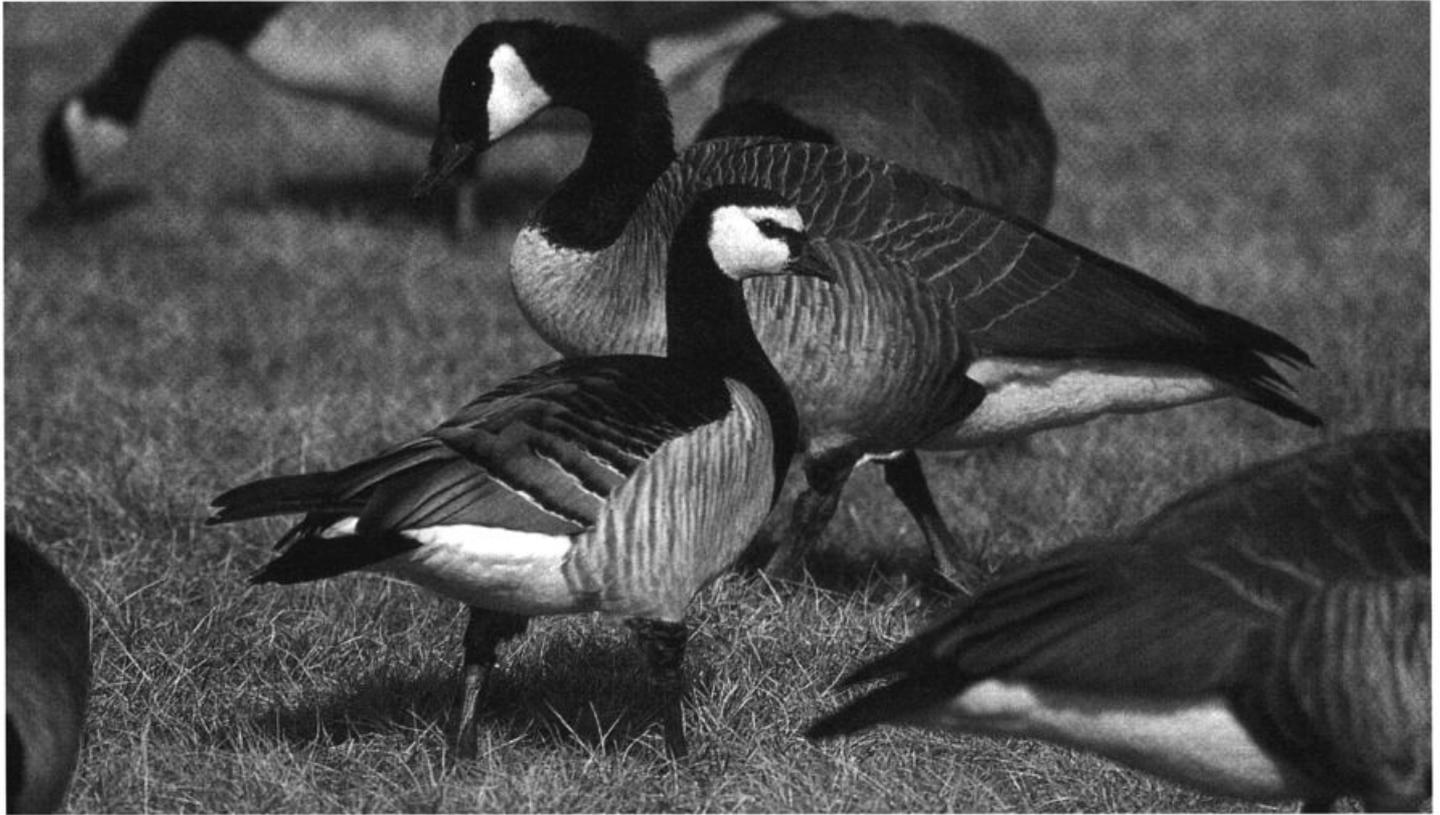


The Changing Seasons: Broken Records



After the first Barnacle Goose showed up in Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada 3 November 2001, about eight Barnacle Geese turned up over the winter in the eastern United States, in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia (with an unconfirmed report of multiple birds in Maryland). All of these birds arrived with wintering Canada Geese and departed with them, mostly before or at the end of the reporting period. It might have been interesting to put a satellite tracking device on one of these birds—to find out where it considers home, at least. But without such clues, the origin of all these geese remains a mystery. This photograph was taken 13 February 2002 at Bill Brenman Park, Alexandria, Virginia. *Photograph by the editor.*

The “Changing Seasons” lately has come to sound like a broken record: this past winter’s weather was *warm*, almost *warmer* than has ever been in many areas, with record-breaking *warmth* in much of the East. (For those who have come up in the time of CDs and DVDs, a “broken record” was an LP [long-playing vinyl record album] with a scratch in it, which caused a repeated backskip of the needle, which made the recording repeat itself.) Did I mention the season was *warm*? I admit that I did compose one of those long introductions about the Weather, in which all reporting regions agreed that it was unusually warm, often dry, and that scores of birds not usually wintering in those regions did so successfully. In reading through that introduction, I nodded off twice; and then I highlighted the two pages on the computer screen and deleted them. (Much cheering.)

If the concord of serious scientists isn’t enough to convince the average skeptic of the effects of the global destabilization of climate (“global warming” as the media dubs it), then perhaps the pages of this winter’s regional reports, when read in light of past reports, will make some impression. Most regional reports in this issue, especially but not only those from above the southernmost tier of U. S. states, are filled with another sort of broken record—filled, that is, with so many superlatives that to organize and repeat them here would require more pages than we can devote to the topic: *first* winter records; *first* complete overwinterings; *farthest* northern occurrences; *latest* departure dates; *earliest* returning dates; *unprecedented* overwinterings by semi-hardy (or nonhardy!) species; overwinterings in *unprecedented* numbers. In reading through

many of the Regional reports, we wade through scores of Neotropical migrants that never reached the tropics, even thriving away from feeders, the northern areas alive with birds usually far to the south in winter, while southern birders wait in vain for the usual numbers of waterfowl, field birds, and blackbirds to show up. I exaggerate, but only slightly. Alaska was cold and Buffalo was eventually snowy; and climatologists are still widely regarded as Chicken Little or Cassandra, at least as far as global warming is concerned. (Pay no attention to that New-Jersey-sized iceberg, ladies and gentlemen.)

You might have guessed that I tend to concur with researchers who have marshaled evidence for the anthropogenic warming of earth’s climate in recent years. Even the Bush administration in the United States acknowledged in early June 2002 that continued production of “greenhouse” gases will “very likely” result in ecological catastrophes throughout the world, remarkably, the administration is taking no action on its own findings. But of course, we must remain cautious in connecting these ever-milder winters to the ever-changing patterns of bird distribution charted in this journal. (A “leap of logic” in English sounds inviting; the awful German “Gedankensprung” sounds like you’ve just lost an axle and serves as a better deterrent.) After reading through the first of our 31 regional reports, I imagined a future brochure for ecotourists to the Atlantic provinces of Canada: “Looking for Neotropical migrants in December and January? Why not come to Nova Scotia or St. John’s, Newfoundland? While enjoying at least *fifteen* species of warbler last winter, birders could take in grand flights of Ivory Gulls, Bohemian Waxwings, and Pine Grosbeaks!”

That these warblers got to the Maritimes, some perhaps as late migrants or reverse migrants (cf. McLaren et al. 2000), is not terribly surprising, nor is the fact that they attempted to overwinter. What is remarkable is that they did so successfully in some cases—I think this is where we see the effects of the warm winter. If we have enough of these, we might dare to say “the effects of global climate change.” The years will tell. The brochures on “Hot Winter Birding in the Maritimes” will hopefully be only figurative: despite the diversion these wintering warblers provide, none of us want the predictions about global warming to be validated. But a Tennessee Warbler in New York in February surely gets one’s attention.

Birders around the continent look to neighboring regions when trying to anticipate changing patterns of distribution or occurrences of lingerers and vagrants in their own areas. Largely, this is a logical way to shape one’s time in the field: if Point A to one’s north and Point B to one’s south are both reporting a bizarre winter influx of Barn Swallows, such as the entire West Coast from British Columbia to California experienced this past winter, then it’s reasonable to go out immediately to a site with similar geography in one’s area to look for small flocks of Barn Swallows. (N B This apparently very early northbound migration occurred in *December, January, and February*: see the S. A. columns in the Middle Pacific Coast, Oregon—Washington, and British Columbia—Yukon regions.) The Internet gives us the real-time capacity to do this; and in some areas, networks of birders using cell-phones, pagers, voicemail boxes, and the like can communicate even more effectively. I still find the technological changes in birding dizzying, but I heed the cell-phone’s buzz when it comes from Cape Hatteras or Cape May with word of some avian anomaly. Eastern birders looking to their north and south this winter would have read Internet-posted accounts of many warblers wintering or attempting to winter out of range: 14 species in New England (called “unremarkable” by Regional Editor Pam Hunt), 10 in New York and New Jersey, five in Virginia and Maryland, and 10 in Georgia and the Carolinas. Florida, where wintering warblers are less startling, recorded 25 species this past season—the only eastern region to outperform the Maritimes. Hmmm.

Assumptions based purely on proximity can easily be pitfalls. Take, for instance, Broad-winged Hawk, a widespread common fall and spring migrant in the East, a Neotropical migrant that largely vacates the United States in winter. There is no doubt that other species are misidentified as Broad-winged Hawks on Christmas Bird Counts and just generally through the winter (young Red-shouldered and Cooper’s Hawks are only some of the culprits). But reliable observers have been seeing *real* Broad-winged Hawks in Nova Scotia, even on Cape Breton Island, in December and January in recent years—and *six* were detailed there this past winter, 2 December 2001 through 13 January 2002. One would then assume that New England might have recorded eight or so, the Middle Atlantic states a dozen or more. In fact, a single bird at Cape May 2 December and three “adequately described” birds on eastern North Carolina C.B.C.s on 16 December were the only other ones reported on the East Coast north of Florida, where regular in winter. (Others were noted overwintering in southern Louisiana, a relatively recent pattern, while one at year’s end in Colorado was without precedent.)

One could call the assumption that Neotropical lingerers such as the warblers or Broad-winged Hawks should be found in increasing numbers in progressively warmer climes the “Latitudinal Fallacy,” even though the assumption appears to hold true, by and large, for Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Blue-headed Vireos, and those winter hummingbirds, for instance. For those of us who look forward to Christmas Bird Counts every year, we have to be on our guard against this potential error. For instance, for the Atlantic Provinces, I count nearly 25 Yellow-breasted

Chats this past season. And out on Long Island and Cape Cod, birders seem to come across a nice number of winter chats. In the mid-Atlantic states, we’re lucky to scrape up two or three chats all winter, in an area with hundreds of birders! Nova Scotia, Cape Cod, and Long Island are largely surrounded by water: for a misoriented fall reverse-migrant, such as a chat (or a Broad-winged Hawk), overwintering might be the only apparent alternative to a chilly open-water crossing, which both would be loath to do in a state of depletion. Islands and peninsulas both trap and concentrate the waifs of autumn, but not in a uniform way, and it is tough to say why Nova Scotia would have almost twice the number of Broad-winged Hawks as the other eastern provinces and states combined—or almost three times the diversity of warblers of the Chesapeake Bay region, with its long peninsula. Perhaps the combination of impediments to onward migration (geography, prey resources, climate) is simply more dire there than elsewhere. In any case, the immature Broad-winged Hawks observed here in the early winter are not usually observed toward winter’s end, and it seems probable that most perish here, we should take note if these birds continue to be seen here in coming winters and survive through the entire winter season.

The White-rumped Sandpipers identified annually on Nova Scotia’s Cape Breton Island might represent a different situation, one not considered in last winter’s Changing Seasons column, namely an annual *pocket* of overwintering birds some 13,000 kilometers out of typical winter range. As far as is known, White-rumped Sandpipers winter in southern South America: they’re there to bid you *bon voyage* at the head of the Beagle Channel as you set sail for South Georgia or Antarctica in November. Why are up to four now present annually, all winter, on Cape Breton Island? And why isn’t the species observed north of Florida (where winter reports are not yet confirmed) in the winter otherwise? The answer here seems tempting: that these birds have figured out that the prey resources and climate are sufficient here, in the extensive mudflats of the area, to permit them to forego most of their extraordinary transequatorial migration. This could be the beginning of a wider trend, or it might just be a few ailing birds per year that cannot make it from a key stopover site down to South America. Broad-winged Hawks spending the winter in Louisiana is impressive; but White-rumped Sandpipers wintering above latitude 45° N is mind-blowing: they should be *south of the Tropic of Capricorn!* One wonders whether these birds are not simply just the “dross,” the failures in otherwise successful migratory strategies, or whether their presence at this remarkable outpost can’t tell us something startling and new about broader biometeorological changes on the horizon. If double-digit figures of White-rumped are seen here in future years, we should pay attention.

Whatever sense we make of them, if any, most of us are impressed by these “gee-whiz” birds, as they’re sometimes called, birds that are genuine seasonal “vagrants,” though they might be very common at other times of year. Certainly, they attract skepticism (which, politely, one must maintain vis-à-vis many such reports). Certainly, they brighten the Christmas Bird Count season and make the long hours under harsh conditions seem merry. As noted in many a winter’s “Changing Seasons” column, however, they’re hard to piece together into *evidence of anything* in the single-seasonal framework. This past winter’s bird reports together suggest a reasonably strong correlation between unusual lingerers/overwinterers and mild weather (or climate), as most of the recent winter “Changing Seasons” columns have observed. For now, we will leave it at that.

WATERFOWL

In light of the concord of regional reports, I elected to use this essay not to repeat last year’s incredulity about wintering hummingbirds (how

quickly we become accustomed to the astonishing) but instead to take a look at a set of birds I rarely spend quality time with: waterfowl. I like and value waterfowl, but I take for granted that their identification and distribution have been worked out—not the case at all, of course. And when it comes to waterfowl vagrancy, my response has been a shrug. Modern waterfowl collectors seem to keep almost everything, and these birds too often fly the coop (a few hours perusing on-line offerings of exotic and native waterfowl, and much else, is eye-opening). Sour grapes? Not necessarily, but arguments about the “wildness” of a given potential vagrant so often come down to familiar tête-à-têtes between the credulous and the skeptical (or the open-minded and the spoilers, depending on your point of view) and are less enlightening after one goes through a few. When asked what he thought of the provenance of a certain Pink-footed Goose found on local turf, a wizened New Englander quipped: “I don’t know. Why don’t you ask the bird?” In most of the sections that follow, human interventions and accidents feature prominently; no one, apparently, asked the bird.

Barnacle Geese (again)

Once bitten, twice shy. Most readers remember the excitement that accompanied announcement of a flock of six “countable” Barnacle Geese on Cape Cod in January 1991. Air tickets were booked, and the geese were dutifully ticked off. Those who made the journey can thank Regional Editor Brian Dalzell for dispelling the myth of their wild origins. Brian did some checking around and found out that these unmarked geese had come from a rogue collector’s gallery on White Rock Island, near Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick. Two adult Barnacle Geese had been released in 1990 (along with other waterfowl), raised four young on the island (*A. B.* 45: 244), migrated with them in early September to Cape Sable Island, Nova Scotia, where they were counted on the local C. B. C. and remained through 8 January 1991, thence repairing to Osterville, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where they wintered at least 18 January—22 March. In the spring, they returned to Cape Sable Island in May via Bangor, Maine 18 April and Hopkinton, New Hampshire 20 April (*A. B.* 45: 416). A perfectly reasonable and civilized thing to do, from the goose point of view: after all, released Canada Geese, though usually more sedentary, had been making up their own rules for decades.

Since that time, it has become more difficult for some to take an interest in tracking and documenting potentially vagrant Barnacle Geese (or any other waterfowl). The traffickers in captive birds tamper, sometimes mindlessly and usually unnecessarily, with ornithologists’ and birders’ efforts to understand movements of birds. It takes a few minutes to band a bird to indicate captive origin, but some collectors argue that it “spoils” the birds aesthetically. (Insert your reaction here.)

The “parolee” Barnacle Geese of 1991 stayed together as a family group, but in fall and winter 2001-2002, rather widely separated single Barnacle Geese in company with Canada Geese were the rule. To the best of my reckoning, there were minimally eight Barnacle Geese present in eastern North America between New Brunswick, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Virginia, November 2001 through April 2002 (Table 1), more than in an average winter, to be sure. These birds’ behaviors differed little from the locally wintering Canada Geese with which they found themselves, and none of the Barnacle Geese bore bands or tags, and none had clipped haluxes (good waterfowl collectors typically clip captives’ haluxes).

We have, in short, no evidence that these Barnacle Geese were former captives; nor is there any evidence that they were from a wild population, the nearest of which is in Greenland, several hundred kilometers from Canada. Regional editors from New England, Hudson-Delaware, and

Middle Atlantic opined in different ways about the origin of these geese. In Connecticut, Pam Hunt notes that the Barnacle Goose populations in Greenland are expanding (thus the supply of potential vagrants would be increasing) and that the Connecticut bird accompanied a flock of Canada Geese, some of which had been banded on Greenland nesting grounds. In northern Virginia, an adult Barnacle Goose hung around a rather docile set of Canada Geese, one of which was banded in 1999 as a gosling near Peterborough, Ontario, which Marshall Iliff cites as potentially problematic for a pro-vagrancy argument.

Of course, we should not assume, in this day of postmodern landscapes and the proliferation of vast urban goose flocks (that in the cold months include “wild” migrants and local birds of “feral” stock), that a vagrant Barnacle Goose must have descended the continent with birds from its natal or breeding grounds—or that it must spend the winter with these birds (or that Canada Geese from Ontario cannot flock with geese from Greenland). Likewise, we should not assume that a Barnacle Goose associating with Greenland-banded Canada Geese came from the Greenland population. (In fact, as Barnacle Geese also nest on Novaya Zemlya and Svalbard, there is no reason to assume that North American birds, if wild, came from Greenland at all.) A vagrant goose moving down the coast might just as easily put down with a flock of city geese that holds a complement of waddling, mottled Muscovy Ducks as with a tundra-nesting flock out in the farm fields. This is especially true of stressed birds in periods of harsh weather, when the shelter of the local golf course pond or boat marina can harbor a bewildering mix of former pets and formidable rarities. In Europe, however, single Barnacle Geese found inland, away from typical coastal wintering areas, are regarded with suspicion.

Are these approximately eight Barnacle Geese just the same old family group, now increased, that was first noted in 1990? (If so, how have we missed most of them for the previous ten winters?) Or are they the real thing, vagrants blown off course by the unusual easterlies set up by decaying hurricanes *Erin*, *Gabrielle*, or *Humberto* between Greenland and Iceland during the time of their transit to stopover grounds in southeastern Iceland? (If so, why didn’t any groups of Barnacles show up together? Don’t these birds usually migrate in family groups?) Is it disturbing that this year’s first Barnacle Goose turned up, again, in New Brunswick? (Say, Brian, could you do some more checking around?)

In the absence of a compelling piece of evidence to sway opinion one way or another, one can just as easily envision a prankster purchasing and releasing a dozen Barnacle Geese (or even driving all around the East, planting them in local goose flocks) as one can imagine a group of migrant Barnacle Geese breaking up under storm conditions over the northwestern North Atlantic and being driven back southwestward toward North America. If ever there were a case to be made for a “flight” of vagrant Barnacle Geese into North America, the 2001-2002 birds might be the best shot; certainly, *no past winter* has seen evidence of such a widespread “flight.” Or perhaps our old friends from White Rock Island just felt the need to get out and see more of the world. If a feral population of Barnacle Geese becomes established in eastern Canada, one wonders how long it might take before their nesting range overlaps with that of the expanding Eurasian Collared-Dove (which now nests above the Arctic Circle in Norway, by the way).

A possible twist in the tale comes from Maryland, in the report of a flock of Barnacle Geese. Ellie and Walt Simonson write: “We saw a flock of about 10 Barnacle Geese on Egypt Road on the drive into Blackwater N.W.R. on 12 January at about 10:00 a.m. We did not count them precisely because at the time we did not realize that seeing a flock of Barnacle Geese was so unusual (we did not know at that time that people were mostly seeing single Barnacle Geese). We later saw the Barnacle Goose

Table 1. Barnacle Geese recorded in eastern North America, November 2001—April 2002

New Brunswick

One bird was present in Moncton 3-28 November 2001. No other Barnacle Geese were reported during this time frame, so this bird could be the same individual as any of the subsequent birds.

Massachusetts

One was at Gloucester 2-7 December 2001 in the salt marsh off Route 127, opposite the Good Harbor Beach parking lot. One was at Lynnfield Marsh Pleasure Island Road, Wakefield or Lynnfield, Essex County 17-20 February (said not to be the one in nearby Connecticut). Another was reported at Herring Pond, Eastham 1 March 2002.

Connecticut

One at Mansfield at Stearns Farm 4-12 December 2001 was followed quickly by one at Mirror Lake, Storrs, from 12 December 2001 through 22 January 2002. This bird differed from at least one of the Massachusetts birds, if indeed Massachusetts had more than one.

Rhode Island

One in Portsmouth 15-19 January in the field along Middle Road; apparently the same bird noted nearby 16 January at Lawton Reservoir off West Main Road.

New York

There were minimally two single Barnacle Geese in various locations around eastern Long Island, all in Suffolk County between 17 November and 20 January: at Hook Pond, Easthampton; Marratooka Lake, Mattituck; Penny Pond, Northville; Grumman Pond, Calverton; and at Wainscott (*vide* P. Gillen, A. Guthrie, A. Wilson). Another different individual frequented Oakland Lake, Bayside, Queens, New York City, as well as the Marine Parkway and Floyd Bennet Field, 1 January through 7 April (I. Grant, S. Walter). An adult at Iroquois N.W.R. 1 March+ was almost certainly another individual (*vide* W. D'Anna).

New Jersey

One in Warren County at Merrill Creek Reservoir from 5 to 10 February 2002.

Pennsylvania

One at Buckingham Township, Bucks County from 2 to 19 February.

Virginia

A bird discovered 6 January 2002 on the Potomac River at Belle Haven Marina was last seen there 26 January; presumably, the same bird settled down in nearby Alexandria between Cameron Run Regional Park and Bill Brenman Park, last reported 18 February.

that has been seen by many birders in Alexandria on 2 February while on a bird walk with some excellent birders from the Alexandria Wild Bird Center. We were able to confirm that the geese we saw on Egypt Road were of the same species." Naturally, one assumes that the birds in question were probably distant blue-morph Snow Geese; but what if they weren't? The moral of this story, indeed of this journal: consult the field guide, and take notes, and always have the camera turned on and ready.

King Eiders

Where are the King Eiders along the U. S. Atlantic coast lately? On the East Coast, only five were reported in fall and winter 2001-2002, just a fraction of numbers seen between Maine and North Carolina a decade earlier, for instance. Though flights of this species have tended to show a fair amount of variation over the past half-century, it seems curious that the Great Lakes, in particular Lake Ontario, should suddenly be seeing large numbers of King Eiders, daily counts of up to 91, whereas prior to the early or even mid-1990s, the species was considered a vagrant here despite counts of up to 75 from the turn of the past century. (In Madge and Burn [1988], it is suggested that King Eider is the most abundant of all ducks worldwide; however, its populations are known to be declining in the Americas and in Siberia.)

The recently published *Summary of the Hamlin Beach Lakewatch Fall and Winter Waterbird Migration Data 1993-1999* (Brett Ewald and Dominic Sherony, 2001, Federation of New York State Bird Clubs) shows no records for King Eider until 1997, after which it is recorded annually. Are the ready supplies of the invading exotic Zebra Mussels on the Great Lakes, certainly an attraction to the wintering eiders here, tied to the recent scarcity of King Eiders on the East Coast? Might similar drops in Common Goldeneye, scaup, White-winged Scoters, and other divers along Atlantic shores be attributable to this rich (and tainted?) food supply nearer to nesting grounds. Or perhaps the recent mild winters, or the declining populations of the eider, or degradation of past Atlantic coastal haunts are causes of its scarcity, which could too just be a temporary lull of a perfectly "natural" sort. Even if the Great Lakes freeze over, as they did partly in early 1994, we might not get a clear answer to these questions. Meanwhile, several standardized studies of wintering waterfowl are in progress on the Great Lakes, with data to be published soon—the news is sure to be intriguing. (Check the August issue of *Birding*.)

Trumpeter Swan (again)

The bird's very name calls out for the conservation measures that have long been in place to aid its recovery: to silence the Trumpeter would be to take aim at an angel incarnate. But in Tennessee this year, a young Trumpeter was shot and killed, and its parent was also wounded, in a state where the species had not been seen for "182 years and 28 days" as Dwight Cooley writes, since John James Audubon's sight records. (The hunter paid a small out-of-court fine for his crime.) Incidents such as this are bound to occur again, as the hundreds of introduced breeding Trumpeter Swans from Ontario, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, South Dakota, Missouri, and Ohio wander more widely in search of wintering grounds that can support their growing needs.

Lately we have another chapter in the Trumpeter Swan story, one that few of us have not noticed, at least in passing, in the mass media and even a movie, namely the establishing of an "Atlantic population," one potentially based in New York and wintering in Maryland. This project has been, at various times, a joint venture of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the Atlantic Flyway Council, The Trumpeter Swan Society, Environmental Studies at Airlie (Warrenton, Virginia; a division of the International Academy for Preventive Medicine), Operation Migration, The Defenders of Wildlife, and the Wildfowl Trust of North America (near Grasonville, Maryland), with the assistance of the Council of Chiefs of the Tonawanda Band of Senecas. All of these groups, one assumes, have the best interests of wildlife at heart (one can read more on the latest experiments at <http://www.trumpeterswans.org/TSMF_3_02.html>).

The latest chapter of the efforts to establish the species in the East has not been altogether felicitous, nor very well publicized, and our regional reports have little recent information on the efforts. In the most recent

experiments, some 18 Trumpeter cygnets were removed from Chugach National Forest, Alaska, in June 2000; two of these died in transport from Alaska, while three more died that year (one of a dislocated tendon, another in a collision with the ultra-light aircraft used to train them to migrate, while another was shot in Maryland soon after it arrived on the intended wintering ground). Another Trumpeter cygnet was not deemed physically fit for the experiment and was not released.

The dozen remaining Alaska Trumpeters spent much of the summer of 2001 and winter 2001-2002 in the vicinity of Oak Orchard Management Area and Iroquois N. W. R., in upstate New York. This group was comprised of four that were trained to follow ultra-light aircraft and eight that had been trucked in to the site from the northern Virginia collection at Airlie. The mild winter meant they didn't need to migrate (which the majority had not been trained to do in any case), and so seven of the eight trucked birds have been recaptured this spring, on instructions from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the last bird has evaded capture. The other four swans, those that learned part of the route from New York state to Maryland in 2001, have disappeared, last seen 18 February 2002 in the Niagara River gorge above Niagara Falls, associating with a large flock of Tundra Swans. These are neck-collared (yellow and black); keep an eye out for them.

After three migration experiments with Trumpeters based at Airlie, it seems the coalition has not remained unified on the issue of the introduction of the species into the eastern states. The Atlantic Flyway Council has not approved a Trumpeter Swan Management Plan (Luszcz 2000), and so the captured birds will most likely be contributed to another restoration program, and negotiations with the Mississippi Flyway Swan Committee have begun, despite some trepidation about the "wildness" of these swans.

Kenn Kaufman (1997) wrote extensively in these pages about the ecological peril that introduced Trumpeter Swans might pose to ecosystems where the species has not been present for centuries (if at all: at many of the introduction sites, there is no historical record of the species having nested there). Certainly, here in the Chesapeake Bay area, introduced Mute Swans have inarguably been a disaster, chasing off other nesting waterbirds, even in some cases attacking humans that dared wander into their sizeable territories! (Greek mythology meets Gary Larson.) In four decades, from the initial Maryland introduction of five Mute Swans in 1962, the species has flourished, if you will, with a current population of some 3,000 birds in the Chesapeake Bay area. What seemed at first a quaint distraction, like the decorative brace of Canada Geese on the occasional estate pond, has, like the introduction of Canada Geese, grown into a fair-sized ecological horror, as well as a public relations disaster animal rights activists now fight against the state's "removal" of Mute Swans in these areas—and even Dame Judith Dench lends her name to the fight against the removal of feral Canada Geese in urban England! Incredibly, the latest judicial interpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act *includes* Mute Swan as a protected species!

Some of Kaufman's cautions were based on analogy with the cases of Canada Geese and especially Mute Swans, for which there is no conscientious argument for introduction in North America (arguments of real estate developers and aviculturists that the birds add to the "aesthetic" and thus monetary value of the property don't fall under the rubric of the "conscientious"). Trumpeter Swans, unlike Mutes, were indeed documented as wintering birds on the upper Chesapeake Bay in early colonial times. And Trumpeter Swans do not appear to be as indiscriminately aggressive toward other vertebrates as are Mute Swans, so we can probably relax worries about them attacking moorhens, children, dogs, and couples in canoes. At least, in this last experiment at Airlie, the

captured Alaskan cygnets showed no aggression toward humans, unlike in the earlier experiments.

When Kaufman wrote that the "Trumpeter introductions are doing disquietingly well," he was no doubt unnerved by the confirmed 1996 nestings of Trumpeters at two sites in New York, probably swans from the Ontario introductions, which had begun in 1982. Adjacent to these swan nests were nests of the beleaguered Black Tern, whose numbers appear to fall in most years, as their nesting habitat, shared with many prairie waterbirds, vanishes. Though there have been impact studies and hypothetical arguments brought to bear, we just don't know whether there is ecological "room" for the megafauna of the past, such as Trumpeter Swan, in the diminished and fragmented eastern ecosystems we have inherited. After all, the Chesapeake Bay until not long ago harbored tens of thousands of Tundra Swans in winter; most merely stop over here on migration now, as the Bay is still in poor health. Harmful interaction with other species is one risk posed by introductions of large waterfowl species; depletion of resources needed by other species is another Gamble such as these are certainly preferable to the outright introduction of nonnative species, such as Mute Swan (or Barnacle Geese), but one wonders, given the presence of large and healthy Trumpeter Swan populations out West, whether our slim resources might not be better put in the service of the less Hollywood-ready species, such as Black Terns, rather than in taking such risks by introducing "big ducks in small ponds."

Blue-morph Ross's Geese (again)

Reports of blue-morph Ross's Goose—a rare creature and one believed to represent, in the case of many reports, a situation of introgression by or hybridization with blue-morph Lesser Snow Geese—have become increasingly regular out of range and bear revisiting here. (Thankfully, we are not aware of any blue Ross's in, or escaped from, captivity.) This past autumn 2001, an immature blue-morph Ross's was studied at Métabetchouan, Québec on 28 September, and a group of four Ross's Geese present 17-26 November at Chincoteague N.W.R. was reported to have two blue morphs (an adult and an immature); this is the second report for the locale, the first having been 2 November 1994, and regionally, a few blue Ross's have been reported along the Eastern Seaboard since the late 1980s, when Ross's became regular visitors in small numbers. Iliff raised the question of hybridization in his column in 1998 (*F N*. 52: 41) after finding a family comprised of an adult white-morph Ross's Goose, its blue-morph Snow x Ross's Goose hybrid mate, and four young of the year, three white and a blue in Maryland; Michael Patten (1998) treated the matter in the "Changing Seasons" column that season as well.

Where would one go to find out more about this very scarce, little-known bird? There are in fact few if any photographs in print, but there are helpful paintings in David Sibley's *The Sibley Guide to Birds* (Knopf, 2000). The article by McLandress and McLandress (1979) that introduced us to this rare morph is not intended as a primer for field identification. Nowadays, one can turn for much rich discussion on such matters to the Internet. On the listserv "Frontiers of Field Identification," owned by Will Russell, there was recently an engaging discussion about putative blue Ross's Geese, mostly focused on birds seen in the core range of Ross's, rather than on the fringes. At issue have been several photographs posted on the Internet, all of which are commended for viewing

- two apparent blue-morph, an adult and an immature, Ross's Geese photographed by John and Barbara Ribble near Karnes City, Texas on 17 February 1999, and an apparent adult photographed by Matt White at Lake Tawakoni, Van Zandt County, Texas on 30 January 2000

(<http://members.tripod.com/~tbr/brossgo.html>);

- Arizona's first record of blue-morph Ross's Goose, a bird photographed at Nogales Sewage Treatment Plant in early January 1999 by Regional Editor Mark M. Stevenson that remained at least through 21 January 1999 (<http://personal.riverusers.com/~ghrosenberg/ArizonaPhotos/BlueRossGoose.html>),
- a goose specimen collected 9 March 2000 by Larry Langenfeld west of Florence, Codington County, South Dakota (<http://lupus.northern.edu:90/tallmand/ross.htm>);
- a goose photographed in the heart of "blue Ross's country," at Klamath Lakes California 15 April 1999 by Richard Millington (<http://fog.ccsf.cc.ca.us/~jmorlan/gallery.htm>); and
- an apparent blue-morph Ross's Goose photographed 23 November 2001 at Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, California by Kevin McKereghan (<http://fog.ccsf.cc.ca.us/~jmorlan/gallery.htm>).

The crux of this Internet discussion comes down to the structure of the birds in question, but particularly the bills' structure and pigmentation the presence or absence of a black or dusky "grin patch" on the tomiae (a classic adult Ross's Goose lacks a grin patch); the amount of curvature to the inner edges of maxilla and mandible (usually flared in Snow, straighter in Ross's); the shape of the culmen (straighter in Ross's, more concave in Snow); and the shape of the maxilla where it meets the feathering of the head (generally straight and vertical in Ross's but obviously curved in Snow Goose). These aspects are well illustrated in the Sibley guide, as are the blacker scapulars and white coverts of (most?) blue-morph Ross's Goose and its (usually?) isolated white head or face. Naturally, too, Ross's Geese are smaller than Lesser Snow Geese, the subspecies in which blue morphs are chiefly found.

Using these features, one might conclude (though the quality of the images posted is not quite adequate for firm conclusions) that the birds from Arizona and Texas show characters most consistent with blue-morph Ross's Goose, while the South Dakota and Klamath Lakes birds show more intermediate characters, particularly in the bills, which appear heavy and long and bear dark grin patches. The Sacramento bird, wonderfully photographed, seems a typical Ross's in all respects, but it does seem to have rather dark tomiae as well.

Martin Reid raises the question, not addressed in Sibley's guide or elsewhere, as to how much of a faint or thin grin patch an otherwise-typical Ross's Goose might have and still be considered "pure." Reid writes: "How much of this variation is within the pure Ross's gene pool, and how much is due to hybridization with or introgression from Snow? This identification issue has not been seriously addressed (to my knowledge) and is important because a conservative interpretation of this variation (i.e., it is all due to introgression from Snow) might lead to the invalidation of numerous records away from the expected range, and would mean that Ross's are *not* identifiable in flight (as F₁ or F₂ hybrids cannot be ruled out on structure and size)."

The situation calls to mind Steve Howell's (1998) summary of the difficulty in distinguishing Thayer's from Iceland Gulls: "We can't learn how much they interbreed until we can distinguish them, but we can't distinguish them because they appear to interbreed!" If, as has been suggested, the sudden appearance of blue-morph Ross's Geese in the latter third of the past century was owing to the introduction of the blue allele from occasional hybridization with Lesser Snow Goose, then our search for a "pure" blue-morph Ross's Goose might be Quixotic. If memory serves, Claudia Wilds consistently and calmly rejected all reports of flying Ross's Geese in the mid-Atlantic out of concern about hybridization, but many of us have been rather lax in tendering records of Ross's out of core range

lately (I have blithely submitted a few reports of flying Ross's, certainly!) Perhaps we should arm ourselves with more caution in this case.

Bills of ivory

We would be neglectful here if we overlooked the substantial search effort mounted this winter by J. M. (Martjan) Lammertink, Alison R Styring, Richard L. Knight, Alan Wormington, Peter McBride, and M David Luneau, Jr., to locate evidence of the continued existence of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Louisiana.

The effort, sponsored by Carl Zeiss Optics of North America (for full report, see <http://www.zeiss.com>), generated staggering amounts of national press publicity and raised public awareness of the woodpecker's plight over the past century but regrettably did not succeed in photographing an Ivory-billed Woodpecker in the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area, where David Kulivan had reported seeing a male and a female on 1 April 1999 (very near where Nancy Higginbotham had, unbeknownst to Kulivan, reported seeing one 13 years earlier) or in the adjacent Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge. On 27 January 2002, an "interesting" recording was made of what sounded like a large woodpecker rapping; the recording can be heard on the Zeiss website. Analyses of the recordings, however, suggest that the source was a gun rather than a woodpecker.

Nevertheless, several impressive cavities and cavity starts and at least 15 recently dead trees with extensive bark scaling—both consistent with Ivory-billed work but not known to be consistent with the work of Pileated Woodpecker—were carefully documented. At the same time, a team from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology placed 12 Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs), a novel technological device designed in-house by their Bioacoustics Research Program, throughout the Pearl River basin; these units took in some 4,000 hours of recorded sound, with results soon to be announced (in *BirdScope* Vol. 16, No. 3). It is unclear at the time of press whether searches for the woodpecker will be mounted again in the late fall and winter of 2002-2003. If the species is not demonstrated by photograph to be in the Pearl, it is likely that this area will be logged in the near future, as I understand it.

As several small parties had done after Kulivan's sighting, I went in March 2002 to see the Pearl, to get a firsthand sense of what the scaling and cavity starts looked like, whether they matched my experience of Pileated Woodpeckers' work such as I had seen in Virginia and Carolina swamps of Sweet Gum and Bald Cypress. For what it's worth, two of the large cavity starts I saw were well outside the realm of my experience with Pileated Woodpecker: their oblong shape (one with a remarkably rectangular top border) and their large dimensions, about 15 cm tall by 10+ cm wide, were striking and matched archived photographs of Ivory-billed cavities (see Figures 1 & 2). Several thoroughly scaled, very recently dead trees, some of them with as much as four meters of their boles stripped of very tight bark, were likewise something I had never seen from Pileateds. It was at least readily apparent, after several days of bayou trekking, that a large woodpecker or two should have little trouble evading a small search team, particularly if the birds are relatively shy, not especially vocal, and fairly wide-ranging. The studies of James Tanner (1942) suggest that Ivory-billed had, or has, these attributes.

That the attractive Pearl River area, recently logged in part, might again soon fall under the axe is a dismal prospect. Though there is every possibility that Kulivan and Higginbotham erred, there is also the possibility that they did not and that a pair of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers persists in the basin. The data gathered by the search team suggest that it would be premature to assume that no Ivory-billed Woodpeckers hang on there. Sixty years after the last fully documented records, the situation of the Pearl puts one in mind of Arthur A. Allen's foreword of



A few large cavities and cavity starts documented in the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area in Louisiana this winter (such as the cavity on the left) resembled known nest cavities of Ivory-billed Woodpecker (the cavity on the right is the actual nest studied by James Tanner in the Singer Tract; it is currently housed in the Cornell collection). The cavities thought to have been made, possibly, by Ivory-billed Woodpeckers had large interiors and very large apertures, with an oval- or pear-shaped entrances. Some of the cavity starts showed a roughly hexagonal shape. The cavity entrance on the left shows two pale scrape marks on the lower rim, where the woodpeckers' feet would cling to the opening. The Tanner nest cavity shows the same pale marks. *Photographs by Kevin J. McGowan.*

August 1, 1942, after the United States' entry into the Second World War:

[Tanner's study] does not tell how the Ivory-billed Woodpeckers can be saved by the expenditure of words alone. Much real work must be done—virgin forest must be set aside as a sanctuary and intelligent management practices applied. Is the bird worth it? Is the preservation of a glorious species that has taken millions of years to evolve worth ten dollars? Is it worth ten million dollars?

Today we are measuring our love of freedom in billions of dollars and thousands of lives. The American way of living is worth anything we have to pay to preserve it, and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is one little guide post on our way of life, a reminder of that pioneering spirit that has made us what we are, a people rich in resourcefulness and powerful to accomplish what is right. [Tanner 1942]

Allen answers his question: "It is worth whatever we must pay to preserve it before it is too late." As the United States finishes prosecuting its latest war, and moves toward drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (thankfully defeated, this time, as we are going to press), it took the conscience of an optics company to make an effort that the national government would not. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Carl Zeiss Sports Optics division, especially Anthony R. Cataldo, have the gratitude of a great many for this effort. Certainly, there are many more pressing conservation quandaries that demand our attention—and one can scarcely imagine what the best outcome of the discovery of a last pair of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers might be. A modern photograph would evoke as much remorse at what we've done to this species as faint hope at the prospect of its survival. Perhaps, as much as an expression of a conservation ethic, our dogged dedication to the great birds—the Trumpeter Swan, California Condor, Ivory-billed Woodpecker—speaks of our sense of culpability for past misdeeds and our need to atone for old transgressions.—*Ed.*

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Geoff LeBaron, Bruce Mactavish, Paul Lehman, Bob Curry, Chris Witt Kevin McGowan, Alison Styring, Ken Rosenberg, and Blake Maybank for discussions of the various topics treated in this article.

Literature cited

- Howell, S. N. G. 1998. Shades of gray: The Catch-22 of Thayer's Gull *Birders Journal* 7: 305-309.
- Kaufman, K. 1997. The Changing Seasons: The Nesting Season, June 1—July 31, 1997. *Field Notes* 51: 960-963.
- Luszcz, D. 2000. Status of the Atlantic Flyway Trumpeter Swan Management Plan. *in* Transactions of the 17th Trumpeter Swan Society Conference. The Trumpeter Swan Society, Maple Plain, Minnesota. *North American Swans* 29: 9-10.
- Madge, S. and H. Burn. 1988. *Waterfowl*. Boston. Houghton—Mifflin.
- McLandress, M. R., and I. McLandress. 1979. Blue-phase Ross' Geese and other blue-phase geese in western North America. *Auk* 96: 544-550.
- McLaren, I., B. Maybank, K. Keddy, P. D. Taylor, and T. Fitzgerald 2000. A notable autumn arrival of reverse-migrants in southern Nova Scotia. *North American Birds* 54: 4-10.
- Patten, M. A. 1998. The Changing Seasons: Nora, El Niño, and strays from far afield. *Field Notes* 52: 14-18.
- Tanner, J. T. 1942. *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker*. New York. National Audubon Society.

