

editor's notebook

the magic circle

As a youthful fan of birds, I remember pulling a hefty *Birds of America* from our family bookshelf, opening it to the full-page Fuertes plate of a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers high in a northern hardwoods forest, and thinking to myself that such a vision of untamed wildness would be forever beyond my experience. It never occurred to me that I might find these spectacular creatures somewhere nearby in my native Pennsylvania. Then, for reasons I have never been able to explain, I lost all interest in birds during my mid-teen and college years. In my twenties in Connecticut, for the fun of looking at things differently, I purchased a pair of binoculars on a gasoline charge-card special. One afternoon on a favorite hilltop, an Eastern Kingbird happened to fly into the magic circle of my field-of-view. It perched on a fencepost, raised its wings, bristled its crown feathers, and for a fleeting moment revealed its secret red patch. There was just something miraculously transforming in the pristine clarity of that isolated image, and I was hooked. A few months later, while I sat looking dreamily out the window, my Pileated Woodpecker, out of nowhere, slammed its claws onto the trunk of a large maple and sounded a spirited challenge.

For me, those experiences embodied the essence of birding: a magical synergy of visual clarity and serendipity. Although I've traveled to exotic places and shivered with delight watching streams of migrant hawks and rains of coastal fallouts, the images which still haunt me most are the images of familiar birds. It is thus fitting that I should have been given this opportunity to take a long and broad view of a nesting season: for the most part, the season of backyard birds. This period is one when the usual rewards of birding are often transformed: the challenge of identification becomes the challenge of finding nests; the anticipation of finding a rarity becomes the thrill of unveiling a first breeding record. More than any other season, it is a time for looking closely into the lives of birds and pondering the myriad questions that their reproductive behavior provokes. It is by going often into the field in this season that one can hope to discover those intricately minute but totally captivating morsels of birdlore—the revelation, for example, that a Golden-winged Warbler includes, as a part of its nest-site geography, a dead stalk of last year's goldenrod on which it cryptically sidesteps to the nest cup to deliver larval leaf-rollers to its nestlings.

This issue marks a transition in a number of ways for *North American Birds*. It will be the last in a series of guest-edited issues: beginning with Volume 54, Michael Patten assumes responsibilities as permanent editor. With his wide-ranging ornithological experience and tireless dedication, Michael will bring a new level of consistency and quality to the publication. At this time, most but not all of the regional reports follow the taxonomic sequence of the 7th edition of the *AOU Check-list of North American Birds*. If you can't find Yellow-throated Vireo after the flycatchers, look for it one last time before the wood-warblers. In subsequent *NAB* issues, all the regional reports will consistently follow the 7th edition *Check-list* sequence. We will also continue to use the most recent AOU nomenclature—with the exception of the names of the native Hawaiian passerines, for which we will continue to use indigenous spellings employing the 'okina. In anticipation of an upcoming announcement by the AOU, Oldsquaw is now Long-tailed Duck again. As the journal continues to expand its role as

a major venue for peer-reviewed, ornithologically important papers, I call your attention to M. Patten's "Suggestions for Contributors" in *NAB* 53(3):246 ff. Finally, the universal sidebar of abbreviations on page 358 contains a few new additions.

I emerge from the experience of editing this issue of *North American Birds* with one overwhelming sentiment: I am completely in awe of the collective level of synthesis and insight masterfully summarized in the regional reports that follow. Regional editors have obviously labored intensely to condense numerous accounts into a readable format and to judiciously interweave these records with intriguing natural history, poignant comment, creative analysis, and humor. Their efforts rely in kind on the equally professional summaries of many sub-regional compilers. At the base of the pyramid are the dedicated hours of the thousands of birders and field researchers who contribute records to the network. Without their "primary productivity" the prodigious enterprise of constructing a human's-eye view of the seasonal activities of a continent's billions of birds would collapse. An infectious delight in bird observation, an appreciation for the productive partnership between birding and ornithology, and a genuine dedication to bird conservation is everywhere apparent in these pages. In addition to the regional reports, Scott Richardson's lively account of an Intermediate Egret in the Hawaiian Islands and Christina Romagosa and Terry McEneaney's thorough summary of Eurasian Collared-Dove expansion highlight two of the themes in *Changing Seasons*: the rare appearance of birds—here the first documented, non-hypothetical appearance of a species in the AOU area—and the transition from vagrancy to breeding residency and range extension.

In the midst of winter—at least for many of us—I encourage you to explore the rich landscape of the magic circle of reports in these pages with the same enthusiasm as you might explore your own favorite bird haunts when the nesting season rolls around again in a few months. In addition to the perceptive and poignant SAs and the summary of exciting records, every report harbors—like nests hidden in the vegetation—new revelations about the lives of birds. I hope these virtual nests will provide each of us with both the insight and the inspiration to brush aside obscuring preoccupation and convention and bring a mystery to light—or at least one of the many first state nesting records that awaits discovery in the field next summer.

—TOM WILL, *Guest Editor*

IN MEMORIAM

With a great deal of sadness, we announce the passing of Thomas Rogers on 23 September in Spokane, Washington, at age 85. Tom was the Regional Editor for the former Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain Region and the current Idaho-Western Montana Region for four decades, resigning only recently with the summer 1994 issue of *Field Notes*. Tom was not only an extremely dedicated editor for a very large region, he was also an extremely knowledgeable and delightful companion in the field. His field habits were quiet, unassuming, methodical, and very observant—skills that served him well in his roles as teacher and conservationist. All of us will miss him.

—BILL TWEIT, STEVE MLODINOW, AND BILL TICE