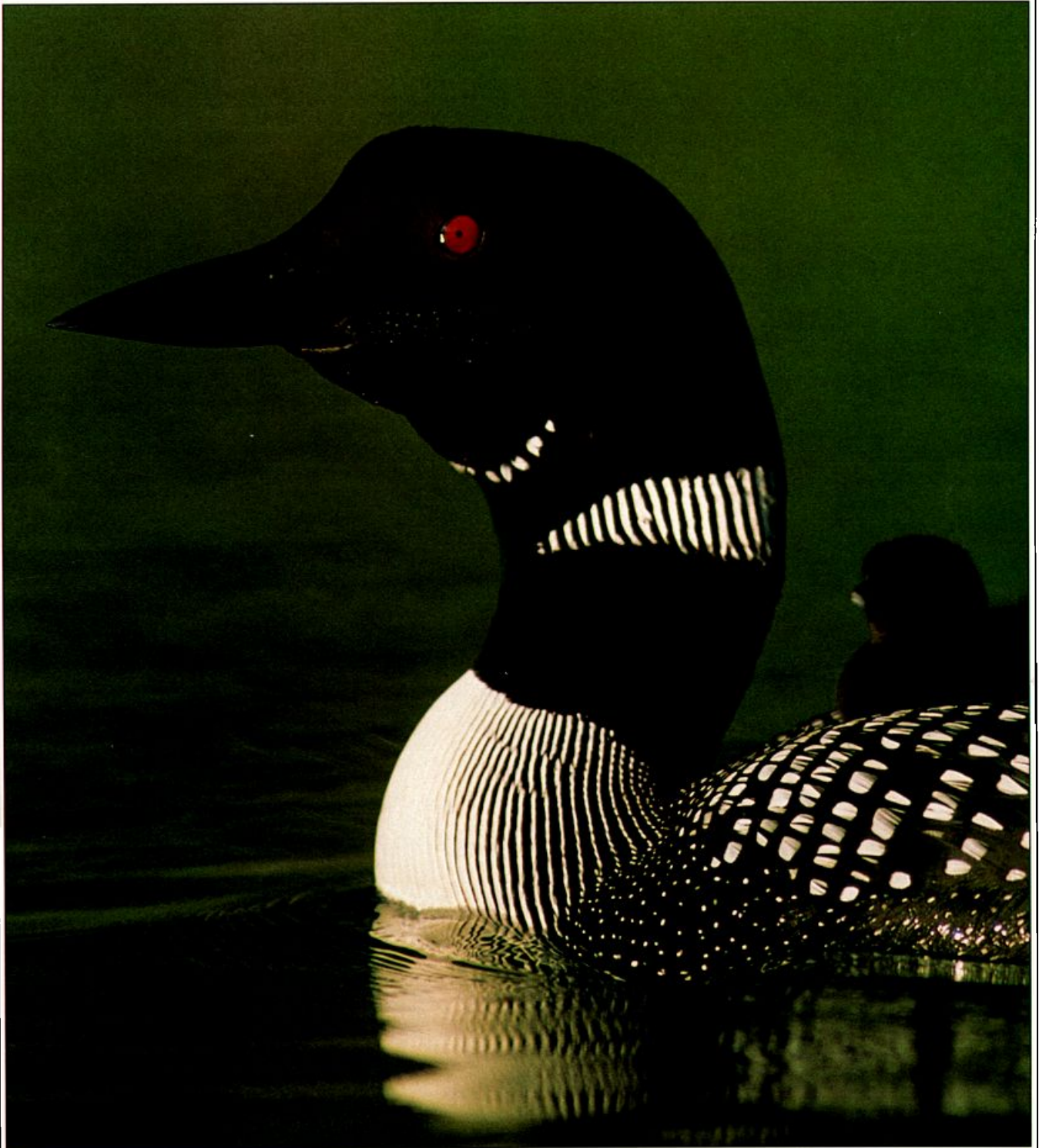


Yodelers of the North · Birds on Base · Population Status of Nesting Laughing Gulls ·
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American Birds

THE MAGAZINE OF RECORD AND DISCOVERY · SUMMER 1993



COMMON LOON, P. 202

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American Birds

The Magazine of Record and Discovery

FROM THE PRESIDENT

THE COMMON LOON is one of North America's favorite birds.

Anyone who has heard its haunting cry across the lakes of our northern woods, or watched as a strikingly patterned parent carried its chicks on its back, will probably speak of the loon with awe. Native Americans celebrate the bird with wonderful stories. The loon seems to call to us from an ancient time.

But modern times have not been easy for this powerful diver. Read "Yodelers of the North" in this issue of *American Birds*. Many threats to the well-being of the Common Loon have emerged in the past century. The good news is that with increased understanding of this bird, people have been able to make changes that have aided the loon. But the sobering truth is that the Common Loon's position is still precarious.

Environmentalists have been accused of having few new ideas since the Clean Air and Water acts in the 60s and 70s. To the contrary, our thinking has been evolving in exciting ways. For a long time, the national focus was on "end of the pipeline" treatment of environmental problems: addressing issues

after they had become catastrophes, whether it was a species in peril, such as the Spotted Owl, or a toxic disaster. Now, we are looking at whole ecosystems, and tackling problems at the front end that protect loons and owls and swans and gnatcatchers.

In that spirit, I suggest that it's time to take the lead out. Remove lead sinkers from fishing tackle boxes. Ban them from the lakes and waterways where they endanger Trumpeter Swans and our Common Loons.

Lead sinkers probably are not the greatest threat to loons or swans. Researchers are finding scary amounts of mercury in loon populations throughout North America. Collisions with power boat propellers, entanglement with fishing line, and gun shots also kill loons in significant numbers.

But we shouldn't have to autopsy 500 loons and swans before we confirm that lead sinkers are a very real threat. Lead is toxic. Public health officials have recommended that lead be banned for all but non-essential purposes. We know that when swallowed, often along with pebbles to aid the bird's digestion, one lead sinker can kill a loon very quickly.

So why not do the right thing, the simple thing? Remove the lead. Tie on a steel nut. We are not the first to make this call. In Great Britain, certain sized lead sinkers have been banned because

they poisoned Mute Swans. The Environmental Defense Fund has proposed a similar ban here. The United States Environmental Protection Agency recently announced that it is developing a proposal, which will be published in January 1994, that could ban the most dangerous lead fishing sinkers. And fishing industry officials have talked about alternatives.

We know what happened when we took the lead out of gasoline. The quality of our air improved. It's still not perfect, but during the initial phase-out of leaded gasoline between 1976 and 1980, blood lead levels among United States citizens dropped 37 percent. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that vehicles emitted 47 thousand metric tons of lead in 1982, but only 1.6 thousand tons in 1991. Taking the lead out of gas has clearly made a difference in people's lives. Why not do the same for the Common Loon and other birds?

Robert A. Berle



*Huachuca Mountains
Southern Arizona*

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American Birds

Summer 1993, Volume 47, No. 2

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Military installations often serve as *de facto* refuges for birds and other wildlife. Much progress has been made in changing the military's attitude toward safeguarding its avian neighbors. But budget cuts, base closings, and base consolidations could jeopardize that progress. By Michael Tennesen

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FRONT COVER: A Common Loon carries its chick across a lake in Quebec. Photograph by Stephen Kirkpatrick.

Venezuela—A Birdwatcher's Expedition

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American Birds is published five times a year. Editorial and business offices are located at 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003 (212)979-3000. Subscription, all in U.S. \$: One year \$30.00, Two years \$50.00, Canada and Foreign \$37.00, Libraries and Institutions \$35.00. Single copies: Christmas Bird Count Issue \$15.00, Spring Issue (Autumn Migration), Summer Issue (Winter Season), Fall Issue (Spring Migration), Winter Issue (Nesting Season) all \$5.00 each. Checks and money orders in U.S. \$ only should be made payable to **American Birds**. Second class postage paid at New York, NY and additional Post Offices. Copyright 1993 by The National Audubon Society. Postmaster: Send address changes to **American Birds**, PO Box, 490, Yorktown Heights, NY 10598. ISSN 0004-7686.

PHOTOGRAPH: JEFFREY STERN

FROM THE EDITOR

NO BIRD COULD HAVE A more definite personality than the raven; none could more

surely awaken immediate interest or exert a more instant charm, or could seem more convincingly to guarantee that its charm and interest would perennially flourish and increase. Its flight has remarkable compass and power. It appears proud and absolutely independent. Ravens throw



a purple light over the familiar scene and invest it with a superfluousness of grateful gliding. They are creatures of a vagrant fancy, unrivaled as powerful tricksters, with apparently inexhaustible vitality. Their sense of acute playfulness is felt by all who come in repeated contact with them.

Certainly no bird has enjoyed a more brilliant reception, nor has any tribute been more profound, than that paid to the Common Raven by the Native American people of the Pacific Northwest. To those who peopled Southeast Alaska, the raven is the principal mythical figure. Raven is a trickster neither good nor evil, but can be blamed for the evil and praised for the good that occurs. There seems to be no end to the variety of its characterizations. On the one hand, Raven may be a foolish, lying thief satisfying only his own greed. On the other, Raven is the ultimate "transformer," who not only illuminates the earth by bringing light stolen from the one who would keep it in darkness, but then proceeds to create and

arrange the essentials of fresh water, land, sea, tides, sky, fair weather, salmon, and even human life itself. It is Raven who is said to have put the sun in the sky. He is the "culture hero" who gives people the things they need to survive, and teaches them how to care for themselves.

The raven tales of the Tlingit Indians sprung up as an oral tradition at a time when animals and humans were less distinguishable than they are now. While the Tlingit practiced

their matrilineal succession, carved their complex and beautiful totem poles, and celebrated important events with lavish potlatches, Raven tales and legends abounded in flashes of brilliance studded with bits of homely wisdom. They contain the most vivid truths expressed with judicious economy of ex-

travagance. Some are lively and half-grotesque, some are discriminating portraits of character, and some show keen intuition and allow critical estimates of the merits and demerits of their fellow beings. Their characterizations are faultless, in the main, and explore archetypal ideas simply told and easily read. They combine symbolism, humor, morality, and reveal the character of work and the scenery of a people. They are the powerful literary record of the Tlingit experience. Get them. Read them. You'll find them every bit as fascinating as I do.

Stay tuned!

Answers to *That's Bird and Aviation Entertainment*, Vol. 47, No. 1, Spring 1993 American Birds.

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1. Lone Eagle | 8. Spruce Goose | 15. Kestrel |
| 2. Kitey Hawk | 9. Screaming Eagles | 16. Dove |
| 3. Blackbird | 10. Yellowbird | 17. Blackhawk |
| 4. Condor | 11. Harrier | 18. Albatross |
| 5. Songbird | 12. Fighting Falcon | 19. Eagle |
| 6. Golden Eagle | 13. Lark | |
| 7. Cardinal | 14. Heron | |

Is "Ecotourism" an Oxymoron In Costa Rica?



Chris Wille writes in the Summer issue of *The Living Bird* (Vol 12, No 3) that in 1992 "more than 49,000 ecotourists breathed the mists of Monteverde's trails." What he didn't say was that most came off of cruise ships just to visit a cloud forest and perhaps, if lucky, see a Quetzal. A what?

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The tour, which includes a visit with **Dr. Alexander Skutch**, has been designed by **Julio Sanchez**, Professor of Ornithology and Curator of the Museum at the National University in Costa Rica. (see Chris's article in *American Birds*, Spring 1993, Vol 47, No 1). Sanchez leads our January trip (15 - 29, 1994) and is joined by **Richard French**, MBE, author of *A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*, in March (March 27 - April 10, 1994).

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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 signi-

ficant, 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?

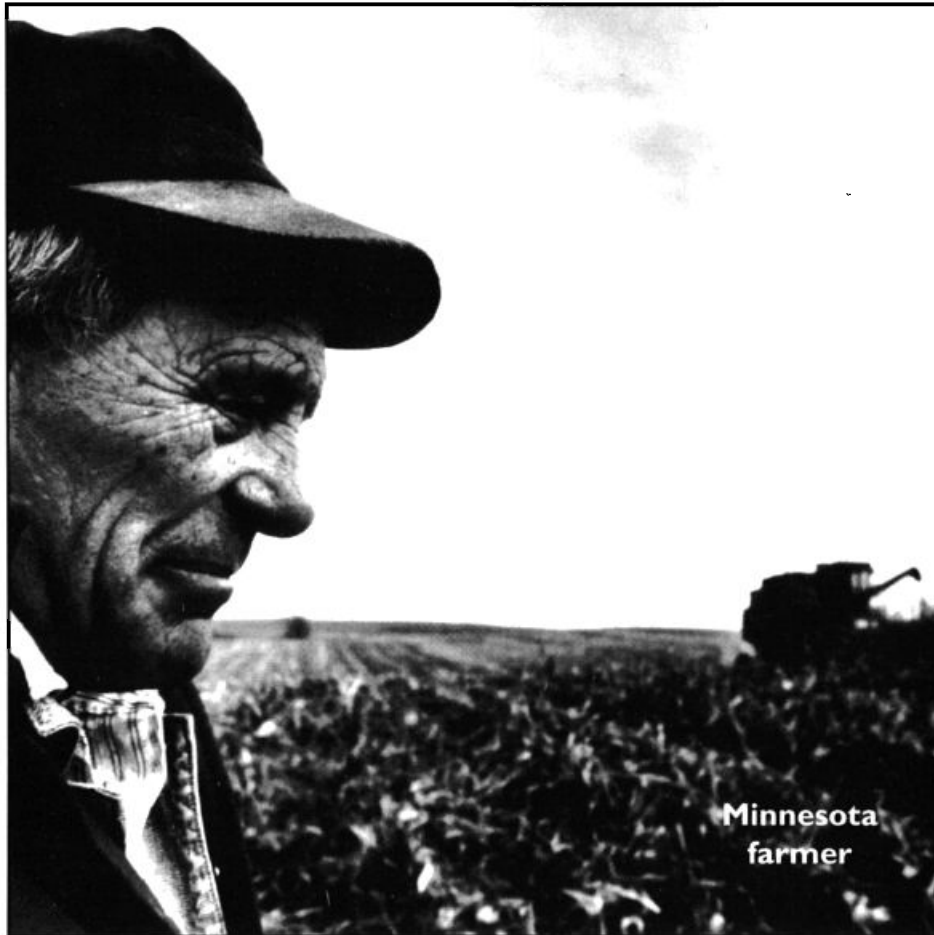
We use boldface type to draw attention to outstanding records of rare birds. General categories of birds that the Regional Editors would place in boldface would include: any species that has been recorded fewer than 10 times previously in a given state or province; any new breeding record for a state 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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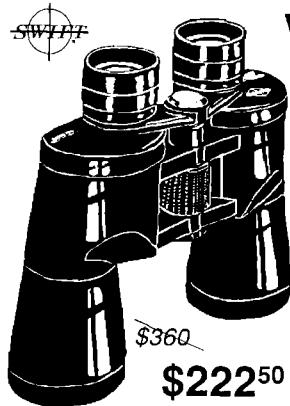
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By James R. Polson

THAT'S BIRD & STATELY ENTERTAINMENT

16. The hotter, drier, and pricklier, the better for this bird, a year-round resident in its arid state.

17. This bird's distinctive tail may help it execute an elaborate "sky dance" over the state it represents.

18. In a state that claims two of its rivers meet to create the Atlantic Ocean, legislators displayed chauvinism in their selection of state bird.

19. A big state that is half mountain opted for a small prairie bird.

20. This tiny ball of energy, the official bird of two states, is a welcome sign of life during long winters.

If you answered fewer than 10, buy an encyclopedia. Answer 10 to 15 correctly, and you can consider yourself well-traveled. If you polled 16 or higher, you might want to run for national office!

Answers to our last quiz, That's Birds and Aviation Entertainment, on page 183.

1. This desert bird represents a state near the geographic center of its United States range.

2. A state that abounds in pines honors a nervous woodpecker.

3. Five Southern states consider this saucy, versatile songbird an apt avian ambassador.

4. This "reclusive" bird, known for its ethereal aria, represents a New England state.

5. A tuneful symbol in six states, this bird sings a different song than its cousin in the East.

6. A sparrow-sized bird, dunked in color, belts a lively warble, from its official state in the Northeast to the Pacific Coast.

7. Three states—East, West, and Midwest—are happy with this rich bird.

8. Scarlett O'Hara might have heard this bird's jumbled call in the gardens at Twelve Oaks.

9. This bird of winter feeders is a brilliant representative for seven states.

10. No state is better known for snow, and no state bird thrives better on it.

11. This state bird is resident only in this state.

12. A famous Southern politician was nicknamed for one bird. His home state picked another "fisher" as its symbol.

13. History made this savior a natural choice as state bird.

14. There's no better place to hear the woebegone cry of this bird.

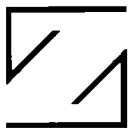
15. This bird cries "Chicago"—but its range and official state are thousands of miles from the Windy City.





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