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Stephen J. Dinsmore

W. Ross Silcock

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The Changing Seasons Expansions

Stephen J. Dinsmore
Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Mississippi State University
Box 9690
Mississippi State, Mississippi 39762
(email: sdinsmore@cfr.msstate.edu)

W. Ross Silcock
P. O. Box 57
Tabor, Iowa 51653
(email: silcock@rosssilcock.com)

Spring is a season of change for billions of birds, a time of passage that brims with the sense of urgency to breed, a time rife with increased hormonal activity. This is especially evident among the many species of long-distance migrants that make their way from points south of the equator to the northern reaches of the western hemisphere. But spring is also a season of unease, as the multitude of pitfalls confronting these migrants become apparent: persistent droughts, violent weather systems, the further spread of West Nile virus, and the gauntlet of anthropogenic obstacles—factory smokestacks, glass-plated skyscrapers, enormous antennas—that proliferate across the continent. In this column, we offer our thoughts on some of the more noticeable patterns we discerned in the spring 2004 regional reports. Many noteworthy events and observations are digested in Special Attention boxes, which are recommended reading. We welcome the new Northern Canada region to these pages—its presence fills a huge void in the journal's coverage—and we are especially eager to read in coming years about high-latitude species whose ranges are contracting rather than expanding: most of the expanding species considered in this column nest between the U.S.–Mexico and the U.S.–Canada borders, and it is virtually certain that global climate change, while a boon for some species, will be a bane for many others. Our increasing understanding of the changes in American Arctic habitats will hopefully be measurable against reports of birds in this journal, counterbalancing to some degree our bias toward reports from more densely population regions.

WEATHER

Weather and climate, perhaps more than any other factors, are responsible for the changing patterns we observe in bird distribution. The continental climate in spring 2004 was in most respects a continuation of long-term patterns, the most significant of which was clearly the continued drought in the West. Dry conditions were especially acute in the central Rocky Mountains, the western Great Plains, and the Great Basin: Wyoming had its thirteenth driest and Colorado its twenty-seventh driest spring in more than a century. In Arizona, declines in hummingbirds were attributed to the effects of long-term drought. On the plus side, the continuing reduction of water levels in at least one major reservoir on the western Great Plains exposed suitable nesting habitat for Piping and Snowy Plovers.

The reporting regions noted a potpourri of weather conditions, as is usual. At the high end of the moisture continuum was Hawaii, which recorded its wettest spring since 1997. The Pacific Coast and northern Rockies generally reported warm and dry conditions, especially in April, leading to numerous early arrival dates as far north as Alaska. Late-arriving migrants, however, were slowed in these regions, as a series of May storms brought cooler temperatures and much-needed moisture—but, in the case of several late-season snowstorms, too cool for many insectivorous species. In much of the East, the weather was warm and dry right through most of the spring, with most regions reporting essentially no fallouts of migrants south of the Great Lakes and New England. Florida recorded only minor fallouts during April, while farther north along the Atlantic Coast conditions were poorer still for birders hoping to witness migration. However, the persistent southerly airflows from April through at least mid-May were perhaps responsible for a better-than-average showing of southern species as far north as Maritime Canada and the Great Lakes region. Included in this mix were reports of Anhingas in Connecticut, Maryland, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin, Wilson's Plovers in upstate New York, Ontario, and Wisconsin, a Brown Pelican in Indiana, a White Ibis in Massachusetts—and Painted Buntings nearly everywhere: across the northern tier of the United States from Minnesota to Maine, and in Canada from Ontario and Québec (and even Saskatchewan!). Though it is impossible to link any of these appearances conclusively to particular weather systems, as is true for records of kites and doves out of range (Brinkley 2003), their arrivals did often coincide with periods of southerly wind. Overall, though, most of these records, viewed interannually, appear to relate to climate change rather than the caprice of weather—Alaska's first Dickcissel, a territorial male rather than a feeder bird, makes the point well.

The weather patterns in the continents center were more complex this spring than on the Atlantic Coast. Around the Great Lakes, Great Plains, and Gulf Coast, northerly winds of several major systems produced some notable fallouts, especially along the western Gulf of Mexico coastlines. The most productive of these occurred on 26 April along the central and western Gulf and on 2 May along the western Gulf coasts. Maritime Canada also saw a stalled low-pressure system in late May cool and wet conditions caused significant avian mortality at Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick, for instance, and probably much more widely than was observed.

Despite the notoriety of several of the spring's migrant fallouts, the flavor of the 2004 spring season might be better characterized as a series of *expansions*: a few widespread species continued to fill gaps in their ranges, southern and southwestern species showed continued signs of expanding or pioneering northward, and several Eurasian species with expanding populations turned up as vagrants on our shores.

PASSERINES

This spring saw notable extralimital flights of several species of songbird, particularly warblers. A series of low-pressure systems moving east in late April and early May produced large fallouts along the central and western Gulf Coast, with adjectives hardly used in recent seasons—"spectacular" in

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The Rites of Spring. This adult Short-tailed Albatross was seen vocalizing, dancing with, and even preening one of the decoys set out to encourage nesting of this Critically Endangered species on Eastern Island, Midway Atoll National Wildlife Reguge, Hawaii 11 February 2004. This bird passed the breeding season, from October into April, on the island, but unfortunately, the banded female Short-tailed that been an annual visitor to Sand Island, Midway for so many years did not reappear in 2003–2004. *Photograph courtesy of J. Klavitter, United States Fish & Wildlife Service.*

the Lower Rio Grande Valley, "remarkable" farther north and east on the Gulf Coast. Two species—Cape May and Blackpoll Warblers—were unusually numerous during this period: Cape Mays were widespread along the western Gulf Coast, with several in Texas and more than normal in Louisiana and Mississippi. Blackpolls had a similar spring, prompting Mark Lockwood to label it "an amazing spring migration of Blackpolls" in Texas. After the last major fallout on 2 May, these birds gradually dispersed inland and did not merit remarks from regional editors until ten days later. On 11–12 May, a major snowstorm grounded many passerines in northern North Dakota, southeastern Saskatchewan, and southern Manitoba (Figure 1; see the S.A. in the Prairie Provinces report). Huge numbers of Tennessee Warblers, "gathered like House Sparrows in Regina gutters," now joined the mix, along with above-normal numbers of Blackpolls and Cape Mays. Many of these migrants perished in the persistent cold and wet conditions, often hit by cars as they gathered along cleared roadsides. Not as evident in the regional reports was another late May fallout, this one on 23–24 May, in the northern Great Plains. As was true of the earlier front, this one held huge numbers of Tennessee and Blackpoll Warblers and a sprinkling of Cape Mays. Numbers of Cape Mays were "unprecedented" in North Dakota and coincided with unusually high numbers in Kansas and South Dakota. Interestingly, however, no Cape Mays were detected far to the west of their usual spring corridor, on the Pacific Coast, for instance. Thus, as in spring 2002, there appears to have been a decided westward shift in the migratory paths of some Tennessee, Cape May, and Blackpoll Warblers this spring. As Chris Wood and Doug Faulkner report from Colorado & Wyoming, species of warbler that winter in the West Indies are rather scarce in spring through the continent's center, as most of their northward migration in the Lower 48 states occurs east of the Mississippi River. Some five Black-throated Blue Warblers in Colorado complemented Boulder's singing male Cape May Warbler (a crowd pleaser) this season, and high numbers of Black-throated Blues from western Texas, the Southern Great Plains, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah also suggest a westward shift in the migration of this species.

Warblers that breed chiefly in the East were also found out West, some in appreciable numbers but most not quite in counts rivaling those of spring 1992 in California (Patten and Marantz 1996). Numbers of such species in the Great Plains, along the eastern slope of the Rockies, and in the Great Basin were near average or slightly above, but along the Pacific Coast and in the desert Southwest, birders were busy checking their spring "traps," which were very productive from the middle of May into early June. Though this phenomenon occurs to some extent every spring in California, this season's influx of certain southeastern species was superior there. Hooded Warbler staged a "small invasion" in southern California and the "strongest showing in years"

Figure 1. While much of the American East experienced withering heat and humidity in May 2004, the Great Plains and the Prairie Provinces suffered periodic snowstorms and northerly winds that grounded, and sometimes killed, enormous numbers of Neotropical migrant passerines. These 19 Tennessee Warblers (and one Blackpoll Warbler) were photographed 23 May at Regina, Saskatchewan, as they gleaned morsels of food from the pavement. *Photograph by Greg Kratzig.*

in central California, with numbers of birds reported almost double those of 2001 (Brinkley 2001). Hoodeds were unusually numerous on the Great Plains also, with eight in Colorado, seven in Nebraska, and four as far north as North Dakota. Northern Parula, another species in the suite of southeastern species observed in large numbers in 1992 and 2001, was "in abundance" in Utah and Nevada this season and numbered about 45 in California (44 reported in 2001). Kentucky Warbler, a southern rarity also detected in the earlier flights, was noted six times in California this spring (twice in 2001) and was well represented elsewhere out of range: north to Michigan (six) and west to Colorado (five). Yellow-throated Vireo, increasingly numerous as a vagrant to California in recent years, was recorded six times in that state (compared to nine each in 1992 and 2001 in California), whereas White-eyed was recorded just four times (thrice in 2001, ten times in 1992).

Species that breed well into the mixed boreal/deciduous forest interface in southern Canada and the northern United States were also recorded west of usual range. Mourning Warbler, not a southeastern-breeding species, is very rare west of its usual migration corridor (and can be an identification challenge; see the comments in the Oregon & Washington region), but this year a sighting in Nevada was the "find of the season among warblers," there were two sightings each in west Texas and Wyoming, where "very rare," and Monterey County, California had a singing male on 5 June. Rose-breasted Grosbeak, with 38 sightings in California and eleven in Idaho and western Montana, was also recorded in above-average numbers.

Western passerines east were fewer, as is invariably the case. Three Say's Phoebes were found in Minnesota, with singles in New Brunswick and Indiana. Indiana and South Carolina had Vermilion Flycatchers. Smith's Longspur was found in North Carolina and a Bullock's Oriole in New Jersey. Ontario had the only Rock Wren east of normal, and it also had a Sage Thrasher, a species also reported in New Jersey, Minnesota, and Missouri. Massachusetts and Illinois turned in Spotted Towhees, and Harris's Sparrows were in North Carolina and New York. Some of the most widely reported species were found in a great many places. About sixteen Western Tanagers were documented from Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, and Manitoba, whereas six Black-headed Grosbeaks were in Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, and eastern Texas. Arguably, any or all of these birds might have wintered in the United States and thus were not displaced in the same way the Neotropical migrant warblers in California almost certainly were. The flycatchers may well have wintered along the Gulf Coast; the sparrows and towhees might have wintered anywhere; and the tanagers and grosbeaks could easily have taken up at feeders in Florida, as at least a few were known to have done over the past season. There was a distinct eastern "flight," on small scale, of vagrant Sage Thrashers, Say's Phoebes, and Harris's Sparrows in fall/winter 2003–2004 and so some of the spring birds were surely birds that overwintered in the East. The same could be said of short-distance migrant warblers, such as the Audubon's Warblers in Alabama, Wisconsin, Florida, and Pennsylvania—but what of Queens, New York's MacGillivray's Warbler? If identified correctly, this bird would be truly exceptional in the spring. (Of course, it too *could* have wintered in Florida!) Another surprise in the regional reports was the proliferation of Lazuli Buntings this spring: Ontario, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Arkansas, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota all had sightings of this species, normally extremely scarce east of range (there are fewer than ten records from East Coast states, in fact). Will

Figure 2. There was a fair flight of "southeastern" warblers and vireos into the Southwest this spring, not quite on par with that of 1992 but similar to that of 2001. This cooperative Kentucky Warbler at Cerro Coso College in Ridgecrest, Kern County, California 16 May 2004 was one of four found in this area of California this May, three of them in Kern County, thus the local moniker "Kerntucky Warbler." *Photograph by Bob Steele.*

this species soon show patterns of extralimital appearance like those long seen in Indigo Bunting and more recently detected in Painted Bunting?

Still more puzzling, several Eurasian or European passerines were noted from the Great Lakes to the Northeast, the star of the show being Michigan's *ocularis* White Wagtail (another wagtail was noted in Baja California Sur), with the Fieldfare in Québec and Brambling in Manitoba also remarkable finds. Old World finches, reported in small numbers beginning late last fall, continued to figure in the regional reports: scattered reports of European Goldfinches stretching from Manitoba (one in late autumn) to northern Ontario (many) and to Québec (two in winter), single Eurasian Siskins in Québec, New Brunswick, and Michigan, and a … Eurasian Linnet in Michigan? Most records committees relegate records of "cage" birds to "status unknown" categories, and for good reason. With help from Julie Craves and Alan Wormington, we opened a Pandora's Box of surprises from the Great Lakes: reports of Eurasian Jays, Common Chaffinches, European Greenfinches, Saffron Finches, Eurasian Linnets, a Blue Tit, and two pairs of *breeding* Great Tits—plus *hundreds* of European Goldfinches coming to feeders across a nine-state, three-province area. Most of these have not been reported in this journal. A rumor has persisted that a large importer, International Zoological Imports in Vernon Hills, Illinois (near Chicago), closed its doors in 2002 and released many of its charges into the wild. As Craves notes, "there is no confirmation of this rumor, but a compilation of reports does suggest the Chicago area as the point of radiation." Still, as John Idzikowski points out, records of European Goldfinch were on the rise around the Great Lakes before 2002. So the southern-tier states and Hawaii are not the only ones with multiple exotic species on the loose: now Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Manitoba, Québec, and Ontario have records of one or more suspicious species. And these are not Southern Ground-Hornbills, Knysna Turacos, Wooly-necked Storks, or Alexandrine Parakeets but largely species that have been reported in the Northeast (New England and the Canadian Maritimes) historically, albeit in very small numbers.

Clearly, some records are "above" suspicion: wagtails are not kept in captivity, for instance, nor are most thrushes, including Fieldfare. Most of the finches, however, are either imported or propagated (legally) in the United States—including Brambling, which has a mostly "clean" track record of vagrancy in North America otherwise (Mlodinow and O'Brien 1996). This is all very disheartening, especially when one considers the apparent distances traveled by some of these (assumed) escapees: European Goldfinches reached Gimli, Manitoba, Thunder Bay, Ontario, and White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia while a Common Chaffinch made it to Silver Islet (in Lake Superior), Ontario, and the Eurasian Siskins traveled to Whitefish Point, Michigan (Figure 3), the Gaspé Peninsula of Québec, and Lorneville, New Brunswick! These are mostly fall and spring records, suggesting that these presumed former captives still tend to move as migrants in season. Sharp (2002) has asked already in this column about separating the wheat(ear) from the chaff(inch), but one has to keep the question alive: hypothetical flights of goldfinches from Chicago to Thunder Bay (740 km) or Whitefish Point (less that 600 km) or even the Lake Winnipeg area (~1200 km) are impressive, but the siskins in the Gaspé and the Saint John, New Brunswick areas were almost 1800 km away from the Windy City. How far to the east in Canada do these birds go before they become inseparable from the Eurasian finches reported there occasionally as apparent legitimate strays? Some would argue that Nova Scotia and Newfoundland & Labrador hold the key: neither province has seen a flight of finches in this century that would provide context for any of the Great Lakes (or nearby) birds. The only Eurasian birds of note this season in the Maritimes, aside from waterfowl, was a Eurasian Hobby—but editor Blake Maybank was quick to point out the ship-riding habits of small falcons, amply substantiated in the *Sea Swallow*, the annual report of the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society.

Figure 3. This Eurasian Siskin at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Michigan (here 5 May 2004), was one of an interesting run of Eurasian finches—including many European Goldfinches, a Common Chaffinch, a Brambling, and a Eurasian Linnet—detected since autumn 2003 in eastern Canada and the Midwest. Though Eurasian Siskin is a plausible vagrant to this site, the plethora of Eurasian species noted since 2002 in the Midwest has cast uniform doubt on all such reports as referring to wild wanderers. *Photographs by Caleb Putnam.*

Despite the overwhelming circumstantial evidence that most of the Eurasian passerines noted around the Great Lakes were not of wild provenance, we still think it important for observers to record what they see and study individual birds in detail. Caleb Putnam, for instance, studied the Michigan siskin carefully, noting three retained juvenal outer greater coverts, indicative of a bird in its first spring—probably the most likely age to make a navigational error on its first migration. As there are known propagators of this species in North America, the proper ageing of this individual does not lay to rest concerns about its provenance. However, we hope that other observers of such birds will go to similar lengths to identify and age birds of this sort, so that, minimally, we come to know what birds inhabit our landscapes and what their movements might be.

WATERFOWL

We noted in reading through the regional reports that the statuses of several waterfowl species appear to be receiving greater scrutiny, some of which may be owing to increased observer awareness and attentiveness. A Trumpeter Swan in Massachusetts (the first, but probably not the last, for New England) and a Mottled Duck in Illinois might have been easily confused with similar species and escaped detection, but it is just as likely that the recent expansions of both species are the reason for their detection. In the case of the duck, extralimital reports are on the increase in the Southern Great Plains and as far to the east as Tennessee; the swan's proliferation in the East is clearly linked to breeding programs in the Midwest and western states.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck is a prime example of an expanding species that is *unlikely* to escape detection: their ringing calls and birder-friendly habits make them all too obvious in most settings. We suspect that many state records committees are presently coming to grips with extralimital

reports of this species. Over the past decade or so, Black-bellieds have experienced widespread increases, especially in the south-central United States, with instances of vagrancy also increasingly, chiefly in the Southern Great Plains, the Midwest, and the East as far north as mainland southeastern Canada. This spring, that pattern intensified. Their expansion in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Oklahoma was showcased this season by up to 33 at Red Slough in southeastern Oklahoma, a record-high count for the state. Reports from Missouri and Ohio this spring can almost certainly be attributed to this expansion. Reports along the Atlantic Coast (such as this season's from New Jersey and the Carolinas) could also pertain to birds from the south-central United States (/Mexico) or might be from Florida. Both populations could be responding to the same stimulus or stimuli in their northward flights, perhaps the gradual warming of the climate. As a side note, some observers have opined that Florida's Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are not of wild origin but instead derived from escapees at Key Biscayne in the late 1960s. This turns out not to be the case. Bill Pranty (pers. comm.) comments that "essentially *every* one of the state's reports of the species, since the appearance of a flock in Sarasota in the early 1980s, is believed to be refer to birds of wild provenance, possibly from the Yucatan. All of the data on this species' spread, especially in the central and southern peninsula in the past ten years or so, point to natural colonization."

Populations of geese that nest in high latitudes are on the increase as well—virtually all of them. Snow Geese were reported in mind-numbing numbers throughout the winter and spring; even areas peripheral to their main migration routes had very high counts. Their small-bodied cousin, Ross's Goose, continues to show dramatic increases in abundance in the Great Plains and is increasingly reported (in increasing numbers) continent-wide, a trend that is also at least twenty years old now. This spring, Ross's Geese were noted as increasing in Oregon and Washington and in "unprecedented numbers" in British Columbia, while a remarkable 15 were detected in the Hudson-Delaware region, where considered "extralimital" only a decade or so ago. Stragglers were reported in Québec, Vermont, Maryland, Ontario (four), and southeastern Alaska, a pattern that is likely to continue and even accelerate. Two dark-morph Ross's were reported in Pennsylvania; because the potential for confusion with hybrids of Lesser Snow Goose and Ross's Goose is very high, such extralimital birds should be documented carefully.

Canada Geese, likewise on the increase, are also in need of more careful scrutiny. As most readers are already aware, the American Ornithologists' Union has recently split the Canada Goose into two species: Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) and Canada Goose (*B. canadensis*) (see the Editor's Notebook). This action may have the broadest impact on birders of any split in recent memory. Knowledge of the impending split dates to at least the mid-1990s, and a small subset of the birding community has since been diligently recording subspecific data for as many sightings as possible. However, in reading this season's regional reports (and many others over past years), we have been struck by how little information there is for what are now considered two separate species. Cackling Geese were reported in New York and Maryland—were they not worthy of mention in other regions? We certainly look forward to more reports of this species in upcoming issues.

As their respective populations also increase, several "vagrant" taxa—Barnacle Goose, Pink-footed Goose, and Greenland Greater White-fronted Goose—have also been detected more frequently. The proliferation of Barnacle Goose records in the East continued this spring, with reports from Québec (two), Massachusetts, New York, and Maryland. The reports of Pink-footed Geese from Québec and Pennsylvania over the season fit a more minor recent pattern as well, but one in Washington (probably one of the two that showed up 2 November 2003 originally) was said to be of uncertain provenance. After a winter with numerous Greenland Greater White-fronted Geese, as far south as Florida, many were reported this spring, in Nova Scotia, New England, New York, and New Jersey.

Old World waterfowl otherwise continue to figure prominently in regional reports from fall, winter, and spring alike. This season, some 46 Eurasian Wigeons were reported from 14 provinces and states away from the Pacific coast, with five Tufted Ducks from the same area. Common Teal appear to be increasing as visitors to North America, with 23 reported from nine states/provinces. A Falcated Duck in Oregon was unique.

SEABIRDS

The Pacific Ocean seabird scene rarely goes a year without some earth-shattering surprise. This spring, the shock came from a most unexpected locale: no one anticipated that Manx Shearwater would be the next species added to Montana's list. This bird—discovered at Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge by a Victor Emanuel Nature Tour guided by Denver Holt and Brennan Mulrooney—was seen bobbing around with courting Western Grebes and photographed extensively, leaving no doubt as to its identity. But what path did this bird take to arrive here, roughly 400 miles (over 600 km) from the Pacific? The arrival of this bird in the midst of the Rocky Mountains did not coincide with any weather system that might be linked to its arrival, at least not in any obvious way; a low-pressure system centered in southwestern Canada swept through the area 28 May from the Pacific, but it was not unusually powerful.

In the Pacific basin, sightings of Manx are recently verging on the "regular," at least off California and Washington, where it has been recorded for the past five seasons, and reports of several Manx per trip are now not unheard of for California. A Manx provided a first record for San Diego County, California this spring, and a report for Santa Cruz County is under review. Is there a breeding population in the Pacific? Away from the U.S. Pacific Coast, the species is essentially unknown in the Pacific; it is a vagrant to New Zealand, Australia, and temperate South America. In the North American interior, there is only one record of the species (from Michigan), also apparently not storm-related. What were these birds doing there? Could cross-continental wanderers be the source of the Pacific birds? This seems highly improbable, even considering the large population of the species and its protracted northward migration from South American waters in the spring. More likely would seem to be a misoriented bird from the Pacific, the site of recent increases in records.

Some have wondered aloud whether the recent perturbations in environmental and seawater temperatures are blurring the boundaries between the various Pacific seawater currents, allowing a few birds normally confined to the Humboldt Current to slip northward, but thus far, there are no species known to have done so (Salvin's Albatrosses would be the most likely of recent vagrants to have come up from the Humboldt). Manx Shearwaters have been recently documented in the Humboldt, it is true, but until January 1998, there were no records north of the Straits of Magellan, Chile (very near Argentina). On 11 January 1998, Mackiernan and party (2001) observed a single Manx off the coast of Chile at 29° S, and since that time Alvaro Jaramillo has documented single birds off Valparaíso on 13 February 2003 and off Arica on 9 February 2004, both in Chilean waters. But Manx Shearwaters do not require a cool-water conduit between South and North Pacific: they routinely cross large expanses of tropical water on their northward migration in the Atlantic. The most likely expla-

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nation for the appearances of Manx Shearwaters off the Pacific is that they are birds that rounded Cape Horn or became trapped in the Straits of Magellan and ended up northbound in the Pacific, where they behaved "normally," heading toward the northern hemisphere at the onset of the austral winter. The Greater Shearwaters found off California in recent years probably took the same route.

But the Montana Manx? Oddball behavior in the species is well documented (who could forget "Mad Manx," the shearwater that flew on board, striking birders off the coast of Massachusetts in years past?), but their navigational sense is remarkable, as documented by the legendary Manx that was taken from its nest in Wales, U.K., flown to Boston, and released. It arrived back on the nest in 12 days, 12 hours, and 31 minutes: not bad for a pelagic flight of 4960 km. One has to wonder whether the determined little Montana Manx was striking out for its natal areas in the North Atlantic (as close as 4540 km away) and just pausing to take in the Rockies.

Most heartening was the increase in reported Laysan Albatrosses at several locations: there were several reports of groups of 20 or more at the Bering Sea/North Pacific interface between Attu and Shemya, the species is "now annual during spring" off Oregon and Washington, and Laysans outnumbered Black-footeds west of the Channel Islands on one California trip. Hopefully, a similar trend will materialize after Short-tailed Albatrosses respond to the irresistible decoys and audio-lures set out at Midway (frontispiece)! Also reported in higher numbers than usual this spring were Flesh-footed Shearwaters, which may be benefiting from extensive predator control on the offshore breeding islands of northern New Zealand. (Interestingly, Pennhallurick and Wink [2004], echoing older categorizations, suggest that Flesh-footed might be best considered a dark morph of Pink-footed Shearwater, as the two species differ genetically only by 0.70%.)

Seabirds also made news in the Atlantic, and once again North Carolina stole top honors with a well-documented Black-bellied Storm-Petrel, a first for the A.B.A. Area. A few albatross reports tantalized: only one was identified to species, a Yellow-nosed Albatross in North Carolina at Cape Hatteras in April, but unidentified albatrosses were reported off Virginia and New York, the former thought to have been a Black-browed. Magnificent Frigatebird, normally a late summer wanderer, staged a better-than-average spring flight along the southern Atlantic Coast, with reports from Virginia, North Carolina (two), South Carolina, and Georgia. The connection with persistent southwesterly winds throughout most of the late spring in the Southeast seems a reasonable one.

SANDHILL CRANES

One of the more interesting expansions of the past decade—one, like those of the geese, not obviously tied to climate change—has been the slow but steady spread of Greater Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis tabida*). The 1980s and 1990s saw this subspecies slowly expand its breeding range southward and westward—into the Midwest and eastern Great Plains—and even eastward to New York, Pennsylvania, and Maine. Iowa, Nebraska, southern Minnesota, and northern Illinois have seen pioneering nesting, presumably originating from established birds in central Wisconsin and Minnesota. They have also expanded dramatically around the Great Lakes, especially in Michigan and southern Ontario. In concert with a growing breeding range, records of Sandhill Cranes outside of their normal non-breeding range in the East have proliferated. This spring saw a flush of Sandhill Crane reports in the East, most probably pertaining to the subspecies *tabida*. Blake Maybank noted that cranes may soon be breeding in the Atlantic Provinces region, and a late May report from Massachusetts was suggestive of nesting. They were widely reported in Québec and upstate New York, while as many as four birds through mid-May in South Carolina were suspected of being possibly prospecting nesters. If this expansion does continue, which directions will it take? The pair in northwestern Missouri this spring was suspected of nesting, as were birds at several sites in the Northeast (and Virginia even had summering birds!). This mirrors the pattern of expansion in Iowa and New York in the 1990s. Typically, singletons (presumed to be subadults and thus inexperienced breeders) frequented potential breeding sites first, and then eventually formed pairs, with breeding confirmed one to three years later. At least in Iowa, this pattern continued this year, with single birds and pairs frequenting many of the large wetlands in the northeastern quarter of the state. This species will almost certainly nest in the Maritime Provinces and Missouri within the next decade, and possibly also in other places such as the eastern Dakotas, Kansas, and several northeastern states. As a past editor of this journal was fond of saying: "Stay tuned!"

SHOREBIRDS

In a season slim on Eurasian visitors—outside Alaska, eight Curlew Sandpipers and three or four Bar-tailed Godwits visited the Lower 48 states and Canada—nesting species were very much in the news. Black-necked Stilts continued their amazing "leapfrog" expansion on multiple fronts. In the West, nesting again occurred in British Columbia, and they continued to "explode" in western Oregon. Their breeding range also continued to expand in the Northern Rockies and in New Mexico. In the Great Plains, South Dakota recorded its third nesting, and counts of the species were way up in Oklahoma. Predictably, the numbers of these birds spilling farther east were correspondingly high, with an unprecedented incursion into Iowa (eleven), Missouri (seven), the western Great Lakes region (eight), Illinois (twenty), Indiana (six), as well as farther east to Ohio (four), Ontario (three—including the province's first nesting), Pennsylvania, and Connecticut. This pattern of rapid expansion and far-flung nesting records can be expected to continue throughout the East.

Snowy Plover was another species on the move this spring, particularly in the middle of the continent. There, the abundance of suitable nesting habitat caused by drying reservoirs and large lakes made conditions favorable for dispersing individuals. This was especially evident in Nebraska, where nesting birds were found at two large reservoirs and five wanderers were located in the eastern reaches of the state. We wonder how many went undetected nesting at other locales in Nebraska and surrounding states. Elsewhere, apparent overshooting migrants were detected in Illinois (two), Missouri (two), and Iowa, and a few were reported away from traditional sites in the Southwest and Great Basin, most of these attributed to the effects of drought.

In other shorebird news, we read with interest the S.A. in the Hudson-Delaware regional report concerning the new catch limits placed on Horseshoe Crabs in the Delaware Bay. This should be welcome news for the Red Knots and tens of thousands of other migrant shorebirds (Semipalmated Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstones, and Sanderlings in particular) that stage in this critical area each spring. We hope that such measures are not too little and too late to reverse the long-term declines documented in this striking shorebird.

SOUTHWESTERN AND WESTERN SPECIES

Theorizing the effects of increasing average global temperatures on avian distribution is still in the speculative stage, although some evidence of range expansion in southwestern species—to be expected in warmer (and in some cases drier) conditions—would seem to correlate with climatic data. Both White-faced and Glossy Ibis have been seen increasingly often out of typical range, but the western White-faced is the real wander-

er, recorded this season in New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Florida, Ontario, and Maine, with two each in Ohio and Illinois and seven in Minnesota.

On a smaller geographic scale, reports of Black-capped Gnatcatcher in Arizona were increasingly widespread. As for the ibises, which are believed to hybridize in situations of extralimital occurrence, Gary Rosenberg and Mark Stevenson emphasize the need to identify Black-cappeds critically, as mixed pairs with Blue-gray Gnatcatcher are known. Also in Arizona, a "pure" pair of Flame-colored Tanagers nesting in Madera Canyon suggests that enough birds of this species are present to avoid mixed-pairing at the northern edge of the range, which has been mostly the case (or at least inferred from the presence of hybrids) in the past. The early arrival of a (now resident?) pair of Rufous-capped Warblers in French Joe Canyon, Arizona and the presence of additional singles in Cave Creek and Sycamore canyons may also indicate a northward move. Buff-breasted Flycatcher, as well as returning for the sixth consecutive year to the Davis Mountains in Texas, appears to be establishing "small local breeding populations" in Cave Creek Canyon and the Santa Rita Mountains in Arizona. Farther northward, a pair of Lucy's Warblers in southwestern Colorado provided the first state nesting record since 1913, and sightings of the species in noteworthy places as widely separated as Oregon, the Imperial Valley of California, El Paso, and a few unexpected locations closer to home in New Mexico suggest that something is happening with this species. The *lilianae* subspecies of Eastern Meadowlark, which breeds in the Southwest and is often called Lillian's Meadowlark, also appear to be moving, as it continues to spread northward in New Mexico and reappeared for the second year in southeastern Colorado. And those southwestern doves—White-winged and Inca—continued to make inroads, the former as a long-distance vagrant well into Canada and the northern United States (to sites too numerous to mention!), the latter by much smaller steps into Mississippi. On the East Coast, some (many?) records of White-winged Doves could also pertain to birds from the Florida population.

From the perspective of mid-latitude birders, the expansion of many birds' ranges appears beneficial, especially for those species with limited breeding ranges. A reassuring development of this sort is the expansion of Tricolored Blackbird. A colony with twenty breeding pairs in Douglas County, Nevada is doing well. The species is rapidly expanding in Washington, where it was first noted breeding in Grant County in 1998; undetected additional nesting areas almost certainly exist in that state. In California, Mendocino County now has three nesting colonies, where only one was known previously, and hundreds were at Soda Lake in Santa Cruz County, a site first used in 2003.

Our mantra in this column—that birders should keep track of common species as assiduously as we track uncommon ones (Dinsmore 2001, Dinsmore and Fontaine 2003)—was recently seconded in *Birding* magazine (Davis 2004), though Davis does not favor a recording system on a national or continental scale. The present journal is of course not able to standardize (or even easily quantify) all the birds reported to its editors, but it can flag expanding and extralimital species, including "common" species, very well. An interesting potential range expansion, for instance, was intimated by the presence of a pair of House Finches in Ketchikan, Alaska, where at least one bird has appeared now for three consecutive years. Eurasian Collared-Doves reached Québec this season, while Wisconsin, Wyoming, and Baja California had their first nesting records of the species. In many other places across the West and Southwest, the species has established itself firmly at many hundreds of sites, and reports from Mexico are also on the increase. In the East, where the expansion has been slow (at least north of the Carolinas), records have begun to increase as well. We continue to believe that birders across the continent would both benefit from, and be beneficial for, a national data-recording project that tracks the movements of such "common" birds with more nuance. The best—and only—current data gathering at this level is by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology/National Audubon Society project called "eBird": if you haven't yet done so, please check into it on the Web at <www.ebird.org>. The information logged here is turning out to be very helpful for regional editors' summaries, another reason to support this fledgling project.

Many regions, after all, remain in need of basic information on bird distribution and seasonal abundance, especially those regions on the edges: Mexico and Central America, Alaska, Northern Canada, and the Caribbean islands. We encourage readers who travel to submit reports to regional editors from such areas in particular. With coverage of the A.O.U. Area nearly complete in this journal (only Greenland is excluded), our hope is that each region's coverage can continue to be refined and to expand; indeed, from nearly every region, the contributors' reports continue to increase in number and quality. As our understanding of bird distribution deepens, we find our "hobby," too, is in a mode of rapid expansion: consider that northern California's first Common Black-Hawk, Virginia's first Magnificent Hummingbird, Louisiana's second Green Violet-ear, Washington's fourth Great-tailed Grackle, and Québec's ninth Fieldfare were discovered by people who simply took a moment to look out their back window, folks whom we might not consider among the "hardcore" but who know enough about birds to contact local birding gurus and to document what they see—people who are rapidly expanding the eyes and ears of our network well beyond what we've ever witnessed on this continent. Let's keep it going.

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