EDITORS' NOTEBOOK

Caribbean conundra

The present issue has as its focus the distribution and nesting of several species of birds in the Caribbean, from its northern reaches in the Bahamas, through its middle reaches in the Virgin Islands and on Guadeloupe, to its southernmost islands just off the coast of Venezuela. The disposition of bird records for these areas is very different than that for the intensely birded areas of the North American mainland: a lack of records of species "x" for a Caribbean island might indicate a dearth of birding coverage rather than an absence of that species. Thus, while one might go an entire birding lifetime and never see a Williamson's Sapsucker or a Cordilleran Flycatcher in New York state (see the previous issue, whose focus was "Bird vagrancy in the East"), it could easily be the case that a first record of Philadelphia Vireo for the southern Caribbean islands provides only the first indication that the species is perhaps annual, if rare, in the region—indeed, a junket of less than a week on a Caribbean island might add several species to its avifaunal archives (see the articles in this issue)!

This unevenness in demographics—in the distribution of birders rather than birds—has bedeviled this journal for more than half a century, as it complicates editorial attempts to summarize the relative abundance and distribution of birds in sparsely birded areas. It was only very recently, for instance, that regional editors began getting sophisticated birding reports from *enormous* areas of the 50 U. S. states, and this journal still lacks coverage from much of Arctic Canada (Nunavut and Northwest Territories), which thankfully is canvassed by our friends at *Birders Journal*. When the regional reports for the Baja California Peninsula, Mexico, and Central America began appearing (2001), we received many messages on their specific contents: "Hey, that species isn't so rare at that location; I've seen it there several times in the past," and so forth. But if one looks back only a decade or two (to *Audubon Field Notes* and *American Birds*) at regions whose reports are now models of ornithological journalism, one sees that every region had a very humble beginning, with only a handful of contributors commenting on what were probably, by modern standards, not terribly unusual bird phenomena. The point to keep in mind, however, is that *no organized set of reports had previously attempted to countenance distribution of many of these species in these areas.* As the density and acumen of birders in each region increase, so the refinement in statements about bird distribution has increased, rapidly, over the years.

To those who might see in our tropical regions' reports and articles some deficiency ("hey, I've seen that there before"), we challenge you to contribute bird records—past, present, and future—to the regional editors for this journal and to the records committees that have begun to form in Central America and the Caribbean. The continual refining of editors' discernment in those regions depends *heavily* on the contributions of people who visit these areas, most of which have few or no resident birders or ornithologists. Birds' distributions can, of course, change rapidly in tropical areas, especially where "development" pressures are tremendous, and the species that is common one day may be extirpated the next—literally. And so reporting on what appear to be "common" species is all the more indispensable here. Our contribution to the history of ornithology in the Caribbean, as at home, begins with forwarding our notes to the appropriate editor or committee.

In some cases, such documentation can go beyond issues of bird distribution and even provide insight into tangled taxonomic matters, of which there are many in the Caribbean. This issue's article by Floyd E. Hayes on the riddle of "Cayenne Terns" nesting among typical (and apparent intergrade) Sandwich Terns in the Virgin Islands is a perfect example of how a practiced eye can open questions not just on distribution but on the very taxonomic placement of birds in these areas. This journal welcomes papers, however preliminary, on conundra such as this one.

American Ornithologists' Union: the latest

Those who keep abreast of matters systematic will have noticed that the latest Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union's *Check-list* (<http://www.aou.org>) rearranges

many of the orderings of bird families we've become accustomed to over the years. Loons and grebes no longer lead the pack: now whistling-ducks, geese, swans, and ducks are the first, followed by Plain Chachalaca, Chukar, and other members of the order Galliformes. After that, the list is similar to the old order, although the vultures and California Condor are now classed with (listed just after) the storks in Ciconiiformes.

We have discussed reordering the regional reports in mid-volume to conform with these changes and have opted for now to continue with the order of the main *Check-list* as published in 1998, until a new and authoritative *Check-list* is published by the A.O.U. We anticipate many more re-orderings between now and such time, based on recent research from several branches of ornithology, and some of these will probably be in keeping with the "radical" changes proposed by Charles Sibley and Burt Monroe in their *Distribution and taxonomy of birds of the world* (1990. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut). While we'll maintain the old order for a while in this journal, we continue to update the English common names and scientific names per the annual Supplements published in the *Auk* and on-line. So swallow hard and start calling Rock Doves "Rock Pigeons"—and don't forget the modifier "American" every time you call a Three-toed Woodpecker (which is now split from its Eurasian counterpart), should you be so fortunate.

Birding in the United States: one in five?

In October 2003, a report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that 46 million birdwatchers across the United States spent $32 billion in 2001 on "birdwatching" activities and products, spending that generated $85 billion in economic output and $13 billion in taxes—and supported 863,000 jobs. The report, entitled *Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis* (<http://federalaid.fws.gov>), analyzed data from the 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.

Press releases celebrated the good news: "Nearly one in five Americans is a bird watcher," remarked Service Director Steve Williams. "This report recognizes what we always thought to be true. Birdwatching is very popular and contributes greatly to our economy, so it is important that we continue to work with our partners to restore and protect habitat to ensure healthy bird populations."

Does anyone else stagger and reel on reading such figures and proclamations? If 20% of people in the United States are "birdwatchers" all of a sudden, then why do *North American Birds* subscribers number fewer than one in 10,000 U. S. birders? The simple answer is that people interested in birds are in fact *not* self-identified as birders and not especially interested in bird distribution. It will be interesting to see, in coming decades, whether "birding" (the report's title) in the United States and in North America generally takes a turn toward increased avidity and intellectual engagement, as in western Europe, or whether birding becomes "packaged" more in keeping with the U.S. cultural axes of entertainment, consumption, and competition. The fate and future of this journal probably rest with a tiny percentage of the 46 million (!) people who move beyond a sense of birds as a momentary diversion and pleasure. If you have a family member, a friend, or a neighbor who falls into such a category—and the report *Birding in the United States* suggests that you certainly must—please do consider giving that person a gift subscription to *North American Birds* at some point. The core of subscribers to this journal has some ability to influence the course that birding takes in North America and beyond, and we should encourage at least a few of those 45,994,500 people to get excited about birds in a more active and cosmopolitan way.

STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REGIONAL REPORTS

Abbreviations used in place names

In most regions, place names given in italic type are counties. Other abbreviations:

A.F.B.	Air Force Base
B.B.S.	Breeding Bird Survey
C.B.C.	Christmas Bird Count
Cr.	Creek
Ft.	Fort
Hwy	Highway
I.	Island or Isle
Is.	Islands or Isles
Jct.	Junction
km	kilometer(s)
L.	Lake
mi	mile (s)
Mt.	Mountain or Mount
Mts.	Mountains
N.F.	National Forest
N.M.	National Monument
N.P.	National Park
N.W.R.	National Wildlife Refuge
P.P.	Provincial Park
Pen.	Peninsula
Pt.	Point (not Port)
R.	River
Ref.	Refuge
Res.	Reservoir (not Reservation)
S.P.	State Park
Twp.	Township
W.M.A.	Wildlife Management Area
W.T.P.	(Waste) Water Treatment Pond(s) or Plant

Other abbreviations and symbols referring to birds and records

acc.	accepted record
ad. (ads.)	adult(s)
imm. (imms.)	immature (s)
juv. (juvs.)	juvenal; juvenile(s)
p. a.	pending acceptance
ph.	photographed
sp. (spp.)	species (plural)
subad. (subads.)	subadult(s)
tape	audio tape-recorded
vt.	videotaped
†	written details were submitted for a sighting
*	a specimen was collected