

# THE CHANGING SEASONS

by James L. Tate, Jr.\*

*With the exception of  
Middlewestern flood areas,  
a generally successful breeding season*

*Swainson's Warbler after netting. Tobay Beach, N.Y., May 20, 1973. Photo/P.A. Buckley.*

By far the most interesting aspect of this breeding season has been the lack of the spectacular decline or failure. In most areas most species had a good-to-excellent breeding year. There were no major atmospheric disturbances, no widespread floodings, and no long cold spells. The results are that species which have suffered losses here and there over the last several years were able to regain some of those losses. The distinction must be made at the outset of this report between high breeding populations and good nesting success. Some species returned from the 1972 disasters and the unusually cold spring migration in low breeding numbers. Many of these same species, however, had a good-to-excellent breeding year.

**LOONS, GREBES.**—Spring migration was delayed for some Common Loons (Atlantic and Pacific coasts, Florida, Wisconsin), as it was for Arctic Loons. A very late record for a small group of Common Loons on Long Island, N.Y., suggested a possible extralimital breeding attempt. Western Grebes had excellent reproductive success in the central Rocky Mountains and in Minnesota. Spillover of the growing Western Grebe population produced Arizona's first breeding colony and a large summering population along the middle Pacific Coast. Red-necked, Horned and Eared Grebes showed scattered summer reports. Eared Grebe may be exhibiting signs of decline in the heart of its nesting range.

**PELAGICS.**—Two additional Black-browed Albatross records now grace the North American list (the first was in 1972). Although rare in the North Atlantic, it is the most likely albatross

to be seen there. The Sooty Shearwater was greatly reduced in numbers along the Middle Pacific coast, but greatly increased both to the north and south. The Atlantic coast reports listed large numbers of Greater Shearwaters east of Beach Haven, N.J., and one bird off Melbourne Beach, Fla. The Short-tailed Shearwater populations seem to have been concentrated near Unimak, Aleutian Is., around July 4, during their annual clockwise circuit of the Pacific Ocean. High counts of Leach's Storm-Petrel came offshore from off Beach Haven, N.J., and from the northern Pacific coast. Wilson's Storm-Petrel was considered especially abundant all along the Atlantic coast including Florida.

**PELICANS AND ALLIES.**—A rare visitor, the Red-billed Tropicbird, visited San Mateo County, Calif., in late June. The Brown Pelican continues to do badly along the Pacific and Texas Gulf coasts, but seems to be hanging on in the Southeast. South Texas reported only remnant colonies, and the post-breeding populations along the Pacific coast were heavily weighted towards adults. South Carolina's Deveaux Bank produced a remarkable 1150 young, and Florida colonies remained stable. White Pelican migration was delayed, with birds filtering out of Florida through June and reported on the lower Ohio River in mid-June and from the prairie states through June. Some known colonies of this species are apparently not being checked carefully (Great Salt Lake and Lake of the Woods). Despite the absence of tropical storms or other

\*Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

disturbing influences, Magnificent Frigatebirds appeared along the southern Pacific coast and inland at the Salton Sea, at Yuma, Arizona, in Florida, and along the southern Atlantic coast. An unusual report of a Gannet comes from Hatteras Island, and Brown Boobies were reported at Point Reyes, Calif.

An unclear picture of Double-crested Cormorant breeding success emerges from the Regional Reports. A scattering of non-breeding summering birds indicates that most of the adults were busy with breeding activity. Some reports listed remarkable successes and some new colonies, while others indicated declining populations.

**WATERFOWL.**—Clearly recognizable trends can be found in several areas. Gadwall are apparently increasing their range and populations in the Northeast and in Ontario. Blue-winged Teal are being found both as summering birds and breeders through much of the West. Waterfowl production was generally good this year. A few areas had limited success (Vermont, New Hampshire, western Minnesota, and parts of the northern Rocky Mountains), but by and large it was a very productive waterfowl season. Regional rarities included a Ring-necked Duck with brood 500 miles out-of-range in Northwest Territories, the first Cinnamon Teal for Alaska at Anchorage, Common Pochard at Adak, and Fulvous Tree Duck in New Jersey.

**BIRDS OF PREY.**—Probably as much effort to determine breeding success goes into hawk studies each year as for any other group. Regrettably, many hawk enthusiasts are closed-mouthed about even the simplest comment on relative success. An incomplete picture results. Curiously, buried in the Regional Reports are reassuring signs of success by some species. Bald Eagle and Osprey, subject of considerable concern, are holding steady in most areas. The Golden Eagle is generally coping successfully with shooting, trapping, and poisoning. Falcons are in serious trouble, a fact that we are not getting across to some of the falconers. American Kestrels are once again demonstrating their responsiveness to nest box programs. Possibly we are seeing the first positive results of the DDT ban. Kites are having only local problems, and the Mississippi Kite is steadily increasing in numbers and range.

Most Buteos were down nationwide this past summer. Ontario and Michigan agree that the Red-shouldered Hawk is failing in their southern areas, but holding its own in the north. Unexpectedly, Red-tailed and Swainson's Hawks did generally poorly throughout their ranges. Accipiters continue to decline.

**LONG-LEGGED WADERS.**—Detailed data for mixed heronries are given in the Florida, Southern and Middle Atlantic Coast Regions, and the Hudson-St. Lawrence and Middle Pacific Coast reports. Almost without exception herons and egrets were reported on the increase by these editors. The incredible success of the Drum Island heronry near Charleston, S C (50,000 young of mixed herons and egrets), has to be seen to be believed. In most heronries across the continent full clutches were reared and little renesting occurred.

Great Egrets are nesting at inland sites, including Washington Boro, Pa., and are expanding into new coastal colonies. Snowy Egret enjoyed good nesting success except at the Salton Sea, where it was in competition with Cattle Egret. At most localities the latter expanded in numbers and range. Limited reports of Great Blue Herons gave no clear picture of their success. The more diffuse distribution of colonies of this species means that many went unreported. Except for the Florida colonies and presumably the Drum Island colony, the Louisiana Heron and Little Blue Heron were reported in small numbers. Reddish Egret was essentially unreported. Perhaps it is time to make a special effort to census these three species as they occur outside of the large southeastern colonies.

Green Heron was very much in evidence, with good nesting success and several extralimital records, including Colorado's first nesting. Black-crowned Night Heron seemed to be holding steady except that individual colonies declined at Pigeon Island, Ont., Fish Springs N.W.R., Utah, and Lacreek N.W.R., South Dakota. Few American Bitterns were reported, but those reported included a range extension (Alaska) and an unseasonal occurrence (Inyo Co., Calif.). Two reports—Northern Great Plains and Middle Atlantic Coast—specifically commented on a several-year decline.

The Wood Stork is the subject of a disheartening report from Florida. Reproduction has not been good for several years. Postbreeding flocks were evident on the Salton Sea and along the Colorado River. The Roseate Spoonbill staged an invasion of the Southwest following another successful breeding season in south Texas. Arizona and California reported numerous sightings. Glossy Ibis continued to increase in the Northeast.

**SHOREBIRDS.**—Compared with last year's disastrously late spring in the far north, this year's mild weather was very helpful. Spring migration and breeding proceeded without a major disaster. The temporary concentration of 30,000 shorebirds in southeastern Idaho points

up the value of providing migration stopover points for these species. There is no reason why refuges and municipal lakes cannot be managed for shorebird habitat at critical times in the same way that we manage marshes for waterfowl. High water levels on the Great Lakes made shorebirding difficult, but flooded fields made up for lost habitats. Unusual breeding records included Piping Plover at Dubois, Idaho, and Waukegan, Ill., Semipalmated Plover at Ocean Shores, Wash., Wood Sandpiper at Attu Island, Alaska, American Avocet in southeastern Wisconsin, and Solitary Sandpiper in Minnesota. Solitary and Stilt Sandpipers and American Avocets seem to be increasing in numbers and range. Regional rarities included European Whimbrel in New Jersey, a full-plumaged Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Barrow, Curlew Sandpiper at Barrow, and Great Knot near Nome, Long-billed Curlew at Juneau, all in Alaska, and a summering Common Snipe in Illinois.

**GULLS, TERNS AND ALCIDS.**—High water on the Great Lakes effectively prevented nesting by many colonies. In most other localities weather was ideal for nesting. Low water levels affected Ring-billed Gull at Oak Lake, Man., and California and Franklin's Gulls did very well in Oregon (15,000 young at Grays Lake), but a 1971 colony of 25,000 pairs at Agassiz N.W.R. in Minnesota held only 500 pairs this year.

Least Tern, of special interest because of its endangered status, had a very good year in many areas, but disastrous results elsewhere. St. Louis, Mo., Eatons Neck, L.I. (usually 600+ pairs), Craney Island, Va., San Diego Co., Calif., and the Georgia coast reported no colonies or greatly reduced reproduction. In contrast, North Carolina, Bay Farm Island, Calif., Cape Henlopen, Del., and Hampton, Va., found Least Terns nesting in numbers.

Large colonies of Common Murre were counted on the Oregon Islands N.W.R. At the same time somewhat over 2 per cent of this population was apparently killed in nets off the middle Pacific coast. Horned Puffins made unusual appearances in both Middle and Northern Pacific Coast Regions.

**OWLS, GOATSUCKERS.**—Although there are often few reports of owls and goatsuckers on which to base population estimates, there appear to be a few trends that are apparent. Barred Owl and in some places Great Horned Owl are clearly faring badly. Whip-poor-will is doing poorly in the heart of its range, and is no longer expanding at the edges of its range. Common Nighthawk, once widespread and abundant, is no longer breeding in many cities of the Northeast. Burrowing Owl, on the other hand, is showing signs

of continuing its spread after several years of decline.

**OTHER NON-PASSERINES.**—Whooping Crane had a poor year at Wood Buffalo National Park, Alta. The insight into its management provided in the Northern Great Plains report should be seriously considered by every reader. It has recently been shown that a major cause of mortality in the Sandhill Crane is sibling competition, seldom is more than one crane raised per nest. This species had mixed success this year.

Among gallinaceous birds the cyclic species hold great interest for most of us. Ruffed Grouse seems to be reaching a peak in southern Vermont and New Hampshire, but has crashed in Minnesota. New York populations are still rising. Blue and Spruce Grouse are increasing over most of their ranges. Despite a mild winter over most of the north, Bobwhite did not have a good year. Gambel's and California Quail appear to have done well.

Mourning Dove was in record numbers over most of the Northeast but was locally reduced in the northern and central Rockies and south Texas. White-winged Dove was up throughout its range. Almost without exception this was an excellent year for Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos. Smooth-billed Ani is increasing in Florida, and Groove-billed Ani had a second highly successful year in a row in south Texas.

Out-of-season and out-of-range Black Swifts made news in four regions, and a flight of 300 at Duncan, B.C. was remarkable. Chimney Swift was down over most of the Northeast and Appalachian Regions. *Chaetura* swifts continue to be sighted in the Southern Pacific Coast Region. Ruby-throated Hummingbird was down in numbers from the Appalachians to the Southern Great Plains, Middlewestern Prairies, and Northeast. Other hummingbirds were less often observed in the Southwest and central Rocky Mountains, owing to improved natural feeding habitat following good spring rains. Observation of these birds is difficult unless they are concentrated at feeders. Interesting hybrid hummers appeared in the central Rocky Mountains, the Southwest, and Middle Pacific Coast reports.

**FLYCATCHERS.**—Several Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were out of range, including one each in Iowa Co., Wis., Malheur N.W.R., Ore., and in Cochise Co., Ariz., where they are uncommon. An interesting albino lived at least two years and raised young this summer at Roby, Tex. Western Kingbird was in increased numbers in most parts of its range, and produced numbers of extralimital records. Out-of-season Eastern Kingbirds appeared in Death Valley and

on the Chickamin River in Alaska, and possibly bred at two sites in Arizona. Tropical Kingbirds were down on the Santa Ana N.W.R., Tex., and one appeared in Los Altos, Calif. Great Crested Flycatcher nested at Key West, Fla.

**SWALLOWS THROUGH CORVIDS.**—In many ways swallows are typical of the nesting season. Although some were greatly reduced in numbers at the beginning of the season (especially along the path of 1972's Hurricane *Agnes*), most areas reported good-to-excellent reproduction this year. The Purple Martin declined in the Hudson-St. Lawrence Region, the central Pacific Coast, and possibly in the Middlewestern Prairie Region, but reproduced well in other areas. Large roosts were reported in Gainesville, Fla., and along the Ohio River. This species should be the subject of special attention for the next few years in order to watch its recovery in the Atlantic Coast states. Persons wishing to cooperate in a study of Purple Martin nesting success should contact Dr. Jerome A. Jackson, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, Miss. Barn, Tree, Cliff, and Rough-winged Swallows generally had a very good reproductive year, but in parts of the East the Barn and Tree Swallows were down. Out-of-range rarities included Tree Swallow nests in Coconino Co., Ariz., the first Rough-winged for Alaska on the Chickamin River, and Cave Swallow nesting in Pecos Co., Tex.

Many reports of lingering Corvids following last winter's lowland invasions, and extralimital records were reported.

**MIMIDS, THROUGH WARBLERS.**—Several reports included information that Gray Catbird was having a good year, and that Mockingbirds continued their slow expansion in the northern borders of their range. A Curve-billed Thrasher was found near Holtville, Calif., in June. Loggerhead Shrike was down in Ontario, the Hudson-St. Lawrence Region and the central Rocky Mountains, but was in good numbers in the Southern Great Plains. We are probably experiencing a widespread decline in this species despite a generally good nesting year.

White-eyed Vireo was markedly up in the Midwest and the Appalachians. Red-eyed Vireo was up nearly everywhere, and was recorded on the Chickamin River in Alaska again this year, and in Inyo Co., Calif. but was absent in the Northern Great Plains. In the Southern Great Plains it was Bell's Vireo that was down. A Yellow-green Vireo report came from Falcon Dam, in South Texas.

Most areas reported warblers doing well. Only eastern West Virginia, the Boulder, Colo. area,

and San Joaquin Co., Calif., reported specific warbler problems. The first Alaska Magnolia Warbler, the second California occurrence of the Red-faced Warbler, and breeding Nashville Warbler in Pennsylvania were unusual.

Mountain Bluebirds continue to respond to management by having highly successful years. Eastern Bluebirds continue to suffer widespread regional losses despite the same management techniques. The differences appear to be the competition for nest sites supplied by Starlings, House Sparrows, and Tree Swallows. We now need to have and to apply carefully worked out management schemes for bluebird box routes in Starling and House Sparrow habitats. A Clay-colored Robin appeared at the Santa Ana Refuge in July.

**BLACKBIRDS, TANAGERS.**—Bobolink appeared to be on the increase in the West. There were several extraseasonal and extralimital records with successful nesting. One Northern Oriole returned to a Key West nest site of last year. A Hepatic Tanager showed up in Santa Barbara, Calif., in July, and two pairs were found near Grand Valley, Colo. Two Summer Tanagers summered near Santa Rosa, Calif.

**FRINGILLIDS.**—Late winter influxes of winter finches left lingerers and breeders in most regions. Included in this lingering-breeding phenomenon were Evening Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, and Red Crossbill. (Also, in some areas, both Red- and White-breasted Nuthatches) Buntings and Blue Grosbeak enjoyed a phenomenal year in most regions. Rarities included Henslow's Sparrow nesting in South Texas, Indigo Bunting singing in Pend Oreille Co., Wash., Dickcissel in numbers in the Appalachian Region, Song Sparrow summering in central Nebraska, and a Golden-crowned Sparrow nest on Vancouver Island. Alaska came up with more than its share, including Brambling, Common Rose Finch, Harris' Sparrow, and Rustic Bunting.

*This season no report was received from the Western New York-Pennsylvania portion of the Ontario-Western New York Region, and the report from the Northeast Maritime Region, although excellent, was received five weeks past the deadline, and could not be included in this issue. It is hoped that there will be space available for it in the next (December, 1973) issue of American Birds.*

*Outstanding in that report was an account of the first North American breeding of the Manx Shearwater, on Penikese Island, Massachusetts. Details will be forthcoming.*