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The Changing Seasons

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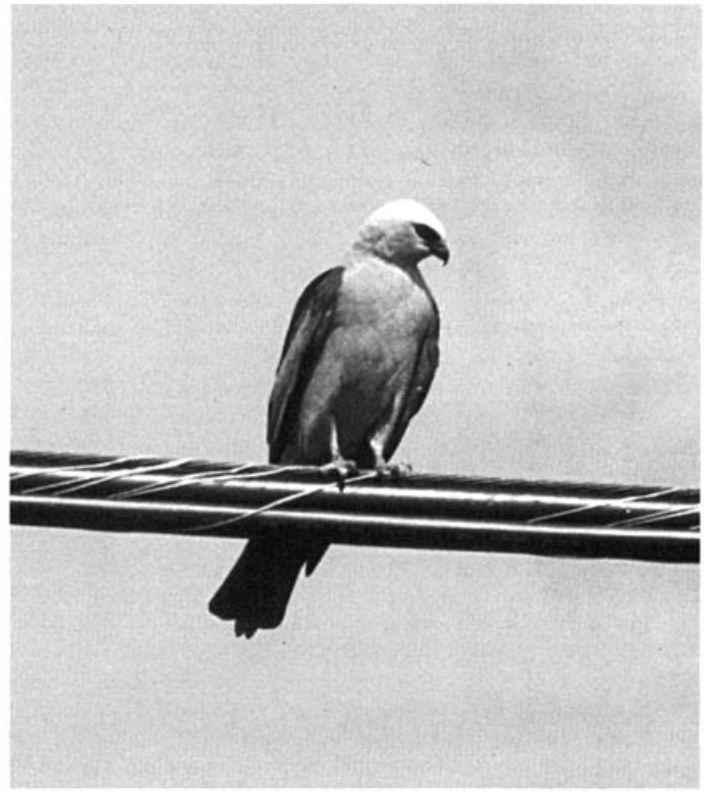
Ah, the summer birding doldrums. But wait—is summer birding really that uninteresting? The flow at our favorite migrant trap has typically slowed to a few drips by early June and is shut off completely by month's end, so we switch our interest to local breeding species. This is, after all, the primary breeding season for most temperate-zone birds and a time for us to study carefully what is occurring during this critical segment of their annual cycle. Summer also provides much-needed rest from hectic spring birding and exhausting Big Days. Myriad activities keep us active in the field each summer, including participation in state breeding bird atlas projects (New York and Maryland are each beginning work on their second comprehensive atlas projects, and several of the California counties are finishing their seconds), volunteering to help with local breeding bird studies, assisting with long-term monitoring projects (mainly for federal- and state-listed species), and perhaps running our favorite Breeding Bird Survey route(s). A few weeks later, and even sooner than that in some regions, we enjoy the onset of fall migration with the return of shorebirds (late June hardly seems like fall, but it is for many members of this group) and the post-breeding dispersal of other species, notably herons. In many parts of the West, mid-summer is proving to be a good time to look for stray eastern passerines, most probably holdovers from spring migration. And yes, there are also a few vagrants to pique our interest. All of this adds up to make summer a very exciting season, even though it lasts a mere two months!

The purpose of the "Changing Seasons" essay has been discussed in detail by several past authors, so I'll refrain from a thorough re-hashing of their points. *North American Birds* aims to provide a series of regional "snapshots" of what is occurring seasonally in North and Central America. The "Changing Seasons" provides a tight summary of the main themes of the regional "snapshots." This column is a place to discuss patterns that occur across regional boundaries and a place to highlight exceptional rarities and other notable records. It is also a venue to discuss patterns (e.g., range expansions) that cross both regions and seasons. What follows is a brief synopsis of some of the more interesting patterns that struck me as I read the regional reports. This summer also saw its share of notable rarities, many of them representing first state, provincial, or country nesting records, and I have highlighted these where appropriate. I encourage you to read the regional reports for additional details on these sightings, many of them detailed in Special Attention (S.A.) boxes. Enjoy!

Weather patterns

Weather during the 2001 nesting season was unexceptional. Continentally, the season began with a series of moderate cold fronts marching across the eastern two-thirds of the continent, resulting in localized rainfall and snow and below normal temperatures. By mid-June, most of the continent was experiencing normal summer weather patterns, and this trend continued for the remainder of the period. Few tropical cyclones formed this summer, and the only storm to affect the United States' mainland was Tropical Storm *Allison*, which hit parts of the Southeast in early June and traveled up the Eastern Seaboard, inundating the Texas Gulf Coast and contributing tremendous amounts of precipitation as far north as New England.



This Mississippi Kite photographed at Amos, Abitibi was the first for Québec and possibly one of the northernmost in North America. The proliferation of this species well to the north of normal range is one of the more remarkable stories of recent summers. *Photograph by M. Lafleur.*

On a finer scale, the regional weather patterns were more variable, although few were noted as being extreme. Dry conditions prevailed in the East (except for localized areas in the Southeast affected by *Allison*), and there were above-average temperatures in the Northeast and more normal temperatures in the Southeast. The mid-continent experienced cool, wet weather in early June, after which seasonably hot and dry conditions were widely reported. Farther west, the weather was even more variable. Parts of the northern Rocky Mountains and the Great Basin were exceptionally dry, while many areas of the Southwest received normal or above-normal rainfall. A major snowstorm in western Montana in early June (up to 15 inches locally) was unusual. Temperatures in this region were generally normal or slightly above normal. The Pacific Coast experienced wet conditions along the northern reaches, with drier conditions typifying the southern reaches; this entire region experienced normal or above-normal temperatures this summer. The Hawaiian Islands continued to experience long-term drought conditions, although above-average rainfall this summer might help reverse that trend. The only comment about weather patterns in Mexico was that it was very rainy throughout the period; weather conditions in the Central America and the West Indies regions were not noted.

Reports of breeding success from multiple regions indicated this was generally a good year, although the paucity of such reports makes any firm conclusions tentative at best. Broad-scale breeding failures were

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reported only in western Alaska and resulted from a cooler-than-normal spring. Spotty drought conditions in the prairies—combined with greater-than-normal summer reports of certain species south of their breeding ranges—made me wonder if there were widespread nesting failures for American White Pelicans and Franklin's Gulls. As with any reporting system that relies on voluntary submissions, we generally hear about the extremes (species doing extremely well, or very poorly) and seldom hear reports when a species performance is closer to "normal." As noted by Bruce Mactavish in the Atlantic Provinces, "The lack of comments on the breeding success, positive or negative, indicates an average breeding season for birds." Knowledge of this reporting bias should temper our broader conclusions, although it often does not.

BREEDING SPECIES

The nesting season is a time to pay particular attention to the primary reproductive period of birds. Our careful observations of breeding birds can help delineate range expansions (and contractions) and occasionally provide insight into general patterns in the population trends of some species. Collectively, this information is extremely useful.

Range expansions

For a variety of reasons, many birds are expanding their known breeding ranges, some at lightning speed and some at a much slower pace. The mid-continent, a region of particular interest to me, provides an interesting example of increasing bird populations. There, several range expansions are underway, some because of true population increases, some because birders are simply looking harder, and some from a combination of these and possibly other factors. Biologists often suggest these changes are due to broad-scale habitat alterations, such as those brought about by conservation programs (e.g., the Conservation Reserve Program and land purchases by Ducks Unlimited, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, and others). But northward expansions in breeding ranges are also thought to result from global warming (Thomas and Lennon 1999), although this pattern is correlative at best. Whatever the cause, it is clear that some species are indeed expanding.

One species that seems to be doing exceptionally well in the mid-continent is Mississippi Kite. I remember when, less than 10 years ago, even an isolated sight record in some parts of the upper Midwest was extraordinary Now, they are regular migrants and local breeders there, and a hawkwatch in western Iowa recorded over 30 migrant kites last fall alone! Yikes! This northward expansion has originated from core breeding areas reaching as far north as central Kansas, central Missouri, and southern Illinois. Small breeding outposts persisted this summer in western Nebraska, central Iowa, and probably at a few as yet undiscovered sites in this region, while new expansion was noted in Illinois, Indiana, and western Missouri. Meanwhile, in the southeastern United States, they are also slowly expanding; in addition to the expected reports in the Central Southern Region, nesting occurred at multiple sites in North Carolina, while up to four individuals each were reported in Québec (first provincial record), at several sites along the Atlantic Coast north to Massachusetts, and in Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Less expected were sightings in Nevada and far northern Arizona. As Mississippi Kites slowly reoccupy much of their former breeding range, we can only hope the same will eventually happen for Swallow-tailed Kites, whose populations have not shown increases in recent years.

Black Rail is one of the most secretive and little-known birds in North America, so news of large breeding populations is always welcome, especially in the interior, where there are but a few scattered known breeding locales. A late June nocturnal survey of selected wetlands along the Arkansas River Valley in southeastern Colorado turned up an impressive 74 calling birds; just how many individuals breed in this area is unknown, but it could easily number in the low hundreds (read the Mountain West regional report for additional details). Away from coastal North Carolina, this may represent the species's largest known breeding population, and it is almost certainly the largest known inland population in North America. Farther north, intensive searches in western Nebraska turned up a single calling bird in a part of the state with several previous summer reports. At the southwestern limit of the breeding range, a small colony was rediscovered in Baja California, a population thought extirpated since 1928. Just how many breeding Black Rails remain undiscovered is tantalizing to ponder. In many parts of the interior, so little serious searching has been done that they could actually be locally common in the appropriate habitat. And given their secretive nature and late night calling habits, they can be surprisingly difficult to detect, even in areas they are known to occupy. Maybe it's time for birders in the mid-continent to burn the midnight oil and mount a serious effort to locate more Black Rails. Where will the next discovery occur?

Another species on the move, at least in mid-continent, is Sandhill Crane. The Greater Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*) has in the last two decades colonized southern Wisconsin, southeastern Minnesota, northeastern Iowa, northern Illinois, and northwestern Pennsylvania, with a couple of isolated nesting records in south-central Nebraska (Sharpe et al. 2001). This pattern of expansion continued this summer with possible breeding noted in northwestern Ohio and southeastern Ontario; stragglers were in New Hampshire and Maine (is breeding possible in this region in the near future?). There is ample unoccupied nesting habitat in northwestern Iowa, western Minnesota, eastern South Dakota, and probably other parts of the upper Midwest; how long (note that the word "if" is not in this question) will it take for cranes to occupy these areas?

The continued expansion of Eurasian Collared-Doves certainly merits a brief discussion here (see Romagosa and McEneaney 2000 for more details). Despite the fact that they have been mentioned in many of the recent "Changing Seasons" essays, I couldn't resist the temptation to discuss them again. The explosion in their numbers has continued unabated, especially in the Great Plains, where they are now found in most of the larger towns north to western Nebraska, eastern Wyoming, and northeastern Colorado; observer effort is low farther north, but I suspect they are rapidly colonizing those areas as well. First state nesting records were reported in Iowa and Minnesota this summer. They are consolidating their range in the interior southeastern United States, with numerous records this summer from Mississippi, Arkansas, and Tennessee; an indication of their abundance in this region was the presence of a roost of 303 birds in Florida in mid-July, now a "typical" count In the West, they continue to thrive in eastern New Mexico, and a pair was nesting in southern California (see Leukering 2001 for more details on their colonization of the southwestern U.S.). On the edge of their present range (this statement could well be obsolete by the time this is published) there were one to three birds each in Wisconsin, Idaho, Virginia, and Delaware. There is concern that Eurasian Collared-Doves could negatively impact native species, especially the Mourning Dove (Romagosa and McEneaney 2000). With this sobering thought, I'm pretty certain their rapid expansion is nothing to cheer about, unless they become supplemental accipiter food. Ted Floyd noted they "stormed into Nevada this summer" (first and second state records); too bad they probably won't storm out just as quickly.

White-winged Dove is another species that is showing signs of a breeding range expansion. It is occurring more frequently east of its regular breeding range, with possible nesting in Nebraska this summer,

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close on the heels of a nest in northeastern Kansas last spring (L. Moore, pers comm.); strays were widespread and were found as far afield as New Brunswick, Ontario, New York (Long Island), Pennsylvania, Delaware, North Carolina, Florida (several outside their normal range there), Alabama, and Manitoba. With the recent nesting record from North Carolina in 1998, it may not be too long before this species breeds elsewhere along the Atlantic Coast, although there is at least some debate as to the source of these birds (see Davis 1998).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher is a species that wanders widely and occasionally nests at locales far from its normal breeding range. This summer it was reported continent-wide in Newfoundland, Maine, Virginia (two), North Carolina (a nest), Georgia (another nest), Alabama (rare but increasing breeder with 1 new nesting locale this year), Ontario (2), Tennessee (two nesting pairs plus a single bird), Mississippi, Wisconsin (2, including one reported as an immature on the unlikely date of 30 June), Illinois (a nest), Kentucky, Nebraska, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, and California (two). Wow—that's a lot of lost flycatchers! The emerging pattern shows a slow breeding-range expansion in the mid-continent and Southeast, along with widespread vagrancy to the north of the breeding range and throughout the West (all non-breeders so far).

Clay-colored Sparrow is another species that may be slowly expanding its breeding range, especially in the eastern U.S. This summer it was noted as "solidly established" in northern New York. Wayward individuals, many of them singing birds (and thus potential breeders), were in Yukon Territory, New Brunswick, Québec (hybridizing with a Chipping Sparrow—a potential identification problem if they successfully produced offspring!), Ontario, Iowa, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, West Virginia, and Maryland. Extralimital reports in the West were fewer but included Idaho's first nesting record and a single bird in eastern Washington, where sporadic breeding is known.

A final species of interest here is Henslow's Sparrow. It was widely reported this summer, despite the fact that its inconspicuous nature makes it harder to detect than most other grassland sparrows. Almost any discussion of declining grassland birds in eastern North America quickly leads to this species, although the picture painted this summer (and in fact for the last several years) is anything but grim. They were widely reported in southern Ontario, New York, Pennsylvania (news of "hundreds" in the western part of the state was encouraging), New Jersey ("more...than in recent years"), Minnesota (reports from eight counties statewide were above normal), Arkansas, Kansas, and Nebraska. In the Middlewestern Prairie Region, Ken Brock noted they were "...reported in good numbers, but were not quite as plentiful as last summer." The real news came from farther west, where first nesting records were recorded in both North Dakota (two nests) and South Dakota. I suspect this apparent increase in their breeding range is a combination of several factors, only one of which may be a true population increase. Other explanations include shifts in distribution that reflect habitat changes (e g , those caused by large-scale Conservation Reserve Programs), or simply the fact that birders there are looking harder. The latter explanation is especially appealing in the Great Plains, where birding coverage is particularly sparse. Stephen Stedman alluded to this detectability problem in an earlier "Changing Seasons" column (Stedman 1998), and I concur with his thoughts; the message "if you look, you will find" may be especially true with Henslow's Sparrows.

I'll pause a moment for a few final thoughts on range expansions. As I read through the regional reports, I am struck by how little mention there is of two other expanding species: Great-tailed Grackle and Shiny Cowbird. I know the grackle is still expanding in mid-continent (pers. obs) and the southern Far West (it is mentioned in the Middle Pacific Coast through British Columbia regional reports), but the cowbird may have slowed its spread since the mid-1990s (Pranty 2000). In terms of range expansions, it appears that at present, doves are "in" and icterids are "out." I concur with the urgings of past columnists here to monitor aggressively those species undergoing rapid range expansions. Birders need to make a more conscious effort to report sightings of *all* such expanding species so that we can later look back and have a sharper image of their pattern of expansion.

Species of special concern

Bald Eagles have continued their remarkable recovery from population lows in the 1960s and 1970s and were mentioned in almost all of the regional reports. Increases in breeding numbers were noted in the Hudson-Delaware region (New York's breeding population has doubled twice since 1991), Ontario, Nebraska, and Kansas, and there were *1,102* territories counted in a survey of Florida (the greatest total since the survey began in 1973). Successful nesting occurred throughout the Middlewestern Prairie Region, several new nests were found in North Dakota, there was a suggestion of breeding in New Mexico, and they continued to recover as a breeding species in California. Additionally, there were numerous scattered reports from the edges of the present breeding range. Perhaps nowhere is this rapid increase more evident than in Iowa, where they have increased from a single nest in 1977 (the first since pre-1900) to eight in 1990, 84 in 1998 (Ehresman 1999), and about 130 nests in 2001 (B. L. Ehresman, pers. comm.)!

This summer was generally good news for the federally listed Piping Plover as well. A record four pairs bred at St. Pierre et Miquelon at the northeastern limit of their breeding range. They apparently did well on the central Atlantic Coast (Delaware and New Jersey), where increased numbers of nesting pairs were counted, although productivity was down slightly in some areas. Breeding success was not noted farther south, although near-average numbers of breeding pairs were present in both Maryland and Virginia. The Great Lakes' breeding population had 32 nesting pairs this year, including a nest at Green Bay, Wisconsin, the first local nesting record since 1941. Single birds at two locations in Ontario in early June were probably late spring migrants. The Great Plains population, the largest in North America, received few comments and thus one hopes experienced near-normal breeding success. Nesting numbers in Iowa were down to four pairs, but farther west there were record numbers (43+ pairs) nesting at Lake McConaughy in western Nebraska and an encouraging five pairs (is this really that encouraging?) nested in southeastern Colorado.

The news was decidedly mixed regarding other imperiled birds On the bright side, a total of *1,085* male Kirtland's Warblers was counted in Michigan, the most since surveys began in 1951. There was also optimistic news about Black-capped Vireos in Oklahoma, although this may or may not have been aided by an active cowbird control program there (see Grzybowski and Pease 1999, Ortega 2000). The news was not so good for Hawaiian Crows ('Alala), now down to a single wild pair, this species may soon follow the trail of the California Condor and exist largely in captive or assisted settings.

Notable breeding records

In addition to the above reports, there were many exceptional state and provincial nesting records this summer. Some of the more noteworthy reports included Red-necked Grebe in Iowa (second state nesting record), Leach's Storm-Petrel in Massachusetts (second nesting locale for the state), Tricolored Heron in Massachusetts (first nesting since the mid-1970s), Wood Stork in Alabama (first state nesting record), Gadwall in northern Mexico (first nesting record for that country), Bufflehead in South Dakota (second state nesting record), Purple Gallinule in

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Oklahoma (second state nesting record), Wilson's Phalarope in Alaska (first state nesting record) and in Massachusetts, Heermann's Gulls (again) in northern California, Boreal Owl in New Hampshire (first state and Regional nesting record), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in Alaska (third state nesting record), Chimney Swift in New Mexico (first state nesting record), Alder Flycatcher in Indiana (first state nesting record), Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Illinois (second state nesting record), White-eyed Vireo in Minnesota (second state nesting record), Northern Wheatear and Brown Thrasher in Newfoundland (first provincial nesting records), Golden-winged Warbler and Scarlet Tanager (in the Black Hills) in South Dakota (first state nesting records), Yellow throated Warbler in Minnesota (second state nesting rexcord), Black-throated Gray Warbler in Montana (first state nesting record), and White-throated Sparrow in Illinois (first state nesting record). In the "probable breeding" category there were also a couple of notable reports, including Short-eared Owls in North Carolina and three potential firsts for El Salvador: Zone-tailed Hawk, Green (Red-throated) Parakeet, and Common Nighthawk.

Miscellaneous

Several interesting nesting records did not fit into the above categories. Avoiding drought in the Great Basin, many waterbirds moved into the Pacific Northwest, and as a result, first nestings of White-faced Ibis in Washington, of Black-necked Stilt and Black Tern in western Washington, and Black-necked Stilt in Oregon were recorded. Wayne Petersen noted the continued decline in the number of nesting waders in New England, although they apparently did well in New York this summer (except for Cattle Egrets, which continue to decline Regionwide as a breeder). Common Eiders continued to consolidate their breeding range in New England, with a report of a group of 214 ducklings in Boston Harbor. That's a lot of duckling-kabobs for the local Great Black-backed Gull population! It was encouraging to learn of at least four Merlin nests in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota; hopefully this southward expansion into urban areas will continue. Common Nighthawks were almost universally lamented as "disappearing" from urban areas across the continent, whereas many species of diurnal raptors appear to be acclimating to cities and nesting in close proximity to human activities (New York City had eight nesting raptor species!), a trend seen in Europe in the last decade as well. A successful ground-nesting attempt by Flammulated Owls in Montana was probably unprecedented for that species. Golden-winged Warblers continue to lose ground against Blue-winged, but note the stable proportions in some parts of upstate New York, where the two apparently segregate by habitat. Finally, a comment on the decline of Horned Larks in southern Saskatchewan (see the Prairie Provinces regional report) caught my eye; this species is super-abundant in adjacent northeast Montana (pers. obs.). What's up on the Canadian side of the border?

NONBREEDING SPECIES

While the emphasis in summer is on breeding species, there are also many reports of nonbreeders that draw our interest. The "summer" season, defined by arbitrary dates to include the months of June and July, means little to the birds we study. Northbound migrants of many species (White-rumped Sandpiper, both cuckoos, several species of *Empidonax*, Mourning Warbler, and many others) are still widespread as migrants in early June, and this pattern was especially evident this year with the cool weather pattern in late spring and early summer. Conversely, fall migration for a few species (most shorebirds, several hummingbirds, Yellow Warbler, orioles, and others) can be well underway by early or mid-July, and for some even earlier and at a time when the aforementioned species are still heading north. In addition, many Arctic and boreal breeders regularly summer south of their breeding ranges, while pelagic birds disperse north in fall (our spring) to spend their winter (our summer) in northern oceans. All of this means that there are many nonbreeding species to draw our attention during the summer months. The examples that follow highlight some of the more interesting such observations this summer.

Summer loons

Over the past decade, and perhaps a little earlier, birders have been carefully studying and identifying loons summering south of their respective breeding ranges. As a result, we have seen a proliferation of records of unusual loons to the point that we cannot automatically assume they are all Common Loons. The summer 2001 season was no exception. Many loons other than Common Loons were reported, further dispelling the old assumption that most of these nonbreeders are Common Loons Red-throated Loons were reported from several Great Lakes states (most were in early June, probably representing late spring migrants), in coastal Alabama (first summer record for the state), and a few summered off Baja California. Inland Pacific Loons were reported from Iowa, Nebraska, Texas, Idaho, Colorado, and at the Salton Sea in southern California, in addition to the normal scattering along the Pacific Coast The only Yellow-billed Loon report was from interior British Columbia This smattering of interesting loons should certainly make us continue to carefully scrutinize *all* summer loons seen away from the breeding ranges.

Pelagic birds

This summer saw the continued saga of extraordinary pelagic finds off both coasts. The regular tubenoses were generally reported as numerous off the East Coast, especially numbers of Greater Shearwaters and Wilson's Storm-Petrels (see the Middle Atlantic Coast report for details on their occurrence in the Chesapeake Bay). Regular trips to the Gulf Stream off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, produced another Bermuda Petrel in addition to the more expected Fea's and Herald Petrels But even more extraordinary was the presence of Manx Shearwaters, normally rare in summer off North Carolina; one was also noted off Bermuda. Farther north, Manx Shearwaters were reported in good numbers, including a count of 61 from shore in Massachusetts. Could this apparent increase in summer sightings south of the normal breeding range be indicative of large-scale failed breeding in the western Atlantic? Members of the Sulidae were also on the move: two Brown Boobies off New Jersey and the expected small numbers of Masked Boobies off the Southeast and in the Gulf of Mexico. A Long-tailed Jaeger was a great summer find off North Carolina. In Texas, a single Band-rumped Storm-Petrel was found inland after Tropical Storm *Allison*, the only "leftover" from this weak tropical storm. A pelagic trip into Mexican waters in the western Gulf of Mexico apparently recorded that country's first Tamaulipan records of Cory's Shearwater, Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, and Sooty Tern.

Likewise, pelagic birding off the West Coast produced a few interesting sightings this summer. Shearwater numbers, especially Pink-footed Shearwaters, were above average, while most reports of other tubenoses were as expected. Interesting albatross records included a Laysan inshore off southern California and a Short-tailed Albatross off Oregon (sixth record there in last 50 years). In southern California, a Dark-rumped Petrel as well as record numbers of Red-billed Tropicbirds at San Clemente Island made news. Magnificent Frigatebirds were scarce, although one off British Columbia was exceptional.

Arctic Terns are showing a pattern of slow increase in the interior during migration (May to October), although much of this increase may be

due to greater awareness and better identification skills. Nonetheless, recent nesting records in Montana (Dinsmore and Jorgensen 2001) and a single Arctic Tern courting a Common Tern at Chicago this summer (see the Middlewestern Prairie report) raise the possibility that there may be future nesting records of this species in the interior United States. In addition to the Illinois report, single adults were in Florida (first inland report for the state), Idaho, and eastern Washington, and two or three were in Colorado. In many parts of the Great Plains, I am beginning to think that an immaculate adult medium-sized *Sterna*, seen during summer away from any known nesting colonies, has a very good chance of being an Arctic Tern. The message here is that all *Sterna* at odd summer locales are certainly worth careful study.

Herons

Late summer is typically the time for post-breeding dispersal by herons, and this year was no exception. The usual post-breeding dispersal patterns were exhibited by many of the more common species, including Great and Snowy Egrets and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, all of which were widely reported. Among the "rarer" species, Little Blue Herons were notable in Manitoba (three individuals, including one as far north as Churchill!), and they nested in South Dakota. Tricolored Herons wandered more widely and included a single bird in Manitoba and a nesting report in South Dakota (third state nesting record). A white-morph Reddish Egret was exceptional in Colorado, and represented the second record of a white morph bird in the Great Plains, after a Nebraska record last fall. In accordance with the increases noted by Patten and Lasley (2000), out-of-range Glossy Ibis were reported in Ontario, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma, and single White-faced Ibis were found in New Jersey, Delaware, and Alabama. Some of these "increases" in reciprocal areas may simply have resulted from increased observer effort and better identification skills, although the westward expansion of Glossy Ibis is generally attributed to a true increase (Patten and Lasley 2000). Intriguing was the story of a nesting colony of White-faced Ibis in the Rainwater Basin of south-central Nebraska (J. G. Jorgensen, pers. comm.). The colony was abandoned in mid-summer, and many of the birds moved to a nearby wetland where two Glossy Ibis (an apparent pair) were subsequently discovered. It is quite possible these birds may have nested (or attempted to do so) with the White-faced Ibis. The co-occurrence of both species in the Great Plains suggests that all nesting *Plegadis* in this region should now be carefully scrutinized, as they cannot all automatically be assumed to be White-faced Ibis

Shorebirds

At I stated earlier, "summer" is a good season to see migratory shorebirds Fall migrant shorebirds were widespread even as far south as Mexico, Central America, and the West Indies by mid-July, especially the typically "early" species such as Lesser Yellowlegs and Solitary and Least Sandpipers For some species, notably Piping Plover and Upland Sandpiper, peak numbers often occur in July; 57 of the former were already in coastal Texas by late July.

As expected, a few exceptional shorebirds were seen this summer Two Bar-tailed Godwits were found in Washington, and another was noted in Hawaii; a Red-necked Stint was in California; and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and an American Woodcock were in Bermuda. In addition, the more regular Eurasian species were found in small numbers on both coasts and at scattered inland locales: Ruffs were found in nine states and provinces, while single Curlew Sandpipers occurred in five coastal states A wayward Purple Sandpiper was accidental at Churchill, Manitoba in early June. Another summer vagrant to interior regions is Red Phalarope, with singles reported this summer in Nebraska, New Mexico, and southern California.

Eastern passerines in the West

As migration in the East slows down in late May and early June, birding continues to be interesting in many parts of the West. The annual phenomenon of eastern migrants appearing in the West through mid-June is well known. While many of the better migrant traps have already been discovered, there are apparently still a few hotspots that remain to be found, such as Warm Springs Ranch in southern Utah (see the Great Basin report for summer discoveries at this site).

The summer 2001 season was exceptional for some eastern passerines in parts of the West (see the Great Basin, Oregon-Washington, and Middle and Southern Pacific Coast reports for more details). The "usual" mix of eastern warblers included above-normal numbers of several species, plus near-record numbers of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (Table 1). While these reports are obviously biased by factors such as where we bird (most effort is at known hotspots), or the timing of weather events relative to weekends (the days most birders are afield), patterns that appear to be real do occasionally emerge. Three of these species (Northern Parula, Hooded Warbler, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak) were widespread in this region in late spring, received special attention in the regional reports, and were probably the result of real increases in numbers of vagrants.

Table 1. Records of some eastern passerines in the western North America, summer 2001.

Species	Region MT/ID	CO/WY	NM	AZ	UT/NV	OR/WA	n. CA	s. CA	BC
Blue-winged Warbler		1					1		
Golden-winged Warbler		1			1			1	
Northern Parula		1		1	2	1	19[1]	5	
Chestnut-sided Warbler		3	2		2	3	6	1	
Black-throated Blue Warbler		1			2		1		
Prothonotary Warbler			1	1		1		1	
Ovenbird	1		1	4	1	1	6	2	
Kentucky Warbler		1	4	2				3	
Hooded Warbler			4	4	2		9	2	
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	4	1+	1	3	5	11	30	10	3

[1]Nesting confirmed at one site, possible at two others

Miscellaneous II

Recent increased attention to jaeger identification, coupled with increased study of vagrant individuals, has led to a better understanding of their distribution in interior North America (see Leukering 2000). Based on personal experience and a perusal of many past summer "Changing Seasons" summaries, I might add a third "rule" to Leukering's list: most "summer" jaegers inland tend to be Pomarines, with only a few Long-tailed Jaegers and almost no Parasitic Jaegers (at least not very many that are well-documented) being reported. Most inland summer jaegers also tend to be adults (or rarely subadults). This summer was no exception to the above patterns: single adult Pomarine Jaegers were found in Nebraska, Texas, and Colorado.

Not surprisingly, many of the "movers" of last winter lingered into the summer season. After a good irruption last winter, Rough-legged Hawks lingered south of their breeding range in small numbers. Mostly singles were reported in British Columbia, Washington, southwestern Manitoba, Minnesota, Michigan, several in southern Ontario, but unusually high numbers were noted along the St. Lawrence River in Québec. Snowy Owls staged only a minor irruption last winter (Brinkley 2001), although single birds tarried south of the breeding range in Québec and Ontario. Probably as a result of the major irruption last winter (Brinkley 2001), many Northern Hawk Owls and Great Gray Owls stretched the southern limits of their breeding ranges this year; however, many of the reports did not specifically indicate nesting activity. Noteworthy summer reports included Northern Hawk Owls in British Columbia (two nests), Washington (first summer record for the region), Idaho (first state nesting record), Québec (probable nesting was noted at two southerly locales), northern Minnesota (four nests), and eastern Ontario. Great Gray Owls showed a similar pattern, with extralimital birds in Québec (confirmed nesting), Michigan, and Washington. Because these reports followed a major southward irruption last winter, the most interesting question : "Is this pattern temporary or permanent?" Only time will tell. Finally, a few Red-breasted Nuthatches lingered at southerly locales after a minor eruption last winter, including the first summer record for Baja California.

There were several other miscellaneous reports of note. A Long-tailed Duck was found in Montana (second state summer record) and another was notable in Wisconsin; this species is exceptional in the interior Lower 48 in summer. Up to seven Black-legged Kittiwakes summering in Baja California were noteworthy. An extraordinary Dovekie off Massachusetts was thought to be the latest ever for the region. Black-whiskered Vireos were reported in North Carolina, where they are accidental, and for the first time in summer in Texas. This species is a classic "stealth" vagrant, with records north only to Back Bay, Virginia; how long before one shows up farther north at Cape May or Cape Cod? Finally, Northern Wheatears lingered after their spring incursion in the Northeast with singles in New Hampshire and Vermont.

Lastly, when scanning the regional reports, there are always a few breathtaking numbers, sometimes of common species. Such reports this summer included 1500 Little Blue Herons at a roost near St. Louis, 263 Swallow-tailed Kites in the Pearl River Basin along the Mississippi/Louisiana border, 1400 Semipalmated Plovers at South Beach, Massachusetts, 15,000+ Common Terns nesting on South Monomoy I., Massachusetts, a concentration of 100,000 (!) Purple Martins in Texas, 13,000 Bank Swallows at Point Pelee, Ontario, and a report of 35 (!) territorial Hooded Warblers (counts of more than a single bird this far north are notable) at Murphy-Hanrehan Regional Park in Minnesota. Many of us enjoy birding for spectacles such as these—I'll never forget the hordes of migratory Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes in the Great Plains in March, masses of shorebirds at Delaware Bay in May, and the winter roosts of tens of millions of blackbirds in parts of the Southeast. These events are often awe-inspiring and provide the sense of excitement that keeps us in the field.

Goodies

As usual, there were a few finds that defied imagination—birds that were so far out of range or season that their occurrence would almost never be predicted. These are the birds that keep so many of us in the field, always searching for that extraordinary find. Sightings falling into this category (some pending acceptance by local records committees) included a Shy Albatross off California, a Little Egret in Delaware, a Garganey in Nova Scotia, a Harlequin Duck in Arizona (second state record), a King Eider in Louisiana (found dead; third state record), single Swallow-tailed Kites in Kentucky (second record since 1900) and Wisconsin, a Wilson's Plover in Michigan (third state record), a Red-necked Stint at St. Pierre et Miquelon (second regional report), a Western Gull in Arizona (second state record), a Roseate Tern in Louisiana (first state record), an Elegant Tern in New Mexico (second state record) plus two more in Arizona, a Black Skimmer in Colorado (first state record) and another in New Mexico (third or fourth state record), a Whiskered Auklet in British Columbia (first provincial record), single Tropical and Tropical/Couch's Kingbirds along the Gulf Coast of Florida (pay attention to those wayward "Western" Kingbirds!), a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Newfoundland (a surprising first provincial record), Cave Swallows in Virginia, Oklahoma, and Kansas (the latter two were first state records), a Brown-headed Nuthatch in Illinois (first state record; same location that hosted a Red-cockaded Woodpecker last fall, so who knows what will be found there next?), a Tropical Parula in Arizona (second state record), single Yellow-throated Warblers in North Dakota and Idaho (both second state records), a Worm-eating Warbler in Oregon (second state record), an Eastern Towhee in Idaho (first state record, but there was no mention that a hybrid Spotted x Eastern Towhee was considered or ruled out), a Painted Bunting in Utah (first or second state record), and a Brewer's Blackbird in Newfoundland (first provincial record).

Gleaning the most from field records

In the above discussion, I attempted to delineate patterns based upon the information in the regional reports. As a result of reporting biases, we may not know a species is expanding until the increase is well underway It should be apparent that patterns are hard to define when data are lacking. I'm not saying we need detailed information on all of the common species, but are spotty data on the breeding success of a bird like the American Robin likely to be very useful? Well, probably not. But other species, those with special conservation interest, or those that are dramatically increasing or declining, or those whose breeding ranges or migration patterns are poorly known, may merit more attention. These are the species upon which we should focus our reporting efforts. And good reporting relies on good note taking.

In my experience, birders vary considerably in the details they record about their sightings while in the field. This can vary from simply keeping life or year lists to keeping far more detailed lists. Detailed lists can be daily lists, lists of species seen at a particular site by date, numbers of birds seen by site and date, or records of identifiable forms, races, subspecies, or identifiable age and/or sex classes, also by date and location Obviously, records in the latter form are the most useful, although each type of record keeping has its own merits. As my birding companions can attest to, I carry a stack of 3x5" cards in the field and I am constantly scribbling details on the number, race, subspecies, age/sex, and other features (e.g., odd plumage details) of the birds I see. Such detailed records have immense value, but only a handful of birders keep them It would be nice to see this pattern change. To that end, I would like to see

more birders jotting down notes while in the field, and then later transferring these notes to one of the many database management programs available for birders. This information can then, in turn, be used to contribute detailed reports that increase our general understanding of birds, provide a source of information for authors of state bird books, can be used to develop local bird checklists, and much more.

We should continually strive to expand our collective knowledge of birds, and contributing the most detailed records possible is the best way to accomplish this. If, say, you encounter multiple subspecies (or other identifiable classes) of a common bird in your area, there is great value in keeping track of each subspecies and reporting those data. As an example, how many birders regularly keep track of the races of Dark-eyed Juncos that occur in their area? In parts of the Great Plains where multiple races regularly occur, limited work suggests that individuals of different races may follow quite different migrational patterns, and their winter distributions can vary markedly between years. Such information is extremely interesting, and more birders should make an effort to collect these data. I cannot remember how many times I've heard another birder make a statement along the lines of "I saw 14 Sabine's Gulls in Wyoming this fall, but the state bird book says they are casual in the state" Well, the source data for that book probably relied on voluntary submissions by birders. If the published information is erroneous, it's probably because no one bothered to submit the correct information.

Many taxonomic changes have at their roots the careful observations of amateur field ornithologists. These careful observations cause birders and ornithologists alike to ask more complex questions, some of which result in detailed studies and eventual splits. There are hundreds of examples where such information might be collected: color morphs of species such as Reddish Egret or the jaegers (could migratory or dispersal patterns differ by color morph?), the age, sex, and color morph of Rough-legged Hawks (there is latitudinal segregation in winter based on age and sex), subspecies of Willets ("western" birds are common in migration and winter along the Atlantic Coast), age classes of many gulls, the three forms of Gray Jays (this could be useful for sorting out the source(s) of irrupting birds), the various subspecies of Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes (this information can be useful in pinpointing the source[s] of migrants using an area; see Lane and Jamarillo 2000a, 2000b, 2000c), the races of Palm Warblers, etc. Some of this information is already being collected and reported, and I applaud those who are contributing to this information gathering. But even broader support from birders is needed for us to better understand the life history traits of these and many other species.

A second, and closely related, reason for recording such data has to do with the ever-changing taxonomic status of many species (see Sibley 1997). Michael Patten (Patten 2000) touched on this subject recently, where he emphasized the lack of records of certain species (e.g., Atlantic Brant, *Branta bernicula hrota*, on the Pacific Coast) following a "lumping" of species; I would like to expand on his discussion. First and foremost, I want to emphasize information gathering *before* a potential species split. Over the past several years, the birding community has seen some rather profound changes in bird taxonomy (American Ornithologists' Union 1998). Advances in molecular tools, coupled with an increased interest in avian taxonomy and the somewhat plastic definition of a species, have led to the naming of several "new" bird species, clearly making this the era of the splitter. And while it is true that splits lengthen our bird lists, they also serve another important function: they force us to study many familiar species more carefully with the result that we learn more about them. Unfortunately, it often takes a split to motivate this additional study. While there are exceptions, how many birders carefully studied members of the "Solitary" Vireo complex before it was split into three species in 1996? Or how about "Western" Flycatchers? Or even something as large and ubiquitous (at least at leks) as a Sage-Grouse? The point is that we typically do not, or have not, studied these species until after they were split. I urge birders to plan ahead: try to pay attention to identifiable forms, races, subspecies, etc., long before a potential split. Even if the split *never* occurs, this additional scrutiny fosters learning, which is certainly a core component of birding.

These pages cannot possibly serve as a complete treatise on this subject, but some species to pay particular attention to in the immediate future include Canada Goose (among others, the small Arctic subspecies *minima* may soon be a distinct species), White-breasted Nuthatch (the Eastern, Rocky Mountain, and Pacific subspecies can be readily separated by calls), Marsh Wren (eastern and western subspecies can be identified by song and plumage), Nashville Warbler (the two subspecies may eventually be split), Brewer's Sparrow (recent work suggests that "Timberline" Sparrow may soon be split from Brewer's Sparrow, see Klicka et al. 1999), Sage Sparrow (Johnson and Marten 1992), Fox Sparrow (four full species may soon result from potential splits; see Zink 1994 and Zink and Kessen 1999), Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (the Hepburn's race could well be a future split), and Red Crossbill (talk of major splits has waned in the last year; alas, the distinct forms often require recordings to separate them, at least definitively).

Parting thoughts

As I wrap up this column, I have two messages I would like to re-emphasize. First, birders should continue to submit reports that are as detailed as possible, and these reports should certainly include information about current species of conservation interest (e.g., include more reports of the rapidly-expanding Eurasian Collared-Dove). Second, birders should think ahead to possible future splits and begin collecting the pertinent data now.

In a different vein, the contents of the "Changing Seasons" rely exclusively on the voluntary reports of birders. In some regions, concentrated birding activity and an efficient reporting system add up to very useful reports; editors in these regions do an excellent job of summarizing local patterns and identifying unusual sightings. Conversely, other regions may suffer in one or both of these areas, and the resulting reports are sometimes less useful. I will end by reiterating a plea of several past writers of this column: please be as thorough as possible when interpreting records in your Regions. Without your interpretation, editors might not mention the record or might misinterpret it. Neither outcome is beneficial.

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