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NEWSLETTER

VOL. 2

DECEMBER 1974

NO. 4

1974 REPORT OF THE RARE/UNUSUAL BIRD COMMITTEE

by John P. Hubbard

This committee was formed to pass judgement on reports of birds rare or unusual in New Mexico. Generally, the committee restricts itself to decisions on species that have not been verified by specimens or photographs in the state. The following represents the 1974 decisions:

Least Grebe - One in apparent immature plumage reported at Bosque del Apache NWR, Socorro Co., on 23 October 1973, by Ross L. Teuber.

Comment: The record is rejected by a vote 5 to 1, with 2 abstentions. The uncertainty of the observer in his own identification, lack of stressing of "tiny" size, and mention of adjacent Horned Grebes (probably Eared) were factors in the rejection of the record.

Black-legged Kittiwake - One in adult plumage reported at Caballo Lake, Sierra Co., on 19-24 November 1971, by Geth and Ed White.

Comment: The record is rejected by a vote of 7 to 1. The difficulty in identification of gulls-particularly in the Southwest where experience with them tends to be infrequent-and the unconvincing details were factors in the rejection of the record.

Ferruginous (Pygmy) Owl - One in adult plumage reported in extreme southern Dona Ana County, in the Rio Grande Valley north of El Paso, on 15 December 1973 (and 28 January 1970), by Geth White and others.

Comment: The record is rejected, but the initial vote of the committee is not overwhelming? 2 strongly and 2 moderately against, versus 4 (at best) moderately for acceptance. The critical factor in rejection, which is based on the strength of the various votes, was the failure to really eliminate the Northern Pygmy Owl. For example, assuming that a reddish Glaucidium in the lowlands is a Ferruginous Owl is not a safe approach to identifying this species, especially in the area in question. In particular, no mention is made of whether the crown was streaked or spotted, a critical way of distinguishing the two species.

Varied Thrush – One in apparent adult plumage reported at Fairview, Bernalillo County, on 26 April and 5 May 1973, by Susan Noel.

Comment: Rejected by a vote of 4 to 0. Unfortunately, the photograph obtained was of little value, and the report stated that the bird picked dead grass (nest material?) from the ground-unusual behavior for a Varied Thrush in New Mexico. The description of a dark "necklace" and orange wingbars fit this thrush, but this could apply to a young Robin as well.

Committee members:

John Hubbard (chairman), David Ligon, Barbara and Daniel McKnight, Ralph Raitt, James Travis, Roland Wauer, Dale Zimmerman.

N.M.O.S. CONSERVATION PROGRAM

At its September 14th meeting, the Board of Directors approved a conservation program proposed by the Conservation Chairman, Henry Zeller.

The primary objective of the program will be the protection of habitat. Habitat is the key to survival of bird species as well as other fauna, and through its protection a material contribution can be made to the accomplishment of the objectives of the NMOS.

Parallel to habitat protection will be a continuing effort to improve non-game management throughout New Mexico. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish is already working on the implementation of the newly-passed Wildlife Conservation Act, and has indicated a desire to expand this activity to cover all non-game. A major part of our activity will be devoted to backing up the Department. Of course, we shall also have recommendations of our own. The Department has taken an important step in the effective enforcement and administration of the Act in engaging Dr. John Hubbard as its immediate administrator. As you know, John is the author of the NMOS Check-List of the Birds of New Mexico.

As implied by these two points, the conservation program will not be limited purely to birds, but will be aimed at the welfare of biotic communities as a whole, maintaining an interest in all wildlife as the most effective way to work for the welfare of birds.

Related to this program are the activities of the Conservation Chairman as an individual in attempting to obtain a natural areas inventory of the State of New Mexico. The State Planning Office has consented to sponsor the organization of a comprehensive cooperative effort on the part of both State and Federal agencies. This inventory will be of considerable interest to the NMOS, and it is hoped that members of the Society will provide information for it as soon as the effort gets organized and going.

The suggestions of all members of the NMOS are solicited for the improvement of our conservation program. Please contact Henry Zeller either by mail or telephone. His address and phone number are given under the list of officers on the last page of this Newsletter. – H. Zeller.

AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILMS are being shown this winter at Angel Fire Country Club Building, Eagle Nest, N.M. on November 2, November 30, and March 28. Showing at 8:00 P.M. You can eat first at the Country Club if you want to. Further info from Robert Bright at Eagle Nest, New Mexico 87718.

BIRD NEWS FROM AROUND NEW MEXICO

SOUTHWESTERN NEW MEXICO

The Southwestern New Mexico Hawk Count for 1974 produced 457 hawks counted in 855 miles for a total of .42 hawks per mile. Eight routes were set up within the counties of Hidalgo, Luna, Dona Ana, Sierra and Grant. The following species were reported: Cooper's Hawk, 5; Sharp-shinned Hawk, 3; Goshawk, 1; Ferruginous Hawk, 16; Rough-legged Hawk, 12; Golden Eagle, 31; Marsh Hawk, 63; Red-tailed Hawk, 111; Kestrel, 89; Prairie Falcon, 11; Peregrine Falcon, 1; and 14 unidentified.

CENTRAL NEW MEXICO - by Dot DeLollis, Albuquerque

Dan and Marian Washburn were delegates for Central New Mexico Audubon Society to the Audubon Southwest Region meetings in Beaumont, Texas, in mid-October. The delegates visited the newly established Big Thicket National Preserve.

Jim Karo, past president of CNMA, will discuss bird photography at the January 16th meeting. Jim is a professional photographer at Sandia Labs and enjoys photographing birds as a hobby. He will talk about the use of different cameras and lenses and the merits and shortcomings of each.

The most interesting birds reported in Albuquerque this fall were a Peregrine Falcon in the west foothills of the Sandias on September 6; an American Redstart at the edge of the southeast mesa on September 22; and a Ladder-backed Woodpecker in the northeast heights on October 18.

NORTHWESTERN NEW MEXICO - by Alan Nelson

Bird study on the Wesco coal lease, south of Fruitland, continues to provide new information. The best reports by Duane Tolle and Steve Pomeroy in September included: Green Heron, Semipalmated Plover, Pectoral Sandpiper, Northern Phalarope, Herring Gull, and Clay-colored Sparrow (a new county record).

A hawk count was conducted by Alan Nelson and Les Lesperance on November 23, southward to Chaco River and northeast to Highway 44 and on to Bloomfield. The results were: 4 Redtails, 1 Rough-leg, and 3 Ferruginous Hawks, 2 Golden Eagles, 1 Prairie Falcon, and 1 Kestrel.

The most exciting event was the presence of 1 or 2 Black-throated Green Warblers on October 30 and 31. One female was killed by hitting a window and H. Lesperance found it. The specimen (sent to U.N.M.) represents the 250th bird species for San Juan County.

NORTHEASTERN NEW MEXICO - by Lorraine Hartshorne

Many Hermit Thrushes were seen around Los Alamos this fall, and a White-throated Sparrow visited the Hartshorne yard between October 22 and November 10. On a field trip to Otowi Bridge, October 20, the Audubon group found a Winter Wren.

On October 19, Judy Vance and the Hartshornes birded Riverside Park in Espanola, and found four Golden Eagles. One was also seen there on November 9, as well as a Marsh Hawk, Song Sparrow, Yellow-headed Blackbirds and many Flickers.

SOUTHEASTERN NEW MEXICO – Marge Williams

Elmer Patterson is the new president of the SE New Mexico Audubon Society. A very nice installation banquet was held at the Roswell Inn, November 3, at which John Hubbard was guest speaker.

Fall migration was good in the Roswell area. A Dickcissel was seen near Bitter Lake on September 13, and a Williamson's Sapsucker was observed in Roswell, September 14. An immature Bald Eagle was seen by two different people near Bitter Lake, October 12 and 19. An injured Golden Eagle was found and is recovering in a pen at Bitter Lake. Other interesting sightings at Bitter Lake included: Common Loon on October 18, Western Grebe on October 26, Peregrine Falcon on October 28, Wood Duck on October 30, Horned Grebe on November 3, Cassin's Finch on November 11, and White-fronted Goose on November 12.

FOR THE BIBLIOPHILE

A dollar and a quarter for a small pamphlet of sixteen pages may seem a rather stiff price to pay. We find this to be a bargain when the publication is "On the Building of a Basic Ornithological Library," author not recorded. The collection is composed, in part, of seven 25-book lists provided by Amadon, Howell, Newman, Parkes, Pettingill, Storer, and Zimmerman. In addition, there is a master list of sixty titles, a list of regional bird books, and a list of recent books. In spite of the fact that our library now totals over fifty titles plus the Bent series, we are making plans based on the subject listings for additions to our reference works. Succinct remarks are made throughout the pamphlet with reference to the volumes reported. These remarks will be of value to us in deciding on the acquisition of new material. The pamphlet may be obtained from American Birds, 950 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022. If members of the N.M.O.S. or friends of birds express interest in books on ornithology, we would be delighted to help as we are able to do. Personal reviews and sources for such books are available on request. – Pierre and Lorraine Hartshorne, 249 El Conejo, Los Alamos, N.M. 87544. Tel# 662-7404.

MORAL OBLIGATIONS OF BIRDERS

by Ro Wauer

I seriously doubt that there is one birder among the birding fraternity that has not, sometime in his field observing career, done some careless act that may have endangered a living bird. Most of those acts can be placed in the "darned careless" category, and the birder has left the scene with a great deal of contriteness. But how many times has the act of carelessness been just thoughtlessness and not even considered to be endangering? A careless step, consistent tree-whacking, driving off roadways, lingering too long at a nest, and rearranging nests or nesting cover for photography sake, or for just a better look, are just a few activities that are taken for granted but may seriously endanger the survival of a particular bird or clutch of eggs.

The question of when to add birds to your list and the controversy of collecting or not collecting have been pretty well overdone. A discourse here will not change ingrained attitudes. However, it does offer a lead into two topics of birding morals: the respect for another's property and solitude, and the fun of sharing a "good" bird with another birder.

I suppose, during the six years that I lived in Big Bend National Park, that more than 300 birders visited my back yard to watch Lucifer Hummingbirds

at my feeders. Not more than two or three of those thankful birders became a nuisance. The majority asked permission to visit my yard and respected my property. Many were invited indoors for coffee or a cold drink, and my dining room window was an even better place to watch hummers from a distance of only a few feet. But one pair of listers stayed all afternoon and most of the evening. They delivered a steady stream of dialog about their exploits in the birding world and with the most famous of birders. Yet, hummingbirds are diurnal!

It has been said before but-like part of the enjoyment of reading a good book is owning it--part of the enjoyment of finding a special bird is to share it. The finding of the Black-vented (Wagler's) Oriole at Big Bend was much more than a publication; it was the excitement of showing it to dozens of other birders. A specimen in a cabinet would not have authenticated the species in the United States any more than 'the approximately 300 sightings and hundreds of photographs that resulted. In the case of the Black-vented Oriole, and many other birds, a good photograph is as publishable as a specimen. And a collected bird cannot be enjoyed by other birders.

I have found that most birders possess the attitude of sharing their bird discoveries. They seem to consider the telling of others of a unique or rare find as an unwritten "obligation of the clan." And yet, this is not universal. There are others who apparently receive a larger thrill from knowing about a special bird and keeping that information to themselves.

I can understand and appreciate the "recluse syndrome" in some cases. I, too, do not trust many birders to give up a lifer for the sake of saving an individual bird or a bit of avian habitat. In the case of an endangered species there is infinite wisdom in silence. But not spreading the word about a migrant Connecticut Warbler seen several days in a row in the local city park, or a Clay-colored Robin using a local feeder, might be considered inconsiderate, to say the least. Incomprehensible to me is the maniacal drive possessed by some pseudo-scientists that demands that a special bird being seen by dozens of birders in Mrs. Jones' garden must become a specimen for a private collection. That sickness must be abolished! Not only is the taking of such a bird illegal and immoral, it is a blight on the serious scientific collector and the birder.

Many birders are strongly opposed to any form of collecting. Yet some of these same individuals think nothing is wrong with tree-whacking, a common technique used to drive owls and woodpeckers from their nests or roosts. Particularly during the nesting season, whacking on tree trunks and poles that exhibit holes large enough to harbor nesting owls is an effective method to find these nocturnal birds. Tree-whacking can be overdone! Think back at the many birders you saw last spring whacking on trees in the Santa Ritas or Chiricahuas. How many times does it take to drive one owl from her nest before she doesn't return?

Nest destruction comes in many forms. The nature photographer can become as great a menace as the scientific collector. The birding guide, who daily points out a nest to interested visitors, can be as deadly as the neighbor's cat. And how many tractor trips, in search of rails, does it take before the resource that we try so hard to protect is negated?

I certainly don't want to set myself up as some kind of a moral pontiff, but I do want to raise some questions. I also want to get some thoughts off my chest. After living in desert environments for 15 years, I will have to admit that another of my pet peeves is people's careless attitude toward driving off marked roadways. The lazy lout that can't find the ambition to walk two or three hundred feet shouldn't be allowed to leave home. Vehicle tracks, particularly in deserts and meadowlands, last for decades. They not only are aesthetically distasteful but serve as the catalyst for the next person and the next. The wilderness "jeep" driver has become a plague. Backcountry clubs are bad enough on our vast stretches of federal lands of

the west, but why some birders climb on the ignore-the-landscape bandwagon is beyond me. Photo imagery taken from thousands of feet above the ground shows that damage from off-the-road driving lasts for years.

We daily hear the word "ecology"—from teachers, from soap operas, from merchants and from politicians. But do we really understand how dependent the living environment is upon all of its parts? The soil, the plants, the invertebrates and vertebrates, all the living and non-living ingredients, serve a function in a healthy ecosystem. The minute and vascular plants share a common bond with the soil and animals, they are dependent upon one another.

Until we realize that we are the intruders and fully respect a wild animal's rights, the reasons and the actual desire for protecting our environment will remain only rhetoric. — from Birding.

N.M.O.S. QUESTIONEER

When the New Mexico Ornithological Society Board of Directors approved the development of the "N.M.O.S. NEWSLETTER", it was a tentative attempt to encourage new membership. Membership has fluctuated less than five percent since. Although the Editor has received a few very nice comments, the Board is properly questioning the logic of continuing the Newsletter. If you have an opinion, please tear off this questioner, mark the activity of your choice (1 through 5), and mail it to the N.M.O.S. President, Dr. Bruce J. Hayward, Rt. P., Box 160, Silver City, N.M. 88061.

What activities do you like best and least? Mark 1 through 5.

Annual Meetings
Special Field Trips
Field Notes
Newsletter
Special Guidebooks

WHY ARE NEW MEXICO'S TURKEYS DISAPPEARING

Wild Turkeys were common within many of New Mexico's mountain areas during the first half of the century. Since the early 1950s, records from several areas indicate a general decline, and in some areas a total disappearance. Bandelier National Monument is a good example of an area where wild Turkeys have not been recorded since 1960. Park service officials are concerned about the loss of this important resource. Studies have recently been initiated to determine the causes of the decline, and if the environment could support an introduced flock.

During the process of my studies I have talked with a number of people about their ideas of the cause of the decline. I have heard suggestions on everything from predators to lack of rainfall and poaching. If any of you have any ideas about this problem, I would appreciate hearing from you. — Ro Wauer, Box 5373, Santa Fe, N.M. 87501.