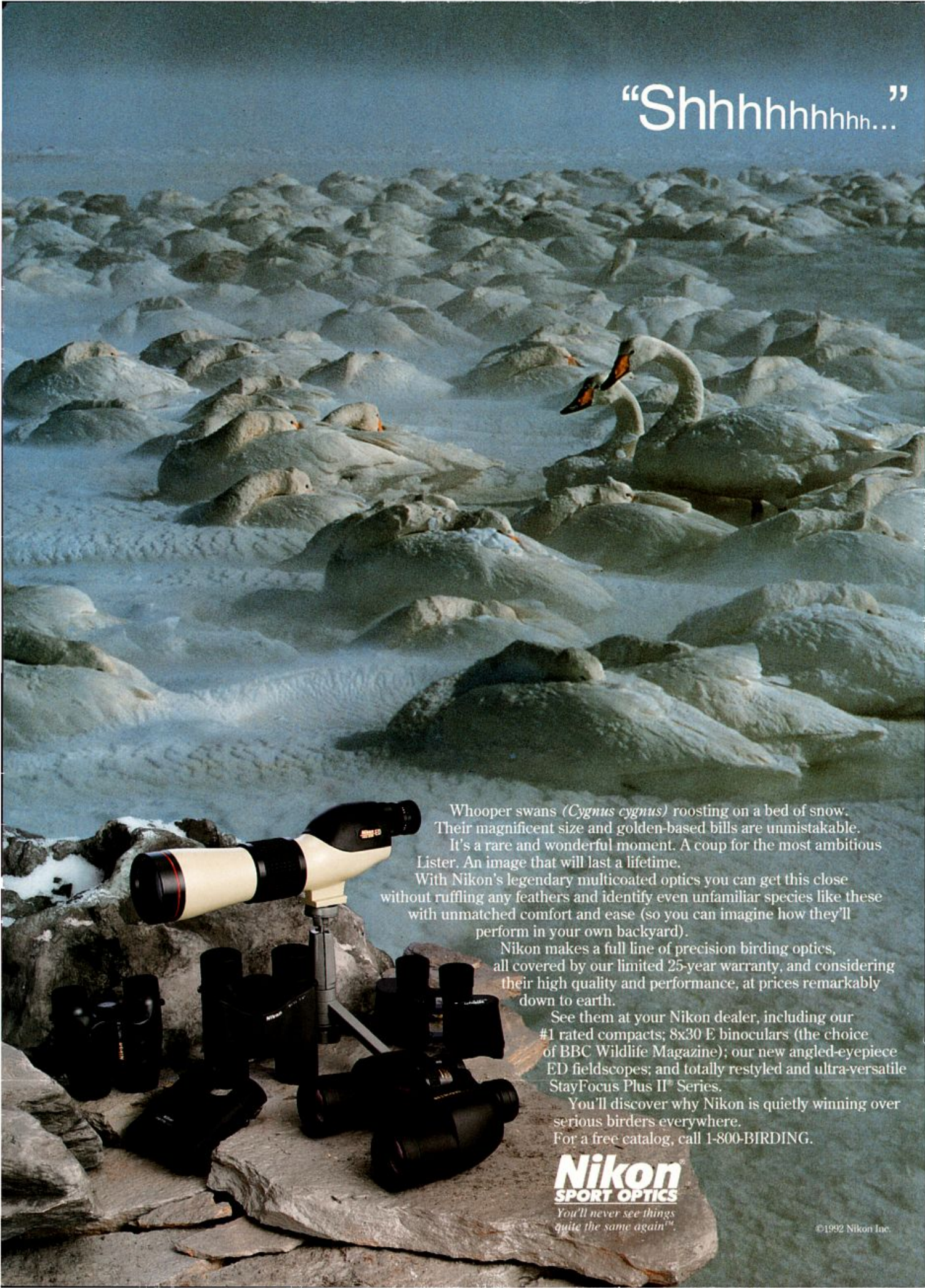
Alexander Skutch · Birds of North America: Life Histories for the 21st Century · Red-breasted Sapsucker Mysteries · A Close Look at Goldfinches

American Birds

THE MAGAZINE OF RECORD AND DISCOVERY · SPRING 1993

SUMMER TANAGER: A NEOTROPICAL MIGRANT, P. 24

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

CAN YOU REMEMBER the first time you *saw* a bird? That moment when excitement, recognition, and fascination mingled? It's the moment when birds and nature become more than just pretty backdrops to our own play here on Earth, and we are aware that birds and other living things relate to one another. That first bird is often when the seeds of conservation and care for the environment are sewn in our lives.

The discovery often happens when we are quite young. Many of our best ornithologists and lay birders began as children. Eminent naturalist Alexander Skutch, who is profiled in this issue of *American Birds*, was hooked while a young man in the Piedmont hills of Maryland.

Not surprisingly, an adult often plays a part in sparking our interest. Maybe it was a school teacher who showed you an American Robin's nest in a local park. Perhaps you had a counselor at summer camp whose reverence for a Summer Tanager was catching. One friend of mine recalls an aunt who dressed her in a bright red rainslicker to attract the hummingbirds that came to her garden in Washington State.

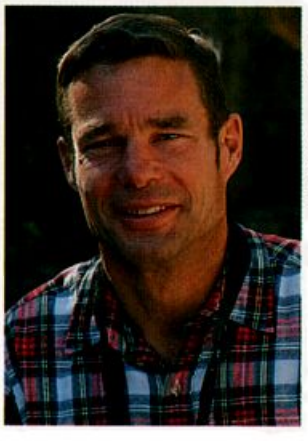
It's that initial contact that can lead a child to a lifetime of making a difference, of growing up to be an activist. It's not easy to know when we are igniting that desire in a young person. We all know that the worst way to teach is to try to make *our* interests our children's interests. But we urge you to take a child for a walk at your favorite wildlife refuge, to be the person that answers a question in a park, to make sure that the schools in your community include a strong environmental education component.

The National Audubon Society is working to educate leaders of tomorrow through our *Audubon Adventures* program. It reaches nearly 550,000 children under 12 in over 18,000 schools around the country. The community-supported elementary school program helps children in grades 3–6 discover the nature in their backyards. One young participant recently wrote to us of the wonders of bird song—why birds have different songs, and how those songs are used for different purposes. She was very excited! If you want to learn more about *Audubon Adventures*, including how to sponsor a classroom, contact your local Audubon Society.

We are dedicated to this program because education at this age is crucial. And it is important that it reach *all* children—rural or urban, rich or poor, the daughter of a banker or the son of a farmer. In this issue of *American Birds*, we report on the continued devastation of raptors by hunters around the world, including in North America. A very important tool in combating this loss is education at the primary level. Reaching school children before they pick up a rifle is one of the surest ways to inoculate against future slaughters.

Think back to that first bird or those first experiences which left you with a sense of wonder about nature. Remember where you were, and how it captivated you. Think of the person who was perhaps there to answer your questions, or to point out even more birds. And then look to where it led you. We know our readers are often involved as "citizen scientists" in the work of keeping our world wild, and our birds safe. Pass it along to coming generations. The binoculars are in your hands!

Peter A.A. Berle



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Hawk Eyes

Red-Tailed Hawk, FK Schlocker Vireo

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PHOTOGRAPHS LEFT COLUMN TO RIGHT KENN KAUFMAN MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY MARCO SABORIO

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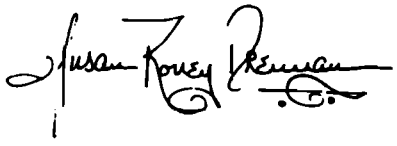
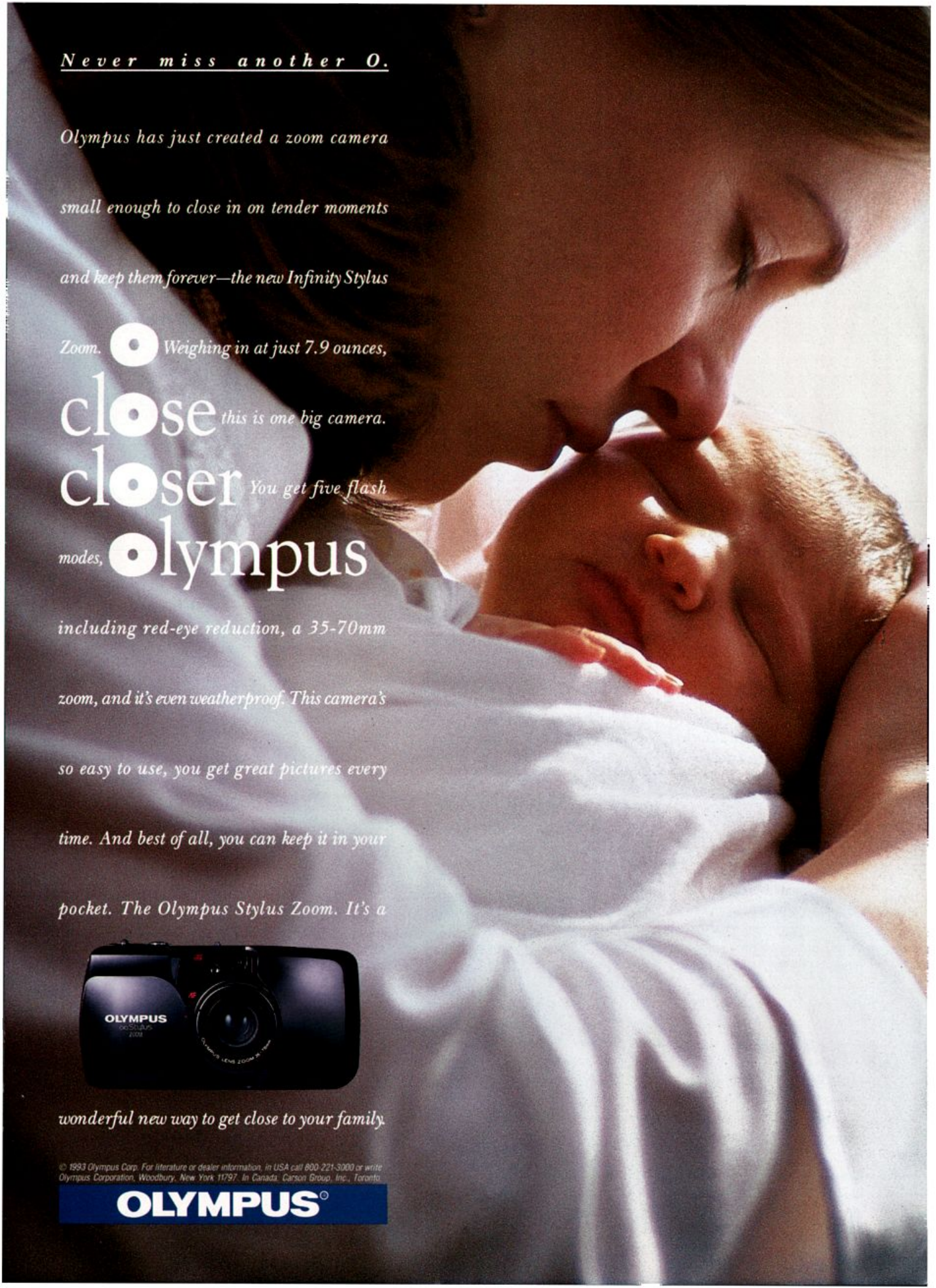
FROM THE EDITOR

THE CHANGING OF THE SEASONS seems, to me, to give life its rhythm. I love this particular repetition. Recurring natural phenomena give life a sense of security or, at least, stability. The spring arrival of birds still make me feel the same excited thumping of my heart as when I was a child. It fills me with an indefinable feeling of well being. Just when I begin to lose faith that spring will ever arrive, the cold weather slackens its grip, the days draw out, and temperatures slowly rise. Bufflehead and mergansers court, plumage of male teal gleams like shining armor, wind from the sea brings with it the scent of seaweed. Large squadrons of billowy geese-phalanxes dot the hazy horizon in changing formations. I stand there following the wonderful sight through my binoculars. The last ground-addicted male Snow Buntings with their elegant black-and-ochre winter plumage, worn over their base color, nervously twitter. Ospreys arrive as one of the surest signs of spring, and with them comes the certain knowledge that winter is over. The ecstatic fluty trilling of the season's first Upland Sandpiper is always a longed-for sign. In this season of awakenings and renewal, most field birders fall into a restless spring-migration mood, alleviated only by spending countless hours in the field. We believe in the promises of spring. We witness songbirds in a hurry to reach breeding areas to stake claim to their territories. Some are conspicuous events. Some are extremely obscure. Those birds arriving first are rewarded with the best territories and have the best prospects for breeding successfully, but, at the same time, they expose themselves to the risk of being hit by a reversal in spring weather. Journeys of such an extent and of such precision are repeatedly accomplished despite many hazardous obstacles. They play a dangerous game which presupposes well-polished adaptations. How do they find their destination with such accuracy, when many may have been there only once before? A bewildering multiplicity of landmarks, position of the celestial bodies, magnetic fields, smells, infra-sound, and inertial, gravitational, and Coriolis forces contribute to the birds' map sense. We admire their natural abilities to become pioneers and colonizers. As the days lengthen and the foliage thickens, birders look for misdirected migrants whose magnetic miscalibrations have led them astray and contribute to make birding exciting. Millions of anonymous birds on the move; most navigating with pinpoint accuracy. It seems supernatural; an inspirational unsolved mystery.

Even if new discoveries or future developments reveal information that completely alters present notions of how birds navigate and cause a radical change in our understanding of migration, the nomadic feats of birds will have forever captured and held my imagination. It is, after all, stranger than fiction.

Stay tuned!!

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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.

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The Wild Blue

Yonder is the transit zone for both airplanes and avian species. But that's not all these sky riders share, according to one Long Island, New York, aviation enthusiast. So make sure your seat belt is securely fastened, and take off on another *American Birds* quiz!

By Michael Higgiston

THAT'S BIRD & AVIATION ENTERTAINMENT

1. What was the nickname of Charles Lindbergh?

2. Where did the Wright Brothers try to soar in their flying experiments?

3. The highest-flying, fastest spy plane shares a common name for many species of marsh birds.

4. The name control towers use for a German charter airline, and a bird that is now being released into the wild in California.

5. When Sky King soared through the television airwaves in the 1950s, what was the name of his airplane?

6. The Cessna 421 airplane shares the name of this noble bird of prey.

7. The Cessna 177 is named for this red bird.

8. Howard Hughes' wooden aircraft had a singularly short flight. What was its name?

9. Hysterical raptors? This is the nickname of the 101st Airborne Division.

10. TV commercials in the 1960s used this term, the bane of fall birders, for Northeast Airlines.

11. This British fighter capable of vertical take-off and landing was seen during the Falklands War. It shares a name with a marsh raptor.

12. A feisty predator, or the name of General Dynamic's F-16.

13. Rockwell's small, single-engine passenger aircraft is named for this horned bird.

14. The Dehavilland DH-114 shares a name with a long-legged wader that stalks food in shallow water.

15. British Airtours International goes by this "handle" on the radio airwaves. It's also a small falcon.

16. Another DeHavilland model is named after a bird that is sometimes "sad" and sometimes spotted.

17. A small, regional airline based in Janesville, Wisconsin, is named after a bird with a broad white band on its tail, as is a Sikorsky helicopter.

18. This is a regional airline in Mexico, Grumman's largest flying boat, and a bird that spends most of its life at sea.

19. This is the moniker of the McDonnell-Douglas F-15, as well as a national symbol.

If you answer fewer than 10 correctly, please pass through security again. Answer 10 to 15 correctly, and the pilot will let you visit the cockpit. If you soar through 16 or more, you're flying first class! Send us your answers, and you may win a prize! Answers to last issue's Quiz on page 165.

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Venezuela–A Birdwatcher's Expedition

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