Fifty Years of Changes to Louisiana's Birds

On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the publication of George Lowery's
Louisiana Birds

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David P. Muth
December 11, 2024

Look at any checklist of birds produced during a day afield in Louisiana today and it will include an assortment of birds, and numbers of birds, that would have been *inconceivable* in 1974, fifty years ago.

The year 1974 saw the publication of the third and final edition of *Louisiana Birds* by George H. Lowery, Jr., the last comprehensive guide to Louisiana's birds. It also happens that I have been birding for just over 50 years here in Louisiana, so for me this seems like a fitting moment to look back.

A lot has changed over those five decades, and the anniversary seems an opportune time to reflect upon those changes, using Lowery's 1974 list as a baseline for comparison. Dr. Lowery, then the Boyd Professor of Ornithology at LSU and the Director of the Museum of Natural Science, accepted 411 species to the "official" state list. The "official" state list as I write this today stands, by my calculation, at 494 species, with two recently added for 2024, Snail Kite and Heermann's Gull (see below).

Because of various lumps and splits and other actions outlined below, the two list totals can't be directly compared, but to a close approximation, since 1974, Louisiana's total species list has grown by 87 species (net), or an average of 1.7 new species per year. At that rate, we should comfortably exceed 500 species by the end of this decade.

But in addition to the total number of detected and accepted species, there have also been dramatic changes in the *populations and distribution* of species, and on the times of year when they can be expected in our state.

This review will be in two parts. First, a recounting of the addition of new birds to our state list since Lowery put the final proofs of the 1974 edition of *Louisiana Birds* to bed. The second will be a review of the sweeping changes in populations.

Herein, I am *not* going to cover the gradual long-term trends that have made the headlines, and are the subject of anguished laments by every birder who has been in the field here in Louisiana over the past decades (in some cases of still active birders, over the past seven plus decades). By which I mean that this review is not intended to cover the long-term declines in most short-distance temperate and long-distance Neotropical migrants, and many resident birds of grassland and forest, which is well documented elsewhere[i] and which has better data than the impressionistic review you are about to read (if you keep reading).

Instead, I am going to write about things like the rather remarkable growth of the state list in Part One. And in Part Two I hope to cover the changes in populations of many birds that had declined to a remnant status because of persecution or inadvertent poisoning; expansion of the ranges of birds once considered rare vagrants to Louisiana (mostly originating from southwest of us); huge changes in wintering abundance of birds that once retreated south each winter; the invasions of various exotics; and other anomalous changes in status that would not be at all obvious to the many people that have taken up birding in the last decade or two.

Someone who knew Louisiana very, very well in 1980, having left the state and later returned, would not recognize a typical checklist today as being possible in the Louisiana they knew. If you think about it, that is pretty remarkable. Except for a few dramatic invasives, plants, butterflies, dragonflies, amphibians, reptiles and mammals haven't changed very much in the same time period. Yes, there have been long-term and depressing declines in many populations of wild native non-bird species. But there have not really been wholesale invasions of native species formerly confined to places outside Louisiana as we have seen in birds. Nor have there been, with the exception of American alligators, readily obvious massive population rebounds of persecuted or exploited (non-fish) vertebrate species.

But with birds the story is very different. A typical January day's eBird entries from across Louisiana is likely to include Ross' Goose (only three records, hunter-kills, accepted by Lowery in 1974); Black-bellied Whistling Duck (two accepted records in 1974); a smorgasbord of routine wintering hummingbirds (still then considered exceptional); Cooper's Hawks but no Sharp-shinned (the opposite in 1974); Osprey, Bald Eagle, Brown Pelican, hundreds of American White Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants, Peregrine and Merlin (all in 1974 not yet having begun their recovery from pesticide poisoning); Anhingas (a rarity in winter then); Limpkin (undreamed of); Lesser Black-backed Gull (the subject of feverish dreams); Inca Dove (seven records before 1974); Crested Caracara (confined to the Gum Cove ranch in west-central Cameron in 1974); Say's Phoebe (three records); Bronzed Cowbird (five records); and House Finch (unrecorded in 1974).

Part I: Lowery's List

Lowery accepted 411 species in the 1974 edition[ii]. Because of subsequent official taxonomic changes by the North American Classification Committee (NACC), "lumps and splits," in order to reconcile the 1974 list with the 2024 list, we have to make some adjustments. Because of *lumps*, we can subtract two forms then recognized as separate species: "Black Brant," now recognized as a subspecies of the circumpolar Brant that normally winters along northern Pacific coastlines (=410), and "Gray-headed Junco," the group of Dark-eyed Juncos from the southern Rockies. That brings the 1974 list to 409. On the other hand, *splits* of Canada Goose into Canada and Cackling geese (=410); Northern Oriole into Baltimore and Bullock's Oriole (=411) and Rufous-sided Towhee into Eastern and Spotted towhees adds three, bringing the comparable Lowery number up to 412.

Back in 1974 Lowery reasonably functioned as the sole authority on what qualified as evidence for occurrence—thus he was "the keeper of the list." After Lowery's death, in 1978, the Louisiana Ornithological Society (LOS) chartered the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC), and a more robust system was put into place for "keeping the list."

Originally, LBRC, like Lowery, accepted sight records for additions to the official state list, records that did not have preserved physical evidence such as a specimen, photo, video, voice recording or other physical evidence (i.e. feathers or a DNA sample). Eventually, in order to justify inclusion on the list with a more rigorous and unimpeachable standard, the LBRC decided to no longer accept records of species new to the state list that were based solely on sight records. The idea was to accept only that which is *re-verifiable*, where the physical evidence can be reviewed again by someone who knows nothing about the report and the reporter, except for that which is preserved, invariably preserved in a properly curated museum like the LSU Museum of Natural Science (LSUMNS).

Based on that new standard, LBRC also began a review of historical records, including those that Lowery had added based solely on his faith in observers who had submitted sight records, or in some cases his faith in (or deference to) earlier ornithologists (or himself). That LBRC review led to the removal of some species from the list. That review is ongoing, and has for the most part been overtaken by subsequent events, as species that lacked physical evidence in 1974 gained it thereafter. In several cases species that had been based solely on sight records were subsequently documented for Louisiana with specimens, photos or videos during the review process.

For the purposes of this review, in order to have a justifiable basis for comparison, I'm going to begin by deleting from the revised 1974 list total any species for which Lowery was unable to review hard evidence—those that he had accepted on faith. On that basis, we can remove 16 species: 1) Harlequin Duck (a sight record by no less than John James Audubon), 2) *American Flamingo*, 3) *Red-throated Loon*, 4) *Trumpeter Swan*, 5) *Smooth-billed Ani*, 6) *Harris's Hawk*, 7) *Great Shearwater*, 8) White-tailed Tropicbird, 9) *Glaucous Gull*, 10) Roseate Tern, 11) *Curlew Sandpiper*, 12) *Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher*, 13) *Painted Redstart*, 14) *American Tree Sparrow*, and 15) *Connecticut Warbler*. Species on that list in *italics* have subsequently been restored to the list, as you will see below.

Lowery had also counted on the state list 16) Snow Bunting because of a mounted specimen, supposedly taken at Covington, St. Tammany Parish. However, no other information about the circumstances or date of the collection is available, and the LBRC removed it from its version of the state list. For the sake of comparison with 2024, Lowery's 1974 list therefore stands at 396. Only four species accepted by Lowery and deleted according to these criteria, Harlequin Duck, White-tailed Tropicbird, Roseate Tern and Snow Bunting, have *not* been subsequently verified with a specimen or photos.

Lowery had also accepted to the state list, on the basis of what appeared to be a successful introduction by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Black Francolin, an Asian species released in Gum Cove in order to create a huntable gamebird. Within a decade or so of 1974, however, this dubious introduction program began to falter. For years, avid listers competing under the rules of the American Birding Association made the trek to Gum Cove Road from all over the country. To get there you took a small ferry (now defunct, alas) that conveyed you across the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway southwest of Sulphur, in the hopes of glimpsing one on the Moore-Odom Ranch from the short section of public road. But it became increasingly difficult, and the briefly thriving population dwindled to nothing. In 1985 the LBRC removed it from the state list. So, Lowery's comparable list is 395.

On the basis of that analysis, 99 species have been added in the fifty years between 1974 and 2024.

Of those, one, Monk Parakeet, is a non-native that has successfully become established (provisionally). Three others have invaded from areas of successful establishment east of us: Eurasian Collared-Dove, House Finch[iii] and Scaly-breasted Munia.

The following list is grouped by **year**, then a **number and species name**. Species names ***italicized*** are species that Lowery counted but for which there was no specimen or photograph. At the end of each account a number in **{brackets}** is the number of birds restored to the state list after demotion. The number in **(parentheses)** is the new state list tally.

The 99 species added to the state list since 1974 are:

(1893)

1. *Smooth-billed Ani*, June 18, Plaquemines Parish, by H.L. Ballowe. This record had been grudgingly accepted by Lowery, but a supposed specimen that had been housed at Tulane had been lost. Lowery was perplexed and skeptical about the record given that every subsequent ani recorded in Louisiana had been a *Groove-billed Ani*. But the lost specimen was recently rediscovered, having been languishing in the Smithsonian, on "loan" from Tulane. For the full story, see:

http://www.losbird.org/lbrc/sbaniremsenbig.pdf *Discovery of a presumed-lost specimen of Smooth-billed Ani from Louisiana*; J.V. Remsen, Jr., and Paul Sweet, North American Birds, Volume 62, No. 2, pages 196-198 (2008).

The Florida population of Smooth-billed Ani is in a long decline. Once expected in south Florida, it is now rare. Given that, the chance of a re-occurrence in Louisiana after nearly 150 years might seem slim. But long-distance vagrancy potential is demonstrated by a 1993 Ohio record. There are recent records for the Florida Panhandle and both Mississippi (2017) and Texas (2022), so there is reason for hope. The Texas record is especially intriguing, as there is no western population closer than the Caribbean Coast of the Yucatan, or Pacific Costa Rica. **{1} (396)**

(1973)

2. Monk Parakeet, December, Patterson, St. Mary Parish, a pair captured in a garden. Lowery noted Monk Parakeet sightings the year before in 1972 and included it parenthetically in his species account, but did not add it to the state list officially. By 1974 the species was being widely reported in the United States, but unlike other established exotics (House Finch, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Scaly-breasted Munia), there were no discrete points of origin and establishment, followed by the subsequent spread of a thriving population. Instead, there were many isolated populations, almost all associated with cities, where they presumably had escaped from captivity—or been released as nuisance pets. Even though they were breeding, evidence that any one of these populations was self-sustaining or spreading very much was lacking for decades. It was not clear that successful nesting was the cause of the persistence of populations, rather than longevity of individuals and continued release. (It was also not clear if the failure to spread from cities was because of dependence on humans for food, nest sites, and maybe "new blood," or because of active suppression by government agencies of rural Monk Parakeets, since they were known as agricultural "pests" in their temperate South American home.)

Given that many introduced exotics go through a period of rapid population increase and subsequent collapse (Blue-gray Tanager and Spot-breasted Oriole in south Florida, for instance), the LBRC remained cautious about putting the parakeet on the official state list, cognizant of the fate of Black Francolin. Nevertheless, the LBRC in 2022 added it the state list as a *provisionally* introduced exotic. **(397)**

1974

3. Baikal Teal, November 7, near the mouth of Pearl River, St. Tammany, taken by James F. Lee while he was hunting, and who subsequently donated the unusual specimen to LSUMNS, where it was prepared by Lowery himself. There was no doubt about the identity of the specimen. However, ducks are notoriously popular in private aviaries, and they escape or are released with frequency. This was the earliest post-Lowery 1974 new record that the LBRC eventually reviewed. All members felt that the question of origin was unanswerable. On divided votes, the LBRC rejected the record, twice.

But the beauty of a records committee is that it archives a record of evidence that can be reviewed repeatedly. After a subsequent committee changed LBRC policy to create an "**origin hypothetical**" category, the 1974 Baikal Teal underwent another review. LBRC in 2020 voted to add Baikal Teal in the new "origin hypothetical" category. There was no doubt about the identity, but also a reasonable chance of natural vagrancy based upon what birders are pleased to call "a pattern of vagrancy."

(A certain amount of uncertainty surrounds the origin of any free-flying bird that shows up anywhere. But there are degrees of uncertainty. Records like that of a Baikal Teal in Louisiana teeter somewhere in the middle. Authors and committees used to keep a junk drawer of records that were labeled "hypothetical" for any number of reasons, including both doubts about the identity of a seen bird or about its natural origin. Requiring physical evidence solves the "identification hypothetical" problem. The "origin hypothetical" designation deals with the second problem.)

Checking only Ebird records, only one other state east of the Rockies has accepted a Baikal Teal record. And there is only one other November record south of Alaska, in British Columbia. Is there really a "pattern of vagrancy?" The LBRC may be on the cutting edge of detecting *an emerging pattern of vagrancy*, or not. Maybe it *was* an escape.

If some future LBRC looks back and concludes that no pattern of vagrancy continued to develop, it too can revise the list. **(398)**

1975

4. Siberian Sand-Plover, April 22, on the sandy spit (now covered by trees and shrubs, but then newly forming) of what would later become part of Grand Isle State Park, east end of Grand Isle, Jefferson Parish, found and photographed by David Doubleday, with Ellen Doubleday and Chester Littlefield. This was the first record of this Asiatic species, then known as Mongolian Plover, recorded in North America outside of Alaska. Doubleday captured his photos by using his 35 mm Nikon to take images magnified through his telescope and binoculars—the equivalent of "digiscoping" decades before the invention of digital cameras. The group, from New England, was attending National Audubon Society's annual convention in New Orleans. In those days before cell phones, before the internet, before even widespread call-in Rare Bird Alerts (an antique practice that involved analog answering machines and a landline; you called in to listen to an analog tape-recording made by a volunteer dictating as needed and generally covering a specific geographic area, i.e., Louisiana), word did not reach Louisiana birders for some time, and the bird was not seen again. Ironically, the first new bird for Louisiana *found by birders* post-Lowery was found by out-of-staters. I doubt anyone predicted this one.

Incredibly, there is one subsequent Louisiana record, and a scatter of other records in the eastern U.S., all in the Fall. The only other Spring record in eBird outside of Alaska is from the north shore of Lake Ontario, at a migrant trap. **(399)**

5. Allen's Hummingbird, November 1975 until March 6, 1976, in Reserve, St. John Parish, by Ron Stein. By 1974 it had become apparent that some hummingbirds were somewhat inexplicably and unexpectedly spending winter in Louisiana gardens. Western Black-chinned and Rufous hummingbirds were known as regular visitors and Broad-tailed had been documented. Buff-bellied visited from south Texas or northeast Mexico. A small group of dedicated birders had begun to cultivate hummingbird gardens, deliberately planting species that they knew (or hoped) would attract wintering hummingbirds. The hunt was on for

new species. One of the pioneers, Ron had an unrivalled hummingbird garden in Reserve on the edge of sugarcane fields. He began observing a young male *Selasphorus* hummingbird as it began molting into adult plumage. His skill and persistence paid off, and he called in LSU Museum personnel to confirm Louisiana's first documented Allen's Hummingbird.

Allen's is not an obvious candidate for vagrancy. It is strictly West Coast, and its migration route to Mexico spreads only slightly eastward. Nevertheless, it continues to occur here and east of us in very low numbers, its true status likely obscured by the difficulty of separating females and immatures from Rufous. At the time of Ron's find, the only record east of Arizona (in eBird) was a bird that wintered in a Houston Garden in 1970-71, and molted into adult male plumage. Allen's Hummingbird became regular enough here that it was removed from the LBRC Review List in 2013. **(400)**

1976

6. *Glaucous Gull*, January 1, Holly Beach, Cameron Parish, photographed by Howard Kisner. By 1974 observers had reported Glaucous Gulls more than a dozen times along the coast, perhaps not surprising given their stand-out-in-the-flock large size and uniform pale buff or white immature plumage. Lowery accepted the species on the state list, but this record was the first documented with a photograph, and therefore under the procedure adopted by the LBRC (and herein) this first documented record became the first official record.

It seems amazing that a species seen so many times, going back to 1938, had never been proven with a photograph, but it is a lesson in what wildlife photography was like before the digital revolution. Cameras with telephoto lens were heavy, delicate, not water-proof, not dust-proof, and very expensive. Carrying them in the field was a chore and risky, and knowing how to use them took training and skill. If you really wanted a sharp picture with a telephoto lens, you mounted the camera on a tripod. There was no point-and-shoot, no automatic focusing or lighting adjustment. Film was also expensive, and came in rolls of 12, 24 or 36 frames. You snapped the photo, then manually advanced the film by turning a lever. If you forgot to advance it, the next shot would be a double-exposure. If you could not remember if you had advanced it, you advanced it again, and ended up with an unexposed frame.

You weren't going to fire off 20 frames per second. And there was no instant gratification. You adjusted your camera settings, took the photo, waited until the roll was used up, then took it in for processing. You might wait weeks between taking the photo and getting the processed film back to see if the picture came out—to see if the bird was in focus, to see if the exposure was too bright or too dark, to see if the colors remotely matched what you saw. There was no post-processing, you could not brighten the image or darken it. That print or slide was all you had, and it had cost you the equivalent in today's money of a few dollars, whether it was any good or not. That fact alone tended to make taking documentary photos rare, and photographers stingy with their film. And, of course, if you wanted to send the slide or print to someone else to document the sighting, you had to pay to have it duplicated, and hope it would not get lost in the mail or damaged in handling.

Glaucous Gull continues to be a very low-level visitor to Louisiana, and remains on the review list. **{2} (401)**

7. Snowy Owl, December 13, Cross Lake, Shreveport, Caddo Parish. Presumably found by a non-birder and documented in the *Shreveport Times*, whereafter a number of birders made the trek to see it while many more did not (some of whom came to regret it). This remains one of the southernmost records for the

central U.S. Given their irruptive nature and conspicuousness, it is a little surprising nearly 50 years has elapsed without a repeat. (Though an injured individual captured in Chalmette, St. Bernard Parish, in November 2000, seems to me more likely than not to have been a natural vagrant.)

These spectacular high Arctic birds make a splash wherever they show up. Unlike most owls, they are quite active in the daytime, and are conspicuous unless the background is snow. Birders thrill to them far to our north, so one anywhere near the Gulf of Mexico these days would acquire mythical status. **(402)**

1977

8. House Finch, December 25, Natchitoches, Natchitoches Parish, Kenneth Shaw, coming to a feeder, banded and photographed. House Finch is native to the western half of the continent. Those western natives that lived from the western Great Plains to the Pacific seem to have been fairly sedentary—there is little history of eastward vagrancy in the record. But they did begin slowly expanding their range gradually eastward, perhaps in response to human habitat alteration.

In the meantime, though, a population of House Finches got introduced in Long Island, New York, from a release of birds bound for the pet trade, in about 1939-1940. After a slow establishment there, the conquest of the eastern United States got underway, and it was explosive by bird colonization standards. The expansion was moving to the southwest, and Louisiana waited. We knew we'd see them eventually.

Interestingly, though, the first record was from west central Louisiana, leaving open the possibility (at least for me), that the first occurrence was from the "natural" eastward expansion from the native range in West Texas, rather than the westward expansion of the eastern non-native population.

In any case, it rapidly established itself statewide, almost certainly as the eastern wave of introduced birds crested. Not surprisingly, there was a decided clustering around built areas in cities, towns, suburbs, and smaller settlements in agricultural areas. It was removed from the LBRC Review List in 1991. **(403)**

1978

9. Antillean Nighthawk, May 27, adjacent to the University of New Orleans (UNO), New Orleans, Orleans Parish, found by Jack Reinoehl, a math and computer science professor at UNO with a tremendously attuned ear for birds, who heard its distinctive calls, very different from the otherwise nearly identical Common Nighthawk. At the time it was classified as a subspecies of Common Nighthawk, but in 1983 the NACC recognized it as a separate species (split it). As the name implies, it is a species of the Greater and Lesser Antilles that winters in northern South America. Another one that no one predicted, it mirrored the unexpected Siberian Sand-plover, dramatically extending the pattern of vagrancy, and was a North American first outside of south Florida. There have been no subsequent documented records for Louisiana, and only a couple of North Carolina records outside of south Florida.

In just three years Louisiana had added two species that were unrecorded in the U.S. except at the extremes, Alaska and Caribbean Florida. But more was to come. **(404)**

1978

10. Saw-whet Owl, February 15, Kisatchie National Forest, Natchitoches Parish, J. Hart. Unfortunately, there is not much more to be said, inasmuch as the only verified Louisiana record was found dead and the specimen luckily retrieved and sent to LSUMNS.

A subsequent in-hand report of a mist-netted individual, from Johnson Bayou, Cameron, in 1995, remains equivocal because the documentation has never been shared with the LBRC.

Saw-whet Owls certainly occur more frequently in Louisiana, at least in some winters. There are records for central Arkansas, north Mississippi, much of Alabama and even Florida. But it is true that there is a dearth of records in the south-central U.S., hinting that we may lie in something of a hiatus.

This can be a hard bird to find, even when present. One way to assess status is to interrupt their movements at migration pinch points with mist nets. Other Saw-whet Owls are caught in mist nets at night, often using play-back to lure them in. Kisatchie seems like a great place for an enterprising searcher to find the next one. But it will probably turn up next where we least expect it… **(405)**

11. Ruff, August 12, University of New Orleans, Orleans, Mike Braun. For anyone back in 1974 trying to predict which Eurasian vagrant was likely to show up in Louisiana next, Ruff would have been high on their list. Ruff was a regular vagrant not only to the east and west coasts, but it had already been found on several occasions in the middle of the continent. Sure enough, on March 20, 1978, Tom Schulenberg, of the LSU Museum staff, found a Ruff on what was then called Magnolia Road, an oilfield road in the marsh north of Holly Beach in Cameron. Others saw the bird as well, but no documentation was obtained.

The first documented record was just a few months later, when Mike Braun, then an ornithology graduate student doing his lab research at the LSU Medical School in New Orleans, found one on the UNO Campus. In those days UNO was sparsely populated with buildings and had vast, poorly drained fields of mowed grass. It was a mecca for migratory shorebirds, especially when heavy rains flooded the grass and grounded migrant shorebirds. During his five years at UNO, Jack Reinoehl recorded 33 species of shorebird on the campus. In the space of less than two years, UNO had contributed two new species to the official state list, and another was soon to come.

Ruff records continue to accumulate in Louisiana. It is almost, but not quite, found annually. **(406)**

1979

12. *American Tree Sparrow*, February 10, north of Haynesville, Claiborne Parish. John Harson discovered a flock on his land and reported them to personnel at Louisiana Tech University, who obtained the documentation. This is the first known fully documented record, though Lowery reported six prior occurrences spanning 1904 to 1958. As might be expected, all of the sightings came from north Louisiana, with the exception of several individuals that made it all the way to Cameron in December of 1958, seen by many at various locations. Despite a few sightings, there have been no satisfactorily documented occurrences in Louisiana since 1979, and that seems strange, because they regularly winter so close to us in the central U.S.

American Tree Sparrow is one of the hardiest perching birds on the continent, wintering well north of most species, and showing a limited tendency to stray south. Its winter movements south towards us are often temporary, and spurred by extreme cold, ice or snow cover to the north. Nevertheless, it appears they used to make it here more frequently. A declining world population and warming winters may offer some explanation. Nevertheless, they have made it in recent years to locations south of us in Texas and Florida, and we are overdue. **{3} (407)**

13. Sabine's Gull, June 2, Curlew Island, Breton NWR, St. Bernard Parish, photograph by Larry O'Meallie. Larry photographed the bird knowing that any June record of a small gull was unusual for Louisiana, and sent slides to LSU. Initially mis-identified as a late Bonaparte's Gull, Donna Dittmann subsequently examined the photos and corrected the i.d. This is one of those cases where a convincing post-Lowery sight record by Ron Stein and Robert Hines at Barataria Pass at the east end of Grand Isle, September 11, 1976, was initially accepted as a first state record by the LBRC, but subsequently demoted as a sight record-only.

Sabine's Gull now has a well-established pattern of migrating through the mid-Continent in small numbers and being detected, often at inland lakes and reservoirs. In this it is much like Pacific and Red-throated loons, the jaegers and Arctic Terns, all of which migrate mostly off the east and west coasts, but small numbers take the interior route. Other Louisiana records are associated with tropical cyclones, presumably of birds interrupted in their fall migration. There is one record from a pelagic birding trip. **(408)**

14. Eurasian Wigeon, November 23, Vermilion Parish, taken by a hunter and mounted by a taxidermist; this record came to light after another one was found by Dan Purrington and Norton Nelkin and thereafter seen by many (including me) along Recovery Road in what would a few years later become Bayou Sauvage NWR, on December 14, 1980. Before the mounted hunter kill surfaced, this had been accepted as a first state record by LBRC. Earlier works on Louisiana birds had it on the state list on the basis of reports of no longer extant hunter-killed specimens. In his 1974 edition, Lowery demoted its status to hypothetical.

This was then probably the most common Eurasian vagrant to the lower 48 states (Lesser Black-backed Gull has overtaken it), and it has now been recorded in virtually every state. Some records are doubtless escapees, but there is a clear pattern of vagrancy for a bird that breeds abundantly across the Eurasian Arctic, from Iceland to the eastern tip of Siberia, just across the Bering Strait from Alaska. Nevertheless, chaseable individuals have been few in Louisiana. **(409)**

15. Anna's Hummingbird, November 10, Hackberry Ridge, Cameron, by Steve Cardiff. The Anna's Hummingbird discovery was remarkable in many ways. Unlike every other western hummingbird that has been added to the state list, it was found "in the wild" on a Cameron chenier feeding on a native plant, rather than in a garden. (Technically, though, the first Rufous Hummingbird, captured on February 6, 1934, was not in a garden exactly. It was captured after having flown into the State Capital Building.)

That first Anna's was also part of an "invasion," since at least two more Anna's were found that fall on the chenier. There has been no re-occurrence of this wild bird phenomenon, as I know too well, having spent many fruitless hours on Cameron's cheniers in November and December hoping to come across an Anna's feeding in flowering salt matrimony vine. The species has, however, become a sparse visitor to hummingbird gardens over the last 45 years but has not shown the surge in records that other "western" hummingbirds have. **(410)**

16. Thick-billed Longspur, November 30, University of New Orleans by the indefatigable Jack Reinoehl. The open and grassy UNO campus, a little bit of the lower Great Plains on the lakefront in New Orleans, contributed this species to Louisiana, the third new addition there in the space of thirty months. The Shreveport area had already been the scene of the other two rare longspurs being added to the list: Chestnut-collared and Smith's, both in 1952. That is where anyone with any sense conducted their searches. But as is so often the case, Thick-billed showed up very far afield, where a skilled and mentally prepared birder awaited its arrival.

This was the first record east of Texas in the Southeast, and there was only one other eastern record at the time, in Massachusetts in 1977. Since then, a few eastern records have been added. There is only one accepted subsequent record for the state of this hard-to-spot species, but searching for it in appropriate habitat when the southern plains are covered in snow will doubtless eventually pay off. **(411)**

17. Blue Bunting, December 16, Johnson Bayou CBC, Hackberry Ridge, Cameron, Steve Cardiff, Van Remsen, Linda Hale and David Hunter. Louisiana having added two species only seen in one other state in the previous few years—Siberian Sand-Plover (Alaska) and Antillean Nighthawk (Florida), a new bird for the U.S. was next. Given how close to the Texas border it breeds, one might have thought the first record would have come from the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV), which even then was a magnet for North American birders. No serious lister did not include a visit there at some point, nor do they today. Most subsequent records have indeed come from the LRGV. But pride of first place goes to the newly arrived post-Lowery LSU crew in 1979.

So far, we have had no additional records, nor have there been any additional records outside of the southern half of Texas. Invasions of the LRGV are sporadic. There are now a few records farther north in Texas, to San Antonio and Freeport.

It was an astonishing record at the time, and it remains one today. **(412)**

George Lowery died in January of 1978[iv]*. Later that year LSU hired Van Remsen to replace him as LSU's ornithologist and to take over as Curator of Birds for the museum. Cardiff came to LSU shortly thereafter as a graduate student, and was eventually hired as the museum's Collections Manager. The duo of Remsen and Cardiff, like George Lowery and Bob Newman (retired as Curator in 1976) before them, insured that the tradition of ornithologist/birders continued in Louisiana. The two of them, other LSU Biology and Renewable Natural Resources faculty and students, as well as Museum staff (including especially Donna Dittmann), along with a number of Ornithology Graduate Students and Museum Associates, would have a profound impact on birding in Louisiana and the growth of the Louisiana list, as you will realize as we continue to progress through it.*

1980 (none)

1981

18. Townsend's Warbler, October 24, East Jetty Woods, Cameron, Cameron Parish, Van Remsen, Steve Cardiff and Tristan Davis. This was a species very much expected and searched for, one of the last common western Neotropical migrants not yet on the list. As it happens, it was discovered on a Louisiana Ornithological Society weekend. This is a frequent stray, especially to the Northeast. It presents identification challenges in separation from our common Black-throated Green Warbler, but we now have almost 20 records, scattered from Cameron to Plaquemines, with a couple of inland records thrown in, spanning from September to May.

Though Hermit Warbler was detected first, there are far more records of Townsend's than of Hermit Warbler. Both are Pacific Slope birds, but Townsend's Warblers nest as far north as Alaska, whereas Hermit's range barely reaches the Canadian border. Townsend's Warbler, starting much farther north, has many more potential vectors along which a straying bird could reach us. (As a result, Hermit Warbler is the only warbler on the official state list that I have not seen, except the presumptively extinct Bachman's Warbler.) **(413)**

19. Great Black-backed Gull, November 11, old Pontchartrain Beach, New Orleans, Orleans Parish by David Muth and Jack Reinoehl. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, eastern birders were seized by gull fever. Great Black-backed Gulls were being detected farther south and west, while Lesser Black-backed and Iceland gulls were being found with increasing frequency away from the southeast Canada and the Northeast, where they were expected in small numbers. West Coast gulls were showing up in the east. First state records were accumulating. Articles were being published in birding magazines and journals about the finer points of gull identification. In Louisiana, the hunt was on. Jack and I found this gull on a piling in the lake and managed to alert a few other birders from a pay phone. They arrived pretty quickly and saw it before it disappeared. Dan Purrington obtained a photo. Since then, records continue to accumulate, with one or two birds found most years. **(414)**

1982

20. Lesser Black-backed Gull, February 14, Almonaster Avenue Dump, New Orleans, Orleans Parish by David Muth. This adult stood out amid the thousands of gulls feasting and resting in the city dump, a vast landscape of unspeakable beauty (to a gull aficionado). The cooperative city employees allowed me to make some phone calls from the corrugated tin shack that served as the dump's office, and I was soon joined by others, including Mac Myers, who obtained a photo as proof. It was thereafter seen by many in the next two weeks. This was the first of what eventually became a deluge. No one then would have predicted that at certain times of the year and in certain locales, Lesser Black-backed Gull could be more common than Herring Gull on the Louisiana coast.

Numbers have increased dramatically across the continent over the last 40 years, going from a rarity to commonplace in the northeast, and from a vagrant to expected in many states, including Louisiana. Yet, despite this invasion of wintering birds, the species has not yet been found breeding closer than Iceland. Such a distribution has no counterpart among Eurasian breeding birds. It was removed from the LBRC Review List in 1996. **(415)**

21. Iceland (Thayer's) Gull, February 14, Almonaster Avenue Dump, New Orleans, Orleans Parish by Mac Myers, with Norton Nelkin and David Muth, photo by Myers. While exulting in the just-found (and re-found) first state record Lesser Black-backed Gull, we continued to scan the flocks, and Mac spotted this first-year bird, a second first state record for the day. Thus, in the space of three months, three new gulls were added to the list, all found in New Orleans, all originating presumably from populations that normally wintered to our northeast. These records were associated with population explosions of large gulls and the presence of *huge* landfills where thousands could be surveyed as they foraged on "fresh" garbage.

As the 1980s progressed, new regulations led to the closure of many garbage dumps close to human populations, and to requirements that garbage be better contained and covered with fresh fill almost immediately. All of this change was good for human health, and good for the nesting terns and plovers that gulls preyed upon, but it made gulling a bit trickier for birders.

Thayer's-type Iceland Gulls continue to be found in Louisiana in low numbers, and eventually Kumlien's-type Iceland Gulls turned up as well. The two types were lumped in 2017 by the NACC. **(416)**

22. Hepatic Tanager, May 7, Peveto Beach Woods (before it became a Baton Rouge Audubon sanctuary), Cameron Parish by Steve Cardiff. This record was something of a surprise—there had been only one prior record for the eastern United States. Unlike most western vagrants, Hepatic Tanager is a bird of South and

Central America, and Mexico, which barely reaches northern Arizona or New Mexico as a breeding bird. The farther north a migratory bird nests, the greater the probability of vagrancy east or west of its migration route. But there are other less obvious patterns of vagrancy, and Louisiana has seen arrivals from due west and southwest.

There was an echo Hepatic Tanager in 1983, but then it was forty years before additional individuals turned up. Other eastern records are few and far between. Of course, it is not necessarily an easy bird to distinguish from the very common Summer Tanager. The sophistication of birders in their awareness of potential vagrants, in our growing knowledge of identification's fine points, supported by an ever-growing literature, and the growing enthusiasm of birders to hunt for the unexpected and unusual, was all part of what was happening in the early 1980s. The cadre of ornithologist-birders that LSU attracted to our state, led by Steve and Van, contributed to a very exciting time for Louisiana birding, as the spate of new first state records attests. **(417)**

23. Williamson's Sapsucker, November 14, Garner Ridge, Cameron Parish, by Van Remsen, with Steve Cardiff, as well as Tom Schulenberg, Tristan Davis and Melissa Allen. This was another remarkable addition to the Louisiana list, as evidenced by the fact that 42 years have elapsed without a repeat. At the time it was the easternmost verified record for the continent, and very few have been detected in the east since. There is a scatter of records from Texas north to Minnesota, and one mist net record for Long Island, New York in 1996.

Reasons for the paucity of records might include that females can be somewhat cryptic and possibly overlooked while foraging up in a tree; its world population is not very high; and it is not a particularly long-distance migrant (meaning there are fewer vectors for straying off course). The closest regular wintering population is in the mountains of West Texas and southeast New Mexico. The other Rocky Mountain sapsucker, Red-naped, is a more common and widespread species, but it has not proven to be a very frequent stray either, though it is even more difficult to distinguish from Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. **(418)**

24. Calliope Hummingbird, December 6, Reserve, St. John the Baptist Parish, Ron Stein. Ron's gardening and observational skills paid off again when Ron noticed this diminutive visitor to his garden seven years after he found the first Allen's Hummingbird and after numerous Rufous, Black-chinned and Buff-bellied hummingbirds in those intervening years. This was yet again the first eastern record of a western hummingbird that would eventually prove to be a frequent and widely distributed eastern stray. But it seemed a truly remarkable and unprecedented find to those of us who got to see it in Ron's garden 40 years ago. Indeed, it was the first verified winter record for the entire U.S.

Twenty years after this first sighting, it had become frequent enough that it was removed from the LBRC Review List—a circumstance that would have been simply inconceivable at the time. **(419)**

1983

25. Tropical Parula, December 17, Holly Beach, Cameron Parish, by David Muth, during the Sabine NWR CBC. It was sheltering along that mostly shrubless stretch in what I jokingly referred to as the Holly Beach Woods, a stand of *Baccharis* and roseau cane immediately south of the junction of highways 82 and 27. It was the closest thing to a stand of trees in my assigned area of the circle, and I worked it assiduously each year.

At the time this widely distributed Neotropical warbler (from the U.S. Mexico border south to Chile and Argentina) was known in the United States only from a small intermittent breeding outpost in south Texas. It was occasional there in winter. But other birds from this area, south Texas and northeast Mexico, the "Tamaulipan Biotic Province" to biogeographers, were known regular late fall strays to Louisiana—Groove-billed Ani and Buff-belied Hummingbird to name a couple. Northeast Mexico could also be the source of rarer vagrants, like Blue Bunting. The year before, a Tropical Parula had turned up on the Corpus Christi CBC, which got my attention. Nevertheless, while it may have been on the wish list of me and others, I don't think anyone was *expecting* it to show up. There have been fewer than 10 Louisiana records since, and none elsewhere in the east, at least none reported to eBird. **(420)**

26. Rock Wren, December 19, Seabrook, Orleans Parish, by Mac Myers. This common and widespread western wren, with a substantial but short distance migratory population, was a known stray to the east, with records in several mostly upper midwestern and northeastern states, so it was "on the watchlist." It had not yet strayed to the Gulf Coast, except one record in the eastern Panhandle of Florida the year before. There were as yet no records for coastal Texas. For the first one to show up at the heavily birded Seabrook boat launch and beach on Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans, in the broken recycled concrete rip-rap along the lakeshore and Industrial Canal, took us all by surprise.

I recall even then debate about natural occurrence (some arguing it might ride east in boxcars). But despite the scarcity of eastern records, a "pattern of vagrancy" has emerged. Louisiana records have been very sparse since then and confined to the west half of the state, matching the national pattern. But every fall and winter I search every pile of concrete rip-rap I can find in New Orleans, waiting for lightning to strike again. **(421)**

1984

27. Tropical Kingbird, May 12, along Highway 1, west of Grand Isle (between Caminada and Elmer's), Jefferson Parish, by Bruce Crider and Bob Newman. Lowery had counted "Tropical Kingbird" on the Louisiana list on the basis of a specimen from Cameron collected in 1965. In 1983 the NACC split Tropical Kingbird into two species: Tropical Kingbird (widespread from the U.S./Mexico border to Argentina) and Couch's Kingbird, occurring from South Texas to Belize and Guatemala in Atlantic drainages along the Gulf and Caribbean coasts. After the split, the Cameron specimen proved to be Couch's Kingbird.

The 1984 bird was a Tropical, and thus new to the state list. Tropical, and to a lesser extent, Couch's kingbirds, are turning up with increasing frequency in Louisiana and elsewhere in the United States, a seemingly genuine increase in numbers. The higher detection rate is surely abetted by greater awareness, more and more sophisticated birders, and digital cameras and recorders, all helping to tease out the vagrant signal from the Western Kingbird background. But no serious birder then, and no serious birder today, ever walks away from a yellow-bellied kingbird in Louisiana without confirming that it is, indeed, "just" a Western Kingbird. **(421)**

28. *Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher*, April 28, Monkey Island, Cameron, Cameron Parish by Dale Gustin, during the spring LOS meeting (allowing dozens of members to see it the following day, but that amazing story will be recounted in a subsequent chapter).

Lowery accepted this species on the basis of a single uncorroborated sight record involving his colleague Bob Newman from Grand Isle, September 30, 1956. Identifying Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher (SBFL) in the

field, separating it from Streaked Flycatcher (and others), is not trivial. SBFL's breeding range barely reaches southeastern Arizona in the west, and it does not reach our border on the east coast of Mexico. It is not at all obvious where one in April in Louisiana might have originated. Was it headed to northwest Mexico or Arizona? Was it an overshoot from the population that breeds in northeast Mexico? Or was it an overshoot by a migrant headed north into the Yucatan? After all, most of the birds we are used to seeing from northeast Mexico (Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Groove-billed Ani) appear to be wrong-way migrants that arrive in the Fall. Most subsequent records of this flycatcher have indeed been Fall records, but Spring records continue. There have been a dozen subsequent records in Louisiana, and many more in the eastern U.S. Birds found north of the Gulf Coast have been almost exclusively in the Fall. Perhaps there is more than one process explaining vagrants to the U.S. **{4} (423)**

29. Plumbeous Vireo, September 16, Hackberry Ridge, Cameron Parish, by Van Remsen. In 1984, "Plumbeous Vireo" was still considered a subspecies of Solitary Vireo. But it was widely understood that what we then thought of as "Solitary Vireo" was likely three species: Blue-headed Vireo in the east, Cassin's Vireo on the West Coast, and Plumbeous Vireo in between—the spectacled vireo of the Rocky Mountains. Plumbeous looked pretty different from the more similar-to-each-other Blue-headed and Cassin's vireos. But Plumbeous is still hard to identify with certainty because the difference between it and dull, faded Blue-headed Vireos is subtle.

In 1984 this was a species that had not strayed more than 100 miles east of the western mountains until the Cameron bird turned up. That might owe in part to its being considered "merely" a subspecies and thus not sought-for by birders, nor carefully documented. But there are no subsequent verified records here, despite 40 years of continued coverage by determined birders. However, there is now a scatter eastern records outside of Louisiana. **(424)**

30. Lazuli Bunting, September 23, Garner Ridge, Cameron Parish, by Steve Cardiff. Yes, only a week after the Plumbeous Vireo, LSU Museum personnel in Cameron, doggedly covering a chenier week after week, armed with advanced knowledge of distribution, expertise on field characters, and field skill, strike again with a difficult species in a subtle plumage.

Most subsequent records have been at feeders in winter, but certainly not all. This can be a very tough bird to separate from the abundant congener Indigo Bunting in many plumages. But given how common and widespread it is in the West, more records might be expected. And yet detection in Louisiana has remained low. This is a widespread abundant species, but it winters pretty consistently on the Pacific coast of Mexico. Maybe it really is much rarer here than Black-headed Grosbeak or Bullock's Oriole. Or maybe not. I can't tell you how often a suspicious looking bunting teed up briefly in a busy moving flock of Indigo Buntings and thereafter could not be relocated in the ensuing confusion of darting buntings. **(425)**

31. Varied Thrush, December 16-17, Hackberry, Cameron Parish, during the Sabine NWR CBC in the woods along the ship channel, southeast of town, by Cathi Reed *et al*. Yes, the Sabine CBC strikes again and the bird cooperated by sticking around to be relocated the following day, seen by many.

Varied Thrush, though a relatively short-distance migrant, already had an unusual record of vagrancy to the east. But the records were mostly from the Northeast. Was that because of the nature of the vagrant movement, or because the Northeast had more birders, both in absolute numbers and in the relative proportion of the population? Were species like Varied Thrush and Townsend's Solitaire more common there because that is the more likely distribution of vagrants, or merely because there was a higher density

of birders? We still don't know, but we now have more repeat records in Louisiana, and scattered through the southeast. However, most eastern records remain along a line centered on the U.S./Canadian border, where there are hundreds of records, suggesting that the pattern is real, and the Southeast is not where most vagrants are headed, for whatever reason. **(426)**

32. Zone-tailed Hawk, December 23, on the Mississippi River batture in Violet, St. Bernard Parish, during the New Orleans CBC, by Ron Stein, Melvin Weber, Nancy Newfield and Terry McKee. Not to be outdone by the Sabine CBC's Varied Thrush the week before, the Chalmette party turned up this stunning black hawk, completely unexpectedly. It was re-found the next morning in a dense fog and seen by many.

This was, not surprisingly, the first eastern record for this widespread mostly tropical species. It has not re-occurred in Louisiana. It would be a stretch to say that a pattern of vagrancy to the eastern U.S. exists for this species, although a spate of records for coastal locations exists on the Atlantic Coast from Prince Edward Island to North Carolina. Many of these records perhaps involve the same individual seen at multiple locations as it moved up and down the coast past hawk watches.

For me, that Zone-tailed Hawk was a lesson: expect the unexpected, to coin a phrase. I, like many others, had journeyed to southeast Arizona two years before where I knew I had the best chance of seeing this bird in the United States. And here it was a 30-minute drive from my house. If a Zone-tailed Hawk could turn up in southeast Louisiana at Christmas, then the scope of vagrant possibilities was much greater than I had imagined. **(427)**

1985

33. California Gull, September 29, Rutherford Beach, Cameron Parish by Donna Dittmann and Steve Cardiff. It is fitting one supposes that two LSU ornithologist/birders from California added this particular species. Once the three northeastern gulls—Great Black-Backed, Lesser Black-Backed and Iceland--had been added and found in subsequent years, it was clear California Gull was a likely candidate for the next large white-headed gull. In fact, however, by 1985 there had been very few eastern records and most were sight records. But we kept studying what to look for and combing the flocks.

Because another thing that happened in the period is that many of us became aware that one could, at least some of the time, under the right conditions and in the right vehicle, drive the nine miles from Rutherford Beach Road to the track at Broussard Beach (the road at the Recreation Center, indeed the Recreation Center, had not yet been built).

On most days there were more cows than people on that beach, and large mixed flocks of gulls and terns, along with shorebirds, pelicans, cormorants and other odds and ends, roosted on the beach during spring and fall migration. There was constant turnover in the flocks as birds left and returned from foraging offshore or inshore, and, of course, as they migrated, with day-to-day changes. If the track at Broussard proved impassable, you could reverse course and often find different individuals on the return trip. It was gull watching heaven. By the end of 1985 six different individuals had been documented along that stretch of beach, and by the end of the decade seven more, mostly by Donna and Steve, but many of us got our first state record there. **(428)**

1986 (none)

1987

34. Hooded Oriole, April 27, Peveto Woods Sanctuary (Baton Rouge Audubon), Diane Loria and Wang Yong. Diane and Yong were graduate students under Dr. Frank Moore at the University of Southern Mississippi who in those years ran a banding station with his students at Peveto studying various aspects of bird migration. The oriole, an adult male, was captured in a mist net, photographed, banded and released. But no birders reported it thereafter.

All of the fewer than 10 subsequent records have been at feeders (or in stands of exotic Turk's Cap on Grand Isle last winter) save one, a spring migrant in the grand old red mulberry behind the courthouse in the Town of Cameron. That towering mulberry, and the pecan towering even higher next to it, fell during Hurricane Rita in 2005, and one of the single best Spring birding spots in Louisiana disappeared.

The origin of Hooded Orioles that stray to Louisiana, and indeed to the eastern U.S. generally, is not certain. Though they nest "north" of us latitudinally in the southwest, they actually have three migratory populations that reach the U.S. One is mainly found in coastal California, another in the major river valleys of southern Arizona, and a third straddling the Rio Grande. That last population as the source would match the pattern we've seen in other "Tamaulipan" vagrants.[v] **(429)**

35. Cassin's Vireo, September 20, Garner Ridge, Cameron Parish by Steve Cardiff and Donna Dittmann. As alluded to earlier, the vireo that had been called Solitary Vireo encompassed three distinct forms that were split into three species. Our common winter vireo is, of course, Blue-headed Vireo. In the fall of 1984, Van Remsen found the first Plumbeous Vireo, the very dull Rocky Mountain form. Ironically, the West Coast form looks much more like the eastern form and it can be quite challenging to distinguish them. However, Steve and Donna found one in Cameron to add it to our state list.

At the time this was by far the easternmost U.S. record. In eBird, there are two unverified sight records for Illinois and Vermont, a bird photographed on an offshore vagrant trap in Maine, and an in-hand measured and photographed individual from New York. There is now an additional verifiable record for Louisiana, but it seems likely that many have slipped under the radar, as it were. It is a tough identification problem, but perhaps with the aid of digital cameras, more records will turn up. **(430)**

1988

36. Cave Swallow, April 24, Honey Island WMA, West Middle Pearl River at Hwy. 90 bridge, St. Tammany Parish by Mac Myers and Norton Nelkin. By 1988 there was a hint that something might be going on with Cave Swallow—perhaps a slight uptick in coastal Texas records. And a few had shown up in South Florida and northeast vagrant traps. More importantly, a specimen had been recovered just a few miles east on Horn Island, Mississippi, in 1986. When these birds were detected in extreme southeast Louisiana, it might have made sense to think they had come from the Caribbean population, but in fact they were clearly of the Texas and Northeast Mexico population.

This turned out to be the beginning of an invasion that inexplicably has involved a rapid expansion of the Louisiana breeding population, but also a regular passage of Fall migrants from we-know-not-where throughout the eastern United States. Strange as it may seem, it looks as if some Cave Swallows move northeast all the way to the Atlantic post-breeding, then return to the Mexican wintering grounds headed southwest, passing through Louisiana in numbers. The first record also coincided with an almost equally inexplicable explosion of breeding statewide by both Cliff and Barn swallows. Cliff Swallow was not known to breed in Louisiana when Lowery published in 1974.

Cave Swallow came off the LBRC Review List in 2011. **(431)**

37. Arctic Tern, June 5, Rutherford Beach, Cameron by Donna Dittmann and Steve Cardiff. Though most migrating Arctic Terns travel over offshore waters on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, there were just enough sightings through the Midwest at lakes and reservoirs to put us on the alert here. They are a late spring migrant, and few are birding beaches in June when heat and humidity rule and Spring migration for most birds passing through Louisiana is all but over. But some of us were, specifically looking for Arctic Terns and other potential vagrants. Honors for first, second and third went to Steve and Donna that June, as well as numbers four and five in June 1990.

There are now seven Cameron Beach records spanning May 30-June 23 and an anomalous July 10 record from Breton Island, Plaquemines Parish. Fall records include our only inland sighting, September 5, Cross Lake, Caddo Parish and a September 23 sighting during a pelagic birding trip from about 30 miles off of South Pass, Plaquemines Parish. **(432)**

38. Virginia's Warbler, December 17, in the late-lamented East Jetty Woods (bulldozed to build the LNG export facility), Cameron Parish, during the Sabine CBC by Steve Cardiff, with Van Remsen, Catherine Cummins, and Curtis Marantz. At the end of 1988 there was as yet little evidence that Viginia's Warbler might stray east. Yet there were a few reports, and it was apparent that these western medium-distance migrants are prone to stray. Their breeding range is quite patchy, with very specific habitat requirements. This might suggest that they are adapted to exploration.

Louisiana already had what seemed a crazy record of a Lucy's Warbler, which are less common and widespread. We hoped for Virginia's, but the record was then considered exceptional. Since 1988, the number of eastern records has increased pretty dramatically, though this remains the sole accepted record for Louisiana. There are very few records for the southeastern U.S—most eastern records are well north us. You will be relieved to know that Virginia has a record, in Virginia Beach. Still, despite this slim evidence, a repeat here seems overdue. **(433)**

1989

39. Shiny Cowbird, May 20, Port Fourchon, Lafourche Parish by Phillip Wallace, Cecil Kersting and Curt Sorrells. This South American species took almost a century to expand northward through the West Indies. But after it reached Cuba in 1982, it hopped across the Florida Straits to the Keys by 1985. There was a May record in southeast coastal Georgia in 1989, but this Louisiana record was the first indication of westward spread and constituted a huge leapfrog in the range. It was followed on June 4 by yet another leap, to Cameron.

In 1987 an article about the arrival of Shiny Cowbird in Florida appeared in the journal *American Birds* (now *North American Birds*)[vi]. As a result, all of us birders serious about searching for the next first state record or other vagrants were on the lookout for the arrival of this species. After all, Bronzed Cowbird had undergone a steady but relentless range expansion into Louisiana from the southwest, beginning in 1961. Bronzed was still a much sought after vagrant in 1974, but by 1989 was regular in much of south Louisiana.

In those days all serious birders combed each issue of *American Birds* looking for clues as to what we should be looking for. There was no internet, there were no online references (you went to your bookshelf or a library), no listservs or social media for rapid dissemination or discussion. Long distance phone calls

on landlines were billed by the minute and not cheap. We waited for the magazine to arrive in the mail, up to a year or more after the event (the publication schedule was a bit erratic), and devoured every word.

Birding, a magazine available to members of the *American Birding Association* that featured *articles for birders*, published an identification article about Shiny Cowbirds after the *American Birds* piece. Phillip, Cecil and Curt were literally looking at and discussing that article as they drove towards the coast that morning. **(434)**

40. Kelp Gull, July 8, Curlew Island, Breton NWR, St. Bernard Parish by Dan Purrington and Larry O'Meallie. It happened again for the second time in a decade, another first U.S. record for Louisiana. There weren't supposed to be any black-backed gulls in the breeding season in Louisiana. And yet here was a black-backed, yellow-legged gull in one of the largest and most important tern colonies in North America on remote Curlew Island, a place that often went years without a visiting birder or ornithologist.

The two birders who had worked the hardest to find a way out to the islands and monitor the breeding terns were Dan and, especially, Larry, who was a passionate bird photographer, when a camera with a long lens weighed a ton, had to be mounted on a tripod, and one took slides to look at later with a projector or loupe.

The two of them were perplexed by the very black backs, large size, and somewhat off-color yellow legs, but submitted them as the default Lesser Black-backed Gull. It was Donna Dittman, examining the excellent (for that time) photos at the LSU Museum, who concluded the impossible: Kelp Gulls, theretofore confined to the Southern Hemisphere, in the United States.

It was another first for Louisiana, and the fact that it turned out that Kelp Gulls were breeding, made it all the more remarkable. Gulls wander, so it would have been one thing if a vagrant Kelp Gull had been spotted in a flock of gulls on a beach or at a dump anywhere in the U.S.—but breeding on a remote barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico? That was certainly not something anyone would have predicted.

Louisiana had a few subsequent records away from the Chandeleurs and Breton Islands, perhaps involving those colonizers, and records accumulated elsewhere in the U.S. The original birds continued the saga of improbabilities by proceeding to begin interbreeding with equally out-of-place Herring Gulls.[vii] The hybrid descendants continue as "Chandeleur Gulls", but the original pure-Kelp pioneers seem to have died out.

We await the next arrival. **(435)**

41. Red-naped Sapsucker, October 27, between Post and Nacarri lanes, Grand Isle, Jefferson Parish by Curt Sorrells, Al and Gwen Smalley and John Sevenair. In 1974 three distinct forms of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker were recognized and treated as subspecies. Analogous to the "Solitary Vireo" complex, there was an eastern form, a Rocky Mountain form, and a West Coast form. In 1983 the complex was split into three species: Yellow-bellied in the east, Red-breasted along the Pacific, and Red-naped in the center.

There are only two subsequent accepted records. This is a very tricky identification challenge, especially because it's often difficult to get satisfying looks at all the relevant parts of this retiring woodpecker. It is further complicated by the fact there is a hybrid zone producing intermediate birds, and because, for whatever reason, some Yellow-bellieds have a red nape, and a few Red-napes don't. The paucity of records may be further explained because juveniles, the age class most likely to stray, are essentially indistinguishable in the field. **(436)**

42. Eurasian Collared-Dove, December 29, Venice, Plaquemines, by David Muth. Actually, the first sighting, on April 24, 1988, Ft. Pike, Orleans Parish by Mac Myers and Norton Nelkin (the day they found the first Cave Swallows) was rejected by the LBRC because of suspicions about the provenance of the doves, since there were a number of aviary birds at a residence nearby. But in retrospect it exactly fits the pattern of expansion, being about as far southeast as it possible to get in "mainland" Louisiana.

A flock of Eurasian Collared-Doves had been released in the 1970s in the Bahamas. They slipped unnoticed into Florida, that hotbed of escaped and released cage birds, perhaps in the late 1970s. But it was not until 1986 that birders put it together and realized an invasion was going on. The rest of us were alerted by an article in *Birding*, the magazine of American Birding Association[viii].

The species was not put on the Louisiana list until September, 1995, by which time any doubt about what was going on with this introduced, originally south Asian species, then undergoing a spectacular range that had reached the Pacific and Canada, was allayed. It was *removed* from the Review List in 1996. **(437)**

1990

43. Red-faced Warbler, April 27, East Jetty Woods, Cameron Parish, by Phillip Wallace and Curt Sorrells. Sometimes birding magic happens. Phillip and Curt found the bird on the Friday of LOS weekend with birders arriving from across the state. It stayed through the weekend in what was then one of the most accessible and easy-to-bird cheniers in Cameron.

Red-faced Warbler is a bird of the dry western sierras of Mexico and northern Central America. The northern tip of its range is restricted to the mountains of southeast Arizona and southwest New Mexico in the U.S. To that date the closest it had come to us was the high Chisos Mountains in Big Bend National Park. That one might show up in a coastal chenier at the height of Spring migration, mixing with eastern warblers, was inconceivable and unspeakably thrilling.

There are now a couple of Texas coastal spring records (it can happen again!), and a May record on a hilltop in inland Georgia (!). But that is it for the eastern U.S. **(438)**

44. *Curlew Sandpiper*, May 4, Vincent Mini-Refuge, north of Kaplan, Vermilion Parish by Ken Rosenberg, now at Cornell *via* LSU. Lowery had accepted this species on the state list on the basis of a sight record and the LBRC accepted a subsequent sight record before it adopted its rule requiring physical evidence. Ken picked this bird out of huge flock of bright spring migrants, including thousands of Dunlins, and got a photo. It stuck around long enough for several of us to add it to our state (or life) list.

After Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper is the most widespread and expected Eurasian shorebird in the U.S. All subsequent accepted Louisiana records have been from the rice fields, mostly in Spring, but it should be expected wherever shorebirds gather. **{5} (438)**

45. Broad-billed Hummingbird, November 2, Metairie, Jefferson Parish, by Nancy Newfield. No one in the eastern U.S. worked harder to discover, explore and document the emerging wintering hummingbird phenomenon that had first been detected in Louisiana. No one had worked harder to plant and test the best plants, or to design and maintain a garden. Every hummingbird gardener waited with Nancy under her watchful guidance--What species would be next? Where would it turn up?

Odds were (we thought) that it would be the widespread Costa's Hummingbird, or perhaps the fairly common but range-limited Rivoli's Hummingbird or Blue-throated Mountain-Gem. But, once again, we

were in for a surprise: Broad-billed Hummingbird, a species with an incredibly limited U.S. presence. Fittingly, it showed up in Nancy's yard, rewarding her years of effort. There was to that point almost no record of vagrancy. There were two prior East Texas records, and an off-the-wall Ontario record. It has since proven to be a fairly widespread eastern stray, but none of us would have predicted that at the time. Western hummingbirds were on the verge of shattering our notions of what was to be expected in the east. **(440)**

1991

46. Western Flycatcher, April 28, Smith Ridge, Cameron Parish by Mario Cohn-Haft, David Muth, Ted Parker and Ken Rosenberg. Given subsequent patterns, it is somewhat surprising that by 1974 the only western *Empidonax* flycatcher on the Louisiana list was Hammond's Flycatcher.

Many of us were searching for a vagrant western Empid, and the next most likely was a "Western Flycatcher" (at the time "Western Flycatcher" had been split into two species, Cordilleran Flycatcher of the Rockies and Pacific Slope Flycatcher). The reason was both its extensive western range and population, and the fact that it is *relatively* easier to identify than its congeners. Of course, that would have been especially true had one shown up in winter, since neither Yellow-bellied nor Acadian, the only other "yellowish" flycatchers in contention, had ever been (and have never been) found here in winter.

But instead, the first one showed up in Spring, at just about the time that Yellow-bellieds begin to arrive in Cameron. But we spotted it and it was added to the state list. That individual was determined to be a Pacific-Slope Flycatcher, but that was made moot when in 2023 the NACC lumped them back together again as Western Flycatcher.

There have been quite a few records of Western Flycatcher subsequently, but interestingly all have been Fall or Winter records. The first record remains the sole Spring record for the state. That one was almost the first found anywhere east of the hundredth meridian. Since then, records have been scattered throughout the east but spring records have been confined to the Gulf Coast and Florida. **(441)**

1992

47. Yellow-green Vireo, May 2, Smith Ridge, Cameron Parish, by David Muth, Mac Myers and Peter Yaukey. Smith Ridge strikes again. This species was "on the list," and vagrant searchers were keen to find it. Though there was no fully established breeding population in the U.S., it did occasionally show up in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and in Spring at oases in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. There were a number of California Fall coastal records. Importantly, there were a couple of records from the Florida panhandle. We knew it had potential. That first "official" record was preceded by a June 3, 1990 well-described sight-record by Donna Dittmann from Willow Island, Cameron.

There are now nearly 20 records, spread from Cameron to the Bird's Foot Delta in lower Plaquemines. Other more recent records are concentrated on the Texas coast, in peninsular Florida, and in both Spring and Fall for eastern coastal locations. There are a number of somewhat discrete breeding populations, in east and west Mexico, the Yucatan, and Pacific Mexico and Central America. They are all migratory, withdrawing to Panama, Colombia, and the upper Amazon on the east slope of the Andes. It is tempting to speculate that some eastern birds might be Spring overshoots from the Yucatan or wrong way Fall migrants. **(442)**

48. Blue-throated Mountain-gem, November 23, at the observer's home in Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, by Mark Swan. This one showed up in the yard of another birder/gardener who was ready and waiting. There was only one precedent for a stray east of the mountains, a single bird seen a decade before in Houston. There are only two additional records for Louisiana, and only a couple of records to our north and east.

Although it might be natural to assume that the origin of our birds is the Chiricahua or Huachuca mountains of Arizona, the closest population is actually to our southwest in the Sierra Madre Oriental of northeast Mexico. Perhaps our birds, like the lowland Buff-bellied Hummingbird, are actually moving northeast. In any case, another mountain bird whose range is primarily Mexico made the list. The Louisiana hummingbird list had doubled since Lowery's day, from five to ten in less than 20 years. But it was not over. **(443)**

1993

49. *Connecticut Warbler*, Apr. 28, Johnsons Bayou, Cameron Parish by Dawn Brenner and Doug Wechsler. This was a species with sight records going back more than fifty years, but no proof until it was captured in a mist net by researchers and photographed upon release. It has a relatively small world population, and its breeding range is somewhat restricted (for a boreal passerine). It has one of the narrower Spring migration routes, moving up through the Florida Peninsula then on a narrowly spreading path west of the Appalachians, through the Great Lakes to Canada. In the fall, somewhat like Blackpoll Warbler, it heads east, then out over the Atlantic to the Greater Antilles and then South America, where seldom encountered. The closest part of Louisiana to its regular migration route is Northeast Louisiana, which has relatively few birders. It is also a generally late Spring migrant; thus, it would rarely encounter frontal passages as it came through our state.

It is also notoriously skulky, the hardest song bird to see of all North American birds—like a Black Rail. It is no wonder then that proof was nearly impossible to come by, especially before the magic of digital cameras, and that the first documented bird came from a banding station.

In short, though much sought-after, it is rarely found. There are only six accepted records and about as many plausible sight records for the state going back to a young George Lowery near Monroe. Two of the six accepted records were offshore, one on a ship and the other on an oil and gas production platform. That anomalous fact might be an indication of how many are slipping past us unseen. It is hard to hide on a platform or boat. All accepted records have been in Spring. **{6} (444)**

1994

50. King Eider, April 9, Grand Terre Island, Jefferson Parish, by Bob Russell, a Corps of Engineers biologist and avid birder. It was sitting on the jetties just across Barataria Pass from Grand Isle State Park. Few birds have looked as out-of-place, 2,300 miles south of its breeding range in the high Arctic, and 1,200 miles southwest of its normal wintering range in the Northeast along the Atlantic. It was not the first Gulf record, although it was the farthest west to that point. Another was found in June of that same year on Curlew Island, Breton NWR. The only other record was a corpse on nearby North Breton Island in May 2001.

Southerly records continue to accumulate so you may yet have the incongruous pleasure of seeing an eider on the Gulf Coast.

Who knows, maybe Harlequin Duck will restore itself to the state list. **(445)**

51. Black-tailed Godwit, May 11, along Hwy. 35, north of Kaplan, Vermilion Parish, by Jim Holmes Jr. I rather doubt that anyone would have picked Black-tailed Godwit as the next most likely species of Eurasian shorebird to show up here. We were and are overdue for Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, and it might have been Bar-tailed Godwit, Red-necked Stint or even Spotted Redshank.

Jim spotted it among over 1,000 shorebirds, including nearly thirty Hudsonian Godwits, a feat in itself, but that is what can happen when you know what to look for and expect the unexpected. Luckily for those who got there the next morning, it stayed overnight.

Black-tailed Godwit regularly nests as close to us as Iceland (like Lesser Black-backed Gull), which may explain the decided eastern bias to the records in the Lower 48. This was the first record for the Gulf Coast, and there is only one subsequent occurrence (in Texas). But it pays to look very closely at godwits. **(446)**

52. *Harris's Hawk*, October 19, along Hwy. 35, north of Kaplan, Vermilion Parish by Paul and Darnelle Mcintosh. (Yes, just five months after the godwit, the same stretch of highway produced another state first.) One of the more intriguing mysteries in the history of Louisiana ornithology was the status of Harris's Hawk. It was described to science by Audubon himself, from a specimen given to him that had been collected near Bayou Sara, West Feliciana Parish, but the locality was not more precise than "between Bayou Sara and Natchez." In other words, it might not have been from Louisiana at all. Nevertheless, it was on every Louisiana checklist, including Oberholser and Lowery. Another problem with the story was that there was little reason for a Harris's Hawk to be there at all. This is a species of desert scrub, savannah, grasslands, and high saline marsh. It is not found in heavily forested, deeply dissected loess hills, as one finds in the Feliciana bluff lands. What would it have been doing there?

Maybe it was a post-breeding disperser from South Texas that was found in the cotton fields then being carved out of the forest? But there was no subsequent indication of such movement in the 19th and most of the 20th centuries, as evidenced by the paucity of subsequent records. The LBRC, in its historical review of the 1974 Lowery list, took it off the Louisiana checklist for lack of hard evidence.

Subsequent late twentieth century sight records, which began to accumulate, were rejected because of the concern that birds were releases or escapees, since the species had become popular in falconry. But a change was clearly underway, with documented fall northward irruptions to our west, perhaps associated with a modest population recovery of the species. The LBRC decided to accept this bird as the official first state record and there have been ten or so subsequent records. **{7} (447)**

53. *Painted Redstart*, December 17, Vincent's Woods, Hackberry, Cameron Parish, by Richard Bello and Gary Worthington during the Sabine NWR CBC. Yes, another astonishing record during the Sabine CBC, which in those days before Hurricane Rita, before Isaac, before Laura, before Liquid Natural Gas export plants, was the queen of Louisiana CBC circles, outpacing all others by a mile. Virginia's Warbler, Tropical Parula, Varied Thrush and now Painted Redstart added to the state list post-Lowery by participants on this one CBC.

This was another case of a species accepted by Lowery but demoted by LBRC for lack of verification. In November and December of 1952, two different birders found an adult in City Park, New Orleans. Both independently reported it to Lowery, without knowledge of the other. Lowery would probably have laughed it off had there not been independent corroboration. This was our first indication that high-

elevation birds of the Sierra Madre mountains of Mexico, with ranges just barely reaching mountains on the U.S. border, like Broad-billed Hummingbird and Red-faced Warbler to come, were potential vagrants to Louisiana. **{8} (448)**

1995 (none)

1996

54. Red-billed Tropicbird, June 9, in the deep Gulf of Mexico, southeast of the mouth of South Pass of the Mississippi River, by Dwight Peake, Mac Myers, and a boatload of Mississippi birders. The Mississippians, were (unsuccessfully) testing the American Birding Association's listing rule about pelagic birds, that the location of a bird at sea in Federal waters would be credited to the political subdivision of the closest point of land. Unfortunately for Mississippi, because the Bird's Foot delta extends so far to the southeast, Mississippi has no deep Federal waters to call their own. So, while the first record of Red-billed Tropicbird was documented on a Mississippi pelagic trip, the sighting was in Louisiana waters.

This was the first time a Red-billed Tropicbird had been found on a birding pelagic trip in Gulf waters. It came as a surprise and an eye opener. The only inkling anyone had that this tropicbird was a possibility, was a bird that wrecked in a Houston back yard in 1985, a completely inexplicable and anomalous record. The widespread accepted wisdom at the time was that White-tailed Tropicbird was the tropicbird of the Gulf, based on a couple of dozen sight records. Lowery had accepted White-tailed on the state list on the basis of one such sight record (and it was subsequently demoted by the LBRC.)

It now seems quite apparent, however, based on several well-documented records since, that Red-billed is the one we should expect. Has the relative status of each flipped over time because of some demographic shift, or, as seems more likely, were early observers just wrong, unaware of the similarities in juvenile plumage and just assuming that the species that bred the closest must be the one in the Gulf? There have been four subsequent Louisiana records during pelagic birding trips, and one record from an observer on an offshore platform. The species has also proven to be the tropicbird to expect in the Gulf generally. **(449)**

55. White Wagtail, Oct 12, Hackberry Ridge, Cameron Parish by Steven Emmons with Leonard East, Dannie Barron, Louise Hanchey, Gary Pontiff and Matt Pontiff on a Gulf Coast Bird Observatory Monthly Field Trip.

In 1974 a birder might have been forgiven for concluding that Louisiana was not a place to look for vagrants from Eurasia. After all, with the exception of Curlew Sandpiper and Northern Wheatear, Lowery had no Eurasian-origin species on the state list. That began to change immediately after 1974 with Baikal Teal, Siberian Sand-Plover, Ruff, Eurasian Wigeon, Lesser Black-baked Gull, and Black-tailed Godwit being added in succession. But no Siberian passerine was on the list until that day in Cameron at the marsh-chenier interface, in a brine scald, amid oil wells, pipelines and cow dung. What a sight that striking little bird must have been walking, hopping and flitting about in the muck.

It breeds as close to us as western Alaska and Greenland. By 1996 there was a well-established pattern of vagrancy on the West Coast, and a tiny number of eastern records to the Great Lakes and Atlantic coast. But this was the first for the Gulf Coast. Some of the increasing eastern U.S. records involve the types that would be coming to us from Greenland, Iceland or northwestern Europe, but the Louisiana bird, and some other eastern strays, were the subspecies found in Siberia. **(450)**

56. Western Gull, October 27, Fourchon Beach, Lafourche Parish, by Mac Myers and Dan Purrington. The cavalcade of new large white-headed gulls continued as two inveterate vagrant gull searchers turned up yet another state first.

It has become much harder to search for those vagrant gulls. While conditions changed with every storm, it was at times possible to drive almost the entire Caminada Headland, from the Belle Pass jetties on Bayou Lafourche in Lafourche Parish all the way to Caminada Pass at the east end Elmer's Island in Jefferson Parish. Beach driving generally was not good for birds, especially nesting terns and plovers, the constant victims of both clueless and malicious recreational drivers, but it certainly made it easier to cover a lot of territory. Sadly, the failing bridge that connected Fourchon Road to the beach was dismantled and never replaced. A massive project to rebuild the whole of the Caminada Headland led to the closure of beach access at Elmer's. Storms have also altered the stretches east and west of Rutherford Beach in Cameron in ways detrimental to gulling—the old broad, tapered beach is now in places narrow and drops off abruptly. Finally, the closure of those big open landfills, and the increasing difficulty of getting access to those which remain as the world "lawyers-up," ended another way to look at a lot of gulls in a short period of time.

Although Western is a common Pacific Coast gull with a fair amount of vagrancy to the western states, there was not then and still is not now much evidence of eastern vagrancy. Part of this is likely because the species can be hard to pin down in most plumages, is geographically variable, has a hybrid zone with Glaucous-winged Gull, and can look like any number of potential hybrids of regular eastern birds. It may just be overlooked. But for whatever reason there is only one additional accepted record, inland on Cross Lake. **(451)**

57. Fork-tailed Flycatcher, November 15, near Lelieux, Vermilion Parish, by Gary Broussard. One of the most spectacular and sought-after vagrants to the United States is Fork-tailed Flycatcher. Even by the time of Lowery's 1974 edition, there were records for south Texas, Key West, and a seemingly surprising number for the northeast. In the two decades after publication, the U.S. map had begun to fill in, with state after state getting records. Alabama already had three. We were primed and ready.

Here was a beautiful, conspicuous bird that lived no closer to us than the southern edge of the Bay of Campeche. The source of most vagrants to the U.S. seemed to be the Southern Cone of South America, a population that migrated north into the Amazon in the Austral Fall (our Spring) with overshoots caught out over the Atlantic and landing in the U.S. Northeast in Spring. Where did those birds go on their return? Across the Gulf? Alternatively, part of the populations from Mexico, Central America and northern South America migrated south after breeding and then returned north in what amounts to our Spring. Was that population contributing vagrants via northbound overshoots, or "Fall" birds headed the wrong way?

Gary's find was in an area of pastureland in the rice country. Paul Conover was an early master of analog video recording and he captured the bird on videotape. Video cameras with telephoto lenses, a miraculous new technology at the time, transformed rare bird documentation. But it was short-lived—the digital revolution was coming. The flycatcher did not stick around, and many searched fruitlessly thereafter. A second was not found until 2008. The frequency of detection has now picked up pretty dramatically. Since it is hard to believe that such a conspicuous and easy-to-identify bird was going undetected, it seems likely something has recently shifted in their populations or movements. **(452)**

1997

58. Clark's Nutcracker, February 9, Longleaf Pine Vista Road, Kisatchie National Forest, Natchitoches Parish, by Mac Myers, Curt Sorrells and Phillip Wallace. If there was one place in Louisiana where you could suspend disbelief and pretend for a moment that you were somewhere out west, in the foothills or lower slopes of the mountains, gazing out over an open vista above a ravine, staring into an actual wilderness, it would be on the Long-leaf Pine Vista Road. One imagines that it must have been a bit surreal for Mac, Curt and Phillip to discover in Kisatchie a denizen of those mountains, transplanted at least six or seven hundred miles east.

Clark's Nutcracker doesn't seem like much of a candidate for vagrancy. They are not migratory in the sense of predictably and seasonally moving from one latitude to another and vice-versa. But they are highly mobile, changing location and altitude in response to cone crops, behavior sometimes referred to as "nomadic." If a bird moves it is a candidate for vagrancy, and that probably explains the number of eastern records.

One imagines that that nutcracker, having crossed miles and miles of inhospitable habitat, suddenly found itself almost at home among the pines of Kisatchie.

But try to calculate the odds: the vector of the nutcracker, hundreds of miles from home, intersecting briefly with the vector of three birders on an exploratory trip far from their accustomed birding haunts, looking for vagrants on a winter trip from New Orleans, in one of the most under-birded areas of Louisiana. That seemingly incalculably rare coincidence has not yet repeated itself in Louisiana. **(453)**

59. Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, May 24, approximately 53 mi. SW of the mouth South Pass of the Mississippi River, Gulf of Mexico, Plaquemines Parish. This bird was seen on a Louisiana Ornithological Society-sponsored pelagic trip out of Venice, and photos were obtained. Participants included Bill Hemeter, David Muth, Mac Myers, Dwight Peake, Dan Purrington, John Sevenair, Curt Sorrels, Phillip Wallace, and several others.

In 1974 the birdlife of the deeper Gulf was a complete mystery. It was not much better by 1997. Despite the fact that there were thousands of oil and gas production platforms operating under Federal permits, there was only one earnest but superficial published survey of (mostly) birder's records of pelagic Gulf birds, and it was not paid for by a Federal or state agency[ix]. In short, beyond the beach, it was *mare incognitum* as far as marine birds, turtles, and mammals were concerned.

In 1974, the only storm-petrels known *for certain* from the Gulf because of (mostly) storm-wrecked specimens, were Wilson's and one Leach's. Wilson's was thought to be the common species for Louisiana, and therefore the northern Gulf. It turns out that this was likely an anomaly. Wilson's in the Gulf seem to concentrate in the nutrient plume of the Mississippi River, meaning that records from the north-central Gulf may not be representative of the Gulf as a whole, where the species seems to be rare.

As an additional factor, offshore knowledge was not much better on the southeast Atlantic Coast. There was very little indication *at all* in 1974 that Band-rumped occurred in *any* U.S. waters with regularity. Gradually it became clear that Band-rumped was regular in the Gulf Stream off the Southeast Atlantic coast. And beginning in about 1991, sight records began to accumulate off the Texas coast. Could the conventional wisdom be wrong?

As early as 1985 Louisiana had a very convincing sight record by Donna Dittmann and Steve Cardiff who saw one during a transect on a research cruise. Very few pelagic trips went into deep water beyond the edge of the shelf over the next decade. In 1995 LOS sponsored a pelagic trip out of Venice instigated by Dwight Peake, who later instigated the Mississippi Ornithological Society-sponsored trip that found our first Red-billed Tropicbird. On that May 27 trip all three storm-petrels were seen. But getting documentation in those days, at sea, was, at best, difficult (especially on that boat!). This 1997 record was the first documented with photographs.

Subsequent trips have found the species to be regular in deep water within reach of trips from Venice. Formal scientific surveys have validated these birder findings. The species was removed from the LBRC review list in 2002. **(454)**

60. Cory's Shearwater, September 13, approximately 35 miles south of Southwest Pass of the Mississippi River, Gulf of Mexico, Plaquemines Parish. This was another LOS Pelagic Trip organized by Bill Hemeter and Dwight Peake. Other participants included Alex Aleixo, Josie Babin, Rob Faucett, Jim Holmes, Jr., Joe Kleiman, Dan Lane, Charlie Lyon, David Muth, Mac Myers, Dan Purrington, John Sevenair, Curt Sorrels, Phillip Wallace, Jason Weckstein, Chris Witt, and doubtless others.

In 1974 there was only one hint that Cory's Shearwaters occurred in the Gulf, storm waifs seen in Alabama in 1973. But by 1997 it had become clear, mostly as a result of pelagic birding trips out of south Texas, that Cory's was to be expected in the Gulf of Mexico. It is an indication of just how poorly known the Gulf's avifauna had been that 50 years ago no one knew that Red-billed Tropicbird, Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, and Cory's Shearwater occurred, the latter two quite commonly.

We now know that Cory's is a common summer and fall visitor to the Gulf. The problem now is that "Cory's Shearwater" is no longer just Cory's Shearwater. It has now been split into three species. One species, retaining the name "Cory's," breeds in the northeastern Atlantic on the Azores, Canaries, and other islands off the Iberian Peninsula. It is common in the summer and fall in the northwestern Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, and is definitely known from the Gulf based on specimen evidence. The second species is now named "Scopoli's Shearwater" and breeds on islands in the Mediterranean Sea. It too moves into the northwestern Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico in Summer and Fall. And it too has been documented in the Gulf with specimens. The third member in the group, Cape Verde Shearwater, is known from this side of the Atlantic only as a vagrant, and so far, there are no Gulf records.

We don't yet know the relative status of the two known species in the Gulf, whether one is more numerous than the other (as is the case for Cory's off the East Coast), or if the timing of arrival and departure is different, or if there are different age, sex or molt sequences involved. Field separation is tricky but is probably doable with good photographs. Still, we may never know which of the two known species this first record represents, and many sightings past and future will have to be recorded "Cory's/Scopoli's." **(455)**

1998 (none)

1999

61. Manx Shearwater, March 11, 52 miles SSW of Southwest Pass of the Mississippi River, Gulf of Mexico, Plaquemines Parish, by Mac Myers, David Muth, John Sevenair, Stacy Peterson, Joe Kleiman, Mark and

Ruth Swan, Gwen Smalley, Curt Sorrells, Donna Dittmann and Steve Cardiff. The only indication of Manx Shearwater in the Gulf up to that point was a skeleton on a beach in Texas in 1975.

This was one of the earliest dates for a pelagic birding trip ever made off Louisiana, and it recorded the only Manx Shearwater for the state, and the first ever found offshore in the Gulf. It is therefore reasonable and tempting to conclude that the time to look for Manx in the Gulf is winter or very early Spring, which would make sense given that Manx nests in the north Atlantic and goes south in the winter, crossing the Equator. Perhaps this bird was returning north. Perhaps it had strayed into the Gulf and wintered here.

It may well turn out that with increasing winter and early spring coverage it will be discovered that Manx is more regular here than the records indicate. Interestingly, and somewhat unexpectedly, it has recently been shown that some Manx over-summer in the Gulf. There have been several mostly storm-related records onshore in Texas and Florida, and two June 3, 2022 birds were photographed on a pelagic birding trip off of Freeport, Texas. **(456)**

62. Mexican Violetear, June 30, Oelkers' residence, Lafayette, Lafayette Parish by Bill Fontenot and Paul Conover, who were following up on a report by the homeowners of a large green hummingbird in their garden. Long before the amazing extent of western and southwestern hummingbird vagrancy had been discovered, comprehended and analyzed, one quite unexpected contributing pattern had emerged. Mexican Violetears had been spotted at Texas hill country feeders on the Edwards Plateau, 600 miles north of the closest breeding population in southern San Luís Potosí, Mexico. There were records from the hills of Arkansas and North Carolina, as if these mountain birds had sought out upland habitat on their journeys. Importantly for us, there were Texas coastal records too.

Violetear was on the list on hummingbirds that might show up in Louisiana, and this bird obliged. Lowery's list included five species of hummingbird. That was now more than doubled. We were now up to *eleven* species in the ensuing 25 years. No one foresaw that in 1974. **(457)**

63. Ringed Kingfisher, November 20, Cotton Pocket, Cross Lake, Shreveport, Caddo Parish, by Terry Davis. As if Mexican Violetear was not enough of a gift from the south, the next arrival was in another league. Incredibly, a tropical kingfisher, of all things, showed up on Cross Lake, seemingly out of the blue. This was the beginning of a re-write of the state's avifauna by Terry and his remarkable ear.

Ringed Kingfishers were not included in the first U.S. field guides I owned, but in the 1970s they began to extend their range northward in Tamaulipas, eventually beginning the colonization of the Lower Rio Grande in Texas. Fifty years ago, serious listers made a special trip to one of the two or three known locations to get it on their U.S. life list.

As for vagrancy, there had been outliers, vagrants to Texas as far back as the 19th Century. In the late 20th Century, its expansion seemed to be continuing northward onto the Edwards Plateau. A vagrant showed up in Oklahoma in 1998, but surely that was a freak outlier? Apparently not. In addition to Oklahoma, they've now been found in New Mexico and Arizona. But Louisiana remains the only "eastern" state with (now two) records. **(458)**

2000

64. *Great Shearwater*, March 16, Gulf of Mexico, 45 miles south-southeast of Grand Isle, Gulf of Mexico, Plaquemines Parish by Karl Bardon. Lowery had accepted Great Shearwater on the basis of sight records,

and three additional post-Lowery sight records were approved by LBRC. However, it had been demoted for lack of physical evidence. Karl was an ornithological observer on an offshore oil platform for the *Migration Over the Gulf Project* and obtained a photo, his sighting becoming the first official state record.

Sightings remained scarce, but since 2015 it is being found with much greater frequency, even with very infrequent pelagic birding trips, suggesting a change in status. Great Shearwater is one of those tubenoses (like Wilson's Storm-Petrel) that visit us from the cold waters of the South Atlantic (or beyond), coming north in the Austral winter after crossing the Equator—another of the world's amazing avian migrations. I have to remind myself when I encounter these birds in the Gulf on a hot, sultry September day, in deep, warm powder blue water, beyond the shelf break, that they were hatched on, and will return to, islands 7,000 miles away. **{9} (459)**

2001 (none)

2002

65. Varied Bunting, April 9, Johnsons Bayou, Cameron Parish, by Jeff Mollenhauer. Jeff was conducting migratory bird field research under Dr. Frank Moore of the University of Southern Mississippi on a Johnson Bayou chenier when he captured and banded this stunning adult male. This was the third species added to the state list as a result of a bander in Cameron: Hooded Oriole and Connecticut Warbler preceded it. Varied Bunting is yet another Mexican species with a breeding range that barely reaches the western U.S. Unlike others that have strayed here, it is not a bird of the mountains, but rather a bird of the desert and low foothills.

Before this mist net capture, there was only one record east of central Texas, but it proved the potential of the species to wander far afield—a bird at Long Point, a productive vagrant trap on the north shore of Lake Erie in Ontario. Since 2002, there have been a handful of Texas coastal records, and two more far-flung records in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. There is also now another Spring record for Cameron, at Sabine NWR.

It should come as no surprise that all of the eastern records are of Spring adult males. Separating female or immature males from female-plumaged Indigo Buntings, while not impossible, is much more challenging. However, it is virtually certain that birds in those plumages are passing through Louisiana with much higher frequency than breeding-plumaged males. **(460)**

66. Townsend's Solitaire, November 16, Sabine NWR headquarters on Hwy. 27, Cameron Parish, by Rob Dobbs. Townsend's Solitaire was a well-known stray to the upper Midwest and Northeast. But there was no indication of vagrancy to the Southeast, much less to the Gulf Coast, even in Texas. Rob's was the first record for the Gulf Coast, and it obligingly hung around into the Spring, often perched in the ornamental holly, on the little man-made island in the marsh on which sat refuge headquarters and the Visitor Center. Pretty much everything except the live oaks was swept away by Hurricane Rita in 2005.

Since then, although the number of eastern records has steadily increased, the only additional Gulf Coast records are three in Texas, one in Florida, two more in Cameron and one on Grand Isle. For the southeast south of northern Arkansas and Tennessee, the only other records (in eBird) are one in Florida and three in South Carolina. There are no eBird records for Mississippi, Alabama, or Georgia. The southeastern hiatus seems real, for whatever reason. **(461)**

2003

67. Baird's Sparrow, April 7, Rutherford Beach, Cameron Parish, by Steve Cardiff, Donna Dittmann, Mac Myers, and Matt Pontiff. Whoa! If one were to pick a U.S. species that is not endangered, can be found in the Lower 48 year-round, but that few active U.S. birders had actually seen, Baird's Sparrow would be near or at the top list. With sneaky habits, a relatively tiny breeding range geographically and temporally, a narrow habitat-restricted migration corridor, and an even more restricted wintering range, almost all of it far from population centers, it offers average birders few opportunities. In migration and winter, it is as difficult or more difficult to see than other grass sparrows like Henslow's, Leconte's, and Grasshopper sparrows. This was the first, last and (still) only record for the Gulf Coast. There are a handful of eastern records, several of them historic (perhaps reflecting a time when there may have been many more Baird's Sparrows in existence).

One does not doubt that a few Baird's Sparrows stray east to Louisiana, but the prospect of finding one skulking in the grass is daunting. This one presented itself for examination on an open beach, on a cow patty. I try to imagine how it ended up there. Had it strayed out over the Gulf during the night and flown desperately over the alien ocean until it landed gratefully on *terra firme*? Had it spent the winter along Rutherford Beach and discovered that the cow patties, even the exposed ones on the beach, offered a smorgasbord of tasty treats? Was it migrating up the coast and saw the closest thing it could find to its native habitat, and staked out its spot on the sparse beach? Or was it just an *abnormal* individual?

There are no subsequent records, and little reason to expect a repeat. Except, as Erik Johnson has pointed out to me, there may be another way. If you can't *see* what sparrows are lurking in a field, maybe, with today's technology, you can *hear* what is in there, and greatly narrow your search. **(462)**

2004

68. Rivoli's Hummingbird, November 10, private residence, Slidell, St. Tammany Parish, by Linda Beall, with Bill Wayman and Linda Keefer. While some might have put their money on Costa's as the next hummingbird for Louisiana, Rivoli's was not a bad guess. It has a range that roughly overlaps Blue-throated Mountain-Gem and encompasses much of Broad-billed Hummingbird's. Both had already occurred in Louisiana. Rivoli's had been recorded in Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia and Virginia.

Once again, a dedicated hummingbird gardener had hit the jackpot, giving hope to all the other obsessed hummingbird gardeners. We were now up to *twelve species of hummingbird*, beginning to rival some of our southwestern neighbors.

However, given its size and conspicuousness, the number of eastern records remains small. There is as yet no subsequent Louisiana record. **(463)**

2005 (none)

2006

69. Mangrove Cuckoo, December 23, near Borgnemouth Park, Meraux, St. Bernard Parish, by Glenn Ousset, during the New Orleans CBC. Hurricane Katrina flooded 99% of St. Bernard Parish on August 29, 2005 and the water pooled in lower areas of Meraux for weeks after, killing most of what had not been toppled or ripped apart by the wind. Glenn found the cuckoo in a devastated woodlot, an impenetrable mix of dead and fallen vegetation and the first low green sprigs of new growth, 16 months after the storm.

There was something both tragic and uplifting about seeing it there, as the survivors of Katrina doggedly set about making sure that the CBC got done, though most of us were still refugees.

I and others had often fantasized aloud about finding a Mangrove Cuckoo in one of the extensive stands of black mangrove on our coast and barrier islands. But for it to actually happen in late December in New Orleans was quite shocking. It was one of the northernmost records in the world, and the first U.S. record outside of Florida (where resident) or Texas (where there have been a handful of records.) (Alabama has since joined us with a September 17, 2009 record for Dauphin Island).

Whether the bird came up from Mexico/Central America as the Texas strays likely do (which is what I would guess) or south Florida/Caribbean, is anybody's guess. **(464)**

2007

70. *American Flamingo*. September 30, 2007, St. John's Island in the Calcasieu River, Cameron Parish, Brandon DeBarge and Brian DeBarge. These birds were reportedly found earlier in September during teal season and were brought to the attention of Cameron resident and birder Cindi Sellers. The historical status of American Flamingo in Louisiana probably can't be sorted out—there just isn't enough reliable information. But it seems pretty clear that given its current status, there was very likely a time when it occurred with some regularity, before the age of scientific ornithology. It stands to reason that such a large, conspicuous, ungainly bird suffered enormous pressure from humans after the arrival of Europeans and their guns to the New World.

Early casual naturalists reported flamingoes along the Gulf. But by the time *formal* ornithology got underway, reports were shrouded in questions about whether observers knew spoonbill from flamingo, or whether free-flying birds originated from the wild or from captivity. Lowery accepted only one historical report, but that record did not meet LBRC's standard, so it came off the list.

This Cameron record involved a bird that had been banded in the Yucatan. Ironically, proving the need for caution, it was traveling in the company of an Old-World Greater Flamingo, also banded, and a known escapee. American Flamingo populations are increasing throughout their Caribbean range, helping to explain the increasing number of U.S. records. **{10} (465)**

2008

71. Gray Flycatcher, January 24, Benton, Bossier Parish, by Terry Davis. In 1974 this western *Empidonax* was unknown as a vagrant to the Eastern U.S. However, the fact that Hammond's Flycatcher had been collected in Louisiana in 1957 would have been a signal to anyone paying attention that all of the Rocky Mountain empids were potential eastern strays. No doubt in large part due to the difficulty of identifying them, and perhaps still more the difficulty of proving it, extralimital records of any western member were slow to accumulate. The same was true in Louisiana, where only Western Flycatcher had been added to the list in the 30 years after Lowery. I think most of us expected that a repeat Hammond's would be the next westerner, or perhaps the more common and widespread Dusky, so it was a pleasant surprise when Terry turned up this one.

The species has been recorded on two subsequent occasions in Louisiana and once in coastal Mississippi, but otherwise all other eastern records have been from North Carolina north and Lake Michigan east. **(466)**

72. Chihuahuan Raven, April 12, Holly Beach, Cameron Parish, by Dan Lane. I confess that no raven was high on my list of likely vagrants to Louisiana, certainly not coastal Louisiana. But Common Ravens are doing well, expanding their ranges into new territory or, perhaps more accurately, re-occupying their former territories in the Eastern U.S. Both species occur in West Texas. There are Common Raven records (perhaps dubious?) for eastern Texas, including one on the coast near Galveston. Chihuahuan Raven, on the other hand, had shown by 2008 almost no pattern of vagrancy, rarely being found very far from its preferred desert and dry grassland habitat.

Dan was dexterous enough to capture recordings of the calling Chihuahuan Raven as it flew (and he flew) along the beach highway heading west of Holly Beach, the bird no doubt beating a hasty retreat to Texas. In doing so he settled the identification question. There were no prior records of vagrancy eastward. Since then, the gap between their South Texas range and Cameron has been filled by a number of Texas coastal records, but Louisiana got a record before the Upper Texas Coast. There is one follow-up record from Rutherford Beach in 2019. We will see if it all signals a trend. **(467)**

74. Cassin's Sparrow, May 10, north of Bossier City, Bossier Parish, by Terry Davis. Most vagrants to Louisiana can be pretty reliably pegged as displaced migrants or wintering birds. But in this case Terry detected a singing male apparently trying to set up a territory and attract a mate. It would have needed to sing pretty loudly, as it was over 200 miles east of the species' range.

Interestingly, there were already by 2008 more typical Spring and Fall vagrant records for the Great Lakes and Northeast Atlantic coast, as well as a breeding season record in Indiana farm country, which is more akin to this record.

Since Terry's remarkable find, more have been sighted in northeast Texas, Arkansas and North Carolina. But none so far in any other southeastern state. However, to one up himself, Terry found a breeding season *group* (two males and a female) at another Bossier site in 2011.

Locating this retiring and somewhat cryptic species is difficult enough when a singing male is present, but we now have two instructive records of migrants, a bird on the west side of the Sabine River in Texas within sight of Lighthouse Road, and another skulking in Peveto last Fall, that open the door for infinite possibilities. Look very closely at any out-of-place Bachman's Sparrow (and wonder about previous reports of out-of-place Bachman's Sparrows!). **(468)**

73. Crowned Slaty Flycatcher, June 3, Peveto Beach Woods, just outside the Holleyman Sanctuary, Cameron Parish, by Paul Conover and Mac Myers.

Since Lowery published in 1974, Louisiana, far from Europe; far from Asia; with Texas intervening between us and Mexico; with North Florida, south Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi between us and the Caribbean; still had managed to snag two first U.S. records--Blue Bunting and Kelp Gull; a first lower 48 record--Siberian Sand-Plover; a first record of Caribbean species outside of southern Florida--Antillean Nighthawk; the first Shiny Cowbird west of Florida; the first U.S. winter record of Calliope Hummingbird; and too-many-to-list first western or Mexican vagrants to be found east of the 100th meridian, the traditional dividing line between "East" and "West."

Paul and Mac were atlassing the Peveto Beach Quadrangle. Why else would they have ventured into a chenier woodland on that stifling, hot and humid date, absent a late frontal passage or other triggering weather event?

The highest achievement in the bird-finding sweepstakes is a "new" bird, a species *novum*—a first description in the Scientific literature using Linnean rules. Audubon did that in Louisiana with Harris's Hawk. But nothing like that has happened since then and certainly not since Lowery published in 1974.

The next level of achievement would have been a first Hemispheric or Continental record. Had Mac and Paul been more skilled, they might have pulled that off. Instead, they had to settle for a first U.S. record and a first record north of the Tropic of Cancer, but *only* a second North American record.

Five months before they found a Crowned Slaty Flycatcher in Peveto, birders staying at a well-known birding B&B on Cero Azul in the Republic of Panama photographed, on the wires, the first record for North America. But let's face it: "North America" is an arbitrary concept. Biotically, it makes more sense to divide the two Americas on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec which separates most of Mexico, the Yucatan, the United States and Canada from lower Central America and the "real" tropics, rather than the Isthmus of Panama, which is in the heart of the tropics.

Many Crowned Slaty Flycatchers breed in the temperate Southern Cone of South America. They head north in the Austral Fall, our Spring, into the vast Amazon and the east slope of the Andes. Even on the Caribbean coast of Colombia and Venezuela it is rare. The Cameron and Panama records remain the only known occurrences outside of South America. **(469)**

75. Jabiru, July 27, Charenton, St. Mary Parish, by Bill Stelly Jr.; thereafter July 31, Sherburne WMA, North Farm Complex, Iberville Parish by Mike Seymour and Josh Sylvest. Bill was trying out a new camera when he came across this unrecognized and stunning giant and took some photos. It is pretty hard to miss a white wading bird that stands over four feet tall, has a black bill that looks impossible, and, just in case you think the big white bird might be a Wood Stork or a Whooping Crane, a bright red collar. Incredibly, or perhaps not so incredibly, given how conspicuous they are, two working biologists, Mike and Josh, independently found a Jabiru at North Farm, Sherburne WMA, 30 miles north and on the other side of the Atchafalaya Basin, four days later. It is assumed it was the same bird.

In 1974 Jabiru, like most large birds, was in trouble. The already tiny population in Mexico and Central America had shrunk, and was shrinking. Few held out much hope for recovery. Nevertheless, there were records of immature Jabiru for Texas and Oklahoma that matched the timing of Wood Storks which were thought to have dispersed northward from southern Mexico post-breeding. Maybe they were real vagrants and not escapes from zoos or aviaries (which often kept this spectacular bird in their collections)? A late summer/fall dispersal pattern has now emerged with almost a dozen records from Texas, and one each from Oklahoma and Mississippi (which beat us by a year). And populations in Mexico and Central America are slowly recovering with protection, especially of habitat. The source population remains very small, but given that they are arguably more conspicuous than a flamingo or Whooping Crane, we can reasonably hope for more records. **(470)**

2009

76. *Red-throated Loon*, January 24, Caney Creek Reservoir, Jackson Parish, by Devin Bosler and Justin Bosler. By 2009 there were good sight records of Red-throated Loon going back to 1945 for Louisiana, but all lacked physical corroboration. In addition, there were inland records on lakes and reservoirs all around Louisiana in Texas, Arkansas, and Mississippi, and records all along the Texas coast to our west, and to our east from Mississippi to the Big Bend of Florida.

Justin and Devin were working on the Winter Bird Atlas in the Womack USGS Quadrangle when they found the loon (and a Little Gull!), proving that, as in the case of the Crowned Slaty Flycatcher, virtue is rewarded. There are now three subsequent documented Louisiana records, also inland, and, one hopes, more to come. **{11} (471)**

77. Green-breasted Mango, August 20, Greenwood, Caddo Parish. Spotted by Kathy Johnson, the homeowner, who alerted Pat Lonnecker and Shirley Huss, who in turn alerted Terry Davis and others. Davis deduced from over-the-phone descriptions and discussions with Kathy that the bird was a mango. Jeff Trahan, Paul Dickson, Charlie Lyon and others arrived to observe and document this one-day wonder.

Ever since the Rivoli's Hummingbird in 2004 every hummingbird gardener in the state was asking "what's next?" and "who among us is going to get it?" The answer to the first question was Green-breasted Mango. The answer to the second was, as it had been for Mexican Violetear, "none of us." Digital cameras and social media were transforming "birding" as we once knew it. Obviously, in the past, casual and non-birders were seeing great birds, but no birder or ornithologist was as likely to find out about it.

Green-breasted Mango is a bird of Mexico and Central America with a more extensive range than Mexican Violetear, but with considerable latitudinal overlap. Unlike the upland Violetear, it is generally a bird of the lowlands. By 2008 there were what then seemed extreme extralimital records in Wisconsin, Georgia. and North Carolina, as well as coastal Texas. So, for Louisiana hummingbird aficionados, it, too, was on the "watch list" of expected hummingbird vagrants.

Records of the mango have continued to slowly accumulate in the United States from Texas northeastward into the Southeast, including two additional Louisiana backyard records. The Wisconsin record is an outlier.

Hummingbird species number 13 for Louisiana. **(472)**

78. Brown-chested Martin, September 6, near Fruge and Pine Pasture roads, Cameron Parish, by Paul Conover. Reading in *American Birds* about a first U.S. record of Brown-chested Martin, seen on heavily birded Cape Cod in Massachusetts in June 1983, was a revelation to me at the time. At that point few of us had considered the implications of potential vagrancy of Austral migrants from temperate South America to the U.S. A subspecies of Brown-chested Martin is resident in northern South America, but birds from the Southern Cone (like the Louisiana bird) migrate north in the Austral Fall, our Spring. Suddenly the prospect that a martin could overshoot the north coast of South America and cross the Atlantic to New England opened a world of new possibilities. Why not cross the Caribbean and the Gulf to get here? Why not indeed.

Of course, it took 26 years and Paul's willingness to go birding in the stultifying heat of early September, not to mention a sharp and skilled eye.

There are still only a handful of records north of eastern Panama. U.S. records are all on the East Coast, from Florida to Massachusetts, and all consistent with the hypothesis of a trans-Atlantic Austral fall overshoot, except the Louisiana record and a February record for southeast Arizona. Because the Austral migrants routinely reach Panama, the two "western" U.S. records also could fit that pattern, with the timing for the Louisiana bird adjusted to account for stray birds returning south with Purple Martins and other swallows. **(473)**

2010

79. Scaly-breasted Munia, December 17, Laplace, St. John the Baptist Parish, by Hans Holbrook. This is another case of an exotic species that was once commonly held as a pet that escaped and began breeding, becoming established and feral. Birds in Louisiana may have spread to Louisiana from east Texas or from populations on Gulf Coast to our east. Beginning in 2016 sightings exploded in Louisiana, often involving groups with both adult and immature birds. Seeing the writing on the wall, the LBRC acted quickly to add it to the state list with the same status as Eurasian Collared-Dove and House Finch. LBRC did not as far as I can tell establish a first date, so I have extracted one from eBird https://ebird.org/checklist/S7262548 of birds photographed at a feeder, after establishment was underway in Texas, Mississippi and northwest Florida. **(474)**

2011

80. Black-headed Gull, March 16, 2 miles northwest of Mouton Cove, Vermilion Parish, by Mike Musumeche. This was a species near the top of everyone's "next bird" list for Louisiana, having been recorded in Texas, Arkansas, and Mississippi, in many cases not that far from their respective borders with Louisiana. In fact, there were records for most eastern states. I was confident it would show up here either on an inland lake or reservoir, at a sewage treatment plant with Bonaparte's, or in a coastal flock. However, Mike, to my surprise, found one in wet ricefield.

This widespread Eurasian species hopped across the North Atlantic via Iceland and Greenland in the 20th Century, and has been steadily colonizing the Western Hemisphere as a wintering ground, but unlike Lesser Black-backed Gull, it has also begun to breed in Canada and New England. To me its scarcity here is something of a mystery, but steadily increasing coverage of inland bodies of water with digital cameras and telephoto lenses should yield additional records. **(475)**

81. Ladder-backed Woodpecker, May 14, in the last patch of trees on Lighthouse Road, Sabine Pass, Cameron Parish, by Paul Conover, with Dan Purrington, Mac Myers, Dave Patton, Phillip Wallace, Curt Sorrells and (barely) David Muth. This was most assuredly *not* a species near the top of everyone's "next bird" list for Louisiana. Although a common resident 200 miles west of the Louisiana border, this woodpecker could have served as the exemplar of the word "sedentary." Once one had travelled west across Texas and the moist eastern forest disappeared to be replaced by arid biomes of the West, Downy Woodpecker disappeared and Ladder-backed appeared. But they had no history of wandering and were not known to migrate or disperse.

Paul found the bird in the westernmost patch of trees in coastal Louisiana, and it stayed just long enough for all of us to see it before it took off and flew over the marsh, presumably continuing across the Sabine River. Interestingly, at just about the same time as the Louisiana record, other individuals began to be found on the Upper Texas Coast for the first time, and records have continued to slowly accumulate there. Has something about human alteration of habitats along the Texas coast made them more hospitable to Ladder-backed Woodpeckers? Only time will tell if a range expansion is underway. To date this is the only record (barely) east of Texas. **(476)**

82. Prairie Falcon, December 28, White Lake Wetland Conservation Area, Vermilion Parish, by Donna Dittmann and Steve Cardiff, during the White Lake CBC. Prairie Falcon is an unusual case. One might expect it to have shown up long before 2011. The breeding range extends from southern Canada well into Mexico,

and most conspicuous birds with that range stray here with some frequency. Furthermore, in winter it routinely spreads in small numbers east across the Great Plains, with many records in states north and northeast of us. But it is not really much of a latitudinal migrant. Instead, it broadens its range east and west in the winter at roughly the same latitudes at which we find the highest density of nesting. What one would describe as vagrant records are really pretty sparse. It seems to "know" where it wants to go and manages to get there. And perhaps Louisiana is just not all that attractive because this falcon prefers to eat prey items it can snatch from sparsely vegetated short grass, like ground squirrels and Horned Larks. But it can also take small ducks and doves, so if it gets here, it should do pretty well.

There is one subsequent record for Louisiana. Although records in east Texas, the Great Lakes and to a lesser extent the Northeast, continue to accumulate, there have been no further records along the Gulf Coast east of Cameron. **(477)**

2012

83. Pacific Loon, November 21, Cross Lake, Shreveport, Caddo Parish, by Terry Davis. Pacific Loons breed abundantly across the west and central Arctic. Most migrate down the Pacific Coast and winter in California and Mexico's coastal waters. However, there has long been a much smaller number that migrate through the interior of the continent to winter along the Atlantic and in the Gulf. As was the case with Red-throated Loon, Sabine's Gull, and Arctic Tern, despite their primarily Pacific or Atlantic offshore oceanic migration, they had been found at numerous inland water bodies in the North American interior, and Louisiana's lack of records was puzzling. It had been documented all around us, both at inland reservoirs and in the Gulf. It is almost annual in the Florida Panhandle. Why not here?

We hypothesized that it was because of our sediment-laden opaque Gulf waters, or the fact that in most of our inland shallow waterbodies were stands of baldcypress obscuring the view, or that they were generally surrounded by private property. Perhaps it was the relatively low density of birders? (But, really? Lower density than southern Arkansas, north Mississippi, eastern Oklahoma or northeast Texas?). Maybe it was the lack of deep-water reservoirs in our flat terrain?

Of course, there had been plausible sight records, but 2012 finally saw the species added to the state list. There are now two subsequent records. With more birders, better optics and cameras, it is likely this often-distant swimmer will be documented with increasing frequency. **(478)**

84. Dusky-capped Flycatcher, November 21, Cross Lake, Shreveport, Caddo Parish by Terry Davis.

Terry Davis…Terry Davis… Where have we heard that name before?

This was a species I had long sought, but had *almost* given up on. Although there was ample evidence of birds straying north or (mostly) northwest of the breeding range well up the Pacific Coast, it seemed it just did not stray east or northeast. There was a single Oklahoma sight record, nothing on the Texas coast above the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and nothing in the northeast, where the density of birders greatly exceeds anywhere in Louisiana or the southeast. Then that guy Terry heard this one.

The point of origin of the Shreveport record is not obvious. The U.S. breeding range is quite restricted, but the species occupies a vast range throughout Mexico, Central America, and northern South America. It has several geographic populations, some partially migratory, some sedentary. The closest population to us, in northeast Mexico, is thought to be sedentary, the population in Arizona and New Mexico, migratory.

In the intervening years the Upper Texas Coast finally got one record, as did the Edwards Plateau. But otherwise, this remains the only confirmed record east of the 100th Meridien. **(479)**

85. Mountain Plover, December 14, Lyons Road west of Lake Arthur, by Michael Seymour during the Lacassine-Thornwell CBC.

The entire breeding population of Mountain Plover is migratory, and while it would be classified as "short-distance," there is every reason to suspect that migrants, bound in both a southwesterly direction (to California) or southeasterly (to south Texas and northeastern Mexico), and the reverse in Spring, should stray.

Louisiana was overdue. The world population is small and has declined substantially. The small plover is the same color as the bare earth fields in which it winters, and it flees from predators by crouching, freezing and blending in to the dirt. None of that makes it easy to spot. But there are a fair number of eastern records, many of them "out of habitat," which may explain why they were spotted. It was therefore something of a feat when Michael picked this bird out from its dry dirt background. **(480)**

2013

86. Razorbill, February 14, at the sea end of the East Jetty of the Calcasieu River, Cameron, Cameron Parish, by Dan O'Malley, Erik Johnson, Mac Myers and Dave Patton. The Fall and Winter of 2012-2013 saw an unprecedented eruption of this *very northern* auk or alcid. In typical winters it migrates from its breeding range in Iceland, Greenland, Atlantic Canada and (barely) Maine no farther south than Long Island Sound. In some years a few strays might make it to Virginia or, exceptionally, North Carolina. In irruption years it had made it to Florida, including the Tampa Bay area on the Gulf Coast. But the 2013 winter was unprecedented. There were records in every Atlantic state, and photos of birds taken flying past Miami with palm trees and beachside condos in the background. Yes, they were rounding the tip of Florida and heading into the Gulf.

Birders saw Razorbills off Fort Lauderdale by December 8, Coral Gables by December 10, Tampa Bay by the 11th. In mid-December it seemed anyone who went looking on either side of the Florida Peninsula found them. Then, they rounded the Florida Big Bend and by December 18 were spotted in Pensacola. They were in the northern Gulf and heading west. On January 19 they reached the Alabama coast. Would they make it to Louisiana? On February 14, from a boat at the mouth of the Calcasieu River jetties, the seemingly impossible happened—a Razorbill in Louisiana.

There is only one other record from the alcid family for Louisiana, an Ancient Murrelet, a species from the Arctic and Pacific with a demonstrated pattern of inland vagrancy, that was plucked by a fisherman from Lake Pontchartrain in 1954. Anyone betting on the next alcid to reach Louisiana would have picked Long-billed Murrelet, another Pacific species that is known to turn up in the North American interior, or Dovekie, a North Atlantic species that had previously made it to the Florida Gulf.

Eventually that 2013 Spring Mississippi joined the list of Gulf states with Razorbill records, but the Cameron record remains the only record for Louisiana, and remains the world's westernmost record. There have been no Gulf records since 2013. **(481)**

2014

87. Sooty Shearwater, June 18, Sabine Pass, Cameron Parish, by Will Selman. Sooty Shearwater breeds in the southern latitudes and is one of the world's most abundant seabirds. Spectacular numbers are seen during the non-breeding season after it crosses the equator into the North Pacific. The numbers in the North Atlantic are less impressive, but still substantial. It is a cold-water species, but migrates through warmer waters and currents. It spends a lot more of its time in Continental Shelf waters than other tubenoses, and is thus often visible from shore in areas where deeper shelf water is close-in and it is a common migrant.

Not surprisingly, relatively few seem to enter the Gulf, but from sightings and beached specimens we have long known it occurs. Sooty Shearwaters had been reported from voyagers more than 100 miles off the Louisiana coast, but frustratingly have never been encountered on organized pelagic birding trips, which rarely get out more than about 60 miles. It seems probable that Sooties in the Gulf are caught out of their preferred cold-water habitat, which may explain why many records are of less-than-healthy individuals or of birds that are clearly out of place off beaches or in channels and bays. Unlike our Gulf neighbors, we had no records of beached birds, storm waifs, or the occasional oddball inshore sighting until this record of a bird photographed in the ship channel. **(482)**

2015

88. Pyrrhuloxia, December 18, Wild Road, Jefferson Davis Parish, by Dan O'Malley during the Lacassine Thornwell CBC. Like Ladder-backed Woodpecker, this is a "sedentary," "non-migratory" species. I often fantasized about turning one up while walking some of the more arid Cameron cheniers. Its range is temptingly close to Louisiana. But I seriously doubt it would have been anyone's prediction for the next bird to be added to the Louisiana list, especially not up in the rice fields. It would not have made my top 20.

This was an exceptional and very unexpected find[x]. Two Great Lakes records from 2004 and 2005 appear (not surprisingly) to have been met with skepticism about their origin but were eventually accepted by the bird records committees of Ontario and Wisconsin. A few other northerly outlier records (from Kansas to Utah) have occurred since. Arguably, a pattern has emerged along the Central and Upper Texas Coast, with the closest record being a wintering 2016 bird from Sea Rim, Texas, just across the border.

It is tempting to speculate about the cause of this apparently sudden-onset pattern of vagrancy. Is it because the species is doing well and young birds are prospecting new unoccupied territories? Is it because of drought or crashes in the food supply caused by other factors? Is it habitat change? In any case, add Pyrrhuloxia to the list of vagrants to search for on your next outing. **(483)**

2016

89. Short-billed Gull, January 1, Cross Lake, Shreveport, Caddo Parish, by Charlie Lyon. This was another check-off from the long list of overdue gulls. Eastern records of this Pacific wintering gull spanned the mid-continent, perhaps because it breeds in Canada as far east as the 100th Meridian, or due north of central Texas. Once it became clear that it would likely be officially split from European Common Gull, searchers began finding it in the Northeast, along with Common Gulls. However, many historical records can't now be reliably labelled as one or the other, especially given the complication that some Eastern records were

thought to be the northeast Pacific form, “Kamchatka Gull,” which is still officially classified as the easternmost ring subspecies of the Palearctic Common Gull.

Still, given the widespread pattern of occurrence across the mid-continent all the way to the Atlantic, records from the Southeast are notably few. In fact, I find no records for Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina or Florida. This Shreveport record and a subsequent record near Baton Rouge, plus one record each in North Carolina and Virginia, are all of them. In the case of Louisiana, the lack of records is not for lack of searching, as someone who has combed through countless gull flocks can attest. Both records so far have been inland, but there is no reason to believe that a bird could not turn up on the coast. **(484)**

2017

90. Limpkin, December 30, Lake Boeuf, Lafourche Parish, by Josh Sylvest, with Jeannie and Michael Maronge during the Thibodaux CBC. Ever since the appearance of exotic apple snails in Louisiana in 2006, birders have been waiting for Limpkin to arrive, predicting it, but not always totally seriously. For one thing, we did not know for sure if Florida’s Limpkin, which evolved eating a small apple snail native to south Florida, could even handle this larger species of southern South American snail. It turns out they could.

What happened next was one of the most astonishing avian events of which I am aware, and will be recounted in the next part of this series on the changes to Louisiana’s birdlife over the last fifty years. But, Josh, in a boat, experienced the excitement of discovery on that dreary winter day out in the *flotant* marsh surrounding Lake Boeuf when he found not one, but four Limpkins.

A history of vagrancy was already established, with birds as far north as Maryland to the northeast of Florida, and near Memphis, Tennessee, to the northwest. A disjunct population was established in the Florida panhandle at Wakulla Springs. The springs create a uniquely warm micro-climate, but still, the location is about the latitude of Baton Rouge, so the species must have some cold tolerance.

There was even an uncorroborated report of a bird shot in 1935 at Moss Lake, Calcasieu Parish, as recounted in Lowery.

A year after the 2017 record, more Limpkins were found near Houma, and *they were breeding*. The floodgates had opened. In 2021 it was removed from the Review List amidst the torrent of records. **(485)**

91. Lucifer Hummingbird, December 8, New Iberia, Iberia Parish, by Mike Musumeche. Surely hummingbird species number 14 was going to be Costa’s Hummingbird. Costa’s had by then begun to show up in the western Great Plains. It had been recorded in Michigan, and, importantly there were records for Alabama and Florida, birds that had surely traversed Louisiana.

But no. Confounding my expectations, the next record was of a Lucifer Hummingbird, in the yard of a veteran birder who fortuitously captured a photo during its brief visit. Lucifer’s has a tiny regular breeding presence in the U.S., regular nesting confined to the Chisos Mountains in Big Bend National Park, Texas. It is fairly regular post-breeding in southeast Arizona and southwest New Mexico, and strays slightly north of there. It is migratory, wintering in Pacific southern Mexico. It had been recorded on the Edwards Plateau and near the Lower Coast of Texas and Rio Grande Valley, but there were no known eastern strays. Other than Mike’s New Iberia record, the easternmost record in eBird was near Austin, Texas. This remains the only record in the “eastern” U.S. **(486)**

2018 (none)

2019 (none)

2020

92. Black-capped Vireo, April 21, Highway 51 near Ruddock, St. John the Baptist Parish, by Jane Patterson. Obviously, anyone predicting the most likely place to find a rare migratory songbird confined in the breeding season to the semi-arid hills of north-central Mexico, west-central and central Texas, up into Oklahoma, that winters on the arid central Pacific Coast of Mexico, would go searching for it in the middle of the largest contiguous swamp forest in North America. Jane knew this, of course; therefore, it is hardly surprising that she succeeded.

In 1974 Black-capped Vireo was in trouble, due primarily to habitat loss and alteration, which led, among other things, to heavy brood parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds. It was listed as endangered in 1987, which began a period of intensive management by Federal and State agencies, cooperating NGOs and land managers. The population, still quite small, stabilized and rebounded somewhat, so that by 2018 it was removed from the Endangered Species List.

As must be apparent, if a species migrates, or shifts nomadically seasonally or altitudinally, or irrupts in response to food shortages, or food abundance, or drought, or snow cover, the potential for it to show up as a vagrant somewhere seems almost unlimited. Nothing is more demonstrative of that amazing fact than that in April of 1991 a Black-capped Vireo was captured in a mist net on the north shore of Lake Erie at Long Point in Ontario, Canada. However, there had been no other accepted eastern records except a 2016 individual just across the river from us at Sabine Woods in Texas. A few days after Jane's sighting, the upper Texas Coast got a second record in Galveston. Incredibly, a year later, a second Louisiana individual showed up in Peveto Beach woods in Cameron, Louisiana. Does the population increase mean that vagrant records will be on an upward trend? Will Golden-cheeked Warbler be next? Stay tuned.

I would be remiss if I did not here recall that one of the most puzzling vagrant records for the northern Gulf came in 1978, when two veteran Mississippi Gulf Coast birders independently reported, from the same location, Black-capped Vireo. This was astonishing enough, but given how distinctive the species is, hard to discount. But the detailed descriptions of the two observers showed that one of them described seeing a male, and the other a female. *Two* Black-capped Vireos in Mississippi at the same place and on the same day? **(487)**

2021

93. Cassin's Finch, April 21, Grand Lake, Cameron Parish, by Suzanne McFatter. If any addition to the state list can be said to demonstrate the profound effect that digital cameras, the internet, birding smartphone applications, and social media have had on birding and detection of vagrant birds, this is it. A lone female Cassin's Finch shows up at a feeder in the Grand Lake settlement on the southern outskirts of Lake Charles. Most northern finches are long gone. It doesn't look like a House Finch. Suzanne is intrigued, takes photos and uses her Merlin App to get an I.D. She is unconvinced by the App so she searches on Facebook and finds the LOS page. She posts the photo and asks "what is this?" Several alert Louisiana experts take a look and conclude the impossible: Cassin's Finch! Kudos to Suzanne for pursuing the answer, and for being observant and skeptical enough to seek clarification when the "official" answer did not seem quite right.

Not on my list of likely vagrants. It is common and migratory. There are lots of records of what are presumably altitudinal or situational migrants showing up at lower altitudes on the periphery of the breeding range. But eastern vagrants? Well yes, barely. A bird banded at the amazing Long Point, Ontario, on the north shore of Lake Erie in August of 1990. A yard bird photographed in eastern Kansas in 2017, another at a feeder in Minnesota in April, 2018. There are extralimital records in west and central Texas.

But Suzanne's is the only record for the Southeastern U.S. **(488)**

93. Golden-crowned Warbler, October 2, Peveto Woods Sanctuary, Cameron Parish, by Charlie Lyon, with Paul Conover and Rosemary Seidler. Cameron Parish has a warbler list to rival any County or Parish in the country. There are records of every extant eastern warbler except Kirtland's, including the enigmatic Connecticut. Western warblers recorded include Black-throated Gray, Hermit, Townsend's, MacGillivray's, Virginia's, Lucy's, plus Tropical Parula, Red-faced Warbler, and Painted Redstart. Forty-five in all, not counting the homeless Yellow-breasted Chat. If you add records of the extinct Bachman's Warbler, the Louisiana list stood at 46, 98% of the 47 species known for the eastern United States. If I had been forced to predict the next warbler for Louisiana, I would have gone with Grace's Warbler, Kirtland's Warbler, Slate-throated Redstart, Golden-cheeked Warbler, or Fan-tailed Warbler, in that order.

So, of course, it was the "sedentary, non-migratory" Golden-crowned Warbler. There was, however, a faint pre-existing pattern of northern vagrancy. Though they nest no closer to the Texas border than the east slope of the Sierra Madre Oriental in Nuevo Leon about 100 miles south, there are records for the LRGV and Lower Texas Coast, and, remarkably, singles from New Mexico and Colorado (!). But there are no records for the Central or Upper Texas Coast. The Cameron record is by far the easternmost record, and the Parish warbler list stands at 46. **(489)**

2022

94. Red-legged Honeycreeper, October 13, Landry-Leblanc tract, The Nature Conservancy Lafitte Woods, Grand Isle, Jefferson Parish, by Melvin Weber. Melvin has been an active and highly skilled Louisiana birder for about 75 years, so it was entirely fitting that it was he who found the birds. There were previous records from extreme South Florida and the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, but these were so "out there" they were shrouded in uncertainty on origin—it is commonly kept as a cage bird. The Texas record was hundreds of miles north of their range in Mexico. In the case of Florida records, the Cuban population was suspected of being introduced.

But most of those suspicions were overtaken by the events of that October 13 and the rest of that Fall. Within hours of Melvin's find on Grand Isle, two individuals were recorded at a hawk watch in the Florida Keys. And within days there were additional records all over Florida, in the Bahamas, and just across the Sabine River in Texas. What had happened? On October 11, Tropical Storm Karl swirled in the Bay of Campeche, near Red-legged Honeycreeper populations in nearby Mexico. Earlier, on September 27-28 Hurricane Ian swept across the western tip of Cuba and then made landfall in southwest Florida.

We birders tend to use tropical cyclones to concoct *ex post facto* explanations for landbird vagrancy. I am generally quite skeptical. Yes, seabirds obviously get displaced by tropical cyclones. But why would a landbird, huddled down and clinging for shelter, take off and get swept along by a cyclone? Why wouldn't it just land and try to ride it out? Well, one reason would be if it was migrating over water when it got swept up in the storm, and it could not land until the storm made landfall.

Honeycreepers from Vera Cruz migrate south in the Fall. Do they fly out over the Bay of Campeche for some mysterious reason? Or, what if Red-legged Honeycreepers weren't introduced to Cuba, as has been speculated, but rather colonized the island by crossing over from the Yucatan. There is evidence that they migrate back to the Yucatan in the Fall. Did Ian somehow displace over-water migrants? The timing of T.S. Karl makes it a more tempting culprit. But if cyclones near the Yucatan displace landbirds, why hasn't this happened countless times before? I lean towards migrants over water, which occurs with less frequency than cyclone winds over land. The H. Ian hypothesis has plenty of ready objections, not least that its winds were blowing in the wrong direction to displace honeycreepers migrating across the Yucatan Channel. But T.S. Karl came nowhere near Florida or the northern Gulf Coast. Hey, I can make up a story as well as anyone else.

In any case, this remains one of the most unexpected and exciting records on the list. They stayed for eight days. There was something about seeing this spectacularly beautiful (even in basic plumage) bird, an icon of tropical America, in the familiar woods and Turk's cap patches of one of the most-birded locations in the state. This is a very familiar denizen of gardens that graces the fruit and nectar feeders at half of the ecolodges in the American tropics, but we got to see it right here at home. **(490)**

96. Slaty-backed Gull, December 21, Crowley area, Acadia Parish, by Paul Conover and Mac Myers. Lowery counted eight species of gull on his Louisiana List. Sabine's Gull was added soon after; then, one by one the list grew steadily. With Black-headed Gull we doubled the Lowery list. Lowery counted only two of the larger "white-headed" gulls, Herring and Glaucous, but we had since filled out the "expected" list, even adding the surprising Kelp Gull. With Slaty-backed Gull the list of "large white-headed" gulls grew to nine, and the total gull list to 18.

In 1974 Slaty-backed Gull was not on anyone's list. It was barely known from Alaska, and there mostly on the Bering Sea islands and western coast. Then, in the winter of 1983-84, during a "Siberian Express," a then newly coined term among weather forecasters, a Slaty-backed Gull in St. Louis caused a huge stir as a first record for the Lower 48. Birders came from around the country to check it off, despite the record cold.

This was at the height of the new gull frenzy in Louisiana, and we all began learning what we could and searching. And searching. And searching. There had been a number of disputed Louisiana sightings between 1984 and 2022 as state after state added this species to its list. But to be accurate almost all of the records were either north or west of us. Maybe we weren't finding them because they just don't stray to the southeast.

No one was more primed and prepared to recognize a Slaty-backed Gull in Louisiana than Paul and Mac. We were all waiting for a difficultly plumaged first-year or immature. Instead, they found an indisputable adult, which unfortunately disappeared a day or so later when another blast of frigid air struck. **(491)**

2023

97. *Trumpeter Swan*, February 2, Bayou D 'Arbonne, Ouachita Parish, by Steve Pagans. Trumpeter Swan was undoubtedly a regular part of the historic avifauna of Louisiana. It is clear from historical accounts that the it bred in the upper Midwest and across southern Canada, and wintered in the Lower Mississippi River Valley. And, at least facultatively (when areas to the north froze-up), to the bays of the Gulf Coast.

Audubon's plate of a young Trumpeter Swan was painted from a specimen he purchased in the stalls at the French Market in New Orleans, destined for someone's dinner table.

Like pretty much every large creature on the continent, it was heavily persecuted and its range was shrinking west and north even in the 17th Century. There was a robust trade in its feathered skins, and of course the meat was irresistible to subsistence hunters armed with guns. After the Civil War, when railroads made it possible to commercially ship preserved meat to the cities of the Eastern Seaboard, it was wiped out in the lower 48, with a tiny remnant population barely hanging on in a couple of remote locations in Wyoming and Montana.

By the time that museum-based ornithology came along, it was gone from Louisiana, already a vagrant. Lowery could find no satisfactory evidence (a specimen or photograph of known provenance) of its occurrence, but nevertheless logically retained it on the state list. So, despite its once having been common, it had to be demoted from the official state list according to the criteria being used for this account.

That's OK, because we now get to put it back on the list. This is because, due to a heroic effort to save the species from extinction, and a subsequent campaign to re-introduce the species to its historic range, we are now seeing the occasional winter record of free-flying, un-banded wild birds, assuredly coming to us from thriving re-introduced populations in the Upper Mississippi River drainages.

What a wonderful, majestic, almost primeval returnee to our state's avifauna! Seeing and hearing one in Louisiana was transformative for me, and I look forward to many more such encounters. There aren't many large animals left in North America. Thankfully, we have witnessed in Louisiana over the last fifty years the return of eagles, cranes, pelicans and storks, not to mention bears and alligators, all because Congress and Federal agencies took action in the very nick of time with a series of environmental laws. **{12} (492)**

2024

98. Snail Kite, July 5, McElroy Swamp, near Sorrento, Ascension Parish, by Jeff and Mona Hebert. Well, once apple snails had apparently managed to draw in Limpkins, Snail Kite was devoutly hoped for. Once again, we know about this first record because of social media and birding Apps, not by traditional means. Jeff and Mona did an incredible job obtaining stunning photos, determining its identity and rarity, and getting the word out. Unfortunately, because it was seen on restricted private property, there was no chance for follow-up.

We can console ourselves with the realization that this appears very unlikely to be the last of Snail Kite in Louisiana, given the Limpkin precedent.

Like most range-restricted or large insectivores or piscivores, or in this case, *gastropodivores* (?), in 1974 Snail Kites were in trouble. Not only was their food being poisoned by unregulated use of agricultural and mosquito-control chemicals, but massive government-sponsored projects to drain the Everglades north of the national park boundary for agriculture, or to divert the water for agricultural and residential or industrial use, were rendering much of Florida below Lake Okeechobee a biological desert.

But population recovery in Florida is underway because of aggressively improved water management by state and Federal agencies, with perhaps a spur by the introduced apple snails. **(493)**

99. Heermann's Gull, July 21, westside beach, Grand Isle, Jefferson Parish, by Patrick Palines. In 1974 the only records away from the Pacific coast were from Arizona in the early 1970s and New Mexico in 1919. Additional extralimital records began to accumulate with birds reaching Texas, Oklahoma, the Great Lakes, the Florida Gulf Coast, and, by 2002, the East Coast. By 2020 there were Florida Atlantic records and then the floodgates opened, with records all the way up to New England. Given how distinctive the species is in both immature and adult plumages, the many records on the East Coast likely involve only a few long-staying, and perhaps returning, wandering individuals.

But we were being unfairly bypassed by these invidious gulls, or was it our incompetence? Patrick put that to rights when he obtained, in a downpour, a "digi-binned" photo of a bird on the dredge pipe being used to pump in sand to rebuild the Grand Isle dune washed away by Hurricane Ida. Patrick was searching, unsuccessfully, for a Pomarine Jaeger that had taken up onshore residence for a few weeks. The gull could not be re-located despite other birders being on the island and getting the word, perhaps because it was on the move—presumably the same bird showed up in Gulfport, Mississippi, on July 29, and was on Ship Island the next day, for another first state record.

Why Heermann's Gulls are now straying across the continent is anybody's guess. It is not as if they were likely to have been overlooked in the past. Whether this phenomenon is a temporary blip involving a few individuals, or whether we can expect a continuation with new individuals recruited, can't yet be known. But one can hope for the latter.

Louisiana's gull list now stands at 19 species, up from eight in 1974. At least ten other species of gull have been recorded in Gulf states, although questions remain about the provenance (or i.d.) of some of them: Ivory, Gray-hooded, Gray, Belcher's, Black-tailed, Yellow-footed, Vega, European Herring, Yellow-legged and Glaucous-winged gulls. Our list will grow. **(494)**

Summary

Louisiana's list stands at 494. This includes 12 species that Lowery counted but which were demoted for lack of physical evidence. If one adds back those 12, in 1974 the Louisiana list stood at 407. The net gain is 87 species new to the state list since publication. Of those 87 species, four are introduced exotics. Subtract those four, and 83 new species of what we consider new "native" birds are believed to have arrived and been detected by verifiable means in Louisiana since Lowery.

There is a decent chance that by the time this is published another new species will have been added. After all, an astonishing ten of the 99 species on this list, or ten per cent, were found during a Christmas Bird Count: Tropical Parula, Virginia's Warbler, Varied Thrush and Painted Redstart during a Sabine NWR CBC; Zone-tailed Hawk and Mangrove Cuckoo during a New Orleans CBC; Mountain Plover and Pyrrhuloxia during a Lacassine-Thornwell CBC; Prairie Falcon during a White Lake CBC and Limpkin during a Thibodaux CBC. Never doubt the efficacy of putting lots of observers into a small area with the mission to find, identify and count every bird.

We are also just waiting on formal LBRC review of specimens and photos from Gulf pelagic trips to add Scopoli's Shearwater to the official list with a first date, perhaps revising the first date of Cory's Shearwater in the process.

Two other pelagic species from the summer of 2024 are under review as I write this.

While this account tallies first state records, the last 50 years have also seen repeat occurrences of species for which Lowery only knew of a single record, or in some cases only a single *confirmed* record. I count in this category at least 21 species. Leading the pack is Northern Wheatear, with 103 years between the 1888 specimen and October 23, 1991, when one was found in New Orleans by Jennifer and Tom Coulson. Other very exciting confirmed second state records included Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Long-tailed Jaeger, Purple Sandpiper, Little Gull, Red-necked Grebe, Leach's Storm-Petrel, Red-footed Booby, White-tailed Kite, White-tailed Hawk, Flammulated Owl, Couch's and Cassin's kingbirds, Western Wood-Pewee, Hammond's Flycatcher, Lesser Goldfinch, Brewer's and Golden-crowned sparrows, and Hermit, MacGillivray's and Lucy's warblers.

A detailed review of species for which only one record existed up until 2022, and many other matters related to this essay, by Donna Dittmann, can be found in the LBRC Newsletter https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/nab/v034n02/p00122-p00132.pdf on pages 33-35. For more details and information about review list species in Louisiana, present and past, consult the LBRC web-pages cited below.

Conclusion

It will escape no one's notice that a lot of names of first state record discoverers repeat themselves. This is no coincidence. Although not every birder goes afield with the object of finding vagrants or something new, like a first state record, many do, as do I. There is certainly something understandable and admirable about birders who just want to enjoy whatever birds they see, unfettered by listing and documentation. On the other extreme, for some it is simply a competitive game: they just want to add a tick to a list, no matter who found it, and move on to the next tick. Most birders fall somewhere nearer the center of the bell curve—searching for the thrill, thrilling in the wonder of birds, the bird for the bird, but enjoying knowing they've just scored another tick.

To those who are attracted to the kind of birding I love, with its heavy emphasis on the search for the next new bird, a few observations:

Successfully finding vagrants and new birds, in my view, requires, first, to spend as much time as possible birding. Second, that we understand that mistakes are inevitable and have the humility to accept correction, and to learn from it. Very often the key to discovering something new starts when you realize that you are wrong or that your assumptions are flawed. This is also invariably the trigger to scientific achievement—science is not advanced by people who think they already know the answers.

When eBird flags your record, the LBRC asks for documentation, or the CBC compiler follows up with you, take that challenge as an honor—you may have found or observed something exceptional. And the volunteers who develop the eBird triggers, evaluate the records for the LBRC, or edit the Christmas counts, are in their positions because of demonstrated expertise and knowledge. Swallow your pride: learn from them, and accept that no system is perfect. Yes. You may be *obviously* correct, but trust me, someone else making the same report under the same circumstances is definitely *not right*. Your task is to convince reviewers looking at the record 50 years from now.

Third, become as familiar as one can with the finer points of bird identification, by making a study of whatever tools are available to you. Looking at Apps on your phone screen is not enough. There is a lot of

digital information available online in convenient Apps, but nothing beats curling up with a book or a well-written article, however you access it.

The most important tool is learning the common and regular birds that are available in your environment. If you want to find a new gull in Louisiana, look closely at the Laughing, Franklin's, Ring-billed, Herring, Lesser Black-backed, and Bonaparte's gulls that you can find on your home turf. If you are not familiar with the incredible variety in first-year Herring Gulls, you are going to spend a lot of time trying to turn a Herring Gull into something special. (I know.)

Fourth, and this is of paramount importance, pay attention to what is going on around you, both near and far. Be ready. If you have not familiarized yourself with the ways in which birds become vagrants, you go afield with a disadvantage. After I read Lowery in 1974, I birded in a cocoon for five years, not yet having met any birders more experienced and more skilled than I was. I thought I was pretty good. But once I had the good fortune to begin spending time with veteran birders, people who found vagrants and new area or seasonal records regularly, my perspective changed. It turned out I knew next to nothing.

Thereafter, I used Lowery as a baseline. Which birds in his book had I not yet seen? I queried other birders about what I needed to do to find them. Some were easy, just knowing where, when and how to look. Reddish Egrets and Snowy Plovers are almost strictly coastal. Brown-headed Nuthatches are almost never far from mature pines. You won't find a Henslow's Sparrow in a deciduous woodlot.

I used other resources, especially journals like *North American Birds* (and its predecessors), to find out what others around me in Louisiana and adjacent states were seeing, discovering what I was missing, and then set out to learn everything I could about those birds. I spent a lot of very happy and productive time talking about birds with others, often on long drives to Grand Isle, Venice, or Cameron. All of this contributed to the most important thing of all: being prepared when you go afield to notice the unusual and unexpected. And then be humble and open to instruction when you invariably get it wrong.

Birders today have extraordinary tools. You can look up anything you want to know about a bird while you are looking at in the field. There is more in reach on your cell phone than there was in any university library fifty years ago. You can listen to recordings of its songs and calls. You can record its vocalizations with your phone, and an App will make a reasonable prediction about what it is, in many cases. You can alert other birders instantly and get reinforcements to join you in the field. Finally, you can capture photos and videos that would have been the envy of the best bird photographers in the world back in 1974, and then look at them to your heart's content and put them on social media for instant feedback from true experts (and from a lot of people who are anything but experts).

But do you want to have someone else tell you that the bird you photographed is new for your Parish, or figure it out yourself and invite others to see it?

In Part Two I hope to examine, with other veterans, the truly huge changes that have taken place in Louisiana since 1974. What was rare, or in some cases unknown, has become commonplace for many species we all now take for granted as expected. In 1988 I "chased" a report of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, driving with friends across the state to Lacassine NWR, hoping not to miss our chance. We successfully added the species to our state lists. Now, I confess I often find them just short of annoying. There are any number of birds that I now expect to see if I bird in the right place at the right time of year—Inca Dove, Swainson's Hawk, Crested Caracara, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Say's Phoebe and Cave Swallow,

to name just a few, that I chased across the state or that when I encountered them made the day or weekend special or memorable. Now I am disappointed if I miss them.

A Note on Sources

Anyone wanting to learn a great deal more about Louisiana birds should consult both Lowery and Oberholser, if you can find copies, but also the excellent resources of the Louisiana Bird Records Committee http://losbird.org/lbrc/lbrc.htm, especially the Photo Gallery and Record File http://losbird.org/lbrc/reviewlist.html, and the LBRC newsletters http://losbird.org/lbrc/LBRCNewsletters.htm.

The Louisiana Ornithological Society website http://losbird.org/ has a wealth of information including archived copies of the *LOS News* and *Journal of Louisiana Ornithology* which contain early reports of the deliberations, post-Lowery, of the LBRC, as well as relevant articles http://losbird.org/publications.php. Each of the new species outlined herein is treated on the LBRC's pages, with additional critical information.

I depended upon eBird (https://ebird.org/home) and *Birds of the World* https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/home to write this. Without them I'd have needed to spend many weeks in well-stocked university libraries, which means it would never have happened.

Admittedly, eBird is a blunt instrument. The level of record scrutiny is not quite at the level of science. Many historical records are just not there, having never been entered. But it provides an unprecedented ability for the at-home researcher to get a snapshot on any species at any temporal or spatial scale. This is astonishing. But obviously it should be understood that my summary of extralimital records outside of Louisiana is almost certainly incomplete.

Before the Hurricane Katrina flood, I owned hard copies of the latest ornithological monographs of every southeastern state, including Oberholser (*The Bird Life of Louisiana*, 1938) and all three editions of Lowery, Stanley Arthur's annotated checklist (1918), back issues of *North American Birds* (including its predecessors), back issues of *LOS News* and *The Journal of Louisiana Ornithology,* years of *Birding* magazine, the *Auk, Wilson Bulletin* and *Condor*, and many Xerox copies pirated from state ornithology journals and birding bulletins. I lost most of them and have only replaced some of them. Having eBird, *Birds of the World*, LOS and LBRC websites, and many back issues of various magazines and journals accessible online, is another of those changes to birding culture that is transformative.

Acknowledgments

I thank the members of the LBRC, past and present, for the hours of volunteer time they have dedicated to this issue over the last 46 years. I thank those birders, including Charlie Lyon, Nancy Newfield, Dave Patton, Matt Pontiff and Phillip Wallace, who answered my questions about specific records. I thank Paul Conover, Donna Dittmann, Mac Myers and Van Remsen for answering questions, reviewing multiple drafts of this manuscript, and offering helpful editing, corrections, clarifications and suggestions for improvement. I thank LOS for hosting it on their website, and for more than 75 years of providing a spiritual home for the likes of me. Finally, I thank my many long-time field companions, most of them old-timers acknowledged in these accounts, for an adulthood spent in our common pursuit and passion. And to my current field companions, many of whom will take care of the next fifty years of new first state records, my heartfelt gratitude.

Mistakes are my own. If any of you with first-hand knowledge notice omissions or mistakes, please let me know.

[i] https://www.stateofthebirds.org/2022/

[ii] Lowery's 1955 Edition of *Louisiana Birds* counted 377 species; the 1960 second edition, 387 species.

[iii] But see House Finch account. I am not sure "natural origin" can be ruled out for that first record, though I am quite sure that most of our subsequent House Finches were from the invasive eastern horde.

[iv] See *The Auk*: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=20701&context=auk

[v] Cardiff, S. W., D. Loria, W. Yong. 1991. First Louisiana and easternmost U.S. record of Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*). Jour. Louis. Orn. 1 (2): 48-53.

[vi] https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/nab/v041n03/p00370-p00371.pdf

[vii] https://gull-research.org/papers/04chandeleur.pdf

[viii] https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/nab/v041n05/p01371-p01380.pdf

[ix] https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/nab/v034n02/p00122-p00132.pdf

[x] And O'Malley, in his excitement, failed miserably to communicate with important individuals (i.e., me) birding just a couple of miles away, about what he had found.