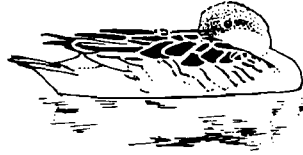


PATILLO — *Anas bahamensis*



M. ESTEY

## Surprise!

The present issue of *American Birds* may come as a shock to our readers and contributors; it is the first change in size in the 33-year history of *American Birds*, which was named *Audubon Field Notes* prior to 1971. Some subscribers including some librarians will undoubtedly complain that shelf heights must now be altered; others have already told us that in its former dimensions, *American Birds* volumes (Vol. 32 had 1238 pages) could no longer be bound.

Our new size has many benefits — and a few drawbacks. The larger page size allows us much more flexibility and freedom of design: we can set type and especially tables and figures in one-, two-, or three-column widths, Regional maps will be larger and more readable; illustrations can be of greater dimensional variety, and when warranted, spectacular in impact. The new size allows us to print on web presses, at a slight economy in cost, with slightly better paper; there is a very real advantage when it comes to printing color (when our budget allows). With about 50 per cent fewer pages per year (but no less material), *American Birds* will stack and bind in less space. Finally, by having a page size uniform with most other magazines in the natural history field, and with more available sizes and shapes, we may attract more of the advertising that helps keep our subscription rates down.

Possible drawbacks might include slightly higher costs for reprints, and the required change in shelf height. We recognize, of course, that to the strict traditionalists among you, any change whatsoever from the accustomed is anathema. We take heart that 32 years from now, you'll be just as devoted to our "new" size, as you were to our old.

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Our January issue, much delayed, not only for a N.A.S. Board of Directors decision on the size change, but because there is so much editing to be done for this, our "Environmental Studies" issue, welcomes back as our Technical Editor Chandler S. "Chan" Robbins, America's foremost specialist in North American bird distribution (among his many other specialties), and editor *par excellence* of the two types of detailed habitat censuses presented in this issue. While Chan's name has been missing from our masthead for some time, he has never deserted his most important role with *American Birds*: the countless hours he devotes to checking and correcting these studies has unfortunately, in recent years, been anonymous.

There is probably no doubt that this issue is one of the most valued contributions to science made by *American Birds*: we know that these studies are continually cited in Environmental Impact Statements, and that they form the basis for an ever-increasing number of derivative studies. It is probably also true that a majority of our readers spend less time with this issue than any other. It is admittedly so densely packed with facts and figures, so rigid in format and style, that to read it through, or even in large measure, requires more devotion than all but a few of the most dedicated among us can muster.

The editors, however, must subject every word of this issue to about six readings. First they go either to Ron and Audrey Ryder (whose last issue, alas, this is) or to Ted Van Velzen, who perform the basic editorial functions of coaxing a variety of editorial styles into our accepted style, pencilling in adjustments in spelling, punctuation, botanical nomenclature, species orders, addition; some manuscripts wind up with 200+ editor's marks on them, others must be re-typed. From our two primary editors the manuscripts come to this office, where they are further edited; thence to Robbins, who checks all figures by computer, querying authors by telephone or letter where anomalies or discrepancies occur. Finally, a second in-office review may discover out-of-order species lists, or other irregularities. Just to check the botany requires a 3-foot shelf of references. Finally, type proof is read at least twice.

A recent letter from Robbins calls attention to the need for much more careful work by authors of these studies, many of whom are professional scientists or advanced students. For example, this year, there were 211 BBC reports, of which 129, or 61%, came in with incorrect total density figures. Additionally, a shocking 10 per cent came in with the wrong number of *species*. In some cases, compilers had omitted one or two species, but in some cases they had simply added incorrectly. Getting the correct order of listing species seems to be a major problem for some; even the spelling of bird names astonishes us: peewees galore, sharpshin hawks, vermilion flycatchers, Weid's flycatchers, and more. Even more surprising is that many multi-year study compilers apparently never refer to past edited copy when preparing new studies; habitual mistakes keep reappearing.

With all these cavils aside, this issue represents an enormous job of important work, for all concerned. It is an issue that the *American Birds* editors often despair that they will never actually see in print, and when they do see it, it is through exhausted eyeballs. Finally, a word to new subscribers for whom this is the first issue received: patience, the March issue will be full of the kinds of material you have been waiting for.

—The Editors