

THE CHANGING SEASONS: Displacements

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Honestly: I tried my best to goad some hapless soul into writing the spring season essay. "What? And write about Mississippi Kites and White-winged Doves out of range? Couldn't I write the fall report instead?" came the most enthusiastic response. Have we become that predictable here? Or have the birds' patterns in springtime become predictable (like so many wintering hummingbirds out of range), so much so as to fail the test of "newsworthiness"?

In a compromise with those who find the kites' and doves' expansions tedious, I have flagged those sections clearly below, so that they may be more easily avoided. Perhaps the real news would be if the kites' and doves' ranges began to contract, or if they ceased to "overshoot" in spring. Nevertheless, three kites and four doves made

the cuts this time around. (I suspect that no one really finds them uninteresting, at least not in the field.) When the first Mississippi Kite makes it to Churchill, Manitoba, wheeling above Belugas and chattering Ross's Gulls on the Hudson Bay, we'll probably relax our focus on kites. Until then, yes, we're obliged to chronicle their northern appearances in some fashion.

There were several surprises in the spring season, incursions of birds that produced odd pond-fellows: the last individuals of an enormous influx of Red-necked Grebes in the eastern interior had yet to depart before the first arrivals in a wide-spread flight of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks had appeared. Such extensive irruptions of both had not been seen in roughly a decade. It's probably not often that Red-necked Grebes and whistling-ducks get to see one another; birders, at least, don't see them juxtaposed too often. And while the spring season saw little in the way of northern visitors other than the grebes, it was—despite being a cool, wet season through the eastern third or so of the continent—another solid year for southern species found well north of usual range: ibises,

herons, egrets, as expected, but also Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, Painted Buntings, Mississippi and Swallow-tailed Kites, to a lesser degree Brown Pelicans, Purple Gallinules, Anhingas, and a few exceptional individuals of Mottled Duck, Roseate Spoonbill, Red-billed Tropicbird, and Limpkin.

And while we think nothing, or almost nothing, of one of the Gulf Coast species making a 2000-km flight to the north, we (or should I say "I" here?) unconsciously draw an imaginary line at the southern boundaries of the United States: when a Central American or Caribbean species turns up in the United States, its provenance is immediately suspect. There are good grounds for such skepticism, but with the warming of climate, should we really be so surprised by such birds? Wouldn't it be more surprising if subtropical and tropical species to our south—especially species known to be highly mobile—failed to turn up in the southern parts of the United States? The pace of avian *depayments* (that perfect French word: displacement, dislocation, literally, "de-countrification" in the sense of getting placed out of country or context) seemed brisk this spring, but we lacked ironclad certainty as to *how* many of the season's birds came to be where they were: thus the Thick-billed Parrot on this issue's cover.

With the addition of Mexico and Central America to our family of regional reports, we do begin to see some patterns of northward expansion (whether dispersal, overshooting, exploration, colonization, or "escape flight" following habitat destruction) in species not traditionally regarded as part of the U. S. and Canadian avifauna; some of those species are considered below. As breeding ranges of some Arctic species contract and retreat northward—Semipalmated Sandpiper, Ivory Gull, and Lapland Longspur are three examples of many—we see more and more "southern" species in the north country. Perhaps we should be terrified by these developments; they could be early portents of unimaginable ecological disasters (see Krajick 2003). We dearly hope not. For background, consult <<http://www.abcbirds.org/climatechange/statepage.htm>>.

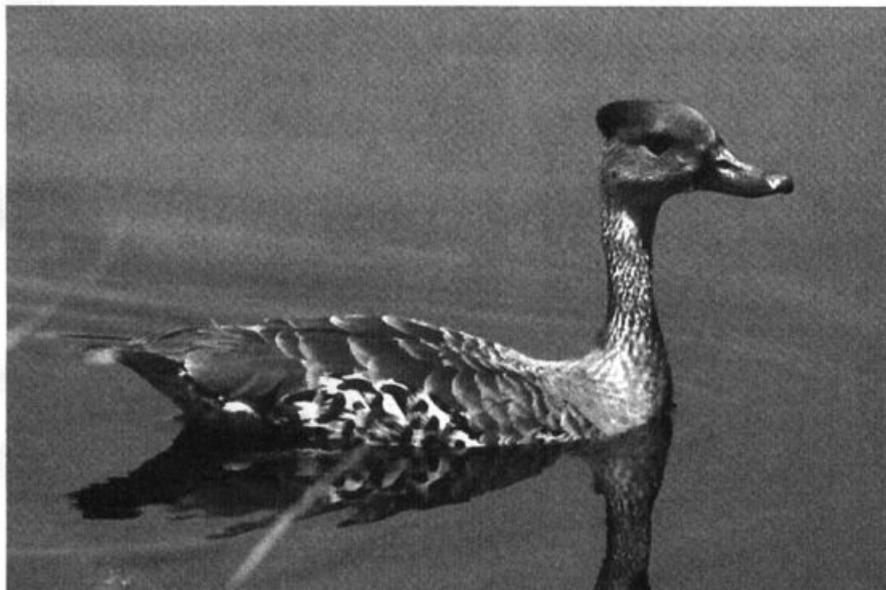


Figure 1. Amid a flurry of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and a modest exodus of Fulvous Whistling-Ducks out of range this spring—as far north as Québec and Alberta by July—this West Indian Whistling-Duck at the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, Virginia appeared 29 April 2003. With only a few reports from Florida, Bermuda, and Texas, the species is essentially unknown away from its Caribbean range, where it appears to be recovering and expanding in some locations. Was it a wild wanderer? Photograph by Mark Suomala.

May and later, and the Great Egret at Juneau, Alaska 7–11 May. The spring and summer have been more remarkable and consistent, however, for wandering ibises: Glossy, White, and White-faced alike have been turning up well out of range since late April. The tale of the expanding dark *Plegadis* species has been told for almost a decade in this journal; more unusual is the more recent irruption of White Ibis, another May wanderer. Manitoba's second at Delta (9–10 May) was the showpiece in a birding festival there, while Massachusetts had one 27 April, Rhode Island one 9 May, and Connecticut had as many as three 12, 18, and 21–23 May. Just to the south, four were scattered between New Jersey, Delaware, eastern Long Island, and at the Pea Patch Island heronry on upper Delaware Bay, where nesting is conceivable (the northernmost nesters are on Virginia's Eastern Shore). Exceptional long-legged waders out of range elsewhere included a Limpkin in South Carolina 11 May (the seventh since 2001: see Cely et al. 2003) and a Roseate Spoonbill in Tennessee 31 May and later. Enigmatic were Brown Pelicans in Tennessee 20–25 May and in Alaska at Clarence Strait 23 May and north of Ketchikan the next day (the latter bird remained for four more days)! These are the first documented **Brown Pelicans** for Alaska. (This journal would make a good home for a paper on the vagrancy of Brown Pelican, which is surely in part a result of population growth but is difficult to characterize geographically.)

Anhingas, possibly one of the more over-reported (that is, misidentified: confused with cormorants) of southern wanderers, were scattered across eastern half of the continent this spring. A lovely flight took place 27 April well north of range: single birds were seen over Cumberland County, New Jersey and in Pennsylvania in Northumberland County and at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Berks County, with one at Reading the next day. An Anhinga a few days later, 3 May, was found on the Missouri River in Leavenworth County, northern Kansas. The last extralimital report for the East came 10 May from Shelby Forest, Tennessee. A report of Anhinga from Barr Lake, Colorado that same day was tempered by re-examination of one state specimen, which turned out to be an Australasian Darter, *Anhinga novahollandiae*. How many of us have routinely ruled out all other darter taxa when reporting flyover Anhingas? A carefully-studied Anhinga at Ramer Lake, Imperial County, California 5 April was only that state's fourth—and, confusingly, in an area frequented by an escaped African Darter (*A. rufa*)!

PASSERINES & PARTS SOUTH

May passerines pushing their northern lim-

its were fewer than in warm springs (e.g., Brinkley 2001), and warblers made only a modest showing. One exception this season was the spate of Painted Buntings north: in eastern Ontario 12–13 May, at Sheboygan, Wisconsin 13 May, at Long Point, Ontario 18 May, at L'Anse, Michigan 19 May, and at Bruno, Minnesota 29 May. A male Hooded Oriole 25 May in Iowa and a male Bronzed Cowbird at Cimarron, Oklahoma the same day coincided with the passage of a warm front. This is a relatively small but noteworthy haul.

Florida provided, as always, much food for thought. Two **Red-legged Honeycreepers**—never before recorded in the United States—turned up on offshore island refuges in Florida this spring. These would seem very unlikely to have been escapees (especially in context with Florida's other Caribbean-basin vagrants this spring, such as White-tipped Dove), but the state's bird records committee has not voted to include them on the state's official list. The two color-banded Southern Lapwings in Florida are believed to be escapees from a collection, but this species has shown increase through Middle America (increasing in Costa Rica) and has the capacity to stray to border states. Like the whistling-ducks, these birds are conspicuous, vocal, and rather gaudy. This season's record of **nesting Double-striped Thick-knees** at Great Inagua in the Bahamas—a species known only from fossil remains here—should give us pause: this is only a day's flight from the Florida mainland (West Indian Whistling-Ducks, of course, are much closer still to Florida). As we attempt to distinguish human-assisted from natural vagrants from tropical America, we should keep an eye on records from beyond the Bahamas as well: single **Large-billed Terns** on the Caribbean coasts of Honduras and Costa Rica, where previously unknown, would be welcome visitors to any sandbar, lacustrine or estuarine, north of range.

SPECIES DECLINING AND SCARCE

Spring isn't the time to assess nesting populations of most species, but we have a few data that bode well or ill for several species. A banded Piping Plover, thought to be Ontario's last breeder, was alone at Lake-of-the-Woods 31 May, and none returned again to Minnesota, but 23 were counted in the eastern Arkansas River Valley, Colorado 5 May, for a state high count—hopefully a positive sign for that Endangered species in the interior. The summer reports will carry more complete news on this beautiful shorebird; most Atlantic reports document widespread nesting failure as a result of unusually high tides made worse by easterly winds in May and June.

Of particular concern among shorebirds are those that stage around Delaware Bay in spring and re-fuel on the eggs of Horseshoe Crab before continuing on to Arctic nesting grounds. The fishery for these crabs continues in the state of Delaware, despite the opposition of conservation groups, and the consequence would seem to be clear: counts of Red Knot dropped by 70% compared to the same time in 2002, Ruddy Turnstone by 58%, Semipalmated Sandpipers by 75%, and Dunlin by 67%. To what extent habitat loss, climate changes, and/or changes in prey resources on Arctic nesting grounds play a role in these declines we do not know.

Shorebird counts can be difficult to conduct in a consistent manner, and complicating the situation this year was an especially late egg-laying of the crabs, both in Delaware Bay and Chesapeake Bay. Next year's counts should provide a better sense of how extensive these declines are, but we note that this year's numbers were only about half of those of 1997—and a quarter of those in 1986, when surveys began. Counts of actual crab eggs on Delaware Bay beaches suggest a greater than 90% reduction of this resource over the past two decades or so, and so the question of changes in the nesting grounds do not need to be answered before we take action to avert the ecological collapse of vital stopover sites.

Grassland birds, whose populations are precarious in many places, were not the subject of much attention in the spring reports. Loggerhead Shrike, where mentioned, was noted to be increasingly scarce (Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, southern California, Oregon/Washington, Maryland, Baja California). The declining Greater Prairie-Chicken continued to do so at Prairie State Park, Missouri, where Roger McNeill notes that construction disturbance appears to have reduced spring displaying by two-thirds; but the reintroduced population of in Grand Forks County, North Dakota "continues to flourish," according to Ron Martin.

The population of Kirtland's Warbler is increasing, with the highest count of singing males in Michigan in 2003—1202 birds!—ever recorded since counts began in 1951. In spring, lone migrants were found at Indiana, Pennsylvania 18 May, at Long Point, Ontario 15 May, at Point Pelee, Ontario 17 May, and at Indiana Dunes State Park 10 May, a neat and typical week-long window of passage in the spring. We received no such encouraging words on Golden-winged Warbler; the latter is now seen less frequently as a migrant or nester in some regions than the dominant hybrid form called Brewster's Warbler, and the only extralimital report came from near