

The Last Word

Too little has been said for too long about the important role in the success of *American Birds* played by our Regional Editors. Probably few readers, unless they are actively involved with the record-gathering and analysing process, have any conception of the amount of time, effort, and thought that goes into every seasonal report we publish. Our editors' task is to gather the reports from every corner of their regions — normally by letter — but often by telephone or telegram; then sift through the stacks, sometimes a foot or more high, of paper crammed with information in every conceivable (often almost illegible) form; verify the doubtful ones, select the most meaningful ones, organize the whole into some logical order, and then write, succinctly and interestingly, a report that gives both the overview and the important details. All this, with a crushing deadline, and, of course, without any compensation except the knowledge of the great service their dedication means to North American ornithology, and the very real prestige that goes with the byline.

There are presently close to forty of these dedicated editors. Some share in the writing of four reports each year, some write a single season once a year, some, like George Hall, our senior editor, have written every season's report for years. Some, like Fred Scott, Gibson and Byrd, Witzeman and company, and others submit manuscripts that are almost letter perfect: some, like Frances Williams, always manage to come in *before* the deadline; some, like Davis Finch, are such perfectionists that they give us days of anxious (but in the end worthwhile) waiting. All want more space than we can allot them; the more readers we have, and the more observations submitted, the more impossible it is for our editors to confine themselves to the space allotments. Most of them are probably unhappy with us most of the time, but they do fair mindedly acknowledge that we have our own problems. We are all indebted to all of them for putting together the most comprehensive seasonal reviews of a continent's changing ornithology anywhere, anytime. And while we pay tribute to them, we should not ignore the very important service rendered to them by sub-editors, area contributors, and all the others who help them. Nor, in fact, all those writers and editors who help keep *American Birds* going, with their unrecompensed services.

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Saturday, August 7 to Tuesday,
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Instructors:

Arnold Small, MS, Associate
Professor of Biology, Los Angeles
Harbor College
Gerald Maisel, MD, President,
Los Angeles Audubon Society

College credit available.

Approximate total cost: \$2,300.

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P.O. Box 24902, Los Angeles,
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There is no way we can ever accurately calculate how many people are actively personally involved with this publication. But if we modestly estimate that each of the seasonal issues lists the direct or indirect involvement of 2500 or more observers (we attempted to total these for one issue but there were too many "et al."s and club records), and that the Christmas Bird Count involves 28,000+ names, and that other studies and papers involve 500 persons, we are talking about 40,000 separate instances of personal involvement each year. Can there be any publication anywhere on earth with as close an association between it and its readers? We think one of the ways in which this involvement is beginning to show is in our present circulation, now at an all-time high of 11,500. Five years ago, when we superceded *Audubon Field Notes*, it was 4100, so we have had a gain of 280 per cent.

While this growth has been gratifying, it has never been satisfying, in the sense that the editors have always had hopes and dreams of someday producing a bird magazine that would truly excite and absorb the countless thousands of birders (including the professional community) of North America. No one knows how many of us there are, we have seen estimates that range upward to 11 million; some based on wild bird feed tonnage sold, on organization memberships, on bird book or equipment sales, on refuge visits. Obviously, a large part of these grandiose totals can be attributed to people no more interested in birds than they are in golf, bridge, the names of trees, or how to grow African violets. But, counting only those who own bird books and binoculars, and who go birding regularly, there must be at least 500,000 of us. This untapped market obviously would welcome a publication more exciting in content and in graphics than *American Birds* is today.

The news is that we are presently planning this publication. The National Audubon Society has authorized us to plan the introduction of the new *American Birds* for the first issue of 1977. Our plans, at this stage, are still tentative, but we do envision a larger page size, feature articles by top writer-scientists in the field, much more full color in photographs and art throughout. Some of the regular features we publish now will be retained and perhaps expanded; new features will be introduced. We are shooting for nothing less than the most beautiful, informative, and stimulating periodical solely on birds anyone has ever seen. And we are pleased to announce that for guidance and supervision we will benefit from the many talents of Les Line, editor of AUDUBON and Vice-President for Publications of the society, and his staff. Our tiny current staff: Arbib, Drennan, Degnan, and Heilbrun, will share in this

transformation.

But we are not going to change *American Birds* without consultation with the loyal subscribers now reading the periodical, as well as the thousands we want to add. So we will be consulting personally with many of the leaders of American ornithology. In addition, a mail survey will go out to a cross-section of readers and non-readers. Beyond this, we want *your* views. We want to know what you like about *American Birds* now; what you would like to see added, changed, improved, dropped. Tell us what kind of *American Birds* would excite *you*. Your letters will be instrumental factors in our final decisions.

Meanwhile, Volume 30, of which this is the first number, will be, we are sure, the best we have produced to date. Our coverage of the continent is now more complete, the article manuscripts we have in hand include a number of excellent ones, we will have more color throughout the year. We cannot, alas, promise on-time delivery of your issues: we are simply too dependent on the arrival of what are basically "late news" manuscripts from our Regional Editors. Those of you who cannot abide waiting for the appearance of *American Birds* in your mailboxes, and write us anxious notes, be reassured. There will be six issues in Volume 30, whenever and however they arrive. — The Editor.

SUBSCRIPTION NOTICE

Subscription rates for *American Birds* have remained, since February 1974, pegged at \$8 for one year and \$15 for two years, in spite of tremendous increases in postal rates, paper and printing costs, and all other publishing expenses. Almost every other periodical of which we are aware has increased its subscription rates dramatically during this period. The current rates for *American Birds* in effect result in a generous subsidy to every subscriber from the National Audubon Society.

This issue, for example, comprises over 130,000 words of type, the equivalent of two average length novels for which a reader might pay \$14 - \$18 at a bookstore. The price of this issue is \$1.50.

While we are not announcing new and higher rates at this time, we suspect that such an announcement is not far off. We urge, therefore, that the prudent subscriber protect him(her)self as much as possible, with a *two-year* renewal. We may even be forced, in the near future, to temporarily end two-year subscriptions. As of now, we are extending applications for them only through June 30, 1976.