
editor's notebook

Field Notes has quite a few subscribers who are not members of the American Birding Association, and these readers may be wondering about the nature of the organization that has assumed major responsibility for publishing this journal. I'd like to take this opportunity to offer some background.

I started sending in reports to my *Field Notes* regional editor in 1967, and I joined the American Birding Association in 1970—shortly after it was founded—so I can say that I've been involved with both for most of my life. And although ABA and *Field Notes* were not officially connected until late summer of 1997, the unofficial connections between them go back much farther than that.

The American Birding Association began its formal existence in 1969 as a recreational club. Its founder, Jim Tucker—an energetic visionary who remains one of my personal heroes—was keenly aware of the lack of any continent-wide organization for people who liked to go birding for the fun of it. The early ABA was a happy-go-lucky crowd, a bunch of sharp birders who zipped around finding rare birds, doing Big Days, and running up their state lists and life lists. But there was nothing superficial about these people. The founders and early members included the likes of Joe Taylor, who was also heavily involved in conservation causes; Stuart Keith, who had already begun his serious research on African birds; Arnold Small, who was already widely respected as a photographer and teacher; and many superb field experts such as Bob Smart and Guy McCaskie. Jim Tucker himself had already been a subregional compiler of records in Florida for *Field Notes*. These people were all involved with birds in a variety of ways. It just happened that, within the tiny organization that ABA was at first, they were mainly looking out for the hobby and sport of birding.

In the time since, the American Birding Association has grown from a few dozen members to well over twenty thousand, and the scope of the organization has widened as well. It still supports birding for the fun of it, and even publishes annual summaries of Big Day records, year list totals, and other sheer sporting aspects of this pursuit. But ABA also has a strong commitment to education and conservation, based on the realization that without action on these fronts there would be fewer birds to watch in the future. ABA has a major interest in the more serious aspects of field birding, including studies of detailed identification and distribution. Since *Field Notes* is the premier periodical dealing with status and distribution of North American birds, and since the monitoring

that it represents is important to conservation efforts, it was only natural that ABA would be interested in this publication.

As ABA has grown, the areas of overlap between the Association and *Field Notes* have become far too numerous to list. For example, most of our regional editors are also ABA members, and many of them have been for years. But beyond this simple overlap, there has long been a sense on the ABA board of directors that this publication was valuable and worth supporting. I myself was on that board at one time, and I can affirm that at least six years ago, ABA's directors were asking "What if" questions. What if National Audubon ever decides to stop publishing the Regional Reports? Wouldn't we offer to help, make an effort to see that this invaluable reporting network was maintained?

In fact there was no danger that Audubon was going to let the reports die away, because the organization also recognized their value. That commitment was demonstrated in National Audubon's careful approach to negotiating the new publishing arrangement: first, Audubon had to be convinced that ABA was really serious, and would have the wherewithal to do a good job with *Field Notes*. I was not involved in these talks, but watching from the sidelines, it looked like a long and intense courtship! Even after NAS and ABA had agreed in principle, discussions on how to effect the transition continued for another year.

So as this publication settles in to its new "home" at the American Birding Association, we have the luxury of knowing that we are 'wanted' here. ABA now has a considerable office staff, and practically everyone involved has pitched in to help with *Field Notes* in some way. The officers and directors, also, have shown a keen interest, offering valuable help and advice in a variety of ways. With continued good input from Audubon as well, *Field Notes* now has a truly outstanding support network. For those readers who had been unfamiliar with ABA, I'd like to offer assurances that the situation is now better than ever.

This issue presents full details on two outstanding firsts for North America—one from Asia, one from the Neotropics—and a full account of an entire season's avifaunal happenings across the continent. We hope you enjoy it, and we hope it will inspire you to go out and see what your own local birds are doing.

—KENN KAUFMAN
Editor