

# American Birds

# AUTUMN GUIDE

October–December 1991

With the cool, crisp air of autumn upon us, the trees are shedding their brightly colored leaves, allowing the patchwork of colors to float onto the ground below. With binoculars in hand, now is the time to improve identification skills of those difficult fall warbler plumages, or to search out that rarity gone astray.

Below, our autumn list of twenty-five sure-to-please birding sites awaits. Whether you plan to bird on an ocean, by a river or in a marsh; on a barren island, expansive field, or deep in the woods, we have just the spot for you. You'll find songbirds, shorebirds, hawks and herons. Just follow our map and begin your days of fall discovery.

**Recommended location guides and further references are included at the end of each site description.**

## 1. HARTLEN'S POINT, NOVA SCOTIA

This point on the outer coast, just outside Halifax, may not look like exceptional bird habitat—but it has a proven potential for turning up unexpected species in fall and early winter. Look for lingering songbird migrants (and strays from the west and south) in the roadside thickets, and for shorebirds on the tidal flats. Also see: *Bird-finding Guide to Canada*, J. Cam Finlay, publ. 1984; *Birding Nova Scotia*, Charles R.K. Allen & Phyllis R. Dobson, rev. 1984; *Birding in Atlantic Canada: Nova Scotia*, Roger Burrows, publ. 1988.

## 2. NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS

In a state famous for birding sites, Newburyport is one of the best. The riverfront in the town itself is great for shorebirds, diving ducks, and gulls. Nearby Parker River National Wildlife Refuge and Plum Island are always worth birding for migrant songbirds in the thickets and for shorebirds and waterfowl around the impoundments. Also see: *Bird Finding in New England*, Richard K. Walton, publ. 1988; *Birds of Essex County, Massachusetts*, Essex Ornithological Club, rev. 1988.

## 3. MONTAUK POINT AND JONES BEACH, NEW YORK

At the eastern end of Long Island, fall migrant songbirds congregate and strays often linger in the Montauk area. Late in the season, the tip of Montauk Point becomes a superb spot for winter sea-watching, with scoters, Northern Gannets, eiders, and alcids among the possibilities. Within easy driving distance of New York City is Jones Beach. The entire barrier island between Jones Inlet, on the west, and Fire Island Inlet, on the east, provides excellent birding for hawks and especially falcons in late autumn, and small south-bound passerines in good numbers into early winter. Scan the ocean along the entire length of the barrier beach with your telescope for sea-birds and rare gulls. Devotees claim there is nowhere comparable in the east to see good numbers and variety of birds throughout the autumn. Also see: *Where to Find Birds in New York State: Top 500 Sites*, Susan Roney Drennan, publ. 1981.

## 4. BRIGANTINE DIVISION, FORSYTHE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, NEW JERSEY

Known to birders as "Brigantine" or simply "Brig," this coastal refuge has fine shore-birding throughout the fall. By November, large numbers of Brant, Snow Geese, and other waterfowl build up. Gulls and birds of prey are among the other features of winter birding here. Also see: *Bird-finding Guide to New Jersey*, William J. Boyle, Jr., Rev. 1989.

## 5. CHESAPEAKE BAY BRIDGE-TUNNEL, VIRGINIA

Some artificial "islands" on this crossing are off limits for birding, but the others can be remarkably rewarding. Fall migrant songbirds, including strays from the west, can be seen with ease on the barren rocky islands. Other attractions at these vantage points include scoters and other sea ducks, cormorants, loons,

and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Also see: *Birding the Delaware Valley Region*, John J. & Justin J. Harding, publ. 1980; *Finding Birds in the National Capital Area*, Claudia Wilds, publ. 1983.

## 6. HUNTINGTON BEACH STATE PARK, SOUTH CAROLINA

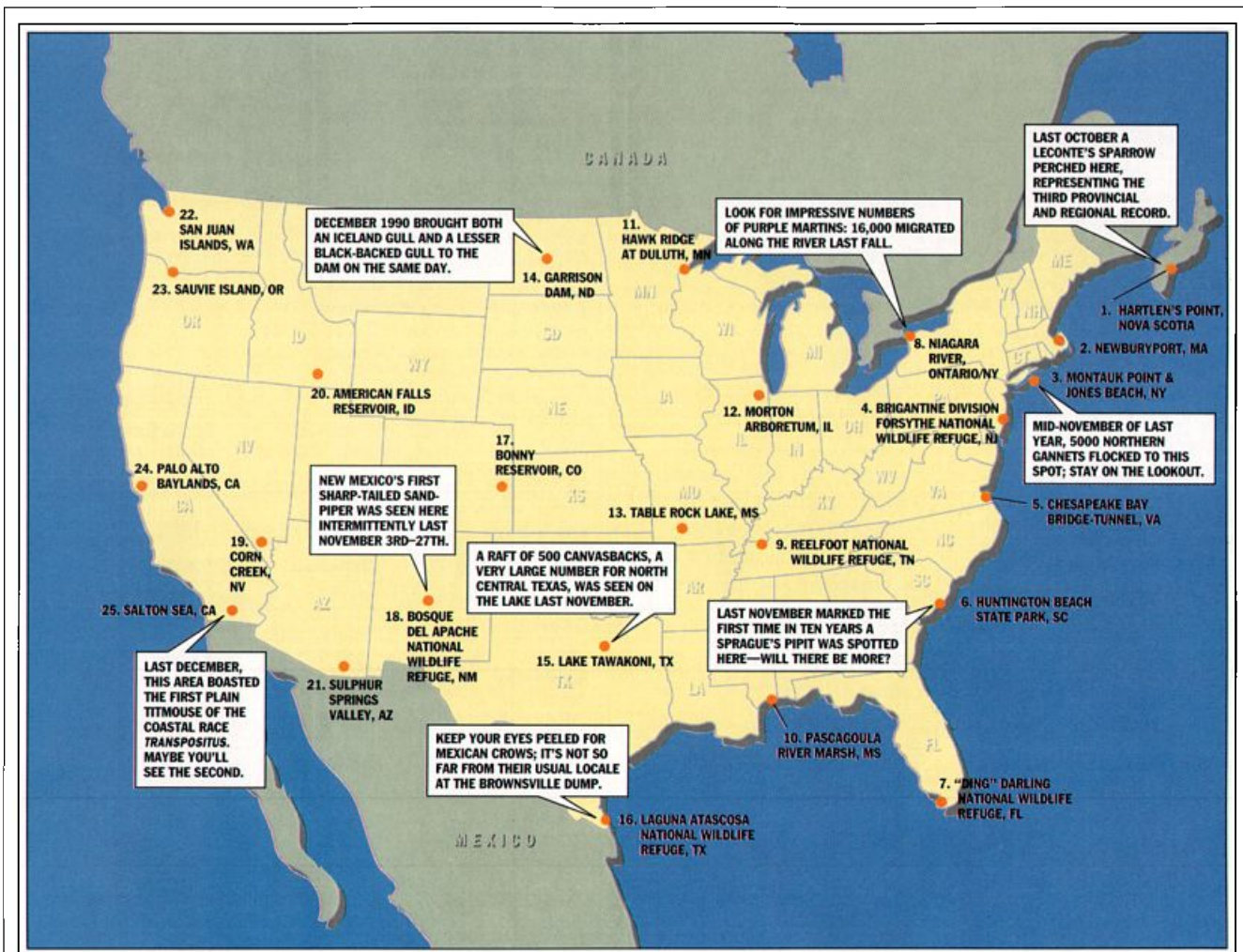
Rails and sparrows in the marshes, shorebirds on the beach, and salt-water birds offshore make this an exceptionally worthwhile coastal birding site. "Northern" birds like Great Cormorant and Purple Sandpiper often turn up on the jetty in late fall. Also see: *Birds of the Carolinas*, E.F. Potter, J.F. Parnell & R.F. Teulings, publ. 1980; *Finding Birds in Carteret County*, John O. Fussell III, publ. 1985; *Virginia Birding Site Guide*, Ruth Beck & Dick Peake, eds., publ. 1985.

## 7. "DING" DARLING NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, FLORIDA

For some reason, the birds on this Sanibel Island refuge seem accustomed to human attention. Herons, egrets, White Ibises, Roseate Spoonbills, Anhingas, and a host of wintering ducks and shorebirds can be approached for close study—a photographer's dream. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Florida* (Lane Series), James A. Lane, rev. 1989; *Florida's Birds: A Handbook and Reference*, Herbert W. Kale II & David S. Maehr, publ. 1990; *Birds of South Florida*, Connie Toops & Willard E. Dille, publ. 1986; *The Birds of Sanibel* (video), Karis & Don Herriott, publ. 1989.

## 8. NIAGARA RIVER, ONTARIO /NEW YORK

Honeymooners may not go to Niagara Falls in cold weather, but birders do, because this is one of the best places on the continent to study gulls in late fall and early winter. Almost all the eastern gull species can be found here, some in large numbers. Also see: *Where to Find Birds in*



*New York State: Top 500 Sites*, Susan Roney Drennan, publ. 1981; *Bird-finding Guide to Ontario*, Clive E. Goodwin, publ. 1982.

**9. REELFOOT NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, TENNESSEE**

Reelfoot's best-known attraction in the cold months is the wintering concentration of Bald Eagles. In addition, however, the area's combination of woods, fields, swampland, and open water makes it productive for a wide variety of other species. Also see: *Bird-finding in Tennessee*, Michael Lee Bierly, publ. 1980.

**10. PASCAGOULA RIVER MARSH, MISSISSIPPI**

This "new" birding site has gained fame in recent years for its diversity of birdlife. Although it is worthwhile at any season, late fall and winter are especially enjoyable times to cover the area. Shorebirds, herons, rails,

Anhingas, and others are regular, and many out-of-range landbirds have been found. Also see: *Birds and Birding on the Mississippi Coast*, Judith A. Toups and Jerome A. Jackson, publ. 1987.

**11. HAWK RIDGE AT DULUTH, MINNESOTA**

Southbound hawks, deflected west by the long shore of Lake Superior, put on a superior show at Duluth. In late fall, this can be one of the best places in the world to study Northern Goshawk. When it's an off day for hawks, the Duluth area can always turn up some other species of interest along the lakeshore. Also see: *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota*, Kim R. Eckert, rev. 1983.

**12. MORTON ARBORETUM, ILLINOIS**

An abundance of ornamental plantings makes the Morton Arboretum one of the best places to find landbirds in

the Chicago area during late fall and winter. If "winter finches" show up anywhere in the region, this is where they're likely to be. Also see: *The Birds of Illinois*, H. David Bohlen, publ. 1989; *Bird-finding in Illinois*; Elton Fawks & Paul H. Lobik, publ. 1975.

**13. TABLE ROCK LAKE, MISSOURI**

History was made here in the winter of 1990-1991 when four species of loons were present at once on the reservoir, probably the first such occurrence inland. Even without rare loons, Table Rock hosts a good variety of waterbirds in late fall and winter. Also see: *A Guide to Bird Finding in Kansas and Western Missouri*, John L. Zimmerman & Sebastian T. Patti, publ. 1988.

**14. GARRISON DAM, NORTH DAKOTA**

In late fall, even when standing water is beginning to freeze up, the spillway

below Garrison Dam remains attractive to wandering waterbirds. Surveys in recent years have suggested that this is the best place in the Dakotas for unusual gulls. Also see: *Birder's Guide to North Dakota*, K.J. Zimmer, publ. 1979.

**15. LAKE TAWAKONI, TEXAS**

This reservoir east of Dallas is a major stopover site for birds of open water, including loons, grebes, ducks, gulls, and terns, with many of these remaining into winter. Short-grass fields in the vicinity attract wintering Smith's Longspurs. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Texas*, Edward A. Kutac, rev. 1989; *The Birds of North Central Texas*, Warren M. Pulich, publ. 1988.

*(Continued on next page)*



**16. LAGUNA ATASCOSA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, TEXAS**

The south Texas brushlands have many bird species not found elsewhere north of the Mexican border. Laguna Atascosa is a good place to see many of these, including Plain Chachalaca, Pauraque, and Olive Sparrow. The refuge also hosts migrant and wintering shorebirds, and is the site of an experimental re-introduction of Aplomado Falcons. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Texas*, Edward A. Kutac, rev. 1989; *Birder's Guide to Texas Coast*, James A. Lane & Harold R. Holt, rev. 1988.

**17. BONNY RESERVOIR, COLORADO**

Out on the high plains, the trees around Bonny Reservoir often attract concentrations of migrant songbirds in fall, including strays from farther east. Waterbirds on the lake and typical prairie species in the surrounding countryside add to the diversity of birdlife here. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Colorado* (Lane Series), Harold R. Holt & James A. Lane, rev. 1987.

**18. BOSQUE DEL APACHE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, NEW MEXICO**

Most famous as the wintering site for the experimental Grays Lake flock of Whooping Cranes, Bosque is also good for migrant shorebirds and other species throughout the fall, and for a big build-up of wintering Sandhill Cranes and geese later in the season. Also see: *New Mexico Bird-finding Guide*, Dustin Huntington & Dale A. Zimmerman, publ. 1984; *Birds of New Mexico Field Check-list*, New Mexico Ornithological Society, publ. 1989; *Birds of New Mexico's National Parklands*, John P. Hubbard and Claudia L. Hubbard, publ. 1979.

**19. CORN CREEK, NEVADA**

Just outside Las Vegas, this oasis on the Desert National Wildlife Range is a great place in fall for observing

migrants—including unexpected ones. A number of "firsts" for Nevada have been found here. Also see: *R.R.A.S. Field List of the Birds of Nevada*, M. Vincent Mowbray, rev. 1989.

**20. AMERICAN FALLS RESERVOIR, IDAHO**

This large reservoir is one of the most consistently productive birding sites in southern Idaho. Loons, grebes, pelicans, ducks, gulls, and terns stop over here regularly in migration, and some remain into the winter. Numbers of Bald Eagles and other raptors can be notable in late fall. Also see: *Checklist for Birds of the Southwest Idaho*, D.A. Stephens & T. D. Reynolds, undated.

**21. SULPHUR SPRINGS VALLEY, ARIZONA**

Along the roads from Willcox to Douglas, the grasslands and farm fields become excellent birding territory by late fall, with large wintering populations of birds of prey (especially Ferruginous Hawk) and Sandhill Cranes. Plowed fields may host Mountain Plovers and McCown's Longspurs. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Southeastern Arizona* (Lane Series), Harold R. Holt, rev. 1988; *Birds in Southeastern Arizona*, William A. Davis & Stephen M. Russell, rev. 1990.

**22. SAN JUAN ISLANDS, WASHINGTON**

The ferry ride from Anacortes to the San Juans produces some of the best alcid-watching in the Lower 48, especially in late fall and winter, with Ancient Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets, and others. Eagles, cormorants, wintering loons, and other species add to the appeal of birding here. Also see: *Guide to Bird-finding in Washington*, Terence R. Wahl & Dennis R. Paulson, rev. 1991;

**INVALUABLE TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

Although coverage and information varies from place to place, rare bird alert telephone services that use taped messages are a real boon for peregrinating birders. These detail current rare or unusual birds sighted and how to get to the place where last reported. Use this listing when visiting the places on our autumn birding map.

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**California**

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Los Angeles (213) 874-1318  
San Diego (619) 435-6761 and (619) 479-3400  
San Francisco (415) 528-0288

**Colorado**

(303) 423-5582

**Florida**

Statewide (813) 984-4444  
Miami (305) 667-7337  
Lower Keys (305) 294-3438

**Illinois**

Central (217) 785-1083  
Chicago (708) 671-1522

**Idaho**

Southeast (208) 236-3337

**Massachusetts**

Eastern (617) 259-8805

**Minnesota**

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Duluth (218) 525-5952

**Mississippi**

Coastal (601) 467-9500

**Missouri**

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**Virginia**

(804) 929-1736 and (301) 652-1088

**Washington**

206) 526-8266

*Birding in the San Juan Islands*, Mark G. Lewis & Fred A. Sharpe, publ. 1987.

**23. SAUVIE ISLAND, OREGON**

Covered regularly by Portland birders, this island in the Columbia River has a variety of good birding habitats: marshes, ponds, brushy woods. Productive all year, it may be at its best in fall and winter, when many waterfowl congregate on Sauvie's wetland areas. Also see: *The Birder's Guide to Oregon*, Joseph E. Evanich, Jr., publ. 1990.

**24. PALO ALTO BAYLANDS, CALIFORNIA**

Extensive trails for access and abundant waterbirds make the Baylands popular with birders at all seasons. The pond near the Nature Center is great for studying gulls and scaup in late fall and winter. High tides in

winter may push rails and marsh sparrows out into visible areas. Also see: *Birding Northern California*, Jean Richmond, publ. 1985; *Birder's Guide to Northern California*, LoLo and Jim Westrich, publ. 1991; *Birding at the Bottom of the Bay*, Second Edition, Santa Clara Audubon Society, publ. 1990.

**25. SALTON SEA, CALIFORNIA**

This huge man-made sea hosts many waterbirds all year, but their numbers in winter are astonishing: grebes, egrets, geese, ducks, shorebirds, gulls, and others. Stilt Sandpipers winter at the south end, and the surrounding country is good for Burrowing Owls and Mountain Plovers. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Southern California* (Lane Series), Harold R. Holt, rev. 1990.

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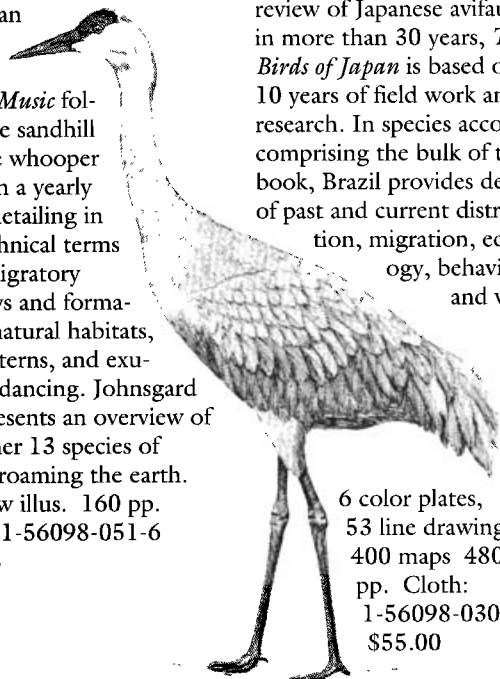
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## TINICUM N.E.C. FIGHTS FOR SURVIVAL

Tinicum National Environmental Center, the country's largest urban freshwater tidal marsh, is currently battling for survival. The refuge, soon to be re-inaugurated the John Hines National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum in honor of the Democratic senator who died in a plane crash two years ago, is located on



Lesser (American) Golden-Plover

12,000 acres near the Philadelphia International Airport. "We have to deal with air, noise, and visual pollution every day," says Dick Nugent, refuge manager. Recently the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation received a permit to build an interconnecting highway over 26 acres of the reserve. There was such a public outcry that the state agreed to an acre-for-acre exchange. "It may work out mathematically," says Nugent, "but the real viability of the exchange remains to be seen." Tinicum hosts Peregrine Falcons, cormorants, herons, owls, loons, many species of migratory shorebirds like Black-bellied Plover and Lesser Golden-Plover, and

numerous songbirds. Over 280 bird species have been recorded there. Private developers are attempting to build on 51 acres of wetlands bordering the reserve. "We're getting a lot of community and Congressional support," says Nugent, "people are coming to help our plight."

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## OIL, BIRDS, AND THE PERSIAN GULF

Desert Storm may have passed, but the damage caused by the large quantities of oil (between 0.5 and 2 million barrels) deliberately released into the Gulf, has not. The damaging effect on birds, other wildlife and the environment is a lasting one.

Approximately six weeks after the spill, Burr Henneman of ICBP/California, and Roy Dennis, RSBP/Scotland flew to Saudi Arabia to assess the damage and environmental impact and to roughly estimate bird mortality and which bird species were most affected.

From Khafji to Abu Ali (roughly 200 kilometers) avian life was decimated. Thousands of Socotra and

Great cormorants and Great Crested and Black-necked grebes along the north coast were smothered in oil and died. Of these, the bird of greatest concern is the Socotra Cormorant. It is already listed as near-threatened by the ICBP Red Data Book. Yet, according to the Henneman Report, those Socotra and Great cormorants found alive, responded well to rehabilitation procedures. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the Great Crested and Black-necked grebes—it is estimated that 95% of these birds succumbed to the oil.

Other species seriously affected were waders, including Black-bellied, Snowy, and Mongolian plovers, Curlew and Terek sandpipers and Bar-tailed Godwits. Large flocks of Dunlin with a mix of Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, and Sanderlings were present. In some flocks, 75% of the birds were partly oiled with 5% to 10% badly oiled. And, while there are no accurate mortality records, Roy Dennis points out in his report "Arabian Gulf Oil Spills," March 1991, that "most waders

affected will die on migration. A very rough estimate would be 10,000 waders already affected."

Gulls and terns were affected on a smaller scale, for it was still too early in the season for large numbers of breeding terns to have returned.

The effects of the oil spill are continuing today, and will continue well into the future. Oil pollution along the Saudi Arabian coastline is a major cause for concern. The residue will collect, and already the abundance of beach tar found on that coast are 10 to 100 times more than any other concentration of beach tar in the world.

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## MARBLED MURRELET VS. CLEARCUTTING

A Congressionally-appointed panel, whose mandate was to map all old-growth territories in the Pacific Northwest and present strategies for preserving wildlife, developed a series of 36 progressively stringent management strategies, and measured their potential effects. The panel estimated a total of 18 different management strategies that would ensure a high probability of survival for the Northern Spotted Owl. In contrast, they couldn't come up with a single management strategy that warranted high probability of survival for the Marbled Murrelet. Ironically, the Marbled Murrelet only recently was recommended for endangered species status. Environmentalists are not confident that the bird will receive adequate protection.



Oiled grebe in Persian Gulf rehab center