

The Changing Seasons:

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The numbers

June and July were warm, as one expects—globally, the eighth warmest June and fifth warmest July since 1880. For the Lower 48 United States, it was merely the twenty-seventh warmest June since 1895, partly because the Northern Great Plains, Minnesota, and Pacific Northwest were cooler than average, while the East and South sweltered, and July's overall rank was just thirtieth, as the Midwest was cooler than usual that month. June rainfall patterns were disparate, as usual: floods were widespread in the rainy Midwest, while the Southern Great Plains, Southeast, and West were drier than normal—the fourth driest June on record in California, the continuation of a terrible three-year drought. July precipitation in New England and the Midwest was much above average, with continued flooding in Iowa, whereas the Southeast remained in drought and Idaho had its sixth driest July on record. Large wildfires in California, Arizona, Texas, North Carolina, and Oklahoma brought the year's total through July to three and a half million acres burned, not far off the recent average, but California had the lion's share of that loss.

Most of southern Canada, the southern Yukon, and Alaska reported a “cool, wet” summer. June and July in northern Québec and across much of Arctic Canada, however, were unusually warm months—more than 4° Celsius above normal in Nunavik, for instance. Pierre Bannon and team in Québec write that “the extraordinary fair weather in northern Québec probably resulted in an excellent breeding season for passerines nesting far north. On the other hand, flooding due to the late melting of the snow created poor breeding conditions in June for ducks in the south and in the boreal forest.” In southern Alberta, write Rudolf Koes and Peter Taylor, “the large amount of moisture wreaked havoc with the nesting success of Canada Geese, American Coots, and probably other species.” In contrast to southern Canada, the Beaufort Sea coast had “a sizzling hot early summer, with a rapid retreat of sea ice,” according to Cameron Eckert. Overall, the Northern Hemisphere sea ice extent ranked third lowest for June and the fourth lowest for July since records began in 1979. (The extent of Arctic sea ice in July has decreased by 6.1 percent per decade since 1979.)

Tropical storm activity was noteworthy for the two-month summer season. Hurricane



These nesting Mississippi Kites were the toast of Newmarket, New Hampshire—and the Internet sensation of the summer of 2008 (here 25 June). New England's summer was well warmer than average, in the top ten percent of June–July periods since 1895. On 24 July, New Hampshire was visited by something almost as rare as nesting kites: an EF-2 tornado that claimed one life. Are the expanding ranges of such birds and the increase in violent weather events both products of a warming planet? Photographs by Mark Szantyr.

Bertha formed in the tropical Atlantic Ocean on 3 July and was the longest-lived, pre-August Atlantic tropical cyclone ever recorded, becoming extra-tropical on 20 July. On that day, Hurricane *Dolly* developed in the Caribbean Sea; it made landfall as a Category 2 hurricane at South Padre Island, Texas two days later. *Dolly* was the most intense tropical cyclone to make U.S. landfall since Hurricane *Wilma* of 2005 (but see the autumn 2008 Changing Seasons

essay). Heavy rain from *Dolly* brought relief from drought to parts of the Southwest and southern Texas but also brought flash floods that caused extensive damage in New Mexico and landslides in Guatemala, which killed 21 people. El Niño–Southern Oscillation conditions transitioned into a neutral phase during June and continued neutral through July in the tropical Pacific Ocean, ending the La Niña event that began in mid-2007.

Summer without surprises



Warming and wetlands

Some of the most charismatic avian wayfarers in this warming climate have been Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. Though still unrecorded from areas well into the boreal belt, they have reached southern Canada several times, and the frequency of their extralimital visits has increased sharply since the 1990s. The proliferation of records has not been surprising to observers in Florida and Texas, where each season turns up new high counts and new locations for this species. But nesting in Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee, only a few years old, seems cer-

tain to expand to new areas, and counts in Mississippi and Alabama—with all-time-largest flocks of 125 and 12, respectively, this season—continue to climb each year. As populations in Georgia and South Carolina also increase, nesting in North Carolina seems only a few years away. This season's records from areas north of breeding states were legion: Massachusetts (the flock coming southward from Nova Scotia!), Illinois (two flocks), Indiana (one), Iowa, Nebraska (its sixth record), and Bermuda (its first). Nesting in some of these areas may be just around the corner.

Just a decade ago, we dutifully researched the possibility of captive provenance for these whistling-ducks out of range. And indeed, in areas far from core range, we should continue to do so: a Black-bellied in Connecticut this season was confirmed as an escapee from a waterfowl collection. But the great majority of these birds must be wild. Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, though not recorded out of range with the frequency of Black-bellieds, have been slowly increasing in some parts of range (mostly in the western Gulf Coast), and this season, Fulvous appeared in Kentucky (second state record) and Missouri (three locations), plus in California and Arizona, where records have been increasing recently. Mottled Duck, another southern specialty, is expanding inland in Louisiana and Mississippi, and records from southern Oklahoma (where becoming regular), Ontario, and Tennessee this season attest to their capacity for further expansion. But what about the White-cheeked Pintails in North Carolina (9 July, Ferry Slip Island) and Texas (through 17 July, near Temple) this season? Or the Masked Duck in northern Texas at near Seagoville 14-25 June? These tropical species are clearly able to make long-distance flights, as attested by older records of wild birds. Time will tell if they become the new whistling-ducks. (Anyone care to wager on whether a Muscovy Duck from the increasing Mexican population will turn up in Louisiana before too long?)

Not all of this summer's waterfowl records were of southern species moving northward. Maine documented its first nesting of Red-head, and Common Mergansers, often with broods, were found in Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, all parts of historical breeding range but south of most areas of regular nesting. One might say that these exceptions prove the general rule of northward expansion, but a changing climate is a complex, dynamic phenomenon, and some of the more adaptable northern species may be able to take advantage of some aspects of climate change and expand, even southward. We should pay particular attention to such species, to the kinds of habitats they occupy, and to their nesting successes or failures. This journal welcomes summary papers on species whose ranges are changing rapidly, in whatever fashion.

I have often wondered over the past

decade why it should be that Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks have been recorded in such numbers in the United States but other species one might expect to flank them en masse in northward movements—particularly the larger wading birds, so abundant in the Gulf Coast states—have not been reported as widely, despite their conspicuousness. This season's records provided more food for thought. Great White Heron, a bird of southernmost Florida (and some parts of the Caribbean), was found in Tennessee, Virginia, Alabama, and Georgia this season, probably a record flight for this subspecies of Great Blue Heron. The intergrade of Great Blue and Great White—known as Würdemann's Heron—nested for the first time in the Florida Panhandle. Reddish Egrets, continuing a recent trend, flew north to Virginia (first documented record) and Nebraska (its second), while Roseate Spoonbill reached Tennessee (with nesting anticipated in Georgia), and White Ibis made it to Utah and Indiana. None of these records are as startling as the discovery of a Jabiru in Louisiana, an adult found in near Charenton and near Ramah, 27 and 31 July, respectively. Although birders found a Jabiru in Mississippi in 2007, the shock effect has yet to wear off in 2008, even if the species nests sparingly in several Mexican states along the Gulf, only a 1000-kilometer flight from the U.S. border. In the Midwest and Northeast, though few of the glamorous tropical/subtropical species made appearances this season, strong showings by Glossy Ibis were the rule, and there were significant northerly records of White Ibis, Tricolored Heron (nesting in Massachusetts; Iowa's sixth), White-faced Ibis (second Iowa nesting), and Wood Stork (steadily increasing as a nester in North Carolina). Among southerly pelicaniforms, Brown Pelicans made it to Connecticut, Idaho (its first), and inland Oregon, a Red-footed Booby to Texas (its third ever), and Neotropic Cormorants to Illinois, Oklahoma (nesting), and Utah (its second record). Brown Booby appears to be increasing as a visitor to Texas and California, and Masked Booby records are also subtly increasing, though some recent reports are left unidentified to species level (Masked/Nazca Booby).

None of these records amount to the whistling-duck-like barnstorm I have expected in the wading species, and most amount to gradual rather than explosive trends. Perhaps the gathering of nearly 1700 large wading birds in Fremont County, Iowa is a clue. This gold mine was not at some random tempo-

rary stopover spot—the tiny farm pond or strip mall's borrow pit that often host Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. These birds were gathered at Forney Lake Wildlife Management Area, a site that provided not just optimal foraging habitat but also nesting and roosting habitat. Such sites are not nearly as common as developed ponds, and though scarce, they tend to be far more productive for birds than steep-sided “lakes” created for capturing storm run-off or for alleged aesthetic appeal: those sites can be productive for waterfowl and a few waders for several years, then decline rapidly in quality, as pollutants change pH levels. Forney Lake had trouble with water retention several years ago, during dry years, and so the lakebed was disked and compacted, to aid in water retention. Natural wetlands and even wetlands that were created or “improved” to mitigate destruction of natural wetlands are far, far more attractive to wading birds than are the glorified ditches of suburbia. Good examples of managed wetlands that have attracted some of the rarer fare reported recently include The Nature Conservancy's Kankakee Sands in Indiana, Arcata Marsh in northern California, Fern Ridge Reservoir in Oregon, and Whitewater Lake Wildlife Management Area in Manitoba. Even small preserves, like Bermuda's Spittal Pond, can be magnificent magnets for wetland species if they are managed with birds in mind (Spittal often suffers damage from hurricanes). Better wetlands, it would seem, hold a greater diversity of water birds, and conditions at these wetlands can change with improved management, viz. the very high counts of Pied-billed Grebe, Common Moorhen, and American Coot from Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in upstate New York this summer, counts that were unthinkable in the 1980s through the mid-1990s.

Birders, now better connected and more curious than ever about what such sites hold, have been increasingly diligent about checking interior wetlands, including large reservoir complexes and their margins and also ephemeral wetlands that crop up during wet cycles, and so it can be difficult to argue in some cases that records of rarer species—particularly less-conspicuous species—indicate range expansion rather than increased observer effort. Black Rail, for instance, was found in two Ohio counties (two birds each), at Illinois Beach, Illinois, and at Bahía San Quintín, Baja California. King Rail was found breeding in West Virginia, for the first time since 1963. How many such birds have

gone undetected in the past? Or have efforts to restore wetlands and wetland quality finally paid off, with species such as Black Rail returning to haunts used in the distant past? Wilson's Phalarope, whose gradual decline in the East as a migrant has been noted many times in this journal, appeared in several surprising sites this summer: an adult performing a distraction display was seen in West Virginia (where nesting has never been documented), a nest was discovered in Kentucky (its first), 11 summered in coastal South Carolina, and seven were seen in mid-June in coastal Virginia, both in locations that could probably support nesting. Bermuda's birders found a Wilson's Phalarope as well, a rarity there. Do these recent glimmers bode well for the rails or the phalarope? Might we see a surge in extralimital nesting attempts like that documented in Black-necked Stilt over the past 15 years? We will surely never see a gathering of 140,000 Wilson's Phalaropes in the East, such as birders found at Lake Albert, Oregon this season, but an eastern breeding population perhaps could mitigate some of the losses in the Midwestern population. What sorts of conditions would be required for such a range extension, if it is even possible?

The warming climate almost certainly has some effect on both the northward dispersal of southerly nesters and on their ability to establish populations in new areas. But these effects—or hypothetical effects—are surely uneven among species, far from a uniform northward advancement of dispersal limits and nesting range. Part of the idiosyncratic nature of these northward movements relates to geography and habitat: suitable habitat simply isn't available for many wetland species, especially away from major river systems and reservoirs. Montane areas are generally unsuitable, and so most dispersants are found from the Great Plains eastward and away from highland areas in the East, though exceptions are steadily increasing, especially with increased birding at remote reservoirs. Habitat specialists, such as Reddish Egret or Roseate Spoonbill, are probably less able to find productive foraging areas than are habitat generalists such as White Ibis and Neotropic Cormorants, species that can be found foraging on school lawns and in golf course's water traps, respectively, in many parts of their ranges. (Great White Herons, though restricted in range, appear to have no difficulty settling into diverse habitats out of range, even in mountain areas, where they forage much like Great Blues.) And the com-

plex interactions of wetland species, too, must limit expansion of some birds: moorhens avoid introduced swans, and Black Rails appear to suffer declines when Great Blue Heron populations burgeon, as they have in the Chesapeake Bay region for the past several decades. There are certainly many more factors involved, but as we begin to track the uneven advancement of so many species beyond their past ranges, we should make careful note of what habitats are occupied and for how long—and possibly also note any interactions among the wetland species present. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks may have greater flexibility in their selection of habitats, and greater tolerance of human activities in close proximity, than many wetland species, so their visibility (also a product of their distinctiveness) in recent years is quite high relative to the actual number of birds recorded out of range. It remains to be seen how far their spread goes; most of the world's species of whistling-duck show decades-long patterns of expansion followed by equally long or longer periods of range contraction. And it will be interesting, too, to see whether their spread has an impact on other cavity-nesting species, particularly Wood Duck.

Larids

Most of the information on nesting gulls and terns in the summer reports comes from coastal colonies, where tern populations overall are generally holding steady or declining (good news if you're a minnow) and where gull populations are mostly increasing (bad news if you're a tern or plover chick). Though some expansion has been southward, such as that of Great Black-backed Gull, most wanderers and expanders in this group make headlines for being either north of normal or inland, rather than on the coast. In the latter category, New Mexico's first Gull-billed Tern, Michigan's second Heermann's Gull, and single Western Gulls in eastern Washington and in Utah were highlights of summer 2008. Royal Tern, like Brown Pelican, has a patchy history of wandering in the interior; one in Tennessee (without a tropical storm to move it there) was arguably less expected than one in Nova Scotia. Two Sandwich Terns well offshore in Newfoundland waters were more unexpected than Newfoundland's first Roseate Tern; Sandwich Tern apparently nested in New Jersey for the first time, the northernmost nesting in North America (is Long Island the next stop?). In the West, this season's Laughing Gulls in Washington and New Mexico fall into a strengthening pattern, over a

decade old, as does the Black-tailed Gull in Washington. Among tropical species, Texas's Brown Noddy records have begun to increase suddenly, and Bridled Terns are turning up onshore in odd locations on both ocean coasts in recent years. But what happened to the vaunted Kelp Gull invasion?

Raptors

Among raptors, the poster-bird of expanding species has been Mississippi Kite, whose appearances in the northern tier of the United States and in southernmost Canada over the past three decades are well catalogued in this journal. In the West, too, records out of range have increased lately—drifters in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Baja California were seen this season. Still, few observers were prepared for *three* nestings of the species in New England, one in Connecticut and two in New Hampshire: based on my reading of Internet exchanges, these events seem to mark an emotional, if not intellectual, turning point in many birders' broad perception of the warming planet and its presumed consequences on birdlife. These kites could nest in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., but they were still in the "South," by a few miles. New Hampshire is not the South, and these kites didn't just pass overhead, lazily down the coast, one day—these active, attractive birds became part of the nesting avifauna of northern New England. (What's more, the kites may have nested in Newmarket in 2004: see Wayne Petersen's "SA" column in the New England regional report.) Bob Paxton, writing the summer's report for the Hudson-Delaware region, cites the failure of New York, New Jersey, and Delaware birders to locate a kite nest as "almost embarrassing" in light of the New England nestings (a gauntlet cast there), but there are large gaps between breeding areas of this species, particularly at the edges of its expanding range: Virginia's known locations are 230 kilometers apart, for instance. So it's likely that we'll see this so-called leap-frogging pattern for years to come, before other suitable areas between these sites are occupied. Meanwhile, keep the binoculars pointed to the sky, anywhere there are dragonflies!

Still lagging far behind the patterns of Mississippi Kite, Swallow-tailed Kite has been gaining ground lately, as two records from Québec (its third and fourth) suggest. White-tailed Kite appears to be expanding and exploring mostly west of the Mississippi River, with significant reports from Nebraska, Nevada, and Louisiana this season. In addition

to an increase in extralimital reports of virtually all "border-state" raptors in recent years (Gray, White-tailed, Short-tailed, Zone-tailed, and Harris's Hawks, Common Black-Hawk), Crested Caracara has shown powerful tendencies to explore far beyond its twentieth-century range, and one was in Woodson County, Kansas in late July. But raptors of southern affinity are not the only ones in the news. Summering, sometimes nesting Sharp-shinned Hawks are being reported with increasing frequency in these pages lately (Arkansas, Nebraska, Texas this season); Cooper's Hawks are nesting in more and more new areas (many of the locations suburban or urban); and Merlins, continuing their spread to the south and east, nested this season in Pike County, Pennsylvania and out on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Some theorize that the increases in accipiters and falcons are enabled by their increasing tolerance of human activity near the nest, such as has been observed in Bald Eagle, following centuries of persecution, but others credit the proliferation of competent naturalists in both remote areas and more densely settled areas. Whatever the constellation of factors that permit some species to nest in more and more areas, while others appear only as occasional visitors, it would be very interesting to look more closely at groups of birds by family, to see which species in those families show the most dynamic patterns of range extension, however we choose to define that. It would stand to reason that species with the most specialized prey and habitat needs would show the weakest patterns, while the less-specialized species show the strongest. Arguably, Swallow-tailed Kite is a bit more specialized than Mississippi Kite, which is also much more likely to accept nest sites in suburban neighborhoods. The far more specialized Snail Kite would seem unlikely to gain a toehold north of Florida, unless its diet of aquatic snails could be modified.

Passerines and near-passerines

Land birds showed muted patterns of expansion, mostly to the north, that mirrored those of the raptors, seabirds, and wetlands birds this season—that is, mostly a gradual process of small, sometimes consolidating range extensions (e.g., Clay-colored Sparrow, Bronzed Cowbird), with a few more outliers and overshoots, many of them now expected, such as White-winged Dove, which visited Newfoundland (two birds), Ontario, Massachusetts, Maine, Pennsylvania, the Dakotas, Montana, and Washington this summer.

(The banding code WWDO occurs even more frequently in my notes on distributional changes than BBWD—and only slightly less often than ECDO.) And speaking of colared-doves, singles at Ketchikan, Alaska and at Teslin, Yukon Territory this season defined this colonizer's northern limits thus far (it will be interesting to see how much farther north they will go!), but another *Streptopelia*, an Oriental Turtle-Dove that visited Whitehorse in the Yukon 30 July, had flown at least 6000 kilometers to reach this most unexpected location.

Conspicuousness is certainly a factor in detection of such rarities: just ask the non-birder who discovered Louisiana's Jabiru: he photographed it, correctly identified it using online resources, and contacted the state records committee online! Among passerines, brightly colored birds tend to garner the most attention by birders and non-birders alike, and it helps that some of these gaudy birds are attracted to feeding stations. This season's stunners included Newfoundland's first Painted Bunting, Iowa's third Painted Bunting, Montana's fourth Northern Cardinal, Labrador's first Blue Grosbeak (another in Montana was its seventh), Texas's seventh Flame-colored Tanager, and Arizona's sixteenth Yellow Grosbeak. Other pioneers found north of usual breeding areas are less conspicuous but often detected by distinctive songs: Swainson's Warblers in Ohio, West Virginia, and Illinois; Alaska's second Vesper Sparrow; South Dakota's third Cassin's Sparrow; Herschel Island, Yukon's first White-throated Sparrow; Nova Scotia's first summer White-eyed Vireo. (Arizona's Crescent-chested Warbler, a colorful but remarkably unobtrusive species, was apparently located by its buzzy, unremarkable song and so gets points for subtlety.) Many, but by no means most, of these species have shown obvious northward range expansion, some of these going back a very long time (Northern Cardinal), others much more recent (Painted Bunting). It is probably often true that pioneers outside of core range are coming from populations that are *increasing*: the Kirtland's Warbler that tried to set up shop in Maine's Kennebec Plains 2 June was the product of a population that has grown very steadily and indeed has broken records annually for some time now: record-high counts are coming from Wisconsin as well as Michigan now. Such a lost bird is not attempting to reoccupy former range, but the Cerulean Warbler in northeastern Texas at Caddo Lake, Marion County, was in an area that held the species in the 1930s

(though the date of the record, 15 July, likely indicates a migrant). In this context, one wonders about the Burrowing Owls in two Ohio counties, the state's fourth and fifth ever: did historical range of the western subspecies extend so far east before European settlement?

Despite much ongoing bird atlas work, we read relatively little in this issue about population trends in land birds at the state level. In Indiana, observers note that the ratio of Black-billed Cuckoo to Yellow-billed has changed drastically since 1999, with Black-billed now twice as scarce, in relative terms, as during the previous century. An active Maryland birder, however, located 13 Black-billeds in a day in one county, so one wonders about the larger picture with this retiring species. Golden-winged Warblers were mentioned as decreasing in most eastern localities but as doing well in southern Manitoba and on Manitoulin Island, Ontario.

Birders on a backcountry expedition in Baja California Sur documented nesting of Whip-poor-will at La Laguna, and others—also Mexican birds?—were in Humboldt County, California and in Green Canyon, Cache County, Utah, the state's first. If some of these birds are sallying northward from Mexico's mountains, how many other stealthy birds are doing the same? Normally birds of mid-elevation canyons, a pair of Elegant Trogons slipped into the Arizona lowlands at Sweetwater in June: is it unreasonable to think this species could turn up in southern California or southern Colorado? Vagrant hummingbirds (or, as one old chum calls them, "ho-hummingbirds"), which used to cause us palpitations, are now sort of "filling in the blanks," as the same chum likes to call it—turning up in states that lie adjacent to (or between) states that already have records. True, we haven't had a "new" hummingbird north of Mexico in quite some time now (Green-breasted Mango, in 1988, was the most recent addition to the American Birding Association list). Michigan added to its haul of Green Violet-ear records with two more this summer, while Wisconsin had one; Broad-tailed Hummingbird was at last confirmed in Missouri; and Broad-billed turned up for a third time in Georgia. Woodpeckers out of range are far fewer than hummingbirds, though most have a much longer history of wandering, as Wisconsin's Lewis's Woodpecker and Oregon's Red-headed Woodpecker—both state thirds—reaffirmed.

As is true of raptors and water birds, not all

expansions or explorations of land birds were northward. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was documented nesting in Rhode Island for the first time this summer, and Golden-crowned Kinglet was found singing in Georgia, a state for which there are no nest records. Georgia also had probable nesting Pine Siskins, hardly a shock following their exodus and subsequent nesting well south of usual, in northern Texas, eastern Colorado, and Albuquerque, New Mexico. White-winged Crossbills, poised for a grand flight, started wandered southward in spring and summer and nested in southern Ontario, central New York, and Vermont; they were also found apparently nesting in the Brighton area of Salt Lake County, Utah. Common Ravens nested in Ohio for the first time (that we know of) in one hundred years, and a Carolina Chickadee entertained birders in Kendall, Florida, 200 kilometers south of the southernmost known nesters in eastern Florida. Again, though these records all have some precedent and context, and pale in comparison to the northward march of southern land birds, they should be monitored carefully for what they can tell us about changing habitats, habits, and climate. Despite excellent computer simulations of how habitats may change with increasing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, we cannot substitute projections for careful field observations, which will, in the aggregate, probably never fail to surprise us.

Saison sans surprises

This essay's title must have been tongue-in-cheek. Although no single bird record was without context or prediction—even the Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher had been predicted, while other rarities were "merely" a few polities beyond previous records—local birders still register shock and awe on seeing, for instance, Mississippi Kites nesting in New Hampshire, almost 700 kilometers from the (then) presumed northernmost nesting station in the East. Certainly, dozens of writers had forecast the event, some over a decade ago. But New Hampshire birders may still lay legitimate claim to their surprise. So too the lucky folks in Maine who watched a singing Kirtland's Warbler; the Californians who took in the adult Bridled Tern at the Salton Sea; the Iowa birders who ogled a Yellow-billed Loon on 15 July in Tama County; the hardcore Alaskan crews on St. Paul Island and Attu Island who found Rufous-tailed Robins (only one previous North American record); and the researchers in Vermont who confirmed

hybridization between Bicknell's Thrush and Veery—this last example perhaps a hint of things to come, as montane habitats metamorphose in response to climate change.

Rarity is relative and surprise subjective. Even still, at this point in the maturity of the birding community, I wonder if we should be shocked or surprised by, well, anything; even the rare storm-petrels countenanced in our articles in this issue have some precedent, albeit mostly as sight records, in North American waters. Our wonder and jubilation at the appearance of a bird out of place or time, or both, sometimes reminds me of that throng of ecstatic Los Angeles revelers who hail the spaceships from high-rises in the film *Independence Day*—they realize too late that the arrival of aliens is an auspicious event but not a particularly good one for the welcoming committee's long-term survival. While I feel strongly that we should not mix dread or anxiety into our birding, perhaps we should temper our enthusiasm for kites, whistling-ducks, and Jabirus and consider the possibility that along with the additions to our local and regional checklists, we may end up soon forfeiting species we now consider reliable old friends: species dependent on coastal marshes and barrier islands, habitats that may be unsuitable or absent if sea levels continue to rise; species that nest in the Arctic, where habitats are changing quite rapidly, and migrate through our parts of the world; and species that nest at lower latitudes only at higher elevations, where habitats are also changing.

Birders, more so than other natural historians and more so than almost any other group of citizens, are in a unique position to perceive the changing ranges of bird species and to take personal and political action to slow the warming of the planet. We may not all agree that this warming process is entirely anthropogenic: but how many of us are willing to gamble everything by doing nothing? What is the potential price of inaction versus the cost of action? Just as the current economic situation in the United States, and many other countries, is without precedent in most of our lifetimes, so too is the climate's warming trend is something utterly new to all of us. We may tire of reading, season after season, of White-winged Doves and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, but they, and many other species, compel us to pay close attention to the changes around us and to refuse complacency. Our deep awareness, our witnessing these changes carries within it an imperative to action. 🌱