

Has Alaska Recovered? · Wild Cards: Winter Irruptions ·
The Career of Ted Parker · Hutton's Vireo Identification · Supplement to the A.O.U. Check-list

American Birds

THE MAGAZINE OF RECORD AND DISCOVERY · FALL 1993



THE BLACK OYSTERCATCHER IN ALASKA, p. 352

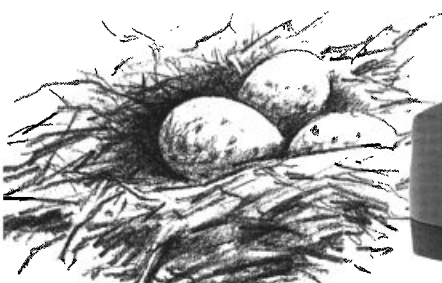
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

THIS TIME OF YEAR is special to birders. While others are lamenting the loss of summer and the advent of winter, birders are rejoicing at the miracle and science of movement. Everywhere—north, south, east, and west—restless birds are responding to that complex, internal guidance system that sends them on a journey, whether thousands of miles to a different continent or simply hundreds of feet in elevation. Some birds pass through our neighborhoods; others stay for the winter. All are worth studying.

What can be more satisfying to a birder than to check through a raft of newly arrived American Wigeon and Greater Scaup, and spot a Eurasian Wigeon on the periphery? In Western states, birds that summer in the mountains may begin to arrive at lower elevations: Mountain Bluebirds, Townsend's Solitaires. Off both coasts, wintering seabirds will bring birders out in the coldest weather to marvel over Oldsquaw, Harlequin Ducks, alcids, and gannets. In the Midwest, sewage treatment plants and lakes alike become hot spots for

gulls. Only a birder would happily visit Niagara Falls in December.

And what do we learn when we witness the late fall and early winter movements and migrations of birds? Why are we so thrilled? Part of it, I think, is the sheer amazement at what is taking place. An adult male Sharp-shinned Hawk is a small raptor; it weighs as little as three ounces. And, yet, to watch it zip past a hawk watch or, even better, to see it maneuver nimbly through the woods in pursuit of prey, is to encounter some of the most finely tuned adaptations on this planet.

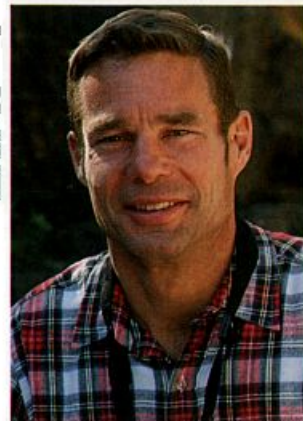
More questions arise: Those warblers whose identities birders so devotedly unscramble in fall are traveling long distances under conditions that are hardly ideal. How do they do it? Why do they do it? And what is happening to them as our environment continues to change drastically in all parts of their range?

Another phenomena excites birders in late fall and early winter: Invasions of certain bird species from their normal wintering ranges. The usual winter irruption is of a northern species, such as the tundra-dwelling Snowy Owl, that shows up in unusual spots such as sand dunes in New Jersey or telephone poles in Kentucky. But an invasion can also be a group of finches from

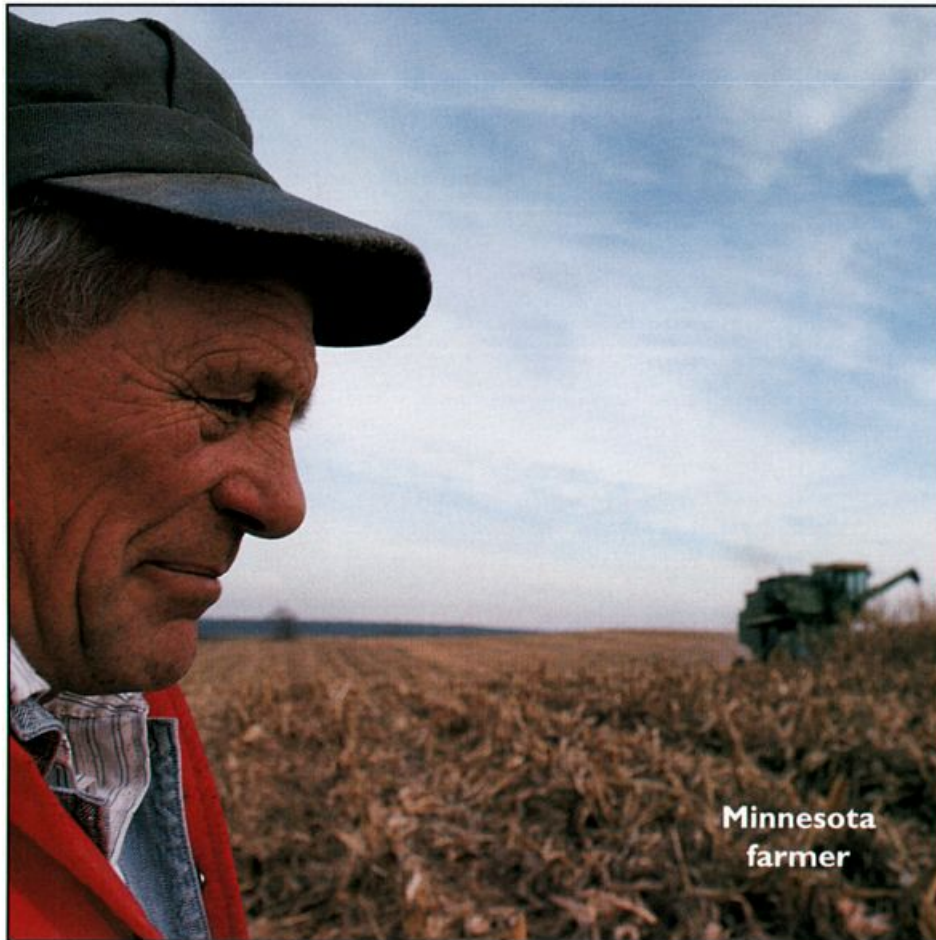
British Columbia that head east to Michigan. Read our article on winter irruptions in this issue for more information.

There is so much to learn this time of year. So many mysteries to plumb. That's one of the reasons *American Birds* is proud of its partnership with its readers. Your observations and contributions to our Regional Reports help us fulfill our mission of being the magazine of record and discovery. Your responses to our educational feature articles indicate a real hunger for information on both birds and conservation. We really believe that our readers, those birders who bundle up in fall and winter to keep an eye on bird populations, are key to solving some of these bird mysteries—and to fostering a sense of stewardship for avian life on Earth.

Robt. A. Berle



Just one of the species protected by the Endangered Species Act.



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For more information about how you can help protect the plants, animals, and ecosystems essential for our future, contact: National Audubon Society, Box ESA, 700 Broadway, New York, New York 10003.

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Fall and early winter birding brings challenges and rewards as birders compare plumages, watch for migration fallouts, and scour the scenery for irruptions. Here are some of the best spots to visit.

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Theodore A. Parker III died in a plane crash in Ecuador in August, taking with him a vast knowledge of birds in the threatened American tropics. *J.P. Myers* reflects on the legacy of this dedicated and talented birder.

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By Kenn Kaufman.

THE PRACTICED EYE 460
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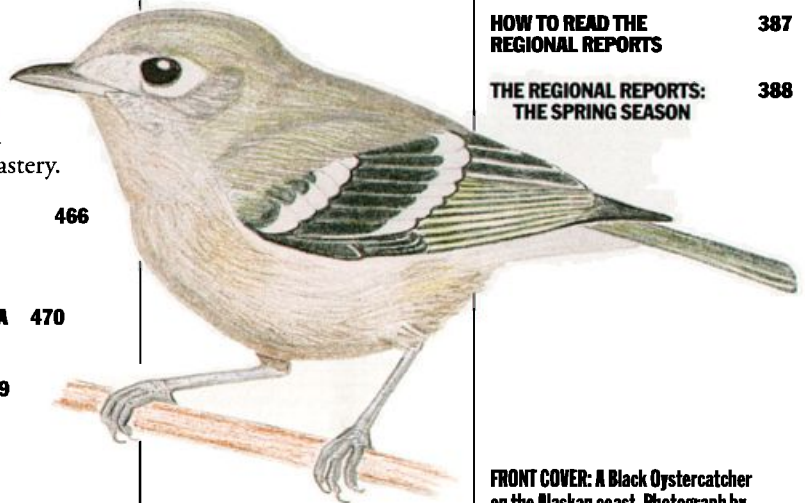
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FRONT COVER: A Black Oystercatcher on the Alaskan coast. Photograph by John Hyde



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PHOTOGRAPH: JEFFREY STERN

FROM THE EDITOR

BECAUSE YOU, OUR READERS, are particularly aware of environmental issues, let me tell you how conscientious we've been in our efforts to be "earth friendly" when publishing *American Birds*.

Our long-time printer, Lancaster Press, knows how the printing process affects the environment, and they care. They've spent considerable time and money addressing concerns facing all printers today, and here are some of the steps they've taken toward an environmentally-safe production process in the prepress department, the pressroom, and at the bindery.

To reduce volatile organic compound emissions, Lancaster uses soybean inks in place of petroleum-based inks on all sheet-fed presses, and imprints their brown kraft paper mailing wrappers with a water-based ink. The results are excellent, as many of our readers have attested. All waste paper from the webs as well as the kraft paper is recycled. All aluminum printing plates are recycled. All waste ink is collected and shipped to a waste management center for disposal. All trim waste paper from the bindery machines is recycled.

Lancaster uses aqueous plates and plate chemistry in place of acidic developer, to avoid contamination of their wastewater system. In this way, they've substituted non-alcohol, phosphate-free chemistry for alcohol-based processing. This further helps

eliminate harmful emissions. No chemicals are put into their wastewater system. The system is analyzed regularly to ensure that all impurities are at or below the permissible limits specified by state, local, and federal authorities.

All processor chemicals are drawn from drums, used, and sent back in drums for recycling or waste management disposal. When film is processed, silver from the emulsion is removed from the film surface and from all film processing units and it is recycled. Once negatives are no longer useful, the silver that remains on



them is removed and, along with the film itself, is recycled. They have installed a water recycling system on their film processors to reduce water consumption by 95%. To protect the ozone layer, Lancaster has removed all aerosol spray cans and now uses pump cans to clean plate frames and cameras.

Lancaster Press continues to explore better methods of producing publications in ways that are kind to the earth. Right now they are testing formulations of soybean ink that will work well on web presses. *American Birds* takes pride in its association with Lancaster because they use the most up-to-date pollution reduction and conservation techniques, often going beyond what is regulated. As advances become available, we are confident that Lancaster Press will add them to their program.

Stay tuned!!

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Position in the dominance hierarchy influenced several important aspects of access to the fruit and general foraging behavior. These included the length of feeding bouts, the chance of being interrupted while feeding, and the amount of time individuals spent with their head buried in a fig feeding, as opposed to nervously looking about for potential predators or competitors. Generally, subordinate species had shorter bouts than those more dominant, although the differences were not striking, and the more subordinate a species, the more likely its bouts were to end by interruption. The tanagers of higher social status spent a greater proportion of a foraging bout actually feeding. In short, being dominant tends to give a bird more time at the breakfast table, less risk of having to leave the table early, and more time to eat while at the table. Furthermore, when a whole mob was in the tree at once, the foraging time of subordinates was restricted, whereas dominants got what they wanted.

How might the influence of the dominance hierarchy manifest itself in the structure of the avian community? One possible effect would be on the net outcome of trade-offs associated with flocking. While flocking may improve feeding efficiency (through systematically depleting resource patches) and provide protection from predators, these benefits may be outweighed for subordinate species by the costs of feeding in a group. Indeed, the three most subordinate species in our hierarchy—the Golden-hooded Tanager, the Thick-billed Euphonia, and the Tennessee Warbler—tended not to arrive and depart with flocks.

Secondly, the ability of dominant species to control access to fruit resources might confer a survival advantage as forests are fragmented and resources made

scarcer. We are presently investigating whether dominance relationships among the tanagers influences their persistence in the highly disturbed landscape of agricultural plantations, pasture, and small forest fragments of Costa Rica. If social status does indeed influence the survival of a species, it could be used as an easily assessed indicator of vulnerability to extinction. Understanding the needs of both dominants and subordinates could also be of aid in planning the restoration of ecosystems.

These are difficult questions to address, but we're going to try. Costa Rica, like other tropical nations, is suf-

fering from ongoing clearing of its forests. It is simultaneously looking toward regrowing some forests that have already been cleared. The country will need every bit of scientific information it can get to help save what remains and plan for efficient restoration. ▶

—Paul R. Ehrlich is Bing Professor of Population Studies at Stanford University, and co-author of *The Birder's Handbook, Birds in Jeopardy, and Healing the Planet.*

—Gretchen C. Daily is Winslow/Heinz Postdoctoral Fellow in the Energy and Resources Group, University of California, Berkeley.

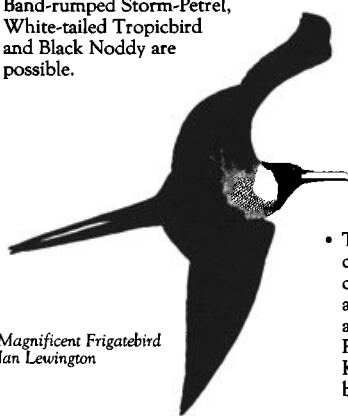
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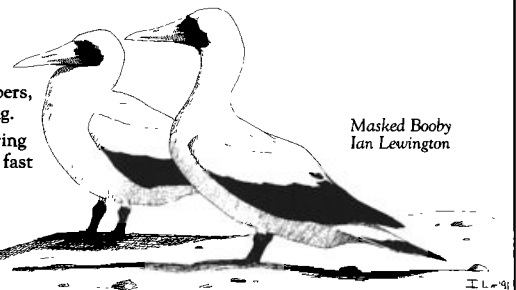
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Magnificent Frigatebird
Ian Lewington

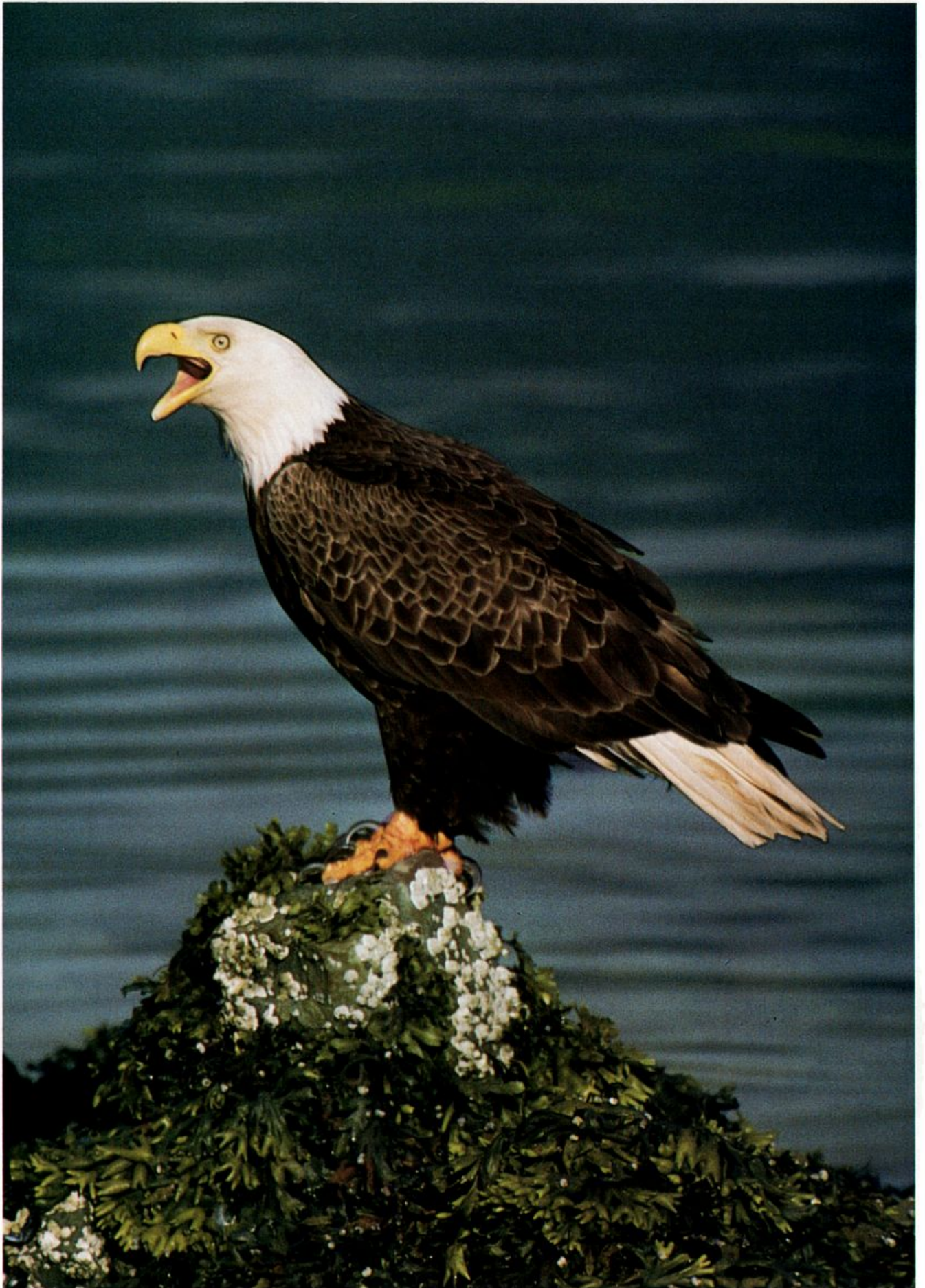


Masked Booby
Ian Lewington

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Snowy Owl

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.

Don't Forget!

The 94th Christmas Bird Count

is just over the horizon



The dates for the upcoming
94th National Audubon Society-Leica Christmas Bird Count

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Monday, January 3, 1994

*For information,
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Seeking names that would express the beauty of flowers—or sometimes, the feistiness of weeds—folk have sometimes turned to birds for inspiration. See if you can identify these trees, herbs, grasses, or flowers with birdy names. *By James R. Polson*

1. A vine of cool regions, distinguished by its yellow flowers, is named for an accomplished, often caged singer.
2. The tubular flowers of this red lobelia attract hummingbirds, but it was named for a bright redbird.
3. This fernlike wild geranium draws its name from its seed, which resembles the stout bill of a well-known waterbird.
4. Also known as trillium, the name of this maroon or purple-flowered plant is a morning salutation to a favorite songbird.
5. The Native American Mesquakies of Iowa made medicinal use of the roots of this species of prairie clover, named for a tall, elegant migrant.
6. A flower petal of this poisonous prairie plant rolls into a conspicuous spike that reminded botanists of the long claw of a particular ground-dwelling bird.
7. A creeping evergreen with showy red fruit is named for a foraging game bird found in a tree in a Christmas carol.
8. This plant gets both its common and scientific names from the strong resemblance of its seed to the bill of a graceful wading bird.

THAT'S BIRD & FLORA ENTERTAINMENT



11. Pie made from these berries are more traditional in England, Wales, and Ireland.
12. Tradition holds that birds of prey strengthened their eyesight on this dandelion-like flower.
13. Associated with witchcraft, this plant can indeed cast a spell on chickens or people—it has narcotic properties and a lethal poison can be derived from it.
14. This plant was named for two birds: Its common name applies to its rufous flowers; its scientific name

includes that of the cuckoo, which is said to be in full song when it blooms.

15. These huge, plume-like fern grows in luxuriant colonies in North America; but the bird that shares its name is not found in the wild on the continent.
16. The leaves of this floating plant, named for a common corvid, can carpet a pond or sluggish stream.
17. The flower cases of this tree resemble a flock of large, white “peaceful” birds in flight.
18. As the comb distinguishes a rooster from a hen, the reddish fruit of this hawthorn distinguish it from all others.

Answers to That's Birds and Stately Entertainment, Vol. 47, No. 2, Summer 1993 American Birds:

9. A European import with white, starred leaves, this is a weed a mother hen would love.
10. You can find this wild lily—and its gamebird namesake—in oak or pine woodlands.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. NM/Greater Roadrunner. | 10. AK/Willow Ptarmigan |
| 2. AL/Northern Flicker | 11. HI/Nene (Hawaiian Goose) |
| 3. AR, FL, MS, TN, TX/Northern Mockingbird | 12. LA/Brown Pelican |
| 4. VT/Hermit Thrush | 13. UT/California Gull |
| 5. KS, MT, NE, ND, OR, WY/Western Meadowlark | 14. MN/Common Loon |
| 6. NH/Purple Finch | 15. CA/California Quail |
| 7. IA, NJ, WA/American Goldfinch | 16. AZ/Cactus Wren |
| 8. GA/Brown Thrasher | 17. OK/Scissor-tailed Flycatcher |
| 9. IL, IN, KY, NC, OH, VA, WV/Northern Cardinal | 18. SC/Carolina Wren |
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