



Winging It

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION



American Birding®
ASSOCIATION

Vol. 24, no. 6
December 2012

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What Counts? And Why? Says Who?

JEFF SKRENTNY • skrentnyspeaks@me.com

Who makes the rules?

Before diving into the nitty-gritty, it's important to understand who actually makes the "rules" for those of us who want to play the listing game on a level playing field and who submit our list totals to the ABA for publication. Most people would probably reply that the ABA makes the rules. Though correct, the full answer is more complicated. (On the other hand, if you don't care to have your totals published, you are free to count whatever you like.) Two different ABA committees are responsible for determining "what counts": The ABA Checklist Committee (CLC) and the Recording Standards and Ethics Committee (RSEC).

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"What? You're counting Whooping Crane on your Tennessee list?"

"Sure! They are wild, native birds."

"But they were raised in captivity and released; you can't count those."

"Are they wild birds? Yes. Are they native birds? Yes. Why shouldn't I count them?"

"Because you can't. That's why."

"Who says I can't count them?"

Which birder is right? And why? Listing is a game played by thousands of birders throughout the ABA Area, and determining "what counts" seems simple enough, until you start digging. It then becomes a more complicated issue where individual and organizational biases, prejudices, and preferences make it a research project that produces many good answers and a few nagging questions. Below, I have attempted to thoroughly and logically answer questions of "countability" in specific scenarios. Of course, the rules for games aren't always logical, and the conclusions reached here may yet prove to be incorrect.

These Whooping Cranes, photographed in Indiana, clearly have bands and radio transmitters attached. Do they "count"? Photo by © Dan Kaiser.



Nominations Sought for 2013 ABA Awards

D. H. MICHAEL BOWEN • Chair, ABA Awards Committee • dhmbowen@yahoo.com

All ABA members in good standing are eligible and cordially invited to make one or more nominations for the five principal ABA Awards described below.

The deadline for receiving nominations is 31 December 2012, so don't delay! Discuss it with friends and birders in your local bird clubs, and check the detailed award descriptions at <<http://www.aba.org/about/awards.html>>. The categories are:

1. ABA Roger Tory Peterson Award for Promoting the Cause of Birding
2. ABA Chandler Robbins Award in Education/Conservation
3. ABA Claudia Wilds Award for Distinguished Service
4. ABA Robert Ridgeway Award for Excellence in Publications in Field Ornithology

Big Day and List Report News

"How do I submit my 2012 my lists?" For 2012, we're premiering a more fun, more flexible, and more powerful way to track and present all your bird lists. There will be no paper submission forms, reducing errors, and saving trees, postage, and time. It all begins January 15, 2013. You will have until February 15th to submit your 2012 lists. More information is available at <aba.org/bigday>.

—Jeffrey Gordon

President, American Birding Association

5. ABA Ludlow Griscom Award for Outstanding Contributions in Regional Ornithology

Then go to <<http://www.aba.org/about/awardsform.php>> to nominate your picks!

You may submit a nomination via web portal or by downloading, printing, and snail-mailing a nomination form to the ABA. In either case, please don't stint on providing full supporting details that will strengthen your nomination(s). Also, consider asking other birders to submit "seconding" nominations for your nominee.

2012 ABA Award Recipients

Member associations benefit substantially from a program under which notable contributors receive formal public recognition as heroes of the community at large. 2012 has been a banner year for the ABA's, with the presentation of five awards, including the our highest honor, the Roger Tory Peterson Award, which had not been presented since 2009, and the Robert Ridgeway Award, which was last presented in 2008.

Winner of the Chandler Robbins Award, given for significant contributions to education or bird conservation, is **Joseph Coleman** of Round Hill, Virginia. Joe is a dominant force in the conservation and birding communities of the Greater Washington, D.C. area. Past President of the Audubon Naturalist Society and the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and incoming President of the Virginia Ornithological Society, he has spearheaded many conservation successes in Northern Virginia. He also finds time to lead regular bird trips and to be a writer/editor for the weekly rare bird alert, "Voice of the Naturalist". Coleman received his award in June, at the annual meeting of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

Richard Crossley of Cape May, New Jersey is winner of the

Editor:

Michael L. P. Retter

Design/Production:

Ed Rother

Editorial correspondence:

mretter@aba.org

Address:

1618 W. Colorado Ave.

Colorado Springs, CO 80904

You can join the ABA, learn more about us and our programs, and access a wide range of birding links on our website: <www.aba.org>

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Winging It (ISSN #1042-511X) (USPS 003-289) is published bi-monthly by the American Birding Association, Inc., 1618 W. Colorado Ave., Colorado Springs, CO 80904. Periodicals postage paid at Colorado Springs, CO, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Winging It*, 1618 W. Colorado Ave., Colorado Springs, CO 80904. (Individual membership: \$45 per year) Return postage guaranteed: Send undeliverable copies and POD Forms 3579 to 1618 W. Colorado Ave., Colorado Springs, CO 80904. For Canadian returns mail to WDS, Station A, P. O. Box 54, Windsor, ON N9A 6J5. GST Registration No. R135943454. Canadian Publications Agreement No. 40033104.

• The American Birding Association aims to inspire all people to enjoy and protect wild birds.

• The American Birding Association represents the North American birding community and supports birders through publications, conferences, workshops, tours, partnerships, and networks.

• The ABA's education programs promote birding skills, ornithological knowledge, and the development of a conservation ethic.

• The ABA encourages birders to apply their skills to help conserve birds and their habitats, and we represent the interests of birders in planning and legislative arenas.

• ABA members are encouraged to patronize our partners for their birding needs. Eagle Optics (800.289.1132) offers a wide selection of the world's best sport optics, while Buteo Books (800.722.2460) offers a wide selection of birding publications, including the popular ABA/Lane Birdfinding Guides. Make sure you tell them both you're an ABA member!

• We welcome all birders as members.

Robert Ridgway Award, given for excellence in publications in field ornithology. Richard's nominator and the Awards Committee were impressed by the innovation and flair demonstrated by his Crossley I.D. Guide, published in 2011 to critical acclaim, as it truly broke new ground in the world of birding field guides. Even non-birders have been thrilled and inspired by the montages of thousands of photos springing to life from every page. ABA President Jeffrey Gordon presented Crossley with his award at the ABA Members' Meeting in Wilmington, Delaware in late September.

Winner of the Roger Tory Peterson Award for Promoting the Cause of Birding is **Jon Dunn**, one of North America's best known and accomplished birders: trip leader, records committee member, field guide editor and author, and all-around authority on our passion, hobby, and science. The ABA particularly recognizes Jon for his contributions to public appreciation and understanding of birds as editorial consultant or editor for all six editions of the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America, which collectively have reached millions of people. Dunn received his award from ABA President Jeff Gordon at the Central Valley Symposium in Stockton, California in November, not far from his home in Bishop.

In 2012, ABA presented two of its members with Ludlow Griscom Awards—it was the first year in ABA history that two people have been so honored. The Griscom Award recognizes “outstanding contributions to regional ornithology”.

Mark Lockwood of Alpine, Texas received his Griscom Award at the Rio Grande Birding Festival in November. Mark is recognized

for his many contributions to birding in Texas, especially for his work as secretary of the state's bird records committee, which is widely regarded as a model committee because of his emphasis on the necessity of proper documentation and speedy review. Lockwood is author of the definitive *Birds of the Edwards Plateau*. He also co-authored the 2004 *Handbook of Texas Birds* and the latest *Birders Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*, a volume in the ABA-Lane birdfinding series.

In September, **Ian McLaren**, a retired professor at Dalhousie University received this year's other Griscom Award from ABA Board Chair Lou Morrell at a ceremony in Halifax, Nova Scotia. McLaren is a premier birder and ornithologist in Atlantic Canada and editor and/or author of the most authoritative books on the birds of the province. His newest volume, *All the Birds of Nova Scotia*, is due to be published before the end of 2012. Ian's long-term studies of the Ipswich [Savannah] Sparrow, which breeds on Sable Island, are well known. He continues in retirement to be active in scientific surveys and counts of birds in eastern Canada.



Joseph Coleman receives the Robbins Award from ABA Board Member Michael Bowen.



Richard Crossley receives the Ridgway Award from ABA Board Chair Lou Morrell.



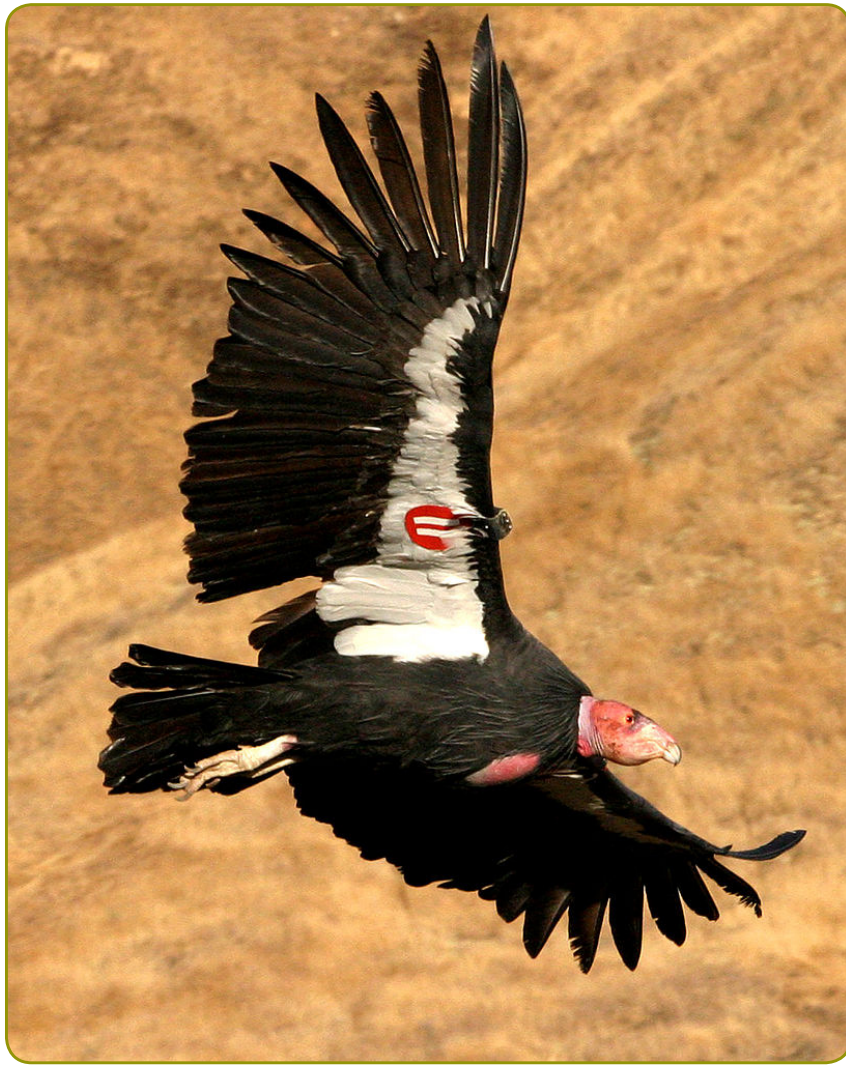
Jon Dunn receives the Peterson Award from ABA President Jeffrey Gordon.



Mark Lockwood receives the Griscom Award from ABA President Jeffrey Gordon.



Ian McLaren receives the Griscom Award from ABA Board Chair Lou Morrell.



Can you count this condor when it flies over next month during your trip to Bitter Creek NWR in California? Only if you think its population fulfills all the ABA's criteria of an established population. In other words, you shouldn't. Photo by © Pacific Southwest Region USFWS.

Within the ABA Bylaws <www.aba.org/about/bylaws.pdf> is the language which establishes the CLC.

The [CLC] shall assemble for publication a master checklist of the birds of North America. For purposes of the checklist, "North America" shall be defined as the continental United States (including the District of Columbia), Canada, St. Pierre and Miquelon... The checklist shall be revised from time to time by the committee, and shall serve as the basis for all North American [life] lists and other types of lists recognized by the Association for areas that include, or are included by, North America as delineated herein. The committee shall consist of five or more members and shall file its report annually with the board of directors.

The CLC is guided in its deliberations by guidelines <<http://aba.org/checklist/bylaws.html>> last revised in 1997 and reaffirmed by the committee in 2007. Though the document listed does have provisions for governance, it does not appear to truly be a functioning set of bylaws with an "Article, Section" format. Regardless, according to this document, the CLC's specific responsibilities are (1) publica-

tion of the ABA Checklist; and, (2) revision of the ABA Checklist.

- Not specifically stated as responsibilities but items that the committee includes in its "ABA Checklist Committee Bylaws" as "unwritten purposes" include:
- 1 • Gather, archive, and evaluate documentation for birds newly recorded within the ABA Checklist Area;
 - 2 • Share and work with the AOU Committee on Classification and Nomenclature;
 - 3 • Review/reevaluate species on the ABA Checklist as necessary; and,
 - 4 • Produce a report to be published annually in Birding that informs the membership of committee decisions. (the 2011 report: <<http://www.aba.org/birding/v43n6p26.pdf>>)

The CLC evaluates records of species not on the Checklist, whether the records are brand new or re-considered old ones. Once a species is added, subsequent sightings are not ruled on by the CLC. It may revisit whether to include any of the species already on the list, but when it comes to "countability", its purview seemingly ends with deciding whether a species should be included on the Checklist.

In practice, it is usually the case that species new to the ABA Area are reviewed by provincial/state records committees first. After that, the records are taken up by the CLC. But there is no rule that this must be the case. Within its currently published "bylaws", the CLC states that

It is generally the policy of the CLC to wait for review of potential first ABA Area records by the appropriate state or provincial records committee before taking the record under consideration. This will not always be the case (e.g., a few states/provinces do not have functioning records committees).

Potential first ABA Area records that have NOT been accepted by state/provincial records committees may still undergo [CLC] review if requested by one or more [CLC] members."

The CLC has a long history of waiting for and showing deference to the individual regional records committees, where they exist. It determines which species are on the Checklist, but "what counts" is more complicated than that. This is where the Recording Standards and Ethics Committee (RSEC) comes in. The RSEC was also created in the ABA Bylaws.

The [RSEC] shall establish and amend the rules and procedures for the submission to, and publication by, the Association, of both bird lists and Big Day Reports... In submitting such lists or reports a member shall be required to adhere to the decisions of this committee... [which] shall consist of three or more members.

The RSEC, which is not governed by any published bylaws, has the power to create nearly any rule it wants pertaining to the "countability" of birds on a list reported to the ABA. Last updated in 2004,

the **ABA Recording Rules and Interpretations (RRIs)** <<http://aba.org/bigday/rules.pdf>> is the most important document in this discussion, and it will be referred to often later in this article. It states that

Members who submit lifelist and annual list totals to the American Birding Association for publication in the annual ABA List Report must observe the ABA Recording Rules... A bird included in totals submitted for ABA lists must have been encountered in accordance with the following ABA Recording Rules.

- 1 • *The bird must have been within the prescribed area and time period when encountered.*
- 2 • *The bird must have been a species currently accepted by the ABA Checklist Committee for lists... within its area, or by the AOU Checklist for lists outside the ABA Area and within the AOU area, or by Clements for all other areas.*



- 3 • *The bird must have been alive, wild, and unrestrained when encountered.*
- 4 • *Diagnostic field marks for the bird, sufficient to identify to species, must have been seen and/or heard and/or documented by the recorder at the time of the encounter.*
- 5 • *The bird must have been encountered under the conditions that conform to the ABA Code of Birding Ethics.*

Another important document the RSEC has created is mentioned in RRI 5: the ABA Code of Birding Ethics <<http://www.aba.org/about/ethics.html>>. To summarize, the four clear principles of the ABA Code of Birding Ethics are:

- 1 • *Promote the welfare of birds and their environment.*
- 2 • *Respect the law, and the rights of others.*
- 3 • *Ensure that feeders, nest structures, and other artificial bird environments are safe.*
- 4 • *Group birding, whether organized or impromptu, requires special care.*

Any bird seen while breaking one or more of these guidelines is not countable on a list reported to the ABA. If you went on private property without permission to see that rare bird, it doesn't count. Know the ABA Code of Birding Ethics, and follow the code if you want to be a lister who is respected by your peers.

The combined work of both the CLC and the RSEC has established a robust set of parameters of what counts, and why. We may count any of the 976 species on the ABA Checklist provided the sighting does not break any of the five rules listed in the RRIs.

Yet, despite the substantial efforts of these two committees, more work needs to be done. There are number of key "What counts?" questions that remain unanswered and perplexing.

Can I count a repatriated Whooping Crane I saw in Tennessee?

Let's now revisit the initial question of what to do with those pesky Tennessee Whooping Cranes by applying the RRIs set forth above.

- 1 • *The Whoopers were in the ABA Area and in Tennessee, meaning that if they don't run afoul of the other rules, they may be counted on those lists.*
- 2 • *Whoopers are on the ABA Checklist.*
- 3 • *The birds were wild and unrestrained.*
- 4 • *Field marks were clear and unmistakable.*
- 5 • *The observer followed the ABA Code of Birding Ethics.*

So this lister is correct in counting the Whoopers, right? Wrong—probably.

But it's only possible to reach this conclusion by taking the time to carefully read the fine print of the RRIs. In particular, reading the *Interpretations* of the Recording Rules is often critical to understanding how to determine "what counts". The devil is in the details. Specifically, for this Whooper conundrum, two rules need to be considered. First, RRI 2, B, (iv): *an indigenous*

*Monk Parakeets are known to eat seeds and fruits from naturalized plants in the Chicago area. Here they are seen eating lilac (*Syringa* sp.) seeds (bottom) and hawthorn (*Crataegus* sp.) fruits (top). But does that mean they're countable? Top photo by © Derek Zaraza, bottom photo by © Timothy O'Brien.*

species which is [repatriated] into [a] historic range of the species may be counted when it is not possible to reasonably separate the reintroduced individuals from naturally occurring individuals. And second, RRI 3, B, (iii): Birds descendent from [escapees] or released birds are considered "wild" when they are part of a population which meets the ABA definition of an established introduced population.



This Barnacle Goose was recently photographed in Illinois, where it's not on the state list. Does that mean it's off-limits for your ABA total? Photo by © Andrew Aldrich.

Concerning RRI 2, B, (iv), the Wisconsin-breeding Whoopers can still, more often than not, be reasonably distinguished from the western "countable" birds. The two migrating populations are almost always geographically separate, and as of November 2012, *all* of the Wisconsin-breeding birds have leg bands. There are times, though, when that distinction cannot always be made. In February 2012, nine Whooping Cranes were seen in Indiana with the famous Hooded Crane. Some of the Whooping Cranes seen with the Hooded Crane did not have leg bands. Were they countable birds from the Alberta-Texas population? Since at least those two unbanded birds could not be reasonably distinguished from the established population, a valid case can be made that those two Whoopers were indeed countable. The CLC has no authority to rule on this particular sighting. The RSEC could, if it wanted to, but it has never engaged in such activity. Until then, it's *up to the observer* to decide whether the sighting breaks the RRIs, and thus, whether the birds are countable.

As for RRI 3, B, (iii), the ABA's only published criteria defining an established introduced population of birds are the comprehensive ones created for introduced exotic species <<http://www.aba.org/checklist/exotics.html>>. In particular, the Wisconsin Whooping Cranes need to meet these four criteria:

- 4 • The population is large enough to survive a routine amount of mortality or nesting failure.
- 5 • Sufficient offspring are being produced to maintain or increase the population.
- 6 • The population has been present for at least 15 years.
- 7 • The population is not directly dependent on human support.

Since not all, and perhaps none, of these four thresholds has been achieved, **Wisconsin-breeding Whooping Cranes wearing bands do not currently meet the criteria necessary to be considered an established introduced population, and they cannot be counted.** But again, here's the important part: *the observer* is the one who makes this determination. The RSEC, though it has the power to, has not addressed particular populations, and the CLC seemingly has no authority in this instance.

There is another player involved with this question: the Tennessee Ornithological Society. Each local organization has its own rules about what can be counted when reporting totals to that organization. TOS does not currently recognize the Wisconsin-breeding Whoopers as countable. Thus, if the above birder reports his list to TOS, his Whoopers are not countable. But in this article we're concerned with reporting totals to the ABA. And in that case, what local organizations have to say, as it relates to ABA listing, is not relevant.

The broader question this situation brings us to is, "If a state or provincial authority does not consider a population countable, can a birder submit it as part of his list to the *ABA List Report* for publication?" It is expected that all listers playing this game observe some manner of pragmatism, self censorship, and practicality, but state committees have absolutely no power when it comes to reporting one's totals to the ABA. You can indeed report to the ABA species and records not accepted by your local records committee. It's up to you, but you are expected to use your best judgment!

As we can see from this Whooping Crane example, what counts is not always easy to discern. And there are at least three other native species with similar repatriated population concerns: Aplomado Falcon, Trumpeter Swan, and California Condor. On top of that, we have the problem of species which are native to one part of the ABA Area and introduced to others (e.g., California Quail and Northern Cardinal). But in all of these cases save one (the condor), the same rules apply as for the Whooping Cranes: using the RRIs as guidance, it is up to the observer to decide whether the birds seen belong to a population which meets the standards of "countability".

Can I count the California Condors I saw at Big Sur in 2010?

Let's now consider the California Condor. It is different from the prior example because of its "Code 6" designation. The current ABA Checklist comprises 976 species listed taxonomically in compliance with the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Check-List. The CLC then assigns each species with a code (ABA Checklist codes can be found at <<http://www.aba.org/checklist/codes.html>>.) indicating how common or rare the species is within the ABA Area. These codes range from 1, the most common, to 5, accidental.

And then there's Code 6. Our 10 ABA Area Code 6 birds, sadly, include eight extinct or likely extinct species: Labrador Duck, Eskimo Curlew, Slender-billed Curlew, Great Auk, Passenger Pigeon, Carolina Parakeet, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, and Bachman's Warbler. It also includes the California Condor, which is not extinct but is not yet considered to have an established population, and

Thick-billed Parrot, a mainly Mexican species which is considered to be extirpated from the ABA Area. The CLC defines Code 6 as follows: *Cannot be found. The species is probably or actually extinct or extirpated from the ABA Checklist Area, or all survivors are held in captivity (or releases are not yet naturally re-established).*

So a Code 6 species cannot be counted, right? Wrong. The RSEC has made no rule regarding Code 6 birds. It has, however, stated that if a species is on the main list of the Checklist, as Code 6 birds are, the species is countable. But the other RRIs also apply, so Code 6 birds should be counted *only if the observer truly thinks the bird in question originated from a population which meets all the other requirements.* Besides, why would that Bachman's Warbler you saw in 1950 no longer be countable because it's since gone extinct? It's as countable now on your life list as it was in 1950.

But any reasonable person would not conclude that current condor populations reach the threshold of being reestablished. **So, no, condors seen since the mid-80s should not be counted on an ABA list with the rules as they are now written.** There is a special case, however: that of the condor dubbed AC-8. She was captured in the wild in the 1986, used in the captive breeding program, and subsequently released in 2000 near Mt. Pinos, CA. Since then, though, she has disappeared and is thought to have perished. This one individual would be immune from the "established population" rule since she's an original bird. But she is not immune from the "transport" clause in RRI 2.B: "has [n]ever been transported or otherwise assisted by man." She was transported with no effect on her location since she was released near where she was captured. Does it matter where a bird ends up relative to its capture site? And she was assisted by man while she was in captivity. Both points make interpretation of this rule unclear, though, and are areas the RSEC could help clarify in the future. The bird's apparent demise makes this particular issue moot, though. (For more on condors and "countability" see Ted Floyd's "Why Can't We Count Condors?" in the October 2010 *Winging It*.)

"Can I count the Monk Parakeets that I saw in Chicago on my ABA list?"

Within the 970 species on the ABA Checklist are 19 exotics that, for now, are "countable" within the ABA Area. Those species are Mute Swan, Chukar, Himalayan Snowcock, Gray Partridge, Ring-necked Pheasant, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Spotted Dove, Budgerigar, Monk Parakeet, Green Parakeet, Nanday Parakeet, White-winged Parakeet, Red-crowned Parrot, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Spot-breasted Oriole, House Sparrow, and Eurasian Tree Sparrow. (If you were surprised to not see European Starling on this "exotics" list, it is now considered a native vagrant because of a specimen from Shemya Island, Alaska. But away from the Aleutians, it is also an exotic species.)

The sighting of a Monk Parakeet in Chicago does not break any of the five RRIs. However, at <http://www.aba.org/checklist/exotics.html> the CLC states that, *the Monk Parakeet population at Chicago, Illinois is wholly dependent on bird seed provided by humans during the winter months, and this population therefore is not recognized by the CLC as established, despite its size or persistence.* Regardless of the actual winter diet of Chicago's Monk Parakeets (see photos), there is nothing in the ABA bylaws which gives the CLC purview here. This decision rests, instead, with the RSEC. In light of that, it's

puzzling that the CLC has made this statement at all, and it may be responsible for much of the confusion surrounding this issue.

The CLC goes on to say that, *The CLC hopes to eventually determine the states or provinces in which establishment has been attained for each of the 17 exotics that are on the main list of the ABA Checklist (we cannot determine establishment of a species on a more local level). The criteria—or more accurately, the lack of criteria!—used to determine establishment varies among the local records committees so substantially that the CLC feels it is necessary to produce its own list based on the above eight criteria.* Again, according to the ABA Bylaws, the above statement is seemingly outside the purview of the CLC, which would make it merely advisory and lacking authority when discussing "countability". **So, yes, you may count the Chicago Monk Parakeets**—or Monk Parakeets anywhere in the ABA Area—if you believe they fit the criteria for an established introduced population as outlined in RRI 3.

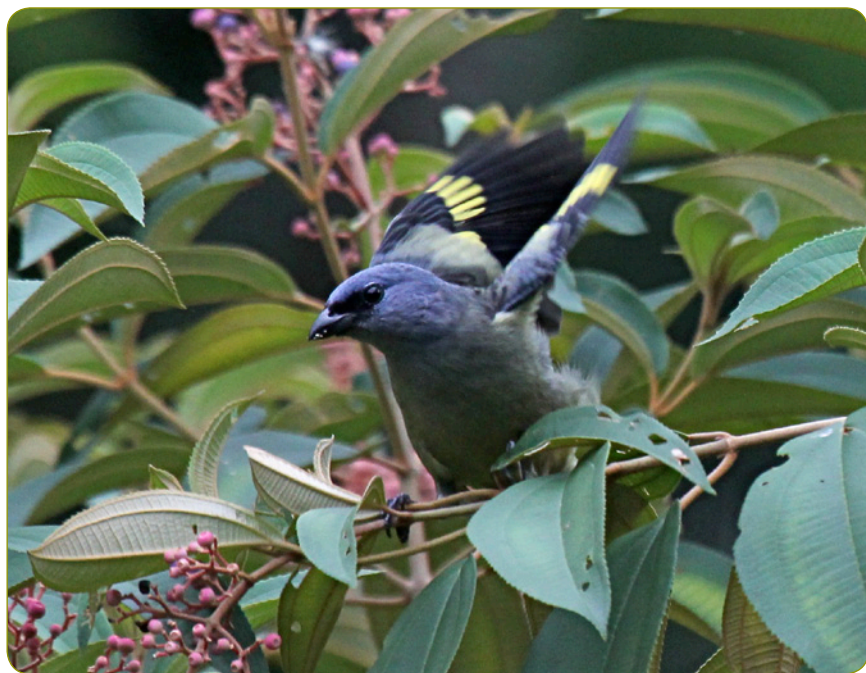
"I saw a Barnacle Goose in Saskatchewan. Can I count it on my ABA list?"

RRI 3 is also applicable here. Is the bird wild? Within the explanation of RRI 3 is the following: "A species observed far from its normal range may be counted if in the observer's best judgment and knowledge it arrived there unassisted by man."

If, in the observer's best judgment, the bird arrived unassisted by man, then the sighting violates none of the RRIs. However, prevailing "common wisdom" seems to be that if a record is not accepted by the state/provincial records committee, it is uncountable on an ABA list. This is stated nowhere in the RRIs. Indeed, the phrase "records committee" appears not once in the RRIs. The bird must, therefore, be countable if we follow the RRIs. (The same can be said of the New Mexico Thick-billed Parrot from early last decade, if in the observer's best judgment, the bird arrived unassisted by man.) An explicit statement from the RSEC that regional records committee decisions play only an advisory roll in their decisions would be helpful in dispelling the widely-held but false belief that records rejected by local committees are not countable on ABA lists. Otherwise, the ABA risks wading into the politics of local records committee rulings, which could have unintended consequences, like a Trumpeter Swan magically becoming uncountable when it flies across a state/provincial line.

*When a bander pulls this Connecticut Warbler out of a mistnet, who can count it? Good question!
Photo © Black Swamp Bird Observatory.*





Yellow-winged Tanager is expanding its range northward in northeast Mexico. If you're lucky enough to find the ABA Area's first one, can you count it on your year list? Photo by © Michael L. P. Retter.

"I saw a Muscovy Duck in Florida, a Northern Cardinal in southern California, a California Quail in Idaho, and a Eurasian Tree Sparrow in Manitoba. Can I count them on my ABA list?"

Each of these sightings seems to again be governed by RRI 3. Within the interpretation is, "Birds descendant from escape[e]s or released birds are considered 'wild' when they are part of a population which meets the ABA [CLC] definition of an established introduced population." **Without a ruling to the contrary, the sightings violate none of the 5 RRIs and are countable if in the observer's best judgment they are from established populations**—whether the bird be resident like the Idaho quail or a vagrant like the Manitoba tree sparrow. Invalidating any of these sightings would require a specific ruling from the RSEC.

"I was at a bird banding demonstration, and I saw a Connecticut Warbler being pulled out of the net and then released. Can I count it on my ABA list?"

At first, the answer would seem to be "no". RRI 3 states quite unequivocally that, "The bird must have been alive, wild, and **unrestrained** when encountered." When defining unrestrained, the RSEC says:

"Unrestrained" means not held captive in a cage, trap, mistnet, hand, or by any other means and not under the influence of such captivity. A bird is considered under the influence of captivity after its release until it regains the activities and movements of a bird which has not been captured.

But then, it goes on to say that

(i) A bird is under the influence of captivity during its initial flight away from its release point and during subsequent activity reasonably influenced by the captivity, such as initial perching and preen-

ing or early sleeping or roosting near the release point. (ii) A nocturnal species released during daylight which goes to roost near the point of release is considered under the influence of captivity until the next nightfall, when it has left its roost and...

(iv) Banders working on licensed projects under proper permits may count, for their personal lists, the birds that they band, without the restrictions described in (i) and (ii).

According to the explanation of the rule, a bander who watches the bird being released can count it, but the birder attending the banding demonstration cannot. But which banders can count it? Only the one who releases it? All of them involved if they see it and are licensed? Do they have to see it fly away? This is very ambiguous territory, but even more confusing is that this definition explicitly contradicts the rule itself. This issue should be clarified by the RSEC.

But in (iv), who exactly are "they?" The whole banding team or just the one person who pulls the bird from the net? Unfortunately, the RRIs give no answer to this question. And what about visiting birders? On this latter question, at least, the rule is clear. **The visiting birder attending the banding demonstration cannot count the bird.** Another confusing aspect of this rule is that its interpretation (iv) explicitly contradicts the rule itself: "**Unrestrained**" means not held captive in a...mistnet." How can a bird in a mistnet be simultaneously unrestrained when viewed by a bander and restrained when viewed by a non-bander? Additional guidance (and consistency) from the RSEC would be extremely helpful in this case.

"I saw a *Selasphorus* hummingbird that was later identified as a Rufous Hummingbird by DNA analysis that I didn't conduct. Can I count it on my ABA list?"

If you were one of the many birders who saw the *Selasphorus* hummingbird in Oak Park near Chicago last year, you likely know that the bird was captured, and that DNA analysis identified the bird as a Rufous Hummingbird—something that purely physical data were unable to determine. The RSEC's Rule 4 applies here: *Diagnostic field-marks for the bird, sufficient to identify to species, must have been seen and/or heard and/or documented by the recorder at the time of the encounter.*

At first, it would seem as though the bird is not countable. Nothing present in the observation was sufficient for identification. But the RSEC also says:

In rare, tricky identifications, for example, photographs sometimes reveal minute, yet critical, details, that were not visible during the initial encounter... On rare occasions a species may not be identifiable until after it has been captured and studied in the hand, or feather and blood samples analyzed. In such instances of "after-the-fact" ID, the bird may be counted on one's life-list."

Just as in the bird banding conundrum above, this interpretation violates the language of the Rule itself. But assuming it does not, the

record must also satisfy the “by the recorder” provision of the rule. In that definition it is stated that

the recorder himself/herself must discern the distinguishing characteristics either visually or audibly. The recorder's identification is not valid if it is based on characteristics seen, heard, or recognized by another person but not by the recorder.

So it would seem that the bird is only countable if the recorder is able to view the DNA results and is able to decipher them himself. **This almost certainly makes the bird uncountable for our hypothetical birder.** These constraints seem much too tight. Unless you gathered the DNA yourself, did the DNA work yourself, and independently came to the ID based on that DNA analysis, you cannot count the species on your list.

Do we really want everyone to be collecting separate DNA samples for their own analysis? No, we do not. Occasionally, there are rare birds seen, and evidence gathered, that require the knowledge of experts to accurately ID. Shouldn't all those who went to enjoy seeing the rarity allowed to list a species seen in such circumstances? I don't think any pragmatic birder would say “no,” and it's puzzling that the RSEC seems to disagree. In light of the changing frontiers of bird ID, it would behoove the RSEC to loosen this rule to include anyone who sees a bird that is later identified by others, by whatever means.

“I just saw a Yellow-winged Tanager in the Rio Grande Valley; it's the first ABA Area record. Can I count it on my ABA Area Year List this year?”

RRI 2 states, *the species must be (a) included in the current published ABA Checklist, as modified by subsequent Supplements, or (b) formally accepted by the ABA Checklist Committee for inclusion in the next published ABA Checklist or Supplement.* Since this won't happen before you report your big year, **no you cannot count the bird.** Furthermore, if the mega-rarity you saw is not approved quickly enough by the CLC, it doesn't *ever* count for your ABA Big Year. This seems absurd, and I cannot understand how this could be the case.

This is the root of the debate that exists over just what Sandy Komito's 1998 Big Year record is. It was published at 745 species. But Komito saw four species not on the ABA Checklist that year. Three of those species, Belcher's Gull, Bulwer's Petrel, and Yellow-throated Bunting, were all eventually added to the ABA Checklist. So was Komito's famous 1998 Big Year number 745 or 748?

No doubt John Vanderpoel's 2011 Big Year of 743/744 will inspire someone to believe that Komito's 1998 record can be surpassed. Records are made to be broken. But what is the record? Does anyone else agree that the ABA should, for it's most prestigious listing achievement, the ABA Area Big Year, clearly allow *all* of the species recorded to be reported, despite the bureaucratic delays that might

need to be worked through?

“I saw a Eurasian Collared-Dove in Florida a day before it was added to the ABA Checklist. I also saw a Plumbeous Vireo before Solitary Vireo was split. I haven't seen either species since. Can I count them on my ABA list?”

There is seemingly nothing that addresses this issue within the RRI's, and since it's a countability issue, the RSEC has purview. Until the RSEC specifically addresses this question, there is no hard answer, and each birder will have to do what feels best.

“I saw a Crested Myna in Vancouver in 1985. Can I still count it on my ABA Lifelist?”

At <<http://www.aba.org/checklist/exotics.html>> the CLC states that, “The [RSEC] has ruled that extirpated exotics cannot be ‘counted’ on lists submitted to the ABA.” According to the ABA bylaws, the RSEC should indeed have authority here. RRI 2 says that, “**currently accepted by the ABA Checklist Committee** means: (i) the species must be (a) included in the current published ABA Checklist... [S]pecies that have been deleted from the main ABA Checklist are NOT considered to be accepted.” Since “Extirpated Exotics” is part of Appendix 1, and not part of the main Checklist, **Crested Myna is no longer countable, period.** But should it be? How is its disappearance substantively different from that of, say, Thick-billed Parrot? Was it not a significant part of the region's avifauna for over 100 years, before it was overwhelmed by the onslaught of European Starlings?

The Crested Myna situation reminds us of one of the “unwritten” purposes of the ABA-CLC, to “Review/reevaluate species on the ABA Checklist as necessary”. It would not be surprising to see species like White-winged Parakeet, Budgerigar, and Red-whiskered Bulbul reevaluated by the ABA Checklist Committee, especially after the Florida Records Committee makes a determination on the request(s) it has had to delist these three species as established exotics. If Florida does delist these species, it is hard to imagine that the CLC would keep these species on the ABA Checklist. Removing exotics from the Checklist has precedent. Four species, Black Francolin, Crested Myna, Blue-gray Tanager, and Yellow-chevroned Parakeet, were all once part of the ABA Checklist but have since been removed. And two of them (the tanager and the parakeet) were Florida birds.

Still, in an attempt to bridge the demands of hobbyist listers, who helped to form the ABA in the first place, and the desire to create a biologically defensible list of birds in the ABA Area, there may be a simple solution. Just as the ABA Checklist has eight extinct native species on the main list, why not

The Crested Mynas you saw in Vancouver may have counted on your ABA list last century, but not any more. Photo by © David Irving.



also include extirpated exotic species? Call it “Code 6X” or “Code 7”. Isn’t the enjoyment of listing these species an important consideration for those who have expended the effort to do so? Or is the need to have a biologically defensible list of avian life in the ABA Area more important? Are the two mutually exclusive? I don’t believe they are. The CLC could work with the RSEC to clearly determine before what date, and even in what location(s), an exotic species was countable, keeping the listers happy by not losing ticks, which they now do when an exotic species is delisted. In addition, it would become an accurate history of species that were historically considered as a viable established exotic species, rightly or wrongly.



Having waded through some rather arcane counting rules minutiae, it’s become apparent to me that all listers should be thankful of what the ABA has accomplished in creating standards for “what counts”. As best as I can tell, perhaps 98% of listing situations are clearly defined and—if one reads the RRI—easy to understand and apply. I have outlined some specific outstanding issues that many would still like to see addressed by the RSEC, and my interpretations may prove incorrect in other instances. There are some tensions between the science that is required and what the listers want, but these are not mutually exclusive needs. Both scientific need and recreational enjoyments can be accommodated with measured and practical leadership, something that the CLC and the RSEC have been providing the birding community for many decades now—and something I think we can expect to prevail into the future.

Jeff Skrentny grew up near Wisconsin’s Horicon Marsh, and from his earliest memories of Canada Geese coming in for a landing there, he has loved birds. But it was only after reading The Big Year and Kingbird Highway in 2005 that he knew birding was for him.

Over 500 birders saw the Thick-billed Parrot near Engle, New Mexico in 2003. Though there was no hard evidence of captive origin, it was rejected by the state committee and the ABA CLC because they thought a wild origin was unlikely. But when it comes to counting the bird on your ABA list, the rules seem to say that it’s up to you whether you think it was wild. Photo by © Michael L. P. Retter.





GIFTS FOR BIRDERS

With the retail season's annual apex upon us, I give you some birdy ideas to expend your capital upon. Happy shopping, and thanks for stimulating the economy!

BLACK RAPID CAMERA STRAP SYSTEM <www.blackrapid.com>: A really secure and comfortable way to tote your telephoto rig out of the way but keep it ready for instant action. This is my favorite system for making the difficult task of simultaneously carrying camera, scope, and bins more manageable.

WINGSCAPES AUTO FEEDER <www.wingscapes.com>: The folks who brought us the motion-activated BirdCam have introduced this heavy-duty, programmable feeder that releases a user-defined amount of feed on the same schedule every day. The idea sounds great for working stiffs like me, who can't watch their feeders all day every day. Instead, birds are conditioned to come during feeding intervals when someone's around to see them!

HEATED BIRD BATH <birdschoice.com>: Water can be as effective or even better than feeders at attracting wild birds to your yard. For those of us in chilly climes, a heated birdbath is key to winter operation. Birds Choice has a lovely selection of heated baths and submersible de-icers to keep the water flowing during the worst arctic blasts!

MUJJO TOUCHSCREEN GLOVES <www.mujo.com>: More and more birders rely on smart phones and tablets to host field guides and sound libraries. Operating the devices in cold weather often means popping off a glove, not always a comfortable option. Mujo and other glove makers offer gloves with conductive fingers, allowing winter touchscreen use while maintaining toasty phalanges.

PHONESKOPE SMART PHONE DIGISCOPING ADAPTER <www.phoneskope.com>: Phonescoping (digiscoping with mobile phones) is finally getting the attention of optics companies, with Meopta and Kowa making adapters for the iPhone 4/4s. PhoneSkopec has upped the ante, making custom adapters to order for any phone/scope combination within their fabrication parameters.

PLUGBUG IPHONE/IPAD CHARGER <www.twelvesouth.com/products/plugbug>: Road warriors using the Mac platform will appreciate this extra USB charging port, which piggy-backs onto a MacBook plug block. When will all laptop makers integrate extra USB power into their plugs?

MOLESKINE EVERNOTE SMART NOTEBOOK <www.moleskineus.com>: Moleskine notebooks have proven their utility over the past two centuries (counting Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and Ernest Hemingway among their aficionados), and countless Moleskines have found their way into birders' kits. Joining forces with the popular Evernote productivity mobile app, this special Moleskine version packs features such as smartphone camera-friendly page ruling and smart stickers for efficient, searchable, and sharable digital captures of handwritten notes and sketches.



BUTEO BOOKS <www.buteobooks.com>: Lots of exciting new titles are on the shelves or on the way at ABA Sales partner Buteo Books! Here are a few I'm especially excited about (quoted summaries excerpted from the publisher). Grab a gift certificate if you can't make up your mind:

- *National Geographic Birdwatcher's Bible: A Complete Treasury* by Jonathan Alderfer. "A lighthearted and broadly cultural and visual approach to learning everything there is to know about birds, bird-watching, birds in history and the arts, and life on the wing."

- *Hawks in Flight: Second Edition* by Pete Dunne, Clay Sutton and David Sibley. "Picking up where its predecessor ended by including two decades of raptor identification refinement, *Hawks in Flight* summarizes and places in users' hands an identification skill set that used to take years to master."

- *The Art of Bird Identification: A Straightforward Approach to Putting a Name to the Bird* by Pete Dunne and David Gothard. "How to get good, then better, then even better at identifying birds in the field—and have fun doing it."

- *Kaufman Field Guide to Nature of New England* by Kenn Kaufman and Kimberly Kaufman. "Whether you're walking in the woods or along the beach, camping, hiking, canoeing, or just enjoying your own backyard, this book will help identify all your nature discoveries... this guide is an essential reference for nature lovers living in or visiting New England."

- *Save the Last Dance: A Story of North American Grassland Grouse* by Noppadol Paothong. "This 204-page hardbound book captures the dazzling beauty of seven grouse species whose populations are diminishing across the prairies and plains of America—and one species that has already lost its battle for survival."

- *The Crossley ID Guide: Raptors* by Richard Crossley, Jerry Liguori, and Brian L. Sullivan. Publishing in April, but teaser plates have been making appearances on various social media and look great! Crossley and crew giving raptors a more detailed treatment in the unique style of his ID Guide: Eastern Birds.

- *The Warbler Guide* by Tom Stephenson and Scott Whittle. Another title to watch for in April; I'm also quite intrigued by the promised companion mobile app.

EAGLE OPTICS <www.eagleoptics.com>: Upgrading optics is always a tantalizing temptation for birders. If you are ready to pull the trigger, be sure to get in touch with the ABA's official optics sales partner for the best birding advice and selection on the web. Particularly innovative among spotting scope offerings is Swarovski's new modular ATX system, with interchangeable ocular, objective (65, 85, and 95mm models), and camera mount components.

THANKSGIVING COFFEE COMPANY

<www.thanksgivingcoffee.com>: Enjoy your coffee and protect Neotropical bird habitat while you're at it with organic, fair trade, shade-grown Song Bird Coffee. Your purchase of Song Bird Coffee from Thanksgiving Coffee Company supports not only the birds we see every spring, but ABA programs as well.

SPELLING IS AS IMPORANT AS EVER

The triumph of the personal computer has rendered obsolete all sorts of minor attainments I was raised to be proud of—or at least to strive for. Neat handwriting, a facility for MLA style, flawless orthography: Who cares? They don't even teach cursive in the schools anymore, and the hyperlink promises to finish off the footnote sometime later this week. And as to spelling....

Well, as to spelling. You might think that “autocorrect” and “auto-complete” have made such concerns irrelevant; but in fact, accurate spelling is *more* important now than it was in the days of iron gall ink on vellum.

Say that you and I have just acquired a box of books at a Louisiana garage sale, and in the bottom we discover a sheaf of yellowed papers, covered in barely legible handwritten prose, some in English, some in French, most in an abysmal mix of the two. Maybe we wear out a couple of pairs of reading glasses first, but eventually we figure out that it is an unknown treatise by a famous Franco-American ornithologist



If you publish a paper on Stellar's Jay, it's quite likely that Google will make your missive soon forgotten. Photo by © Karney Lee, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



The Northern Mockingbird shown here is proclaiming its territory through song, and will fiercely defend it from intruders. This individual does not have a range; the species as a whole, however, does. Photo by © Linda Tanner.

on Stellar's Jay, and we spend the evening poring over the text.

And it bothers us not in the least that the bird in the manuscript is called “Stellar”, “Stellere”, “Stiller”, “Estella”, and even, once, “Steller's”.

But look what happens when we e-publish a diplomatic transcription of our find. An ornithologist halfway around the world conducts an online search for “Stellar's Jay”, and because that alternative is the least frequent in our text, our discovery languishes so far down on the list of “hits” that she never even gets to it—a sad thing, because a quick reading would have answered the very question she'd set out to solve.

The eye is patient. Google is not.

As the ornithological record moves to be more and more online, birders profit from its easy “searchability”. But if we want our observations to be part of it, we need, paradoxically, to pay more attention than ever to using the full, official, and correctly spelled names of birds.

Who would have thought the internet could be so pedantic?

RANGE, TERRITORY, AND HABITAT

I love beginning birders. There's something about the brightness of their eyes and the freshness of their minds that takes me back to my own early days, and the excitement of my first this and my first that comes back to me when I'm in their company, no matter how many times I've seen the that or the this we're all oohing and aahing over.

Beginners are also eager to learn: why would they have begun in the first place if not? When I teach courses and workshops, I like to begin each session with a new word or two—or, better, more precise definitions for a familiar one.

And better still, a word the participants bring to class with them. Every fall, someone tells the group about a bird he's identified, and then, not wanting to seem too confident, adds the fateful disclaimer: “But I don't know if New Jersey is in its territory.”

Nothing wrong with that sentence to the normal native speaker of English. But we're birders, and so I explain that *territory* is not the same as *range* or *habitat*.

They're easy enough to keep separate. When we speak of a bird's *range*, we actually mean the geographic distribution of the species, the area shown on the range maps in the field guides: the range of Northern Mockingbird, for example, now reaches from southernmost Canada to Veracruz, and can be expected to extend even farther north as the years go on.

Habitat is equally abstract: a description of the kinds of places—generally defined by plant communities and structures—that Northern Mockingbirds can be found within that vast range. Hedgerows, forest edges, farm fields, and leafy suburbs all work. Lakes do not.

Territory, in contrast, is almost painfully specific: the real physical space that a bird or a pair of birds or a family or a colony defends against intruders. Wherever I live, it seems, the territory of the local Northern Mockingbird is centered on the tree outside our bedroom window.

Sometimes, just sometimes, I wish he'd range elsewhere.

It's fascinating to watch grassroots conservation movements evolve in developing countries, where the local inhabitants generally tend to be more concerned with basic needs like getting enough to eat than with conservation of natural resources for future generations. The idea of conserving habitats and resources at a large scale seems to be easier to grasp, accept, and especially prioritize if you're not worried about your day-to-day existence. But what if getting your daily bread actually depends on the existence of wild creatures, and not just for eating but for showing, alive, to other people? Suddenly conservation is not such an abstract concept.

Let's look at an example of how ecotourism can encourage conservation and how Birders' Exchange, a humble ABA program, can provide essential equipment that can help catalyze this process. Birding tourism is well developed in Ecuador compared to most Latin American countries, and for many local operators it is viewed as an important way to make a living. I have found in my experience that most guides, lodge operators, and other professionals that rely on birding tourism for business quickly come to recognize the need to conserve the wild habitats that support the spectacular birds that visitors seek. It's kind of a no-brainer: no habitat means no birds, and no birds will inevitably lead to no birders, which will leave the operator with no income.

It is exciting for me every time I encounter Ecuadorians who are just making this connection for themselves. They're not becoming conservationists because they read about the need for conservation online, or heard a passionate presentation on the topic at school. They're becoming conservationists through direct personal experience!

So to me it is logical that one way to further an agenda of conservation in developing countries like Ecuador is to encourage more people to become involved with birding—and wildlife observation in general—on an economic level.

While I was in Ecuador this past summer I got to see the concept in progress. In early July I finally visited a site that has been on my radar for a couple of years: Recinto 23 de Junio, a small village in the northwest that has already been profiled in several posts on the blog *10,000 Birds*. Veintitrés de Junio is famous for its healthy population of the bizarrely spectacular and enigmatically rare Long-wattled Umbrellabird, a species endemic to the wet Chocó bioregion of northwest Ecuador and southwest Colombia. What I found was a local *campesino*, Luis Ajilla (*ah-HEE-yah*), who is experimenting with a new way of making a living that relies on maintaining the natural environment that surrounds his village rather than modifying or destroying it.



The author (right) and Luis Ajilla.

I arrived at 23 de Junio the way the locals do, riding the *chiva* from nearby San Miguel de los Bancos. (Think of a truck chassis with a wooden bus “cabin” fitted onto the back where a cargo bed might be more appropriate.) I stayed the night at Luis's modest *cabaña* that he and his son have constructed so independent birders can spend the night and they don't have to drive an hour or more from wherever they might otherwise stay. The water wasn't working properly during my visit, but the cabin was clean and comfortable, and I had no trouble sleeping in the peaceful setting. I spent a whole day exploring the forest patches about the village with Luis. He showed me the lek site at the edge of a pasture where the male umbrellabirds gather at dawn to perform their strange mooing serenades that give them their Spanish name: *el pájaro toro*. He showed me his own forest patch farther up the mountain where we

Male Orange-breasted Fruiteater, a species endemic to the Chocó bioregion of western Colombia and northwestern Ecuador. Photo by © Andrés Vasquez.



found more umbrellabirds, as well as other rarities such as Orange-breasted Fruiteater and Black Solitaire. The terrain was steep and rugged, the forest was steamy, and the trails were poorly defined. I loved it!

Throughout the day Luis and I talked about the progress that he and his son were making in developing their business. We talked about the plans he had for the future, including how he



Male Long-wattled Umbrellabird, another local specialty. Photo by © Edison Buenano.

might improve their services and facilities. But what struck me most was when Luis brought up the need to educate more people in the village about how to live more sustainably and less wastefully. He is now planning how he can have an impact on more people outside his family. He is excited that he has found a cause, and he wants to bring more people onboard! Perhaps the Ajillas will eventually be able to employ more local residents in their operations. These are exactly the sort of people that can make the greatest impact in conservation on a grassroots level. But in the short-term, they simply need to expand and improve their business. As the saying goes, money talks.

In order to grow as birding operators, and expand their economic presence, the Ajillas will need access to knowledge and information, and equipment. They already had a dog-eared copy of *The Birds of Ecuador* (published in Spanish in Ecuador a couple years back!), and presumably each time a birding tour leader brings a group to 23 de Junio, one of the Ajillas, through accompanying the group in the field, will be able to absorb some expert knowledge about identification and species distribution. But there was one glaring thing Luis was missing: a decent binocular. As we set out in the morning, he sheepishly showed me what he referred to as his *juguete* (toy): a pair of field glasses that seemed something in between a children's toy and an antique pair of opera glasses. My Leica Ultravid HDs suddenly felt a bit

heavier around my neck. The cost of a rugged pair of waterproof binoculars (\$200) is still a prohibitively high investment for this family. This indispensable tool of the trade that most birders take for granted will make a huge difference in improving Luis's birding abilities, and consequently, his guiding abilities. And this is where Birders' Exchange comes in.

Birders' Exchange is, in my opinion, one of the most exciting and critical programs operated by the ABA. I would argue that the most dire need for conservation awareness and action exists in the biodiversity-rich tropical regions, and by outfitting local researchers, educators, and conservationists, the ABA is directly helping to promote conservation in Latin America. Many ecotourism professionals such as Luis Ajilla are also obvious conservationists, and as such they are deserving of the support of Birders' Exchange as well. As I was chatting with Luis in the Andes in July, I was already thinking about what a perfect fit his project seemed to be for Birders' Exchange.

Once I returned home, I got in contact with Betty Petersen, Director of Birders' Exchange. I learned that BEX has a small inventory of field optics on hand, and by corresponding with Luis we were able to identify a courier. A birder from the US had plans to visit Recinto 23 de Junio just a couple months after I got in touch with Betty, and after shipping her two pairs of binoculars, she successfully delivered them to the Ajillas at the beginning of November! Being able to help make a connection like this is more satisfying for me than seeing 10 lifers or getting

a sound recording of a rare species. Without the "people" element, birding would be missing something essential.

So here is an appeal to all of you who appreciate the "people" element of birding, all of you who enjoy traveling to look for birds in the tropics, and all of you who recognize the critical need for tropical conservation. (That should cover most of us, right?) Keep Birders' Exchange in mind, and do what you can to support this mission. Donate your old waterproof optics when you upgrade. I hope there is never a deserving project that can't get the support of BEX because there are no donations on hand. Be on the lookout for potential recipients of donations as you travel, and get their contact information so you can link them with Betty at BEX. And remember that in order to advance conservation, we need real live people to see the value of it for themselves.

Scott Olmstead leads a dual life, teaching high school Spanish for most of the year and leading birding tours for Tropical Birding during the summer months. He is hopelessly and happily obsessed with the birds of Latin America.

For more information about Birders' Exchange, and how you can help our neighbors to the south conserve habitat and save the birds we share, as well as resident birds throughout the Neotropics, please contact Betty Petersen at bpetersen@aba.org

The Cradle of American Ornithology

Philadelphia, PA • 27–31 March 2013

The City of Brotherly Love is the birthplace of the United States, and also the birthplace of North American ornithology. Pennsylvania natives George Armistead and Ted Floyd will retrace the steps of Audubon, Wilson, Cassin, Say, and Bond (yes, *James Bond!*), among others. Our rich history is explored in depth, as we visit Audubon's house and historical sites including Bartram's Garden. A special "back-stage" visit to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia will land us in the presence of treasured artifacts from the early ornithological era (including some of Audubon's field gear and field sketches). Of course there will be plenty of birding, too, as we examine the old stomping grounds of our most famed ornithologists. We shall search for spring's first trilling Pine Warblers, "peenting" American Woodcocks, and the coast



nearby should yield Purple Sandpiper, Great Cormorant, and an array of seaducks and gulls.

For more details please go to <<http://events.aba.org/2013pa/>>. **Cost: \$595**

Please send all submissions (including photos) for "Milestones", in the format appearing below, to Michael Retter at mretter@aba.org

Milestones

Rich Cimino of Pleasanton, CA saw the Watsonville, CA Common Cuckoo in Oct. 2012 for his 700th ABA Area bird.

Lori and Mark Conrad of Hermosa Beach, CA saw the cuckoo, too. It was their 550th California species.

Robert DeBellevue of New Orleans, LA saw his 5,000th bird, Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, at Barren Grounds NP in New South Wales, Australia, on 23 Sep. 2012.

Bruce Deuel of Red Bluff, CA saw his 725th ABA Area bird, a Common Ringed Plover, near Davis, CA on 21 Aug. 2011.

Lois and Wally Goldfrank of Santa Cruz, CA, tallied their 227th and final (Clements) family, Atrichornithidae, on 2 Sep. 2012 at Cheynes Beach, Western Australia, when they saw a Noisy Scrub-bird.

Gary Grantham of San Diego, CA recently recorded his 2,000th world bird, a Green Ibis, at Lake Sandoval in the Peruvian Amazon. He also hit #450 for CA with the split of Xantus's Murrelet.

Bob Hartman of Silver Spring, MD saw his 2,500th world bird, a Little Weaver, at Kenya's Lake Nakuru NP on 6 Nov. 2012.

Marie Cecile Lee of Elbert, CO, observed her 600th ABA Area bird, a Florida Scrub-Jay, at FL's Archbold Biological Station on 15 Apr. 2012.

Carolyn Mangeng and **Dale Spall** of Los Alamos, NM saw their 600th ABA Area bird, a Plain-capped Starthroat, in se. Arizona in Aug. 2012.

Jens and Kathy Munthe of Escalante, UT saw their 4,000th world birds in Australia in Oct. 2012. Jens saw

a Purple-crowned Lorikeet at Dryandra Forest, and Kathy saw a Chestnut Quail-thrush at Hattah NP.

Larry Peavler of Indianapolis, IN saw his 875th ABA Area bird, a Piratic Flycatcher, in Rattlesnake Springs, NM on 21 Sep. 2012.

On 12 Sep. 2012 **Don Roberson** observed CA's 1st Northern Gannet, providing his 600th bird for CA. It is believed that he becomes only the 2nd birder to reach 600 in any U.S. state.

Tom Schall of Kerrville, TX saw his 600th ABA Area bird, a Five-striped Sparrow, in AZ's California Gulch.

Mike Schwitters of Choteau, MT recorded his 800th ABA Area species when he saw "Barolo" Little Shearwater off MA on 26 Aug. 2012.

Stephanie Seymour of Englewood, NJ saw her 450th ABA Area bird, a California Thrasher, on 13 Sep. 2012 at Fremont SP in California.

CORRECTION: **Craig Caldwell** of Westlake, OH recorded his 700th ABA Area bird, a Terek Sandpiper, on St. Paul I., AK, on August 21, 2012. Gray-tailed Tattler was erroneously given this honor in the last "Milestones".



Terek Sandpiper on St. Paul Island in August 2012. Photo by © Doug Gochfeld.

DOVEKIES AND CLIMATE

What future does the Dovekie face as the North Atlantic Ocean warms? No one knows, but rising ocean temperatures in the Greenland Sea are raising concern about potential dangers to this little auk's highly specialized diet.

The Greenland Sea extends from the east coast of Greenland to the west coast of Spitsbergen, where the vast majority of the world's 40–80 million Dovekies breed. They feed almost exclusively on three copepod species, which are zooplankton of the genus *Calanus*.



Dovekies leave the breeding colony to feed off Svalbard. Photo © Michael Haferkamp.

The two most nutritious copepods are large cold-water species. Biologists' concern is that increasing sea surface temperatures could displace them from Dovekies' optimal foraging range and replace them with a small, warm-water copepod that is much less nutritious.

International teams of researchers from nine nations have spent a decade investigating possible effects of the dietary change on Dovekies' foraging behavior, energy requirements, survival, and breeding productivity. Their findings are reported in three papers in the online, open-access journal *Marine Ecology Progress Series*.

Nina J. Karnovsky and 11 colleagues investigated copepod distribution and Dovekie foraging behavior in 2001 at two Spitsbergen colonies. They reported in 2003 <tinyurl.com/Dovekie1> that Dovekies forage preferentially in cold waters adjacent to their colonies, feeding on relatively nutritious copepods. They avoid warm-water currents where the least nutritious copepod is abundant.

Karnovsky and 11 collaborators next compared the three copepods' distribution with Dovekies' foraging behavior on both sides of the Sea. The authors reported in 2010 <tinyurl.com/Dovekie2>

that the highest numbers of Dovekies forage in cold waters where the most nutritious copepods occur. Correspondingly, their chicks have a high-energy diet. Oceanic climate models predict that warming surface temperatures in the Greenland Sea will be too high by the end of this century to sustain the relatively nutritious cold-water copepods. This would leave Dovekies no choice but to feed themselves and their young on the least-nutritious species.

Could Dovekies subsist on this low-energy diet? David Grémillet and eight coauthors offered some hope in 2012 <tinyurl.com/Dovekie3>. During breeding seasons from 2005 to 2007 in the Greenland Sea, the Grémillet team simultaneously compared

the diet, foraging effort, breeding success, and adult survival at colonies in cold-water and warm-water regions. The objective was to compare results at "one moment in time", simulating the eventual effect that a warming ocean might have on Dovekies' physiology.

Dovekies foraging in warm currents had to double their trips' duration and nearly triple their flight time to obtain sufficient food for themselves and their young. Nevertheless, the extra energy they expended ultimately made no difference in chick growth, fledging success, condition of breeding adults, and adult survival. The Dovekies in warm-water regions managed to subsist on the least nutritious copepods.

Grémillet and his associates cautioned, however, that these adults were foraging near their maximum physiological capability. Sea surface temperatures predicted by the end of this century could eventually force the birds to make longer and longer foraging trips for lower-quality food. If so, "We argue that even if [Dovekies] seem currently able to buffer the consequences of climate change in the North Atlantic, such abilities will not extend indefinitely."

Despite their large population in the North Atlantic, a Dovekie pair produces only one egg per year, and only about 50% of the hatchlings fledge. A much warmer ocean could eventually threaten even those immense numbers.

THE ALBATROSS QUANDARY

For an exercise in puzzlement, try counting the world's albatross species. Is the total 13, 14, 15, 21, 22, or 24? Depending on the reference, the number could be any of those. Inconsistent and controversial species assignments have created a taxonomic muddle in the family Diomedéidae.

The long-standing “traditional” number was 13: Wandering, Royal, Short-tailed, Waved, Laysan, Black-footed, Gray-headed, Black-browed, Buller’s, Shy, Yellow-nosed, Sooty, and Light-mantled. They are the species listed, for example, in Peter Harrison’s classic *Seabirds: An Identification Guide* in 1983, the *Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World* in 2003, and the ABA’s official world checklist, *The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*, in 2007.

In contrast, the IOC World Bird List has 21 albatrosses <world-birdnames.org>, and the BirdLife International list has 22 <bird-life.org/datazone/species>. The Wandering Albatross is split into four species: Wandering, Antipodean, Amsterdam, and Tristan. The Royal Albatross is divided into Northern and Southern species. The Black-browed Albatross has a sister species named the Campbell Albatross. The Shy Albatross is separated into Shy, Chatham, Salvin’s, and White-capped species. The Yellow-nosed Albatross is split into Atlantic and Indian species.

Chris J. R. Robertson and Gary B. Nunn set off this veritable taxonomic explosion in 1998 by proposing recognition of 24 albatross species, primarily by elevating most of the world’s albatross subspecies to full-species status. Their proposals were published in a 1998 compilation of papers titled *Albatross Biology and Conservation* (Surrey Beatty and Sons, New South Wales), and their recommendations quickly prompted widespread interest.

With several exceptions based on subsequent DNA studies, the Robertson–Nunn taxonomy has been accepted at least tentatively by many ornithologists. Two prominent dissenters are John Penhallurick and Michael Wink, whose analysis of cytochrome-*b* sequences led them in 2004 to reject the proposed splits and call for a return to the traditional 13 species (*Emu* 104:125–147). Commentary in *Birding* (September 2012, pp. 34–39) expresses the same objection to classifying species based only upon slight genetic divergences.

Such contrasting viewpoints about albatross taxonomy persist in the familiar disagreements that plague so many taxonomic decisions: how to interpret genetic differentiation, how to assess the relevance of morphological variation, and how to defend either the phylogenetic or biological species concepts in any particular case. It is hard to imagine that there will ever be a worldwide consensus about these graceful seabirds’ taxonomic status. (Peter Pyle and Michael L. P. Retter discuss these species concepts

informatively in an online “conversation” at <tinyurl.com/Pyle-Retter-discussion>.)

Penhallurick continues to emphasize his 13-species recommendation in a 2012 paper in the *Open Ornithology Journal* <tinyurl.com/JohnPen>, and he points to a different factor involved in wide acceptance of the Robertson–Nunn 24-species proposal: “the fact that it coincided with increasing, and justified, concern about threats to the survival of many albatross taxa, particularly from long-line fishing.” Penhallurick’s view is that governments should not limit conservation policies to protecting “species”; instead, the agencies should completely avoid arguments over species definitions. In that way, subspecies and even localized populations could be protected, no matter what their taxonomic status. Pyle offers the same opinion in his *Birding* commentary, that species classification should be based on taxonomic science and not used primarily to serve even the most worthwhile conservation goals.

Postscript. The Clements Checklist, which is now maintained and frequently updated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology <tinyurl.com/ClemList>, has added two albatross species since the sixth edition: Salvin’s Albatross and Chatham Albatross, which breed on islands off New Zealand. Steve N. G. Howell reports in his 2012 book *Petrels, Albatrosses, and Storm-Petrels of North America* (Princeton University Press) that Salvin’s has been recorded once in the Aleutians and that Chatham has been found twice off central California.



White-capped [Shy] Albatross. Photo by © Nick Leseberg.



Antipodean [Wandering] Albatross. Photo by © Nick Leseberg.



"Sightings" appears monthly, alternating between *Winging It* and *Birding*, with the latest news, reports, and rumors from Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. Sightings are compiled from online rare bird alerts, with valuable contributions from a growing network of informants continent-wide. Readers should note, however, that none of these reports has yet been vetted by a records committee. All birders are urged to submit documentation of rare sightings to the appropriate state or provincial committees. For full analysis of these and other bird observations, subscribe to *North American Birds* <aba.org/nab>, the richly illustrated journal of ornithological record published by the ABA. In this compilation, *italicized place names* denote counties or parishes.

Mid-October to Mid-November 2012

Summary: Superstorm Sandy pummeled the E. Coast 10/30–31, making landfall near Atlantic City, NJ, and heading nw. through PA before veering ne. Many coastal birding sites sustained serious storm damage and were temporarily closed for repairs. Birders who were able to venture out during and after Sandy were rewarded with a host of storm birds, including Leach's Storm-Petrels, Pomarine Jaegers, and Red Phalaropes. A major incursion of early **Northern Lapwings** was noted in the Northeast and East-Central regions following the same easterly winds from the N. Atlantic that drove Sandy inland. Cave Swallows were widespread in the East-Central and the Great Lakes regions following powerful southwesterlies. The ABA's Bird of the Year, Evening Grosbeak, lived up to its billing with a dazzling southward irruption unmatched in more than a decade. A slew of potential state 1sts was discovered this period, including **Herald Petrel** (PA), Wilson's Storm-Petrel (PA), Black Vulture (Baja California Sur), Harris's Hawk (MT), **Gray-tailed Tattler** (MA), **Wood Sandpiper** (RI), Sabine's Gull (Chihuahua), Cassin's Kingbird (MN), Anna's Hummingbird (DE), **Cave Swallow** (BC), **Virginia's Warbler** (NY), **Hepatic Tanager** (SK), and Cassin's Sparrow (OR and Baja California Sur). The ABA's Bird of the Year, Evening Grosbeak, irrupted southward, as did other winter finches.

Northeast: Single Pink-footed Geese were reported from *Essex*, MA 10/20 and *Washington*, ME 11/6–7. A Pacific Loon was in *New London*, CT 10/30. Western Grebes were found on the Ottawa R. at Gatineau, QC 10/17–23 and at Barnstable, Cape Cod, MA 11/11. Single Leach's Storm-Petrels turned up well away from



Wood Sandpiper. Jamestown, RI; 23 October 2012.
Photo by © Mark Szantyr.

the coast following Sandy at L. Massabesic, NH 10/30 and Grand Isle, VT 10/31; also, a Magnificent Frigatebird appeared in *Newport*, RI and *Bristol*, MA 10/30–31. White Ibises were at E. Dennis, Cape Cod, MA 10/21 and Narragansett, RI 11/10+. In QC, a Swainson's Hawk was at Saint-Jean 10/22, and Purple Gallinules were at Les Méchins 10/8 and Cap Tourmente 10/17–23. The **Northern Lapwing** invasion began in NL with a flyover at St. John's 10/27, then as many as 5 were seen in MA, including 2 on Nantucket 10/30–11/11+, and single birds at Eastham, Cape Cod 10/30, Halifax 11/11–12, and Bridgewater 11/12. Another in *York*, ME 11/3 was that state's 2nd, and still another was discovered in *Shelburne*, NS 11/11. More spectacular shorebirds in the region included a **Gray-tailed Tattler** on Nantucket 10/18–20, an amazing 1st for MA and the E. Coast, and RI's 1st **Wood Sandpiper**, reported from Jamestown 10/13–30. Sooty/Bridled Terns displaced by Superstorm Sandy were reported from the CT coast at Old Saybrook, Stamford, and Madison 10/29–30. A Black Skimmer continued in *Cumberland*, ME to 10/18. An Allen's Hummingbird was in *Berkshire*, MA 10/25–11/10+. Banders at Bon Portage I. netted NS's 2nd **Dusky Flycatcher** 10/18. An Ash-throated Flycatcher at Bonavista 10/30–11/5 was NL's 2nd. A Bell's Vireo was on Martha's Vineyard, MA 10/23. A Northern Wheatear continued in *York*, ME to 10/11, and another was on Cape Cod, MA at Orleans 10/11–15. Mountain Bluebirds were at Jamestown, RI 11/10+ and Gloucester, MA 11/11+. Townsend's Solitaires appeared on Cape Cod at Monomoy NWR 10/5 and Truro 10/20–21; others were observed at Neguac, NB 10/25 and Missisquoi NWR, VT 11/7. Black-throated Gray Warblers turned up in MA at Monomoy NWR 10/6 and on Martha's Vineyard 10/23. "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warblers were at Truro on Cape Cod 11/4, and at Stratford, CT 11/11. A Townsend's Warbler was at Renewes, NL 10/20. A Spotted Towhee came to a feeder in *Washington*, ME 10/27. A Painted Bunting was in *Fairfield*, CT 10/27.

East-Central: A Cinnamon Teal was at Bombay Hook NWR, DE 10/21. Pacific Loons were in *Niagara*, NY 10/15 and *Washington*, PA 11/4. A Western Grebe in *Lebanon* 11/4–9 was PA's 2nd. Storm birders found plenty of tubenoses in PA following Sandy's passage through the state, including a **Cory's Shearwater** in *Dauphin* 10/30 and a moribund **Herald Petrel** in *Blair* 11/3; the latter is a state 1st (although a bird filmed at Hawk Mtn. in 1959 and identified as a dark-morph Kermadec Petrel is a contender for that title). A **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** in *Huntingdon* 10/31 was another potential 1st for PA. Many Leach's Storm-Petrels were on the Delaware R., where a

Rock Wren. Fort Morgan, AL; 11 November 2012. Photo by © Duane Miller.



high count of 20 was reported from Philadelphia; others turned up on the Susquehanna R. in both PA and MD, on L. Cayuga in NY, and at scattered locations as far inland as *Bedford*, PA. More storm birds included a Band-rumped Storm-Petrel seen from Cape May, NJ 10/30, NJ's 2nd **Red-billed Tropicbird**, rescued in *Salem* 10/30, and single Northern Gannets on the Susquehanna R. in *Dauphin*, PA and *Harford*, MD 10/30. Two **Northern Lapwings** were at Montauk, NY 11/10–13, and another in *Mercer/Monmouth*, NJ 11/8 was the southernmost of nine recent reports of the species. A Little Gull was in *Taylor*, WV 10/29, and a **Ross's Gull** was on L. Cayuga, NY 10/30. Sooty Terns were reported from both the PA and NJ sides of the Delaware R. during Sandy 10/30. Black Skimmers appeared on the Susquehanna and Ohio rivers following the storm. Pomarine Jaegers turned up well inland in PA during Superstorm Sandy 10/29–30, including 29 in *Fayette* and a staggering total of **58** noted on the Susquehanna R. in *Dauphin*, while **130** were seen from Cape May, NJ. White-winged Doves appeared at Harrisburg, PA 10/31 and at Ft. McHenry, MD 11/9. An **Anna's Hummingbird** at Newark 10/27–11/13+ was a 1st for DE, and PA's 2nd **Calliope Hummingbird** was in *Chester* 10/21–11/11. Cave Swallows were widespread. Townsend's Solitaires turned up in *Bedford*, PA 10/14 and *Cape May*, NJ 10/25. A Varied Thrush was seen briefly in *Cumberland*, PA 11/4. A **Virginia's Warbler** in *Queens*, NY 10/31–11/12+ was a stunning state 1st. A Saltmarsh Sparrow in *Bucks* 11/1–3 was PA's 5th and an unexpected storm bird. A Harris's Sparrow was in *Madison*, NY 11/9.

Southeast: A Western Grebe was in *Sullivan*, TN 11/7–8. In VA, 3 Long-billed Curlews were in *Accomack* 10/12, and a **Black-tailed Godwit** continued at Chincoteague NWR as of 10/26. In KY, Black-legged Kittiwake was recorded in *Pulaski* 11/7 and *Lincoln* 11/11. An **Elegant Tern** was at Siesta Key, FL 10/25–11/9. *Jackson*, MS hosted 2 Inca Doves 10/7–14. A Say's Phoebe was reported from *Fauquier*, VA 11/5. In FL, Tropical Kingbirds were in *Franklin*, FL 10/9+ and *Miami-Dade* 11/8, where there were 2. A Fork-tailed Flycatcher was in *Monroe*, FL 10/19–20. AL's 4th Rock Wren was at Ft. Morgan 11/9–11. "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warblers were in *Northampton*, VA 10/19 and at Ft. Morgan, AL.

North-Central: A Tufted Duck was at Ottawa, ON 10/20–23. A Harlequin Duck was at Upper Souris NWR, ND 11/9. In OH, Western Grebes were in *Trumbull* 10/25–11/1 and *Geauga* 11/3+. A Northern Fulmar was seen from Netitishi Pt. on s. James Bay, ON 10/29. In ON, a Wilson's Storm-Petrel was seen from Hamilton, and single Leach's Storm-Petrels were seen on L. Ontario from Oshawa and Hamilton 10/30. A Northern Gannet at Netitishi Pt. 10/23 was n. ON's 2nd, and a Great Cormorant seen there 11/1 was a 1st for n. ON. A Prairie Falcon was in *Hancock*, OH 10/13–16. A Hudsonian Godwit was in *Chariton*, MO 11/5. A **Ross's Gull** was at Ft. Erie, ON 11/1. A California Gull was in *Lee*, IA 11/1. A Costa's Hummingbird visited a feeder *Finney*, KS 10/27–29. A Say's Phoebe was seen briefly in *Cuyaboga*, OH 10/25. A Vermilion Flycatcher in *Alger* 10/27–11/8 was MI's 5th. A **Cassin's Kingbird** in *Cook* 10/27–11/11



Cassin's Sparrow. Floras Lake, OR; 10 October 2012. Photo by © Russ Namitz.

was a 1st for MN. In WI, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was in *Ozaukee* 10/31–11/1, and a Black-billed Magpie was in *Ashland* 10/14. Cave Swallows were widespread around the Great Lakes. In MN, Clark's Nutcrackers were seen in *St. Louis* 10/12 and *Ramsey* 10/30–11/2. An incursion of Mountain Chickadees and other high-elevation species was noted in w. NE. A Bewick's Wren was in *Eau Claire*, WI 10/27. A Mountain Bluebird was in *Lake*, MN 10/31–11/13. A Townsend's Solitaire was at Whitefish Pt., MI 10/19–20. A Varied Thrush was at Wildwood, MB 10/9. A Sprague's Pipit continued in *Polk*, IA to 10/14. Flocks of Bohemian Waxwings appeared on the IN lakeshore 11/4, and a single bird appeared in *Cook*, IL 11/6. A **Hepatic Tanager** at Wadena 11/2–9+ was a 1st for SK and Canada's 2nd. In OH, a Lark Bunting was in *Tuscarawas* 11/3–13+, and a Harris's Sparrow was in *Wood* 10/11. A Golden-crowned Sparrow at Sioux Falls 10/12–17 was SD's 3rd; another was in *Wayne*, IL 10/19.

South-Central: A **Northern Jaçana** was at Santa Ana NWR, TX 11/3. A Mew Gull was in *Hidalgo*, TX 10/27. A Ruddy Ground-Dove continued in *Bexar*, TX to 10/18. A Costa's Hummingbird appeared in the Christmas Mtns. of TX 11/6–7. A **Greater Pewee** continued at Houston, TX. A Varied Thrush was in the Christmas Mtns. of TX 10/20–11/8+. In TX, a flock of 21 Red Crossbills was seen in Vernon 11/4, and Evening Grosbeaks turned up as far s. as Ft. Davis.

Mexico: Baja California's 3rd White Ibis lingered at Estero Punta Banda 10/26. Baja California Sur hosted 2

Hepatic Tanager. Wadena, SK; 6 November 2012. Photo by © Nick Saunders.



firsts, a **Black Vulture** at Isla Natividad 10/28, and a **Cassin's Sparrow** at Llanos Hiray 11/10; other late Oct.–early Nov. highlights from the state included a Pacific Loon at La Paz, 4 Mississippi Kites at Estero San José, 32 Franklin's Gulls at La Paz, an “Eastern” Bell's Vireo at Bahía Tortugas, a Yellow-green Vireo at Isla Natividad, a Louisiana Waterthrush at San Antonio de la Sierra, a Cape May Warbler at Isla Natividad, a “Mangrove” Yellow Warbler at Guerrero Negro, and a Grace's Warbler at Bahía Tortugas. In Chihuahua, a **Sabine's Gull** at Nuevo Casas Grandes 9/11–12 was the state's 1st, and 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches were found nw. of Madera 9/13. A Bell's Vireo was banded at Minatatlán, Veracruz 10/17. A Black-chinned Hummingbird was found near Santa María Jalatengo, Oaxaca 10/10.

Interior West: Harlequin Ducks appeared in *Davis*, UT 10/23–11/9+ and *Washoe*, NV 11/6–7. Reports of Black Scoters trickled in from the region: MT hosted 1 in *Cascade* 10/12 and 2 in *Deer Lodge* 10/27; another turned up in *Navajo*, AZ 10/17; Calgary, AB hosted a flock of 6 on 10/23 and a singleton 11/5; and a lone bird turned up *Sierra*, NM 10/27. MT's 8th Yellow-billed Loon was at Glacier NP 10/21–24+. A Red-necked Grebe was in *Rio Arriba*, NM 10/22–11/4, and a Clark's Grebe was at Calgary, AB 10/23–25. NV's 2nd Neotropic Cormorant continued at Las Vegas as of 10/28. A **Harris's Hawk** found at Flathead L. 10/13–25 will be MT's 1st if accepted. A Mountain Plover was in *Clark*, NV 10/20. Two Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were in *Ada*, ID 10/27–30. Two American Woodcocks were in *Eddy*, NM 10/11, with 1 continuing to 10/15; another was in *Larimer*, CO 11/7. A Lesser Black-backed Gull seen on the Missouri R. at Ft. Peck Dam 10/10–11/4+ was MT's 10th. A Red-bellied Woodpecker came to a feeder in Cheyenne, WY 10/26–11/1. A Yellow-throated Vireo was in *Washington*, UT 10/12–13, and a Philadelphia Vireo was at Peña Blanca L., AZ 10/20–25. A Blue Jay was at Ruby L. NWR, NV 10/22. In CO, Sedge Wrens were in *Pueblo* 10/16 and *Lincoln* 10/21. An Ovenbird was in *Tooele*, UT 10/9. A Bay-breasted Warbler was at Ash Meadows NWR, NV 11/10+. A Hermit Warbler continued in *Washington*, CO to 10/12. Single Rufous-capped Warblers were reported from *Cochise*, AZ at Miller Canyon 10/13–22 and French Joe Canyon 10/20. *Pueblo*, CO hosted a Le Conte's Sparrow 10/17–22 and a Nelson's Sparrow 10/19–24. A “Sooty” Fox Sparrow was in *Cochise*, AZ 10/20. A Bobolink was at Tucson, AZ 10/23. A Common Grackle was in *Yuma*, AZ 11/6–8. Two Purple Finches were in *Washoe*, NV 10/15–21, and another was at Lewiston, ID 10/29.

Alaska: Three Anna's Hummingbirds were reported from the Ketchikan area in mid-Oct., and 2 were at Juneau. An **Ash-throated Fly-**

catcher was at Ketchikan 11/7–10+. A Sky Lark at Ninilchik 10/18–22 was the 1st recorded on the state's mainland. Palm Warblers were found at Ketchikan 10/13, Anchorage 10/18–20, and Juneau 10/22. A **Northern Parula** was seen briefly at Ketchikan 10/21, and a Clay-colored Sparrow was there 10/22.

Pacific Coast: A Common Eider was in *Grays Harbor*, WA 10/19–29. A kettle of 17 Magnificent Frigatebirds was seen over *San Diego*, CA following a tropical storm 10/18. Also in CA, a Brown Pelican was found well inland in *Lassen* 10/29, and a Black Vulture was in *Santa Barbara* 10/26. WA's 2nd **Wilson's Plover** continued in *Grays Harbor* to 11/3. Victoria, BC hosted a Little Gull 11/3 and an Elegant Tern 11/1–3. A Thick-billed Kingbird was in *Los Angeles*, CA 10/19–23, and another returned to *San Diego* 10/15 and continued through the period. Also in CA, a Blue-headed Vireo was in *San Luis Obispo* 10/20–21, a Yellow-green Vireo was in *Ventura* 10/24–28, and another was found dead in *Santa Barbara* 10/26. BC hosted its 1st **Cave Swallow** at Richmond 11/10+. A Northern Wheatear in *Grays Harbor* 10/26–11/5 was WA's 2nd. A Rufous-backed Robin was in *Riverside*, CA 10/29–11/8+. Vagrant warblers in CA included Worm-eating Warblers in *San Mateo* 10/18–25 and *Humboldt* 10/26–28, and single Pine Warblers in *Santa Barbara* 11/4 and *San Diego* 10/30, as well as 2 in *Los Angeles* 10/24 and 10/28–11/12. OR's 1st **Cassin's Sparrow** was in *Curry* 10/10–11. A Field Sparrow was in *Marin*, CA 11/3–6. A Rustic Bunting was at Masset, Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Is.), BC 10/19. A Varied Bunting in *San Bernardino* 10/10–12 was CA's 4th. Two Bramblings were at Sandspit, Haida Gwaii, BC 10/20. An Orchard Oriole was in *Clallam*, WA 10/21–11/12+.

Hawaiian Islands: Migrant waterfowl on O'ahu included a Greater White-fronted Goose at the Ki'i Unit of James Campbell NWR 11/1+ and Eurasian Wigeons at Kuilima STP, where a single bird was seen 10/5, and a flock of 6 appeared 10/27. A Peregrine Falcon was at Ki'i 11/6. A Bar-tailed Godwit was found at Kawai'e Sand Mine Bird Sanctuary, Kauai 10/16–25+, and another turned up at Ki'i 10/20–27+. Three Maui Parrotbills and an 'Ākohekohe were reported from the Waikamoi Preserve, Maui 10/25.

Northern Lapwing.
Allentown, NJ; 8 November 2012.
Photo by © Sam Galick.



Book Review: *Bird Sense* and *What the Robin Knows*

MARK COCKER • Claxton, Norfolk, U.K. • mark.cocker@virgin.net

Bird Sense: What It's Like To Be a Bird

• **Tim Birkhead.** Walker & Company (Bloomsbury), 2012.

Contains bibliography and index; xxii + 265 pages. \$25—hardcover. \$15.75—eBook.

What the Robin Knows: How Birds Reveal The Secrets of the Natural World

• **Jon Young.** Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

Contains introduction, appendices, references, and index; xxx+242 pages. \$22—hardcover.

Both of these books stand out on the shelves for addressing an important subject that is often quite overlooked by ornithological authors: What actually is it like to be a bird? How do they experience the world, and what can we learn from the differences between our respective sensory experiences? While Tim Birkhead tackles this absorbing theme as a subject of conventional science, Jon Young's approach is much more oblique. He is a modern tracker in the tradition of old-style Native American hunters, and his goal is to explore how we can make practical use of avian behavior to develop our own field craft and birding skills.

The first title, *Bird Sense*, is in many ways vintage stuff from its British author. He mixes a comprehensive grasp of his field with a clear, lucid, frequently humorous prose style. This winning combination has made Birkhead the most respected popularizer of ornithological science in his native country. His previous book, *The Wisdom of Birds*, was acclaimed on several continents and some of the themes of that last work are recapitulated here. He is concerned not only with exploring the very nature of birds' sensory world, but also with describing the ways in which ornithologists have gradually unraveled its secrets. *Bird Sense* is, thus, a straight scientific study mixed with a dash of science history.

Birkhead takes the five conventional senses in turn and has an additional chapter on the more intangible field of birds' emotional worlds. He also has a section on magnetic sense, that perception of gravity and the Earth's magnetism that aids birds in their navigation during long-distance flight. The core message that emerges from the whole text is the fundamental separation between human and avian perception and also the massive differences in sensory development across the entire class of birds.

Sight is a perfect example. Kiwis, those weird nocturnal ratites of New Zealand, can find their earthworm diet deep in the ground entirely by smell, via nostrils located at the tips of their long bills. They have, by contrast, a poor sense of sight that means they bump into things when running away. Yet a species such as the Peregrine Falcon has an acuity of vision far beyond our own. While humans

have a single fovea—the acute spot on the back of the eye where the image is sharpest—falcons, like kingfishers, hummingbirds, and swallows, have two. The density of light-sensitive cones in those foveae is also far higher than in humans. Where a Peregrine has one million per square millimeter, we possess just 200,000.

Not only is bird vision often far sharper than our own, in some species it can be sensitive to ultraviolet (UV) light. A Eurasian Kestrel, for instance, can detect the UV reflected in a vole's urine trail. Meanwhile, a female Blue Grosbeak can perceive the UV in the plumage of her potential mate, and the degree of this UV reflectance enables her to judge his overall quality and health.

The chapter on avian hearing is particularly entertaining and equally illustrative of the deep separation between us and birds.

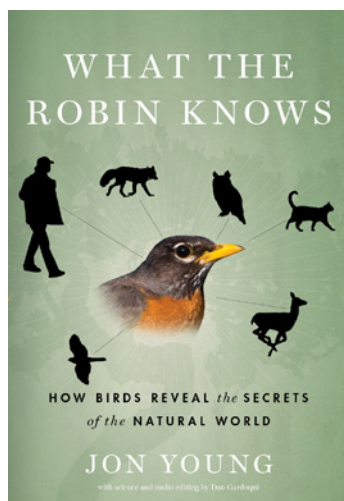
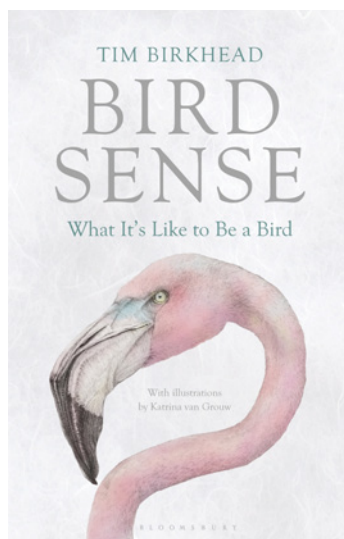
One small simple measure of their higher power is captured in our very name for the Eastern Whip-poor-will. The song on which that mimetic title is based actually comprises five notes. Our inferior hearing, however, slurs the sound and we detect only three. The scientist who unraveled this discrepancy, Ainsley Hudson, pondered whether the bird itself actually hears it as five or three notes. He later surmised the truth from an unexpected source: the imitation of an Eastern Whip-Poor-Will song made by a Northern Mockingbird. The copied version reproduces the song as five notes, indicating how, for birds at least, the answer to Hudson's question is patently obvious.

Another strand in the story of avian hearing more fully reveals Birkhead's dual approach to his task. It concerns the ability of another nocturnal bird, the Oilbird, to move about subterranean caves in conditions of total darkness. Like bats, Oilbirds bounce high-frequency sounds off the cave walls and navigate by echolocation. However, Birkhead describes not just the biology entailed in this remarkable faculty, he also rehearses the human history by which we unraveled the facts.

It was a Swiss naturalist and surgeon, Charles Jurine, who, looking into how bats with surgically removed eyes could navigate in the dark, took the further liberty of blocking their ears with wax. He quickly found that they blundered wildly. The seeming illogic of Jurine's discovery in 1793—that bats need to hear to “see”—persuaded scientists for more than 100 years to accept Baron Cuvier's explanation for this bizarre contradiction. Cuvier proposed that they did it by touch. It was not

until the 1930s that a Harvard graduate, Don Griffin, was able to prove that bats produce high-frequency sounds beyond the range of human hearing and use these to create an auditory map of their immediate surroundings.

The overall effect of this hugely entertaining book is twofold. Anyone even vaguely familiar with the basics of avian biology has already encountered some of the more exceptional details, such



as the ability of owls to locate and catch mice in conditions of complete darkness using only their ears, or the Bar-tailed Godwits from Alaska that can navigate 11,690 km non-stop across the Pacific to New Zealand. Birkhead's rehearsal of such stories means we are reassured that birds are as amazing as we always thought. Yet the author has mined the material on bird sense and experience to find new stories that leave us astonished all over again at their wonderful powers.

Jon Young's *What the Robin Knows* is very much about applying that knowledge of bird behavior and sensory experience for our own ends. Whereas behavioral ecologists tend to study animal communication for what it reveals about the psychology of non-human organisms, Young's tracking ideology is concerned with its cognitive, emotional, and spiritual benefits to the observer, including the feelings of connectedness and the sense of enhanced well-being derived from close contact with nature.

The expressed intention of Young's book is to promote a brand of wildlife tracking of which he is a professional tutor. He argues that bird vocalizations are particularly valuable in helping us to unlock a wider understanding of place, habitat, and wider wildlife communities. The author defines and explores the differing messages contained within five kinds of avian vocalization—song, companion calls, territorial aggression, adolescent begging, and alarms. He particularly stresses the importance of contact calls as a means to attune oneself to the surrounding wildlife in any given location.

In the tracker's vocabulary, these background conditions are known as the "baseline." The baseline is the sum of all the usual actions and interactions taking place among the customary local fauna, which includes mammals and even insects, as well as birds. It is a concept at the very heart of his discipline and Young has a highly telling phrase—"cacophony of harmony"—to define and underscore the centrality of the baseline.

In alliance with this concept is the twin idea of the "sit spot." It is the tracker's equivalent of a birder's local patch—the specific place where he or she goes repeatedly to gain insight into the accompanying baseline. By understanding and appreciating the normal, everyday pattern of behaviors in any natural setting, a tracker can instantly recognize anything out of the ordinary. Has that American Robin stopped singing, for instance, as it reacts to a passing predator, or is it busy collecting food for a nest of its young? Why have those alarm calls of the Dark-eyed Juncos just stopped? Does that slight shift in behavior indicate the presence of a hunting Cooper's Hawk? By being attentive literally to what the robin knows or what the juncos have detected—to the tiny details passing before us, and details that most inattentive naturalists miss—you can read the landscape and gain a deeper appreciation of the world around. You will acquire in time the kind of sign-reading ability at which native hunters once excelled.

Many of the field methods and skills that Young aims to inculcate in the young tracker overlap squarely with those that are routinely acquired by a more conventional birder. This was especially emphasized in Young's discussion of walking. We are encouraged to acquire the art of "fox walking". By learning this style of movement through the woods—places with heavy tree cover seem to be the habitat of choice for the tracker—then we will avoid the unfortunate

mistakes of the untutored person. The latter's usual mode of progress creates what Young calls "the bird plow", a churning line of perpetual disturbance that flushes birds constantly ahead of us. However, by practicing the fox walk, we will create around ourselves an alternative to the "bird plow", the "circle of invisibility".

It is with this labored prescription that I started to rebel against the ways of the tracker. Instead of leaving it to common sense that would-be nature observers will acquire their own understanding of moving slowly and of being able to attune the senses to the whole environment, we are adjured to do the fox walk. The discipline somehow ceases to be the study of the natural environment, and the end becomes a mode of being in that place. At times, the real end of tracking seems to be our own inner workings, rather than our understanding of place and other species.

The key question that nagged me during much of my reading of *What The Robin Knows* is this: Why would one want to substitute the arts of the tracker for the conventional goals and skills-set that already shape standard-format birding? Birders are axiomatically committed to a number of laudable objectives, such as developing forensic powers of observation (identification), record-keeping (citizen science), contact with the natural world, pleasurable recreation, vigorous physical activity, and spiritual exercise in wild places. Yet at one point Young describes tracking as "a multidimensional, full-contact nature sport"! In a curious way, his own definition seems to ally tracking with the most competitive—and, arguably, the most banal—kind of birding, which is listing. At times, in fact, tracking, with its highly specialized vocabulary and its preoccupation with a very specific set of natural interactions (which are almost always in the woods), and its concern to demonstrate, if only to the tracker himself, that one can walk like a fox and see like an owl, seemed as limited and prescribed in scope as listing. Birding, however, is as open-ended and as without prescription as the individual wishes to make it. At its best, surely, the science of birds resembles one of those sets of Russian dolls; there are always larger questions to wrap around and contain the ones that engaged us before.

This is not to suggest that birders have nothing to learn from *What The Robin Knows*. On the contrary, Young's deep concern for the ordinary location, and his determination to pay close attention to the commonplace and the everyday are surely a healthy corrective to the dominance in modern birding of rarity and the exceptional. Equally, Young's emphasis on mastering all forms of vocalization and his detailed attention to bird behavior challenge birding's sometimes obsessive concern for feather detail, and even the inner chromosomal patterns of birds' DNA. Identification and taxonomy are not the whole ornithological story. Young's tracking approach reminds us of the importance of mastering all aspects of birds: appearance, vocalizations, behavior, and their relationships with the surrounding community. The holistic approach implicit in *What The Robin Knows* is both relevant and important and, regardless of any reservations, I sense that birders can learn a huge amount from this book.

Mark Cocker is an author and naturalist whose books include Birders: Tales of a Tribe and Crow Country, which was short-listed for the Samuel Johnson Prize and won the New Angle Prize. He has just completed the text of a new book, Birds and People (due out in 2013), a worldwide survey of birds' cultural importance.

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Feb. 14-17, 2013 in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Four days of field trips and three fabulous keynoters: George Lepp, Kevin Karlson, and Alvaro Jaramillo. Largest concentration of Bald Eagles in the lower 48 states plus huge flocks of migrating waterfowl. Details at www.WinterWingsFest.org or call (877) 541-BIRD. Reg. opens in Dec.

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