

# The Changing Seasons

*The 1978 Nesting Season  
in North America . . . a most  
thoughtful, provocative analysis*

*William B. Robertson, Jr.*

**E**VENTS THAT ATTENDED the composition of this essay started me thinking about the *American Birds* (*AB*) information system. Because *AB* commands one of the most extensive reporting nets ever organized in natural history, first-time writers of *The Changing Seasons* (*CS*) are likely to fall prey to the spider fallacy. Poised at the center of the far-flung array, a *CS* editor easily imagines that all the current news of bird occurrence that's worth knowing is unerringly transmitted to him. Writing *CS* (especially for the breeding season) two years in a row is a powerful corrective for such hubris. Second time around one begins to realize that he doesn't really have all the data at the tips of his pedipalps, but instead often tries to read auguries from fragments caught in a tattered web.

As the most recently retired spider, small insights about how information gets through the holes came home to me when I tried to follow trends that seemed evident last year. To begin with, the actual holes are large; not every interesting area is visited every year. Particularly so in the West where the observers who represent mobile data points may be located hundreds of miles apart. *AB* casts a wide net, but not a very tight one. Large phenomena are not likely to go unnoticed, but events at one point, such as outpost breeding occurrences, may easily escape the mesh. Or, they may be noticed and then discarded as the

information is boiled down on its way from the field to the pages of *AB*. Observers decide what's worth reporting to Regional Editors and Regional Editors, with tight constraints on the space they can use, have no choice but to prune rigorously. It's small wonder that a *CS* editor sometimes looks in vain for reports of particular species in particular places.

**T**WO CASES WILL SERVE to illustrate. Last summer regions west of the Rockies reported unusual numbers of Indigo Buntings, about 150 in all. The total from the same areas this year was *three*. You might conclude that the species had aborted its promising invasion of the West. And, you would be wrong, because, at least in Arizona (Janet Witzeman, *in litt.*), Indigo Buntings remained numerous but weren't reported because other records claimed the limited space. The last two summer *CS* reports (*AB* 30:921, 31:1104) listed 63 first state breeding records for various species. It's of interest to know whether these new footholds were retained and such recent novelties should still be newsworthy. Yet, fewer than half are mentioned in the present reports. In 26 cases the newcomers were there again and nested, or *probably* nested. As several Regional Editors pointed out, observers tend not to search as diligently for bird nests that would document *second* state breeding records. For three of the records — Little Blue Heron in North

Dakota, White Ibis in Virginia, American Redstart in Arizona —reports included the equally valuable information that the areas were checked this year and no evidence of nesting found. Correspondence revealed a probable fourth, Northern Parula in California (Jon Winter, *in litt.*). What of the missing 33? It's a good bet that most will surface again in future summers. This year, in one way or another, the information fell through the holes in the net.

**T**HE AIM OF THIS EXERCISE was to make a couple of simple points. So simple, perhaps, that they don't need saying. To those who use (or draw clues from) the seasonal reports: *AB* is a victim of its success as a data-gathering scheme. No more than a fraction of the information of interest can be published. Regional Editors generally know much more about a given event than they have room to say in print and no comment doesn't necessarily mean no information. To *AB* contributors' information on the numbers and success of bird populations in the early years of colonizing new areas has particular interest and deserves special attention. And, lastly, to *CS* editors (the spiders, myself): in your hot pursuit of trends and regrets about lost information keep in mind the nature of the system. Especially the fact that the machine runs mainly on the donated time and energy of non-professionals.

The recent efflorescence of field studies continued with information from work by state fish and game departments especially prominent this time around. Many states (perhaps all 50) have sizable programs on "non-game" birds, such as the surveys of coastal water birds in New Jersey, raptors in Colorado and riparian passerines in California. Increasingly, attempts are being made to manage nesting directly — a shell island built for Least Terns in Texas, nest platforms for cormorants in several areas, floating mini-islands for Common Loons on New Hampshire reservoirs. I wonder how many such research and management efforts one could have found 10 years ago. Observations of interest also came from state and federal studies, mostly in the West, that are intended to gauge likely effects of proposed strip mines and power plants.

**I**T'S EVIDENT THAT DIVERSE groups are spending much time and money to find out where birds nest and in what numbers. A fair proportion of the work involves painstaking study in places whose birds are poorly known. Thus it's germane to ask what becomes of the information. The thin trickle that reaches *AB* is no more than the camel's nose in the tent door and perhaps even less of the camel will find its way into the formal literature. The likely fate of much of the information is to be buried alive in 1000-page environmental impact statements and internal reports. *AB* could fill a useful and appropriate role by developing guides to the maze of shadow literature on bird distribution. An annotated list of the various breeding-bird atlas schemes would be a good place to begin.

#### THE SEASON

**W**E SEEM TO BE IN A TIME of relatively benign summers and horrendous winters. Again this year the mostly bland weather should have favored productive bird nesting. Locally more extreme conditions, such as serious flooding in south Texas after hurricane *Amelia*, seemed to have no important effect on bird life. It was past weather that most affected bird populations this summer, the winter of deep snow that followed a winter of record cold in the East and the drought-breaking winter and spring rains in the West.

Not much can be added to what's already been said about the impact of two harsh winters in succession. The list of species affected has climbed to near 50. Many of this year's additions (Short-billed Marsh Wren, Brown Thrasher, Vesper, White-throated, Field, and Song sparrows) were birds that winter predominantly in the mid-South. The area affected has extended to the upper Texas coast (Eastern Bluebird) and the Southern Great Plains (House and Bewick's wrens). Winter and Carolina wrens remained the species of most concern, but perhaps 20 species were reduced by 50 percent or more at least locally. Fred Scott's note that Carolina Wrens (down by nearly 90 percent in parts of rural piedmont Virginia) were much more numerous in towns, showed how feeders buffer the effects of severe weather. With another winter just 'round the corner at this

writing a certain unease must prevail in the East, and not only for bird populations.

**T**HE REBOUND OF WATER BIRDS that followed rain in last year's drought areas was encouraging to say the least. To say the most, the change in some places was astonishing, theatrical, and it revealed an unsuspected diversity of species that had been affected by the historic drought. From the Midwest to California marshes and lakes that were dusty a year ago were full, streams running, vegetation lush. Nearly all the water birds of interior wetlands, from grebes to larids, had a banner season, although, locally, Western Grebes, White Pelicans and White-faced Ibis did not. Marsh passerines, prairie shorebirds, Short-eared Owls, Bobolinks, and grassland finches shared the flush times. In the temporarily verdant deserts of the Southwest, the Cassin's Sparrow invasion (*AB* 32:1043, 1057) was topped by a nesting of Lark Buntings in southeastern California, hundreds of miles outside the previously known breeding range. Throughout the West hummingbirds were attracted away from feeders to the flourishing natural flower fields.

By contrast, a few scraps of information suggested that birds in the Arctic may have had a poor nesting season. Observers agreed that the spring migration of shorebirds was very late and their apparent return unusually early. On May 25 flocks estimated at 80,000 were still in southern Saskatchewan. At almost the same time, Northwest Canada, *AB*'s only window on the Far North in this report, was experiencing severe cold and blizzards were said to have killed many birds. Reports reaching Esther Serr indicated that migrant shorebirds were absent from the Northern Great Plains for only a few days in mid-June. Greater and Lesser yellowlegs increased rapidly after about June 17 and many species had reappeared by July 1. The flood of records of late lingering by shorebirds that breed in the High Arctic included a report of 50 White-rumped Sandpipers that summered in southeastern Colorado. High Arctic birds (Ross' Gull, Snow Bunting *et al.*) found by the New York Linnaean Society centenary field excursion at Churchill, Manitoba, in June also suggested poor conditions on the breeding grounds. A cursory check of egg dates, incubation periods and periods of dependency

of young (see Palmer 1967, *in* The Shorebirds of North America) suggests that a tundra shorebird seen away from its nesting area before mid-July probably did not nest successfully. Few species have eggs before late May even in early springs and, from that point, most need at least 40 days to complete the breeding cycle. Allowing for wasted motion and travel time, shorebirds in the southern United States even in late July (such as the 5000 Lesser Yellowlegs in southern Florida July 29) perhaps aren't likely to have nested successfully. The Arctic Loons that were migrating north off Oregon in late June needing a full 90 days to nest would also seem to have calculated very closely indeed.

#### FIRST STATE BREEDING RECORDS

**A**S LONG AS YOU REMEMBER that crossing a man-made boundary adds no biological significance to the event, listing first breeding records for Canadian provinces, states and *AB* Regions is a handy way to keep track of breeding range extensions. The boundaries are milestones of a sort and first records attract notice and are likely to be reported. Several Regional Editors made the well-taken point that extension of known range doesn't necessarily mean range expansion, but may merely result from more thorough observation. The boreal birds recently found in northeastern Vermont may exemplify range extensions that involved no actual change in breeding distribution. Other first records (Black-necked Stilt in Alberta in 1977, Sooty Tern and Lark Bunting in the list below) probably occur in response to unusual conditions with no lasting increase in the species' established breeding range. Doubtless we are too inclined to see range expansion in every new breeding record simply because dynamic interpretations are attractive. However, except where conspicuous birds spread in well-studied areas (I suppose there's no argument about the Cattle Egret), proof of range expansion is hard come by. One may end by discussing whether range exists apart from knowledge of it. Manx Shearwaters may have bred in Newfoundland from time immemorial, but Newfoundland didn't become a known part of their breeding range until last year. If next year they're found breeding on the Maine coast, it will be impossible to *prove* that they haven't been there all

the time as well. Probably the best we can do is try to make reasonable guesses about each case as it arises.

In the lists below I've tried to clean up the act by separating occurrences according to the kind of evidence of nesting available. Based on information received, the following 30 first breeding records of 22 species involved discovery of active nests or (mainly for waterfowl) sightings of adults with broods of non-volant young: *Double-crested Cormorant*, Hudson-Delaware (near Fisher's Island, New York) and Middle Atlantic Coast (James River near Hopewell, Virginia) regions; *Cattle Egret*, Ohio, Idaho, Utah (Hugh Kingery, *in litt.*), and Middle Pacific Coast Region (three colonies); *Louisiana Heron*, North Dakota; *White-faced Ibis*, North and South Dakota; *Green-winged Teal*, Indiana; *Ring-necked Duck*, Yukon; *Lesser Scaup*, Northern Pacific Coast Region (near Everett, Washington); *Spotted Sandpiper*, Alabama; *Wilson's Phalarope*, Yukon; *Herring Gull*, Illinois; *Sooty Tern*, North Carolina (H. E. LeGrand, Jr, *in litt.*); *Boreal Owl*, Minnesota; *Blue Jay*, Montana; *Tennessee Warbler*, Vermont; *Lucy's Warbler*, Texas (AB 32:1027); *Wilson's Warbler*, New York; *Canada Warbler*, Indiana; *House Finch*, Ontario and Georgia (H. E. LeGrand, Jr., *in litt.*); *Pine Siskin*, Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky (AB 32:1016; Vernon Kleen, *in litt.*); *American Goldfinch*, Southwest Region (northeastern Arizona); *Lark Bunting*, California; and *Brewer's Sparrow*, Kansas (AB 32:1028).

CITATIONS IN A.O.U. CHECKLIST (1957) range statements suggest previous nesting records for Spotted Sandpiper in Alabama and Tennessee Warbler in Vermont but the respective Regional Editors indicated that these earlier reports were not fully confirmed. The Boreal Owl record apparently represents the first nest found in the contiguous United States, but records of juveniles from Colorado and Montana (Hugh Kingery, *in litt.*) suggest the existence of a breeding population in the northern Rockies. The unsuccessful Sooty Tern nesting follows several summer reports of birds seen around colonies of other terns and Black Skimmers on the North Carolina coast.

A last, unclassifiable and challenging entry

under confirmed first breeding records concerned the ♀ Blue-throated Hummingbird that appeared at a feeder just outside Sequoia National Park last December (AB 32:396, 1052). It must have set a record of sorts for first visits to California by reportedly achieving two intergeneric hybrid matings, with a ♂ Anna's and later with a ♂ Black-chinned Young fledged from the first miscegenation and they should present (and have) interesting problems of identity. The second nesting failed and the vagrant female, a pioneer in several dimensions, was last seen in late May

AT LEAST TWO ADDITIONAL first records, Red-bellied Woodpecker in Massachusetts (AB 31:1113) and Anna's Hummingbird in Washington (AB 32:1048), were overlooked in last year's tally. Another of the 1977 records, unidentified white *Sterna* nesting on Puget Sound (AB 31:1181), can now be clarified. Luckily, the terns came back and nested again this year and proved to be neither Common nor Forster's, but Arctic Terns about 800 miles south of the known Pacific coast nesting limit.

At least 10 more first breeding records in 1978 failed of full verification by narrow margins. Most involved observations of newly-fledged young, adults feeding fledged young or territorial adults carrying food or nesting material. That list included: *Turkey Vulture*, Maine; *Sora*, Alabama; *Wilson's Phalarope*, New York; *Royal Tern*, New York (one that made a nest scrape in a Long Island ternery, but evidently without a sequel), *Eastern Kingbird*, Yukon; *Cliff Swallow*, Louisiana; *Water Pipit*, southern California, *Bay-breasted Warbler*, Colorado (pair present all summer in budworm-infested spruce forest and seen carrying nest material and later attending fledged young); *Northern Waterthrush*, Oregon; and *American Redstart*, Yukon.

FINALLY, IN A FURTHER 27 instances 18 species representing potential first records were seen during or throughout the breeding season in circumstances that suggested they were nesting. Many of these were present for several weeks to several months in seemingly suitable habitat and behaved territorially or at least sang or called persistently. And, that list

included: *Double-crested Cormorant* (New Jersey), *Black Vulture* (New Jersey), *White-tailed Kite* (Washington), *Sora* (Yukon), *Common Snipe* (New Mexico), *Short-billed Dowitcher* (Yukon), *Caspian Tern* (New Jersey), *Whip-poor-will* (southern California), *Buff-collared Nighthawk* (Arizona), *Black Swift* (New Mexico), *Chimney Swift* (Arizona, southern California), *Yellow-bellied Flycatcher* (Appalachians of West Virginia and Virginia), *Alder Flycatcher* (Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Indiana, Iowa), *Swainson's Thrush* (Arizona), *Philadelphia Vireo* (Vermont), *Tennessee Warbler* (Colorado), *Yellow-rumped Warbler* (Cheat Mountains of West Virginia), and *Clay-colored Sparrow* (Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey).

In all, the confirmed, probable and potential first breeding records totalled 68 and involved 47 species. The records appear rather equally divided between those that represent at least temporary range expansions and those that resulted from discovery of outpost populations that may always have been present.

#### POPULATION STATUS

**I** DISLIKE TREATING RECORDS by taxonomic sequence but at the moment see no other way out. Comments mainly concern breeding range extensions and the current status of reportedly stressed populations.

**TUBENOSES** — The Laysan Albatross colony on Kauai persisted and a possible second colony was found on the other side of the island. Newfoundland's nesting Manx Shearwaters increased (Dr. Leslie Tuck, pers. comm.) and summer sightings once more stirred wishful thoughts of undetected colonies on the New England coast. An estimated 60,000 Greater Shearwaters on Georges Bank for once gave the East a shearwater concentration to match those seen off the Pacific coast. By far the most striking news of procellariiforms, however, was an unprecedented incursion of Northern Fulmars into the Gulf of Maine in late June and July. Reports included 8000 on Georges Bank and 1000 each on the *Bluenose* trips of June 26 and July 4, where the previous high count had been *five* (Finch *et al.*, *AB* 32:151). The event inevitably roused

speculation about breeding range expansion, but the birds were far from the nearest known breeding area in Newfoundland (colonized about 1973) and far too numerous to have come from there. Moreover, nearly all were of the extreme light plumage color phase which suggests origin from low-latitude nesting populations of the eastern North Atlantic. Peter Vickery's surmise that they probably were non-breeding sub-adults drawn from their usual pelagic range to an unusually rich food source seems the most economical interpretation at present.

**PELECANIFORMS** — White Pelican colonies in the Dakotas produced an estimated 10,000 young. Reports elsewhere were dominated by summering non-breeders that ranged from a thin scatter in the East (to western Maine) to thousands on western reservoirs and 1500 on San Francisco Bay. It's puzzling that White Pelicans seemed to do so poorly in a year when most interior water birds had good nesting success. A second North Carolina colony of Brown Pelicans was located on the lower Cape Fear River and 38 young fledged from two small colonies in Texas. Large numbers summered along the northern coast of the Gulf, in Texas and in California. Widespread reports of successful nesting suggested that formerly hard-pressed interior populations of the Double-crested Cormorant were rebounding strongly.

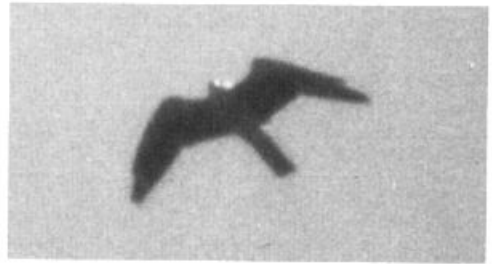
**CICONIIFORMS** — Most species had productive seasons, but it was discouraging to read that soft eggs and other likely pesticide effects still trouble some colonies in the West. In much of the East the Great Blue Heron now seems to be the most stressed wading bird. A reported doubling of Glossy Ibis numbers in New Jersey should dispel the recent mild unease about northerly populations on the Atlantic coast. Presumably the Cattle Egret balloon can't go up forever, yet it seems to be taking a long time for the species to encounter much resistance from its New World environment. Besides the first records above, Cattle Egrets nested in Ontario, Wisconsin, Minnesota, both Dakotas, and at two places in Colorado, where nesting was first confirmed last year. A colony was discovered within New York City, on an island in the East River,

and another of 500 pairs inside the city limits of Wiggins, Mississippi.

**WATERFOWL** — A flood of breeding records for various ducks from areas where they have seldom nested in recent times (Common Merganser in Pennsylvania, Red-head in Illinois, Ruddy Duck in west Texas, Canvasback in southern California) reflected the increased habitat available. The Gadwall registered a major range expansion north in Ontario. Harlequin Ducks on a lake in Lassen National Park kindled hope that a breeding population may exist in California.

**VULTURES** — The Turkey Vulture seems to be making a major surge north. This summer records came from Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario, three places in Québec and northeastern Vermont, and Maine had 50 sightings and a probable nesting. Farther west the species nested again in northern Idaho and one June 27 at Churchill, Manitoba, may have been the northernmost ever recorded. Black Vultures were numerous in western New Jersey and singles reached Long Island, southern Maine and Québec.

**“KITES”** — The kites are an odd assortment of raptors with little in common except the name, but they do share certain behavior, notably lack of the wariness characteristic of many hawks. That trait may go far to explain the fact that kites were nearly extirpated 50 years ago and since have increased while other raptors were declining. Their once-fatal tameness may be adaptive in altered environments whose human population no longer includes many compulsive hawk-shooters. Thus the Swallow-tailed Kite is the only locally breeding raptor that regularly hunts over southeast Florida suburbia. Two species, White-tailed and Mississippi kites, now breed far beyond their original range limits. This year each species expanded its range locally, in Oregon and Colorado respectively, and the Texas population of White-tailed Kites seemed to be in a phase of rapid build-up such as occurred in California several decades ago. A recent decrease in central California (Christmas Bird Counts show that number of White-tailed Kites seen per party-hour has dropped in the past two years) may result from effects



*Mississippi Kite, Cape May Pt., N.J. June 10, 1978. Photo/ Clay C. Sutton, Jr.*

of the long drought on rodent populations. Kites seen far from breeding ranges included White-tailed in South Carolina; Mississippi in central Illinois, at Cape May and near Baltimore; and a Swallow-tailed Kite in Maryland in late May. The Everglade Kite in Florida had probably its most productive season of the past half century with more than 100 young reared, and Hook-billed Kites nested again, successfully, on Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.

**OTHER DIURNAL RAPTORS** — Few reports of Cooper's Hawks from the East and evidence that the Goshawk is solidly established in its expanded range (19 nests in a small area of northwestern Connecticut) renewed speculation that Goshawks may have usurped the Cooper's Hawk niche in some areas. Reports also gave little encouragement for declining populations of Red-shouldered, Swainson's and Marsh hawks. Most other raptors seemed to fare well. The outlook for several threatened species brightened appreciably and summer records of singles not far from ancient eyries stirred faint, but probably illusory, hope even for the eastern Peregrine.

**SHOREBIRDS** — Definite nesting records for the Surfbird and Wandering Tattler from mountains of the northern Yukon added to the very few breeding localities known for these species. American Oystercatchers nested successfully at Monomoy and three Willets that summered in extreme eastern Maine suggested possibly impending spread into former range in the Bay of Fundy. Human interference continued to harass coastal Piping and Snowy plovers and the Piping Plovers of the Great Lakes. Both, however, enjoyed good nesting seasons in the Great Plains. The unusually numerous nesting

records of American Avocets in southern California included six pairs that nested in Death Valley. So much for rain in the desert.

**LARIDS AND SKUAS** — Breeding populations of gulls and terns seemed stable or increasing on the Atlantic coast and curiously variable on the Great Lakes and the Gulf. In New Jersey, Great Black-backed Gulls increased 25 per cent and Herring Gulls 75 per cent according to reports. Long Island recorded its first Laughing Gull nest of this century and Virginia had another Caspian Tern nest and record numbers of breeding Sandwich Terns. On the Great Lakes, Ring-billed Gulls are booming, Forster's Terns are increasing, and, at least on the eastern lakes, Herring Gulls are decreasing and Common Tern populations have crashed. Several well-known Gulf colonies of Royal Terns and Black Skimmers weren't occupied this year, but a new Caspian Tern colony was located in west Florida and Least Terns and Laughing Gulls seemed to thrive. A few Sooty Terns nested on the Texas coast and the Louisiana colony (Chandeleur Islands) fledged a record 27 young. At least 10 Long-tailed Jaegers were present in June around the head of the St. Lawrence estuary. With limited work offshore not much was added to the eastern skua story, except that a Great Skua was collected at Georges Bank where both species are now thought to occur.

**CUCKOOS** — Jerry Jackson called it "the year of the cuckoo" and (even though a cynic might say that's any year) the term was abundantly justified. Both species were reported in unusual numbers from almost all parts of their breeding ranges, each registered minor range advances and the unfortunate problems that cuckoos have vis-a-vis plate glass windows produced specimens to document many out-of-range records, including a first Regional record of the Black-billed Cuckoo from western Washington. Many comments attributed this year's increased numbers to outbreaks of tent caterpillars, but it's not clear where the extra cuckoos would have come from, since there were few reports of notable abundance last year. Perhaps the caterpillar infestations, though widespread, were local and cuckoos concentrated where feeding was best. The kamikaze tendencies of

both species caused heavy mortality. Frances Williams' report mentions hundreds killed on roads in east Texas and I saw more than 30 DOR Yellow-billed Cuckoos in driving 150 miles on secondary highways in Illinois in August.

**OWLS** — Reports of successful nesting by Spotted Owls in four western Regions were encouraging, but there's not much comfort in the available information about Barn Owls in the East. Burrowing Owl numbers were reportedly up in several areas, but, alas, the prairie dog poisoners seem to be busy again in parts of the West. A Great Gray Owl in northern California was notable and Barred Owls were said to be spreading south in the northern Cascades.

**HUMMINGBIRDS** — The Rufous Hummingbird made news on a broad front. The hummingbird seen last April at Newton, Massachusetts, was determined from photos to have been a Rufous. Others reached northern British Columbia and the southern Yukon and one (probably Rufous) at Old Crow, north of the Arctic Circle, may have been the northernmost hummingbird of record. Large numbers (500 in one field of wild columbines in eastern Oregon) flooded the Great Basin and central Rockies in late summer and they were accompanied, at least in Colorado, by many Broad-tailed and Calliope hummingbirds. Rivoli's and Blue-throated hummingbirds ranged well north of their usual beat to east-central Arizona and west-central New Mexico. Up to five Berylline Hummingbirds, "becoming a summer staple" in Arizona, were in Ramsey Canyon, Huachucas, and two young fledged from the second known nesting in the United States. The season's fanciest hummingbird, also in Arizona near Nogales, was a Plain-capped Starthroat (*Helimaster constantii*, breeds north to southern Sonora), the second known U S occurrence.

**"TRAILL'S" FLYCATCHER** — The troubles that eastern observers are having with Willow and Alder flycatchers were put most elegantly by Clive Goodwin, "The Traill's Flycatcher complex continues so," most succinctly by the Hudson-Delaware

editors, "Help!" In the five years since the former species was definitively split, field work had seemed to build a reasonable picture of the division of range and habitat. Birds that say "fitz-bew" were spreading into new territory, and, at least in southern parts of the joint range, birds that say "fee-bee-o" were becoming scarcer and more closely limited to bogs and alder thickets. This year the advance of "fitz-bew" birds continued — north in New England and eastern Canada, south over the Virginia and North Carolina piedmont, to higher elevations in Eastern uplands. The neatly dynamic concept of relationships showed signs of coming unstuck, however, owing to a resurgence of "fee-bee-o" and to growth of the chilling suspicion that some individuals may speak both pieces. In Ontario birds of each song type occurred widely in habitat and range characteristic of the other and in the Appalachians half a dozen colonies of birds that said "fee-bee-o" were located south to western North Carolina, one in an area recently occupied by "fitz-bew" birds. The "fee-bee-o" song type was again noted in parts of the Midwest where no records of breeding Alder Flycatchers exist. Meanwhile, far away in southern California, surveys of riparian habitat revealed that the once-common Willow Flycatcher was nearly extirpated. One hopes that this news won't provoke a mass immigration of frustrated observers from the East. I myself am glad to live where I confront only silent migrants for which "Traill's Flycatcher remains available" (*Auk* 90 416).

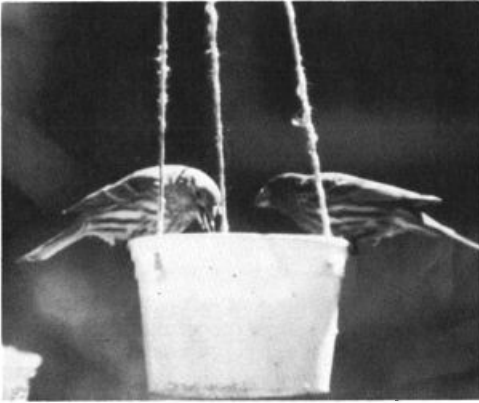
SWALLOWS — Tree Swallows, often using nest boxes put up for bluebirds, pressed their range limits south in both the Appalachians and the Rockies and some left the mountains to nest on the Virginia piedmont and the high plains of eastern Colorado. The Barn Swallow has very nearly completed its colonization of the Southeast. This year it nested in central Florida and advances in Louisiana, Mississippi and west Florida almost closed the gap between northern birds and the once widely disjunct breeding populations on the north coast of the Gulf. One pioneering pair of Cliff Swallows nested near Charleston, South Carolina, and the colony on the east side of Lake Okeechobee (Sykes, *Wilson Bull.*

88:671), disjunct by around 700 miles, was active again. The Purple Martins of the West, reportedly scarce everywhere and almost gone from southern California, made a dark spot on the rosy picture of hirundine successes.

EASTERN BLUEBIRD THROUGH VIREOS — Despite winter kill and interference from Tree Swallows, a number of nest-box populations of Eastern Bluebirds nested productively. Comments continued gloomy for the Loggerhead Shrike in the northeastern quarter of its range and for several vireo species in the West. The Black-capped Vireo seems to be heavily impacted by cowbird parasitism throughout its range. Bell's Vireo was reportedly scarce where reported at all and the Warbling Vireo population of southern California is evidently reduced to a few pairs. In towns of the Rockies, a drastic decline of Red-eyed Vireos (also Yellow Warblers) may be related to extensive spraying of street trees

PARULIDS — The distribution of Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers seemed to become a bit more complicated, if that's possible. Continuing recent trends, the Blue-winged has now spread through much of the former Golden-winged range in New Jersey, New York and Vermont. The Golden-winged, however, maintained recent increases in Ontario and increased in northeastern Illinois (in an area recently occupied by Blue-winged Warblers), central Indiana (nested), and at its far range edge in eastern Manitoba. Kirtland's Warblers declined slightly in Michigan, possibly an effect of last year's drought, and (as everyone must know by now) two singing males, apparently unmated, were found in west-central Wisconsin. If the Grace's Warbler seen carrying food near Pueblo, Colorado, was indeed nesting, it represented a range extension across two mountain ranges to the east slope of the Rockies. Although it has not been well-documented in *AB*, a small breeding population of Chestnut-sided Warblers has been known from the eastern Colorado foothills since 1968 (Hugh Kingery, *in litt.*). A number of additional records this year included one singing male in the mountains. Exhaustive surveys of riparian areas revealed the Yellow Warbler to be another species that





*House Finch, St. Lambert, Qué., May 3, 1978, First record for Québec. Photo/ B. Barnhurst.*

was once common but is now threatened in southern California.

**ICTERIDS THROUGH FINCHES** — Apparent range expansions by Great-tailed Grackles and Bronzed Cowbirds continued. The former nested in north-central Oklahoma and at a new locality in southern California and one seen in San Francisco was a first record for the Middle Pacific Coast Region. The cowbird seems to have invaded new areas in New Mexico (eggs found in Hooded Oriole nests) and nested again in New Orleans. In the East and Midwest, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks continued to be reported farther south and at lower elevations, Blue Grosbeaks farther north and at higher elevations. This summer less than 600 miles separated the westernmost eastern House Finch in St. Louis and the easternmost western House Finch in southwestern Oklahoma. Unless the greater distances between towns slows spread of the

eastern birds, the gap could be closed within five to ten years. Perhaps preparation of appropriate ceremonies (driving a golden sunflower seed?) should be begun.

#### EXTRALIMITAL ODDS AND ENDS

Because this piece is already too long, I can note only those records from a rich gathering that were claimed to be the first (italicized) or second for various areas, including first specimens, first "documented" records, etc. We have already been thoroughly scooped on news of the most astounding find, a Spoon-billed Sandpiper near Vancouver, British Columbia (*AB* 32:1062). Other records that seemed to qualify were: Arctic Loon (Maine), *Western Grebe* (New York), *Manx Shearwater* (North Carolina), *Audubon's Shearwater* (Alabama), *Brown Pelican* (Michigan), Olivaceous Cormorant (Colorado), *Rufous-necked Sandpiper* (British Columbia), *Lesser Black-backed Gull* (Groton, Connecticut, June 29; said to have been *Larus f. fuscus*, the darker-mantled Scandinavian race), *California Gull* (New Mexico, first specimen), Bridled Tern (Alabama), *Black Tern* (Yukon), Black Skimmer (Ontario), *Burrowing Owl* (New Brunswick), and, to end with the same species as last year, *Chestnut-collared Longspur* (Wisconsin).

In closing, my heartfelt thanks and salute to the *AB* Regional Editors. The detailed help they provide by answering letters so patiently and promptly should have resulted in a better report. — *South Florida Research Center, National Park Service, Everglades National Park, P.O. Box 279, Homestead, Florida 33030.*

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#### **SOUTHERN ATLANTIC COAST REGION**

**/Harry E. LeGrand, Jr.**

Owing to a lack of correspondence sufficient to write a full-length seasonal report for Summer 1978, Harry E. LeGrand, Jr., regrets the inconvenience to *American Birds*' readers; but, will publish a summary of the summer

highlights with the fall report; all of the noteworthy sightings from the Carolinas for the summer season will appear in the "Briefs for the Files" section of *The Chat* and noteworthy sightings for Georgia will be published in *The Oriole*. Please remember that all regional correspondence for *American Birds* should be sent to LeGrand at Department of Zoology, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29631.