees. Agricultural assistance will also be provided.

Saudi Arabia

The National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has included avifauna in its System Plan for a sustainable rural economy. A national network of protected areas throughout the kingdom will be set up. Five years of field research on the Houbara Bustard, combined with a captive breeding program, have laid the groundwork for its conservation, according to *IUCN Bulletin*. Saudi elite have come under criticism for their hunting of bustards in other countries, such as Pakistan.

Mexico

The Museo de las Aves de Mexico (Museum of Mexican Birds) has opened in Saltillo, Coahila. It houses the collection of Aldegundo Garza de

Leon, and includes a majority of Mexico's birds from both tropical and subtropical regions. Birds are arranged by habitat, adaptations, and various themes (such as nesting). The exhibits are in Spanish.

The museum has a research area, and an interpretive center will educate children on the nation's rich natural heritage.

AUDUBON REPORT

Luring Lusty Laysans

The National Audubon Society is hoping to lure Laysan Albatrosses to an uninhabited island off the coast of Oahu, Hawaii, following the model used to reestablish puffins and terns on the Maine Coast. The Laysans have been colonizing near airport runways on Oahu, where they are a hazard to airplane traffic. The seabirds are also nesting on beaches, where human disruption and predators such as dogs and cats disrupt nesting attempts.

Audubon scientist Stephen Kress has joined with Hawaiian conservation agencies to entice young birds to Kaohikaipu Island (Black Rock), a state wildlife sanctuary. Kress and colleague Richard H. Podolsky, using techniques developed in Maine, will set out life-size models of adult albatross, chicks, and ceramic eggs.



Laysan Albatross

From mid-December to mid-May, recorded sounds of courting adults and chicks will be played at the island. The combination of decoys and sounds could lure the birds to the island. Biologists expect it will be several years before Laysan Albatross relocate, if they do. Albatrosses do not breed until they are about eight-years-old, and they typically "prospect" for several years before breeding. Kress hopes that young birds will begin familiarizing themselves with Kaohikaipu this year.

Voluntary Bias?

A bill to create the National Biological Survey (NBS) has been passed by the United States House of Representatives, but proposals from some lawmakers jeopardize its future. The survey will assess the nation's biological resources, including birds, by cataloging and mapping every plant and animal species. An important source of data on bird populations is gleaned through voluntary efforts, such as Breeding Bird Surveys and Christmas Bird Counts. But if an amendment adopted by the House bill becomes law, it would bar the NBS from using the services of volunteers in conducting the survey. Following the complaint that many volunteers are nonscientists with a special agenda, Rep. Jack Fields of Texas said: "... in essence we are creating an environmental gestapo that will go on people's private property."

Prohibiting use of volunteer-generated data would be a disaster for bird monitoring efforts, since most programs rely on volunteers in the field.

Restoring Bird Habitat

The United States Bureau of Reclamation has signed an agreement with the National Audubon Society to restore and protect habitat in 17 west-

ern states. Audubon staff and chapter volunteers will help pinpoint and carry out projects on Reclamation lands. The Bureau—which provides drinking water to millions and operates dams, canals, and water projects—irrigates 9.1 million acres in the west. "By working together to identify areas that need restoration or will benefit from improved management, Audubon has a chance to reverse habitat degradation, thereby making the planet more hospitable for migratory birds," says Stan Senner, director of National Audubon's Migratory Bird Conservation Program.

All Species Day

School children around the United States dressed as California Condors and other endangered species for Halloween, in celebration of National Audubon Society's All Species Day October 30.

Designed to involve children in efforts to save endangered animals, insects, and plants, the program included advice ranging from how to make costumes to organizing communities. Mayors in Washington D.C., St. Louis, and Los Angeles issued proclamations, and events varied from classroom projects and parades to a festival in Sacramento. More than 500 educators and community organizers requested information packets on All Species Day.

DIRECTIONS

Honors

Heather Williams, an assistant professor of biology at Williams College, was given a \$240,000 MacArthur "genius grant" in June. Williams was recognized for her contributions to the study of communications through her research on song learning in birds. Some of her current research



Heather Williams

interests include how the two sides of a bird's brain interact in the production of bird song, and what role do male and female House Finches each play in enforcing local dialect stability in colonized areas of the eastern United States.

A Maurice Brooks Lectureship has been established at West Virginia University. Brooks, professor of Forestry and Wildlife Management at the school, died January 10, 1993. The first lecture was presented in April by M. Philip Kahl, vertebrate zoologist, photographer, and writer.

A pair of Red-breasted Mergansers will be featured on the 1994 duck stamp issued by the United States Department of

Interior. The painting is by Neal R. Anderson of Lincoln, Nebraska. This is the second stamp for Anderson, who submitted the winning art of Lesser Scaup in 1989. The proceeds from the stamp, which is sold to hunters and stamp collectors, go to conservation of wetlands. It will be on sale July 1.

Transitions

Biologist Jack Ward Thomas has been named chief of the United States Forest Service. Thomas, with the Forest Service for 27 years, headed a scientific team that delivered a plan to President Clinton on protecting forests and the Endangered (Northern) Spotted Owl in the Pacific Northwest.

Mary C. McKittrick has been named the Program Director for Systematic Biology at the National Science Foundation in Washington.

Mark Robbins left the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia to become the



Red-breasted Merganser

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

QUOTES

"A group of bird-watchers gathered recently on the East Coast for a competition to see who could identify the most species during a specific period of time. Is this the kind of tranquil natural activity that brings a harried person peace of mind?"

Charlie Creekmore, *Chico News & Review*.

"We volunteers also do 'good science.' If we didn't, why would former Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan ... present the Fellowship Award for Volunteerism to the Breeding Bird Survey?"

Thomas M. Valega, in a letter to *The Washington Post* on Congressional efforts to ban volunteers from working on the National Biological Survey.

Ornithology Collection Manager at the Museum of Natural History, University of Kansas.

The Association for Parrot Conservation has been formed to provide a forum on the status, threats, and conservation of the world's parrot populations. The group will undertake scientific research, policy recommendations, and education. Initial emphasis will be placed on New World parrots. The President is **Enrique Bucher** of Argentina. Dr. Bucher hopes that "by initiating and facilitating effective parrot conservation actions, the association will make a substantial contribution to conserve the parrots of the New World, of which 30 percent of the species are at present threatened."

Obituaries

Robert Earl Stewart of Jamestown, North Dakota, died July 15, 1993, in Florida. He was 80. Stewart worked for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for 40 years as a research biologist. He was a pioneer in avian ecology, authoring several books on birds. Stewart did significant

research on bird populations in both Maryland and North Dakota. He received the Meritorious Service Award from the Department of Interior in 1976.

Ben B. Coffey Jr. died August 22, 1993, in Memphis, Tennessee. He was 89. Coffey was one of the South's most active amateur ornithologists, observing and recording birds for nearly 70 years. He participated in 234 Christmas Bird Counts over several continents, and was compiler of the Memphis Count for 60 years. Recordings of rare bird songs collected by Coffey and his wife Lula form the Coffey Neotropical Collection at the Florida Museum of Natural History at the University of Florida. Coffey, a retired fire prevention engineer, was a fellow of the American Ornithological Union.

Richard Edes Harrison, a past president of the Linnaean Society, died January 5 in New York City. He was 92. Harrison, a well-known mapmaker, was a fixture in New York City parks, pursuing unusual bird sightings

BEHAVIOR WATCH

Great Blue Omnivore

The Great Blue Heron is big enough that, like the proverbial ten-thousand-pound gorilla, it may be able to eat "anything it wants to." Watching Great Blues in Oregon, K. J. Merrifield saw a couple of cases in point (*Northwestern Naturalist* Vol. 73, No. 1). On one occasion, a young Double-crested Cormorant that had just captured a large fish promptly lost its catch to a surprise attack by a heron. And in another case, a Great Blue spent several minutes stalking and pursuing Red Phalaropes that had been driven close to shore by a winter storm.

Facing the Wall

Black-legged Kittiwakes nesting on cliffs have a very strong tendency to face toward the rock wall behind the ledge. Some new insight into this behavior comes from observations on Swallow-tailed Gulls in the Galapagos, which also often nest on cliffs. Edward H. Burtt, Jr., who had previously studied the kittiwakes, found that Swallow-tailed Gulls also generally faced the wall behind the nest (*Ibis* Vol. 135, No. 4). In the Swallow-taileds, this behavior carried over to those nesting on flat ground: If there were some large object nearby,

such as a major shrub or rock, the adult gull on the nest would tend to face that object.

Kermadec Copycats

A white patch in the outer part of the wing is a characteristic of the skuas and jaegers, piratic seabirds that often force other birds to give up their food. A similar white wing patch is also shown by a few of the large petrels. For example, sea-going birders in the Pacific have often noticed that the Kermadec Petrel in flight can look a lot like a skua.

Now there is evidence that the birds notice the same thing. During long-term observations, Larry Spear and David G. Ainley found that skuas and jaegers avoided attacking Kermadec Petrels, even though they readily attacked other petrels of similar size. Furthermore, the Kermadecs sometimes attacked other birds no smaller than themselves, using behavior similar to that of the skuas, and forced them to give up their food. It seems that the Kermadecs' vague similarity to the real predator is enough to deter the skuas and intimidate the other birds (*Auk* Vol. 110, No. 2).

Choosy Egrets

The Cattle Egret got its name because it follows cattle in pastures, capturing insects



Swallow-tailed Gull



Cattle Egret

flushed by the grazing animals. Before it had cattle to follow throughout the world, however, it had a wide variety of other grazing animals in its native range in Africa. Joanna Burger and Michael Gochfeld made a careful study in Kenya to see which herds attracted the egrets. They found that the Cattle Egrets were highly selective: the birds often foraged with zebras, wildebeests, and waterbucks, but almost never with giraffes, gazelles, or impalas, while virtually every herd of Cape Buffalo had its attendant egrets (*Ornis Scandinavica* Vol. 24, No. 3). Walking speed of the animals seemed to be an important key: The egrets tended to associate with animals that were moving at a rate of 5 to 15 steps per minute.

A Mink in the Ointment

Terns nesting in colonies are automatically vulnerable to pressure and predation. Sometimes the presence of just one predator can have a major effect on a colony. Studying Common Terns nesting in Ontario, Gary P. Burness and Ralph D. Morris documented the impact of a single wild mink (*Condor* Vol. 95, No. 3). The mink was seen capturing several tern chicks during nighttime forays through the colony, but it had a larger effect by disturb-

ing the adult terns and keeping them off their nests. During one cold night, on an intensively studied plot within the colony, the mink took four tern chicks—but another twelve chicks died in their nests, apparently from exposure, since their parents had been kept away too long by the prowling mink.

When Eagles Share

The national emblem of the United States, the Bald Eagle, often belies its regal appearance by feeding on dead fish and the like. But when it hunts, it can be a formidable predator. During a study in Florida, Martin J. Folk saw Bald Eagles in pursuit of birds several times (with the abundant Cattle Egret as the favored prey). On five occasions, the two members of a pair of eagles were seen working together in the hunt: either taking turns in pursuit, or with one “herding” the intended prey toward the other eagle. This cooperative strategy seemed to work very well (*Fla. Field Naturalist* Vol. 20, No. 4).

Carrion-Feeding Peregrines

Although the Peregrine Falcon is often regarded as one of the world’s most impressive predators, its hunting skill is not developed overnight. Young birds may have to improvise before they become masters of pursuit.

On the outer coast of Washington, in January of two separate years, Joseph B. Buchanan saw young Peregrines feeding on dead birds washed up on the beach: a Common Murre in one case, a White-winged Scoter in the other (*Northwestern Naturalist* Vol. 72, No. 1). Such behavior may be an extreme response to hunger on the part of inexperienced hunters; in one of these cases, Buchanan had watched

the young Peregrine make 19 unsuccessful attempts to capture Dunlins before it resorted to feeding on carrion instead.

Redstart Head Start

The American Redstart builds a simple cup-shaped nest for raising its young. So do various other birds—and the redstart seems to realize this. Stephen M. Yezerinac watched a pair of Yellow Warblers through the process of building a nest and raising a brood of three young. Less than two weeks after the young Yellow Warblers had fledged, however, he was surprised to find a female American Redstart incubating its own eggs in this same nest (*Wilson Bull.* Vol.

The Revenge of the Frogs, Latin American Style

Neotropical migrants face a variety of challenges on their wintering grounds.

In southern Veracruz, Mexico, a study of the neotropical green frog found two cases in which this amphibian had swallowed Hooded Warblers.

According to Richard Vogt, Jesus Ramirez, and Jose Luis Villareal, the warblers most likely had been captured by these large frogs when they came down to the water’s edge to bathe (*Wilson Bull.* Vol. 105, No. 3).



American Redstart

105, No. 3). Apparently the redstarts have been found helping themselves to ready-made nests in the past also, with the nests of Red-eyed Vireos having been adopted at least four times.

As the researchers pointed out, however, there have been many documented cases of birds eating frogs or toads, and very few known instances in which the amphibians turned the tables and ate birds.