

THE CHANGING SEASONS Rome Burning?

“
Our holy grail—guaranteed persistence
of all American birds in natural numbers and
habitats—is indeed worthy of revolutionary fervor.

”
—John Fitzpatrick,

“The AOU and Bird Conservation: Recommitment to the Revolution”

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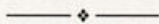
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A Conservational Preamble: The Changing Centuries

Our birds are in trouble. And it is not simply the readers of this journal who may be aware of the fact: it is apparent to most perceptive observers, despite the daily distractions and even the efforts of some to obscure the obvious. We certainly cannot fail to see the flames smarting about us. And so rather than begin with the weather and bird news, with tales of the great Alaskan and Yukon forest fires of 2004, or with rosters of rare waders, or of wandering tropical birds, we thought we would look first at modern bird conservation, mostly in the United States, as it stands at this juncture. Accompanying the overview here are 31 “State of the Region” conservation summaries that follow the temperate-regions’ reports, smaller overviews that are intended to give the uninitiated some sense of the issues that face birds and their habitats on a regional level.

We stand at a remarkable crossroads in this new century. We have an immense reservoir of knowledge about birds and their habitats, as well as formidable resources to remedy many of the problems that face them. At the same time, our best science tells us that hundreds of species are declining in number, many of them precipitously, and some could be lost if immediate action is not taken. If it took less than a century to make five billion Passenger Pigeons disappear, will our science and its applications arrive in time to prevent more species from such a fate?



In North America, we have experienced four crises of bird conservation, crises that bracket the twentieth century. Our predecessors seriously addressed, if not clearly resolved, the first three crises. We are now in the fourth, unresolved, crisis. It took monumental endeavors to settle the three previous emergencies. Each involved a revolution of thought and action, designed to reverse the problems that beset our birdlife.

The first crisis, perceived first at the end of the nineteenth century, was characterized by the slaughter of birds, mainly for the millinery trade. In his summary for the Hudson–Delaware regional report, Bob Paxton mentions this crisis as having its roots in the Northeast. Our forebears faced the issue straight on, with the upshot being the rise of our bird protection movement, the birth of the Audubon societies, the passage of essential Federal legislation (e.g., Lacey Act of 1900), and the birth of federal bird refuges (1903). The rest, as they say, is history.

The second crisis had become apparent to conservationists by the 1930s. Wetlands, especially in America’s heartland, were in drastic

decline, led by a farm policy begun during World War I to “plow to the fences.” Widespread drainage for farmland, in combination with large bag-limits, devastated wetlands and waterfowl populations continent-wide. The ensuing response—the creation of a functioning National Wildlife Refuge “system” and wildlife management techniques to recover populations of waterfowl—was arduous but nothing short of spectacular.

The third crisis was brought about by the excessive use of synthetic pesticides, especially DDT, after World War II. Both *Silent Spring* the book (Carson 1962) and “silent spring” the reality can be viewed as essentially bird-driven. Manmade poison and the chronic failure of a federal regulatory process were finally addressed. Banning DDT (1972) and the passage of the Endangered Species Act (ESA, passed in 1973) characterized the response to this emergency, whose “avian poster children” were familiar, popular species: Brown Pelican, Peregrine Falcon, Osprey, and Bald Eagle. As this summer’s regional reports attest, their populations all continue to increase annually.

Resolution of each of these crises required a new way of thinking about nature and about birds, much like the process outlined by Thomas Kuhn (1962) in *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. That kind of inventive thinking is required now, in the thick of this fourth crisis. As sober and thoughtful an observer and participant as John Fitzpatrick, current head of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and a past president of American Ornithologists’ Union, can even call it a “revolution” in his *Auk* article “The AOU and Bird Conservation: Recommitment to the Revolution” (2002).

Of course, each of the three previous crises was denied, belittled, or resisted by those with clear economic interests in conflict: plume

hunters in the first case, some large farmers in the second, many chemical companies in the third. Each effort at conservation was even resisted by many who actually had an intimate interest in saving the birds—from oologists and

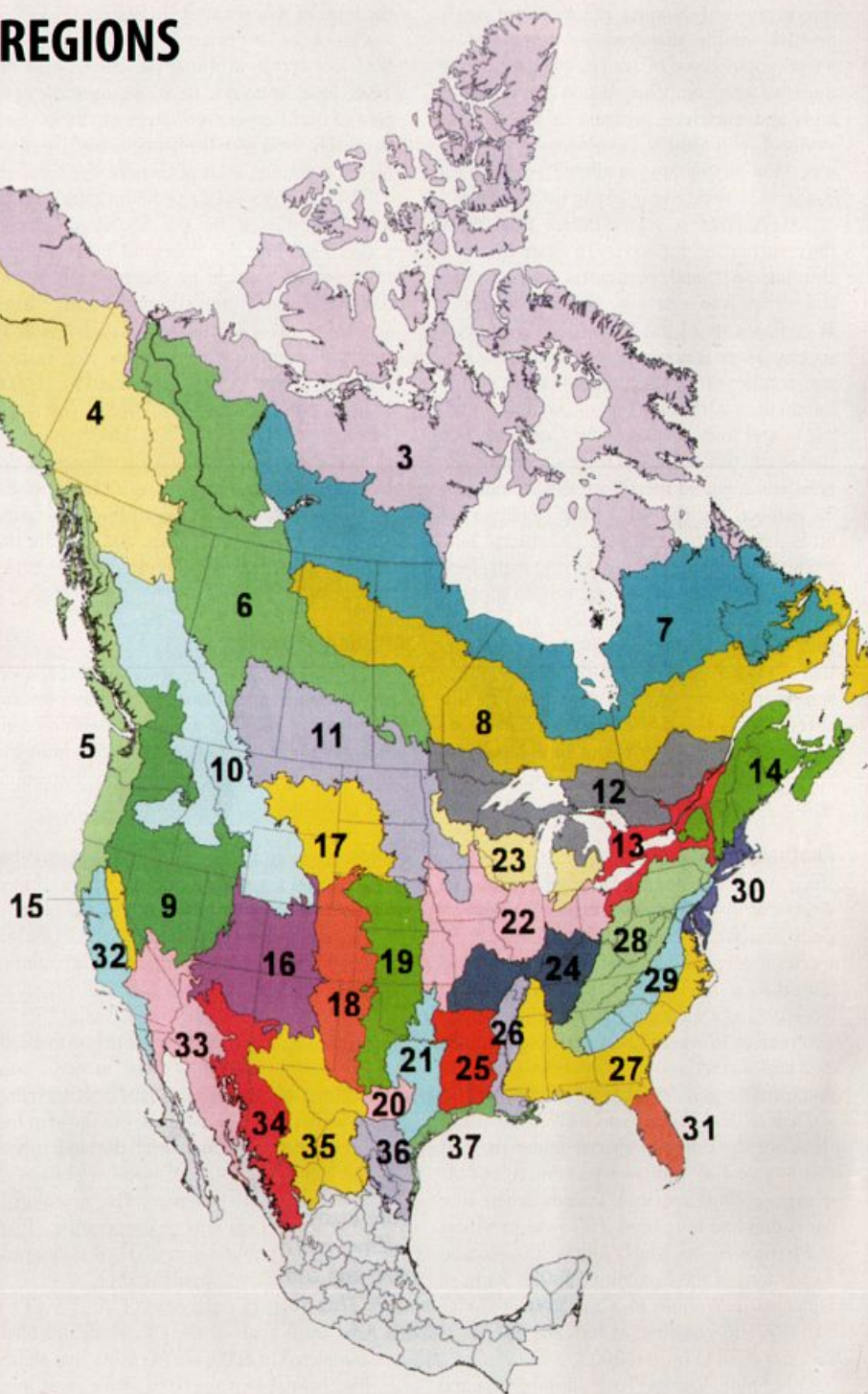
curators who feared the imposition of restraints on their activities in the first case, to impatient and irresponsible hunters who bristled at regulations on their activities in the second, to naturalists who attacked the efforts against pesti-

cides as not "scientific" or as "propaganda" in the third (Fox 1981, Barrow 1998). Resistance continued until it became obvious that there was no option but serious action, no alternative to accepting a new synthesis of ideas, a revolu-

BIRD CONSERVATION REGIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

BCRs in US and Canada

1. Aleutian/Bering Sea islands
2. Western Alaska
3. Arctic Plains and Mountains
4. Northwestern Interior Forest
5. Northern Pacific Rainforest
6. Boreal Taiga Plains
7. Taiga Shield and Hudson Plains
8. Boreal Softwood Shield
9. Great Basin
10. Northern Rockies
11. Prairie Potholes
12. Boreal Hardwood Transition
13. Lower Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Plain
14. Atlantic Northern Forest
15. Sierra Nevada
16. Southern Rockies
17. Badlands and Prairies
18. Shortgrass Prairie
19. Central Mixed Grass Prairie
20. Edwards Plateau
21. Oaks and Prairies
22. Eastern Tallgrass Prairie
23. Prairie Hardwood Transition
24. Central Hardwoods
25. West Gulf Coastal Plain/Ouachitas
26. Mississippi Alluvial Valley
27. Southeastern Coastal Plain
28. Appalachian Mountains
29. Piedmont
30. New England/Mid-Atlantic Coast
31. Peninsular Florida
32. Coastal California
33. Sonoran and Mojave Deserts
34. Sierra Madre Occidental
35. Chihuahuan Desert
36. Tamaulipan Brushlands
37. Gulf Coastal Prairie



tion, to address the emergency. While each of the three crises was grave, each had relatively simple solutions, or so it seems in retrospect. In the first crisis, the imperative was to stop the slaughter and accept that Americans could no longer proceed as though natural resources were unlimited. In the second, the goal was to reverse wetland draining and to accept newly devised wildlife management techniques to revive populations of waterfowl. And in the third, we were compelled to stop poisoning our birds and ourselves, bringing to the fore the words of John Muir at the opening of the century, "Tug on anything at all and you'll find it connected to everything else in the universe."

Today's crisis is very different from those three past crises, however—far more insidious and intricate—and pesticides, over-harvests, and wetlands loss have by no means vanished as components of the crisis for at least some species. There is no simple solution to the current conflagration, which burns on the fuel of hundreds of conspiring factors. Migrants heading to and from the Neotropics are front-and-center, whether forest species or shorebirds, but grassland songbird species are also plummeting in number. At the same time, gallinaceous birds—the prairie-chickens, Northern Bobwhite, Greater Sage-Grouse, among many—are suffering. Seabird populations are also continuously assaulted. Today's problems are enumerated in detail in the conservation summaries that follow the regional reports, along with the species most in danger. But how are the affected birds being identified? Which species are candidates for the lists of the Endangered Species Act? And how do we orient ourselves in this complex fourth crisis?

Another sort of "listing"

Since the 1970s, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has "listed" those species that are officially designated Threatened and Endangered, species that could disappear unless serious and immediate action is taken to save them. The Act has served as a wake-up call, requiring the U.S. government to use the best available scientific data and methods to identify those species in imminent danger, designate accompanying critical habitat, and develop species recovery plans. (It is not the listing of species under the ESA that is a goal of bird conservationists, but the recovery of those species.) Canada, where similar listing had long been left to the provinces and territories, has largely followed the recommendations of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC, est. 1977) in enacting, at last, the Species at Risk Act (SARA) in June 2003.

Other bird "listings" have an important and intimate lineage for us. Longtime readers of *North American Birds* and its antecedents will remember the perennial "Blue List" in the pages of *Audubon Field Notes* and *American Birds*. The regional editors took on responsibility for gathering data on declining birds from contributors and then "flagging" species that deserved spe-

cial attention by their contributors and by wildlife agencies. Back in 1996, the first serious listing of the Partners In Flight (PIF) "Watch-List" also appeared in these pages (Carter et al. 1996). The PIF listing was then adopted by National Audubon and has regularly been brought down to function on the state level, in the form of Yellow and Red Lists.

Out of the first tri-national North American Bird Conservation Initiative discussions in 1998 came the need to devise a geographic concept of Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) and to overlay them with the listing of birds in trouble. The ensuing *Birds of Conservation Concern 2002* (USF&WS 2002) combined the species from the PIF plan, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the Waterbird Plan (all outlined below) overlaid by geographic BCR but did not include hunted or federally listed species. *Birds of Conservation Concern 2002* is the publication to which editors refer in their regional summaries of conservation issues. More recently, the American Bird Conservancy has distributed its own "Green List," covered in this essay last summer, which combines all the bird-plan standards and covers all bird species, hunted or not. Still, even with this remarkable proliferation of "lists," where and how are the actual issues of bird conservation being addressed?

Plans and Delivery

Since the late 1980s, the world of bird conservation has been facilitated by the move toward multiple "plans" that outline national and continental priorities. Taking their cue from the historic successes of waterfowl conservation, the plans include the following:

- North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) • The model of science-based management plans, designed across governmental and private sectors, the NAWMP combines two plan essentials: good planning and significant resources. It was begun in 1986 and has been highly successful.
- Partners In Flight (PIF) • Launched in 1990, PIF was primarily involved in addressing declines of our migrants landbirds traveling to winter in the Neotropics, but the plan has been expanded to include all the landbirds of the United States and Canada, regardless of their migration patterns. The new North American Landbird Conservation Plan (NALCP), published in 2004, is now available and makes gripping reading.
- U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (USSCP) • The main goals of the U.S. shorebird plan, completed in 2000, are to ensure that shorebird habitat is maintained at the local level and to maintain or restore shorebird populations at the continental and hemispheric levels.
- North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (NAWCP) • Covering colonial waterbirds, marshbirds, some seabirds, and related species, the innovative *Waterbird Conserva-*

tion for the Americas was published in 2002. Its planning regions extend ambitiously southward to the northern coast of South America.

- Game Birds • There are congealing efforts among champions of gallinaceous birds to coordinate conservation activities, especially where they overlap with Farm Bill appropriations (see below). The Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative and the North American Grouse Partnership are two such efforts.
- North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) • While each plan listed above is engaging in some level of step-down planning, resulting mostly in regional plans, the plans are also involved at a higher level of consultation through NABCI. Starting at a meeting in Puebla, Mexico in 1998, and coming to fruition in the U.S. the next year, NABCI has sought to facilitate a degree of coordination between all the plans to expedite integrated bird conservation in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, namely "all birds, all habitats." The NABCI effort, moreover, was closely and simultaneously intertwined with the development of BCRs. Another level of step-down is the initiation of state-wide NABCI-like consultations such as exist now in Missouri or Wisconsin.

The actual delivery of bird conservation work takes many forms, including the following essential vehicles in the United States:

- State Wildlife Grants (SWGs) • These grants are funding numerous ongoing wildlife-related projects through state wildlife agencies. Top among these projects are the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies mentioned in several regional conservation summaries; these statewide plans are required to be finished in 2005 and provide great opportunities to guide bird priorities in the states. Many localities are holding public comment sessions as we go to press.
- Joint Ventures (JVs) • These coordinating bodies, an outgrowth of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA, see below) of 1989, are mentioned by some of the conservation summaries (e.g., in the Central Southern and Middle Pacific Coast regions). Originally formed to facilitate waterfowl and wetlands conservation, these 14 regionally based partnerships are currently moving to embrace the delivery of on-the-ground conservation action for all birds.
- Farm Bill • Once deemed the mega-distributor of excessive political "pork" and grandiose agricultural subsidies, the Farm Bill supplies crucial bird conservation funds in agricultural areas. The importance of the USDA conservation farm programs—especially the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), and Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)—are well summarized by Jim Dinsmore and Ron Martin in their regional sum-

WEBSITE REFERENCES FOR SELECTED RESOURCES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE: <www.zeroextinction.org>)
 American Bird Conservancy (ABC: <www.abcbirds.org>)
 American bird observatory list (<www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/OBSERVATORY.html>)
 Bird Conservation Alliance (BCA: <www.birdconservationalliance.org>)
 Bird conservation plans (download at: <<http://birdhabitat.fws.gov/NAWMP/plans.htm>>)
 Bird Studies Canada/Études d'Oiseaux Canada (BSC/EOC: <www.bsc-eoc.org>)
 Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC: <<http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/reports/bcc2002.pdf>>)
 Boreal Songbird Initiative (BSI: <www.borealbirds.org>)
 Conservation International (CI: <www.conservation.org>)
 Cornell Lab of Ornithology (CLO: <birds.cornell.edu>)
 Ducks Unlimited (DU: <www.ducks.org>)
 Joint Ventures (JVs: directory at: <birdhabitat.fws.gov/nawmp/jvdir.htm>)
 Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences (MCCS: <www.manomet.org>)
 Migratory Bird Conservancy (MBC: <www.conservebirds.org>)
 National Audubon Society (NAS: <www.audubon.org>)
 National Flyway Council (NFC: <www.centraflyway.org>)
 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF: <www.nfwf.org>)
 National Wildlife Federation (NWF: <www.nwf.org>)
 Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC: <www.nrdc.org>)
 NatureServe (<www.natureserve.org>)
 North American Bird Conservation Initiative (<www.nabci.net>, <www.nabci-us.org>)
 North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS: <www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs>)
 North American Landbird Conservation Plan (NALCP: <www.partnersinflight.org>)
 North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (NAWCP: <www.nacwcp.org/pubs>)
 North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP: <www.nawmp.ca>)
 Partners In Flight (PIF: <www.partnersinflight.org>)
 PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO: <www.prbo.org>)
 Ramsar (RAMSAR: <www.ramsar.org>)
 Regional Migratory Bird Coordinators (MBCs: <birds.fws.gov/Offices.htm>)
 Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (SMBC: <<http://nationalzoo.si.edu>>)
 The Nature Conservancy (TNC: <nature.org>)
 The Peregrine Fund (PF: <www.peregrinefund.org>)
 The Sierra Club (SC: <www.sierraclub.org>)
 U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (USSCP: <shorebirdplan.fws.gov>)
 Waterbird Conservation for the Americas (WCA: <www.nacwcp.org>)
 Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN: <www.manomet.org>)
 Wings Over Water (WOW: <www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/birds/wb_om_e.cfm>)
 World Biosphere Reserves (<www.unesco.org>)

maries. Over 40 million acres are enrolled in these Programs as of 2004.

In this national and continental overview, one must credit the inestimable efforts of non-governmental conservation groups—from the international work of the Bird Studies Canada, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ducks Unlimited, National Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, the Peregrine Fund, American Bird Conservancy, the independent Audubon groups, alongside the smaller yet highly effective regional and local groups such as the local and regional bird clubs, land trusts, bird observatories, and the state-based Important Bird Areas (IBA) led by National Audubon Society. The hard science on which bird conservation education, outreach, and advocacy rests comes from these and many other groups, from Manomet, PRBO, the many university based Centers for Conservation Biology, and from scores of citizen-science projects. We have compiled a list of hundreds of such organizations and initiatives but can provide here only a condensed list of website references (see box above), many of which have local-level links.

Opportunities to learn about the problems that face bird populations, and to engage in bird-related conservation work, are so multitudinous in North America that we may become overwhelmed by the possibilities, to the point that we tune out the information altogether. Faced with multiplying lists of birds imperiled, with solicitations for donations to worthy causes, and with on-the-ground opportunities to help birds in our local areas, we can be forgiven for some degree of disorientation, even dismay, in our attempts to prioritize all that we take in, as well as our own contributions of time and money.

But we must not, because of the deluge of information and opportunity, lose sight of the prize. Fitzpatrick's (2002) clear-sighted call-to-arms offers a compelling manifesto for American bird conservation, harmonized mainly through the multiple bird plans, that we can all understand and agree upon: "Ensure persistence of all American bird populations in their natural numbers, natural habitats, and natural geographical ranges, through coordinated efforts by scientists, government, industry, and private citizens." He proposes a ten-year program to conserve American birds and their habitats includ-

ing the following measurable goals:

- Fewer gaps in understanding population trends.
- Redundant, question-driven monitoring of all bird species.
- Effective methods for monitoring difficult-to-detect species.
- Scientific auditing of monitoring projects and conservation plans to produce adaptive responses in both.
- Habitat management in place to stabilize all high priority species in North America.
- Non-governmental organizations to shepherd bird conservation.
- Bird conservation objectives stewarded by dedicated coordinators.
- Citizens engaged in numbers befitting a revolution.

As Marjorie Ziegler, Brainard Palmer-Ball, and Chris Sloan observe in their regional summaries: conservation without funding is next to impossible. Let us suggest here, then, that the five most important bird-funding issues have already been identified, at least in the United

States. This was accomplished at a January 2003 Wildlife Management Institute conference on bird conservation priorities where over a hundred participants from across the country hammered out potentially conflicting objectives. That list of five issues could easily be our collective starting point, and this is the exact set of priorities adopted by the Bird Conservation Funding Coalition that meets and acts regularly in Washington, D.C. These are funding issues (appropriations)—not support for politicians, not requests for new legislation. This means the items are already contained in the federal budget, and we are trying to highlight their significance so that the appropriations can progressively expand. (Note: If we were stressing needs, this list would be far costlier. As Ziegler suggests in the Hawai'i summary, state wildlife funding needs alone are actually four times what the states presently receive through State Wildlife Grants.) The list is far from perfect, but here it is, in no particular order:

1. **North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)** provides matching funds for conservation projects for the benefit of wetland-associated migratory birds in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The Act, in existence since 1989, is an excellent example of how conservation funding can be leveraged. (While authorized at \$54 million annually, appropriations recently have been far lower.) Approximate appropriations: \$38 million annually.
2. **State Wildlife Grants (SWGs)** fund a wide variety of wildlife-related projects by state fish and wildlife agencies throughout the country. They arose out of the popular effort to pass CARA and the work of the Teaming with Wildlife Coalition. SWGs are currently funding the state Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies, which will be very important for bird conservation and management on state lands especially. (As indicated above, real needs are much larger than current appropriations.) Approximate appropriations: \$70 million annually.
3. **The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA)** established in 2000 a matching grant program for the conservation of migratory birds in countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as within the U.S. As a new and encouraging program, it is hoped that it will grow considerably, as it represents one of the best potential tools for remedying multiple conservation crises for passerines. Approximate appropriations: \$4 million annually.
4. **The Division of Migratory Bird Management of the USF&WS** needs funding for essential bird monitoring and research. This science support is crucial to delivering effective bird conservation, especially for basic population information. (The Division's budget has been suffering annual shortfalls recently of over \$4 million.) Approximate appropriations: \$24 million annually.

5. **Joint Ventures**, those regionally based partnerships of public and private organizations dedicated to the delivery of bird conservation within their boundaries, were formed to facilitate waterfowl and wetlands conservation. JVs are now moving to embrace the delivery of conservation action for all birds. As they grow, they will need increased funding. Approximate appropriations: \$11 million annually.

The budget-agenda for the Bird Conservation Funding Coalition may prove to be critical in the next couple of years, and their five-point list was the outgrowth of real consensus building. To their five items one could easily include five *additional* budget items that most knowledgeable bird enthusiasts would endorse:

1. **Upcoming Farm Bill funding** (due to be renewed in 2006) for CRP, WRP, GRP, and other conservation programs.
2. **The National Wildlife Refuge system** budget in the area of operations and maintenance, especially since the Refuge System deals so directly with birds.
3. **Funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund** (approaching \$450 million each for federal and stateside elements) for land acquisition. (And assuring that the current Administration does not continue to divert that funding.)
4. **The International Programs of both the USF&WS and the U.S. Forest Service**, since they are budget-conscious, often bird-oriented, and very effective.
5. **U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) funding** where it deal with birds—increasingly integral to bird conservation, bird-banding, and related science support, especially the Breeding Bird Survey.

Taken as a whole, these ten priorities could form a bird-conservationist's funding wish-list. Of course, there are many other valued and valuable funding needs, from the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, and Environmental Protection Agency work to oceans (NOAA) and recreation (National Park Service). These agencies' budgetary needs should all be addressed by bird conservation forces in due course.

Potentially, when our voices combine, we are a powerful force for change on this continent—in far smaller numbers than we now have, our predecessors confronted unsustainable practices and largely stopped them. Our most recent surveys tell us that there are upwards of 70 million Americans interested in birds (Cordell and Herbert 2002) or 46 million who have either taken trips to see birds or spend time at home watching birds (Pullis-LaRouche 2001). In the first case, the numbers are many more than voted for either of the major U. S. presidential candidates in 2004; in the second, the total at least approaches that number of voters. Yet bird conservation would

appear to motivate, or even matter deeply to, only a tiny fraction of citizens in any country in the Americas. Political candidates who energetically court comparatively minor groups for their votes rarely supply more than occasional plaudits for conservation-minded voters, and the "conservation vote" is a phrase rarely heard in campaign circles, despite the proliferation of many environmental advocacy groups. The progress made in 100 years of North American bird conservation is indeed remarkable, yet recreational birders and bird conservationists as constituencies are currently on no one's political radar. As Ron Martin concludes the Northern Great Plains regional summary: "Perhaps the connotations of the word 'conservation' are too passive. We cannot go on just documenting the declines and doing nothing because the available science does not give us the entire picture. Action is the key." And so it is up to all of us to play a part in the colossal rescue operation that invites us. For those new to the ropes of bird conservation, read a bit about your region and consider making contact with a conservation initiative or organization in your area. Get your feet wet. Make sure every B.B.S. route in your region is covered every year. Veterans: make sure your organizations are making good use of every body and every dollar. Network. Dare to accomplish enormous, even revolutionary, things. And, yes, vote—for the sake of the birds.

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The Weather

Across the eastern half of the continent, our reporting regions were nearly univocal: cooler-than-normal, cloudy, and usually rainy weather prevailed north of Florida. This pattern was most pronounced in New England, the Canadian Maritimes (though Newfoundland got little rain), Québec, Ontario, and Nunavut, where temperatures were 1.5° to 4° F below average, and where above-average precipitation was recorded in both months. It was the sixth coldest summer recorded in Saskatchewan, the seventh coldest June in North Dakota, and in Manitoba, it was the coldest summer since observations began in 1875. Ontario had several record-low temperatures and heavy localized flooding from rains during its Atlas project, whereas atlassers in Pennsylvania got above-average rains and were relieved to have mild weather through June and July. From New York south to Georgia, temperatures were milder than normal and rains began in earnest mostly in July.

In the Midwest, the summer was drier but still relatively cool, with Chicago reporting June 1.3° and July 2.1° F cooler than average. June was cooler and drier than normal in Missouri and Iowa, but both states had a cooler and wetter July than usual, the twelfth coolest on record in Missouri. To the east, in Kentucky and Tennessee, both months were wet and

cooler than usual, particularly July (potentially the coolest on record there). The Gulf Coast states had a mild June, also with copious rain, but much less rain in July.

The effects of weather on bird nesting east of the Plains drew few comments except in the eastern High Arctic, where the cold apparently reduced breeding success markedly or even foiled nesting attempts altogether; a crash in some lemming populations did not help matters for jaegers and raptors. From southern New England southward, however, the mild weather favored cavity-nesting species and most raptors. From Illinois and Indiana south to the Gulf of Mexico and Texas, the tune was much the same: a pleasant season with good nesting successes for woodland and grassland species, with rare positive adjectives ("tremendous," "exceptional") from some quarters.

The weather out West was mixed, with the Montana and Alberta cool and wet but Alaska, the Yukon Territory, British Columbia, and most of the Northwest Territories warm and dry, in sharp contrast to high-latitude regions farther east. This warm, dry weather was beneficial for most nesting birds but in July worsened the most extensive forest fires ever recorded in Alaska and the Yukon. These fires, in the context of expanded logging activities in these areas, bode ill for boreal forest species, whose habitat, already diminishing because of insect plagues abetted by a warming climate, shrinks annually. On the other hand, the growing reports of high counts of American Three-toed Woodpeckers and of various sparrows moving into burned areas in the West indicate that at least a few species will benefit in the short term. The Great Basin, Arizona, and interior West generally, report continued dry conditions, and in southern Utah and Nevada, Steve Summers and Rick Fridell note that the long-term drought "is starting to produce landscape-level changes, particularly in sagebrush and pinyon-juniper habitats," with dead trees especially evident and increasingly frequent wildfires. Arizona's Pinaleno, Mazatzal, and White Mountain ranges suffered mightily from fires. Scattered areas in Colorado, New Mexico, and West Texas had nourishing rains that encouraged breeding in some species (e.g., Cassin's Sparrow) but failed to fill reservoirs.

Because almost 90% of conservation threats to birds are habitat-related, we have organized interesting seasonal reports from June and July 2004 around general habitat types, rather than taxonomically or by theme. For overviews of habitat conditions and threats in particular regions, see the "State of the Region" summaries that follow the regional reports, and check the Nesting Season report for annual Conservation Corners in future years, which will detail ongoing research and conservation efforts in greater depth. In the compendium of reports that follow, there is easily as much evidence of population recovery and growth as evidence of population declines—we should

take heart from the former and take strength and resolve from the latter.

Arctic lowlands

Cool summer weather appeared to be the culprit in the poor nesting success and survivorship noted across the eastern Arctic regions. On the northern Hudson Bay coast of Québec, summer came almost a month late. In northern Ontario, atlassers found that Tree Swallows failed to nest and that Common Loon nests were scarce, with many nestings up to three weeks late. Across that province, Internet-linked observers remarked on the unprecedentedly early arrival of adult shorebirds, presumably failed nesters, and later on the below-average numbers of juveniles. Unprecedented in southern Ontario, for instance, was a flock of 150 Black-bellied Plovers at Blenheim 9 July. Biologists on the ground in the Arctic, corresponding with birders farther south, confirmed that it was an exceptionally cold, wet summer and thus very poor year for nesting shorebirds, waterfowl, and other tundra-nesting species. At Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, Cameron Eckert reports that regular nesters such as Buff-breasted and White-rumped Sandpipers could not be found at all. To the west, snow and ice gripped the southern Hudson Bay through mid-June, causing geese and shorebirds to linger, awaiting warm-up. Rudolf Koes and Peter Taylor note that Snow Geese experienced almost complete nesting failure and that many shorebirds appeared not to nest, as large flocks of adult Short-billed Dowitchers, Hudsonian Godwits, and Silt Sandpipers had begun assembling in late June.

The decline of nearly all shorebirds—population trends are downward in the cases of all but three North American species—has also been observed, and quantified, by birders in several regions where traditional stopover habitats are regularly scrutinized. In Massachusetts, the numbers of Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Sandpipers, and Short-billed Dowitchers that use Newburyport Harbor are all sharply down from totals of 25–35 year ago, but the causes for the decline locally are unknown, possibly involving decrease in prey, possibly increased disturbance by fishermen. In New Jersey, Red Knots—in numbers almost 85% lower than 20 years ago—mostly missed the peak of Horseshoe Crab spawning, which came on 3 June this year. The cold summer could not have benefited this imperiled species, whose Atlantic migrants nest in far-northern Nunavut. In California, 50,000 Red-necked Phalaropes were estimated at Mono Lake 31 July, a date when there are usually only 3000–5000 adults present. By contrast, Joe Jehl counted only 2500 at Mono Lake in three days of boatwork in early September, a time when there are normally 50,000 present. His conclusion is that the species barely had a nesting season. Results of surveys from the Skidegaten–Prince Rupert Ferry in British Columbia 8 July were similar: 28,714 pelagic phalaropes, a high number for

so early in the season. Such widespread nesting failures in Arctic species are not without precedent, but they bear careful monitoring, including at stopover sites.

It is difficult to know what to make of the Snowy Owl in Tippecanoe County, Indiana in July through mid-August; there is no summer precedent in this area for this bird of the Arctic Plains. Surveyors in the Northwest Territories around Yellowknife reported low densities of prey and low productivity for owls. This could presage an exodus from the North in the coming winter, although if few nests were successful, a very large flight seems less likely.

Boreal forests

We receive very little in the way of overview of the nesting season in the vast boreal forests, and what little we got this season was mixed. In central Canada, Churchill and northern Alberta observers commented on the eerily silent woods, devoid even of common warblers and emberizids, particularly the less-hardy species. The spring season's cold winds, snow, and frequent rain resulted in widespread observations of massive mortality in passerines (Dinsmore and Silcock 2004), and Koes and Taylor suspect that the continuing cold of June was simply too much for some species. In Alaska, by contrast, nesting began early in the record warmth, which may have saved at least some passerines during the raging forest fires that burned 6.4 million acres of boreal forest this season, the largest burn in the state's history. The Yukon's 273 fires burned a record-high 4.5 million acres, most of it in the Wilderness Zone. When one considers that this area home to many thousands of Rusty Blackbirds, a species whose counts have dropped severely in recent decades, the losses come into clearer perspective. A bright spot in this habitat, albeit on its far southern periphery, was Michigan's first documented nesting of Great Gray Owl near Seney N.W.R.

Grasslands and agricultural landscapes

Some 70% of grassland birds in North America show declining population trends, according to B.B.S. data. In reading through the "State of the Region" summaries, one cannot help but be struck by the statistics: in many places, over 99% of native prairies are gone, and the agricultural landscape that has replaced it is comparatively depauperate for birdlife. Murphy's (2003) analysis of avian population trends in farmlands found that the current negative trends are linked strongly to changes in agricultural land use. The "cleaner" modern agriculture with less waste grain, less fallow pasture and weedy margins, fewer insects, an increasing frequency in haying, and the increase in application of harmful chemicals are probably part of the reason for grassland birds' declines, in addition to the continued loss and fragmentation of habitat. Peterjohn (2003) argues that "effective conservation of farmland birds will require innovative solutions based on current

agricultural practices that benefit the greatest diversity of farmland birds."

Ken Brock's correspondents in Illinois and Indiana found that "summer 2004 was an especially good breeding year for many species, and particularly the grassland, open country, and scrubland birds," and though these are anecdotal observations—that is, not accompanied by statistics on nesting success (as is almost always true of reports of passerines in this journal)—they fit well with other comments from contiguous regions, as far west as the Prairie Provinces. Among the species mentioned in the Midwest as having had productive nesting seasons were Dickcissel, Bobolink, Northern Bobwhite, Blue Grosbeak, Eastern Kingbird, and Eastern Meadowlark, while southern Alberta's lush growth brought up notably improved numbers of Sprague's Pipit, Le Conte's Sparrow, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, and Bobolink. Iowa and Nebraska reported a profusion of Dickcissels and Bobolinks this season, whereas neither species was mentioned in numbers east of Appalachia, where both sometimes summer (the Dickcissels breeding, often in numbers) when droughts grip the Midwest. It is important to bear in mind that these species tend to be nomadic, that some grassland species are apparently not declining, and some, if declining in parts of their range, are expanding in others. As elsewhere in the world, most grassland birds respond vigorously to "ideal" conditions for breeding—just the right balance of air temperatures, precipitation, and insect abundance—but many lose out during even potentially successful seasons when fields are cut before the young have hatched or fledged. This apparently happened in Dixon County, Nebraska, where plowing of a field full of Bobolinks reduced their numbers immediately; the field was allegedly enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program, which permits such actions under "emergency" conditions. The persistence of cold weather into summer on the North Dakota prairies (which saw frosts and 25° F readings in late June) probably qualified nesting successes in the northern grasslands.

The wet, mild summer across most of the prairies, Midwest, and East may have been responsible for the bounty of Sedge Wrens reported. Across Iowa and Missouri, the species was said to be "common," and in Illinois and Indiana, Sedges were "plentiful." The species was also recorded in above-average numbers to the east of typical range. Tennessee, which has only a few confirmed records of breeding, had 18 singing males between Montgomery County and White County. Three sang in well-studied Augusta County, Virginia, a new county record. In the Northeast, records came from New York (23, mostly in the St. Lawrence Valley), Vermont (7), Maine (2), and Connecticut, where nesting was disrupted by mowing. Single males in southern Alberta and on the Katy Prairie in Texas, where rare, sang away, to no apparent avail. Note that our explanation for the low numbers of Dickcissels and

Bobolinks east of range—that conditions in the Midwest were favorable for nesting—is here marshaled to explain the *opposite* phenomenon in Sedge Wren. (In fact: we're guessing.)

More guesswork is required to account for the increasing appearances, and nestings, of extralimital Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, which seem capable of turning up almost anywhere. The list of wanderers is longer than usual this summer: Ocracoke Island, NC 1 June; Maxwell, NM 8 June; Riding Mountain National Park, MB and Lebanon County, PA 9 June; Loudoun County, TN 12 June; Flamingo, FL 18 June; Longue-Rive, PQ 19 June; Miscou Island, NB 21 June; Fort Huachuca, AZ 24 June; St. Clair N.W.R., ON 26 June; Baie-Comeau, PQ 27–28 June; Custer, SD 3 July; Wildhorse, AB and the San Rafael grasslands, AZ 6 July; Macon County, IL 14 July; Las Vegas N.W.R., NM 15 July; Stutsman County, ND 21 July; Orangeburg, SC 23 July; and Hamilton County, TN 24 July. Nesting birds, or birds attempting to nest, were found in St. Clair and Union Counties, IL; Livingston County, KY; Bitter Lake, NM; Roanoke, VA; Gage County, NE; Edgefield County, SC; five Tennessee and four Missouri counties; and Grant, Vernon, and Caldwell Parishes, LA in June. Finally, former nesting locations in McDonough, GA, Lyon County, KY, and Monroe, NC had brief visits by single birds but no nesting noted. Western Kingbird, which has shown a weaker pattern of expansion in the East than Scissor-tailed, nested for the first time in Mississippi, in DeSoto County, in June.

Most grassland species are not expanding in number or extent of range. Loggerhead Shrikes appeared to lose ground across the continent this summer. Indiana birders could find *none* in their state's former stronghold in Daviess and Sullivan Counties. Michigan birders found *none*. Wisconsin had shrikes in three locations, Illinois at least two pairs, and Minnesota had them in 12 counties, with 13 Iowa counties also reporting them. Seven captive-raised birds were released at Breckenridge, Québec, a province from which the species has disappeared. In the West, an extralimital shrike wandered into the mountains at Bow Valley Provincial Park, Alberta, and southern California populations, already very small on the coastal slope, slipped still more, as they were trapped and relocated by predator control programs designed to benefit Snowy Plovers and Least Terns.

Another species that requires healthy populations of insects and small rodents, American Kestrel, has disappeared from many former haunts in the East and Midwest. Alarm bells were again sounded in Delaware, New York, Virginia, and in Massachusetts, where productivity plummeted in the Blue Hills Reservation and in the cranberry bogs of Plymouth County, two locations where long-term studies of the species are in place. Wayne Petersen writes: "This small falcon could be declining at a rate unequaled by practically any other bird species in New England." Other mousers of open habi-

tats scarcely occasioned comment: Barn Owls had dismal nesting in Virginia but nine broods each in Kentucky and South Dakota, while Northern Harriers were mentioned only a few times, with nesting detected in Virginia, New Mexico, and Texas, and summering birds in Tennessee, Kansas, and Missouri.

Henslow's Sparrow shows some plasticity in adapting to disturbed areas; but though its habitat requirements may be varied, it is by no means a generalist when it comes to nesting areas, and B.B.S. data indicate a decline of 96.4% since 1966. Fields in upstate New York that once had dozens are now mostly devoid of them, for reasons unknown; extensive searches found only two nesting areas around Rochester this summer. In Kentucky, the species was noted to be expanding, with a first summer record from McCracken County; several new locations were also discovered in Tennessee. Carefully monitored in their core range, Henslow's were found in 17 eastern Iowa counties (an increase), and seven counties each in Minnesota and Wisconsin, while Ohio's Wyandot County produced a count of 20 in one field—not in a strip-mined area, which have become their habitats of choice in that state and others nearby: a count of 45 came from Indiana strip mines on 8 July. Strip mining as a practice is generally of extreme concern to environmentalists, both for its destruction of biological communities and its disruption and degradation of waterways. Nevertheless, it is of interest to biologists working on enigmatic species such as Henslow's Sparrow that artificial environments can be created that will sustain populations, at least for a numbers of years. The same is true for "false prairies" of eastern North Carolina, where a population of as many as 500 Henslow's persists on the grounds of the Voice of America radio towers, a facility used to broadcast anti-Communist programming around the world. The crossroads of politics, resource extraction, habitat management, and ornithological study are manifold with this charismatic sparrow.

Grasshopper Sparrow, like Henslow's, is a species of concern because of its decline, though Grasshopper is more widespread and able to nest in a much wider variety of fields. Most reports in this journal do not involve counts from the core range in the prairies but rather outposts from the edges of the species' range. In Québec, where the status of the species has needed clarification, the Canadian Wildlife Service found 64 singing birds in June in the Pontiac region. To the east, in New England, 10 were reported on the Kennebunk Plains, a traditional site in Maine (also for Vesper Sparrow), and 15 each in Worcester County and Hampden County, Massachusetts. In Indiana and Illinois, which could be considered "core" range, the species was said to be "flourishing" this season—although the top count came not from a restored prairie but from a strip mine in Pike County, Indiana. The cooler-than-usual South Plains of Texas had a "bumper

year" and Colorado a "great year" for the species. In northwestern Pennsylvania, two were at the Erie airport, where unexpected, while near the southern edge of range in northern Mississippi, reports came from Tunica, Noxubee, Clay, and Monroe Counties. California, where the species is also declining, had significant reports in Placer, Ventura, and Sierra Counties.

For most areas east of the Mississippi River, Lark Sparrow is a species whose habitat requirements are obscure and whose history of distribution is equally puzzling. Generally, it was more numerous as a nester a century ago, before the regeneration of many of the eastern forests. Thus, as for other sparrows, conservationists question the value of preserving ephemeral islands of "artificial" habitat away from its prairie range. The reservation is well-taken, but there is also the question of what effect the widespread suppression of fire—which presumably afforded this and other species some open habitats in the East in pre-settlement times—has reduced available acreage for nesting in modern times. The only regions to consider this species in summer 2004 were Kentucky (15), Mississippi (one in Noxubee County), Alabama (6–8), Arkansas (8), North Carolina (one pair in sandhill habitat), Ohio (2), and Georgia (one, possibly a migrant). At the opposite corner of range, one singing on 4 July along the lower La Biche River in the Yukon provided the territory's third record.

Clay-colored Sparrow and Western Meadowlark had been expanding their breeding ranges at their eastern peripheries in the late twentieth century, but meadowlarks seem to have withdrawn in recent years, while Clay-colored, though irregular, continue to make gains, nesting in for the second year in a row in northeastern Illinois in Kane County (and possibly Cook County) and in Dickinson County, Iowa, that state's first documented nestings. Iowa also had reports from five other counties but no other nests reported. Pennsylvania atlasers and birders found five singing males in western and central portions of the state, including one in a strip-mine context; they also favor Christmas tree farms in the East. Clay-colored were noted to be common in a ten-year-old burn near Norman Wells, Northwest Territories, and unusually numerous in eastern Washington; one along Wilson Creek, California was a first in summer for the Mono Basin. Western Meadowlark, a declining species in many areas, has perhaps recovered a bit in Ohio, where reported in three counties, but continues to disappear in Ontario in the lush Rainy River district, where no habitat changes have been detected that might account for the decline. On the edges of range, singing (and calling!) Westerns were in St. Clair County, Missouri and Drew County, Arkansas. A camera trained on a Sprague's Pipit nest in North Dakota recorded a predator taking the young, a Western Meadowlark.

For many declining open-country species, reports are patchy, and we'll take the news anywhere we can get it. There were five broods of **Greater Prairie-Chicken** in Ringgold County, Iowa (where reintroduced)—the only mention of the species this season. Several double-digit counts of Northern Bobwhite in Indiana were heartening, but only three Wisconsin and 11 Michigan counties (as opposed to 20 last summer) recorded the species, which is now considered extirpated in Minnesota. Ferruginous Hawks were said to have their highest productivity at the edge of range in Manitoba since 1987. With the spring and summer rains, **Baird's Sparrows** moved back into many former haunts in central and eastern North Dakota; one reported in Iowa in June will be reviewed (there is no acceptable state record). In Minnesota, **Burrowing Owls** (state endangered) in Watonwan County departed after their burrow was excavated by a fox, but a dozen in an Archer County, Texas colony prospered. In Minnesota's Clay County, a pair of **Rock Wrens** produced young, a first breeding record for the state, and one sang at the summit of Mount Cain on Vancouver Island, from which there is only one previous nesting record. Still more remarkable was the Rock Wren that held court in Port-aux-Basques, Newfoundland, singing and bobbing through early July. Ghosts at the edge of former range, a pair of nesting **Bewick's Wrens** at Chickamauga Battlefield Park, Georgia provided one of few Appalachian records of this species (here formerly considered subspecies *altus*) in the past 15 years; another report from Tennessee awaits review.

Shrub-scrub and successional habitats

When confronted with how little we still know about how various bird species utilize successional and disturbed habitats, we should take a deep breath and accede how much we do understand and how far we have come. Michigan tallied 1341 singing male **Kirtland's Warblers** this season—the highest count ever made. This increase is owing, in large measure, to the careful scientific study of its use of young Jack Pine habitats and to the application of this study in the species' management. We should take this count as a point of guarded optimism for bird conservation generally, even though **Kirtland's Warbler** is by no means home-free: hurricanes blew through Florida during the peak of its migration to the Bahamas, where the storms also ravaged its wintering habitats. We are hopeful that next year's counts of the species will again be high. Also most heartening was the record-high tally of over 2000 pairs of **Black-capped Vireos** in the Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma, a count likewise bolstered by cowbird trapping and careful prescribed burns.

In the same Bird Conservation Region as **Kirtland's Warbler**, albeit in very different habitats, the declining **Golden-winged Warbler** remains a species of conservation concern, one

that is more of a puzzle as concerns its habitats and one that has the added disadvantage of a sibling species, **Blue-winged Warbler**, that threatens its genetic integrity. The current estimate of its population is 210,000, though this may seem high to birders who seek them in migration! In the East, nesting **Golden-wingeds** may soon be a memory. A few persist in the highlands of New Jersey (along power-line cuts) and in Addison County, Vermont; one nested in Ohio (the first successful state nesting in 11 years); and three new pairs were found during atlas work in Pennsylvania around Powdermill. One does wonder how much more we could discover with more focused effort: in southeastern Kentucky, a graduate student found 36 singing males in three counties, as well as seven active nests—the first found in the state.

In the Midwest, eastern **Bell's Vireo** reports were generally favorable, especially from the core of range in Ohio and Iowa, where 24 counties reported the species. One on territory in Graves County, Kentucky was at a new location, and a record 47 birds were noted in Sullivan County, Indiana, all in reclaimed strip mines. Eight counted in thickets in Prairie County, Arkansas was considered a good tally, as were counts of 15, 12, and 10 in central Nebraska counties. Even the surveys of *pusillus* **Bell's Vireos** in California were considered "encouraging": over 500 singing males were tallied in the Prado Basin, with outlying nesters and prospectors elsewhere. Though we received few reports on the southwestern *extimus* race, eastern **Willow Flycatcher** posted several increases: a nesting pair at Wheeler N.W.R. in Alabama furnished the state's first confirmed nesting, and another in Boone, Arkansas may have been nesting. Also at the southern edge of range, **Red Slough W.M.A.** in Oklahoma held 10 territories and at least two nests in July.

Coastal and interior wetlands

I. COLONIAL WATERBIRDS

We could do an entire issue on the ups and downs of terns, which are covered well and in detail, especially in the coastal regions' reports. Most of the tern news was good, especially after the rather poor nesting season of 2003, but it is important to bear in mind that terns' nesting success fluctuates year to year and that long-term trends are more meaningful than comparisons of a few years' data. Fortunately, monitoring of colonial waterbirds has come a long way in recent years, and most efforts are coordinated, so that our understanding of continental population dynamics is increasingly refined.

Royal Tern numbers in Florida were said to be the highest in over 120 years and included nearly 4000 pairs nesting in Tampa Bay. Large counts also came from the Chandeleur Islands off Louisiana (30,000 **Royal/Sandwich**), but numbers in Virginia's coast were said to be continuing a ten-year decline, possibly owing to disturbance by people and predators. **Caspian Tern** is little known as a nester to most of us.

The June census of the Chandeleur Islands off Louisiana turned up 585, but few others were reported from coastal areas away from the Pacific, where the species has, shamefully, become a scapegoat at the Columbia River mouth for taking "too many" salmon smolts. Three nests were found in Lake Champlain (New York and Vermont), and 1560 nests were on Little Galloo Island in Lake Ontario. In California, the Salton Sea had some 30–50 pairs, and the Monterey County's 450 adults raised 221 fledglings, over double the best count here.

Common Tern may require a name change in the future, if its continent-wide declines—estimated at 90% in recent decades—continue. At Kouchibouguac National Park in New Brunswick, the colony declined to 4335 pairs this season, a 46% drop from 2003. On Machias Seal Island, claimed by both Canada and the United States, researchers report almost complete nest failure and attribute this crash to a dearth of small baitfish (also credited for the anemic numbers of large tubenoses this summer: see the New England report). High lunar tides on 3 June and 2 July disrupted colonies in the Hudson-Delaware region, where productivity was said to be the lowest since 1976 at Barnegat Bay, New Jersey. Also in that state, the large ternery at Stone Harbor continues to be plagued by expanding **Laughing Gulls** (also partly a cause of Virginia's 74% drop in nesting **Common Terns**) and by feral cats, which are fed in the parking lot next to the colony. Thanks to careful predator removal programs, Massachusetts posted another increase in **Common Terns**—now up to 16,087 pairs—but managers observed that juveniles died by the hundreds in August, possibly from *Salmonella* poisoning. **Roseate Tern**, beleaguered by a recent oil spill off Massachusetts, appeared to hold its own there (declining 12%), and good news came from Long Island, New York, where 1700 pairs nested on Great Gull Island and 300 pairs colonized Cartwright Island, thanks to the canny use of decoys and site management techniques.

Least Terns received extensive (and mixed) comment from the West and from inland locations, where it is listed as state endangered in all locations. On the East Coast, the species declined in Delaware, where floods, dogs, and ORVs foiled all nestings, and New Jersey, where a house cat killed at least 20 (plus a **Piping Plover**). Both the Mississippi River and the Ohio River levels had no major floods, allowing for breeding on river islands by **Least Terns** at locations in Indiana (where productivity was nonetheless poor among 80 nests in Gibson County), but the lower Ohio River birds suffered from poor sites, and Kentucky birds nesting along the lower Tennessee River lost all 26 nests to a predator in July. On the other hand, Lee County, Florida and the Kentucky/Tennessee sites on the Mississippi River and elsewhere had good nesting success, the latter with almost 3400 nesting birds found. New Mexicans found an active colony at Brantley Lake (seven pairs) to add to their 11 pairs at Bitter Lake. In California, a few inland pairs produced young in Kings and Orange Counties,

staging birds reached a healthy 276 in Santa Clara County, and wandering singles were found at the Salton Sea and at Buckhorn Reservoir, a first Lassen County record. Oregon got its twelfth record of the species ever.

Most unexpected in the interior, **Black Skimmers** were detected as vagrants in Fulton County, Kentucky 22 July (state first) and Springfield, Illinois 23 July (state second); no tropical storm was involved, very unusual for inland appearances of this coastal species. Only central New Jersey reported good nesting success in this species, at Barnegat; Stone Harbor Point's colony of up to 800 suffered cat predation and flooding. As Least and Gull-billed Terns have done, skimmers have also begun nesting on flat rooftops, as in Melbourne, Florida this season; although strip malls are scarcely more appealing than strip mines as a substitute for natural habitat, this adaptation provides some hope for some of our colonial waterbirds: after all, humans are very good at building strip malls, and if sea levels continue to rise, some species will need alternatives to vanishing barrier islands. As Harry LeGrand reports from the Carolinas, however, spoil islands are no longer routinely built in many areas, and gravel roofs are no longer the standard.

Unlike some of their fellow coastal colonial nesters, **Laughing Gull** and **Brown Pelican** populations appear to be increasing on the whole, though their colonies also shift with time. Both also appear to be expanding northward, and this season saw a high count of 25 Laughings from the Bay of Fundy, where the species may soon nest. In Virginia and Maryland, banders ringed 2485 young Brown Pelicans, well above the seasonal record. The species is also increasing along the Texas coast, and inland observers are starting to see more, such as the single in Tarrant County 26 July; no one was prepared, however, for the flock of 35 that passed over Lake Belton in Bell County. So far, interior birds—such as the Brown Pelican in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin in mid-July or the one in Harlan County, Nebraska in late June—have not been banded, which makes mid-Atlantic provenance seem less likely, and it would seem that the Gulf of Mexico would be the most likely source.

The big pelican story was the unprecedented large and widespread influx of juvenile Brown Pelicans into the Southwest and up the West Coast this season. In California and the Great Basin, the birds arrived in May, earlier than elsewhere, and reached as far into the interior as Lake Mead, Nevada (28 birds!), Antelope Island, Utah (one), and California's Owens Valley and Lake Henshaw, in San Diego County. In New Mexico, one made it to Morgan Lake, but Arizona was utterly awash in pelicans beginning in mid-June, with singles flocks as large as 33 and 50 birds, and three dozen or more brought into rehabilitators. Gary Rosenberg and Mark Stevenson estimate that over 300 birds were present in Arizona; they note that these "invasions typically result from nesting success followed by food shortages in the Gulf of California. The absence of adults among grounded birds suggests that inexperience is also a factor." No pelicans were observed in the Southwest after late July, but in the coastal Pacific Northwest, flocks as large as 77 were seen in British Columbia by late June, and by late July, a new Oregon high count—of 8000 birds at Clatsop Spit—was made.

In a balanced ecosystem, raccoons are natural predators with a moderate impact on nesting birds. However, their use of human garbage enables them to reproduce in unnaturally high numbers, and they (and other mammals) have increased to levels that are now seriously dangerous for colonial waterbirds, which have few alternative nesting sites when forced to abandon traditional areas. Two large colonies in Tampa Bay, Florida—Audubon's Washburn Sanctuary and Tarpon Key N.W.R.—were abandoned because of raccoons this season. That's about 6000 pairs of herons and allies that may have failed to breed because of a few mammals. It is unknown whether the collapse of many ardeid colonies in states to the north—from Virginia to New York—can be attributed to predators, but some species' numbers have dropped incredibly rapidly. **Cattle Egret**, abundant in Atlantic heronries through much of the latter third of the twentieth century, is disappearing: the Delaware River's Pea Patch colony has lost 92% of its Cattle Egrets, New York Harbor

about 90%, and Virginia's coast has lost 89%. What on earth is happening to these birds? They are hardly scarce in the Gulf Coast states: estimates approaching 1.6 million for Texas are probably accurate, and Joe Grzybowski and Ross Silcock suggest the species is increasing in Nebraska. In context of overall local declines in colonial ardeids on eastern coasts (e.g., 89% at Pea Patch, 35% in Virginia), Cattle Egret's decline is less surprising, but it may be that coastal development and changes in agriculture are responsible for their particular drop. For most ardeids, surveys periods and methods are too irregular, when compared continentally, for clear inferences to be drawn from available data, but standardized surveys are soon to be coordinated for many species.

On the other hand, it would seem to be a good time to be a **Great Blue Heron**, a species noted to be expanding by all regions that reported it, particularly inland. New colonies were found in central North Carolina and in northern and western Virginia; more than 125 nests were found in Plymouth County, Massachusetts; and in Kentucky, a statewide survey documented some 5150 pairs—in a state that had none as recently as 30 years ago. **Double-crested Cormorant** is another piscivore whose numbers have been growing for some time, through most of its range. The Indiana lake-front had its first known nesting record of the species (41 nests!) this past June—and the state's first in over 50 years—and four new colonies were discovered over the summer in downstate New York. Two new colonies were found in the delta country of Mississippi, where known colonies doubled in size from 2003. Arizona's nesting population is likewise growing. This species has become the bad guy in several regions, by virtue of being *too* successful, particularly in the Northeast. In June, 6000 were "removed" from islands in Lake Ontario near Presqu'île Provincial Park, and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation destroys their nests and oils eggs on Little Galloo and other islands in Lake Ontario, so that habitat for other colonial waterbirds (e.g., Great Blue Herons) will not be destroyed by the cormorants' feces. Thousands more were slaughtered in Arkansas and Michigan.

II. PLOVERS

Closely tied to the fates of terns are those of **Piping Plover**, a declining species listed as federally endangered in the United States and on the SARA list in Canada. Interior Canada has essentially none left: the Lake of the Woods site in Ontario had none this year. Elsewhere in the Great Lakes region, Michigan's 55 pairs produced 93 young, but there was no nesting farther west in Minnesota or Wisconsin. One of this Great Lakes population, color-banded in 2000, turned up 9 July in Nassau County, Florida; be sure to keep watch for these banded birds and report observations. On the Atlantic coast, 490 nesting pairs in Massachusetts was the lowest since 1997, and Rhode Island had 50 pairs. The population on Long Island has doubled since 1985, thanks to careful management,



It was a summer of pelicans in the continent's interior. Juvenile Brown Pelicans from the Gulf of California irrupted en masse into Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, and southern California, while adult American White Pelicans wandered southward and westward after abandoning their largest nesting colony at Chase Lake, North Dakota. This adult Brown Pelican took up with local Whites at the Harlan County Reservoir in Nebraska (here 20 June 2004), furnishing a sixth state record. This crossing of pelicans' paths was typical of summer 2004, in which northern species were found well south of range, while southerly species blazed trails northward. Photograph by Stephen J. Dinsmore.

but in New Jersey, disturbance by people and predators reduced nesting pairs to 133, with production down to a too-low 0.62 fledged young per pair. Delaware's population has been reduced to seven pairs, all at Cape Henlopen State Park. On the Gulf Coast, two Pippings in Alabama represented a first June record for the state. In the West, a pair of Pippings nested at Prewitt Reservoir, the first Colorado nesting away from the Arkansas River Valley since 1949.

Nebraska's boom in Piping Plovers was nothing short of magnificent—over 300 birds and over 120 nests were located at Lake McConaughy, with at least six broods elsewhere in the state—and this abundance was also seen in the scarcer Snowy Plover, whose numbers rose to 24, with at least three nests statewide. In these areas, reservoir levels are already low, and agricultural needs have pushed them even lower. So while some species of waterbird have been reduced in number, the plovers have been moved in to exploit the exposed reservoir edges. This temporary phenomenon—which could quickly be ended by rising water levels and growth of shoreline vegetation—could also account for Snowy Plovers in other locations: a pair with three young in Modesto, California (second county nesting); 14 adults with three chicks at Pyramid Lake, Nevada (where rare breeders); and smashing counts of 20 on Pelican Island, Alabama 22 June, of 61+ adults (and 14 nests) on barrier islands off Mississippi, and of 255 birds at Bitter Lake N.W.R. in New Mexico 23 June. In Washington, this species is increasing, with 27 nests in Pacific County and six at Ocean Shores this season; Oregon expects up to 100 fledged young, also up from past years. With such a bounty of breeders, extralimital Snowy Plovers were not unexpected; singles turned up at Bowdoin N.W.R., Montana 11 June and in Stearns County, Minnesota 4 June, with three birds in Baylor County, Texas 18 July, the latter probably post-breeders but in an area where breeding is conceivable.

III. PISCIVOROUS RAPTORS

More good news. Ospreys returned to the Montréal area, where two active nests were found. In Vermont, 108 fledged young was even better than last year's 82, the previous high. Massachusetts's largest concentration, at Westport, saw 95 young fledged from 73 nests, the best productivity in three years. In the Midwest, Indiana's Department of Natural Resources released eight young Ospreys (the state has just eight known nests), in hopes of increasing the population, while 23 were released in Iowa (where all four of the state's nests failed). Missouri reported increasing numbers, a few were in new sites in Arkansas and Louisiana, and three nests were reported in Illinois. Only Virginia and Maryland reported reduced productivity, probably a result of the Chesapeake Bay's extreme hypoxia of the summer. In the West, Washington's numbers equaled 2003's, New Mexico had a record-high 17 nesting pairs, and California nesters were

found in new areas in Santa Cruz and Santa Clara Counties.

Bald Eagles are another success story of modern conservation, and their recovery continues essentially everywhere. They increased by 12% in New York to 84 pairs, with 111 young fledged and many new nest sites; New Jersey's 44 pairs produced 52 eaglets, and Delaware's 32 nests yielded 37 young. In the Midwest, Ohio also reached an all-time high, with 108 nests and 127 successfully fledged. An Indiana survey found 85 chicks in 44 nests, but survivorship was not known. Iowa had a record 175 nests. Of six Illinois nests, one was the first in the Chicago area in over 100 years. Out West, San Diego County had its first modern record of nesters at Lake Henshaw. If there was any truly bad news about Bald Eagles out there, it did not reach our desks.

IV. FRESHWATER MARSHLANDS AND PRAIRIE SLOUGHS

Though many species have yet to be seriously surveyed, there is guarded optimism about freshwater marsh birds in some regions, especially where restoration or mitigation projects are well underway and producing good results. The ponds maintained by Ducks Unlimited near Nicolet, Québec, for example, had up to 37 Least Bitterns in May, and tallies of 10 birds each came from Standifer Gap Marsh, Tennessee, Red Slough, Oklahoma, and Back Bay, Virginia; breeding was confirmed at Parker River N.W.R. in Massachusetts, where the species had been absent for some years. The Hudson-Delaware report also includes nestings in New York, Delaware, and New Jersey. The more remote, northerly distribution of American Bittern makes its status, especially in the Lower 48, less clear. One in Pensacola provided the first June record for northwestern Florida, and singles in Tennessee's Heritage Marsh, in Colorado's Delta County, and two Texas counties were thought to be potentially nesting birds. In Missouri, two nests were found in June at Squaw Creek N.W.R.

Like bitterns, rails are among the least known of the freshwater marshbirds, and standard sampling techniques and protocols for surveys are just now being established, so that monitoring efforts can begin to assess breeding populations in uniform ways. Little enough is known about most species (other than endangered taxa of Clapper Rail) that population estimates are not available for rails. To make matters more complicated, rails appear to be rather mobile as nesters, much as waterfowl are. Because biologists know scarcely more than birders about local populations, our work in reporting their numbers and nesting attempts is potentially very useful. The wet summer may have benefited rails, which were well reported in 2004, more so than 2003 (Brinkley 2004). Massachusetts, which has scarcely more than a dozen recorded nestings of King Rail, documented two nestings at Plum Island. Ohio, which places King on its endangered list, had four in Pickaway County, one in Lucas County, and a nesting pair with young in Franklin

County. Illinois had a pair with four young at Prairie Ridge W.M.A., Iowa had several at Clarence Cannon N.W.R., and Oklahoma had nesters at traditional locations, Hackberry Flat W.M.A. and Red Slough. Maryland reported one, and Virginia's Mason Neck N.W.R. had three, the only location away from their stronghold around False Cape. Many parts of former range are uninhabited: Minnesota, for instance, had none, and its last confirmed record is from 1992.

Common Moorhen numbers continue to hold steady in the Midwest but to decline in the East. Young were noted at six Illinois, five Indiana, one Minnesota, one Kentucky, one Delaware, one Maine, two Iowa (of seven counties with moorhens), and two Vermont locations. A few singles were in Tennessee, Minnesota, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Missouri, but no evidence of nesting was reported other than in upstate New York. In western Pennsylvania, a tally of 34 in two counties was very good, but the Philadelphia area has lost the species in recent years, and the highest count from their most reliable New Jersey site, Hackensack Meadows, was only eight. Some 51 were counted at Red Slough, Oklahoma. It is not clear why this large rail should be declining in what appear to be suitable sites, but environmental pollutants at Hackensack and Tinicum could be to blame.

Small rails receive even less mention in regional reports than larger species. Nesting of Sora in Northwest Territories, Iowa, Massachusetts, and Virginia (and possibly Maryland) and Virginia Rail in California, Iowa, Tennessee, and possibly northern Virginia were the only reports of those species. A Black Rail at the Munuscong W.M.A. in Michigan's Chippewa County on the Upper Peninsula 3-4 June provided only the third state record. A marsh with six Blacks in Greene County, Georgia on that state's Piedmont, two in Seeley, California, and three in Pasco County, Florida were at new locations. Yellow Rails were reported in Ontario (near Thunder Bay, Dryden, and Ottawa), in California's Siskiyou County, and on the Liard Highway in Northwest Territories, a new location. For the second year, none were found in the Rainy River area, a regular area for the species in Ontario, or in Modoc County, California.

Pied-billed Grebes, like several other freshwater marsh birds, are becoming increasingly scarce in the East but perhaps faring better in the Midwest, and there is a suggestion in the Hudson-Delaware regional report that Mute Swans are limiting their breeding marshes. There were two nestings in Delaware, three "possible" nestings on Long Island, four confirmed Maryland nestings, and scattered summering birds from Maryland to Georgia. Pied-billed were called "plentiful" in Illinois and Indiana, with at least five breeding records in Illinois and a peak count of 160 at Horseshoe Lake in Madison County, Illinois. A group of 40 in Abilene, Texas included many young of the year, the first nesting record for Callaghan County.

Black-necked Stilts are busting out all over, still. Away from southern Alberta, where 38 graced Lake Newell, and multiple sites in British Columbia, the Canadian records included one at Cherry Hill Beach, Nova Scotia 6–8 June and a pair at Jarvis, Ontario that attempted to nest in a cornfield in May and June; the nest failed but was the province's first. Farther south, middlewestern records continue to accrue: Wisconsin had four, Ohio had four, including a probable nesting pair, Indiana had a nesting pair, and Illinois had four reports, one of 11 birds. These numbers were minor compared to Fulton County, Kentucky's 67 stilts! Palmer-Ball and Sloan note that the species appears to be established as a breeder throughout the lower Mississippi River floodplain. In the West, wanderers were widespread, notably in New Mexico. Oregon's Willamette Valley again had nesters, and five juveniles (with 12 adults) confirmed the first county nesting at Millers Creek Reservoir, Texas.

American White Pelican became the buzz of the Internet this summer season, when it was reported that the world's largest colony—28,000 birds at Chase Lake in Stutsman County, North Dakota—was suddenly deserted early in the nesting season, with adults abandoning eggs and chicks and dispersing to parts unknown. Regions to the East awaited a major influx, but none was observed. Pelicans were in "normal" summer numbers just west and just east of the Mississippi River in the Midwest, the Gulf Coast states, and Tennessee/Kentucky, with just two in Québec, three or four in Ontario, and seven along the Atlantic Coast between Massachusetts and New Jersey. The dispersing pelicans apparently went south and west, where higher-than-normal numbers were seen as far as British Columbia (145–200 per site) and Nebraska (400). Numbers were normal elsewhere on the Pacific coast and Southwest, though 32 at El Vado Lake in New Mexico 19 June were "unexpected."

Grzybowski and Silcock tied the early appearances of pelicans to those of **Franklin's Gulls**, which turned up in mid-June in large numbers (e.g., 730) at Lake McConaughy and smaller numbers south to Willcox, Arizona; four in northern Idaho and one in central Texas during the same period may also have been failed breeders. Counts of 186 **Marbled Godwits** at Lake McConaughy 20 June and 51 at Brantley Lake, New Mexico two days later may also indicate widespread nesting failure, perhaps owing to the cool prairie summer. An impressive flock of 650 at American Falls Reservoir, Idaho 10 July could have been of failed breeders, post-breeders, or both. **Wilson's Phalarope**, found in similar habitats, was seen in higher-than-usual numbers early in the season, as in Arizona, where over 100 were counted 29 June at Willcox. Good news for this species came from coastal Washington and Oregon, where rare nestings were documented.

Sandhill Crane appearances out of range have become almost too numerous to merit a full accounting. (But what the heck.) This season saw singles in Sackville, NB;

Rogersvilles, NB; Round Hill, NS; Aspen, NS; near Charteris, PQ; Mount Solon, VA; Berks County, PA; Wyandot County, OH; Branchport, NY; Erie N.W.R., PA; Grafton, NH; Rochester, NH; Stonington, CT; and Hooper's Lane, NC. In Québec, groups of cranes that did not appear to breed were in Saint-André-de-Kamouraska (2 on 12 July), Île du Grand Calumet (3–5 through the season), and at Aylmer (5 on 29 July). Two pairs in the Belgrade Lakes region of Maine (the fifth year for that site) produced one "colt," and upstate New York's pair in Wayne County produced two, the second year for that site. Pennsylvanians found a new nest site in Crawford County, which produced two young. At least four family groups were seen in Illinois and Indiana, and at least five pairs were reported in Ohio. Iowa cranes increased to 16 pairs, and scattered singles were observed in western states, with few indications of extralimital breeding, though Vancouver Island had its first nestings in 63 years. **Whooping Cranes** had their best nesting season in modern history: 54 nests and 41 fledglings were recorded. Most unfortunately, two of this migratory flock would be shot on 6 November 2004 in Kansas; last year's killing of a Whooping Crane in northern Texas resulted in a \$2000 fine and six months' jail time. But the population, now totaling around 450, is higher than at any time in the past 100 years.

Finally, we rarely get word on waterfowl productivity in the summer report, as productivity is best measured over the fall and winter for most species, and many sea ducks' population dynamics are poorly understood. **Gadwall**, one of a few waterfowl known to be increasing in North America (others are Northern Shoveler and Green-winged Teal), nested at Hennepin Lake, Illinois (and was found at three other sites in the state). In the West, where also increasing, dozens of broods were found in western Washington and two even in western Oregon, where still rare. **Blue-winged Teal**, which shows complex population trends across its range, was noted breeding in Massachusetts, California (first for Napa County), Kentucky, western Washington (117 birds), and at four sites in Tennessee. A pair of **Common Mergansers** in Bureau County, Illinois in summer suggested nesting, and rare nesting was confirmed for Virginia/Maryland along the Potomac River, when a chick was observed 30 May and a hen with six young 8 June. Four family groups located on Piru Creek, Ventura County, California were the southernmost anywhere, though the species has nested in Chihuahua, Mexico.

V. SOUTHERN WATERBIRDS WANDERING

One predicted consequence of climate change is the northward shift in the breeding or post-breeding ranges of tropical or subtropical waterbirds. The most conspicuous candidate for this thus-far speculative connection is **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck**, which was reported as far north as Ayer's Cliff, Québec this season. Florida and Louisiana report continued

"explosive" growth of breeding birds and overall numbers, Texas birds are now nesting north to Grimes County, and the 34 reported in South Carolina were just the tip of the iceberg: 150 are now breeding in Colleton County on private land (Harrigal and Cely 2004). Other reports came from North Carolina (8), Oklahoma (8), and Mississippi (5), all certainly potential places for nesting, which has been confirmed as far north as Arkansas to the west. Other waterbirds found north of range were **Neotropic Cormorant** (one in Tennessee, 2 in Kansas, 2 in Oklahoma, many in northern/western Texas and New Mexico), **Roseate Spoonbill** (first Mississippi nesting, 19 in Georgia, 5 each in Oklahoma and South Carolina, 3 in Arizona, singles in New Mexico, Kansas, and North Carolina), **Purple Gallinule** (singles in Virginia and Utah), **Limpkin** (one in Georgia), **White Ibis** (singles in Nova Scotia and New Mexico, three in Tennessee, and 321 at Red Slough, Oklahoma), and **Reddish Egret** (15 in Georgia at one site). These patterns seem to strengthen each summer and fall, though the northern extent of wandering shows considerable interannual variation. In a note in the Colorado & Wyoming regional report, Chris Wood and Doug Faulker caution that Little Blue Herons are rare in the interior West and should be carefully separated in the field from juvenile Snowy Egrets with pale bills and legs. From Long Island and from Lake Barkley, Kentucky came word of probable **Little Blue Heron x Snowy Egret** hybrids—all the more reason to be cautious in identification of rare and extralimital birds.

Northward bound

For many bird species undergoing rapid range extensions, often including many extralimital wanderings, analysis in a habitat-specific framework can be misleading, especially for species well adapted to suburban and other heavily "converted" landscapes. **White-winged Dove** is a wonderful example. In Canada, Nova Scotia had its twenty-ninth record at Liscombe in July (and fourth for 2004!), Brighton, Ontario had a quick visitor 30 July, Québec's eleventh was at Saint-Augustin 19 June, and Vancouver Island, British Columbia had one 12 July. Five were in Kansas, two each in Iowa and Georgia, and singles in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. They are expanding breeding range on the Alabama coast and central Colorado, spreading northward more gradually New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Nevada, and appearing along the southern California coast and Channel Islands, west of typical range.

Kites, too, are simply inevitable components of the summer seasons' reports. Although no expansion of nesting range was documented, with the exception of potentially Attala County, Mississippi, **Swallow-tailed Kites** appeared over Iowa City 3–5 June (the state's third modern record), at Copenhagen, Ontario 5 June, and at Block Island, Rhode Island 18–20 July. Monitoring efforts in the Pearl River basin of

Mississippi and Louisiana produced 47 nests and an aerial count of 151 Swallow-taileds 22 June; they peaked at Florida's Lake Apopka a month later, with 475 birds. (To the person who finds the first nest north of 36° N: we'll buy dinner.) Mississippi Kites showed similar trends at the northern edges of range. Iowa, Colorado, and Massachusetts had multiple wandering birds, Michigan and Wisconsin had singles, while Texans and Missourians located nests in new locations. **Black Vulture** also continues to appear north of known breeding range in the summer, with records from Miscou Island, New Brunswick 17 July, Saint-Thècle, Québec 6 July, and two birds at Dublin, New Hampshire 4 July; no northerly nests were reported.

Minor movements

Eurasian Collared-Doves posted fewer headlines than White-winged Doves, but many western and central regions reported new areas colonized, and **Common Ground-Doves** received modest but encouraging comment, at least in the West. Surprising to many will be reports of probable nesting of **Ruddy Ground-Dove** in Guadeloupe Canyon, New Mexico, the western Phoenix Valley of Arizona, and Calipatria, California. **Cave Swallows** continued modest range gains, nesting in a culvert near Justiceburg in Garza County, Texas and among Cliffs in eastern New Orleans, not far from the state's second **Gray Kingbird** nest. The only appearances of **Shiny Cowbird** were in southern and northwestern Florida, coastal North Carolina and Georgia, and in Nova Scotia at Canso, for Canada's second record! Swainson's Warbler stole the show in Cape May County, New Jersey and Johnson County, Illinois, with other reports of note from the Alabama mountains and eastern Mississippi. A pair of Prothonotary Warblers at Lyme, Connecticut might have nested, but no direct evidence was found.

Raptor (re)occupations

As has been happening in Europe for several decades, North American raptors, no longer shot for sport, food, or bounty, are beginning to reoccupy former range, even moving into areas now suburban and urban. **Cooper's Hawk** numbers are on the increase at many hawk-watches in the United States, and reports from nesting areas are proliferating as well. In urban areas, nests were found near downtown Wilmington, Delaware and near Buffalo, New York, while Block Island, Rhode Island had a nest, one of many found in New England suburban sites. **Summering birds** in the Imperial Valley of California, in southern Louisiana and Mississippi, and in the Pineywoods of Texas were exceptional. **Merlins** can now be found in many southern Canadian and northern U. S. cities, to the astoundment of many a southerner. Eight Merlin nests were found in the urban Montréal-Laval area of Québec, and more were seen around Québec City over the summer. A pair also nested in downtown Fargo, North Dakota. With this apparent extension of range, Merlins are now showing up in

June and July away from nesting areas: four on the Massachusetts and one on the South Carolina coast in late July, one in Algona, Iowa in mid-July, one at Lake Chautauqua, Illinois in mid-June, and one in late June in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama were all noteworthy.

Final notes

It is remarkable how well, and how quickly, birders are able to detect changing trends in open-country species such as White-winged Dove and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher—or larger birds, such as Cooper's Hawks—but remarkable, too, how little our collective field time tells us about trends in most smaller forest-nesting species. In reading through the summer's regional reports, we found remarks on the potential decline of Swainson's Thrush in the Northeast, the steady but spotty counts of Cerulean Warbler in Appalachia, the widespread nestings of Red Crossbill(s) in North Carolina, West Virginia, and Texas (and probably Georgia and Kentucky), and nesting or potentially nesting Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers in Tennessee, Virginia, and Colorado. Olive-sided Flycatchers in Ohio and western Texas hinted at nesting, and atlassers in Pennsylvania confirmed three pairs of Yellow-bellied Flycatchers in Wyoming County, likely the southernmost breeders anywhere. For a sense of trends in more widespread species, we still turn to B.B.S. data (<www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs>) and increasingly to eBird (<www.ebird.org>), a resource that covers all seasons and that is growing in popularity and usefulness. To help our regional editors better interpret the many bird lists they receive, especially those from woodland habitats, we humbly ask contributors to archive the results of birding outings with eBird. It takes very little time, and it would add much to your regional editors' understanding of the commoner species in particular. Indeed, a habitat we scarcely mention above—western shrublands—contain the largest proportion of species listed by Partners In Flight, including many sparrows, thrashers, grouse, and neglected species like Verdin, thought to have declined by 85.6%. Perhaps 90% of western shrublands are under the stewardship of the Bureau of Land Management. We hear very little about nesting species in these habitats.

As we celebrate the solid increases in so many bird populations, we should keep mindful of the storm clouds for others. While the worst of the West Nile virus epidemic may have passed in the East (though American Crow numbers remain low), the disease continues to ravage bird populations in the West, particularly corvids. There is special concern in central California for the endemic Yellow-billed Magpie. As reported in the Southern Pacific Coast report, the University of California/Davis Center for Vectorborne Diseases found in July that half of the state's dead birds tested positive for the virus. Another report of avian disease came from the Hudson Bay coast of Québec, where an avian cholera outbreak at Ivujivik killed most of the Common Eiders. There is renewed concern for eastern Peregrine Falcons,

which experienced fairly good breeding season in New York, Ohio, and Tennessee, but only moderate success in Iowa and Virginia, where thinned egg shells were noted in a few cases. Tests on eggshells from Virginia pairs in 2001 and 2002 found high levels polybrominated diphenyl ethers—chemical compounds (used as a flame retardants) that have also been found in human milk and Great Lakes fish. Tests will again be run on cracked and thin Peregrine eggshells from failed 2004 nestings.

While the forests of our continent are indeed burning, and global climate change looms over even the most well-conceived bird conservation strategies, we must answer our title's question in the negative: Rome is not yet burning. Many conservationists will be actively putting out fires, figuratively, for decades to come, but we have no cause to give up hope that the preservation of this continent's birdlife is within our reach.

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