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American Birds

THE MAGAZINE OF RECORD AND DISCOVERY · WINTER 1991 · $4.00

TO HEAR THE BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER, SEE PAGE 1053

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FAMILY PORTRAITS

Number Nine

1.

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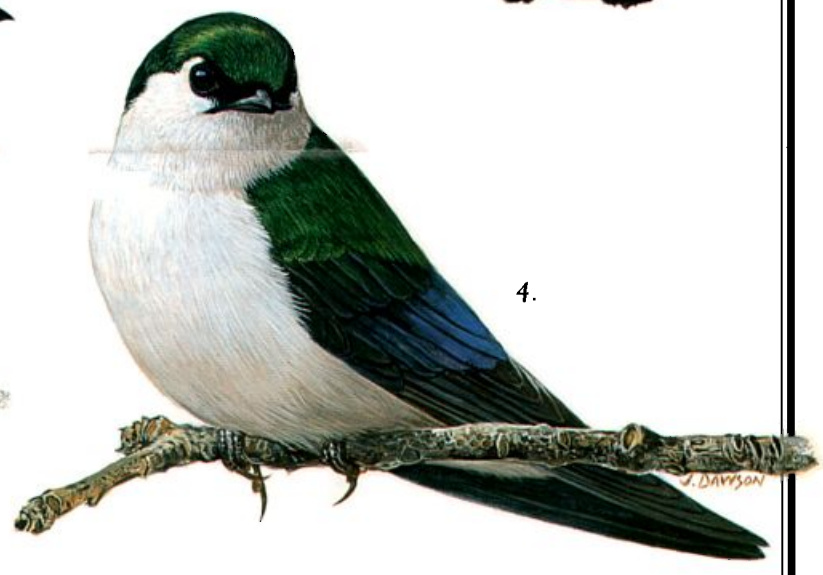

4.

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Painting by
JOHN DAWSON

FREE AS A BIRD: THE PHRASE COULD HAVE BEEN invented for swallows. Sweeping high overhead with musical calls, skimming low over stream or meadow with wingbeats of liquid grace, they seem bound neither by worldly cares nor by the laws of gravity. Free in their lifestyles as well, swallows are not bound to precise habitats in the way of most birds. A pair of swallows needs little more than open air for flight and someplace to build a nest. Modern man has provided a multitude of nesting sites—on buildings and bridges, in culverts and crevices and birdhouses—and swallows have become our closest neighbors among native birds. There are probably far more swallows in North America today than there were when Columbus landed.

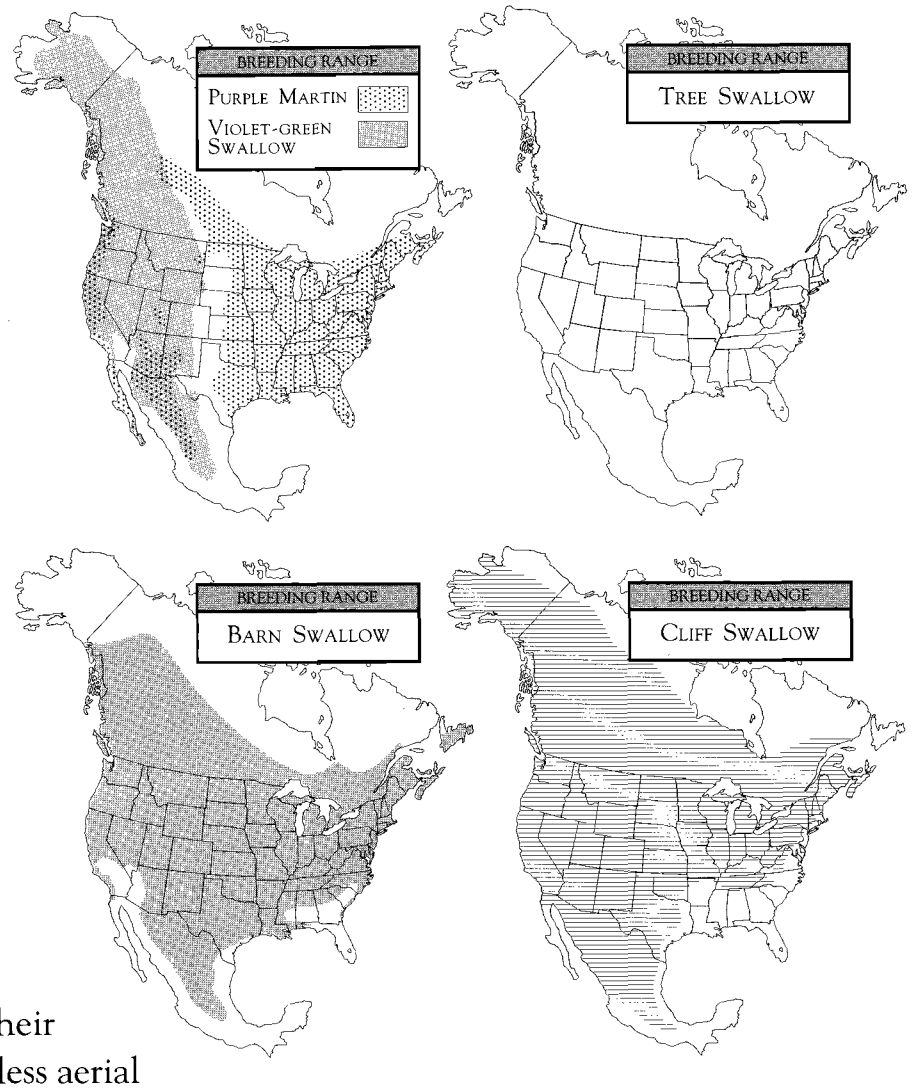
SWALLOWS

1. Purple Martin 2. Tree Swallow
3. Barn Swallow 4. Violet-green Swallow
5. Cliff Swallow

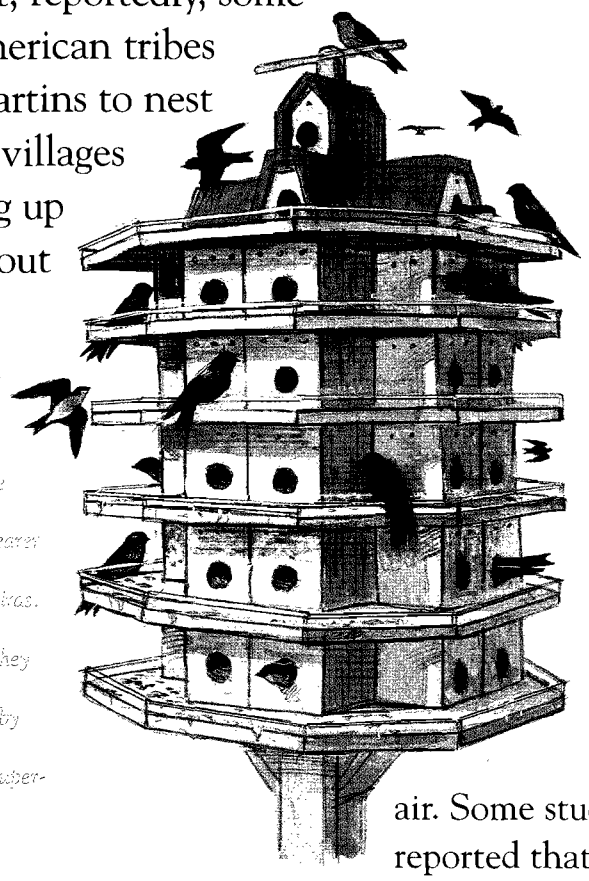
A supplement to AMERICAN BIRDS, *Winter 1991, Volume 45, Number 5*

SWALLOWS

Most kinds of swallows are sociable birds. *They raise their young in nesting colonies, spend the night in communal roosts, and migrate in flocks. Sometimes their gatherings reach incredible numbers. Late summer roosts of purple martins in the upper Mississippi valley have been estimated at 100,000, and concentrations of migrating tree swallows on the Atlantic coast in fall can number over a million!*



Today the vast majority of purple martins in eastern North America nest in multiple-roomed birdhouses erected for them. The martin house tradition goes back many years. For example, records show that martin houses were occupied in Greencastle, Pennsylvania, as early as 1840. But long before that, reportedly, some native American tribes enticed martins to nest near their villages by hanging up hollowed-out gourds in dead trees.



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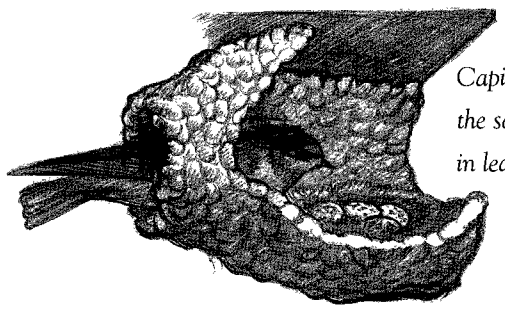

Legend holds that the celebrated swallows of Capistrano return every year on the same date: March 19, even in leap years. In real life, these birds are cliff swallows, and they come back to Capistrano (and the rest of southern California) with less precision, often by late February. But their return—like the return of any migrant birds—is still worth celebrating.

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TREE SWALLOW *Tachycineta bicolor* Common in summer in the north, this is also the swallow most likely to be seen in mid-winter in the southern states.	Length: 5.5" Glossy steel-blue to blue-green above, snowy white below. Tail is short, notched at tip.	Woodland edge, semi-open country, farmland, often near water.	A shallow cup of grass, lined with feathers, placed in a tree cavity or birdhouse.	Musical twittering and churring notes.	
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950 THIRD AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10022

American Birds
The Magazine of Record and Discovery

FROM THE PRESIDENT

BATTLE LINES ARE BEING drawn for a tough environmental fight in 1992. The Endangered Species Act is up for reauthorization. For loggers, real estate developers, commercial fishing interests, ranchers and others who feel that the benefits of the act are unquantifiable, 1992 will be their opportunity to try to gut this landmark legislation. For the conservation community, it must be a year to strengthen this successful act.

The act provides for the conservation of endangered and threatened species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. In effect since 1973, the list of notable successes includes the Whooping Crane, the Brown Pelican, the Peregrine Falcon, and now the California Condor. If only the Endangered Species Act was envisioned 20 years before its time, we might have an Eskimo Curlew or Ivory-billed Woodpecker on our life lists!

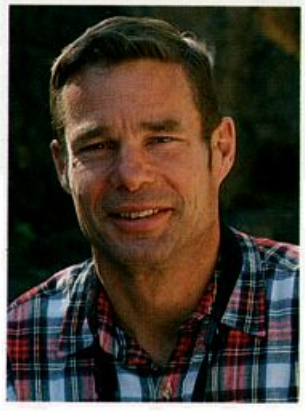
A species achieves protection under the act when the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service lists the species for protection after scientific review. Listing is followed by a protection and recovery plan, and since such plans limit ongoing habitat destruction, as for example in the case of the Spotted Owl in the Pacific Northwest, they usually generate intense opposition.

The current federal list, which totals more than 500 plants and animals, includes 64 bird species. Five are listed as threatened, the rest endangered. Hawaii, with 28 birds on this federal list, California with 12 birds and Florida with six birds, are the "endangered bird species list centers" of the nation.

Audubon and its chapters actively take part in the listing process. For example, the Palomar Audubon chapter in California recently petitioned to have the California Gnatcatcher listed as endangered. In September, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service proposed that it be put on the list.

For every successful listing, however, there are many more waiting—3,800 species are currently awaiting listing, and so protection, under the act. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service processes about 65 a year. At this rate, many species could become extinct and their habitats destroyed before the government considers them.

We must think proactively in the coming battle to reauthorize the act. We must keep existing protection for species facing extinction, and we must look for more protection. We must secure adequate funding to begin the listing process for the 600 highest-priority species of the 3,800 identified candidates. Finally, the act must be strengthened to provide greater protection for ecosystems rather than just for species.



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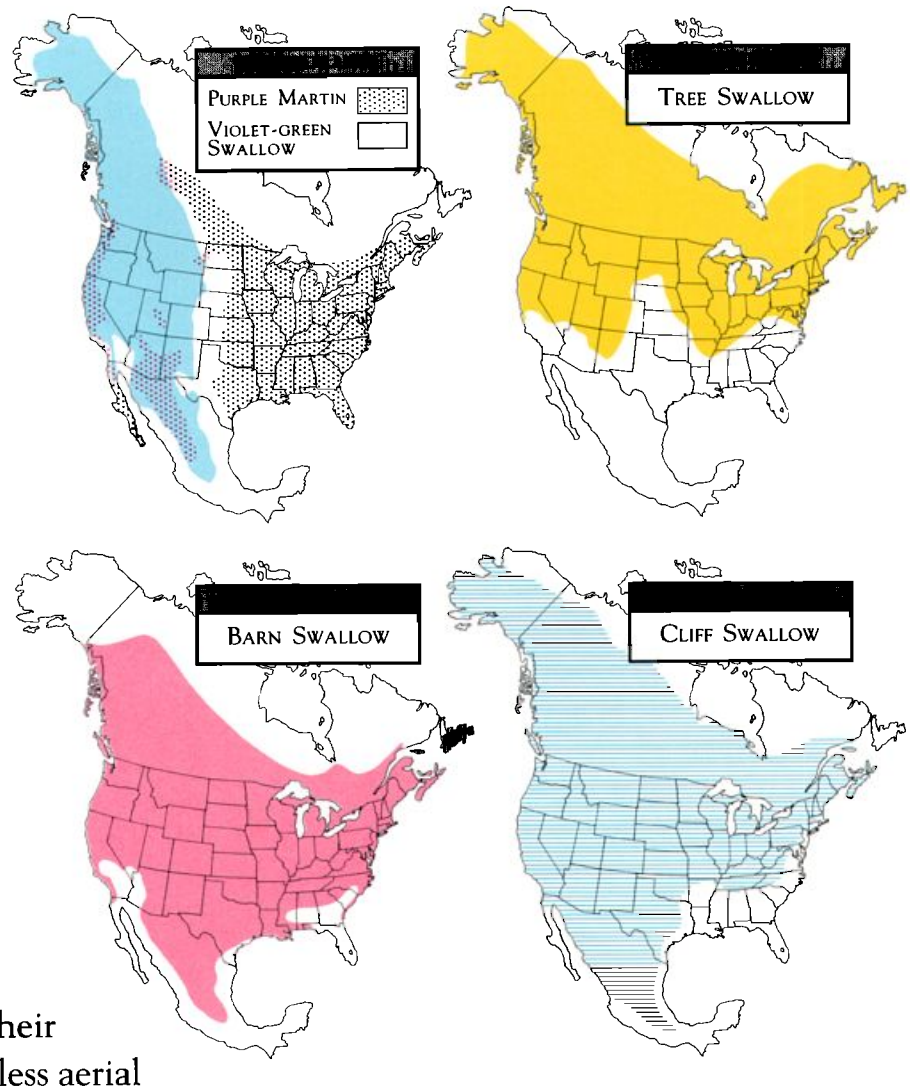

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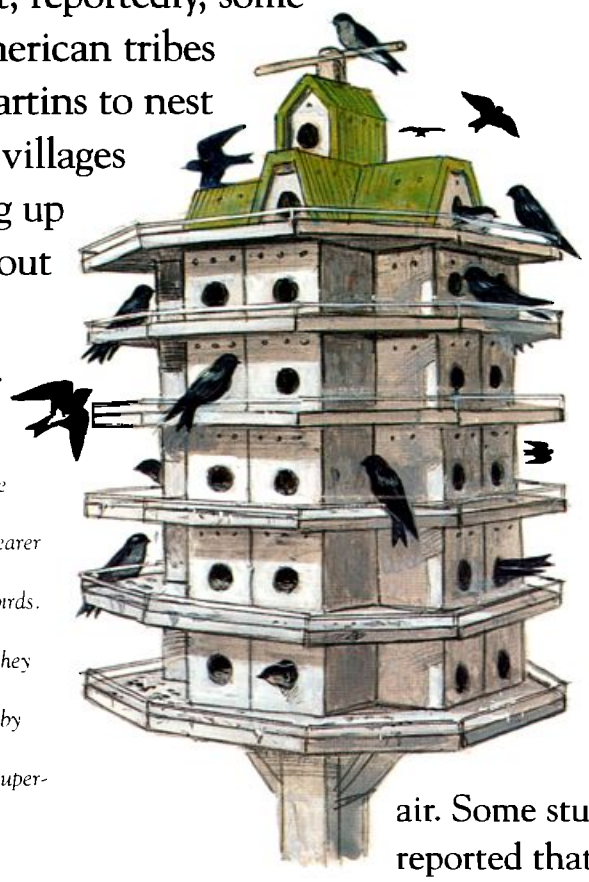

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SCIENCE

Front cover: Blackburnian Warbler (*Dendroica fusca*) Photograph by Maslowski Photo.

ARTWORK CLOCKWISE FROM CENTER COURTESY DAN KIMBALL KENN KAUFMAN STEVEN HOLT/VIREO JACK MURRAY

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FROM THE EDITOR

DO YOU REMEMBER USING A SLIDE rule, carbon paper, a manual typewriter, or a time we didn't have laser printers or fax machines? I do, and I can even remember when birders were just beginning to set up rare bird alert systems to communicate their sightings to one another. Today there is even a high-tech computer "list" to which one can subscribe, called *Birdchat*, that birders use to electronically talk to each other via computer modem. Words and phrases like pixels, teleporting, software, database, floppy drive, optical storage systems, macro-programming, and graphic interfaces have changed the language so that it has taken on a futuristic tone. People can talk with friends, trade in the stockmarket, shop, pay bills, book airline reservations, or play chess long distance from their favorite armchair at home. All that's needed is a telephone, computer, modem, and membership in a networking system. The whole world is literally at your fingertips.

We had great fun putting this issue together because we had an opportunity to talk about some of the possibilities for the future of birding. Robert Eisberg, computer expert and creator of BirdBase 2, allows his lively imagination some free-reign and makes an interesting case for "anything is possible." Ed Mair, author of *A Field Guide to Personal Computers for Bird Watchers*, reviews six of the most advanced commercially-available software programs for birders. We were really lucky to persuade Michael Godfrey, producer of the video series *Up Close* and *Videoguide to Birds*, to share his insights on the advantages of video footage over 35mm still photography. Malcolm Abrams, co-author of *Future Stuff* and *More Future Stuff*, reviews some marvelous innovations we will certainly be seeing birders take into the field. Jessica Cohen, a New York-based writer, polled some of the leading bird tour companies and tells us where future birders will be traveling. Jo Ann Heltzel, author of the reference text *Learning About Lyme Disease*, talks about preventing a problem that promises to be even more pervasive for future field birders.

With this issue we inaugurate a new aspect to Kenn Kaufman's department, The Practiced Eye. From now on we will illustrate his identification tips with his own cleanly and clearly executed drawings.

Enjoy this issue and Happy New Year. Stay tuned!

—S.R. Drennan

ANSWERS TO THAT'S BIRD & TOOL ENTERTAINMENT, VOLUME 45, NO. 3, FALL 1991 AMERICAN BIRDS

1. skimmer
2. crane
3. calliope
4. frigate
5. crow
6. thrasher
7. shoveler
8. dipper
9. nutcracker
10. handsaw
11. rail
12. plantcutter
13. scythe
14. plane
15. falcon
16. quill
17. cock
18. roller
19. stilts
20. hawk


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HOW TO READ THE REGIONAL REPORTS

Birds have no respect for range maps. Bird distribution in North America is constantly changing, as birds expand their ranges into new areas, disappear from former strongholds, or alter their patterns of migration.

Our knowledge of bird distribution is also changing constantly, as discoveries continue to come in. Keeping up with all these developments is a challenge for ornithologists, conservationists, and birders.

The Regional Reports, published four times a year, contain a wealth of information about our dynamic birdlife. To those seeing the reports for the first time, they might appear difficult or technical, but they are not; anyone with any birding experience will find the reports easy to understand. If you have hesitated to dip into this section of the magazine, we invite you to read the report from your area of the continent; we predict that the information there will alternately surprise you and confirm your ideas about birdlife in your region. To help you get started, here are answers to some questions that may occur to first-time readers.

What kind of information is included, and do the Regional Editors just report everything that's reported to them?

Regional Editors do not report every sighting of every bird. Such a list would be huge, unwieldy, and not very useful. Instead, they solicit reports from as many observers as possible, screen the records for accuracy, choose those that are most significant, look for trends and patterns of occurrence, connect scattered bits of information, and ultimately come up with a concise, readable summary of the real bird news—the important avian events and trends of the season throughout their region.

Why are there so many abbreviations in the text?

We abbreviate some frequently-used words and phrases to save space. Most of these are easy to understand and remember. (See the list of abbreviations at the end of this section.) In addition to these standard abbreviations, some Regional Editors use shortened versions of the names of some birding hot spots; they list these local abbreviations in a separate paragraph, just after their introductory comments and just before their main species accounts.

What do the initials in parentheses mean?

Most records published in each report will be followed by initials, to indicate the source: the person(s) who found or reported the bird(s) mentioned. The initials may be followed by et al. (short for et alia, meaning "and others"), or preceded by fide (literally, "by the faith of"—meaning that this is a second-hand report, and the person initialed is the one who passed it along to the Regional Editor). A dagger (†) before the initials means that this person turned in written details on the sighting.

There are good reasons for giving credit to the observers involved. Readers may be reassured about the accuracy of surprising sightings if they know who the observers were; researchers who want to know more about a certain record may be able to contact the observers directly.

Who are the people who send in their sightings?

All observers are invited to send in notes to their Regional Editors: details on rare sightings, species that were scarcer or more numerous than usual during the season, unusual concentrations on migration, and so on. Reading the reports for your region for a few seasons is the best way to find out what kinds of information are desired. Although the Regional Editors cannot cite every record that they receive, every contributor helps them to produce a more thorough and accurate summary.

Why are some bird names in heavier or blacker type?

We use boldface type to draw attention to outstanding records of rare birds. General categories of birds that the Regional Editors would place in boldface would include: any species that has been recorded fewer than 10 times previously in a given state or province; any new breeding record for a state or province; or any bird totally outside established patterns of seasonal occurrence. (For the most part, records are not boldfaced unless they are backed up with solid details or photographs.) Birders who like to know about rare birds (and most of us do) can get a complete rundown of the season's outstanding rarities by scanning all the Regional Reports for those boldfaced birds.

What are the boxes marked "S.A." ?

"S.A." stands for "Special Attention" (and, by coincidence, is pronounced "essay"). The purpose of the boxed essays is to draw attention to particularly noteworthy phenomena or trends.

Likely topics for essays include new population trends or new patterns of bird distribution, unusual invasions or migration events, field research projects that have yielded new data, specific conservation problems that have an impact on birdlife, or detailed discussion of some outstanding (or perplexing) rare bird record. Experienced readers of *American Birds* make it a point to flip through all the Regional Reports and read all the S.A.s, even in regions where they do not read the rest of the text

THAT'S BIRD & BOOK ENTERTAINMENT

When it's too dark, cold, wet or late to go birding, there's nothing like curling up with a good book. If you are like most birders, you gravitate towards titles containing bird names or images.

So next time it's too dark, cold, wet or late to go birding, give this Birds and Book Quiz a try. You might even win a prize.

1. In 1959, America's most celebrated rabbit writer authored a book with a bird title. Can you name it and him?

2. His surname is a color, his column graced the *New Yorker*, and he coauthored *Elements of Style*. This prolific author _____wrote a paean to courage, freedom and love entitled _____.

3. E.L. Doctorow's most famous tomes may be *Billy Bathgate* and *Ragtime*, but there's another, about a gangster, a poet, a tycoon and a beauty, set in the Adirondack Mountains that's worth a few bird calls as well. Name the 1979 novel.

4. The names Henry James and Milly Theale should be all the clues you need to identify this story of a New York heiress in English society.

5. An epic saga of dark secrets, innocence wronged, decadent wealth and juicy human indulgences, this novel set in the Australian outback, became one of the most popular TV mini-series of all time. Name the book and its author.

6. Al lifts weights and picks up girls, while his pal tries to fly. Both end up in Vietnam. Can you name this 1978 novel by William Wharton?

7. Name the hero of the 1988 sports book entitled _____ *The Making of an American Sports Legend*, by Lee Daniel Levine. It's the story of a shy teenager from the Hoosier state who grew up to play in Beantown.

8. Larry McMurty wrote a "shoot em up" novel about outlaws, Indians, cowboys, ladies, ladies of the night and unusual heroes. It rode off with a Pulitzer Prize in '86. Can you name the book?

9. Now think way back to 414 B.C. where it's opening night at the Adelphi (or one of those other off-off-Broadway theatres). Aristophanes is all in a tither as his new play, set in a comic dream world called "Cloudcuckooland the Beautiful, the ideal commonwealth in the skies" is about to debut. Needless to say the show was a smash. Can you name it?

10. South African author Alan Paton wrote this novel about apartheid in 1953.

11. You may not remember the name Richard Bach but you will surely recall the phenomenal success of his slim little tome that flew off bookshelves (2 million sales) and onto a motion picture screen in the 1970s.

12. The author of *Wampeters, Foma & Granfalloons* also wrote a funny, corrosive book satirizing the principal inhumanities of contemporary life in the U.S. of A. circa 1970. Name this mustachioed author and his novel.

13. Jonathan Evan Maslow, fanatical birder/naturalist/writer, published a political/ornithological/history of Central America in which the Resplendent Quetzal symbolizes freedom. What's the title?

14. Wallace Stegner won the National Book Award for this poignant novel about Joe Alliston, a literary agent who watched others achieve fame.

15. Which bird smiles in the title of Stephen Jay Gould's 1985 reflections on quirkiness and meaning?

16. In 1933, Ford Maddox Ford penned his vivid memoir of Paris life in the '20s. Can you name this rather neglected book with the beautiful bird title?

17. Rebecca West's genius and the Russian Revolution were all it took to produce this novel in 1966.

18. This author with a bird surname and skinny legs wrote a novel about still life in America in 1980. Name the book and the writer.

19. A housepainter, a town called Stillwater, a wife and two children who dream about polar expeditions sounds dreary until Admiral Drake sends them a penguin. Tell us the name of this beloved children's classic and the husband and wife team who wrote it.

20. Woody Allen wrote this book. It didn't fly. Can you name it?

Write your answers on a piece of paper and mail before March 31, 1992 to: American Birds Quiz, 950 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022.

The entrants with the most number of correct answers will win something of value.

Until April . . .Good Birding!

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Alan Carey/VIREO

How to identify U.F.O.s

From a distance, they're gossamer apparitions rising from the marsh.

Through Nikon binoculars, they're unmistakably white ibises (Eudocimus albus). Adult, at that. Their distinguishing characteristics vividly clear: The full white body. Small black tips on the wings. The outstretched neck with long, slender, down-turned bill. And reddish hue in face, bill, legs and feet.

Nikon's legendary multi-coated optics make identifying such unidentified flying objects as easy as it is soul-stirring. Because you'll see the most subtle field marks clearer, brighter and in more detail than ever. Even to the point of identifying those black-billed snowy egrets amidst the flock.

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