

FIRST GALACTIC RECORDS

By Robert Campbell

Regular readers of the Sunday *Boston Globe* may have noticed the list of recent bird sightings that usually appears on the same page as the extended weather report. They may have also noticed that these reports often include bird sightings that, if true, represent not only new state records; but perhaps even national or galactic records as well.

Fairness compels me to admit that I am not the only person who has noticed this phenomenon. A few years ago, a *Globe* reader wrote a letter to the editor in which he commented upon such unusual reports as "a pair of Green Falcons" at Plum Island and "Abe Lincoln Sparrows" at Mount Auburn Cemetery. This inspired me to monitor the *Globe* sightings, and my findings follow herewith.

Raptors and owls are probably my favorite birds, and I was pleased to note that the above-mentioned "pair of Green Falcons" was soon followed up by a "Dark-faced Deer Falcon" at the same location. Also, a "Short-eared Hawk," doubtless a new species, was reported from Hadley on December 15, 1991. Hadley was also where a "Gray-faced Screech Owl" seems to have been observed on December 19, 1996. Hadley observers also were privileged to hear the Shakespearean iambic pentameter call notes of the "Bard Owl" on December 22, 1991. Supposedly the Old World Scops Owl has never been seen on this side of the Atlantic, and it is simply unbelievable that with all the birding talent in Massachusetts, only the *Globe* was able to document both "Lesser Scops" AND "Greater Scop" in Pittsfield on November 15, 1992.

With more species of birds becoming adapted to habitats among humans and in human-built structures (I think that the correct word is "edificarian" or something like that) in recent years, it was only a matter of time before the appearance of "City Shearwaters" was documented in Rockport on September 25, 1994. Among sea birds, a "Mule Gull" (a hybrid, surely) was seen in Hadley on April 26, 1992. I do not know what to make of the several reports of "Black-legged Kittiwigs," most recently at Stellwagen Bank in late 1991, or of the mysterious "Yellow-crested Cormorants" supposedly seen well offshore at Cashes Ledge on September 5, 1993.

The *Globe* has also reported some interesting shorebirds. With the growing acceptance of clothing-optional beaches, it was not surprising that a "Bared Sandpiper" turned up on North Monomoy on August 16, 1992. Fortunately for this overexposed species, it avoided the attentions of the hormone-crazed "Rutt" that was reported from the same place a year later, on August 15, 1993. Monomoy birders also were able to admire the satiny smooth plumage of a "Silk Sandpiper" on July 19, 1992, and the oddly-shaped "Bobtailed Godwit" on the same date.

Other curious sightings of waterbirds were the "American Abasset" on Plum Island, and the four "Pie-billed Grebes" (possibly the same species originally described by Mr. Shemp Howard and associates) seen on the Billington Sea.

According to the *Globe*, land birders have also had a few surprises in the past few years. Birders watching the clumsy, erratic flight of the "Wobbling Vireos" in Marshfield on August 15 and September 5, 1993, could not help comparing their ineptness with the precision synchronized aerial maneuvers of a group of "Parallel Warblers" in Hadley (again!) on October 20, 1991. Mount Auburn birders located three "Blue-gray Nacatchers" on April 26, 1992, but may have overlooked several more of these drowsy little rascals snoozing away in the dense foliage.

Miscellaneous reports include the "Rough Grouse" swaggering through the Quabbin area on November 11, 1992, the "Wide-eyed Vireo" which was startled by the unexpected arrival of birders at Manomet on October 24, 1991, and the observers who came up empty on a Billington Sea visit and had nothing more to report than six "Red Hens." Better than no birds at all, I suppose. And what had the "Larder-head Shrike" seen at Marshfield on September 5, 1993, been feeding on?

There are lots more new records for the planet brought to us through our local broadsheet. Among these are Great Catbird, Rose-breasted Grousebeak, Thick Thistle, Arcadian Flycatcher, Ash-tailed Flycatcher, Yellow Cuckoo, Veery Thrush, Harrison Sparrow, Crown Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chaps, and Chestnut-colored Longspur.

Keep watching the skies.

Bob Campbell teaches fourth grade at the Morrison School in Braintree, MA, where he once had *Bird Observer* treasurer Glenn d'Entremont as a student. Glenn subsequently retaliated by introducing his former teacher to birding. Bob's current main interest is herpetology: among other activities, he monitors the rattlesnake and copperhead population in the Blue Hills.

Thanks to Cathi Pelletier for assistance in producing this issue of *Bird Observer*.