

# Editors' Notebook

## Into the breach!

The American Birding Association has begun a subscribership campaign on behalf of *North American Birds*. Many regional editors, along with friends of the journal, will be distributing back issues and subscription forms to birders likely to sign on as subscribers. We hope that this grass-roots drive will be more effective than a mass mailing in increasing our subscriber base and that by this time next year, we might count several hundred, perhaps 1000 new subscribers among the readers of the journal. We can always use more help, so if you feel inclined to talk up the journal among friends or colleagues, please drop a line to the editor (ensifera@aol.com; or by mail at 9 Randolph Avenue, Cape Charles, VA, USA 23310), who will be happy to help get you set up. With more subscribers, we'll be able to publish more articles, color photographs, and more in-depth regional reports.

## Offshore outposts

The thrill of a few weeks in autumn on Southeast Farallon Island off central California, or out on Bermuda, or, more recently, on one of the deep-water oil-drilling platforms in the Gulf of Mexico would be hard to beat anywhere, but there are autumn outposts at sea yet to be fully test-driven. This season's reports from observers stationed on San Clemente Island, almost 100 km off southern California, and on St. Lawrence Island, in the Bering Sea, include a number of island first records, as well as a few records even more significant. We received much good photographic material from birders and ornithologists on both islands, so we gathered the images up in montages to showcase some of their discoveries. Islands hold an obvious attraction to migrant and vagrant landbirds (whose only alternative might be open ocean), but they also offer a gauge for those studying migratory waves and reverse migrants, as the "overflight" or "overshoot" of such waves is often more apparent on islands than on nearby mainland coasts. These particular islands are also well situated for studying seabird flights.

## Good fortune

This journal and its predecessors have been blessed for nearly 20 years with the editorial services of Greg Lasley and Chuck Sexton. We at the journal will miss their swift pen and sense of humor, their mastery of the Texas avifauna, and their devotion to the enterprise that is *North American Birds*. We're fortunate, too, to have a worthy lot of Texans willing to fill their boots—Mark Lockwood will be heading up a team that includes Willie Sekula, Brush Freeman, and Cliff Shackelford, not to mention numerous subregional compilers and contributors. Texas, where everything is on a grand scale, has so much birding activity in its borders that for the editing team to track down and check all the interesting reports—some of them just Internet-generated gossamer—inevitably involves an enormous commitment of time. So if you see these good editors afield, where they'd dearly love to be more often, offer a "thank you" and a cold drink.

## Typos and sundries

Our apologies to Adrian Dorst, whose fine photograph of the Bar-tailed Godwit at Tofino, British Columbia (*N. A. B.* 55: 381), was miscredited, and to Gary H. Rosenberg, whose stunning Elegant Tern photograph taken at Avra Wastewater Treatment Plant on 19 July 2001 (*N. A. B.* 55: 506) was ascribed to the nearby New Mexico record; thanks to Rudolf Koes and Mark Stevenson for sending in these corrections. The article on the first successful U. S. nesting of Heermann's Gull (*N. A. B.* 55: 375-378) had its dates of reception and acceptance truncated; it was received 20 September 2001 and accepted 22 October 2001. Finally, a *faux pas* in the Editors' Notebook, where yours truly set Mexico "second only to Brazil in the New World" in its number of endemics. In fact, with recent splits, the new



Armed with patience, perseverance, and chum, birders were rewarded with White-faced Storm-Petrels off the coasts of Massachusetts at Hydrographer (here) and Atlantis Canyons, off Block Island, Rhode Island (one banded!), off Long Island, New York, off New Jersey at the Hudson Canyon, and off Virginia near the Norfolk Canyon. One of the scarcest seabirds that regularly if rarely visits western Atlantic waters, White-faced is often found offshore in large aggregations of Wilson's Storm-Petrels. Photograph 28 August by Stephen Mirick.

Clements and Shany *A Field Guide to the Birds of Peru* (Ibis, 2001) recognizes as many as 118 endemic species there, with more birds currently defined as endemic subspecies surely to be accorded status as species in the future. In describing the new subregions of Mexico, which now have their own maps, thanks to Cindy Lippincott and Bob Berman, we inadvertently left off mention of the state of Colima; it falls in the subregion of Central Mexico (cf. *N. A. B.* 55: 375-378).

## September morning

I can't avoid a few words on what was certainly a harrowing experience for all of us. How trite it is to write here that more than the seasons changed on September 11: our collective lives changed, no matter how we reacted to the atrocities in New York City and Washington, D. C., and central Pennsylvania that day. The next week's *New Yorker*, rarely a magazine to take a birder's-eye view, captured a widely felt disparity:

*On the morning of the day they did it, the city was as beautiful as it had ever been. Central Park had never seemed so gleaming and luxuriant—the leaves just beginning to fall, and the light on the leaves left on the trees somehow making them at once golden and bright green. A bird-watcher in the Ramble made a list of the birds he saw there, from the Northern Flicker and the Red-eyed Vireo to the Rose-breasted Grosbeak and the Baltimore Oriole. "Quite a few migrants around today," he noted happily. (Adam Gopnik, "Taking a long walk home," *The New Yorker* 24 September 2001: 34-38.)*

In the East, for birders afield on that day, the cruel convergence lingered: one of those perfect, blue-blue migration mornings, with birds in their places at the appointed times in hoped-for numbers and plumages and foliage perfectly lit, all oblivious to the sky-borne terror that rained down just a few hours after their own dawn descents.

Now, even seven months later, where the talk is of recovery and retribution, and our markets and military defy the impact of those planes, a cer-

tan innocence is still elusive where birding for so many seemed a realm wholly apart from atrocity—one of aesthetic marvel, or passionate wonder at birds' behavior and movements, or dispassionate scientific pursuit—there drifts an intrusive presence through our birding, ghostlike. Was it a disparity of scale that we registered; was it that we felt our avocations so puny next to so much loss on that morning? Or was it the disorienting contrast of serenity and beauty in the migrants' presence with the surreal live images broadcast on television? Or is there, perhaps, some barely intimated association between the safe, restorative pleasure we take in our own respite from wordly cares—our birding—and the definitive end of the isolation from terror that the United States had enjoyed? Had we imagined, without forming the thought, our pleasure and our passion to be apart from politics? We might look away from CNN's footage of oil-soaked Socotra Cormorants during the Gulf War; we could hardly look away from images that told of a brutal interruption of what is for many birders the most sublime time of year.

### Connections, contributions, consequences

I would imagine that, for some reading this, questions such as these are as foreign as were the topographies of central and southern Asia before the war commenced and we found ourselves semi-willing students of theretofore-obscure realms. But for those who found in September 11 a cause for reflection on their day-to-day activities, including birding, and who recognize the quiet slippage it occasioned, it may also be true that this thunderclap morning brought with it some measure of political catharsis. The United States of America, made up of its citizens, our lives, our achievements but too our excesses and flaws and our comfortable distance from the difficulties and despair of so many on the planet, could not fantasize itself in the singular for much longer. We were, as some members of our government had warned us, "overdue."

And so September 11 could, for some, have meant a change in the way birding feels. "To what end do I bird?" is a question heard more often now—is it an escape from stressful quotidian life, a focused pursuit with structured guides (Internet postings, listing goals, geographic touring), a set of scientific inquiries? I compose these thoughts as a citizen of the United States and as an Easterner, and they are inevitably personal and provincial. But on the days that followed the attacks, email messages flooded the offices of the A.B.A. from the four corners of the globe, all expressing an anguish and solidarity either unimaginable or unarticulated before the attacks. We became aware how close we are to so many in the world who care about our lives and life as such. Feelings of shock and concern, it turned out, were not provincial.

This journal represents an enterprise in solidarity; its reporting regions are now made up of 23 nations: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, France (Guadeloupe, Martinique, and St. Pierre and Miquelon), Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the United States of America. With these, other political entities are within our reporting area: Bermuda, a self-governing British dependency; the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Montserrat, the Cayman Islands, and Turks and Caicos Islands, all dependent territories of the U. K.; Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius, and Saba, municipalities of the Netherlands Antilles; Puerto Rico, a commonwealth of the U. S. A.; and the U. S. Virgin Islands, an unincorporated territory of the U. S. A. And in this issue, we have field notes from an October visit to Aruba—not a Venezuelan island but an autonomous state within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, like its neighbors Bonaire and Curaçao.

But our solidarity through this journal is uneven. How much contact do we birders, from all over this half of the hemisphere, have with each other? Is it *enough*? Of the many countries included this journal, some rarely have visits by North American birders; and many of their birders and citizens interested in birds likewise have not visited North America. Some countries included in the journal have never had bird records published. Lee Jones, in

his Central American Region column, implores adventurous birders to take on the little-known countries of Nicaragua and El Salvador, now relatively tranquil after years of unrest. In the Caribbean, Rob Norton writes, a few souls ventured out to Montserrat, recently ravaged by the Soufrière Hills volcano, to find that perhaps two thousand endemic Montserrat Orioles have survived the eruptions, with help from local forest wardens.

One wonders what difference hundreds more international exchanges by birders from this hemisphere might make for the birds' well-being. Many, many people are deeply involved with North and Central American birds all through their ranges, but one can't help thinking that we can all try to do more than what we do now to bolster the worldwide project of progressive birding: to strengthen local knowledge about birds and local resolve for conservation, to get to know the people, including birders, of other countries, and to stay in dialogue and develop friendships with them. So many millions of bird migrants move between borders with no thought to politics or outrageous attacks. If we are to speak for them, perhaps we should undertake their migrations with them more often and begin to perceive the planet more as they do. Ours is no time to withdraw and to go about our business as usual, as we are urged; it's an unparalleled opportunity to reach out beyond borders drawn on maps. What can we do?

As readers know, the A.B.A. offers literally hundreds of ways for members and nonmembers to become involved at the local and regional level with birding and conservation organizations, as well as with national and international groups pursuing the welfare of birds. There are volunteer projects large and small to suit any taste or talent. The A.B.A. takes its partnerships in conservation projects seriously and constantly adapts to the changing scene of international bird conservation. But so many of us, most of us, have constraints upon our time that prevent us from taking part in the dozens of bird-conservation projects available to us, much less from forging ties with countries and islands distant from us. The part of our lives that includes birds might be just a few precious weekends a year, or even just a slow backroad commute to work.

It may seem an outlandish claim: *those observations have real value*. When I was growing up, sending in field notes to *American Birds* was considered an ethical imperative, done for the greater good, the "permanent record," so it was said. "Do these observations amount to anything?" we asked ourselves from time to time. The question has been asked over and over again in this journal, and the difficult but accurate answer has almost always come in the negative: truly vast amounts of data would have to be computerized, an overwhelming task, and even then it could never be satisfactorily standardized. *North American Birds* and its predecessors have never served as archives for data but rather as journals that analyzed trends and records over large regions in narrative, that is, more or less as journalism—far from lacking in value, but never a database from which to draw firm conclusions. But then, that was before the Internet, which now connects birders from all over the world and permits us to dare what was never before feasible.

Now, for the first time on a continental scale, there is an opportunity for individual birders to make a contribution that could end up, as with Christmas Bird Count data, having important consequences, perhaps even deep effects in the realm of bird conservation. I urge all to read the pages penned by John Fitzpatrick, Frank Gill, Mike Powers, Jeff Wells, and Ken Rosenberg that detail plans for *eBird*, a database on a continental scale. Is it ambitious? Yes, it is. Will it have hitches along the way? Most certainly. Is it beyond our capacity as a community of people devoted to birds to make this happen? By no means. I hope that readers will consider becoming involved in this project in coming months and years; it promises to enrich the pages of this journal, and much more. Sooner than we might imagine, *eBird* could reach through and unite the bird-people of the Western Hemisphere.

—Edward S. (Ned) Brinkley, Editor

