

BURROWING OWL

CENTRAL NEW MEXICO AUDUBON SOCIETY, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

April - May 1981

CALENDAR

TENTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION!! COME JOIN THE CELEBRATION!!

CNMAS meets each month on the third Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, recreation room, Copper and Jefferson, N.E. Meetings are open to the public. Nonmembers and beginners are welcome on all field trips. For membership application see page 8 of this OWL or call Dot DeLollis (299-5384).

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY Annual Meeting of the
APRIL 11 AND 12 NEW MEXICO ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, UNM Biology Building, Room 139. Saturday: 8:30 a.m. registration followed by programs and meetings; 1:30 p.m. identification workshop; 7 p.m. evening program. Sunday bird banding demonstration at Candelaria Farms, future nature center site. More information from Mary Lou Arthur (256-7359) or Ross Teuber(265-8962).

THURSDAY
APRIL 16

REGULAR MEETING of the Central New Audubon Society, 7:30 p.m. at St. Timothy's Lutheran Church. Chuck Hundertmark of Rio Grande Bird Research will present a slide pro-

gram on his group's bird banding activities in the Albuquerque area.

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY
APRIL 18 AND 19

New Mexico AUDUBON COUNCIL meeting in Roswell. April 18: 1 p.m. meeting. April 19: EARLY morning field trip to Lesser Prairie Chicken booming ground or Bitter Lake NWR depending on conditions at the time. Call Evelyn or George Price(242-6604) if you would like more information. All Audubon members are welcome.

FRIDAY AND SATURDAY
APRIL 24 AND 25

BLM Open House and Public Input Planning sessions to determine what areas are suitable for Coal Strip Mining in the Chaco and San Juan Areas. Open House 7 to 9 p.m. Friday, Rio Grande Inn 1015 Rio Grande Boulevard, N.W. Public Input Planning sessions 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., Saturday. If you are

concerned about the future of this fragile area, please attend!

Call leader Hart Schwarz (266-1810) for information.

SATURDAY
APRIL 25

FIELD TRIP to Priest Canyon at the south end of the Manzanos. Meet at the parking lot of the UNM Physics and Astronomy Building, Lomas and Yale, N.E., at 7 a.m. Bring lunch and water. Call leader Darwin Miller (265-6361) for more information.

FRIDAY
MAY 15

DEADLINE for Burrowing Owl copy. Call the Prices (242-6604) with questions or comments.

SATURDAY
MAY 16

Fourth Annual SPRING BIRD COUNT. See article in this issue for details. Call Barbara Hussey (292-5626) if you plan to participate. Meeting time 6 a.m.

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY
APRIL 25 AND 26

National Audubon Society BIRDATHON. Call Barbara Hussey (292-5626) if you would like to participate or to sponsor someone.

THURSDAY
MAY 21

ANNUAL MEETING of the Central New Mexico Audubon Society at St. Timothy's Lutheran Church. Potluck dinner starts at 6:15 p.m., meeting and election of officers at 7:30 p.m. Program: Dr. John Hubbard of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish will discuss New Mexico's environmental future. The Washburn Award will also be presented. More details in this issue.

SATURDAY
MAY 2

FIELD TRIP to the Bosque del Apache NWR. If you've only seen the Bosque in the winter, you're in for a treat! Meet at the Physics and Astronomy Building, Lomas and Yale, N.E., at 7 a.m. Bring lunch. Call trip leader Jim Karo (294-2777) for more information.

THURSDAY
JUNE 4

Annual BOARD DINNER MEETING at the home of Barbara Hussey (292-5626) 705 Monte Alto, N.E. "Get acquainted" potluck supper starts at 6:30 p.m. for past and present board members and spouses. Bring food. If you can bring tables and chairs call Barbara. Board meeting begins at 7:30 p.m.

THURSDAY
MAY 7

BOARD MEETING, 7:30 p.m. A volunteer is needed to host the meeting. You need not be a board member. Call Barbara Hussey (292-5626) to volunteer.

SUNDAY
MAY 10

FIELD TRIP to Juan Tabo Park and Waterfall Canyon. We will bird lower Juan Tabo Canyon and Waterfall Canyon with upper Juan Tabo being a possibility if conditions warrant. Meet at 8 a.m. at intersection of Tramway Road and Juan Tabo Canyon Road. Bring lunch and water.

FRIDAY THROUGH SUNDAY
JULY 3 THROUGH 5 1981 National Audubon Society Convention, YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colorado. Call Barbara Hussey (292-5626) if you have not received information in the mail.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

On February 28 we held our first trip to the chapter's adopted trail in the Sandias. Tramway Trail No. 82 is about 3 1/2 miles long. It begins at a point 8/10 of a mile up the La Luz Trail and ends in Sandia Heights subdivision. Our responsibilities also include a spur connecting Trail No. 82 with La Cueva Recreation Area. Since there is still some question as to the location of the trail in Sandia Heights, John Southwick of the Forest Service Adopt-a-Trail Program has asked us to consider the Jaral Ranger Station site as the temporary end of our trail. Several of our members will be attending an orientation program with the Forest Service to learn trail maintenance. We will be holding work parties from time to time to maintain the trail. Your help will be needed so watch the OWL for announcements. This can be fun for the whole family as we discovered in February and there are possibilities for environmental education too.

Last column, I mentioned the Birdathon. Well, due to mailing problems, we did not receive the information in time for our chapter to sponsor the event. However, anyone can participate on an individual basis. It works like this: Individual participants in the Birdathon will secure as many sponsors as possible, who will pledge a tax deductible contribution for each bird species sighted by the participant during a 24 hour period on Birdathon weekend (April 25 and 26). You do not have to be an Audubon member and organizations such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Garden Clubs, etc., are encouraged. There will be a Grand Prize for the participant who raises the most money. Prizes will also be awarded to Best Birder, Outstanding Chapter, Regional Award (ours covers New Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana), Regional Best Birder, Regional Outstanding Chapter. Some of the prizes will be birding tours, leather-bound field guides, binoculars, Audubon Encyclopedia, bird sculpture, and more. For more information give me a call (292-5626). I have forms and instructions available.

On May 16, we will hold our fourth annual Spring Bird Count (see calendar). We need all birders to come out for this. By holding our count each year, we are helping establish valuable ornithological data. You do not have to be experienced-- "more eyes see more birds!" No participation fee will be charged. We hope to have a picnic afterward.

CNMAS will be having its annual meeting on Thursday, May 21 this year, including election of officers and the presentation of the Washburn Award. This year will be extra special as it is our Tenth Anniversary. So do not miss it!

Finally, start planning for the National Audubon Society 1981 Convention. July 3 to 5 at the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colorado. You should have received information in the mail already. If not, call me and I will sent it to you. This year there will be more programs for children so plan on making it a family event!

FOURTH ANNUAL SPRING BIRD COUNT

CNMAS'S Spring Bird Count for 1981 will be Saturday, May 16.

Three general areas will be covered:

- (1) Sandia Mountains (meet at San Antonito School on NM-14 north of the turn off to Sandia Crest).
- (2) East Mesa and Foothills area (meet at the turn off to Juan Tabo Recreation Area on Tramway Road).
- (3) North Valley and West Mesa area (meet at Corrales Shopping Center).

Count leaders will be Dustin and Sue Huntington. Call Barbara Hussey (292-5626) by Thursday, May 14 for area assignments, or to request a specific area. All counts meet at 6 a.m. No charge.

CNMAS CANDIDATES FOR 1981

Dustin Huntington, chairman of the 1981 Nominating Committee has submitted the following candidates for this year's election:

President	Kay Anderson
Vice President	G. Martin Ruoss
Treasurer	Diana Kinney
Recording Secretary	Phyllis Schmidt
Corresponding Secretary	Bev Grady
Director (1981-1985)	George Price

The election will be held during the annual meeting on May 21, 1981. Nominations from the floor will be accepted.

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CENTRAL NEW MEXICO
AUDUBON SOCIETY**

By Barbara Hussey

The first meeting of the soon-to-be-known-as Central New Mexico Audubon Society became reality on April 17, 1971. Spearheaded by Mrs. Esther Tuttle, an intrepid group of bird lovers and wildlife enthusiasts had been holding organizational meetings and after a great deal of hard work and creativity, managed to become eligible for chapter status in record time. By June 1971, we had 41 members and had elected our first slate of officers with Mrs. Tuttle as our first president. Our first field trip was on April 24, 1971, to Juan Tabo Canyon, led by Chuck Hundertmark who was to become our second president.

These events began our 10 year history of providing programs, debates, films, speakers, field trips, and environmental activities to our now nearly 600 members and the public.

By July 1971, CNMAS took over co-sponsorship (along with the Mountain Club, Sierra Club, and UNM) of the already successful Audubon Wildlife Film Series. It now has just finished its eleventh season and proceeds are earmarked for a scholarship sponsoring a teacher to the Audubon Ecology Camp in the west. Over the years, our chapter has financed three such scholarships.

In December of 1971, our chapter adopted sponsorship of our three Christmas Bird Counts. These had previously been administered by members of the New Mexico Ornithological Society. The counts are still run by individuals, but CNMAS helps ensure their continued leadership and publicizes them to attract participants.

On May 18, 1973, our chapter took a big step becoming the principal plaintiff in a suit filed in federal court against the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Reclamation (BurRec) now known as Water and Power Resource Services. The suit was an effort to halt clearing of riparian vegetation (phreatophytes) in the Caballo and Elephant Butte areas until an environmental impact statement (EIS) was drafted. We were joined as plaintiffs by the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, the Southwest Research and Information Center, the New Mexico Citizens for Clean Air and Water, and three individuals. After a series of court hearings and several EIS drafts over a period of years, the BurRec made revisions in their procedures concerning phreatophyte clearing. BurRec now looks more closely at the value of riparian woodlands and has set up public input opportunities and new management plans greatly reducing the acreage for proposed clearing along the Rio Grande. Because of this, the suit was officially dismissed in 1979, six years after it was originally filed.

In 1976, CNMAS established its Washburn Award honoring Dan and Marian Washburn for their devoted service to the chapter. The award is presented at our annual meeting to government employees who demonstrate outstanding accomplishments in wildlife conservation. That first year it was given to Dick Rigby (then) manager of Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Since then we have presented the award three more times and hope to award it again this year at the annual meeting in May.

The Burrowing Owl has grown up considerably during our ten years of existence. It began as a one-page ditto sheet and has

matured into the attractive eight-page booklet you are now reading. Each editor was able to put a little of himself or herself into it to make it better each year.

In May 1978, our president, Dave Lange, piloted the establishment of our spring bird count. Twenty-five hearty birders braved inclement weather and found 100 species that year. Since then our totals have been 119 species in 1979 and 117 in 1980. This year our spring count is on May 16 and if we get a good turn out of participants, maybe we can break our 1979 record.

After trying it briefly in 1974 and 1975, we organized, in 1978, our Rare Bird Alert (RBA) telephone network. The word on unusual birds can now be spread quickly enough for all to get a chance to see them. The list of participants is updated at least once a year; call one of the RBA numbers to join the list.

Over the years we have sponsored "camper-ships" for children to attend Albuquerque Public School summer camp. We have made available programs on birds to civic organizations, clubs, and children's groups; and in 1979 and 1980, Ross Teuber conducted a series of bird identification classes before our general meetings.

In June 1980, CNMAS co-sponsored with the Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society, the Southwest Regional Audubon Conference at Ghost Ranch near Abiquiu, NM. The conference was attended by over 200 Audubon members from New Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana. Our chapter urged that there be more children's programs during the event. Their successful administration by teachers and volunteers from CNMAS may have helped convince National Audubon to expand their youth programs at the national convention at Estes Park and at other regional conferences around the United States. These programs are making it easier for families with children to participate in Audubon events.

This year CNMAS has joined with many other local outdoor organizations to help the U.S. Forest Service in its adopt-a-trail program. We will be maintaining trails for the benefit of those who get enjoyment from recreation in the Sandias.

Now in our tenth year, we begin celebrating our past achievements and look forward to the future. There is still a great deal of work ahead for the Central New Mexico Audubon Society--to complement, on a local basis, the work of the National Audubon Society. As those of us who started interested only in watching birds have discovered, we cannot ignore our environment. CNMAS must continue to do all it can to see that New Mexico and the rest of the world remains a place where all species can co-exist.



**GOVERNOR BRUCE KING DECLARES APRIL AS
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MONTH IN NEW
MEXICO**

**SATURDAY
MAY 2**

**Gila River SPRING BIRD
COUNT. No further in-
formation is available
at this time.**

**SUNDAY
MAY 17**

**Espanola Valley SPRING
BIRD COUNT. Call Bill
Stone in Santa Fe(988-
1454) if you'd like
information. He'd like
to hear from you by
May 10, if you are
interested in partici-
pating.**

TENTH ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL MEETING

The Central New Mexico Audubon Society will hold its 10th annual meeting on Thursday, May 21, 1981 at St. Timothy's Lutheran Church Recreation Room, Copper and Jefferson, N.E.

The potluck dinner starts at 6:15 p.m. Bring a generous amount of your favorite recipe to share with others, and tableware for your own use. Beverages will be provided. This is our tenth anniversary so be prepared to celebrate. There are door prizes planned and possibly a raffle.

The Washburn Award will be presented to a government employee, and our new officers will be elected.

The guest speaker will be Dr. John Hubbard, ornithologist with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. He will speak on the future of the environment in New Mexico.

Your help is needed to make this celebration a success. Call Hospitality Chairman, Natalie Hechter (268-9290) to volunteer or to donate decorations or items for door prizes.

BIRDING IN THE SANDIAS
By Hart Schwarz

The Sandia Mountains offer some of the finest montane birding in the state of New Mexico. But in spite of the Mountains proximity to Albuquerque and its accessibility, many choice birding spots remain relatively unknown. So, from time to time, I shall use this space to share some of my favorite places with you.

One such place is the little community of Monticello (6200 feet) and the Three Gun Spring Valley to the north of it. It is not at all difficult to find. If you start out at the eastern edge of town, near the Aladin Motor Hotel, get on the Interstate and follow it east for about one and one-half miles. Then exit at Carnuel and continue east on old Highway 66 for about two miles and then turn left onto Monticello Street just before reaching Roy's Taxidermy Shop. Then follow this street (also designated as Forest Road Highway 522) for about a mile until it dead ends at a small parking lot (see map).

The Three Gun Spring Valley resembles a fowl. Tilted up towards the north and bordered by high ridges to the west and north and the Sandia massif to the east. A four-mile trail, starting at the parking lot, cuts across the valley between two major arroyos and their passes over the northern ridge on its way to Ojo Pass (8,400 feet). At about the half-way point, the trail approaches Three Gun Spring, which nestles just above the base of the northern ridge. It is a perennial spring and the only source of water for the people and animals living nearby.

Between Monticello and the spring, the terrain is rocky, undulating and desert-like. The largest plants are scattered oaks and junipers but there is also a wide variety of lesser plants such as cholla cactus, yucca, rabbitbrush, and mountain mahogany, Apache Plume, and Fendler Bush. The latter is particularly conspicuous in May when its showy white blossoms resembling those of the orange tree, give ample testimony to nature's largess at this time of the year.

Every part of the mountain has its own unique character and concomitant bird life, and the little desert enclave of Three Gun is no exception. Last summer it was here that the Scott's oriole was most regularly seen, and it is also a good place to make the acquaintance of the black-chinned sparrows, of whom there are so many that on the two-mile walk to the spring, one is always within earshot of these talented singers. When confronted with the abundance of this sparrow it is hard to believe that they colonized the Sandia foothills less than 20 years ago. There may also be a golden eagle aerie at Three Gun, perhaps in the cliffs above the spring, since these large raptors are not an uncommon sight there.

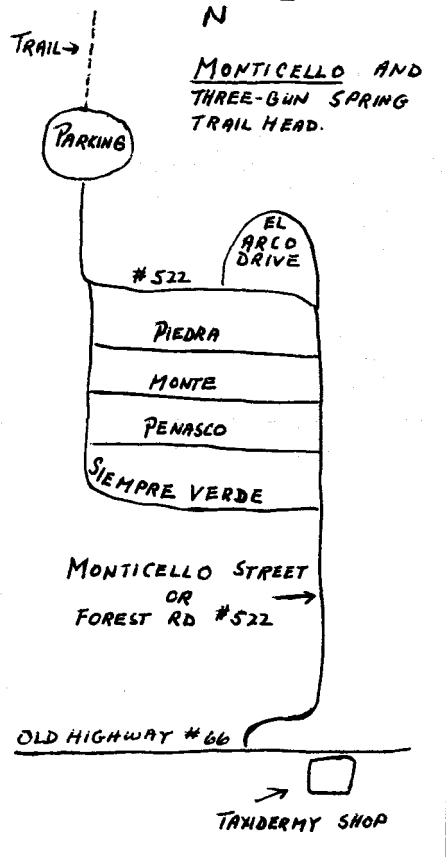
Residential Monticello itself is the home base for a flock of several hundred pinon jays, many of whom begin nest construction in early March. Another Monticello residential is a pair of curve-billed thrashers. They have been there continuously at least since last April, and in three nesting sessions managed to fledge three young. All three nests were in cholla cactus at the eastern end of Piedra Street. One of my most memorable bird encounters came last June 21, 1981, when I observed a curve-billed sitting on a nest surrounded by a profusion of lavender cholla blossoms. This is a bird not often encountered in the Sandias; the last summer record occurred ten years earlier.

If the Three Gun area is associated in my mind with any one particular bird, it would have to be the poor-will, an abundant species from mid or late April to early October. Nothing can be more rewarding than to walk up the arroyo to the west of the trail, especially on calm, warm evenings with a full moon illuminating and transfiguring the landscape, and to listen to the ethereal voices of these wraith-like birds. At first the calls are rendered sporadically--tentatively, but soon they merge into a veritable chorus, leaving a susceptible listener in spellbound rapture. The poor-will's call is a two syllable "poll duke," though at close range a third syllable may be heard. These birds are also good time-keepers, starting their calls at precisely 20 minutes after official sunset.

Three Gun is a unique and inspiring part of the Sandias, but it may not be so for much longer. As has happened too often in the past, selfish interests are willing to degrade a beautiful environment merely for profit. About two years ago, the 400 acres between Monticello and the National Forest line were purchased by a developer bent on building 123 houses in an area already heavily impacted. If this development is implemented, it would place a severe strain on the limited water supply and threaten to pollute it as well. Already a huge drilling rig has cut a wide and destructive swath through much of the habitat in search of water, but as of now, permission to commence building has not yet been granted by the County Planning Commission.

Perhaps you will want to see Three Gun for yourself and having done so, may feel moved to see the area preserved. Should you want to voice your protest against further development, you can write to the following address, alluding to Proposal No. S.C. 5-80-38:

Mr. Robert Cassias
Chairman of the Subdivision
Review Board
Bernalillo County
Post Office Box 1293
Albuquerque, NM 87103



RAPTOR'S RAP
By Jeremiah Johnson

This is my first column for the Burrowing Owl. I plan to discuss primarily raptors, a bird or two each issue, but any favorite birds you would like to hear about or other suggestions would be welcome. This issue we will look at the barn owl.

All owls are in the order Strigiformes. The hawks and the owls were once placed together because both groups of birds hunt and feed on other animals. It is now thought that owls are more closely related to the nightjars (whip-poor-wills and allies) than to hawks or any other birds. The barn owls are in the family Tytonidae, while all other owls are grouped together in the other family, Strigidae.

The genus name for the barn owl is Tyto, which is Greek for "owl," and the species name alba is Latin for "white." The "white owl's" clicks, howls, screams, and hisses are responsible for the creation of hundreds of man's superstitious ghosts, demons, and gods. People still kill barn owls as harbingers of evil and death. Nothing could be further from the truth; better mouse and rat controllers could not be envisioned.

The outer toes of owls are reversible, so the arrangement of digits can be three in front/ one in back as in typical birds, or two in front/two in back as in the ground cuckoo, the roadrunner. The efficiency of the reversible outer toe was demonstrated to Elaine and me one night by a young great-horned owl which escaped into the living room. The bird flew towards a plastic-covered window, and at the last moment reached up and seized the covering with one set of toes in the two/two arrangement and one in the three/one arrangement. The area covered by the spread toes in the cuckoo arrangement of foot was much larger than the other. Toenails curving in towards the center of the roughly rectangular patch made for a rodent trap nearly as large as my outstretched hand. Any rat or other rodent unlucky enough to find itself surrounded by those talons would be hard pressed to avoid being caught.

The barn owl's chosen haunts are usually reported as abandoned buildings, old mine shafts, open woodlands, suburbs, and the like. In New Mexico, barn owls can be found nesting in large burrows and other cavities formed when the sides of an arroyo begin to fall inward. Such nesting areas present a hazard to the young owls. Years ago, a tragedy struck a nest when a large chunk of arroyo caved in, tossing four white down-covered baby Tytos to their death in the hot sun of the day. I found this sad scene in a wash near Rio Rancho. Such nesting sites are used often by barn owls in New Mexico. Unfortunately, the slow-moving white birds attract great attention when startled into flight during the day and present a seemingly irresistible target for chase. Areas easily reachable by off-road vehicles and motorcycles have far fewer nesting owls. We have also found barn owls nesting in cavities in the volcanic cliffs of the Jemez Mountains. These cavities are more permanent than the arroyos but danger still faces the young owls in the form of great-horned owls and prowling mammals. Raccoons and larger owls are both known to eat young Tytos.

However, the young are not without their own form of protection. Eight needle-sharp claws and an unfriendly disposition can make entering a barn owl nesting area hazardous!

IDENTIFICATION OF NEW MEXICO BIRDS
By Dustin Huntington

Elaine felt the wrath of an angry and frightened baby Tyto, named Horus Owlbert, that stayed with us a week, and I learned of the foolhardiness of reaching into a cavity occupied by seven other baby Tytos when I replaced Horus in the nest he had fallen from. Four of the young owls attached themselves to my bare arm, and it took me awhile to convince them to let go. All eight babies fledged from the nest.

Barn owls exhibit staggered hatching, and it is not uncommon to find owls ready to fledge as well as just-hatched babies in the same nest. In the competition for survival during times of scarce food, the younger babies usually starve to death or serve as food for hungry older nestmates. If all the young were the same size and age, the whole brood might be lost. Young owls need tremendous amounts of food, supplied mostly from mice and other small rodents.

The adults have excellent night vision and although owls see little color, none are blind during the day. Man is said to need thirty times the amount of light a barn owl needs to discern objects in the night. Amazing as barn owl eyes are, its ears are probably used more in the endless search for rodents. Barn owl ears are asymmetrical in size and placement, enabling it to judge distance and direction with uncanny accuracy. In fact, the entire face of the "monkey-faced owl" collects sound to be channeled to those exquisite ears. One totally blind barn owl was successfully raising young, hunting mice in a barn by sound alone. A bird which makes loud flying noises would not only alert its prey, but would probably be unable to hear the prey at all. Soft down and soft-edged feathers on most owls permit such quiet hunting.

This short article can only begin to describe the unique lifecycle of the white owl, but currently "haunting" our flight cage is a female Tyto Alba, and anyone wishing to look eye to eye with a real ghost is welcome to give me a call. We should have her a few more weeks.

Since shorebirds will be arriving back by the time this article is published it seems appropriate to cover three short identification problems of New Mexico shorebirds.

GREATER AND LESSER YELLOWLEGS

While the standard field guides are fine for differentiating between yellowlegs and other shorebirds, the distinction between the greater and the lesser is not so well covered. The greater is a much larger bird (twice the bulk) than the lesser. This difference is easily seen when the two are together, or if there are other shorebirds that provide a scale. Size can be hard to judge for isolated birds, therefore other characteristics must be relied on. As with many of the confusing shorebirds, bill shape and call are of the most use in identifying individual birds.

Bill shape is the most useful characteristic to use for a distant yellowlegs. If the bill is clearly upturned the bird is a greater. If the bill is straight the bird is not necessarily a lesser; both species may have straight bills. The species can, however, be separated by the proportional length of the bill. The greater is a proportionately longer billed bird than the lesser. This leads to a subjective judgement which, to an extent, must be based on experience but there is a good general comparison. In the greater, the bill will be about twice the distance from the base of the bill to the back of the head. In the lesser it is about one and a half times this distance (see Fig. 1). Comparison to the head width removes some of the subjective nature of the decision about the proportional length.

Call is also useful and definitive in separating greater and lesser. The calls are on the Peterson record and listening to them a few times should enable one to identify the calling bird.

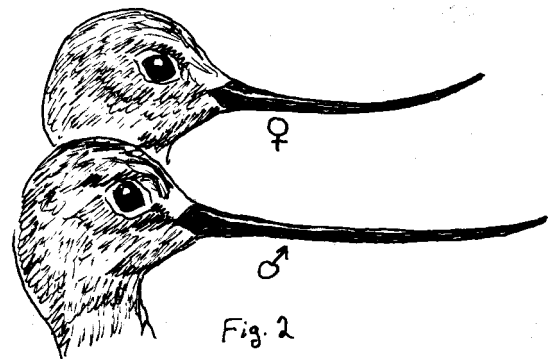
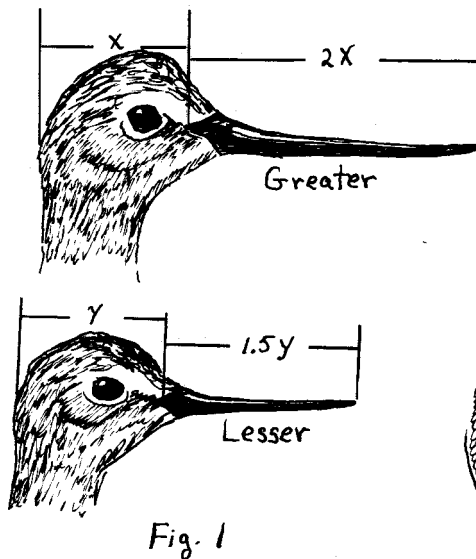
DETERMINING THE SEX OF AVOCETS AND BLACK-NECKED STILTS

While identification to species is often difficult enough there are many species where the sex of the bird can also be determined. The differences in some species is quite pronounced and is pictured in the field guides. In the other cases the differences are subtle and can be easily overlooked.

Avocets and black-necked stilts are unmistakable birds and can not easily be confused with any other species. The standard field guides do not explain how to differentiate between male and female in these species. The book "Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders" by A. J. Prater, J. H. Marchant, and J. Vuorinen is the best reference for such information and is highly recommended.

In Spring breeding plumage only male and female black-necked stilts can be separated by the back color. The male has an all black back, the same color as the back of the neck. The female has a brown back contrasting with the black on the back of the neck. The male also has a slight pinkish tinge to the underparts but this much harder to see than the back color. Juveniles and winter plumage birds do not show this difference.

Avocets can be identified to sex at any time of the year but the differences are not as pronounced. The male has a longer bill which is relatively less curved; the female has a shorter bill with a much stronger curve (Figure 2). I have found this difference to be pronounced in some birds and is especially good in differentiating a breeding pair. In the hand measurements give complete separation based on bill length and curvature. However, there is enough variation in the birds that I do not find it possible to even tentatively identify all avocets to sex.



BIRD SEED is available from Jeremiah Johnson to aid his raptor rehabilitation project. See the February-March Burrowing Owl for details or call Jeremiah at 881-1560.

ROSS'S RAVINS

Hi folks! Here it is the first of April already, and that means time to put out our hummingbird feeders. In fact, if the first arrivals are any indication, we may have an early migration, and it is more important than ever that we have our feeders out early. Dr. Rod Drewien tells me that the last of the whooping cranes left Bosque del Apache two weeks before the usual date, and the first one was seen at Ouray National Wildlife Refuge on the Green River in Utah on February 15, 1981. That is a full month ahead of the earliest previous arrival date. Other early arrivals here include rough-winged and violet-green swallows seen at Bosque del Apache on March 14, 1981, as well as a few early shorebirds. These included a large flock of killdeer, and a couple each of long-billed dowitchers and greater yellow-legs. Of course all of the winter residents have not left yet, and there was still an adult bald eagle, about 500 snow geese, and over 100 Canada geese. Also quite a few ducks of at least a dozen species, including all three teals, were still there! Be that as it may, with the indications of early migration, it behooves us to get our hummingbird feeders started. Not too many or too much syrup until the first ones show up. Let me know when you get your first arrivals (265-8962).

Speaking of migration, another kind of migration will be taking place soon. Our own Pat Basham will be migrating northward from Socorro on April 10, 1981, with a flock of her painted birds to hang a one artist show. Having had a peek preview of part of the flock, I strongly recommend that you plan a field trip to Lovelace Clinic between April 10, 1981 and May 9, 1981, to do some observing. If these paintings are snapped up as rapidly as the ones from her last show, you would better make it soon, or you will miss the best ones.

Steve West, one of our professional ornithologists from the southeast part of the state, just called (3/18). Remember, he was the second runnerup in our big year listing contest year before last? He was telling me that all of the swallows we normally have, except tree swallows and purple martins had returned to Carlsbad Caverns by Valentine's Day. Another indication of an early migration. He has been banding herons at a rookery near Loving, New Mexico for the past two years, and says there are a couple pair of Louisiana herons possibly nesting there, although to date he has not been able to find the nests.

From another source, there was a report of an apparently resident flock of ground doves in the vicinity of the Narrows, above Elephant Butte.

Generally, reports of unusual birds, or even of usual birds have been few and far between. The controversial Artic/red-necked loon at Tingley Beach Lagoon was still there on March 18. It may still be there. If it stays long enough, maybe it will molt and put on its breeding plumage so it can be irrefutably identified. But do not count on it!

Other interesting birds include a whistling swan seen on Tom Bidell's field trip to Cochiti Dam, a pair of peregrine falcons and some rufous-crowned sparrows were seen on the trail maintenance orientation trip to the west side of the Sandias, and a common (yellow-shafted) flicker in the vicinity of Constitution and California northeast. We are still getting scattered reports of golden-

crowned sparrows from the foothills of the Sandias. There was an interesting report of an albino house sparrow from a resident of Algodones. He said this bird has been around for two years and has a nest in his yard.

In mid-February, I had the privilege of participating in a workshop on sparrows at Patagonia, Arizona, lead by Ken Kauffman and Will Russell of Wings, Inc. They not only gave some good material on the identification of sparrows, but some suggestions on birding in general, and on identification of birds other than sparrows. They also pointed out some of the field guides and suggested some excellent references on specific groups of birds. Should you ever have a similar opportunity, I urge you to take advantage of it. From Patagonia, it was just a hop, skip, and jump over to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. That is an interesting place at that time of year. Costa's hummingbirds winter there, and are so numerous as to become "trash" birds very quickly. Cactus wrens, Gila woodpeckers, and common (gilded) flickers are also to be seen everywhere. A Harris hawk very accommodatingly posed on top of a saguaro and allowed me to take his picture. It was easy to list over 40 species of birds in the monument, and about 90 on the whole trip, many of which are much more difficult to find in New Mexico.

This has been fun, but now it is time to go. With spring migration coming on you should have good birding for the next couple of months. Have fun, and if you find any "goodies," please share them with me. Thank you, and so long.

RLT



The Owl
 Once on a time there was a owl
 The owl live in old oak tree in make
 a nest and some Owl is in the dug
 ground and make a nest and
 live in there no cold I think it very
 warm The owl is two great eyes
 he see any thing and he have
 two wings, he make a fly and
 he have one tail and he can
 said who who That is all talk
 about the owl
 John Bull Walks Behind

Our very special thanks to Ted Turner for the above delightful bit of Americana. It is especially nice to have for our Tenth Anniversary celebration.

Mr. Turner tells us that the copy book of John Bull Walks Behind is in the Museum of the Northwest Indian Center in Yakima, Washington. It was probably done about the time of John James Audubon. Larry George, a Yakima Indian artist, did the picture of the "Owl in the dug ground." Mr. Turner recalls that when his parents homesteaded southern Idaho in 1920, the "Prairie Dog Owl" was in great abundance. "They were fiesty creatures and dive bombed my little brother which made him furious!" By 1922 farming and irrigation had driven the little owls and prairie dogs out of the area.

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