

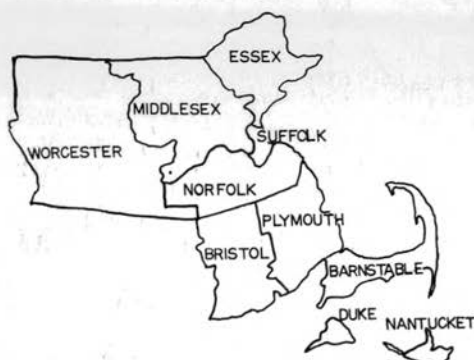
# BIRD OBSERVER

OF EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS



VOL.5 NO.2  
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MUDHEN



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Bird Observer of Eastern Massachusetts has been declared a non-profit tax exempt organization by the Internal Revenue Service. Any gifts to Bird Observer will be greatly appreciated and will be tax deductible to the full extent of the law.



## EDITOR'S PAGE

### TIDE CHART

Here is the tide table for Newburyport Harbor, accurate to the nearest quarter hour on Eastern Standard Time, add one hour for Daylight Savings Time. For best shorebird viewing be at the harbor approximately four hours before or after high tide.

	<u>High Tide</u>	<u>High Tide</u>
Sat. April 23	2:00 a.m.	2:30 p.m.
Sun. April 24	3:00 a.m.	3:30 p.m.
Sat. April 30	8:00 a.m.	8:30 p.m.
Sun. May 1	9:00 a.m.	9:30 p.m.
Sat. May 7	2:00 a.m.	2:30 p.m.
Sun. May 8	2:30 a.m.	3:15 p.m.
Sat. May 14	8:30 a.m.	9:00 p.m.
Sun. May 15	9:30 a.m.	10:00 p.m.
Sat. May 21	1:00 a.m.	1:30 p.m.
Sun. May 22	1:45 a.m.	2:00 p.m.
Sat. May 28	6:30 a.m.	7:00 p.m.
Sun. May 29	7:30 a.m.	8:00 p.m.
Mon. May 30	8:30 a.m.	9:00 p.m.

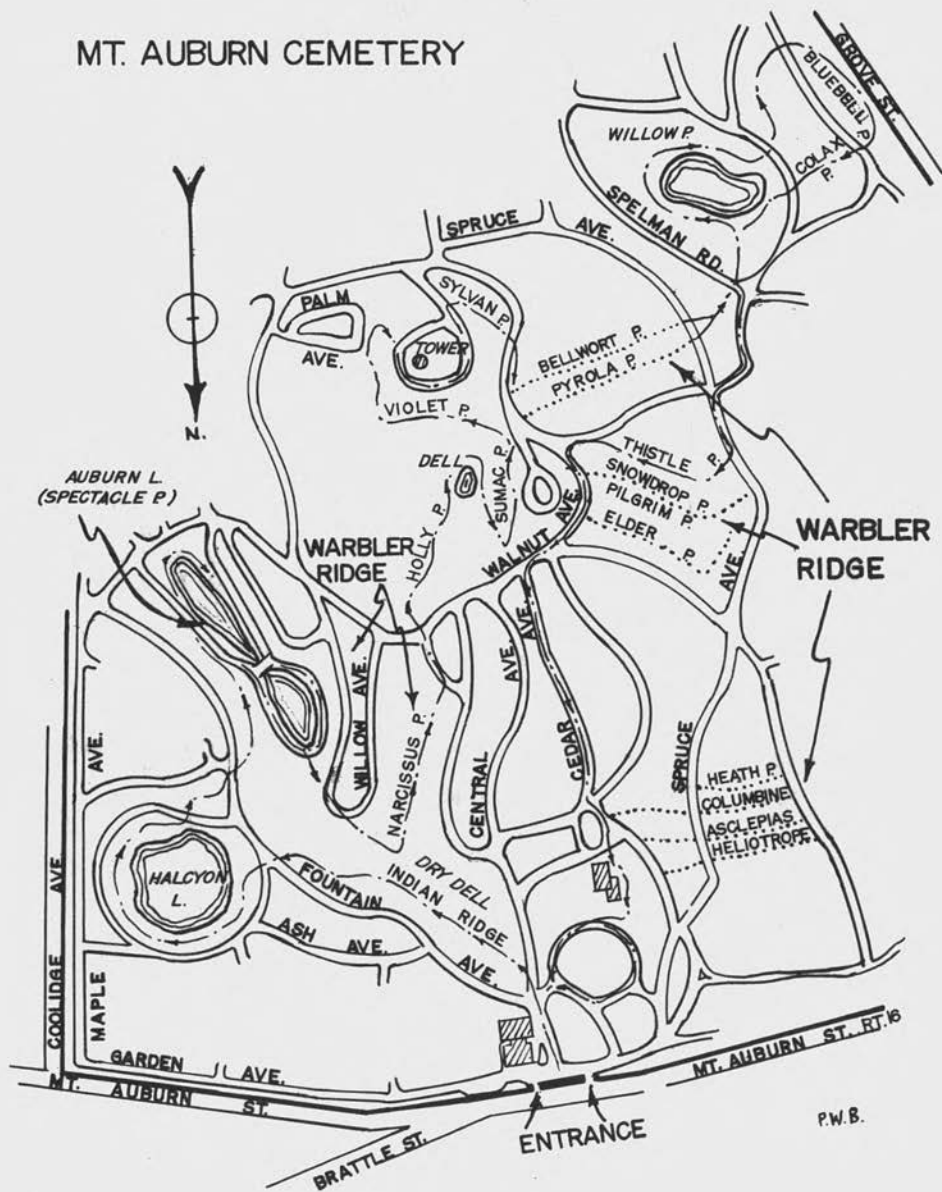
### THE GREATER BOSTON "CHRISTMAS" COUNT

On Saturday, June 18, 1977, a breeding bird census will take place. The area covered, the rules and the format will be the same as the annual Greater Boston Christmas Bird Count. A similar count, the Captree "Christmas" Count on Long Island, New York, has uncovered many breeding birds, including Acadian Flycatcher since its inception in 1972. This new, and possibly yearly, count will also attempt to uncover breeding birds. Anyone interested in participating in this worthwhile project is urged to contact Robert H. Stymeist, 46 Beaver Street, Waltham, Massachusetts 02154, or call 891-7313.

### PELAGIC TRIP

The Brookline Bird Club will sponsor a pelagic trip from Harwichport to Pollock Rip on Sunday, June 5, 1977. For reservations, send a non-refundable deposit of \$7.00 to Mr. Herman D'Entremont, P.O. Box 207, Newton Center, Massachusetts 02154.

# MT. AUBURN CEMETERY



## MT. AUBURN CEMETERY

by R. H. Stymeist, Cambridge, and J. T. Leverich, Boston

For almost its entire existence, Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge has been a highly favored haunt of birders. Of the more than seven hundred avian species known to appear on our continent north of Mexico, at least two hundred and thirteen have been seen in the Cemetery's 164 acres, or in the air above them. Mt. Auburn lies within the Atlantic Flyway, one of the great migration routes that cross North America between the tropics and the Arctic. It is not surprising, therefore, that many species native to eastern North America pause to rest there during their semi-annual passage through the sprawling metropolitan area of Boston.

The Cemetery's total list contains many birds not normally found in this region at any time of the year---"accidentals." The Hermit Warbler discovered May 16, 1973, was a first record east of the Rockies. A Golden-crowned Sparrow, another Western straggler, was found in late April of 1966; it remained into the first week of May. Other casual visitors include Chuck-will's-widow, Acadian Flycatcher, Boreal Chickadee, Prothonotary, Cerulean, Yellow-throated and Kentucky Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, and Blue Grosbeak. Often the appearance of these birds can be traced to storms that have blown them off course. Occasionally non-passerine species can be seen flying over the Cemetery (cormorants, loons, herons and hawks); these very rarely land. Sightings include the now famous Least Bittern of the spring of 1976 that sat for five hours in a dogwood tree and was photographed. American Bitterns have been seen on two occasions. Golden Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Water Pipit, Long-billed Marsh Wren, Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Lapland Longspur, and Snow Bunting round out the list of "freaks." In the spring of 1974, a Mockingbird resident in the Dry Dell suddenly began imitating a Virginia Rail, suggesting that that species had also visited the Cemetery, but to our knowledge no rails have ever been sighted here.

Mount Auburn Cemetery was created in 1831 when Dr. Jacob Bigelow of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society convinced George W. Brimmer, owner of the land, to sell his property to the Society to be converted into a beautifully planted cemetery. The planting of rare trees and shrubs has long been a policy at Mount Auburn. Preeminent among the trees are the massive European Beeches. A Copper Beech that was planted by Edward VII during his visit in 1860 still flourishes at the main gate. The oaks are equal in size to the beeches, but they are much older. All of the trees throughout the cemetery have been labelled by Cemetery authorities, with the assistance of specialists from the Arnold Arboretum.

### Timetable of migration

In the paragraphs below are listed, by week, various migratory species that may be reasonably expected in Mt. Auburn. No attempt has been made to catalog the dates of first arrival for these species. Rather, the chronology is meant to suggest the period that represents the optimal time for sighting each species. Peak abundance for many of these birds occurs in the third week of May, and dwindling numbers may often be found

right up until the end of that month. In spite of this, we have preferred to list a species earlier in the chronology, if this is feasible. Remember that as May progresses, the foliage likewise advances. The earlier in the season that a species can be found, the more comfortable and relaxed the viewing is likely to be.

#### Third week of April:

Green Heron, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Golden-crowned Kinglet (rare after this date), Solitary Vireo, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Palm Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Purple Finch, Rufous-sided Towhee, Savannah Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow.

#### Fourth week of April:

Black-crowned Night Heron, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Spotted Sandpiper, Whip-poor-will, House Wren, Brown Thrasher, Black-and-white Warbler.

#### First week of May:

Solitary Sandpiper, Chimney Swift, Eastern Kingbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, swallows, Gray Catbird, Wood Thrush, Veery, Warbling Vireo, Northern Parula, Nashville Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Orchard Oriole, Northern Oriole, White-crowned Sparrow.

#### Second week of May:

Ruby-throated Hummingbird, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Worm-eating Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler (rare), Blue-winged Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Ovenbird, Hooded Warbler (rare), Wilson's Warbler, American Redstart, Summer Tanager (rare), Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak (rare), Indigo Bunting.

#### Third week of May:

Yellow-billed Cuckoo (rare), Black-billed Cuckoo, Common Nighthawk, Swainson's Thrush, Gray-cheeked Thrush (rare), Cedar Waxwing, Red-eyed Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Tennessee Warbler, Cerulean Warbler (rare), Yellow-breasted Chat (rare), Canada Warbler, Bobolink.

#### Fourth week of May:

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Eastern Wood Pewee, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Bay-breasted Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Mourning Warbler.

#### First week of June:

Acadian Flycatcher (rare).

### Effects of the weather

The Cemetery is densest with birds on the morning after a night in which the winds have shifted into the southwest. Southerly winds during the night can also produce excellent birds; westerly winds less often do so. If a cold front passes through this area in the early morning hours, truly spectacular concentrations often appear. The principle is valid even if the morning after the passage of the front is a very rainy one. Stormy days, on the other hand, with both wind and rain are almost always poor for birding.

Watch the weather maps in the daily paper or on television. Even when the weather conditions in New England seem to be optimal, there may be no migrants. Such is often the case when there is a stationary or slowly-moving cold front in the mid-Atlantic states. Migrants will back up behind this front as if it were a dam. If you suspect this to be the case, watch that front very carefully. As it recedes northward through New England, there should be a pronounced wave of migrants passing with it. Unfortunately, when this particular weather pattern occurs, the birds seem loathe to linger in our vicinity. They are truly here today and gone tomorrow.

### Time of day

The ornithological character of Mt. Auburn Cemetery changes dramatically from hour to hour. To appreciate the full diversity of its migratory offerings, one must arrive very early. In the hour between 5 and 6 a.m., Common Nighthawks may be seen flying low over the ponds. The thrushes that are present will be singing. For example, one morning last May, over 40 Swainson's Thrushes were heard before 6 o'clock, but only 3 of these birds could be located after 6:30 a.m. (Veerys and Wood Thrushes also sing at this early hour, but they continue in song later into the day. Hermit Thrushes, even when present in numbers, rarely sing here in the morning. Gray-cheeked Thrushes will sing, but they are very rare in the Cemetery.) Other species to be heard at dawn that may be missed later in the day include Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Evening Grosbeak and Lincoln's Sparrow. This last case is quite interesting, for Lincoln's Sparrow is supposed to migrate silently. On heavy migration days in mid-May, however, one or more individuals sometimes sing for about 15 minutes beginning about 5:15 a.m.

Indian Ridge and Halcyon Lake (Eddy Pond, to birders) are among the earliest spots to attract numbers of migrants. These spots should be active beginning about 6:15 a.m. Spectacle Pond, the Dry Dell, and the ridge between them are next to come alive. By 6:45 a.m. most of the warblers and vireos that are present should be singing. Remember that these birds are insectivores. They will go where the insects are most active, and in the chill of our early May mornings, active insects will be in sunny places. This principle should help you plan your route through the Cemetery: sunny spots like Willow Pond and the east side of the tower are best early in the morning; shadier spots like the wet Dell generally are not very productive before 8 o'clock.

After 9:30 a.m., activity tapers off, and it is principally the permanent residents on territory that continue to sing. The early morning birds (basically, the nocturnal migrants) are still there, all day long, but

residents on territory that continue to sing. The early morning birds (basically, the nocturnal migrants) are still there, all day long, but they spend most of the midday sleeping, preparing for the next night's journey.

From noon until dusk, the Dell is an excellent spot to visit, for birds come there to feed and bathe. So also are the evergreens along Coolidge Hill Road, where many migrants sleep the day away. Spishing will often bring them out into the open.

Activity increases again from 4 to 6:30 p.m. as the migrants feed once more before resuming their nightly journey. Around the tower and to the west down Central Avenue seem to be especially favored spots at this time of day.

Remember also the following points:

1. Certain species (flycatchers, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird and swallows) migrate by day. If southwest winds continue through the day, they may arrive in mid-morning or even during the afternoon. Conversely, if these species are present in the early morning and the wind is from the southwest, they will often disappear before evening.
2. Certain rarities in the Cemetery seem disposed to "make a show" of themselves, remaining active and vocal all day long. This has been particularly true of Hooded, Kentucky, Mourning and Worm-eating Warblers. Should one of these species be mentioned on a current Voice of Audubon recording, by all means go to Mt. Auburn. Your chances of seeing the bird on the day it is found are excellent; your chances of seeing it the next morning are poor.
3. The two ridges named "Warbler Ridge" on our accompanying map are good in some years, very poor in other. Be sure to check both ridges at an appropriate time of day several times per season. In poor years, they do not require a daily check.

#### Birding by Sound

In eastern Massachusetts, Mt. Auburn Cemetery is surely one of the finest locales in which to learn to bird by sound. Several factors contribute to its pre-eminence. First of all, the Cemetery boasts a nearly complete sample each year of migratory passerines. You will have to go elsewhere for certain flycatchers and sparrows, but most of the other families are very well represented in Mt. Auburn. The Cemetery is, of course, a very split-level place, replete with eskers (ridges) and hills. If one stands on these elevations, one will often be at eye level with various tree-top species. Clearly, it is highly desirable to be able to see a bird singing at the same time that you are learning his song. Best of all, Mt. Auburn is a very well-birded spot with a high density of knowledgeable birders. If you have a question about a bird song while you are there, your chances are excellent that a fellow birder prepared to answer your question will be nearby.

The following ideas are offered in the hopes that they will help the reader



to begin to bird by song.

1. Take stock of what you already know. Few of us would fail to recognize the songs of the American Robin and the Song Sparrow, or the calls of the Blue Jay and the American Crow. Make a list of those species with vocalizations that are already familiar to you. Then try to describe each of these songs and calls in words, to yourself or to a friend. All languages are notoriously weak in their vocabulary for describing sounds. You will thus find it necessary to develop your own capacity for characterizing bird songs. You may even find it necessary to invent your own words. But start trying to improve your verbal characterizations immediately. A song that you can describe in words is much easier to remember.

2. Learn to tune out the familiar. In the beginning you will find that you are using bird song primarily in a negative fashion, to decide which singing birds are NOT worthy of further attention. Don't be discouraged if this is your approach. The true experts of auditory recognition rely heavily on this same principle: that bird is most worthy of investigation whose song is unfamiliar.

In your first few weeks of birding by sound, the familiar songs will dominate your hearing. This you should try to change. The more capable birders gradually acquire the ability to block out familiar songs and to "hear" only the unusual, a sort of subjective selective deafness. Although one acquires this skill very slowly, it is a skill that one can practice. On a lazy afternoon, go to the Dell, look the birds over, and identify as many as possible. Then sit quietly and try to absorb the total sound picture. As you rest there, begin to tune out certain of the better-known songs from your hearing. (It may help to try to empty your mind of conventional thought.) Remember that the ideal is to avoid "hearing" a certain song. If you find yourself hearing the song, identifying the singer, and then dismissing the bird from your thoughts, you are indeed birding by song, but you are not practicing selective deafness. Try again.

3. Limit each year's learning task. Obviously, one hopes that over the years, one's repertoire of identifiable songs will increase. However, in the beginning, be very careful not to let yourself be overwhelmed. The project of learning to bird by song will take several years of effort. Limit your learning task. Each year select a certain number of species whose songs you intend to learn that year. Choose the more abundant species before you work on the rarer ones. You may find it useful to own the two-disc set of records that parallels the Peterson field guide, A Field Guide to the Bird Songs of Eastern and Central North America, published by Houghton Mifflin. Play the songs of those species that you wish to learn, and try to learn to recognize the songs before these species arrive on migration. If you can learn the basic patterns ahead of time, you will experience less difficulty when called upon to identify variations of the basic patterns as sung by the real-life birds.

In the field, resist the temptation to identify every species by sound. Instead, concentrate on recognizing every individual bird of those species whose songs you have decided to learn this year.

4. Listen to all aspects of a bird's song. Far too many beginners concen-

trate on the melody alone, as if it were the tune of a popular ballad. This is too limited an approach. Here are some of the characteristics that you should listen to:

(1) General melodic line. Does the song end with a rising pitch, or with a falling intonation? Chestnut-sided and Yellow Warblers have songs that many find quite similar. However, the melodic line ends with a rise in pitch in the Yellow Warbler and (usually) with a drop in pitch for the other species. Is the melody clear and made up of separate notes, or does the bird slide from one pitch to another (slur)? How quickly do the changes in pitch occur? Too fast to be recognized accurately (a sparrow's trill)? Recognizable but too fast to count (a warble)?

(2) Melodic pattern. For birdsongs that are basically tuneful, concentrate on the structure and pattern of the individual phrases. Two species, for example, sing songs consisting of short phrases that are doubled (sung twice in succession). These are the Brown Thrasher (with quite an extensive repertoire of phrases) and the Indigo Bunting (with a rigidly repeated canary-like pattern). The characteristics just given are in fact diagnostic for these two species.

All thrushes have songs that have a rich sound somewhat flute-like in quality. Only the Wood Thrush sings with short phrases, typically reversing the direction of the phrase each time---note-down-up, note-up-down, note-down-up, etc. The song of Swainson's Thrush rises up the scale, that of the Gray-cheeked Thrush tumbles down it. This is more a question of general melodic line. To recognize the Veery, however, look to the structural pattern. The Veery's song consists of 3-5 runs down the scale, each run almost identical to the preceding run except for starting on a lower pitch.

It is even helpful to think about the fixity of the melodic pattern. Both the Indigo Bunting and the Purple Finch sing the same song over and over again with practically no variation. Northern Orioles, American Robins and (especially) Mockingbirds tend to introduce some variation in the melodic pattern with each reutterance.

(3) Subjective effect. Some species (for example, the Purple Finch) have a truly melodious song. Others (Chipping Sparrow) sing songs that are true monotonies, a mere repetition of identical sounds. In between are the many other songs that you may find monotonous without their being true monotonies. Obviously this is a very private matter, and each individual birder's reactions will be different. It is helpful, however, to think through your own reaction to each bird's song. Do you find the song boring? glorious? grating? or even more basically, do you find it hard-to-hear?

(4) Timbre, or quality of the sound. A Scarlet Tanager has a robin-like song with a decidedly burry sound ("hoarseness"). Certain warblers (Golden-winged, Blue-winged, Northern Parula, Cerulean, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue) have a very buzzy song. Certain thrushes (Veery, Hermit Thrush, Swainson's, Gray-cheeked) have an eerie rich sound that results from quite audible overtones that we hear as separate notes. In the case of the Veery, if you will listen quite closely, it should be

possible to hear three separate notes being sung simultaneously, a whole chord at once. Certain songs have a sort of "breathless" quality, as if the bird were whistling without properly pursing his lips. This is true of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak and the Warbling Vireo. Other songs are quite the opposite, so reminiscent of human whistling that we say that the bird himself is whistling his song (Northern Oriole, Cardinal).

(5) Timing and rests. Be sure to listen for the silences between the phrases as well as the song itself. These pauses are highly characteristic of the species, as is the frequency of repetition of the sung phrases. How long must one wait for the bird to continue to the next phrase? How many songs are produced per minute? The Robbins field guide, Birds of North America includes data on this topic and can be used as a reference.

(6) Dynamics. Is the song loud and clear (Brown Thrasher, Song Sparrow, Northern Oriole), soft and tentative (Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Solitary Vireo, and even more so, Warbling Vireo), or markedly variable in volume. The song of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet is frightening loud for so small a bird, at least when he is near. Yet at a distance only the loud triplets from near the end of the song carry well.

(7) Instability. Loud songs are almost always well-enunciated, but some of the softer songs have in addition a certain tentativeness that almost seems to suggest that the bird is only a beginning amateur, who has yet to learn his tune properly. An Orange-crowned Warbler has a monotonous trill somewhat like that of the Chipping Sparrow, but when this bird sings, he seems unable to hold the pitch securely. Pitch instability is, of course, one of the prime characteristics of that abundant early migrant, the Yellow-rumped Warbler.

The above list of song qualities is neither standard nor complete. In learning to bird by sight, one relies on a field guide that gives for each species a composite of visual clues that together serve to clinch an identification. So likewise, in learning to bird by song, it is important to amass for each species a list of several characteristics (melody, phrasing, pattern, timbre, timing, dynamics, etc.) which together will serve to identify the singer.

5. Save the hardest problems for later. Just as there are difficult problems of sight identification for the visual birder, so also there are certain groups of bird songs that will almost certainly cause difficulties for the beginner in auditory identification. We would list the following as definite problem areas. (In each group, those species that are underlined are relatively easy to distinguish.)

- a. Purple Finch, House Finch, Orchard Oriole.
- b. Chipping Sparrow, Worm-eating Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Pine Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco.
- c. Black-and-white Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler.
- d. American Robin, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Solitary, Red-eyed, Philadelphia and Yellow-throated Vireos.

Good listening!

## FURTHER AIDS TO HAWK IDENTIFICATION

by Paul M. Roberts, Somerville

When studying hawks, the birder is often frustrated by having too brief a glimpse of the bird, or by observing conditions that are so poor that it is difficult is not impossible to make a correct identification. With this problem in mind, the North American Hawk Migration Association organized a panel of leading authorities on hawks to discuss some of the "Sticky Problems of Hawk Identification." Participants included Dean Amadon, co-author with Leslie Brown of the authoritative Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World; Richard Fyfe of the Canadian Wildlife Service; Donald S. Heintzelman, author of Autumn Hawk Migrations; and David Evans, Franklin Haas, and Fritz Scheider, a bander and two observers, respectively. The panel did not seek to duplicate information already published in most field guides; rather, they hoped to supplement this information with little-known field characteristics and comparisons.

Readers of this article, therefore, should review the relevant portions of one or more of the following publications: Dean Amadon and Leslie Brown, Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World; W. Earl Godfrey, The Birds of Canada; Donald S. Heintzelman, Autumn Hawk Flights; Mary Louise Grossman and John Hamlet, Birds of Prey of the World; Roger Tory Peterson, A Field Guide to the Birds and A Field Guide to Western Birds; Richard H. Pough, Audubon Water Bird Guide; and Chandler S. Robbins, et al., Birds of North America. For identification of eastern raptors, the article by Frances Elkins, "Notes on Hawks" in Bird Observer (July-August, 1974) is invaluable.

The following material surveys the migratory species usually seen in eastern and central North America, above the Deep South. Except where indicated, it is taken from the published report of the panel session as reprinted in Birding (November-December, 1976).

The panelists agreed that there are two basic rules of hawk identification. The most important one is to admit that you cannot identify every hawk. As Heintzelman stated, "It is not always possible to identify positively every bird that is passing, and you're simply deceiving yourself if you think you can." Several members of the panel recalled a comment by Robert Hughes of the Sierra Club to the effect that the more experienced the observer, the greater the number of unidentified hawks reported. The second rule of identification is always to apply the question of probability, that is, "In this place, at this time of year, at this time of day, what is that bird likely to be?"

THE VULTURES: There should be little difficulty in differentiating between the Turkey and Black Vultures. A Turkey Vulture, with its wings in the characteristic dihedral, tends to rock when soaring. Although Zone-tailed and Marsh Hawks also rock in flight, they do so primarily in crosswinds; a Turkey Vulture will rock in up-drafts as well.

The Black Vulture, easily discernible at close range, can also be recognized at some distance by the absence of contrast between the wing linings and flight feathers, a mark that is very obvious in the Turkey Vulture.

Furthermore, when Black Vultures occur in numbers, they tend to fly side-by-side.

THE ACCIPITERS: The accipiters clearly present the most difficult problems, not only because of their secretive habits, but also because of their numerous similarities as well. If the standard criteria are not sufficient to differentiate between a Goshawk and a Cooper's Hawk, the former can be recognized by its heft and by the white fluff feathers of the crissum (under tail-coverts).

A male gos and a female Cooper's can present special problems that are due to overlapping size and the tendency towards a rounded tail in the male gos. To differentiate between the two, in addition to looking for the white crissum, estimate the depth of the wing from the leading edge to the trailing edge (at the body) and compare it to the length of the tail. The Goshawk tends to have a tail slightly less than 1 1/2 times the depth of the wing. The Cooper's tail tends to be 1 1/2 times the wing depth or slightly longer. In flight, the Goshawk tends to fly straight through any rough winds, at times with such a powerful regular stroke that in Canada it is often mistaken for a Gyrfalcon. The Cooper's Hawk tends to employ what Scheider calls a "cuckoo tail," shifting the tail back and forth in extensive ruddering.

A Sharp-shinned Hawk is best told from the larger Cooper's Hawk by the proportionately smaller head, shorter tail, and by the absence of the Cooper's white lower flanks. The head of a Cooper's Hawk sticks out much farther in advance of the wings than does that of the Sharp-shinned. On the wing, the Cooper's flight is much more sustained than that of the sharpie, which tends to kite about. There was some disagreement regarding the value of tail shape as a criterion in field identification of the accipiters. Heintzelman believes that a Cooper's Hawk has an extremely rounded tail, while the sharpie's can be "essentially square, slightly rounded, or slightly notched." Evans does not think that the shape of the tail is a reliable characteristic. He asserts that the male Goshawk often possesses a rounded tail, causing confusion with female Cooper's Hawks, and female Sharp-shinned's tails are never notched, sometimes square, but usually rounded.

THE BUTEOS: The habits of the buteos generally make it easier to observe and identify them. Nevertheless, they can be confusing because there is no single consistently reliable identifying characteristic for any buteo. In the east, we commonly rely on the red belly band to identify the Red-tailed Hawk, but that band is occasionally absent on eastern redtails. In the west, where one finds many dark-phase birds, the band criterion is meaningless. The red tail is not a wholly reliable characteristic either: some melanistic Red-tailed Hawks have no red in the plumage at all. Moreover, Harlan's Hawk (Buteo jamaicensis harlani), now regarded as a subspecies of the redtail (Buteo jamaicensis), usually has no red in the tail. (Some individuals of this subspecies do have red in the tail, presumably because of interbreeding with other races of the Red-tailed Hawk.)

A dark-phase Swainson's Hawk might also be confused with a dark-phase Red-tailed Hawk, but the Swainson's Hawk will show flight feathers darker than the wing lining. The dark-phase redtail will generally have flight

feathers lighter than the wing linings, although the contrast is never as much as in the light-phase bird. When seen from a great distance, the Red-tailed Hawk might be identified by its very light wrists, which create something of a headlight effect. (This should not be confused with the wing windows of the Red-shouldered Hawk.)

One final note on the melanistic Red-tailed Hawk: Evans notes that he has banded three melanistic Red-tailed Hawks that possessed golden hackles on the back of their heads, exactly like those of the Golden Eagle.

The Red-shouldered Hawk, which appears to be making a comeback in the Northeast, is often identified on the basis of its "wing-windows." This characteristic, though common to the species, is not truly distinctive. Heintzelman notes that almost any hawk, especially a Red-tailed Hawk in molt, can appear to have such windows. Paul De Benedictus believes that the Red-shouldered's windows are unique in that they are crescent-shaped whereas other hawks have circular to rectangular windows. However, he cautions that the Red-shouldered's windows can be obscured during heavy primary molt.

To distinguish better the Red-shouldered from the Red-tailed Hawk, carefully compare the wing depth at the body with the length of the tail. The wing of the Red-tailed Hawk appears to be as deep as the tail is long (measured from the trailing edge of the wing). The Red-shouldered Hawk possesses a tail longer than the depth of the wing. Finally, the flight of a Red-shouldered Hawk often resembles that of an accipiter---flapping, sailing, and then flapping again.

The Broad-winged Hawk should present little difficulty. Viewed from above, it has a clean, evenly brown back. Adult redtails and redshoulders have variegated backs. Viewed in flight from below, the Broad-winged Hawk has distinctively light-colored wings contrasting with dark wing tips. When viewed head-on in flight, its light cere tends to create a single headlight effect. The immature, which may be more easily confused with other buteos, can be identified by a terminal tail band that is broader in this species than in the others.

The Swainson's Hawk, rarely seen in eastern Massachusetts, is almost immediately recognizable in the East because it soars with a marked dihedral. Both light and dark phases possess a white or pale area under the chin, and the immature tends to have a light leading edge on the wing.

The Rough-legged Hawk is perhaps the most difficult buteo to identify in Massachusetts. I have witnessed heated debates over whether a bird was a Rough-legged or a Red-tailed Hawk, and observers often report Rough-legged Hawks in the most unlikely seasons. Many birders seem to consider any large hovering buteo to be a roughleg, but redtails, Swainson's and Ferruginous Hawks are all known to hover at times. Only the Rough-legged and Ferruginous do so regularly, however.

There are three main color phases in the Rough-legged Hawk, including what Haas calls a "true light phase" (not depicted in any field guide). In this phase, the wing linings are mottled, lighter than in the dark phase, and darker than in the "normal light phase." The "true light phase" bird also possesses a white belly band and a very narrow, mottled terminal tail

band. Research by Tom Cade indicates that the color phases actually form a continuum. Fyfe, in field research in Arctic Canada, has found that most nesting Rough-legged Hawks are close to the "true light phase." It is the immature bird that is generally considered to be the "normal light phase."

Cade's research also indicates that it is possible to sex North American Rough-legged Hawks, although the system is not applicable to European specimens. Adult males are light on the breast and tend to possess multiple tail bands. The immature bird has a much darker terminal portion of the tail, a half or more of which might be dark, accompanied by a faint second sub-terminal tail band. The adult female has a prominent tail band without any suffusion of brown near it. In the light phase, the female has a less solid belly band or bib, which tends instead to be patchy. The immature light phase bird has a solid brown belly and lower abdomen.

The Ferruginous Hawk, with circular windows on the top of its wings and a very pale tail is easily identified. However, contrary to some sources (such as Pough), this bird has been known to hover. Where it occurs with redtails and Swainson's Hawks, it is advisable to check the angle of the wing in any soaring buteo. Of these three buteos, the Red-tailed Hawk holds its wings the flattest; the Swainson's has a marked dihedral; and the Ferruginous lies between the two extremes.

THE EAGLES: The Bald Eagle is easy to differentiate from the Golden Eagle by its much larger head, which sticks out in front as much as the tail does in back. By contrast, the Golden Eagle's tail is approximately three times as long as its head. The Bald Eagle's wings are also much longer and more slender. When gliding, the Bald Eagle holds its wings flat or curved gently downwards, while the Golden Eagle holds its wings in a dihedral, arching up in moustache-like fashion.

The dihedral also separates the Golden Eagle from the dark phase Rough-legged Hawk. The Golden Eagle's wings are flat from the body to the wrist, the dihedral being between the wrists and the wing-tips. The dihedral of the Rough-legged Hawk is the reverse, between the body and the wrist, with the wings flat from the wrist to the tip.

THE MARSH HAWK (HARRIER): Heintzelman finds that many observers confuse the Marsh Hawk with a falcon, especially with the Peregrine. Personally, this does not seem unlikely. On Monomoy, I have seen Peregrines patrolling the marshes, gliding and tilting exactly like a Marsh Hawk, almost as if in conscious imitation of the latter. Humans are not the only observers to experience difficulty in differentiating between a Marsh Hawk and a Peregrine. In the autumn of 1976, I noticed that the mere appearance of a Marsh Hawk over the Stage Island Pool at Plum Island would raise all the ducks and shorebirds. These birds had been conditioned by a Peregrine that had been frequenting the region for approximately one month, and apparently they did not quickly differentiate between the falcon and the harrier.

When seen in migration, the Marsh Hawk can be identified at a distance by its jerky flight. It snaps its wings.

Maurice Broun, commenting on the Marsh Hawks seen at Hawk Mountain, thought that there were three distinct color-coordinated migratory movements in the fall. The immature birds, tending to be orangish-brown, move in late August and in September. They are followed by the brown females, which predominate during October. The males come later in the season, almost exclusively throughout November. Similar patterns occurred in Minnesota.

THE OSPREY: The panelists thought that the Osprey did not present any significant identification problems.

THE FALCONS: The Gyrfalcon should have special significance for eastern Massachusetts birders, for at least two and perhaps as many as four individual gyrs were sighted in the eastern part of the state this winter. White-phase birds were observed in Newburyport-Rowley and in Boston-Cambridge, while one or possibly two dark-phase gyrs were reported on the Cape. (See Bird Observer, September-October 1976, and Birder's Kit, December Field Notes.) The white-phase Gyrfalcon should provide no problem, except perhaps for an initial confusion with a Snowy Owl, but the dark-phase gyr is often mistaken for a Peregrine. Fyfe reports that in Canada many observers automatically identify any large blue-backed falcon as a Peregrine, but subsequent examination has shown some to be dark-phase gyrs, which can have a blue back and a very black head, quite similar to the Peregrine's. The Gyrfalcon can be distinguished by its size, its heavier wingbeat, and by a more substantial (broader) tail. The gyr can pose another problem, however. As was the case in Boston, when the Gyrfalcon soars it can splay its wingtips, giving the wings a definitely buteonine appearance. Based on personal observations at Plum Island, this holds true for soaring Peregrines as well, although their wings are not as thick as the gyr's.

The Prairie Falcon should present no problems in the field, although some members of the panel thought that the black patches under the wings extend much farther onto the wing than most field guides indicate. Fyfe notes that one can age Prairies by their tails. Adults tend to have rusty-colored tails, while immatures' tails are a barred sandy brown.

The commonly described characteristics of the Peregrine were considered sufficient by the panel, except that some members thought that there could be difficulty in differentiating between immature Peregrines and Prairies. The immature Peregrine, with a much darker, heavier head pattern, lacks the Prairie's underwing patches.

Similarly, the Merlin provides few problems. It is particularly easy to identify in flight by its habit of holding its wings lower than its body while maintaining a steady wingbeat.

The Kestrel provides a greater challenge. It is my experience that at a distance it is possible to confuse a Kestrel with a Peregrine. Their shape is similar, but the base of the Kestrel's wing is narrower than the Merlin's or the Peregrine's. The Kestrel also shows some body between the trailing edge of the wing and the tail; Merlins and Peregrines do not. Furthermore, the Kestrel possesses a series of translucent dots on the trailing edge of the wing. These are especially noticeable in the male. The bird's light buoyant flight is also distinctive. Although it is



commonly considered to be the only falcon that hovers, observers are cautioned that the Prairie Falcon is known to hover on occasion.

UNIDENTIFIEDS: Despite the many contributions of the panelists, you should still encounter a number of these. Don't call a hawk unless you are positive of its identification. Rather, when you recognize that you are dealing with a difficult bird, try to take note of every characteristic that the conditions permit you to observe. When possible, write them down for future reference. If other birders are in the area, ask if they saw the bird, what they thought it to be, and why. If no such reports are available, carefully analyze your data. What family, subfamily or genus was it or could it have been? What factors encouraged you to identify it? What was seen or not seen that caused you to eliminate other possibilities? It is frustrating to see any hawk that you cannot identify, but by keeping thorough notes on the unidentifieds, not only will you learn better what to look for the next time, you will increase your appreciation of these spectacular creatures as well.

If you would like to expand your knowledge of hawks beyond reading the literature cited above, the Massachusetts Audubon Society occasionally offers courses on the state's hawks and owls. You are also invited to participate in the New England Hawk Watch, held on one weekend during spring migration and on four weekends during the fall. Such field work with other observers, some of whom may be more experienced, is often instructive as well as enjoyable. The Fall 1977 Hawk Watch will be preceded by an evening session on hawk identification, the precise date and location to be announced later.

#### LONG-EARED OWL VOCALIZATIONS

The following is an excerpt from an article entitled "Observations of Nesting Long-eared Owls," in the Colorado Field Ornithologist, No. 28, Fall 1976, regarding vocal responses to human interlopers near the nest:

"When young were in the nest, an adult would deliver a peculiar harsh squeal at a rate of six to ten per minute. When no young bird was evident, the call was a sharp double bark, 'bek-bek,' about eight times per minute. The first kind of call was uttered in flight and from an exposed perch, while the second was given from a perch. Bill-snapping was the most common used threat, and this kind of activity continued until the young were completely fledged. The only vocalization the young ever gave was a loud, plaintive whistle with a rising inflection. This call was made when the young were fledged; it lasted about a full second, was infrequently uttered, and sounded like a Broad-winged Hawk call."

#### BRIELMAN'S SWAMP

The State Division of Fisheries and Wildlife has purchased 120 acres of Brielman's Swamp in Pittsfield. The swamp is one of the favorite birding stops in western Massachusetts, and is the breeding ground for gallinules, rails, snipes, teals and other species. An outstanding area for migrants, this is a pleasant stop-over when you're out at Mount Greylock.

## SUMMARY FOR JANUARY, 1977

This was the twelfth coldest January in 107 years of official record, with the temperature averaging 23.3°F, 5.9° below normal, with a low of 3° on the 18th. No January thaw occurred, the temperature climbed above 40° on only two occasions and then only briefly. Low temperatures were often accompanied by strong winds, which caused bitterly cold windchill conditions. Rainfall totalled 4.41", with 1.71" on the 10th being the heaviest single fall. Snow accumulation totalled 23.2", 11.2" more than average and the most for the month of January since 1966. On the 7th, 13.8" fell during a NE gale for the second greatest 24-hour accumulation on record. This was the first January since 1948 with measurable snow cover all month. Total snow accumulation for this winter now stands at 41.4", double the past average and nearly equal to the whole season's normal. Most unusual was a thunderstorm Jan. 28 bringing heavy rain and high winds to Massachusetts.

### LOONS THROUGH CORMORANTS

On Jan. 1, a bird identified as an immature Arctic Loon in basic plumage was studied near Wood's Hole from aboard the Nantucket ferry (DJA,RWS#). During January, a slight influx of Red-necked Grebes was apparent along the coast from Cape Ann to Manomet, the higher counts being 26 at Brant Rock Jan. 2 (WRP), 17 at Manomet Jan. 10 (WRP), and 17 at Rockport Jan. 10 (JWB). A spectacular count of 300+ Northern Fulmars was made from shore at 1st Encounter Beach in Eastham following a NE gale Jan. 8 (CAG,BN), while maxima on Georges Bank were 1200 in the Northeast Channel Jan. 24th and 3000 further to the southwest Jan. 26 (KP for MBO). Of these and the Eastham birds, the vast majority (90%+) were in the light phase, in contrast to the high percentage of dark-phased individuals recorded earlier in the fall in Massachusetts waters, lending support to the theory suggested in the October summary that Fulmars present at this season are comprised of the more southerly breeding Eastern Atlantic population (nominate glacialis), in which the light phase predominates in a similar ratio, while the early fall influx involves the western Atlantic form. Collecting, therefore, may prove invaluable to determine the true picture. An extraordinary late Sooty Shearwater was carefully studied in "the Gulf of Maine" Jan. 27 (KP for MBO) representing one of the very few mid-winter records for the species in New England. Two Double-crested Cormorants persisted on Nantucket until at least the 2nd (RRV,CSS), following a comparatively high number of sightings in December.

### HERONS

A Snowy Egret at Buzzard's Bay Jan. 5 (N.Wheelock) was almost certainly the same individual present there on the CBC (Dec. 18th), and a total of 38 Black-crowned Night Herons remained through January, all on the southeastern coastal plain. Two American Bitterns lingered at Eastham until Jan. 15 and at least one at the same location until the 29th (WRP).

## WATERFOWL

A "Richardson's" Canada Goose appeared in a mixed flock of feral and wild birds at Town Cove, Orleans Jan. 26, where it remained into February (M.Holland & v.o.). This form (Branta canadensis hutchinsii) may be an early derivative of the same ancestral stock as the pale Atlantic birds (nominate canadensis), being very small (close to the size of a Mallard), light in coloration with a pale breast, a short stubby bill and with the white of the cheeks usually continuous across the chin, and seldom even a hint of a white collar at the base of the neck. Griscom and Snyder state "Due to the complete change in our concepts of the subspecific variations of the Canada Goose, the identity of the subspecies involved in numerous records from 1836 on of small Canada Geese is uncertain." There is but one specimen from the state, from Bridgewater, October 8th, 1910 (William Brewster).

Numbers of wintering waterfowl typically confined to freshwater were substantially depleted by the freeze-up in mid-December, although 18 individual Gadwall survived the first period of cold weather, two of which were found as far north as Newburyport Jan. 2nd (H.D'E.). Pintail totalled 35 throughout the state, and a single Blue-winged Teal survived the entire month in Sandwich (REP), where that species has regularly lingered into January over the last three years. Three adult male European Wigeon were noted on the Nantucket CBC Jan. 2nd (DJA,RWS), and another was present in Buzzard's Bay Jan. 16th (D.Briggs). The species most adversely affected by the harsh weather was Redhead which vanished from most mainland localities by early January and on Nantucket, where they normally reach concentrations of several hundred at this season, the CBC total was a meager 77. However, two adult drakes were seen on the ocean at Plum Island Jan 23rd (RRV). Two Barrow's Goldeneyes were present throughout the month at Newburyport (v.o.) and one in Chatham Jan. 16th-29th (WWB). Harlequin Ducks returned to their traditional haunts at Magnolia and East Orleans where flocks of 7 and 3 respectively were recorded intermittently throughout the month (v.o.). Of five King Eiders reported, one female at Nantucket Jan. 1st was unusual for that locality (DJA,RWS). Unlike Harlequin Duck, King Eider is decidedly scarcer on the coastal plain than on the mainland. Several observers were startled on a crossing of Nantucket Sound Jan. 1st by an apparently pure albino scoter, probably a White-winged, which was seen sitting on the water and then flopping away from the ferry near Cross Rip Shoal (MK,RSH,RWS#).

## RAPTORS

Goshawks continue to increase locally, as 16 were recorded this month from widely scattered localities, cf. 0,11,6,7 for the last four Januaries. By comparison, three Cooper's Hawks were reported, one immature at Eastham throughout the month, an adult at Nantucket Jan. 2 (TL) and an adult at Concord on the same day (CBC). Three Red-shouldered Hawks were evidently wintering in Bridgewater (GRF,WRP), and a single bird was seen in Andover Jan. 9 (HWF). Rough-legged Hawks numbered 29 this January (cf. 0,16,11,7 since 1973) indicating a significant influx this winter even considering the possibility of duplication of reports, which is hopefully at a minimum. The white phased Gyrfalcon discovered in December at the Plum Island marshes

continued there throughout the month, though was only observed sporadically by duck hunters and the refuge personnel. Despite the abundant difficulties confronting compilers of separating the legitimate winter Merlins from the misidentified ones, enough reports continue to emanate from the southeastern coastal plain (Nantucket in particular) to strongly suggest their regular occurrence there, at least into early January. Five individuals were competently identified on the Nantucket CBC Jan. 2 (EFA,RRV) and one adult was found in Eastham Jan. 25 (WRP). An immature Bald Eagle was observed feeding on the ice off 1st Encounter Beach, Eastham on the 14th (PAB,FB).

#### BOBWHITE THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

Four to five Bobwhite were recorded from Lancaster, a first for that area in recent years (HM). A Sandhill Crane was discovered in a Bridgewater cornfield Jan. 20 (Robert & Nadine Timberlake), where it remained until the 22nd to be carefully studied and photographed in color by numerous observers. Ample brown feather edging in the wing coverts suggested a hatching-year bird. A Clapper Rail at Eastham Jan. 15 (WRP) was unique for the state, although 7 Virginia Rails were noted throughout the month, one as far north as Ipswich. A Common Gallinule lingered at Nantucket until at least the 2nd (DJA,RWS) despite the harsh conditions. A single Killdeer was seen in Plymouth Jan. 1 (GAW), while a second individual persisted in Bridgewater until the 14th, where it obtained food at a pig farm (MK). Three American Woodcock were recorded on the Nantucket CBC Jan. 2 (MJL,CSS), and three were present in Wellfleet the same day (BN,CAG). Common Snipe totalled 22 for January.

#### SKUA THROUGH ALCIDS

Two skuas (sp?) were observed on Georges Bank Jan. 30 (KP for MBO). Due to the recent specific separation of Catharacta skua skua and C. s. mccormickii into C. skua and C. mccormickii (or Northern Skua and South Polar Skua) combined with the uncertainty regarding specific field identification of the two forms, all such reports shall be listed as skua (sp?), unless convincingly identified as either species. It seems likely that most skuas encountered locally, particularly in June - Sept. are actually South Polar Skuas, which is supported by recent specimens as well as re-examination of extant specimens in collections. The Northern Skua, which breeds in the vicinity of Britain and Iceland is actually a scarce bird. Glaucous Gulls totalled 11 at coastal localities, one inland at Natick on the 2nd (EWT) and 3 on Georges Bank Jan. 25 (KP for MBO). Iceland Gulls at Newburyport built up to 60+ Jan. 23 (RRV), of which 2nd-winter birds predominated by 75%, and the maximum count from Cape Ann was 30+ Jan. 16 (JN,JWB). Further south, 9 were recorded on the Nantucket CBC (RRV), and on Georges Bank, a total of 17 were counted between the 21st-31st (KP for MBO). Black-headed Gulls occurred in lower than normal numbers and never congregated at their traditional locales at Newburyport and Boston Harbors. Two separate individuals were seen in Wellfleet Jan. 22; an adult on the ocean side (WWB), and an immature in the bay (N.Mazzarese). For the second consecutive winter, a flock of 1500-2500 Bonaparte's Gulls fed in a tidal rip at Siasconset, Nantucket,

where the species has never previously been recorded so abundantly (EFA,RRV#). The flock contained at least 3 Little Gulls, 2 immatures and one adult (EFA,MJL,RRV), a species which first occurred there in February, 1976. Almost invariably driven inshore by easterly storms, Black-legged Kittiwakes were noted in numbers from land on the 7th, when 2382 were counted passing Rockport (AWN,AGS), on the 8th when 2000 were estimated in Cape Cod Bay from Eastham (BN,CAG), and on the 16th when 500 were estimated off Provincetown (RRV,MJL).

Exceedingly large numbers of alcids, in particular Thick-billed Murres, continued to be reported throughout the month from numerous maritime vantage points. A change from the situation in December, when virtually all of the non-oiled alcids reported were Thick-billed Murres, was evident in that substantial numbers of Razorbills were noted as well. The highest counts were made following major storms from the east and northeast on the 8th and 15th-16th. On the 8th at 1st Encounter Beach in Eastham 300 Razorbills, 1500 Thick-billed Murres, 6+ Dovekies and 8 Common Puffins were recorded (BN,CAG), on the 15th at Orleans 500 Razorbills and only 2 Thick-billed Murres (WRP), and the next day at Race Point, Provincetown, were 800 Razorbills, 2 Common Murres (1 not oiled), 4000 Thick-billed Murres and 1200 unidentified alcids (RRV,MJL). At least 9 oiled Common Murres washed ashore on the outer Cape and Nantucket after presumably acquiring the oil on the Nantucket Shoals (v.o.), and in addition, apparently un-oiled individuals were seen at Rockport on the 6th and 13th (MHM). In addition to the aforementioned Dovekies, one was seen at Rockport on the 2nd (RHS,LT), one at Ipswich on the 9th (JN), and three at Rockport on the 16th (JN,JWB). Black Guillemots remained throughout the month in the vicinity of Provincetown Harbor (BN). Black Guillemots have been reported more and more frequently from the South Shore, the outer Cape and Nantucket in the last five years.

#### OWLS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Only three Snowy Owls were reported during the month; two in the Plum Island region throughout the month (v.o.) and one at Gloucester Jan. 19 (F.Steadman). Most likely the result of the heavy snow accumulations which concealed their food supply, numerous owls typical of woodland habitats were found in urban areas. Two or three separate Barred Owls roosted in deciduous trees around the Harvard and M.I.T. campuses in Cambridge, Jan. 2-25 (v.o.), and single Long-eared Owls were present briefly in Cambridge (E.Johnson) and Everett (F.Hoenig) on the 3rd. Additional Long-eared Owls were seen on Nantucket Jan. 2 (RRV,MJL), at Wellfleet throughout the month (WWB) and in a suburban section of Hingham from the 15th on (Thatcher;RPE#). At least seven individual Saw-whet Owls occurred in urban localities scattered throughout the state, and two were heard calling repeatedly on Nantucket, in the same forest in which they have bred in recent years, on the 2nd (TL,RSH,RRV#). Most exciting to those fortunate enough to see it was the appearance of a Great Gray Owl in Andover on Jan. 5. During its brief two day visit, it was observed perching in low deciduous growth bordering a field, and was clearly and identifiably photographed (JRK,WCD,RAF,RRV). At very rare intervals, so-called "flights" of these birds are driven southward and eastward to New England, probably due to inaccessibility

of food within their normal range. The only flights of any proportion known in ornithological history occurred in the winters of 1842-43 (when one bird was taken as far south as Stratford, CT), and in 1890-91. During the latter flight, ornithologist William Brewster noted that "throughout eastern Maine, these owls were killed in such numbers that a single taxidermist received no less than 27 specimens." This great flight just barely extended to eastern and central Massachusetts, with specimens taken in Townsend, Groton and Winchendon. Single specimens were also taken in various other non-flight years here in Massachusetts; a total of 25 before the turn of the century. Few Great Grays have appeared in Massachusetts this century, eight records being separated by decades, the most recent being the infamous Gill bird discovered by Vose and Dwelley on 1/22/73 which remained there through mid-March, 1973. A female Red-bellied Woodpecker spent the entire month at a feeder in Adamsville (CW), a female was reported from Natick on the 1st (Biggart); the bird previously reported from Eastern Pt., Gloucester remained until at least the 27th, and a fourth was found in Barnstable on the 30th (CAG). Three Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers somehow managed to survive well into January, although none north of Boston; one in Scituate on the 1st (MFL,BAL), one at Wellfleet on the 12th (WWB) and the third at Sandwich from the 19th-31st (RFP).

#### FLYCATCHERS THROUGH WRENS

An Eastern Phoebe in Bridgewater on the 10th was unique in the state (LR). A roost of over 1500 Common Crows was discovered on Bellview Hill, West Roxbury and 1537 were reported on the Concord CBC. Note the accompanying table of passerine totals for the Concord CBC which was on Jan. 2 this year, from which it can be seen that Blue Jays and Chickadees have recovered from a low in 1975. The information is really too limited to infer anything about the status of Tufted Titmouse, while Red-breasted Nuthatch has remained constant over the last three years. Carolina Wrens, experiencing peak populations in their centers of abundance, were recorded north to Concord and Littleton on the CBC, in Lexington on the 7th (PNF) and in Ipswich on the 16th (H.Cole). Two Long-billed Marsh Wrens on Nantucket Jan. 2 (SZ,CJ) were the only ones reported.

	1973	1974	1975	1976
Blue Jay	2082	1443	1162	2054
B.C.Chickadee	2053	1994	1757	2149
Tufted Titmouse	251	409	288	502
Red-breasted Nut.	32	13	12	12
Mockingbird	64	77	139	171
Am. Robin	168	46	80	229
Cardinal	140	127	195	260
Eve. Grosbeak	148	209	524	496
White-thr. Sparrow	324	117	177	831

Above is a table of Concord CBC totals since 1973.

### MIMIDS THROUGH WARBLERS

From the Concord CBC data, it is evident that Mockingbirds continue to increase markedly in that area, and that a saturation level has not been reached, and probably will not be reached as the continued clearing of land goes on in that area. Robin numbers dwindled this month following an exceedingly strong fall migration and subsequent high number of birds lingering into December, although Concord's CBC total of 229 was still significantly very much higher than the totals for previous years. The Concord and Nantucket CBC's listed 5 and 10 Hermit Thrushes, respectively; 9 others were noted throughout the state. Most unusual was a flock of 10 Eastern Bluebirds on Nantucket, Jan. 2 where the species does not nest (TL,JS). Although winter Bluebirds are quite regular on Cape Cod, they are scarce on Nantucket, particularly in recent years. In addition, 5 Bluebirds were reported from Bedford (L.Brooks). Following an unusually strong fall migration, 6 Water Pipits were recorded on Nantucket Jan. 2 (RRV,SZ,CJ), and 2-4 were present at a cow farm in Bridgewater Jan. 16-31 (WRP#). Two Bohemian Waxwings were found feeding on Viburnum berries in Littleton on the Concord CBC Jan. 2, where they remained until the 8th when the berries had been consumed, and a single bird appeared in Lexington on the 25th (Diane Miller). Cedar Waxwings, in contrast, were decidedly absent throughout the state, the largest flock being one of 35+ at Hanover Jan. 3 (GRF). Northern Shrikes numbered 10 in January, (cf. 13,7,7,9) for the last four years, indicating a close to normal flight. A Loggerhead Shrike was meticulously described at GMNWR on the Concord CBC Jan. 2 (JFK,PSM). Single Orange-crowned Warblers occurred on Cape Cod at E. Orleans Jan. 2 and at Chatham Jan. 5 (CAG,BN), and along with Yellow-rumped, constituted the only warbler species reported in January.

### BLACKBIRDS THROUGH FRINGILLIDS

The larger flocks of apparently wintering Rusty Blackbirds were 16 on Nantucket Jan. 2 (RRV), 13 in Concord on the same day (CBC), 18 at S. Peabody the 18th-27th (RSH) and 22 in Barnstable Jan. 16 (REP). A flock of 500 Common Grackles present throughout the month in Orleans was unusually large especially considering the nature of the winter's weather (BN). The Rose-breasted Grosbeak discovered at a feeder in Hudson succumbed to the weather on Jan. 5 and is now a specimen at MAS (Sharon Ford). January Dickcissels numbered 6; in Scituate Jan. 1 (LB), on Nantucket Jan. 2 (CSS), in Gloucester Jan. 6 (S.Howard), in Bridgewater Jan. 16 (RAF), in Chatham the same day (CAG) and in Provincetown Jan. 29 (RRV). January Dickcissels have numbered 4,3,3,2 since 1974. A total of 120 Purple Finches on the Concord CBC was significantly higher than recent years; they have totalled 101,33,41,88 since 1974. House Finches continue to spread westward with a few now in Groton (J.Clancy) and 2-6 in Lancaster (HM). The winter finch population was very low with only one report of Common Redpoll, from Carlisle (KJH). Pine Siskins totalled a scant 9 on the Concord CBC (cf. 1,127,4,375 since 1974). A White-winged Crossbill in Wellfleet Jan. 2 (CAG,BN) was unique. Rufous-sided Towhees numbered a significantly high 28 (cf. 8,41,6,7 since 1974).

A single "Ipswich" Savannah Sparrow was seen Jan. 1 on Duxbury Beach (WRP), and Savannah Sparrows totalled 62 on the Nantucket CBC. Most interesting was the Grasshopper Sparrow at North Wellfleet Jan. 2 and again on the 5th (DMcN). This species has been reported in late December and early January for three years consecutively now in Massachusetts. Two Chipping Sparrows were found on Nantucket Jan. 2 (RRV,CSS) and one continued in Lancaster (HM). Seventeen White-crowned Sparrows were reported during the month - seven of them on the Nantucket CBC. Reports of White-throated Sparrows continued in phenomenal numbers, the ratio being 7-1 on the Concord CBC over the last year's total of 177 (see chart).

The McCown's Longspur was certainly the highlight of the month. The bird was first discovered in a cornfield in Bridgewater on Jan. 9, by Wayne R. Petersen and it remained there until January 26. It was banded by Kathleen S. Anderson of Manomet Bird Observatory on the 23rd. For more details on this record see Bird Observer vol. 4, #6, p.163. The bird was clearly photographed in the hand by Sibley Higginbotham (see photo this issue).

RRV,RHS

#### LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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## SUMMARY FOR FEBRUARY, 1977

February brought a return to seasonable temperatures, fairly sunny skies and lower than usual precipitation. The temperature averaged 30.7°, .3° above the normal, making this the first warmer-than-average month since last September. The remarkably long seige of generally well below normal temperatures which began in mid-October was not relieved until the second week of February, when, between the 10th and 14th, the temperature averaged 9° above normal. The high mark was 48° on the 12th and 25th; the low, 9° on the 17th. The five month period, Oct. - Feb., was the coldest such period since that of 1934 - 1935. Precipitation totalled 2.40", 1.14" below normal; the most for a 24 hour period was 1.05" on the 24th-25th. Snowfall amounted to 5.9", the most in any storm being 3.8" on the 20th-21st. This snow brought the seasonal total to 47.3", 13.9" over average and already 5.2" over the whole-year average. A snow cover of 1" or more covered Boston continuously for 62 days Dec. 26 - Feb. 25, a new record stretch in the entire 42 years of airport records.

### GREBES THROUGH HERONS

Most outstanding this February was the beginning of a tremendous influx of Red-necked Grebes that became apparent on the coast during the third week and continued into April, during which time approximately 400 birds were counted, mostly in localized compact flocks, from Plum Island to Provincetown. More specifically, the counts were as follows:

February:		#	
6,12	Cape Ann, Provincetown	22,10	RSH;BN,CAG
19,20	Salisbury-P.I., Provincetown	15, 80+	WRP,RRV++
22,26	Hull-Manomet, Brant Rock	67,67	WRP,RPE;HWH
27,28	Hull-Cohasset, Gloucester	<u>110,75+</u>	RRV,MHM

Although incursions of Red-necked Grebes in past winters have been attributed to the freezing over of the Great Lakes, where they winter in large numbers, it would seem presumptuous to infer that this year's flight occurred for that reason in the light of the fact that the birds did not arrive en masse until the third week of February, when they typically begin their northward movement anyway. Perhaps migrating birds from further south were diverted from their normal inland route and consequentially southern New England received the bulk of the migrant population. Pied-billed Grebes totalled 7 for the month, all reports coming from the south shore towns of Lakeville, Bridgewater, Scituate and Plymouth. The only Northern Fulmars noted inshore were 5 off 1st Encounter Beach Feb. 11 (BN,CAG), but on Georges Bank, a Greater Shearwater carefully studied Feb. 8 in Great South Channel (SE of Nantucket) was particularly unusual, although of much more frequent occurrence there in winter than the Sooty Shearwater noted in January. Both species are almost certainly overlooked. The total of 5 Black-Crowned Night Herons reported is of negligible value, as numerous individuals assumedly go unreported, but the American Bittern seen on Nantucket Feb. 20 (CJ) may well have been the sole individual of that species surviving to that date.

## WATERFOWL

The "Richardson's" Goose of January continued at Town Cove, Orleans throughout the month, and although the individual Snow Geese reported from W. Falmouth throughout the month (AAC) and Marion Feb. 26 (GM) may well have survived the winter locally, 6 birds seen at Plum Island Feb. 21 (DG) were certainly representative of arrivals from a more southerly location. The only counts for Brant received were 1000 at Bourne Feb. 12 (EPG) and 700 at Squantum throughout the month (v.o.). Any data concerning estimates of this species' winter population would be of interest to the compilers for documentation of the species' current increase which is readily apparent from CBC data, the only data source now available. Other waterfowl tended to either hold their own or decrease through the remainder of the winter's low temperatures and heavy snow cover; of 28 Gadwall recorded, the northernmost was one in Newburyport Harbor Feb. 11-19 (RRV#), and the larger flocks were 10 in Salem Feb. 20 (MK) and 12 in Plymouth Feb. 4 (WRP), and the total of 17 Pintail reported this month was down from the 35 reported in January. A count of 30 American Wigeon at Orleans Feb. 20 indicated that they wintered there (BN,CAG), and single Northern Shovelers were noted in Lakeville Feb. 14 (RS), Manchester Feb. 19 (in salt water)(HWF), and Beverly Feb. 20 (JN). Of 8 Wood Ducks reported in February, 2 in Newburyport Harbor Feb. 27 were unusual for that locality (HWF#). Eight male Redheads in Bourne Feb. 12 (EPG), 5 in Lakeville Feb. 20 (WRP) and one in Plymouth Feb. 22 (WRP) all probably wintered locally, although 32 Ring-necked Ducks in Falmouth Feb. 12 (EPG), 60 in Wareham the same day (EPG) and 1-2 in Newburyport Feb. 19-27 (WRP) may have included recent arrivals from proximate southerly localities or simply birds previously driven to salt water by the interior freeze-up. An impressive count of Canvasback was 1660 in Somerset Feb. 27 (WRP), and wintering Common Goldeneyes numbered 2500+ in Newburyport Harbor, where they were counted on the 19th (RSH#). A male Barrow's Goldeneye was found at Revere Feb. 6 (SZ), one male in Quincy Feb. 4-19 (GAW), four amongst the Commons in Newburyport Harbor Feb. 19-26 (WRP,RRV#) and 5 males in Plymouth Harbor Feb. 26 represent the highest count ever for the south shore (WRP,KSA). The overall total of 11 Barrow's Goldeneyes for the area was near average for February. The Harlequin Duck flock at Magnolia numbered 5-13 and was present there throughout the month (v.o.), and the three at E. Orleans continued there as well; King Eiders were seen at Nahant Feb. 11 (a female)(SZ) and Marblehead Feb. 20 (a male) (MK). Ten Hooded Mergansers were reported, all from the southeast coastal plain except one at Salem Feb. 20 (MK); Common Mergansers numbered 50 in Hingham Feb. 19 (NO,SO) and 100+ in Somerset Feb. 20 (WRP).

## RAPTORS

Seven single Goshawks occurred at scattered localities and the 2 Cooper's Hawks reported both were birds seen in January; an immature seen frequently in the Eastham-Orleans area (CAG,v.o.) and one in Littleton (VS). Quite unusual for recent years were Red-shouldered Hawks at Cape Ann Feb. 13 (JFK), at Newburyport Feb. 21 (WRP) and in W. Roxbury Feb. 1 (WWB), while one in Bridgewater Feb. 19-23 was

somewhat more commonplace (GRF#). Rough-legged Hawks totalled 17 in February (cf. 8,10,12,13), while seemingly a high total, recent winter reports are blatantly incomplete, in particular lacking totals from Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, areas that may represent the species' center of abundance in Massachusetts. The white phased Gyrfalcon from January continued in the Plum Island area throughout the month, and Merlins were seen at Manomet Feb. 8 (MBO staff), at Orleans Feb. 12 (WRP), unusually far north in Essex Feb. 20 (JN), on Nantucket the same day (JN) and in Provincetown Feb. 26 (CAG,BN).

#### GALLINULE THROUGH ALCIDS

The Common Gallinule on Nantucket was still alive and well there until at least Feb. 19 (CJ), in a location where they regularly survive milder winters. Three Killdeer were present in Plymouth Feb. 26, late for so many unless the birds were early migrants, and one was observed in Halifax the next day as well (WRP). Other wintering shorebird species, all typical, included 40 Ruddy Turnstones in No. Scituate Feb. 5 (WRP), a total of 32 Common Snipe from scattered localities, 30-40 Red Knots in No. Scituate Feb. 5-19 (WRP,GAW) and 800+ Purple Sandpipers at the same locality Feb. 21 (MFL,MJL,RRV). Glaucous Gulls totalled 12 in the area, compatible with the January total, though Iceland Gulls as usual reached peak winter concentrations of 75 at Cape Ann Feb. 6 (RSH) and 90 at Plum Island Feb. 19 (WRP), and on the outer Cape, 10+ were seen off Race Pt., Provincetown Feb. 20 (RRV). Becoming at least somewhat less surprising, if not actually regular, in recent years, an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull of the graellsii race was observed flying in to roost for the night with Herring Gulls at Town Cove, Orleans Feb. 25 (KPA). Two adult Black-headed Gulls were seen regularly in Newburyport Harbor throughout the month (RRV#) and a group of 1-4 were more or less regularly present in the Revere area throughout the month (SZ), while the only report of Little Gull received was of an adult in Gloucester Harbor Feb. 6 (AWN). Black-legged Kittiwake counts of note were 100+ in Gloucester Feb. 6 (WRP) and 300 off North Beach, Orleans Feb. 20 (WRP). The alcid flight of early winter dwindled following the third week of January, and most counts in February involved tight flocks of essentially stationary birds, mostly Razorbills, seen sitting on the water. Such flocks of auks numbered 250+ off Orleans Feb. 12 (WRP) and 125+ off Provincetown Feb. 20 (RRV,HM,ROP). Confirming our suspicions of their relative abundance on the offshore banks, three Common Murres were identified on the Nantucket shoals Feb. 12 (MBO staff), and, in addition, one un-oiled individual was seen from shore at Provincetown Feb. 20-26 (RRV,PP,BN#). The massive concentrations of Thick-billed Murres encountered early in the winter moved elsewhere this month; five remained in the vicinity of the entrance to the Cape Cod Canal in Bourne until at least Feb. 26 (WRP), and 50+ were seen off Provincetown the same day (BN,CAG). Black Guillemots continue, apparently regularly, to occur further south than our previous conception of their "normal" winter range; two were observed at No. Scituate Feb. 5 (WRP) and 7-8 were seen off Race Pt., Provincetown Feb. 20 (RRV,PP,ROP,HM).

### OWLS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

A few Screech Owls, apparently succumbing to starvation, flew into dwellings in the Norwell-Scituate area Feb. 2 (BAL). Two Snowy Owls occurred during the month, one at Salisbury (v.o.) and one at Squantum Feb. 25 (NO,SO); three Barred Owls continued to cause excitement as they roosted in exposed perches in deciduous trees around the Harvard University campus in Cambridge (v.o.), and one was located in Melrose Feb. 13 (CJ). The Long-eared Owl continued in Hingham, as did two Short-eared Owls in Eastham (v.o.). Breeding Saw-whet Owls were heard calling in Brewster Feb. 12 (WRP) and Middleboro Feb. 26 (KSA). The Red-bellied Woodpeckers of January at Adamsville and Gloucester continued at their respective localities throughout the month, and an adult Red-headed Woodpecker came to a feeder briefly in Middleboro Feb. 5 (H&G Griswold).

### HORNED LARK THROUGH THRUSHES

A total of 190 Horned Larks were observed at the Cumberland Farms in Bridgewater on the 6th (BBC-D.Davis). The wintering population is variable, but is above average here this winter, with 200 reported during January. The Common Crow roost at Bellview Hill, W. Roxbury continued with an average number of 1500 present throughout the winter (RMB#). Another roost near Shopper's World, Framingham totalled over 500 (EWT). Only 2-3 Fish Crows were reported during the month (WRP) (cf. 185,5,74) for the last three years. Has this species moved westward or has it left our area? We need more reports of this recent first-time breeder.

The annual Cardinal, Tufted Titmouse and Mockingbird census was held on Feb. 13 and 14. The results were Cardinal 8382, an increase of 3635, Tufted Titmouse 8311, an increase of 3102, and Mockingbird 2199, an increase of 1001. For a full report send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Massachusetts Audubon Society, Natural History Dept., Lincoln, MA, 01773.

Four Winter Wrens were reported during the month, one each from Lancaster (HM), Melrose (CJ), Manomet (MBO) and Concord (BBC-J.Hinds) (cf. 5,6,2 for the last three years). Only three Carolina Wrens were reported during the month as compared with 11 in 1974, 11 in 1975, and 5 in 1976. Cold winters are extremely hard on Carolina Wrens, which traditionally increase during cycles of mild seasons, only to be eliminated by cold and snowy winters. More reports during the spring months will be needed to determine what effect the winter of 1977 had on the population of this species.

A Catbird was observed at Milton on Feb. 2 (M.MacDonald) and only four Brown Thrashers were recorded. The counts of American Robin continued unusually high, although down from December and January. A total of 81 were seen on the 14th at Falmouth (AAC). The severity of this winter undoubtedly had its toll of the number of passerines that usually winter in Massachusetts. Single Hermit Thrushes were reported from six locations, as compared with 24 individuals in early January 1977. Four Bluebirds were seen in Bedford Feb. 1-3 (L.Brooks).

### WAXWINGS THROUGH SPARROWS

Cedar Waxwings were reported from just two localities and in very small numbers, 15 in Lancaster on the 12th (HM) and 14 at Plymouth on the 26th (PS). Last winter 163 were reported. Cedar Waxwings are erratic winter visitors throughout, and their numbers fluctuate from year to year, even from month to month, continually scattering and regrouping in different areas. They often congregate where there is an abundant supply of berries, however a heavy winter snow storm earlier this year ruined what crop there was. Nine Northern Shrikes were reported, scattered throughout eastern Massachusetts with 2 - one adult and one immature - at Plum Island (v.o.) (cf. 16,8,7,6 for the last four years). Ten Meadowlarks were found on the 10th in Scituate (Mrs. Crocker).

Twenty-two Redwinged Blackbirds were reported on the 12th in Hingham (NO) and 60 were at Norwell on the 18th (BAL). The first general arrival in small numbers were reported on the 25th from many localities in the Route 128 area. Larger numbers arrived on the 27th in southeastern Massachusetts with 1200+ in Middleboro and Bridgewater (WRP). A Rusty Blackbird was seen on the 27th in Clinton (HM) (cf. 1,24,14,0 for the last four years). A roost of 400+ Common Grackles were present all winter in Orleans (v.o.). The first migrants were single birds in Wellesley on the 24th (LJR) and in Acton on the 25th (HF). A general arrival in small numbers occurred on the 26th. A Dickcissel was reported from Manchester on the 19th (HF) (cf. 1,7,0,0 for the same period, the last four years). Very few reports of Evening Grosbeak were received, with a maximum count of only 30 at Falmouth (AAC). Definitely above average numbers of Purple Finch were reported with a maximum of 55 throughout the month in Lancaster (HM), 75 in Lexington (PR) and 31 in Reading (BEC-A.Blaissdell). There were 89 other individuals reported from many localities, (cf. 30,19,23 for February during the last three years). House Finches still continue to increase and 180 were reported from Westport (JJC).

Five Pine Grosbeaks were seen during the month; 2 at Milton on the 2nd (M.MacDonald), on the 4th, 1 in Watertown (RHS), 1 on the 6th in Wellfleet (CAG), and 1 on the 14th in Brookline (HTW). Only 1 Pine Siskin was reported during the entire month at Norwell on the 7th (BAL) (cf. 311,6,278 for the last three years).

A Chipping Sparrow continued at Lancaster through Feb. 14. This bird has been around since December 1976. Chipping Sparrows have been recorded only on two occasions since 1973 during February (3 in Middleboro on 1/15/73 and 1 in Barnstable on 2/2/75). White-crowned Sparrows were reported from 3 localities, an adult present all month in Lancaster (HM), another adult at Broadmoor Sanctuary, Natick (EWT), and an immature in Brookline on the 26th (HC). The McCown's Longspur was seen again at Bridgewater on Feb. 3 only (C.Sharf). It had disappeared on the 26th of January before being rediscovered.

With the month of May upon us, the compilers hope that all of you take notes on migration and try to compile more data on arrivals, departures and peak movements. Have a happy Spring!!

RRV,RHS

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ADDENDA

Black Skimmer:

9/19/76	Revere	4 imm.	S.Zende
9/19/76	Plymouth Beach	1	MBO staff

## The Sky Dance of the Woodcock

by Robert H. Stymeist, Waltham

In March, before the spring peepers set up their chorus, the American Woodcocks return to their nesting ground in Massachusetts. At morning or evening twilight their flight provides one of the most colorful courtship performances in the birding world. I was surprised recently to learn from fairly avid birders that they had never witnessed this spectacular exhibition; how little they know about this unusual shorebird.

Woodcocks (hunters sometimes refer to them as Whistler, Bogsucker and Timber Doodle) are fairly common in Massachusetts and breed in every county in the state, including Suffolk. They are more or less nocturnal and hide and sleep by day, being seldom seen unless flushed. They prefer low damp boggy places, bushy meadows, damp woodlands, but are sometimes found on hills, dry ground, or open pastures.

The Woodcock's bill is its most conspicuous feature. It is nearly 3 inches long; when probed in the mud, the sensitive nerves at the tip act as antennae, detecting the movement of earthworms, its chief food. The bill is "hinged" near the tip, enabling it to grasp worms under ground, pick up ants or catch flying moths. These curious adaptations are found only in Woodcocks.

There was a time when Woodcocks were nearly extinct. E.H. Forbush stated in Game Birds, Wild-Fowl and Shorebirds (1912) that in 1899, "Tens of thousands were killed by would-be sportsmen and thousands died of starvation. One man killed 400 Woodcock in just four hours". Such numbers are unheard of today. In seven nights in 1968, Woodcock biologists hand-netted and banded over 600 birds in a relatively small area in Cape May, New Jersey; twelve hundred were flushed.

To thrive, the Woodcock must have young forests containing woody plants a few inches high to trees a little taller than 30 feet. The density of vegetation must be relatively light for easy foraging. In hot weather Woodcock like to rest in dense shade, particularly under evergreens. Young aspens or birch ususally indicate good Woodcock cover.

Back to the courtship flight. The male struts around the female, bows and calls repeatedly a nasal "peent." He then rises high in the air with erratic flight and a variety of peculiar notes, some from the "whistling" of its wings and especially when it descends a twittering "chipper, chipper chip-chip" and then the "peent" again. They land nearly at the same place from which they left. I have sat quietly many times in a field, watched the male leave the female, (and when the whistling was barely audible ) ran to that place and laid quickly on the ground. If lucky, the male landed within a few feet! Unfortunately, the female is flushed in the process, something the male also realizes! This game is fun, but do it only once or twice.

Some of the best known Woodcock display grounds are:

Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary, Perkins Road, Topsfield. This is probably the best and most accessible location, away from all traffic and distracting lights. The birds go up in the field in back of the barn. From U.S. Route 1, turn east on Rte. 97 at the traffic lights. Perkins Road is the first left. The Sanctuary is 1 mile on the right.

Scotland Road, Newburyport off Rte. 95. In back of Chase Shawmut off the shoe factory.

Plum Island Airport, Newburyport. Much noise here, but easily accessible after a birding trip to Plum Island.

Rock Meadow, Belmont, off Concord Avenue near the Lexington line. Long a favorite for Greater Boston birders, but traffic noise is unbearable. Go off the road to the right of the town incinerator and away from the road. The noise will lessen but it is still distracting.

Highland Farm-McLean Woods, Belmont off Concord Ave. Not far from Rock Meadow, fewer Woodcock but better viewing with less noise. Park on Somerset Street and walk into the meadow. McLean Woods is across Concord Ave. from the Tennis Club. Walk to the edge of the hill for best results, toward Rock Meadow.

Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Sout Wellfleet. Entrance on west side of Route 6, immediately north of Eastham-Wellfleet town line.

Fort Hill, NATIONAL SEASHORE, Eastham. Entrance on East side of Route 6

Rock Harbor, Orleans. Area to the south.



SANDHILL CRANE, Bridgewater, Massachusetts, January 22, 1977. Photograph taken by Winthrop W. Warrington, Jr., with a Nikkormat Electric with a Novoflex 400 m.m. lens, 1/500 sec. at f 5.6; Kodachrome film #64.



## THE WORM-EATING WARBLER CONNECTION

by Leif J. Robinson, Wellesley

Recently, Ted Atkinson called to say that Bird Observer wanted an article about the Worm-eating Warblers that have summered in Weston for the past two years. (Actually, there is evidence that they have bred in the same location for some 15 years!) At first, I declined, mainly because the breeding site must be kept secret, much to the chagrin of some good friends (I hope still!).

But then the June, 1976, issue of American Birds arrived, with the lead article entitled "Birdwatching etiquette: the need for a developing philosophy," by Richard L. Glinski. Though this topic is not new, Mr. Glinski places it in modern perspective--that of a rapidly growing corps of jet-set birders who are preoccupied with building up a List. "The impacts of such pursuit," he writes, "no doubt vary with the species observed and the time and location of the observation: thousands of birders were able to witness with a minimum of disturbance a wintering Ross' Gull as it fed along a coastal shore in Massachusetts, yet a small fraction of that many people along Sonoita Creek during the nesting season of the Five-striped Sparrow could diminish the reproductive capability of this species in Arizona and the United States."

Thus, I was prompted to explain my reasons for keeping secret the nesting site of the Weston Worm-eaters. I hope that anyone who observes breeding of a rare species will disclose the location only to those who need to know, such as Dick Forster of Massachusetts Audubon Society, and who can keep the secret.

Point 1: For species at the limit of their normal breeding range, very subtle changes in habitat may be of paramount importance for successful nesting. Such areas are apt to be small, fragile, and may accommodate only one or two pairs. Thus, it is crucial that human interference be kept at a minimum.

Point 2: This "colony" of Worm-eaters, in particular, may yield some interesting facts concerning the life style of this species. For example, I have had the impression that their song slows down as summer progresses. Also, are there preferential breeding locations within this special bit of woods? How many breeding pairs can it support--and will the numbers of birds increase? Why do Dark-eyed Juncos (birds at the southern limit of their range) breed in the same habitats as the Worm-eaters?

As yet I have answers to none of the above. That may require years of observation. If the area is disturbed, I shall never know, and in that respect my motive for secrecy is very selfish.

But what about the birds themselves? Don't they deserve some protection? Glinski concludes: "There can be no room for the over-zealous listers who are oblivious of everything but a field mark, and who unknowingly may run over a nest while attempting to see the 'white bar in the wings.'" These people take from the sport of birding much more than they are able to give, for they can never develop a concern for

birdlife as quickly as they can collect check-marks on a field list.  
(Italics mine.)

Those with whom I have birded realize that I enjoy a "great" bird as much as anyone. Yet, I maintain that to "know" a bird is to see it when it is on its breeding grounds--that crucial period from which new stock will come. For a rare species, to disclose its haunt is to do disservice to both the bird, who wants to live there, and the birder, who may never see the progeny from that successful nesting. The prize of one year should not be at the expense of the future.

Postscript: What I have learned is summarized in my log for June 27, 1976: "Today I saw both adults ... they were giving sharp single chips, not unlike a weak Cardinal. The birds also seemed much less secretive than before, going repeatedly from ... to ... . I frequently heard a series of liquid chips ... from begging young, probably two in number. Then I saw the young being fed--they appeared to be motley versions of the adults, with some remaining down on the head breaking the black stripes." Two days later I worked the same site--the adults were present but much less evident. Apparently, once the young fledge the show is over, for I never saw them again.

#### WORM EATING WARBLER



photograph courtesy of Massachusetts Audubon Society

THE THIRTY-THIRD SUPPLEMENT

The thirty-third supplement to the American Ornithologist Union (A.O.U.) Checklist of North American Birds (Auk 93: 875-879; 1976) has little effect on the eastern birder. The Black Brant (Branta bernicla nigricans) has been lumped into the Brant (Branta bernicla bernicla). Many of you may have to delist this species that spent the greater part of February 1975 at Chatham. The Tufted Titmouse (Parus bicolor bicolor) now consists of two recognizable forms; the Eastern Tufted Titmouse, and the former Black-crested Titmouse (Parus bicolor articrostus).

The supplement also contained many scientific name changes to reflect the current trend in systematic ornithology and to recognize more genera than the original Fifth Edition of the A.O.U. Checklist of 1957.

Formerly

New Name

Royal Tern	Thalasseus maximus	Sterna maxima
Elegant Tern	Thalasseus elegans	Sterna elegans
Sandwich Tern	Thalasseus sandwicensis	Sterna sandwicensis
Caspian Tern	Hydroprogne caspia	Sterna caspia
Burrowing Owl	Speotyto cunicularia	Athene cunicularia
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Centurus carolinus	Melanerpes carolinus
Golden-fronted Woodpecker	Centurus aurifrons	Melanerpes aurifrons
Gila Woodpecker	Centurus uropygialis	Melanerpes uropygialis
Lewis' Woodpecker	Asyndesmus lewis	Melanerpes lewis
Hairy Woodpecker	Dendrocopos villosus	Picoides villosus
Downy Woodpecker	Dendrocopos pubescens	Picoides pubescens
Ladder-backed Woodpecker	Dendrocopos scalaris	Picoides scalaris
Nuttall's Woodpecker	Dendrocopos nuttallii	Picoides nuttallii
Brown-backed Woodpecker	Dendrocopos arizonae	Picoides arizonae
Red-cockaded Woodpecker	Dendrocopos borealis	Picoides borealis
White-headed Woodpecker	Dendrocopos albolarvatus	Picoides albolarvatus
Long-billed Marsh Wren	Telmatodytes palustris	Cistothorus palustris
Painted Redstart	Setophaga picta	Myioborus pictus
Boat-tailed Grackle	Cassidix major	Quiscalus major
Great-tailed Grackle	Cassidix mexicanus	Quiscalus mexicanus
Bronzed Cowbird	Tangavivus aeneus	Molothrus aeneus
Pyrrhuloxia	Pyrrhuloxia sinuata	Cardinalis sinuatus
Hoary Redpoll	Acanthis hornemanni	Carduelis hornemanni
Common Redpoll	Acanthis flammea	Carduelis flammea
Pine Siskin	Spinus pinus	Carduelis pinus
American Goldfinch	Spinus tristis	Carduelis tristis
Lesser Goldfinch	Spinus psaltria	Carduelis psaltria
Lawrence's Goldfinch	Spinus lawrencii	Carduelis lawrencii
Green-tailed Towhee	Chlorura chlorura	Pipilo chlorura

Let's hope they will split on the thirty-fourth!

R. H. S.

BIRD OBSERVER  
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BACK ISSUES  
6.50 yr  
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