

# EDITORS' NOTEBOOK

In this issue, we offer two informative pieces on one of our continent's most striking songbirds, Painted Bunting. The article by Sykes and Holzman on the species' breeding range in the East and the article by Mlodinow and Hamilton on its extralimital wandering together contribute much to our understanding of the bunting's status and distribution; a later paper on wintering distribution will complement these articles. "Why offer such exhaustive descriptions, when we already have field guides' maps?" some might ask. There are many compelling reasons to pursue an increasingly refined understanding of where this species is found—and where it is absent. The most important is that, at least in the Southeast, Painted Bunting habitat is being lost to development at a rapid pace. As private lands are developed in the Southeast, the public areas described specifically as bunting habitat will almost certainly become the last refugia of the species in the East. For the conservation of the population, it is crucial that scientists and planners know where the birds *are*. (It is also useful information for birders who would like to see one.) The second paper tackles a trickier subject, the "vagranity" of Painted Bunting. Working from an exhaustive table of extralimital reports of the species from every state that lacks a breeding population, along with Bermuda and eight Canadian provinces, the authors discover strong seasonal patterns in the reports and suggest possible causes for these patterns.

What connects these papers, besides their topic? Take a look at the Acknowledgments and the many "in litt." and "pers. comm." references in them. These studies would hardly have been possible without the help of hundreds of

knowledgeable, local observers, who supplied the writers with old records, current breeding areas, and documentation that form the core of the data, along with Breeding Bird Survey results and findings of other citizen-science initiatives. To understand where these buntings breed, and where they appear as vagrants (some of which stay to breed), thousands of eyes were needed. *The core of people who made these papers possible consists, by and large, of the readers of this journal.*

The "Changing Seasons" essay brings this point home. Sullivan and Wood examine trends in abundance of several "common" species—particularly American Kestrel—using the best available data from citizen-science initiatives. They also look briefly at trends of vagrancy in two favorites, Cave Swallow and Red-throated Pipit. Their point, as directors of the new "eBird" project based at Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is straightforward: the status and distribution of our avifauna are ever changing, never static. Where Ernest Choate could tally 25,000 kestrels in a day, at Cape May, modern hawkwatchers now fail to find that many in four months of dawn-to-dusk census work. But Choate never knew a Cave Swallow there, a species that modern birders now find annually, sometimes by the dozens. What was once abundant is now far scarcer; what was unknown is now rare but regular.

The plea made by Sullivan and Wood is likewise straightforward: *don't assume that your personal bird records have no value.* If we all can take 5 minutes out of our day to enter what we've seen into eBird, our observations, collectively, have the power to reveal patterns of vagrancy, small-scale irruptions, and

even trends in populations. *If we only take the time.* Modern birders are more galvanized than ever against the assault on the great wild habitats—our spiritual homes, in a sense, and homes to the birds that carry us through our lives and that so indelibly mark the paths we take. But for so many species, we lack a common repository of our experience of these birds, lack even basic data on their distribution. The audacity of eBird is that it seeks to change the very culture of birding, from a disparate and Balkanized set of practices into a more globally connected and meaningful one: from a private set of notes collected into old shoeboxes in our closets into a common history of ourselves—who we are, where we've been—and especially where the birds are. In collocating our observations, eBird empowers us to perceive patterns in what seemed random, to make contextual sense of bird records we once called "accidental." Without question, eBird is the successor the earliest attempts, made in *Bird-Lore*, the precursor of this journal, to synthesize bird sightings across the continent on a seasonal basis—in the essay that first appeared in 1917 called "The Seasons."

If you have not considered the ramifications of this new way of record-keeping, take a careful look at it—not for Cornell, not for *North American Birds* regional editors, but for the "common" birds, so many of which seem to be in decline and so few of which are attended to in depth in this journal's regional reports.

## A Thank You and a Farewell

To all who contributed to the "Friends of *North American Birds* Fund" over the past year, all of us who work on the journal thank you from the bottom of our

# The Friends of North American Birds

SUPPORT THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS, THE ABA'S JOURNAL OF ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORD.

Since its inception, the fund has enabled us to make many improvements to the journal's look and feel. The journal is now mailed in a protective wrapper to ensure its delivery in one piece. The content has benefited from an increase in page count which has allowed for additional articles with even more detailed analysis. The amount of color pages has increased which has allowed for us to expand the Pictorial Highlights and an occasional Photo Salon. All of this has been made possible with your generous contributions.

There are more plans in the works for future issues but the fund does need your continued support. Each "Friend of NAB" will be recognized annually in the first issue of each volume of

*North American Birds.*

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hearts and wish you a Spoon-billed Sandpiper on your local mudflat in 2005. (We'll come visit when it turns up!) Your generous donations have allowed us to continue mailing issues in wrappers, to expand both the color pages and black-and-white pages (this issue is 192 pages, the previous issue was 167!), and to include material on bird conservation—part of the legacy of this journal that has been in eclipse for many years.

In September of last year, the man who set the Fund in motion, and who was one its most generous supporters, was lost to us, after a brave battle with cancer. Dave Cutler was not only a person who loved birds and people equally and intensely; he was a Regional Editor who for over 50 years worked to suture birding communities together across the Atlantic states and to bring the fruits of their birding—their bird records—together in print, in this journal and several others. He was true blue; he was tireless; he was, as his admiring friends all attest, the sort of friend one hopes for once in a lifetime. He is very much missed. For those considering making a donation to Dave's fund in his memory, please refer to the In Memoriam piece in this issue, where further details are available.

### West Indian winds

The autumn season of 2004 was devastating to many of the Caribbean's islands, with six tropical storms or hurricanes making landfall somewhere in the Lesser or Greater Antilles, four of those hitting Florida this season. The report from Florida is frightening—tens of billions of dollars in damage and many nesting areas of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers wrecked. But the report from the West Indies & Bermuda Region is even more sobering: many species are barely hanging on as it is, and hurricanes could in several cases cause not just local extirpation but extinction. While this journal has seen a steady, slow growth in connections to local birders who live in the Caribbean and on Bermuda, editors Rob Norton, Tony White, and Andrew Dobson also welcome contributions from observers on cruise ships, Caribbean getaways, guided birding tours, and ornithological expeditions and research projects. Every little bit of information is helpful in forming a sense of birds' status and distribution on the Caribbean's thousands of islands, cays, and islets: in so many cases, even reports of "common" birds fill in huge gaps in distributional data across the 2,753,170 square kilometers of the Caribbean Basin. (In the works, by the way, are local eBird sites for the U.S. Virgin Islands and for Puerto Rico.)

Thanks to an annual contribution from the ABA's Education Fund, *North American Birds* subscriptions have been donated to bird and other wildlife organizations throughout the Caribbean, including three each in Cuba and Jamaica; two each in the Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, and Trinidad and Tobago; and single groups in Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, the Turks and Caicos Islands, the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands (Tortola), Anguilla, Antigua, Montserrat, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada. We very much appreciate editor Tony White's initiative in arranging this effort, which has already borne fruit in much good correspondence.

### Editors' moves

After 13 years editing the Middlewestern Prairie Region, Ken Brock is passing the torch to **Keith McMullen** (Keith.A.Mcmullen@mvs02.usace.army.mil or warbler@intertek.net), **Jim Hengeveld** (jhengeve@indiana.edu), and **Geoff Williamson** (geoffrey.williamson@comcast.net); they'll tackle the Illinois & Indiana Region as a team beginning with the Spring Migration 2005 report. Colorado & Wyoming now have two new Regional Editors joining Chris Wood: **Tony Leukering** (GreatGrayOwl@aol.com) and **Bill Schmoker** (bill@schmoker.org), two veterans of midcontinental birding and longtime contributors to the journal. We are delighted to have them as part of our crew. Doug Faulkner, who has edited the Region for the past year, will be focusing his efforts on a book treating Wyoming birdlife but still helping out behind the scenes. He has been instrumental in bringing many Wyoming contributors on board, and we can't thank him enough for his many contributions. In Pennsylvania, Nick Pulcinella will be succeeded by **Rick Wiltraut** (rwiltraut@state.pa.us) in the Eastern Highlands & Upper Ohio River Valley; thanks too to Nick for his distinguished year of service! **Sarah Rupert** (tanager@sympatico.ca or Sarah.Rupert@pc.gc.ca) will take over the Spring Migration seasonal report from Matt Holder in Ontario; thanks to Matt for holding the fort since 2002. In the Baja California region, Robb Hamilton's email has changed (robb@rahamilton.com). In the Iowa & Missouri region, Bill Eddleman's email has also changed (edlemanw@sbcglobal.net), and that Region's spring report will now be edited by Steve Dinsmore (sdinsmore@cfr.msstate.edu).

Welcome on board, all!

—Edward S. Brinkley

### Corrigenda and apologiae

In our article on Little Stint (58: 316–323), our best efforts to aid the authors in their roster of extralimital records fell short by at least two: Doug McRae and Chris Benesh found an adult in fading plumage at Big Pond, Big Pond Cove on Brier Island, Digby County, Nova Scotia 21–24 August 1997 (*Nova Scotia Birds* 40.1: 16 and 41.2: 37); and one adult was at Safety Sound, Nome, Alaska, 7 June 2000 (*North American Birds* 54: 316). Apologies to the finders for missing these important records; and thanks to Lance Laviolette for supplying us with the *Nova Scotia Birds* articles! In the article on the possible Brown Skua at Sable Island, NS (58: 622–626), the year of publication was lacking in the literature cited for Jiguet (1997) and for Reinhardt et al. (2004); the caption for Figures 6 and 7 in that article should indicate the location as “south of Hatteras” rather than “off Oregon Inlet,” a correction supplied by Mike Tove. Mike Todd was responsible for the excellent image of the Hudsonian Godwit at Dauphin Island, Alabama (*N.A.B.* 58: 461); we apologize to Mike for that caption's erroneous attribution. Harry LeGrand points out that the caption for West Virginia's Lesser Nighthawk (58: 629) missed mentioning North Carolina's only record—from 9 December 1998 (\*NCSM #18830). In reference to the Texas Glaucous-winged Gull (58: 458), Allen Chartier points out another *more* extralimital record of the species, one not published in this journal but accepted by Michigan's committee, on 29 December 1997 in Genesee County (Reinoehl, J. 2000. Actions of the Michigan Bird Records Committee for 1999. *Michigan Birds and Natural History* 7: 251–269). Finally, several folks caught the mistake on the Black-headed Grosbeak caption (58: 631)—it should be a subadult rather than adult male. Thanks to all who sent in these corrections.

Many of you noticed that the pages our last issue were very pale in places. Unfortunately, the mill that normally supplies our paper was on strike, and though we ordered “comparable” paper, it was not of very good quality. Our press ended up reimbursing us for the cost of all the paper for that issue, which is some consolation; but we would like to apologize to our contributing photographers in particular for this problem.

—Edward S. Brinkley

—Matthew F. Sharp

## STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS USED IN THE REGIONAL REPORTS

*	specimen collected
+	bird(s) seen through end of period
†	written details on file
A.F.B.	Air Force Base
acc.	accepted by records committee
A.R.C.	Avian Records Committee
b.	banded
B.B.S.	Breeding Bird Survey
B.O.	Bird Observatory
B.R.C.	Bird Records Committee
C.A.	Conservation Area
C.B.C.	Christmas Bird Count
C.P.	County Park
cm	centimeter(s)
Cr.	Creek
Ft.	Fort
G.C.	Golf Course
G.P.	Game Preserve
Hwy.	Highway
I. (Is.)	Island(s), Isle(s)
imm. (imms.)	immature(s)
Jct.	Junction
juv. (juvs.)	juv. (plumage); juvenile(s)
km	kilometer(s)
L.	Lake
mm	millimeter(s)
m.ob.	many (or multiple) observers
Mt. (Mts.)	Mount/Mountain (Mountains)
N.A.	Nature Area, Natural Area
N.F.	National Forest
N.M.	National Monument
N.P.	National Park
N.S.	National Seashore
N.W.R.	National Wildlife Refuge
p.a.	pending acceptance
P.P.	Provincial Park
Pen.	Peninsula
ph.	photographed (by + initials)
Pt.	Point (not Port)
R.	River
R.A.	Recreation(al) Area
R.B.A.	Rare Bird Alert
R.P.	Regional Park
R.S.	Regional Shoreline
Res.	Reservoir
Rte.	Route
S.B.	State Beach
S.F.	State Forest
S.G.A.	State Game Area
S.P.	State Park
S.R.A.	State Recreation Area
S.R.	State Reserve
S.W.A.	State Wildlife Area
S.T.P.	Sewage Treatment Plant/Pond
subad. (subads.)	subadult(s)
Twp.	Township
v.r.	voice recording (by + initials)
vt.	videotape (by + initials)
W.A.	Wildlife Area
W.M.A.	Wildlife Management Area
W.T.P.	(Waste)water Treatment Plant/Pond