THE Fledgling

FIRST ISSUE!

THE MENTOR'S CORNER

BY SCOTT WEIDENSAUL

BASIC SPARROW IDENTIFICATION

LEARN HOW TO IDENTIFY SOME OF THE MOST CHALLANGING SPECIES

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A Letter from The Editor

Welcome to the debut issue of The Fledgling! Even though the chief intention of this magazine is to give young birders (under the age of 21) a chance to network and grow their birding and writing skills, this magazine does so much more. It serves as an important tool for birders of any age, helping them connect with, mentor, and even learn from up-and-coming leaders in the fields of biology, ornithology, and conservation.

This magazine has been founded by the young birders of the American Birding Association's Young Birder of the Year Mentoring Program (YBYMP). Early in the year 2020, several young birders and I noticed an unrealized niche for a magazine written by and intended for young birders. Even at its conception, the idea received fantastic support and response. With help from the American Birding Association and many other great people, The Fledgling was able to spread its wings. As a result of the hard work of many individuals, you are now reading the first issue of the magazine; the first of hopefully many to come.

No matter where you come from, your age, and your particular birding interests, this magazine holds a place for everyone. Please take a moment and become acquainted with the regular and guest contributors features on pages 3-4. From there, consider learning more about the exploits of young birders in the regular and well compiled News and Notes column. Learn about the intricacies of identifying Sparrows (or LBJs – Little Brown Jobs) from Weston Barker, who offers sound advice and new angles on this perennially challenging issue. Northern Saw-Whet Owls, as well as the birds a Caribbean island make appearances. In this issue, you will also learn about the tremendous effect mentoring has on young birders as you read Scott Weidensaul's piece in the first installment of "The Mentor's Corner" and concluding this magazine is "Tailfeathers" a regular column by Gracie McMahon.

The Fledgling is only spreading its wings, and only you, the reader, can make it fly. If you are an adult, please share the magazine with your birding friends, family, and especially young birders. If you are a young birder, please share with all your birding friends. Young birders are always welcome to contribute their writing, photos, and illustrations.

Lastly, thank you for reading the Fledgling. On behalf of all the young birders who are part of this, I greatly appreciate it. I look forward to producing many more issues of the Fledgling, as I hope you look forward to reading them!

Editor

P.S. We welcome letters of praise, constructive criticism, or other general commentary. A selection of the letters we receive will be published in each subsequent issue. Please email thefledglingmag@gmail.com to send feedback.

Production Team

William Young, Editor

William Young, a 17-year-old from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is an avid birder. He is interested in all aspects of ornithology, biology, and science in general. William is a high school student and an Eagle Scout. He is researching and writing a book about Ted Parker III, a trailblazing neo-tropical ornithologist. William's other work has appeared in Bird Watcher's Digest and Birding Magazine.

Chelsea Mosteller, Content and Layout

Chelsea Mosteller is a 17-year-old birder from Columbia, Missouri. She's been birding since she was very young, and started taking it seriously three years ago after witnessing a blackburnian warbler in the spring. Aside from birding she loves art and is interested in other nature subjects, such as bugs and botany.

Tony Belejack, Assistant Editor

Tony Belejack is a 13-year-old bird-watcher from Connecticut. He began birdwatching at age 10. His hobbies include watching Nascar, college football, hunting and fishing. His favorite bird is the Golden-cheeked Warbler.

Ronan Nicholson, News and Notes

16-year-old Ronan Nicholson is a bird illustrator and photographer. When not birding, he enjoys hiking, swimming, and traveling. He has visited over twenty states in the past three years, was the Young Birder of the Year for 2019 and received scholarships to attend bird camps all over the United States.

Gracie McMahon, Tailfeathers Column

Gracie McMahon is a 14-year-old birder from Rockford, Illinois. She was named the American Birding Association's Young Birder of the Year in 2020! Gracie is heavily involved in her local banding station, Sand Bluff Bird Observatory, collecting over 200 volunteer hours a year. She has also been featured in The Daily Herald and the Washington Post.

Hannes Leonard, Web Designer

Hannes Leonard is a 18-year-old birder, photographer, and sailor from Texas. An avid traveler, he spent seven years living and travelling on a sailboat including fifteen months in the Caribbean. While he loves to watch any and all birds, his favorites are seabirds, woodpeckers, and birds of the Caribbean. He currently lives in the UK south of London.

Silas Powell, Book Reviews

Silas Powell is a 13-year-old birder who lives near Boone, North Carolina in the Appalachian Mountains. His spark bird was probably the Swallow-Tail-Kite. He has been fortunate to have had the chance to bird in many places. Because of his Dad's job, he has lived twice in Europe and once in Mexico, along with North Carolina and Florida.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTERS

Weston Barker

is a 16-year-old birder from Sagadahoc County, Maine with a strong interest in bird photography and illustration. He enjoys exploring complex subjects such as avian anatomy, topography, molt, and fine scale identification and has written for several local birding publications (including Birding magazine), and placed second in the Illustration category of the 2019 Young Birder of the Year contest

Phillip Salzinger

Is a young birder from Georgia. He had been birding since 2017 and quickly became obsessed. He now co-leads his school's bird club and is passionate about introducing people to the world of birding.

Katie Warner

is a 13-year-old young birder from Vancouver, Washington. Her spark bird was a California Scrub-Jay who visited a window feeder she set up several years ago. She loves how birding takes people outside and to experience something new. She is very interested in photography and loves to take photos of all the birds she sees.

Adrianna Nelson

has been an avid birder since she was nine years old when she saw a Dark-eyed Junco hopping around her yard. She is a biology major at Appalachian State University and is beginning a research project studying songbird behavior. Adrianna is the 2020 Young Birder of the Year. She also enjoys learning about plants, amphibians, lichens, and lepidopterans.

Scott Weidensaul

is an author and researcher who has written more than 30 books, including his newest, "A World on the Wing," about global bird migration. He is a co-founder of Project SNOWstorm, tracking snowy owls, and the Northeast Motus Collaboration, expanding wildlife telemetry in the East, among other projects. He and his wife live in New Hampshire.

Yellow-rumped Warbler by Chelsea Mosteller

Young Birder Achievements

I saw my lifer Evening Grosbeak on November 17th, 2020 in Watauga County, North Carolina. It showed up at a local birder's home, and she invited other bird watchers to come see it. This female stayed just long enough so I could snap some pictures!

-Adrianna Nelson 19

My family took a trip to the South Carolina/Georgia border on December 12, 2020. After looking in a few places, I found my target bird, Bonaparte's Gull which was also my 300th year bird for 2020 at Singing Pines Recreation Area in South Carolina. On the same trip, earlier in the day, we visited Georgia, which was the 20th state I've been to.

-Ronan Nicholson 15

This bird had been continuing along the main road at Bosque Del Apache NWR for a few weeks now, so once I got to 399 on my life list, I finally decided to chase it. Northern Shrike is bird that I've always wanted to see, so it made for a great #400. One Saturday I got down there in the mid-morning the Northern Shrike was the third species I saw on the refuge. It was unusually cooperative, sitting in a tree, and allowing me to approach within 10-15 feet! I used the car as a blind and got some nice photos of it. It was certainly a great experience with a great bird for a great milestone.

-Owen Sinkus 15

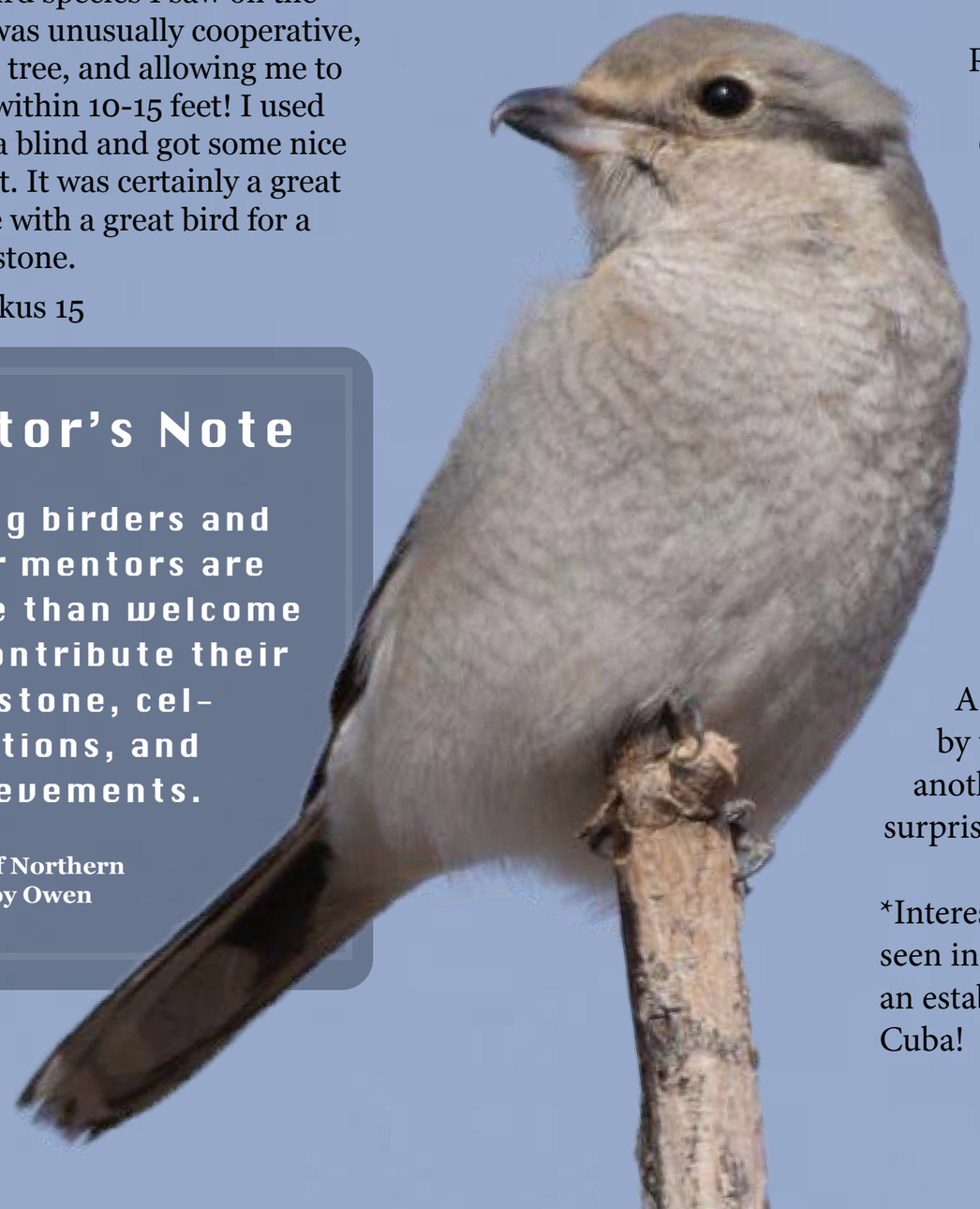
Editor's Note

Young birders and their mentors are more than welcome to contribute their milestone, celebrations, and achievements.

Photo of Northern Shrike by Owen Sinkus

ABA Checklist updates:

The following are recent ABA Checklist updates. In other words, these birds have been either newly confirmed as a first ABA record from a sighting in recent years, are newly established exotics in the ABA area, or from other changes that adds or removes a species.



Pallas's Gull - West Aleutians, AK May 2, 2019

Common Wood Pigeon - Quebec, CA May 9, 2019

Tricolored Munia - Florida Keys, FL December 17, 2013*

Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler - Gambell Is, AK September 9-12, 2019

Mexican Duck - Southwest US, AZ, NM, TX. Newly split from Mallard. Formerly "Mexican" Mallard subspecies

The official ABA Area Checklist now comprises of 1120 species

A Eurasian Sparrowhawk is under review by the ABA Checklist Committee along with another possible addition to the list. Don't be surprised to see this on the list next year!

*Interestingly, the vagrant Tricolored Munias seen in the Florida Keys in current years are from an established population in the West Indies and Cuba!

Getting to Know the Northern Saw-whet Owl

-Adrianna Nelson-

We set off down the Blue Ridge Parkway, silently traveling under a star-spangled sky and brilliant crescent moon. I could already tell that it was going to be a great night for owling. It was finally clear - no wind, no rain, no fog. It was perfect. At our first stop, we stood silently at the forest's edge, enclosed by the dark silhouette of trees. We played the classic "toot-toot-toot" calls, and heard no response. Not discouraged, we headed to another overlook, which was supposedly a fantastic area to find saw-whets. We broadcasted yet another round of calls and, again, received nothing but silence. We anxiously headed to our last stop for the night. We had a clear view of the lake from the parking lot, with moonlight reflecting off of its still surface. The dense forest darkened the edges of the water, creating an eerie setting for our owl hunt. This time, an owl-like bark tore the silence. We hurried to the tree line with our binoculars and flashlights and located a pair of glowing eyes. Disappointed, we discovered that the mystery eyes belonged to a curious opossum. As if on cue, another bark from across the lake alerted us of the owl's presence. There was no mistaking it. We finally found our saw-whet owl.

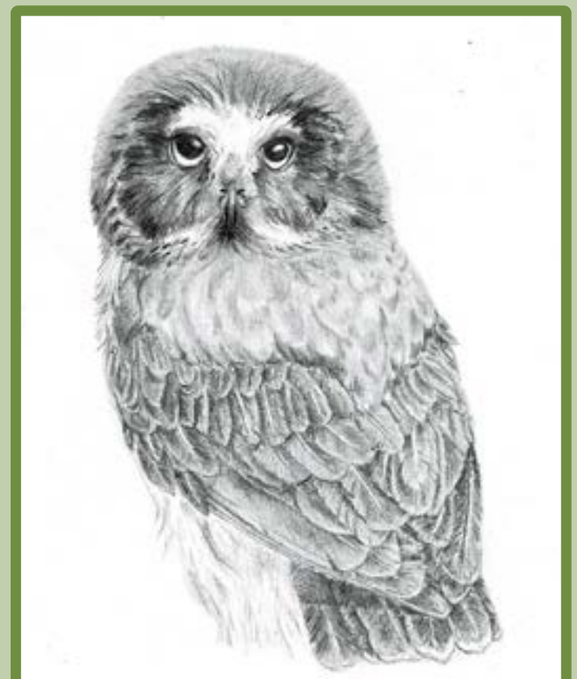
Northern Saw-whet Owls (Aegolius acadicus), a "typical owl" in the family Strigidae, is a favorite of birders and nonbirders alike. They are endlessly intriguing and fascinating, becoming the spotlight of many an owling trip. Even though they are elusive, many birders in North America might have the chance to hear or even see one, since they can be found year-round in much of the West, southern Canada, New England, parts of Central and Southern Appalachia, areas surrounding the Great Lakes, and sections of Mexico. Saw-Whets also winter throughout most of the United States, although less commonly throughout the South. These secondary cavity nesters are known to breed in a variety of habitats depending on availability and geographic location. Mixed hardwood forests with conifers seem to be the norm, providing habitat for nesting, hunting, and roosting. Swamps, savannahs, and shrub-steppe are also nest site contenders, especially when located near a riparian area. They will gladly take up a nest box. Other man-made structures sometimes attract these owls too. A Saw-Whet Owl in Massachusetts was even reported nesting in a utility pole! They typically lay 4-7 white eggs. The female takes responsibility for incubating and brooding, while the male brings a constant supply of food. When the nestlings are about 18 days old, the female leaves the nest. Without the female to keep the nest clean and tidy, it quickly becomes layered in feces, pellets, and leftover meals. After the young fledge, they remain dependent on the adult male as a steady source of food for many weeks.

General breeding and wintering ranges are not much of a mystery, but knowledge about saw-whet migration is somewhat sparse. These birds can be difficult to detect and are easily overlooked. Even Alexander Wilson was duped by these owls, believing they were generally a year-round resident of the Northeastern United States. Very little is known about their numbers, habitat requirements, and behaviors during migration. To remedy this, an organization called Project Owlnet was started nearly three decades ago by ecologist Dave Brinker. Project Owlnet has been working hard to maintain three goals:

1.) Support the growth of owl banding stations
2.) Standardize methods of capturing and measuring
3.) Increase communication and shared efforts among owl banding stations

There are now more than 100 participating stations, all netting and banding thousands of birds each fall. Banding stations help uncover new aspects of saw-whet biology. For example, female Saw-Whet Owls significantly outnumber males during migration netting and banding, leading some scientists to believe that males may possibly remain year-round residents to defend territory while the females migrate. Using banding stations to raise questions, gather data, and direct future research is exceedingly important to advancing our knowledge of the species. Efforts such as these could potentially lend some clarity to other events in saw-whet populations, such as fluctuations in prey numbers. Prey species like rodents are able to raise many young when acorn and cone crops are in high production. In response, saw-whets have plenty of rodents on which to dine and feed to their own young. Therefore, banding stations detect an increase in saw-whet populations in years following high yield acorn and cone crops. This is just one of many examples of how their abundance, movements, trends, and ecology could be better understood with the rise of banding stations.

Northern Saw-Whets are pros when it comes to catching mammals. They are the masters of preying upon small rodents including mice, shrews, voles, lemmings, and bats. Sometimes, they take larger prey like juvenile pocket gophers, chipmunks, and squirrels. Other birds are on the menu as well. Songbirds, including but not limited to titmice, juncos, thrushes, kinglets, and sparrows, have been reported to make up a small portion of their diet. They are known to munch on the occasional invertebrate, not shying away from spiders, a variety of insects, and intertidal invertebrates. Their diet varies based on geographic location, availability, and stage of their annual cycle.



Saw-whet Owl Illustration by Adriana Nelson

I have skipped over an important part about Saw-whet Owls - their appearance. Why is this important? Because saw-whets are adorable. Juveniles sport a brown back, light brown breast and belly, and a dark brown head with a white "V" between their dull yellow eyes. Adults display a brown backside with sparse white spots. Their breast and belly are white with vertical brown streaking. They have round heads and fine streaking all over the face, retaining the white "V" between the eyes. They also develop striking golden irides. While they do have a rather charismatic appearance, one of the most charming characteristics about these owls is their minute stature. Many are probably familiar with the saw-whet that was stranded in a Christmas tree last November in New York. After unwillfully traveling about 170 miles in a felled Norway Spruce to Rockefel-

Getting to Know the Northern Saw-whet Owl [continuation]

ler Center, the tiny owl was rescued. The bird, named “Rockafeller,” was initially mistaken as a juvenile because it was so small. While the Elf Owl holds the title for smallest owl in North America, saw-whets are the smallest owl in the East. They top-out at just over 20 cm in height and around 75-100 grams in mass, rivaling American Robins in size. These tiny terrors are the light-weight champions of the predator world.

Another captivating aspect about their appearance is the manifestation of unique feather patterns on the ventral side of the wing in the presence of ultraviolet light. While humans cannot see these patterns in normal light conditions, UV light has proved to be a fascinating and useful technique for examining saw-whets and other owls. Porphyrin is a common pigment found in bird feathers. Under UV light, this compound will fluoresce. New feathers often contain the most porphyrin and fluoresce the brightest, while porphyrin in older generations of feathers is more faded and fluoresces a duller color. This has become a valuable tool for aging birds in the field, especially when examining them at night. Why saw-whets possess this characteristic is still debated. Some think that it may have to do with predator evasion. Others believe it has to do with mating. Saw-whets perform a courtship display that could very well involve flaunting their fluorescent feathers. The male flies around the female up to 20 times before finally bringing a prey item, giving her ample time to examine his wing patterns. This could indicate age, and more importantly, breeding experience. Individual variation exists as well, perhaps acting as a sign of fitness. Females might be able to detect differences in the fluorescence, and select a mate accordingly.

One interesting fact about the saw-whet stems not from its biology, but from its name. What does “saw-whet” mean anyway? Apparently, the owl’s call resembles the sound of a saw being sharpened by a file, or a whetting stone. They have been known to make up to 11 different types of vocalizations. Their song (also known as the advertising call) is a classic string of consistently repeated monotone syllables: “toot-toot-toot”. Other calls include barks, squeaks, twittering, and guttural noises. Many people’s favorite call, however, is the whine. This high-pitched note is truly an unforgettable sound. Saw-Whets have non-vocal sounds also, snapping their bills when alarmed.

As one can see, Northern Saw-whet Owls are interesting birds, capturing the hearts of many. From new scientific discoveries to glowing wings, I hope I was successful in sharing my wonder for these fun-seized creatures. Perhaps this even inspired some owling trips. After all, hunting for the mysterious saw-whet is an adventure all on its own. I remember searching for the saw-whet one crisp May morning in the Appalachian Mountains. The emerging sun was casting a soft shade of purple over the horizon. The Red Spruces were topped with Dark-eyed Juncos, singing for the chance to pass on their genes to the next generation. Golden-crowned Kinglets bustled around the nearby branches, greeting the first hint of morning with an excited energy. The dawn chorus was beginning to warm up, but my fellow birders and I had yet to find a saw-whet. Just before morning fully emerged, we heard what we came for. Out of the dark spruce-hardwood forest, a Saw-Whet called in the distance. We faced each other, smiling from ear to ear. For several minutes, we stood in perfect silence, enjoying the sounds and sights of the new day. Owling in general is fun, but getting to experience the mystifying saw-whet in person is an absolute wonder.

-Adrianna Nelson 19

Owling Tips!

1. Know your species - Knowing the habits of the owls in your area can be valuable. Familiarizing yourself with their ranges, vocalizations and activity.

2. Know your spots - Dedicating time searching for the birds in your area is the best way to get familiar with the most reliable spots near you.

3. Keep trying - It’s easy to get frustrated. Owls can be tricky, but keep trying even when you turn up nothing.

4. Stop trying - This may sound counterintuitive, but I have found more owls by accident than by serious owling efforts.

5. Look at eye-level - Many owls, including saw-whets are happiest roosting or spying on prey in trees at eye-level.

6. Use playback and flashlights - It’s fine to use playback, but use it sparingly. Likewise, most owls don’t mind a moment under a flashlight, but just remember to keep it brief.

Burrowing Owl by Hannes Leonard

Great Inagua: A Remote Paradise

By Hannes Leonard

(Top to bottom) American Flamingo, Black-necked Stilt, Antillean Nighthawk. By Hannes Leonard

Lying only 50 miles from Cuba, Great Inagua is the second largest and southernmost island in the Bahamas. Its unique and remote location has created a home for a tremendous array of species. This includes a single endemic, the Inagua Woodstar, along with Cuban Parrots, Double-striped Thick-Knee, and a breeding colony of 80,000 American Flamingos.

The chief industry on Great Inagua is the production of salt at a large Morton factory. Luckily, Great Inagua is a great example of how humans and birds can thrive side-by-side. The production of salt involves the creation of huge salt pans for the water to evaporate in. The water level in these salt pans is carefully controlled. Water progresses through the pans as it continually evaporates. This habitat benefits not only the flamingoes, but also other breeding waders and more than thirty species of shorebirds.

On both of my trips to Great Inagua, I arrived by boat and stayed on one of the transient docks in the Government Basin. This is just on the edge of Matthew Town, the main settlement on Great Inagua. We have always visited in the spring, but the birding is excellent year-round. As soon as I arrived, it was easy to tell the island holds great birding potential. Standing on the dock, I was greeted by Burrowing Owls and American Kestrels, while Smooth-Billed Anis and Gray Kingbirds could be heard on the road.

A walk on the road leading from the marina to the town dump yields a wonderful array of species. This road leads through low scrub, which eventually morphs into low-lying dry forest before ending in town. Greater Antillean Bullfinches, Indigo Buntings, as well as Black-whiskered and Thick-Billed Vireos can be found lurking in the scrub. At the right time of year, Antillean Nighthawks are abundant. During migration, the tree-filled edges of the path become home to migrant warblers, in addition to the ever-present Yellow Warblers and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. At the salt pond, a quiet approach can bring amazing views of waders. During my visits, the water level was always too high to be productive for sandpipers, but herons, Willets and Black-necked Stilts graced the edges. On the edges of town, flocks of Cuban Parrots feed in local yards. The town's baseball fields serve as the home for several Burrowing Owls, and a visit at the right time of year will allow for close-up observation of both adult and young birds.

The most amazing birds of Great Inagua, however, are off the beaten path. To explore the other reaches of Great Inagua, you'll need a car, and a local guide will come in handy. We went birding with Casper Burrows, one of several excellent guides on the island. A typical bird tour on the island starts just on the outskirts of town with a visit to the feeders of a local bed-and-breakfast. As gnatcatchers and vireos call from the bushes, a lucky birder will spot Inagua's only endemic, the Inagua Woodstar, flying in. The Inagua Woodstar is a delightful little hummingbird, similar in appearance to the Bahama Woodstar. The male Inagua Woodstar has a stunning purple throat when the light shines on it properly, a green back, and rufous flanks. Females are similar in appearance, but lack the purple throat.

Least Tern by Hannes Leonard

Moving on to the uninhabited portions of Great Inagua, a slow drive along the water's edge can yield herons, egrets, and some shorebirds. The trees also have the potential to hold passage migrants. On my trip, this included an uncommon yellow-billed cuckoo. A brief stop at the island's small airport may yield fantastic looks at the local swallow flock. On our second trip, the usual Barn Swallows were joined by a rare Antillean Palm-Swift and young Cliff Swallow.

After the airport, my family and I headed to the saltpans at the Morton Salt factory. At that point, the "wader fest" commenced. Driving among the saltpans, we could see Least Tern nests just on the edge of the road. Looking into the saltpans, we saw a Snowy Plover family feeding in the mud. A little further down the road, a small pond held a White-Cheeked Pintail family and several Black-Necked Stilts. The trees bordering the pond held singing yellow warblers and a La Sagra's Flycatcher. Continuing even further, the road was lined with Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstones, and a sole White-Rumped Sandpiper. Looking on, the first flocks of flamingoes beckoned in the distance. The salt pans give way to dry scrub, which produced Smooth-billed Anis, Common Ground-doves, and Bahama Mockingbirds.

Eventually, the road dead ended with an overview of Lake Rosa and even more flamingoes. On the return trip, we observed even more shorebirds before heading into a different patch of scrub.

The birding now took us into a mangrove swamp, where a new cast of birds begin to show themselves. While we were there, a Belted Kingfisher darted up the narrow channels while Yellow Warblers sang from the low trees. A careful eye might have spotted several Green Herons nestled among the forest of roots, waiting for an unsuspecting fish to dart into range. This mangrove forest is special to look at, and in my experience, unique to Inagua due to the salt processing. Growing in and along this large channel of fresh seawater means that the water in this mangrove forest is crystal clear, providing an incredible opportunity to peer below the surface and see the ecosystem underneath.

Just beyond these mangroves, Cooter Road takes you through a wonderful variety of habitats. Starting along the mangroves, it moves on through dry scrub forest, then to a few ponds, before ending in scrub forest again. The scrub forest along the road holds Cuban Parrots, Yellow Warblers, Greater Antillean Bullfinches, White-Crowned Pigeons, and Black-Faced Grassquits. Killdeer and Spotted Sandpipers grace the ponds. On one trip, we were even lucky enough to find the second island record of White Ibis, a great spot by our guide, Casper. At the right time of year, Antillean Nighthawks breed along the road as well. One year, a pair decided to nest in the middle of the road, right between where each set of tires would roll.

At the end of Cooter Road, we made a quick stop at another set of ponds in hopes of finding my nemesis bird, the West Indian Whistling Duck. Although we struck out, the ponds did have a nice array of birds, including a Least Grebe and a Northern Waterthrush. The final stop before turning around is North Dam Road. This road runs along the northern edge of Lake Rosa and driving along it is an incredible experience. With Lake Rosa on one side and a collection of salt ponds on the other, this road is perfect for both shorebirds and waders. Driving along the road reveals hundreds of flamingoes and herons. The mixed flocks of Roseate Spoonbills, Tricolored Herons, and Reddish Egrets in flight are a stunning sight that I'll never forget. A little further down the road, a salt pond is home to a flock of Stilt Sandpipers and several Clapper Rail families. Finally, at the end of the road, both sides open up and you are surrounded by the shallow Lake Rosa and hundreds of flamingoes. Regretfully, the crumbling road finally forces you to stop. This vista of pink and blue truly shows the remoteness and stunning beauty of Great Inagua.

Driving back gave us a nice chance to slowly watch the island go by and to observe some of the other human components on Great Inagua which were missed. The wild donkeys and pigs feeding in the bush off the road and the now-wild cotton plants serve as the only reminders of a long-failed plantation attempt. Driving back by the salt plant, the towering white piles of processed salt are truly something to behold. The dried salt pans are covered in huge salt crystals while a bulldozer pushes the unprocessed salt into smaller gray piles.

Remote and rarely visited, Great Inagua is a birder's dream.The sandy beaches, open skies, and beautiful water, not to mention the fantastic birding opportunities, provide the perfect location for any birder's vacation. Combined with the extremely friendly locals, Great Inagua is one of the nicest places I've ever birded. I can't wait to go back!

Getting There:

So, you want to visit Inagua? I don't blame you. It's one of my favorite islands to bird on in the West Indies and has some of the most amazing numbers of waders I've ever seen. Visiting is not easy, however, and Inagua is extremely remote. I travelled both times with my family on our boat as part of longer cruises while we were living aboard. For those without boats, you're in for an 18-hour flight from Miami with multiple stops. Once you're there, though, the birding is amazingly accessible, and the locals are extremely friendly. You're in for a real treat.

Snowy Plovers by Hannes Leonard

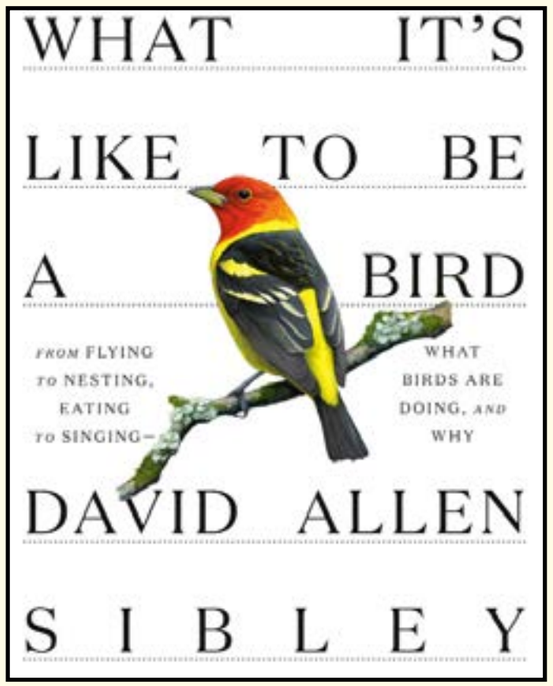
What It's Like to be a Bird

BY DAVID SIBLEY ALFRED A. KNOPF 2020

Reviewd by Silas Powell

Award winning author David Sibley's new book What it's like to be a Bird is a large 8x11 inch book, full of colorful images. This book includes an abundance of intriguing facts on just about every species of bird one could imagine. Time will become irrelevant while looking at this book. I, for one, have spent many hours staring at the vibrant pictures while reading and re-reading the facts.

After the introduction, the book is separated into four sections. The main part is the "Portfolio of Birds." In this section one will find life-size paintings of birds from swans to swallows, along with plenty of fascinating facts. For instance, did you know that some species of swifts spend 10 continuous months in the air at a time? Or that some birds eat paint to gather more calcium? Not only that, on some pages one will find diagrams including things like how Mallards take off from the water, and how Peregrine Falcons catch thermals.



Once one has finished flipping through the Portfolio of Birds section you'll come to the "Birds in this Book" which is an index of all the birds in the previous portion. The index has a painting of each species and a brief description about the habitat and/or behavior along with the page number.

Continuing on with the book, one will find a page called "What to do If." This is a great guide to situations such as "what to do if a woodpecker is attacking your house" or "what to do if you find a dead bird." If a bird has built a nest on your porch, the book advises that you give the bird as much privacy as possible, and enjoy watching the nesting cycle.

This book is perfect for all ages, whether one loves looking at large, life sized pictures or at the smaller details characterizing one bird from another. If any of the aforementioned features have sounded remotely interesting to you, then this is a book for you. In fact, this is a book for everyone.

Crossbills: Incredible Avian Gems

Katie Warner

White-winged Crossbill by Chelsea Mosteller

Crossbills: the only birds in the world with bills that naturally cross. Not only does this extraordinary adaptation allow crossbills to effectively harvest pine seeds from closed pinecones, it also serves as their most distinctive feature. In order to gather pine seeds, they place the tips of its slightly open bill under a cone scale and bite down. The crossed tips of the bill push the scale up, exposing the seed inside. Then they use their tongue to eat the exposed seed. It is a very effective technique which allows crossbills to feed exclusively on pine seeds.

Crossbills aren't born with their unique cross. When they are chicks, their bills are short and straight, lacking the cross of their parents. They only gain the cross when they are around a month and a half old. When they forage, their beak is continually twisted in the same direction. This molds their beak into the crossed shape.

Next time you see a flock of crossbills, look closely and you might find that some of them have bills that cross in a different direction than others. When they are chicks some birds might twist their beak in a different direction, then their beak would get crossed differently. In Red Crossbills, the number of birds with left-over-right bills appears to be about equal, although White-winged Crossbills with left-over-right bills are much rarer than right-over-left (similar to how there are more people who use their right hand more than their left).

It is not yet fully understood why some crossbills have bills crossed in different directions. One theory is that when foraging on a pinecone still attached to the tree, a crossbill would have great difficulty collecting seeds on one side of it. Since some crossbills have bills that cross in different directions, they are able to finish the other side of the cone, increasing the amount of pine seeds available. It is possible that this adaptation is genetically inherited, but it would be hard to prove, due to the fact that some crossbills are polygynous. Another issue contributing to this is the fact that crossbills are nomadic, and thus hard to track.

Although there are five species of crossbill, (three of which live in the U.S: Red, White-winged, and Cassia), there are actually 10 types of Red Crossbills recognized. The types are not as genetically distinct as subspecies, but in some ways, they act as separate species. They rarely forage or breed with other types, and they have different bill sizes that help them specialize in feeding from different pines. One of these types was identified as phylogenetically different in 2016 and was split by the American Ornithologists Union (AOU) in 2017. The new species was named the Cassia Crossbill, since it lives only in the small Cassia County in Idaho. The Cassia Crossbill feeds almost exclusively on Lodgepole Pines. The cones of Lodgepole Pines are large, and no other type of crossbill is able to easily gather the seeds. Because they have such a limited range, they are non-migratory residents unlike the nomadic Red Crossbill.

Crossbills are fascinating birds, with their unique bills, feeding style, and food sources. They are widespread, occurring throughout North America and in some parts of Europe. Their bill is the key to their success, allowing them to access food that no other bird can collect easily. Indeed, Crossbills are a reminder that every organism holds a niche in nature.

HOW TO RUN A YOUNG BIRDER'S CLUB

- PHILLIP SALZINGER

I never was an "outdoorsy" kid. I enjoyed hiking but I didn't do much of it, and my family never went camping. I found animals interesting but I always thought of them as distant; something that only existed in the tropical rainforests and arctic tundras visited by David Attenborough. I never knew that birding was something that I could do in Atlanta until I entered the seventh grade. In seventh grade, students were finally allowed to sign up for clubs at my school, and saying that I was excited would be a tremendous understatement. I had been curating an excessive, ever-changing list of clubs to join since the beginning of the school year. On the day of the club sign-ups, I was ecstatic. With my enthusiasm, I signed up for half of the clubs offered, including my school's bird club.

My first bird walk was on a fall day in September in a forest behind a local museum. I was so bad at using binoculars that I only saw a Pileated Woodpecker and some Chimney Swifts, but the realization that I could see something so beautiful so close to home was enough to keep me coming back for more. By that November, birding had evolved into an obsession, and my obsession grew stronger and stronger with every day that passed. Throughout that year, I went birding with my club every other week. As the year progressed, I had the realization that I could also bird by myself. The bird club had enabled me to become a self-sufficient birder.

Once I started high school, I became involved in founding a high school bird club at my school. I wanted to help spread my love of birding to even more kids. Although the club had a rocky start (we only had three or four meetings in my entire freshmen year), it has since grown into a fantastic club.

In my experience, running a bird club is not difficult. A successful club will likely need a lot of planning, semi-regular meetings to foster a sense of community, and dedicated leaders. When running a bird club, one should be a very active leader. Send people regular updates about future meetings as well as what birds should be expected during different seasons. Attempt all different kinds of meetings, such as weekend bird walks, bird identification workshops, bird illustration workshops, really anything birding related. A good leader should also listen to feedback from their group members. If the club wants to do one thing and the leaders want to do another, then the leader should listen to the club. Dreaming big is a good thing in bird clubs. Although an individual may not be able to accomplish everything, dreaming big is a fantastic way to ensure a successful club. Another part of being a good leader is being organized. Goals will never be accomplished if one cannot organize to get them done.

Scheduling in particular is vital. In my first year leading my bird club, I was extremely disorganized. I decided that we would have occasional lunch meetings when there was something pressing to discuss, and at some point, we would go as a group to a local park. We ended up having three lunch meetings throughout the entire year, and only one out-of-school meeting. This year I was much more organized. We've had two out of school bird club meetings despite it being harder to meet than usual this year. We have also had lunch meetings nearly every Wednesday since our school's annual club fair. Being a good leader takes hard work, but it is vital to the success of the bird club.For birding clubs within schools, meeting out of school for bird walks is a fantastic way to teach bird identification to club members. However, this can host some of its own challenges. Many schools will require you to plan the meeting in advance and have teachers or parents with you. If you know of any teachers who enjoy bird watching or birding it can be incredibly helpful. Another problem is choosing a location. Remember, the majority of the people in your club will be beginners. You don't need to go to your local dump to sort through gulls or chase a Ruff at some sewage lagoons with them. Going to a small park nearby where the birding is good but not overwhelming is ideal. Occasionally, a more ambitious trip to a well-known birding location may be well received, but sticking close to your school for the majority of trips should ensure a steadier introduction to birding for club members.

The final challenge is probably the hardest to overcome: access to binoculars. My school bird club was lucky enough to receive a grant to buy six pairs of binoculars, but there can be other ways to acquire binoculars for your walks. You can hold a fundraiser for binoculars (i.e. a bake sale) or you can borrow extra binoculars from birding friends. All in all, field trips are a fantastic way to connect with your bird club members while teaching them how to bird.

Photo by Phillip Salzinger

Recruitment for young birder clubs can be extremely difficult, due to birding not being seen as a "normal" activity for kids. Getting people to join can be a matter of advertising a club well. A club should be able to represent the wide range of activities which includes birding. That way, anyone can see how they might enjoy birding. Additionally, be prepared to recruit only a small group of people. Many kids don't care for the idea of birding, so even having a group with a few members is impressive. Recruitment, however, is meaningless if you cannot keep members of the club. Because of this, your club must be a supportive, non-intimidating place for beginner birders. Additionally hosting fun events like The Big Year watch parties or Wingspan game nights can be a fantastic way to engage new members.

To maintain a club, communication is important. These days, there are many ways to keep in touch with members of the club. Having a group chat is a wonderful way to do this. Different messaging apps have their pros and cons, but in the end, the most important part of having a group chat is remembering to use it. A group chat should be a fun, supportive place for members to share sightings and photos. Additionally, for new birders, a group chat can be a fantastic way to ask for help identifying birds. Not only does this let newer members feel less intimidated by the plethora of confusing birds around them, but it also allows more intermediate members to practice their identification skills. Other ideas of group chat activities include identification quizzes and fun facts.

I believe that my positive experience with bird clubs was not a coincidence. Almost anyone with proper resources and an enthusiastic group can lead a club!

-Phillip Salsinger 16

THE MENTOR'S CORNER

SCOTT WEIDENSAUL

When someone asks me for the highlight of my birding year, I'm sure they're expecting me to recount some morning of migration magic when the trees were dripping with warblers, or the best hawk flight of the season along my beloved Appalachian ridges. So, they're usually a little surprised when I tell them that the highlight for me, year in and year out, is a week in Maine with a bunch of teenagers.

Photo by Scott Weidensaul

It's Coastal Maine Bird Studies, a field ornithology session for young birders ages 14-17, which I've had the privilege to oversee for nearly 20 years at National Audubon's famed Hog Island camp on the coast of Maine.

Every June -- when Black-throated Green and Blackburnian warblers are singing in the spruce trees, and Common Loons are yodeling at night on the tidal waters of Muscongus Bay -- we welcome several dozen teens to the 330-acre island, which has been Audubon's flagship educational facility since it was founded in 1936, with a hotshot twenty-something-year-old named Roger Tory Peterson as its first birdlife instructor.

Hog Island was founded as (and largely remains) a camp for adults, but Coastal Maine Bird Studies, or CMBS, has from the start been designed to give serious young birders some of the same high-level instruction our adult campers receive. The idea behind isn't to provide an intensive birding experience (although we bird all day, every day) but to immerse participants in the wider world of ornithology -- the science of birds as living, ecologically complex creatures.

The first session was held in June 2002, the brainchild of Hog Island's then-assistant director Laura Councell (now Laura Guerard, at American Birding Association) with advice and help from Kenn Kaufman and then-camp director Seth Benz. Among that first class of campers was Tom Johnson, now a Field Guides leader, a member of the ABA Checklist Committee and a regular contributor to Birding, and a periodic Hog Island instructor himself in more recent years. That set the template for many CMBS participants who

Eastern Egg Rock by Laurie McLaughlin

Common Tern Nest by Scott Weidensaul

have gone on do great things in the world of birding and ornithological research -- achievments for which we take no credit, obviously (though we appreciate the reflected glory).

One reason the teen ornithology program has been as impactful as it has been is thanks to its faculty. In addition to Laura's early guidance, CMBS has benefitted from the leadership of Laurie McLaughlin, Doug Wentzel and Joshua Potter from Shaver's Creek Environmental Center in Pennsylvania; marine scientist Heather Richard; Judy Camuso, who became the first woman to lead the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife; and Raymond Van Buskirk, a well-known presence at ABA birding camps and himself a 2006 CMBS camper -- among other stellar instructors.

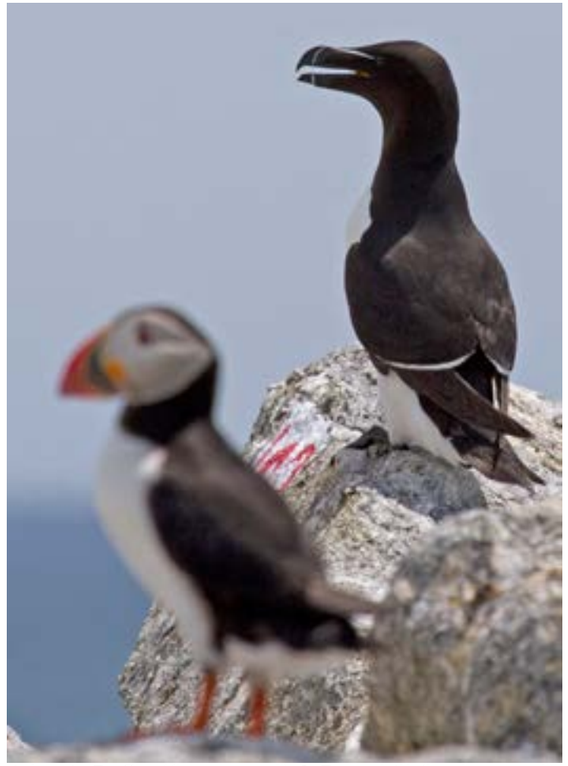
The CMBS campers -- known as the Corvids during their week on the island -- also have the benefit of spending time in the field with a range of other ornithological and birding professionals who serve as faculty, because the teen sessions usually overlap with one for adults. Corvids often join Dr. Angelika Nelson, the former curator of the Borror Lab of Bioacoustics at Ohio State University, for daybreak sound-recording sessions, or have the chance to explore a Herring and Great Black-backed Gull colony with Dr. Sara Morris of Canisius College. Ecologist and writer Dr. Drew Lanham from Clemson University, and crow expert Dr. Kevin McGowan from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, have been repeat instructors, along with -- well, a long list of luminaries, from bird artist Catherine Hamilton to Project Puffin founder Dr. Steve Kress.

(Oh, and why are the teens known as "Corvids"? In truth, that nickname started because the CMBS crew originally occupied the housing unit known as the Crow's Nest -- but then we realized it's perfect, because as we all know, corvids are social, vocal, and the most highly intelligent of birds.)

The itinerary changes from session to session and year to year, depending on who joins the faculty, and what special projects we may have underway. For a couple of years, the Corvids -- always happy to get up before daybreak for a bird adventure -- were my helpers as we mist-netted Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes to deploy light-sensitive geolocators in a bid to learn more about their migrations. But hands down, the biggest thrill at every session is the unique opportunity for the Corvids to land on Eastern Egg Rock, the restored puffin colony seven miles out in the bay, and spend part of the day with the resident biologists observing Atlantic Puffins, Arctic, Common and Roseate Terns, Razorbills, Black Guillemots and other nesting species.

Landing on Egg Rock is not for the faint-hearted, and is by no means a guarantee; some years we've had to cancel the visit because sea conditions were too dicey to risk. There is no dock or wharf, just algae-slicked, rockweed-covered boulders where the only traction is afforded by gray barnacles that will slice open a hand or knee should you fall. We land in a traditional Maine cod-fishing dory piloted by our extraordinary island manager Eric Snyder, who expertly noses the dory into the rocks and times the surge of the waves so that, one by one, the campers can leap from the bow to be hustled ashore by the island biologists.

From there, everyone must maintain the absolute strictest concentration, because a single misstep on the narrow trails can mean a crushed tern egg or chick, all while being-



Atlantic Puffin (foreground) & Razorbill (background)
Photo by Scott Weidensaul

Swainson's Thrush by Scott Weidensaul

bombarded (and pooped on) by screaming adults. But once you're in one of the observation blinds, you have the chance to watch thousands of seabirds coming and going, often within mere yards of you. It is simply breathtaking.

Landing on Egg during the breeding season is an exceptional privilege; in more than two decades of teaching on Hog Island, I've only done it twice myself, and it's not something we routinely offer to adult campers. But since the beginning of the CMBS program, we've felt it's a great way to give serious young birders and ornithologists a taste of equally serious field science -- and it's helped turn more than a few of them into biologists themselves.

Because the CMBS sessions usually overlap with adult camps, there can be some alarm on the part of sedate (often older) grown-ups suddenly confronted with the prospect of spending a week on an island with a large group of teenagers. In truth, the overlap is primarily at our family-style meals and evening lectures in the Fish House, our communal gathering space. And over the years, the most common complaint we get from adults on the evaluation forms at the end of the session is some variant of, "I didn't get to spend enough time with the Corvids."

Even after 20 years or so, I always feel the same way. Missing 2020 because of the pandemic, I'm more anxious than ever to reconnect with the next generation of birding and ornithological greats this summer, and welcome another flock of Corvids to our magical island.

-Scott Weidensaul

BASIC SPARROW IDENTIFICATION WITH WESTON BARKER

Sparrows: often regarded as one of the trickiest-to-ID bird families in North America, and all too often left unidentified in the field as a "little brown job" or "sparrow sp." Rather underappreciated and visually unspectacular compared to some of North America's other bird species, sparrows can be, and are, in my opinion, unique and beautiful in their own way.

Learning to easily recognize different species isn't as hard as you might think. By far the best way to learn them is simply to get outside, find some sparrows, and watch them. Take notes on the bird while in the field; this is one of the best and most rewarding ways to learn a species well.

Here I'll go over some basic but helpful field marks for identifying some of the more commonly confused species. Specifically, three species in the genus Melospiza: the Song Sparrow (Melospiza melodia), Lincoln's Sparrow (Melospiza lincolnii), and Swamp Sparrow (Melospiza georgiana), plus one in the genus Passerculus: the Savannah Sparrow (Passerculus sandwichensis).

There are several terms which are frequently used in sparrow ID. Try to familiarize yourself with the following markings: the lateral crown stripes are the broad, usually dark stripes running along the top of the head, usually separated by a narrower median crown stripe. The supercilium, often referred to as the eyebrow stripe, is the band running along the head above the eye. This can be quite broad on many sparrows. The malar is the pale stripe on the cheek, starting at the base of the bill, and usually bordered by a dark lateral throat stripe and moustachial stripe.

Savannah Sparrow by Chelsea Mosteller

Also keep in mind that, especially by late summer, many birds will have very worn feathers, meaning those distinguishing field marks may not be easily noticeable. And as for juveniles...well, they're at a whole different level, one that I haven't reached yet. But when sparrows start migrating north in spring, they'll be wearing their neat, fresh breeding plumage, and are generally easy to ID (once you know how of course!)

Below is a comparison of the four sparrows listed above (Song, Lincoln's, Swamp, and Savannah).

BASIC SPARROW ID: SPARROW BY SPARROW

Photo by Weston Barker

SONG SPARROW:

- Thick, dark, and somewhat messy streaks on white breast and sides, usually including a dark, blurry spot in the center of the breast
- Normally all gray bill
- White malar, contrasting with broad, dark lateral throat stripe
- Usually no eye ring. Sometimes shows thin white eye arcs, especially beneath the eye
- Gray or white supercilium
- Overall dark chocolate-brown and heavily streaked appearance in the field

LINOLN'S SPARROW

- Very neat, thin, crisp black streaks on buffy breast and sides. The color of the breast contrasts with the unstreaked, clean, white belly.
- Slightly thinner bill than Song Sparrow. Usually shows yellow at the base of the lower mandible. The rest of the bill appears gray
- Buffy malar
- Buffy eye ring, usually obvious at close range
- Overall buffy and heavily but neatly streaked appearance in field

Photo by Weston Barker

SAVANNAH SPARROW:

- Crisp but wavy dark brown streaking on sides and breast
- White malar
- Pale supercilium, with yellow lores. Often the whole supercilium can appear yellow
- Pink bill
- Wings often tinged with rufous
- Dark brown lateral crown stripes, separated by inconspicuous white median crown stripe
- Tan auriculars
- Overall thinly streaked and sandy-colored appearance in the field

Photo by Weston Barker

Photo by Chelsea Mosteller

So there you have it: some basic identifying field marks of four similar North American Melospiza and Passerculus species. Now, go out and find some sparrows!

SWAMP SPARROW:

- Rufous wings and tail usually stand out in the field
- Brown or rufous flanks, only very faintly and thinly streaked with blurry brown
- Rufous lateral crown stripes often appear joined together to form a cap on top of the head in breeding season. Lateral crown stripes are browner and separated by a gray median crown stripe in fall.
- Mostly clean gray breast, often showing very faint thin streaking
- Often shows a blurry central breast spot
- Bill longer and thinner than Song Sparrow, usually showing yellow at base
- Gray supercilium contrasts with rusty crown and buffy auriculars, especially in spring
- Orangey back with strong black stripes
- Overall appears mostly rufous and gray in the field, and unstreaked below.

Bushtit by
Katie Warner

Tailfeathers

Hello readers! First, I want to thank you all for reading our magazine. It means quite a bit to all of us at The Fledgling, and I hope you will find our young birder magazine enlightening and fun! I was named the Young Birder of the Year last year. I like to believe that one experience that has helped me grow as a birder is volunteering at my local banding station, Sand Bluff Bird Observatory (SBBO). When I first walked into SBBO at the mere age of 6 (wow, that seems like a long time ago), I was greeted by, for lack of a better term, many older folks. I felt a bit overwhelmed, and out-of-place. I had never had much contact with the older generations before this. My life consisted of going to school with people my age, and playing on the playground. I was concerned with how I would fit in with these people at SBBO. As I grew closer to the birders here, I realized they were (and still are!) amazing people, determined to make me a better birder. As I started to be a more frequent visitor to SBBO, I became more friendly with them. At every opportunity they got, they shared their many years of knowledge with me, helped me become a better net-checker, and taught me the best way to handle the birds. Outside of Sand Bluff, I try to make as many acquaintances with birders as I can, and make as many connections as I am able to. I attempt to learn from everyone I meet. As younger people, fitting in with older birders can be difficult. We tend to be more comfortable with people of our own age. Sometimes, if we want to learn more about the activity we enjoy so much, we must step outside our comfort zone. Older birders hold many great tips and tricks of the trade that one can only learn from experience. I have learned so much from my older birding friends, that I wouldn't be anywhere close to where I am today without their help. I hope everyone has a mentor in your life that you can look up to and take guidance from. If not, there's no time like the present! Meet people other than your immediate friends and classmates. Visiting banding stations, museums, and symposiums is a great way to do this. I hope you are all inspired to make some new mentors and friends. Again, thank you for reading to The Fledgling!

Gracie McMahon
2020 ABA Young Birder of the Year.