

pictorial highlights



The Great Skua is normally a pelagic species in North America meaning, naturally, that it is seldom seen from land. This obliging first-winter bird (aged by the U-shaped subterminal spots to the scapulars and wing coverts) was photographed ashore at St. John's, Newfoundland, 30 Jan 2000. It appeared on 20 Jan, after a severe gale in which it injured its left wing. Undaunted, it fed on dead gulls and even killed a Great Black-backed Gull. However, it was further injured when attacking an Iceland Gull and was captured for rehabilitation 3 Feb. Photograph by Bruce Mactavish.



Gulls present a special identification challenge, not only because of the myriad plumages related to age and geographic variation, but also because of their penchant for interbreeding. A particularly well-known hybrid is a cross between a Glaucous Gull and a Herring Gull, a cross originally described as a separate species, the Nelson's Gull, many years ago. This first-winter Nelson's Gull was photographed at Superior, Wisconsin, 7 Dec 1999. Note the rather Glaucous Gull-like bill but the wing pattern reminiscent of a Thayer's Gull. Photograph by Karl Bardon.



European strays add excitement to fall and winter birding in northeastern North America. Some species, such as this Fieldfare photographed at Grande-Cascapédia, Gaspé, 29 Jan 2000, add color as well. This first-winter male remained at a feeder from 14 Jan-13 Feb. Photograph by Michèle Lafleur.



The Clay-colored Sparrow breeds primarily in the southern Prairie Provinces and across the northern Great Plains; hence, it is rare toward either coast, although it occurs regularly during fall migration. This immature in fresh plumage, documented east of its usual range at Martin's Creek, Northampton, Pennsylvania, 12 Dec 1999, was one of six found in the Hudson-Delaware Region this winter. Photograph by Brian Hardiman.

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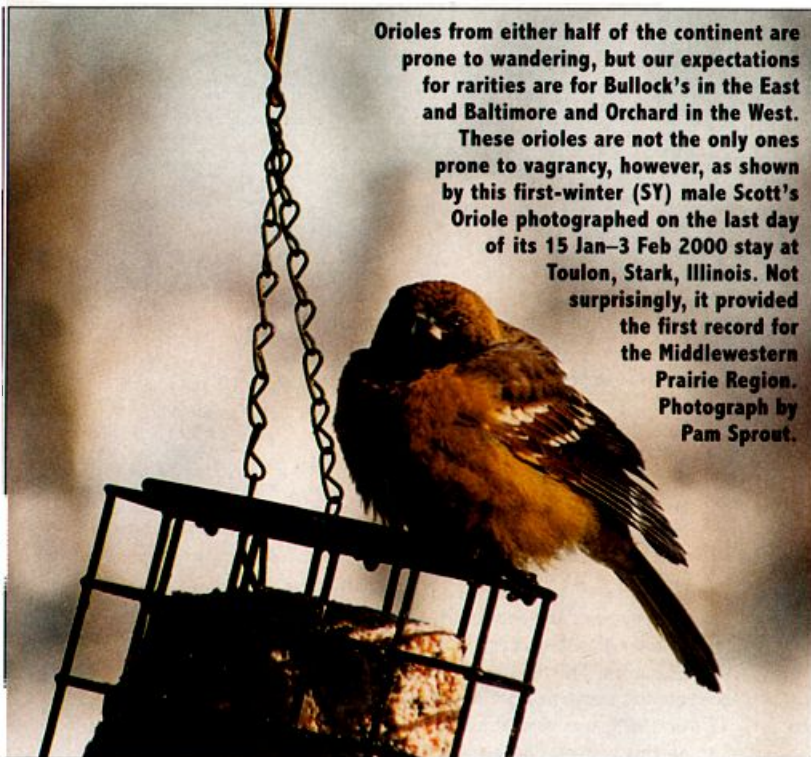
Any albatross off the Atlantic Coast is noteworthy. Almost all of the few records involve the Yellow-nosed Albatross, like this subadult a mere 5 km off Hatteras, North Carolina, 5 Feb 2000. This bird furnished the first documented record for the Southern Atlantic Region. Photograph by James Cameron.



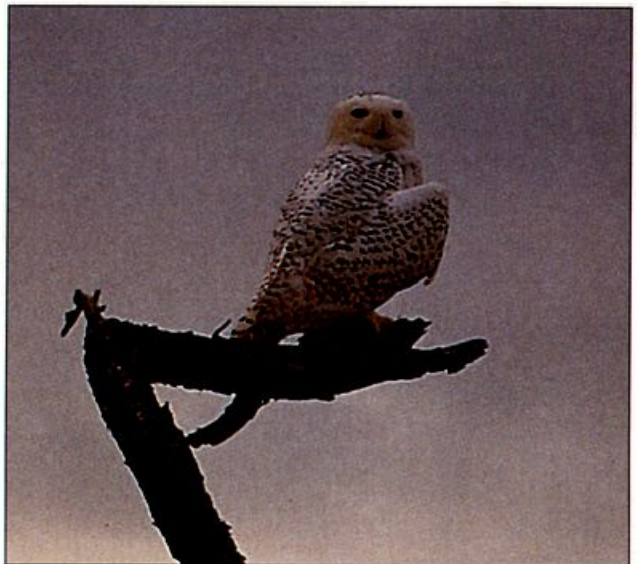
As with the Rufous-capped Warbler (see the cover), United States records of the Rufous-backed Robin have increased dramatically in the past decade. Texas's eighth was this beauty at Sarita, Kenedy, 31 Jan–13 Feb 2000; the photo was taken on 5 Feb. Photograph by Jimmy McHaney.



The Say's Phoebe is a denizen of the arid West. A few wander east in fall, fitting of its autumnal coloration. Kentucky's second record was furnished by this bird in Logan County 28 Dec 1999–14 Jan 2000; the photo was obtained 8 Jan. Photograph by Brainard Palmer-Ball, Jr.



Orioles from either half of the continent are prone to wandering, but our expectations for rarities are for Bullock's in the East and Baltimore and Orchard in the West. These orioles are not the only ones prone to vagrancy, however, as shown by this first-winter (SY) male Scott's Oriole photographed on the last day of its 15 Jan–3 Feb 2000 stay at Toulon, Stark, Illinois. Not surprisingly, it provided the first record for the Middlewestern Prairie Region. Photograph by Pam Sprout.



Snowy Owls frequently push southward along the Atlantic Coast during winter, but who would expect one in Florida? This immature (note the black barring on the mantle and wing coverts) provided the first record for that decidedly non-snowy state. It frequented St. George Island State Park and Bald Point, Franklin, 8 Dec 1999–9 Jan 2000; the image was captured at the former on 10 Dec. Photograph by Jim Cavanagh.



Because only the Ruby-throated Hummingbird occurs commonly in the East, all odd hummers receive close scrutiny. This winter was exceptional for odd hummingbirds in the East (see the "Changing Seasons"). Two noteworthy finds in Louisiana were this immature male Broad-billed Hummingbird (left) at Anne Gregory's 6 Nov 1999 and this adult male Broad-tailed Hummingbird (right) in Iberville Parish 21 Nov 1999. Photographs by Michael A. Seymour.

If you do not molt into ptarmigan-like winter plumage, you would not be particularly well-camouflaged in the snow. Such wisdom could hardly be more true if you are a gaudy adult male Vermilion Flycatcher (left) attempting to winter in western Montana at Victor Crossing, Ravalli. This devil-may-care bird appeared 2 Jan 2000, providing a first for Montana. But soon after it attracted the attention of birders, it attracted the hungry eye of a Northern Shrike (bottom left), to which it succumbed 11 Jan. Photographs by Claude Birkeneder.



Mountain Bluebirds are regular in western Texas, but this female at Port Aransas 8 Jan 2000 through the winter, and photographed 15 Jan, was at an unusual easterly locale on the Texas coast. Photograph by Jim Flynn.





One or two Pine Warblers are found annually in California in winter and a few have wintered in southern Arizona. Despite this precedent for wintering in the West, few would have predicted one spending the season in the frigid temperatures of Moscow, Idaho. This hardy immature male was photographed 14 Dec 1999 during its lengthy stay from 7 Dec into at least early April. Photograph by Ray Hoff.



The skulking Le Conte's Sparrow is being found with increasing frequency in winter on the eastern escarpment of the continental divide. Small flocks have been found in recent years in eastern Colorado and eastern New Mexico, including eight near Colorado's John Martin Reservoir 2 Feb 2000 through the winter. The photo was taken 4 Feb. Energetic birders would do well to search wet reedy/grassy areas in this region during winter to determine if there is a small regular wintering population. Photograph by David A. Leatherman.



As noted for the Scott's Oriole, the Bullock's Oriole is a far more expected stray east of its normal range, but few are as flashy as this lovely male in fresh plumage at a feeder in Elk Horn, Iowa. It was present 4 Nov 1999 through the end of winter, was photographed 18 Dec 1999, and represented only the third record for Iowa. Photograph by Thomas H. Kent.



The Lesser Nighthawk is rare in the United States in winter, with generally only one or two found in the Sonoran Desert of California. Thus, a mid-winter bird far to the north at San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge 30 Dec 1999 was certainly unexpected. This male (note the white wing patch) provided the first winter record for the Middle Pacific Coast Region. Photograph by Joelle Buffa.

Kirtland's Warblers are rare and enigmatic; despite intense study of this species, its main wintering grounds have yet to be discovered. It is generally accepted that the species winters in the Bahamas. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of records for the main Bahamian Islands. Thus, this female photographed on southern Abaco 9 Jan 2000 was met with interest. Photograph by E. Bracey.

