

EDITORS' NOTEBOOK

The "Friends" Fund

Way to go, guys! Thanks to your generous contributions over the past twelve months, the journal is in the best financial shape of the past decade. In addition to over \$14,500 raised from the individuals listed below, the Sacramento Audubon Society has contributed \$1500 from funds raised by Jon Dunn in his lecture series there. (We'd have no objection if other lecturers would encourage local bird clubs and Audubon chapters to make similar donations!) These donations will be used to improve the printing and paper quality, as well as the length of the journal, in issues to come. In this issue, for instance, note the many extra pages and images. Thanks to all who have supported the journal in the past year—and don't forget that your donations are tax-deductible. (If we have left out any contributors for 2003, please contact the Editor directly at ensifera@aol.com.)

Photographic contributions

Many thanks from all who have contributed photographic material for this and past issues. The present issue contains more photographs than have ever been published in an issue of *North American Birds*, and we hope there is something of interest for everyone here. This issue was a difficult one to assemble for the production crew, largely because we had quite a few images submitted directly to the Photo Editor that lacked data such as the location, photographer, and date of the image. We would ask that contributors send photographic material directly to Regional Editors and that all such information (as well as email, street address, and telephone number) be included for all submissions. And please print all the information using large, block letters. Because so much image-material that is submitted now comes in digital formats, clear and correct attributions and sup-

porting information sometimes fall through the cracks of the Internet. This makes the task of assembling an issue more difficult than in the past, when "hard copy" was the rule. So do take pity on us, and make sure that every image submitted is accompanied by plenty of information on its provenance! For the record, we published 99% of the individual birds for which we received identifiable images.

Banes and biases

I hate hurricanes. And personally hope never to see another hurricane come ashore in my lifetime. *Isabel*, a long-lived, powerful Cape Verde hurricane, made landfall near Drum Inlet on the Outer Banks of North Carolina 18 September 2003 and moved northward through Virginia, trashing the homes, boats, and gardens of friends and family—and of many fellow birders—as well as the wildlife

refuges, parks, and forests beloved by generations of local people and visitors. Venerable Hatteras lodgings I had cherished since 1965 broke apart and were swept off into the waters of the sound; the shattered lives of those who took a direct hit will take longer to mend. *Isabel* also caused considerable environmental damage to forests and waterways over portions of eastern North Carolina and eastern/central Virginia and was surely the worst Virginia storm since *Hazel* of 1954 and the Chesapeake-Potomac Hurricane of 1933. In Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, the terrible nocturnal landfall of Hurricane *Juan* visited havoc on the Halifax area 29 September this year, one of Canada's worst hurricanes ever and hardest to hit Halifax since 1893. And on Bermuda, *Fabian's* direct hit with 105 knots of wind on 6 September was the worst there since 1926 and one of the most destructive events in the island's hurricane-peppered history.

For a thousand reasons, these storms are detested and inarguably awful for the well-being of birds and people alike; but if they are so despised, why

the attention to these storms in these pages? Since the earliest days of *Audubon Field Notes*, hurricanes have preoccupied issues of this journal—in 1955, the passage of hurricanes *Carol*, *Edna*, and *Hazel* even made the cover of Vol. 9, No. 1, as did *Donna's* in 1961 (Vol. 15, No. 1). Part of the explanation is clear enough: tropical cyclones can take birds' distribution—the focus of the journal—and turn it upside-down, with displacements of some

THE FRIENDS OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS

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Robert Duncan	Charles Nunn	Richard Zaineldeen
Kathryn Dunham	Darrin O'Brien	C. Fred Zeilemaker

Our apologies to Travis Mahan, who has submitted some very nice photographs for recent issues but was surely chagrined to see his name misspelled each time! This issue features several more of Travis's photographs (Illinois & Indiana region), with proper credit this time. (Thanks for putting up with us, Travis!)

—Matthew F. Sharp

species appearing to show patterns, others seemingly random. We do know more about the birds associated with these storms now than we did in 1955, owing mostly the many landfalling hurricanes since the mid-1990s (after 1960, most of the twentieth century was relatively quiet for Atlantic tropical cyclones). We do *not*, however, know a great deal more today about the actual mechanisms by which pelagic birds, littoral birds, and shorebirds are moved by or grounded by these systems. These questions are raised in the "Changing Seasons" essay herein, with reference to the special interregional report on Hurricane *Isabel*, the latter an attempt to collocate the many data gathered during and after the passage of this terrible storm. Why were few Sooty Terns seen but many Wilson's Storm-Petrels, in contrast to so many storms of the past? Read all about it in this season's lead essay.

Perhaps another reason for the journal's storm-focus, however, is that a hurricane is perceived by most active field birders as a bounty, as suspension of the rules and reality of birding in their area, as perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the effects of such a storm, including its improbable cargo of pelagic birds, far inland on the local patch. To see such birds is, on some level, to enter into a different layer of ornithological history—intimated only in dusty notes and old specimens from the hurricane-charged late 1890s or early 1930s, periods completely beyond the ken of almost all modern birders. Lines on a local checklist that remain blank for decades are suddenly scrawled to overflowing; "suspect" records of the old-timers suddenly come into clear context.

We should not chastise ourselves too much on account of a certain fascination for destructive storms. Lives are lost; homes are lost and damaged; habitat is lost or degraded. (Perhaps only bark beetles and woodpeckers can look on a felled forest with relish.) Though none of us long for this kind of meteorological violence, so too are we utterly unable to prevent it—and perhaps our awe in watching the passage of these storms relates to our own powerlessness to influence them. To ignore the birds displaced by these storms would be inconceivable: we would forfeit the opportunity to understand the lives of so many species *in extremis*, in situations that show us both their vulnerability and their hardiness, their behaviors almost never seen otherwise, and perhaps too forfeit the opportunity to perceive and document a key to the fluctuations in populations of such species over time. Curse though it may have been, *Isabel* has gotten its ornithological due in these pages, in keeping with the journal's tradition of six decades.

Hurricane coverage notwithstanding, long-time subscribers might notice that a few themes recur in recent years at *North American*

Birds, among them: Florida birds, hybrids, and subspecies. If not outright biases, such themes are not coincidences, either, but a product of several historical factors. One reason that so much of our recent material has come from Florida (articles on Mangrove Swallow, Budgerigar, Eurasian Kestrel, Short-tailed Shearwater, nesting Elegant Tern) should be clear by a glance at the map: as an enormous peninsula jutting into the subtropics, the state has geography that ensures a rich and dynamic avifaunal record—in the cases of our recent papers, a Pacific shearwater, a Eurasian raptor, a tern and a swallow that should be in Mexico (roughly), and a nesting "exotic" from Australia all showcase the state's diversity. Another reason for so much material from Florida is that the state has several contributors, both professional ornithologists and birders, who see this journal as an appropriate place to send their manuscripts (we are most grateful). If one had to pick a single state that is currently "underbirded" as regards its potential for interesting publishable birding and ornithological material, Florida might well be a logical choice. The southeastern United States, too, though increasingly populous, generally receive much less birding attention than do the northeastern.

But a decisive reason for our Florida—and in this issue Southeastern—focus is probably simpler still: for the Caribbean and Central America, for the West, for New Jersey, and for Canada, there exist quality journals that publish color material very similar to the fare of *North American Birds*. The journals *Western Birds*, *New Jersey Birds*, *Cotinga*, and *Birders Journal* are outstanding venues for material from western North America, New Jersey, tropical America, and Canada. Most states in the Midwest and Northeast also have good quality journals for their bird records, although most publish only in black and white, as is true of several smaller Caribbean-area journals. States in the Southeast and in the continent's center, however, have struggled to maintain state-level birding and natural history publications on a regular schedule, certainly understandable given the long hours required of the volunteers who staff these periodicals. And so the material we receive here tends to be skewed geographically, coming mostly from areas that have few alternative outlets. This is not to say that we do not regularly solicit articles from other parts of the continent or that what we print is anything other than superb! We are delighted that so many of our readers and contributors support their local, regional, and national publications, a rightful place for their articles and photographs; we are equally delighted that *North American Birds* can serve as repository for material from states or countries without local or regional journals that have the capacity to reproduce color material.

As to this journal's rather obvious recent fascination with, not to say bias toward, sub-

species and hybrid birds, we must plead guilty. Although the predecessor journals *Audubon Field Notes* and *American Birds* often treated bird identification questions, such articles now fall to *Birding* magazine, with *North American Birds* covering chiefly matters of bird distribution, including: expansions and contractions of range; migrations and extralimital occurrences; the distribution of subspecies; appearances of aberrant individual birds, morphs, or hybrids; atmospheric and oceanographic phenomena and their relation to birds' distribution; and related topics. In the course of considering avian distribution, we do make reference to matters of field identification, but these are rarely comfortable summaries of settled subjects (take for instance the questions of out-of-range "Gray-bellied Brant," hybrid albatrosses, "Siberian Pipits," hybrid ibises, "Western Flycatchers," and those odd four-year gulls). We have gotten correspondence on not a few of these birds in recent years, with the result that some records, such as those of Loggerhead Kingbird (*N. A. B.* 54: 235-240), have been found inadequate or in error. We intend to revisit an older article on Intermediate Egret on Midway Atoll, Hawaii (*N. A. B.* 53: 441-443), which may pertain to an "Eastern Cattle-Egret" rather than an Intermediate Egret (have we piqued the reader's interest?). From our recent issues on *Western Birds* East and *Caribbean Birds*, we received a full range of diverse opinions on photographs of potential Pink-sided Junco (*N. A. B.* 57: 303) and MacGillivray's Warbler (*N. A. B.* 57: 574) from New York, some in support, some questioning, some guardedly agnostic. It is remarkable, and very humbling to one's own grasp of bird identification, to receive opposing opinions from experts in their fields! And this is perhaps why we regularly publish images of unusual plumages and probable hybrids (see page 177 in the Pictorial Highlights): we feel it our duty to give countenance to the widest possible range of your discoveries—but especially those that provide all of us with unparalleled opportunities for learning. The junco and other birds in these pages have led to fruitful, sustained discussions on the "Frontiers of Field Identification" listserve and elsewhere (see <<http://oceanwanderers.com/JuncoID.html>>) and brought to light unsolved questions and many unpublished images of puzzling individuals. By introducing questions to which we often do not have full answers, we intend not so much to jump the gun as to jump-start such discussions on such problems. We would not be "deconstructionists," who dwell unduly on the unidentifiable; rather, our frequent emphases on the limits of field identification are intended as a healthy caution for all of us, as exemplary exhortations to careful observation of the birds we're fortunate to study.

—Edward S. Brinkley