The Changing Seasons:

Antidisestablishmentarianism

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Why are we so fascinated by birds? Well, there are all the stock answers: we delight in their brilliant colors and beautiful songs; we marvel at their trans-hemispheric migrations; we understand, as Roger Tory Peterson did, that "the observation of birds leads inevitably to environmental awareness." All these things ring true, I suspect, for those of us—readers of this journal—who consider ourselves to be field ornithologists with a particular interest in avian population biology.

And there's something else—something simpler, but also deeper and I think truer. We're fascinated by birds because they are emblems of freedom. The sight of a Bald Eagle flying through falling snow; a Peregrine Falcon circling the lonely rimrocks; the season's first Osprey sailing past the hawkwatch—those things stir us so. Such experiences are utterly and completely different from, say, a Bald Eagle in a cage at the zoo, a Peregrine on display at a nature center, or an Osprey being fed by a rehabber. I'm belaboring the obvious, I realize, but I want to be crystal clear: we like our birds wild and free.

In a similar vein, we like our bird *populations* to be somehow "natural," even "native." We're not terribly impressed by Mute Swans in the back bays of Long Island or Purple Swamphens in the marshes of South Florida. Indeed, our government wildlife agencies have attempted to eradicate such populations. They're ostensibly bad for the environment, after all. But isn't there something else at play here, some measure of ornithological xenophobia, some degree of preferential treatment for "our" birds?

The ultimate expression of this belief, if you ask me, is the decree that restrained, nonnative, and otherwise "unnatural" birds and bird populations simply do not "count." To so many of us, this point of view is eminently reasonable. It is self-evident that the Bald Eagle in the snowstorm "counts," whereas the bird in the zoo emphatically does not. Those are extreme examples, I realize, but what of the vast gray area in between? What of a successfully rehabilitated Bald Eagle reintroduced back into the "wild"? What of an entire eagle population that has benefitted from the direct and indirect interventions of wildlife managers, conservation biologists, and government regulatory agencies? What of Barnacle Geese and White-cheeked Pintails, or rehabilitated seabirds released far from their point of capture, or doves and other gamebirds that represent a complex genetic mélange? Depending on our personal comfort levels, such birds and bird populations either do or do not "count."

A bit of cultural history. It was back in the 1970s that we North American birders formally established a wall of separation between "countable" and "non-countable" birds and bird populations. We were caught up in the ecological spirit of the times. Most professional biologists in North America—especially those pioneers in the emerging field of academic conservation biology—held that there was a profoundly important distinction between natural (or "native") species and communities versus introduced (non-native) ones. The distinction wasn't merely academic. It was also a value judgment. Supposedly natural species and communities were held in higher esteem than their supposedly non-natural counterparts. Back in the 1970s, you didn't get grants and tenure for studying urban ecology or human ecology.

That's all changed.

Biologists and other scientists today accept that there's no such thing as a pristine, natural ecosystem, untouched by humans. Melting glaciers, the ocean awash with garbage, the upper reaches of our atmosphere—even those environments show the unmistakable fingerprint of human alteration. And it's not as if any of this is especially new. Biological anthropologists tell us that the supposedly pristine natural communities of the Americas were being powerfully transformed by humans thousands of years before the European conquest.

There is no "balance of nature." That was a pleasant fantasy for the middle decades of the twentieth century. Ever since humanity got serious about technology and civilization, hundreds of generations ago, the bio-

Figure 1. In summer 2010, the release of 140 or more rehabilitated Louisiana-origin Brown Pelicans in Georgia (here near Brunswick, 29 June) offered a small bright spot in what was a terrible season for victims of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. *Photograph by Georgia Department of Natural Resources.*

FACING PAGE: This adult Nutmeg Mannikin, photographed 13 September 2010 in Los Angeles County, California, does not "count." The species does not appear on the *ABA Checklist*. And as if to emphasize its artificialness, the bird is wearing a band—a sure sign of meddling by humans. Yet the Nutmeg Mannikin population of southern California is fascinating. Originally from southern and southeastern Asia, Nutmeg Mannikins are apparently expanding their range and increasing in number in and around Los Angeles County. In this "Changing Seasons," we are exhorted to pay more attention to such "exotics"—and to examine assumptions about the wildness and naturalness of "our" own bird populations, many of which show signs of human tinkering as extensive as the mannikins'. *Photograph by Alex Viduetsky.*

Figure 2. On 22 July 2010, this juvenile Blue-footed Booby was found walking behind the United States Fish and Wildlife Service office in Yuma, Arizona, which is adjacent to open, flat creosote desert. This image was taken that day at one of the Service's holding pens (typically used for wayward Brown Pelicans). The booby was rehydrated and transferred the following day to the Sony Bono National Wildlife Refuge in California. Apparently, it was later released on the refuge at the Salton Sea. ***Photograph by Susanna Henry/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.***

logical systems on Earth have been in a condition of imbalance and instability.

How has this come to pass? Most of us can cite a laundry list of causes: overhunting, clear-cutting, mining, agriculture, acid rain, greenhouse gases, habitat fragmentation, industrialization, urbanization… Yes, if you want to get a grant today, go and do research on urban ecology and human ecology.

And there's another factor, both symptom and cause. Ecologists call it "homogenization"—basically, the idea that Earth's ecosystems and landscapes are increasingly dominated by such organisms (and their genomes) as Mute Swans, Mallards, Eurasian Collared-Doves, and Common Mynas.

Certainly the view of most academic ecologists is that anthropogenic ecological homogenization is a bad thing. But that doesn't mean we should pretend that the phenomenon doesn't exist. We shouldn't sweep the problem under the rug by decreeing that introduced, escaped, and otherwise "non-native" bird populations somehow don't "count." On the contrary, we ought to be especially knowledgeable and vigilant about such bird populations—which I shall hereinafter refer to as "exotic." I don't particularly care for the word, but it beats the pants off the misleading and value-laden "non-native." It will have to do.

(I note in passing that I am of the belief—not shared by all—that there is a powerful causal linkage between what we birders "count" and what we care we about. As soon as a bird species becomes countable, whether it's a Cackling Goose or a Common Myna, birders get fired up about it. Knowledge increases. Action results. And the converse: I would wager that there is less knowledge—and therefore less concern and less action—today among rank-and-file North American birders about, say, White-winged Juncos and Black Francolins than when those birds were countable.)

Anyhow, a major focus in this installment of "The Changing Seasons" will be on exotics, species that rarely take center stage in this essay. My conception of exotics will be broad indeed. I'm thinking not only of species, whatever those are, from elsewhere, but also of populations and even genes from elsewhere. Yes, even genes. We've known for more than a third of a century now that the "gene's-eye view" provides the clearest picture of population-level phenomena (Dawkins 1976). And we've known for more than a century and a half that the concept of the "species" is one of convenience (Darwin 1859). The complexity of gene flow among bird populations, with and without human involvement, is often poorly reflected in our relatively rigid taxonomic categories.

Birds of summer 2010: Which ones count?

Conservation biologists are killing **Mute Swans** established in the Middle Atlantic and Great Lakes regions. (Note that "controlling" is not the correct word here, as it implies a population-level achievement that we cannot meaningfully assess for years or decades to come—if ever.) Recent killings resulted in reduced numbers this past summer at a few well-birded spots in Delaware and New York, and the species once again went undetected as a breeder in Maine. (But one wonders how much longer!) There have been other reductions: Virginia's coastal population has been mostly eradicated, and Maryland's recent counts represent a fraction of those from the 1980s (E. S. Brinkley, pers. comm.). The species continues to make inroads elsewhere. In Ohio, 19 individuals were noted at four sites away from the known breeding range in that state. Meanwhile, free-flying birds continue to be noted in Brevard County, Florida, where breeding occurred in 2009. The population-level impacts of Mute Swans on "native" waterbirds will continue to be studied—and debated—by conservation biologists, probably for decades to come.

Whereas Mute Swans are standard-issue Eurasian exotics in most people's eyes, the situation with **Trumpeter Swans** is more nuanced, as the species is known to have wintered in eastern North America into early colonial times. The question of whether the historical breeding range of the species extended east of the central Great Lakes is controversial (Shea 2002, Whan and Rising 2002), and field ornithologists argue over whether to call the eastern populations "introduced" or "reintroduced." Whatever one's position in the debate, the birds have arrived, their range is expanding, and their population shows no sign of stabilizing. Scattered small numbers were noted from Manitoba to Québec, with the first breeding record for the Ottawa, Ontario area and the second breeding record for eastern Manitoba. Pushing south, breeders were noted from Nebraska's Hall County to New York's Finger Lakes region; in between, two to five Trumpeters were noted at two Ohio locales. And within the undisputed historical breeding range, the species continues to recover. For example, Trumpeter Swans recently resumed nesting in eastern Washington, where they had been absent as breeders for nearly two decades.

If you own a copy of the fourth edition of *A Field Guide to the Birds* (Peterson 1980), check out the range map for **Canada Goose**. Wow. It's amazing what can happen in 31

Figure 4. This immature Peregrine Falcon observed 23-26 (here 23) July 2010 near La Mata, Oaxaca and an adult seen nearby on 25 July 2010, are probably part of an increasing resident population in the state. It is unclear whether these and other "city" Peregrines are progeny of reintroduction programs in the United States. ***Photograph by Jorge Montejo.***

years. Habitat change is a part of the story, but so is "wildlife management" (moving genes around, basically) and possibly a "pre-adaptation" of Canada Geese for human-altered landscapes. To be sure, the status of the species in almost every region north of Mexico and the Caribbean is an unfolding story. For example, Canada Goose is a "review species" in Louisiana, reflecting the Louisiana Bird Records Committee's current uncertainty about the occurrence of "wild" birds in that state (Cardiff 2009). Nevertheless, this summer's report from Alabama includes a record-high count for the Gulf Coast region of that state—163 at the Mobile municipal park 25 June. These were presumably not "wild" migrants from northern breeding areas, but they are not flagged as problematic in the regional report. Do we benefit from attempting to segregate the "wild" from the exotic in such contexts, when one consequence of doing so is that we sacrifice important data on the latter?

Globally, the saga of **Mallards** has been even more astounding than that of Canada Geese. These days, Mallards can be found over much of the planet. And it's not just individual, "unitary" Mallards, but also their genes. From the southeastern United States to Hawaii to New Zealand and beyond, the genomes of Mottled Ducks, Hawaiian Ducks, and Pacific Black Ducks, respectively, are increasingly being invaded by Mallard genes. Worldwide homogenization of the genome of the Mallard superspecies complex shows no sign of slowing down. Mallards are exploding in the Mexicali Valley of northeastern Baja California, with the highest numbers ever reported this past summer. Why the dramatic increase? Two likely causes are the proliferation of wastewater treatment facilities within the Mexicali Valley proper (R. A. Erickson, pers. comm.) and recruitment from the nearby Imperial Valley of southern California, where Mallard numbers have increased substantially in the past decade, probably due to releases by the California Department of Fish and Game (G. McCaskie, pers. comm.).

Tufted Duck is a rare annual visitor to North America, mainly from fall to spring. But summer records are unusual, so reports last June from New Brunswick and Washington were headline makers. In the past, such reports might have raised the red flag of escape from captivity, as Tufted Ducks are widely held in zoos and other collections. Today we're a little more relaxed about escaped waterfowl (it happens, get over it), even as we are coming to recognize that myriad other anthropogenic factors may contribute to extralimital records of ducks, geese, and swans: everything from temperature increases at high latitudes to massive supplemental feeding courtesy of turbocharged high-yield agroecosystems. (Astute readers may be aware that some of these modern methods are substantially more efficient than older ones, resulting in far less "waste" grain per unit effort than used to be the case. But their massive overall productivity overwhelms that effect, resulting in more surplus, in an absolute sense, than ever before. Think of rice production in Asia. And think of all the migratory geese now "shortstopping" in the agricultural districts of central North America.)

Gray Partridge populations appear to be in overall decline in North America. The harvest from Nebraska is down 97% since 1987, and there was only one report this past summer from Wisconsin. What is the cause of the population loss? Is it changing practices with regard to stocking and hunting? Is it the ongoing decline of "traditional" agriculture? Or is it intrinsic population variation, as implied by Southern Great Plains regional editors Joe Grzybowski and Ross Silcock?

Ring-necked Pheasant numbers continue to plummet in parts of the Midwest. This past summer, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources tallied the lowest count on record. Oh, well. The pheasant is just an introduced "chicken," a plaything for hunters. That's true, but consider the cause of the decline in Iowa. Could it be the oft-mentioned and much-lamented decline of "traditional" agriculture in the Midwest? Another possibility, according to regional editor Jim Dinsmore, is that the disappearance of grasslands likely lies behind the pheasant's misfortunes; and that is relevant to conservation and management of, say, prairie-chickens. It's important for conservation ornithologists to pay attention to exotic fowl, which may well be indicators of ecosystem health.

We call them ***Wild* Turkeys**, in distinction from their Butterball® brethren. But let's not kid ourselves. State and provincial wildlife

Figure 3. This juvenile Merlin, one of three that fledged at Chappaquiddick Island, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts (here 23 July 2010), continued to mark this the southernmost known nesting locality of the species in New England. What was presumably the same pair nested at this location in 2008. ***Photograph by Lanny McDowell.***

Figure 5. This third-cycle Great Black-backed Gull was discovered 21 July 2010 on Dauphin Island, Mobile County, Alabama by a visiting birder involved in oil spill response work. Even though the species has become more regular at this location in recent years, this image documents the state's first record in the month of July. ***Photograph by Lisa Hug.***

agencies swap meleagridid genes in the same manner that boys once traded baseball cards. And in a manner that recalls the successes of Canada Geese, Wild Turkeys have proven remarkably well adapted (or pre-adapted) to human-modified landscapes—especially eastern suburbs and cities in the case of the turkey. Wild Turkeys are filling in the gaps in the wilder portions of North America, too. The mountains of Alabama got their highest summer count—22 birds at Oak Mountain State Park—this past summer.

The Canadian stronghold for **California Quail** is the Okanagan Valley, but small numbers were reported this past summer farther east in the British Columbia's Pend-d'Oreille Valley. And that raises a question: is the species "native" to Canada? As far as we can tell, the historical range of California Quail extended no farther north than southern Oregon (Leopold 1977). The first introductions (to Vancouver) were back in 1860-1861, however, and the species had reached the Okanagan Valley by 1912 (Long 1981). It's a bit of a stretch to say that a population established for at least 150 generations (3000-4000 "human" years) is "non-native." The birds are part of the British Columbian avifauna, with no need for an asterisk (or dreaded "E").

Northern Bobwhites, like Wild Turkeys, have long been popular with hunters in North America. And both have been the "beneficiaries" of extensive meddling by wildlife biologists. But populations of the two species are trending in opposite directions. Whereas the wily turkey has prospered in human-modified environments, the apparently less-adaptable bobwhite has not. This past summer, Northern Bobwhites were once again characterized—by several regional editors in the Midwest—as some combination of scarce, declining, and withdrawing.

Brown Pelicans are well known for their capacity for dispersal, even to sites far inland. Humans disperse Brown Pelicans, too. It is heartwarming to read of the release of more than 140 rehabbed Brown Pelicans at coastal Brunswick, Georgia (Figure 1). The birds, victims of the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster, had dispersed over a wide area by the end of July. In theory, we birders may have to worry for the next several years about the "countability" of pelicans in Georgia; in reality, it is safe to say that all of us are cheered by this success story. Much farther south, the sight of a Brown Pelican in downtown San José must have been impressive; the species is practically unknown inland in Costa Rica. One might wonder, in such a case, about the possibility of escape from captivity, but recent inland records from Mexico and Guatemala might indicate an incipient trend, such as has been seen in the Lower 48 states for more than a decade. In such cases, we must confess that we really don't know where the bird came from.

As if to make a clear point about the blurry distinction between wild and not-wild, an apparently stressed juvenile **Blue-footed Booby** walked right up to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's rehabilitation pens (used for pelicans) in Yuma, Arizona, waiting for service (Figure 2)! After getting food, water, and medical attention, it was taken to the Salton Sea in California and released back into the "wild"—although one wonders if that grand inland sea is in any sense "natural." Would such a bird then "count" more or less than a Louisiana pelican brought to Georgia? Or a Red-footed Booby that so enjoyed its Miami spa treatment that it often returned to the vicinity of its rehab to roost for six months, as happened in 2010?

The means by which **Cattle Egrets** reached the Americas in the late 1800s is unknown; the most frequently invoked explanation is that of "self-introduction." But why didn't it happen much earlier? The consensus is that the advent of extensive clear-cutting and cattle ranching in South America were the prerequisites for establishment by this species. The rest is history. Like invading Southern Lapwings, Eurasian Collared-Doves, and House Sparrows, Cattle Egrets achieved success by colonizing human-altered landscapes. Interestingly, the Cattle Egret invasion has stalled and even reversed somewhat in the northeastern United States. The species used to breed in New England, where there were only three sightings (from Connecticut) this past summer. Cattle Egrets have declined sharply in the Hudson–Delaware region, too; only at a colony on Pea Patch Island (in Delaware Bay) were substantial numbers noted. Why the reversal of fortunes for the Cattle Egret in the Northeast? The matter has not been formally studied, but it is worth noting that much of the region is undergoing a well-documented recovery of wooded habitats—precisely the opposite of what is required by invading Cattle Egrets.

Glorious and officially uncountable, **California Condors** would most assuredly be extinct were it not for massive human intervention starting in the 1980s. The species is a paradox: it is one of the great icons of the unspoiled wilderness of western North America, yet it is one of the most intensively managed creatures in the history of life on Earth. For the fourth straight year, condors nested in Baja California's astonishing Sierra San Pedro Mártir—where elevations exceed 10,000 feet (3000 meters). The Mexican population is, of course, being carefully monitored—by an extensive team of Mexican biologists and their colleagues at the San Diego Zoo.

Well past the middle of the twentieth century, we shot raptors (because they're predators, that's bad) and poisoned them with DDT. For the past several decades, though, we've been working to restore raptor populations—with generally felicitous outcomes. For more than a human generation now, it has been *de rigueur* for every lakeside or seaside hamlet to put out a nesting platform for **Ospreys**, and

translocation projects in the Midwest continue to bear fruit in many locales. The species has responded so splendidly to human assistance, and to some countries' bans on DDT, that it may be expanding its winter and breeding ranges beyond the former historical limits. This past summer, two Osprey nests were active near Ensenada, Baja California—in an industrialized zone, of course. Nesting was first reported there in 2002. Farther south, an Osprey was noted at Isla San Andrés (off the coast of Nicaragua), not considered at present to be within the breeding range of the species.

Broken record alert. Once again, **Bald Eagles** continue their astonishing recovery. The breeding population in New York has quadrupled in the past decade; New Jersey added 11 more known nests this past summer; nest sites in Delaware are up 50% in just two years; the greater Toronto, Ontario area got its first breeding record; fully 88 of Iowa's counties now host nesting Bald Eagles; occupied territories in Kentucky have doubled in the past five years; all of New Mexico's known eyries were successful in 2010; and so forth. And it must have been impressive to watch 46 Bald Eagles migrating northward past Derby Hill, New York—on the surprisingly late date of 16 June. Government "game," "fish," and "wildlife" agencies can take much of the credit for the current and projected good fortunes of this nongame species.

Crested Caracaras get around. This past summer, caracaras strayed north to far northern California and to Montana. (Idaho's first was in late 2009, by the way.) The escaped-bird bugaboo (escaped from where?) used to be invoked for extralimital Crested Caracaras, although not for any of the aforementioned records. In Middle America, meanwhile, Crested Caracaras are very much on the move, and their movements are assumed to be related to anthropogenic habitat change in the region. One was sighted on two dates in July in the Toledo district of Belize.

The situation with **Merlins** is fascinating. Unlike various other raptor species, the feisty Merlin has not been the beneficiary of a recovery effort. Yet the species is undergoing a remarkable southward range expansion. Its recent colonization of urban and suburban habitats—on both the wintering and breeding grounds—seems to be the key to recent successes. This past summer, Merlins nested again at Chappaquiddick Island, Massachusetts (Figure 3); in the lowlands of central and western New York; within the Toronto city limits and elsewhere in southern Ontario; in Knox County, Ohio; and in Pike and Luzerne counties, Pennsylvania. Farther west, summering Merlins were noted in five southern Minnesota counties and at two locales in eastern Oregon.

Figure 6. The lack of a black neck ring and the dark iris indicate that this Eurasian Collared-Dove at Ketchikan, Alaska 22 July 2010 was a juvenile. Nesting has yet to be documented in Alaska, but the presence of fresh juveniles in Alaska suggests that the species breeds there. ***Photograph by Kathy M. Ripley.***

We all know the mantra: hybrids don't "count." Neither do recently established populations of exotics; you have to wait a few years. So it is with many North American populations of **Peregrine Falcon**. Think of all those Peregrines flying around East Coast cities; the odd Peregrine straying or lingering far to the south in the summer months; and even Peregrines passing our coastal and ridgetop hawkwatches come autumn. Among them are many pigeon-eating, skyscraper-nesting, mixed-taxon hybrids of decidedly non-local parentage. The results of Peregrine "reintroduction" efforts have been spectacular. And the upshot is a biological novelty, a creature that didn't exist until the late twentieth century. This past summer, it was, as usual, all good news for these known or suspected "pseudogrines" (sensu Dunne 1986). Typical were the reports of birds nesting in urban districts from Richmond, Virginia to Ontario's southern megalopolis and beyond—even to Oaxaca City (Figure 4). From New York, we receive news that productivity is greater on human structures than in wilder settings in the Adirondacks and elsewhere; frustratingly, five cliff nests in the "natural" setting of New Jersey's Hudson River Palisades produced no young for the second year in a row. The breeding season was rated as record setting in Kentucky, where 13 pairs produced 23 chicks, all of which fledged. Along with urbanizing Wild Turkeys and genetically aggressive Mallards, the hybrid Peregrines of North America must be counted as one of the most problematic success stories in the annals of "wildlife" management on the continent.

Steve McConnell, regional editor for Alabama and Mississippi, offers the following sage advice: "The appearance of Herring Gull × Kelp Gull hybrids on the Alabama coast now dictates that observers carefully look over all dark-backed gulls to confirm initial impressions and test assumptions." Then he notes that photographs of a dark-mantled gull at Dauphin Island proved to be a third-cycle Great Black-backed Gull, Alabama's first record for July (Figure 5). But let's return to those Herring Gull × Kelp Gull hybrids. What *are* they? Donna Dittmann and Steve Cardiff have christened them **Chandeleur Gulls**. Such birds were first noted on Louisiana's Chandeleur Islands, far from the breeding grounds of either parental species. Although they're "just" hybrids, these Chandeleur Gulls are fascinating, providing us with intriguing insights into the role of hybridization in the origin of species (Dittmann and Cardiff 2005). Hybrid origin might have played an important role in everything from the evolution of the *cismontanus* ("Cassiar") subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco (Miller 1941) to the origin of Pomarine Jaeger, which may have come into existence as a result of contact between Great Skuas and Parasitic Jaegers (McCarthy 2006). Far from being genetic dead-ends, hybrids can in fact power speciation. As Dittmann and Cardiff (2005) tell it, the Chandeleur Gull story is evolving, in both senses of the word.

Avifaunally, Hawaii has to be the most extraordinary state in the United States. It has

Figure 7. In Washington County, Alabama, these two White-winged Doves were observed at a feeder 10 July 2010, as the photographer enjoyed his own evening meal. The species continues its steady march northward into Alabama's interior. ***Photograph by Matthew Rouse.***

more endemics, more extinct species, more critically imperiled species, and more established exotics than any other U.S. state. For listers and field ornithologists alike, Hawaii is where it's at. When we think of exotics, it's understandable to think of the "classic" groups: psittacids, of course, plus doves and ducks, and a smattering of passerines. But as Pranty (2004) makes clear, representatives of practically any taxon may be noted as exotics. Case in point: the sandgrouse, those taxonomic oddities sandwiched between the orders Charadriiformes and Columbiformes. This past summer, 36 **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** were tallied at one site on Hawaii Island.

We all saw it coming, but we're still in shock. Any way you slice it, the prolific **Eurasian Collared-Dove** deserves "Bird of the Decade" honors for the North American landmass and outlying islands. What the collared-dove has pulled off is breathtaking, far exceeding what even the European Starling and House Sparrow were able to accomplish in the early stages of their invasions of North America. The news this past summer has to be the species' northern incursions, with numerous reports from southeastern Alaska, where breeding apparently has already occurred (Figure 6), and southern Yukon. New Brunswick and Québec had reports, too, and collared-doves were found at eight or more sites across southern Manitoba; in southern Alberta, "they now seem to occupy nearly every human settlement," according to Prairie Provinces regional editors Rudolf Koes and Peter Taylor. Farther south, their numbers continue to balloon. Eurasian Collared-Doves now occur in all 99 counties in Iowa, where they arrived only back in 1997. And a survey of 144 urban coastal sites in Santa Cruz County, California, produced 360 individuals; the species was first detected there only back in 2005.

And here's something to ponder: are "our" birds even Eurasian Collared-Doves? There is growing sentiment that the Bahamian population—our founder population at least in part—has been admixed with African Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*) or the related avicultural variety formerly known as Barbary Dove or as Ringed Turtle-Dove (*S. "risoria"*). Smith (1987) noted that Florida colonizers were interbreeding freely with the local *Streptopelia*, which already showed variations in plumage. In recent regional reports from Baja California to Puerto Rico, from Alaska to the Midwest, editors have noted "paler" *Streptopelia* doves that look mostly like Eurasians. A small group of collared-doves in Berrien County, Michigan, for instance, has been present (and "counted") since 2006. But as Peder Svingen writes in his Western Great Lakes report this season: "at Three Oaks, *Berrien*...observers following up on a report from spring found 4 apparent hybrid *Streptopelia* showing white or predominantly white undertail coverts, with some birds lacking black pigmentation on the outer webs of the outermost rectrices." Thanks to Adam Byrne and Phil Chu, who bird-dogged and studied these collared-doves at Three Oaks, we have another piece of the puzzle.

Collared-doves are here, rather obviously so, and spreading like wildfire; see the S. A. item in the Alaska regional report. But the question of what they actually are remains to be elucidated. In the end, will they be any more or less "countable" than our city-dwelling so-called Rock Doves, now known as Rock Pigeons—of which Patten, McCaskie, and Unitt (2003) memorably write: "referring to these birds as Rock Doves would be equivalent to referring to domestic dogs as Gray Wolves in a document on mammals." These authors refer to them as "Feral Pigeons (*Columba 'livia'*)" instead. What's in a name, or in punctuation? If we use quotation marks around a species' English or scientific names, does that imply that we demote the bird in value somehow, that we decide not to pay close attention to its demography, its populations, its behaviors? And what does such spurning say of us?

As in recent summers, **White-winged Doves** (Figure 7) were reported far north of the breeding range. Strays were noted north to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saint Pierre et Miquelon, Québec, Maine, New York, Ohio, Montana, Idaho, and Oregon. Iowa got

Figure 8. This Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, a first for South Dakota and third for the United States, was in Spearfish Canyon in the Black Hills from 10 (here 17) July through 19 August 2010. ***Photograph by Doug Backlund.***

its first nesting record, and Colorado had reports from eight sites in seven counties. What has triggered the relatively recent population explosion, range expansion, and uptick in vagrancy by the White-winged Doves? It's as if the species has undergone a sort of "ecological phase transition," having been transmogrified into a full-on invasive. Why? Here's an idea: approach the question by way of a comparative study with the ecologically similar Eurasian Collared-Dove. What can we learn by comparing the population dynamics of a recently arrived invading species (Eurasian Collared-Dove) with an indigenous but only recently "converted" invader (White-winged Dove)? Sounds like a fine project for a dissertation or postdoc on spatial modeling. Warning: Such an undertaking will require special attentiveness to the matter of ecological history. In particular, *where* are these extralimital White-winged Doves coming from?

One theory is that many of the birds dispersing in the warmer months (mostly May through November) are coming from the Florida population, which appears to have gotten its start in the early 1960s around Homestead, when ten pairs (from Tampico, Mexico, and thus probably of the nominate subspecies) were released and began to multiply, followed by several sizable releases of the species (subspecies and origins unknown) in the 1970s elsewhere in the state (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). How many of the vagrants recorded in the East and Midwest at feeders should be considered the equivalent of Rock ("Feral") Pigeons or municipal-park Canada Geese? Currently, birders thrill to the sight of a White-winged Dove well out of range, and many avid state listers have jumped in the car to give chase. Would we risk trampling that enthusiasm by taking a closer look at the genetic makeup of such birds? And, in the end, should our reactions to individual birds or to "species" be dictated by a discovery of checkered genetic history or of exotic status?

If you've been birding for several decades, you will no doubt recall that **Budgerigar** (along with Crested Myna) used to be a "poster child" for the successful establishment of exotic bird populations. The Florida population may have exceeded 20,000 as recently as the late 1970s (Pranty 2001), and the species was assumed by most birders to be secure. Today, however, the Florida population has declined to fewer than 25 pairs (B. Pranty, pers. comm.)—and the Crested Myna is altogether gone from its onetime redoubt of Vancouver Island. Thus, the report of a Budgerigar only 40 kilometers from the remnant breeding population was understandably flagged as "likely a recent escapee" by Florida regional editors Bruce Anderson and Andy Bankert.

Figure 9. This male Yellow Grosbeak near Rodeo, Hidalgo County, New Mexico 5 June 2010 provided the fifth New Mexico report but the first away from the middle Rio Grande Valley. ***Photograph by Melvin S. Moe.***

The hardy **Monk Parakeet** is the only psittacid that routinely establishes populations in North America north of the southern tier of U.S. states. The species is reported in the hundreds on Christmas Bird Counts in Connecticut, where it is a widespread breeder in coastal and near-coastal districts. But Monk Parakeets haven't been detected as breeders in Massachusetts—yet. That may be about to change. Three Monk Parakeets tending a nest in Middlesex County this past summer got pretty darned close to qualifying as the Bay State's first nesters! Maybe this year. Or—who knows?—maybe the Monk Parakeets of southern New England will follow the same trajectory as the Budgerigars of the west-central Florida peninsula. Exotics keep us guessing, and that's one of the reasons why they're so fascinating.

It's hard not to notice a stunning green exotic psittacid on the mean streets of New Haven. But what of the very extensive presence of exotic psittacids *within* those parts of the western hemisphere with extant indigenous psittacids, that is to say, much of tropical America? Such populations might understandably be overlooked by many of us—but not by birder-adventurers John Shrader and Karen Shrader. Exploring Isla San Andrés during the period 8-11 June, they tallied 40 **Brown-throated Parakeets**. The species was introduced there at some point in the past 25 years (and no later than 2001), and it quickly became established (P. Salaman, pers. comm.). Based on the Shraders' records, we can say that the Brown-throated Parakeet is persisting in its new home on San Andrés.

Purple Martins begin massing for "fall" migration relatively early—in midsummer. At Auburn, Alabama, a roost of about 100,000 birds was studied 16-19 July this season; at Wichita, Kansas, perhaps 30,000 came to roost 27 July; and at Richmond, Virginia, 11,000 were estimated coming into a roost in ornamental pear trees 31 July. How many of these hordes had fledged with the assistance of humans, who erect and maintain martin houses all over the East? If you guessed 100%, you're probably correct. Although the two or more western subspecies make use of natural cavities for nesting, the nominate eastern subspecies has relied on human hospitality since John James Audubon's time, and there are almost no records of martins nesting in a natural cavity east of the Rockies since 1900. When one stops to think about the human–martin relationship in the East, it is profound: eastern martins depend on us almost completely for their survival. How different the spring and summer seasons would be without their rolling chatter! Martins are, fortunately, a favorite bird of suburban and rural Americans far and wide, but their populations have been in decline since 1980 (Brown 1997), a trend whose causes are not known.

One of the great birds of 2010 was the **Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush** that visited Spearfish Canyon, in the northern reaches of South Dakota's wonderful Black Hills, for at least six weeks (Figure 8). How on Earth did it get there? One hypothesis—which hasn't gotten much traction—is that the bird escaped from captivity. Um? Like, a retired couple just happened to be carrying a nightingale-thrush in their recreational vehicle? And they decided to ditch the poor bird in Spearfish Canyon? Next...

Blue-gray Tanagers are very popular in captivity, and birds that escape or are released sometimes establish populations in the wild. The species bred at three locations in southern Florida in the mid-twentieth century, but those populations had winked out before the turn of the century. Farther south, though, one continues to encounter exotic Blue-gray Tanagers. An introduced population flourishes in Lima, Peru, for example. This past summer, a pair was observed in Yucatán. Were they escapees? Or were they "naturally occurring"? If the latter, do we classify them as vagrants or simply as birds dispersing from the core range a bit to the south?

The same questions arise in connection with Utah's second **Northern Cardinal**, observed in late June near St. George in the state's extreme southwestern corner. For sure, cardinals occur in the wild in the northwestern Mojave Desert. But what is their provenance? Birds found in the general vicinity of Las Vegas are viewed by the Nevada Bird Records Committee with some amount of trepidation (M. Meyers, pers. comm.). Could the Utah bird have escaped from a holding in or near Las Vegas? Or did it vagrate from central Arizona, where the species is of "natural" occurrence? And which feat would have been the more impressive?

A photographically documented **Yellow Grosbeak** was in New Mexico near the Arizona border in early June (Figure 9). The species is common in captivity, but it is certainly a plausible vagrant to Arizona, where most accepted state records are from late May through late July (Pranty et al. 2008), so the timing of the New Mexico record is perfect. Let's say the bird was a "legitimate" vagrant. Enter the 800-pound gorilla in the room. *Why* did it vagrate? One of the hypothesized consequences of anthropogenic climate change is increased incidence of vagrancy. It makes sense: sea ice melts, desperate Ivory Gulls vagrate. In a series of recent—and absolutely breathtaking—studies from Europe, Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) have been shown to evolve novel dispersal strategies in response to climate change. In the old days, vagrants reached faraway destinations by hitching rides on oceangoing vessels. These days, they may well be accomplishing the same feat via climate change. Let's not fool ourselves: just as we cannot disprove ship assistance in so many instances of transoceanic vagrancy, so we cannot rule out anthropogenic climate change as a trigger for certain vagrants. Either way, it's "unnatural." (And 2010, by the way, tied 2005 as the hottest year in the meteorological record books, according to the National Climatic Data Center.)

Another dandy from Arizona this past summer was a **Black-vented Oriole** reported near Willcox in late July. The bird was neither photographed nor found again, so the Arizona Bird Committee has its work cut out. Presumably, the question of vagrant versus captive origin will arise in the course of the committee's deliberations. Let's pretend—and there is no *a priori* reason for doing so—that this oriole was an escapee from captivity. Would that lessen its interest or importance? Is it not worthwhile to attempt to document the basic population status and possible ecological impacts of escapees? A survey of all known exotics in Florida (Pranty 2004) revealed the presence of tens of thousands of such birds, with populations numbering anywhere from one to well over 1000 per species. More than 200 species were enumerated by Pranty (2004), and it is easy to imagine that their collective ecological impact might well be significant. A similar effort in Arizona (and other borderland states) would surely be worthwhile, and, in this regard, the 2010 Peach-faced Lovebird Census Project in the Phoenix metro area <tinyurl.com/4g4cv5o> was a superb initiative toward this goal.

Two extralimital **House Finches** were reported this past summer from Canada. One was a juvenile at Sainte-Félicité, Québec, which lies a bit north and east of the current range of the species. The other, on the west shore of Hudson Bay, was a first for Nunavut. Were these birds exotics? House Finches in Québec are presumably descended from the population released from New York in the early 1940s; so the answer for the Sainte-Félicité individual would seem, at first blush, to be in the affirmative. Now what about the bird from Nunavut? Did it originate from the "native" western population or from the "exotic" eastern population? That's hard to say: expanding western and eastern populations drove the golden spike at some point in the late twentieth century, but we're not sure where. And that adds a new wrinkle: genetic introgression. How do we know that "native" House Finch genes haven't infiltrated the "exotic" genome—and vice-versa? We don't. We probably cannot. Once again, the quixotic goal of distinguishing between "native" and "non-native" populations is thwarted by the inconvenient truth of reality.

One of the stranger stories of the past decade has been the detection of numerous Eurasian songbirds in the Great Lakes region, especially around Lake Michigan. This phenomenon—involving Common Chaffinches, Eurasian Siskins, **European Goldfinches**, and other species—is apparently the result of deliberate releases by cagebird importers in the Chicago area. A recent paper (Craves 2008) focused on the apparent ongoing establishment of European Goldfinches in the western Great Lakes region. How far have the Chicago releases spread? This past summer, an individual of the Asian *caniceps* subspecies group was found at Chevery, in extreme eastern Québec, 2300+ kilometers from Chicago.

If you build it, they will come. So it is with the sociable **House Sparrow**, like Purple Martin a well-known example of an avian commensal—a species that benefits from a host (*Homo sapiens* in these instances) without harming that host. Practically every human structure is discovered sooner or later, it seems, by House Sparrows. Except in the far north. Adventuresome individuals range north to southern Alaska, but the population remains small, unstable, and peripheral in The Last Frontier. This past summer, at least a dozen House Sparrows were fledged from three nests in Ketchikan, about as far to the southeast in Alaska as you possibly can get. What does the future hold in store for the House Sparrows of Ketchikan? Will they follow in the footsteps of successfully invading Eurasian Collared-Doves? Time will tell. And here's a twist: not all of Alaska's House Sparrows come from the North American population. A vagrant to St. Lawrence Island in 1993 almost certainly originated from a population recently released at Provideniya, in the Russian Far East, where House Sparrows continue to increase (D. D. Gibson, pers. comm.). Additional vagrants to Alaska's Bering Sea region might well be expected.

If you want to see a **Eurasian Tree Sparrow**, you have to go to St. Louis, Missouri. Every North American birder knows that. Well, not exactly. Reports this past summer from McLean and DeWitt Counties in Illinois and from Linn County, Iowa remind us that the species ranges a bit north of St. Louis. But why doesn't the range of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow extend any farther than that? Com-

pared to invading House Finches and House Sparrows, the range expansion and population increase of Eurasian Tree Sparrow have been a decidedly slow-mo affair. How come? The age-old answer of competition with House Sparrows—which happen to be in general decline in North America—can't be the only explanation. In their monograph on Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Barlow and Leckie (2000) tell us that our North American population of this species "provides an exceptional opportunity" to address cutting-edge questions in contemporary biology. What are we waiting for?

Would you like to make an immediate and lasting contribution to field ornithology? And while you're at it, would you like to earn the eternal gratitude of listers everywhere? (And the opprobrium of the handful of holdout "NIB" [No Introduced Birds] killjoys?) Then be the first person to provide formal, published documentation of the current status and distribution of **Nutmeg Mannikin** in southern California. Scott Smithson reported at the 2006 Western Field Ornithologists meeting that at least 700 were present in the Los Angeles basin alone at the end of 1998 (<tinyurl.com/4ftcnpk>), and the population continues to increase and expand. This past summer, Ventura County, northwest of Los Angeles, got its first documented nesting record. The species is here. It's established. It ought to "count." We know all those things. But in order for the Nutmeg Mannikin to become official, the ABA Checklist Committee requires—understandably and credibly so—a formal published paper. Organize a study in southern California, publish the results in *Western Birds* or perhaps this journal, and your place in the history books is assured.

Another of our successfully established estrildids is **Tricolored Munia**. A population now well established in Yucatán was first detected in 1993. A flock of 12 was seen in early June along the Kinchil–Celestún Highway, and another flock, consisting of eight individuals, was reported mid-month six kilometers up the road. Might successful establishment of Tricolored Munias negatively impact agriculture on the Yucatán Peninsula? And here's another question: where did the Tricolored Munias of Yucatán come from? From their "native" range in India, one might reasonably surmise? Not necessarily. The species became so abundant in Puerto Rico in the late twentieth century that trappers turned their sights on the well-established population in the commonwealth. The moral of this story: so often, we do not know the origin and history of a bird population.

Coda

Late last year, I traveled to the vibrant Indian state of Gujarat. In so many ways, I have to say, the Gujarati people are exactly like us. They're worldly and well educated, they're increasingly "green," they're way "wired," and they're super-diverse. Picture the U.S. state of California with about 15 million more people, and you have a pretty good idea of what Gujarat is like.

Something else. Birding is all the rage in Gujarat. I met teen and twentysomething birders with the skill set and sophistication to rival that of the finest young birders in North America. I met the winsome "elders"—chronological counterparts of our aging boomers. And I met thirtysomething and fortysomething Gujarati birders who were discomfitingly just like me.

All that said, I did notice one big difference between them and us. Despite the amazing cultural, ideological, and linguistic diversity of Gujarat, most of its people are united by an outlook on animal life that is profoundly different from our own. I realize I'm being somewhat simplistic in the following assessment, but here goes: most people in Gujarat don't kill or otherwise harass animals. Hunting is practically unheard of. It's part of a heritage that goes back thousands of years. Want a heaping serving of chicken curry? You're more likely to find it at an "Indian" restaurant in Scottsbluff than at many dining establishments in Ahmedabad. (Try the thali instead.)

People, chickens, and other animals coexist in Gujarat in a manner that you just don't see in North America. For millennia, they've lived together, tolerating one another, occupying the same ecological niche. The distinction between "natural" and "unnatural" is blurry at best. The wall of separation between "wild" and "artificial" just isn't there.

Some of the "native" bird species I saw in Gujarat included Indian Peafowl, Purple Swamphen, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Red-vented Bulbul, and Common Myna—all of which are established as exotics in the United States. I felt right at home, as if I were in L.A., say, or Miami. I just can't see how the "native" avifauna of Gujarat can be said to differ—in any ecologically or behaviorally meaningful way—from the "non-native" avifauna of the United States. In Gujarat, anything goes: Sarus Cranes and Red-wattled Lapwings, Rose-ringed Parakeets and Red-vented Bulbuls, camels and rickshaws, ag fields and seacoasts, tourists and shopkeepers—it's all one mishmash of culture and environment, the ultimate ecological melting pot.

Honestly, it's much the same over here. It's just that we're so slow—so painfully slow—in coming to realize what's happened here, what's been happening here for centuries. We stubbornly cling to our neo-Platonic fantasy that everything has its place and purpose, that everything can be put into a box, that everything can be assigned to a category. A species is either "native" or "exotic," in our world view. A population is either "indigenous" or "feral." Any particular bird is either "countable" or not. Such a system is, according to Plato's formulation, "beautiful."

It's beautiful perhaps, but it's not reality.

And is it really all that beautiful? Pretend for a moment that we—birders and field ornithologists, ecologists and environmental scientists—could put aside our conviction that populations, communities, and ecosystems are either natural or unnatural. Yes, such a change might well necessitate new strategies and tactics for wildlife managers and conservation biologists. But that's a merely academic take on the matter. And I respectfully acknowledge that such a change would be upsetting to the great many of us who abide by Aldo Leopold's famous dictum that the world properly consists of things that are wild and things that are not wild. But bear with me, please, for just a moment longer.

Visualize the change now at a grander level. Imagine what it would do to the collective psyche, to the very the heart and soul, of our society. Imagine if we could see ourselves—all of us, Sarus Cranes and "pseudogrines," rare vagrants and escaped cagebirds; and everything around us, wilderness areas and vacant lots, wildlife refuges and soybean fields—as all in this thing together. Wouldn't that be grand? Wouldn't that be beautiful?

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