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On the cover: “What counts” is a perennial topic of conversation among many birders. Until recently, it was unclear to many birders whether they could count Aplomado Falcons seen in Texas, such as this one photographed near Brownsville, on lists they report to the ABA. Please flip to p. 47 for exciting news on that front. Photo © Stan Tekiela
"You can’t count that."
"Those just got split."
"Hey, it’s your list."
"Well, the ABA says…"

All of these are things I hear and overhear from birders in the field, around the bar, and online. Moreover, they are things I have been hearing for years, long before I joined the ABA staff. To me, they point to a number of issues that are pretty much forever on the minds and lips of birders.

Everyone draws lines somewhere about what birds do or do not “count”, even if they don’t keep a formal list of any kind. Further, those of us swimming in today’s advancing taxonomic currents are forever having to keep track of frequent splits and occasional lumps. This may be a bit maddening at times, but I guarantee it’s more fun than being swept along in a tide that is receding.

As much as we seek information and understanding about the birds we see, we also recognize that birding has a higher degree of self-determination and more gray areas than many recreational pursuits. It’s also built on the honor system, so there is a lot of truth to the sentiment that any birder can count whatever they choose to.

Yet even in a community as determinedly individualistic as ours, there is a need for helpful authority, someone to help set and explain the rules, and to occasionally modify them when warranted. Birder’s Guide to Listing & Taxonomy is designed to be a one-stop annual update on the state of the game. It’s also meant to let you really know “what the ABA has said”. Finally, it’s a place where you can find out how to join in and influence ongoing conversations about many of these issues. We hope to hear from you.

Good birding,
Jeffrey A. Gordon
President, American Birding Association

From the Editor

It may not be clear at first glance what listing and taxonomy have to do with one another. But dive a bit deeper, and it soon becomes apparent how the two are not only related but even dependent on one another.

Of course, listers depend on the American Ornithologists’ Union to maintain its checklist, and they use that as the scorecard for their listing endeavors. Morgan Churchill’s article in this issue provides you with some background on the theories that guide these ornithologists when deciding what is a species (and what isn’t). The annual “Check-list Redux” explains in simple terms all that’s changed on the AOU Check-list this year. Armchair tickers, rejoice!

Listing articles in this issue include reports on big years in Guatemala and San Diego County, California, and an introduction to photo big days. Birders engaged in big years—especially in relatively little-known areas such as Guatemala—help with our knowledge of status and distribution. Photo big days document for posterity what bird was where and when. Both can help scientists when they’re trying to decide which species is which, where it occurs, and, sometimes, if it “counts”.

Finally in this issue, we have news on Aplomado Falcons: both regarding how the repatriation efforts are going and—this is the listing issue after all—on whether you can “count” them on your ABA Area lists.

Whether your passion is leading bird walks at your local park, competing in big days, or studying the minutiae of Phylloscopus warbler identification, I hope you will find something of interest—indeed, of use—in this issue. Please take a moment to let us know what you did and didn’t like, and what was missing. Even better, write something for us! Be sure to check in at <aba.org/birdersguide>, where you will find a much-expanded e-version of this issue and links to discussions of the topics you read about here. We look forward to hearing from you!

Good birding,

Michael L. P. Retter
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Nicholas Block is the Secretary of the ABA Recording Standards and Ethics Committee. He began birding at age 13 and participated in the first ABA Young Birders’ Conferences. His birding travels in Mexico sparked an interest in avian phylogeography, which eventually led to a Ph.D. in Evolutionary Biology from the University of Chicago. His dissertation research at The Field Museum focused on the evolution and phylogeography of the Bernieridae, a passerine family endemic to Madagascar. He currently is a first-year Assistant Professor at Stonehill College.

John Cahill moved from Pennsylvania to Guatemala at the age of five and has been birding in Guatemala ever since. He currently holds the big year record for Guatemala (623 and counting). At the age of 14, John participated in a young birders’ event held at Cornell Lab of Ornithology. John is a hardcore birder who has been birding like a lunatic for the past four years.

Barbara L. Carlson is a full-time chiropractor and thus, unfortunately, only a “part-time” birder. Her 2013 San Diego County big year quest was inspired by her desire to top her somewhat less intense 2007 effort. With a little help from her friends and her loyal dog, Roxie, Barbara set a new record for herself, for the county, and for all counties in the ABA Area.

Morgan Churchill began birding 10 years ago after being inspired by a Michigan State University study abroad program held in Kenya’s Masai Mara Game Reserve. His major research interests are the evolution and palaeoecology of marine mammals, and he has published papers on the systematics of right whales, the taxonomy of seals and sea lions, and the ecology of fossil walruses. Morgan lives in Laramie, Wyoming, where he recently earned a Ph.D. in ecology.

Paul Hess is “News and Notes” Department Editor for Birding magazine. He started watching birds at age seven in Los Angeles. Now a retired newspaper editor in Pennsylvania, he formerly chaired the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee, has contributed many articles to Pennsylvania Birds, writes an ornithological news column for the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology newsletter, edits the Three Rivers Birding Club newsletter in Pittsburgh, and has coauthored several National Geographic books on birds. Paul has received awards for outstanding contributions to Pennsylvania ornithology and for bird conservation efforts in the state.

Michael L. P. Retter is the Editor of Birder’s Guide magazine. A former full-time birding tour leader, Michael has traveled extensively in the Americas (from Alaska to Ecuador), and he still leads private tours (especially to Middle America) part-time. When at home, Michael now spends most of his time writing field guide to the birds of Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize. He is the Chair of the Indiana Bird Records Committee and volunteers as an eBird reviewer for Illinois and Indiana. Michael lives in Fort Worth, Texas, with his fiancé, two indoor cats, and about 150 orchids.

Tom Stephenson has been birding since he was a kid. His articles and photographs are in museums and many publications, including Birding, BirdWatcher’s Digest, Handbook of the Birds, Handbook of the Mammals of the World, and Guide to the Birds of Southeast Brazil. He was on Zeiss’s digiscoping team for the World Series of Birding; his team, co-led by Scott Whittle, won the Cape Island Cup in 2011 and set the U.S. record for a photo big day in 2014.

Scott Whittle has 20 years of experience as a professional photographer and educator. He has an M.F.A. in Photography from the School of Visual Arts, is a fellow of the MacDowell Colony, and has held the New York state big year record. Scott coauthored Princeton University Press’s The Warbler Guide with Tom Stephenson. He lives in Cape May, New Jersey, where he leads workshops and pursues his passion for birds and photography.
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When I decided to do a big year (año grande) in Guatemala in 2013, I had just come off a great year of birding in December 2012. I had identified 591 species in Guatemala that year. That's more than anyone else has listed on eBird for Guatemala for an entire lifetime. I just felt the time was right. I wanted to get out to every corner of the country and find rare birds. I wanted my big year in Semuc Champey, Guatemala.

Semuc Champey, Guatemala.
Photo © Soft_Light
Guatemala in 2013, I had just come off a great year of birding in December 2012. That's more than anyone else has listed on eBird for Guatemala for an entire lifetime. I just felt the time was right. I wanted to get out to every corner of the country and find rare birds. I wanted my big year in
Un Año Grande en Guatemala

Guatemala to contribute to science and bird conservation. I wanted my birding to make a difference in Guatemala.

A big year in the ABA Area can tell you a lot about the birder—for example, how much free time and discretionary income he or she has. But a big year in Guatemala probably reveals more about birds than it does about the birder. Why the difference? The birds of the ABA Area are well known and their ranges are thoroughly described; not so in Guatemala. The ABA Area has hundreds of thousands more birders than Guatemala. This means that Guatemala has a lot more surprises. It also means that you have to find your own birds. A big year in Guatemala is a daunting task. Imagine doing an ABA Area big year without a single lead on a bird—without twitches.

January 1, 2013. 7:45 a.m., Pantin, Baja Verapaz
I start my big year by birding a 16-mi. (26-km) route along the old Coban–Salama Road, in the heart of Guatemala. The top of the road, well above 6,000 ft. (1,829 m), has fragments of cloud forest. The edges of the dirt road are lined with flowers. White-eared Hummingbirds zip between the blossoms. Once Coban’s only connection to Guatemala City, this is now a quiet dirt road, almost completely unused yet in surprisingly good condition. At the Salama end, 3,000 ft. (915 m) lower, the trees are sparse and the land is arid. This route affords me a few species that are tough to see in Guatemala: Hepatic Tanager, Chipping Sparrow, and Red Crossbill.

By the end of my first day, I had checked 108 species, including my three hit-list birds and Resplendent Quetzal.

This road has a few things to show us about Guatemala. The road winds from cloud forest to pine-oak forest to pine forest before descending to pine-savannah and dry scrub. Only 16 mi. (26 km) long and so many different habitats!
That’s how this country is. Guatemala is an extremely diverse country in a compact, rugged area. Two ocean coasts and a lot of mountain ranges create a series of diverse microclimates. In Guatemala, you can watch a Lesser Roadrunner scurrying beneath dusty brown thorn bushes, walk half an hour, and see a Resplendent Quetzal glide between mist-enshrouded oaks cloaked in lush epiphytes. I have stood on the side of a steep mountain and heard above me Highland Guans and Slate-colored Solitaires while below me Brown Jays and White-crowned Parrots flew from tree to tree. Every little microclimate and every obscure habitat niche hold surprises for the birder. Guatemala has it all: alpine meadows, tropical rainforests, Florida-like mangroves, Oregon-like pine forests, Arizona-like deserts, and Costa Rica-like cloud forests.

Guatemala is dense birding. In terms of sheer diversity, imagine 75% of the number of species on the ABA Checklist found in an area the size of Tennessee! For intra-American migration, Guatemala is the land where east meets west. Here you can see migrating Eastern and Western wood-peewees in the same tree. Guatemala is also the land where north meets south. You can see a Hairy Woodpecker in the same tree as a Common Chlorospingus.

January 1, 2013. 1:30 p.m., Salama, Baja Verapaz

On the road again. It is still early afternoon when I arrive in the dry Salama Valley. I hear the distinctive call of a Cassin’s Kingbird. In 2012, I was surprised to find this species in the adjacent Chixoy Valley. According to the range maps in the field guides, Cassin’s Kingbird is not found anywhere near this part of Guatemala. Soon I see and hear more Cassin’s Kingbirds. It was not an accident that I crossed paths with these birds. They winter here.

There is so much that we don’t know about birds in Guatemala. The distribution of Cassin’s Kingbird is just one example. Doing a big year in Guatemala and putting my observations on eBird is a great way to contribute to our understanding of the birds of this great country. I can share insights about the birds of Guatemala with the rest of the world. From Guatemala, I can contribute what I learn about migrating Bay-breasted and wintering Golden-cheeked warblers with the rest of the world. Through these observations, we can better understand the movements of birds that nest in such faraway places as the Northwest Territories and Texas, yet depend on Guatemala as either their flyway or their wintering grounds.

Because Guatemala has not been exten-
Un Año Grande en Guatemala

From top to bottom: The range of Spot-breasted Oriole is little known in Guatemala; the author has recently spotted it in several places on the Atlantic slope, such as Punta de Manabique. Pink-headed Warbler, a resident in highland pine-oak and cloud-forests, is one of the more famous Guatemalan birds. Slender Sheartail (male shown here) is endemic to central Middle America, from Chiapas to Honduras. All photos © John Cahill

Coast. We stop at a random location to change drivers, and, above the cacophony of the frogs in a nearby wetland, I hear the distant but distinct cackling of Double-striped Thick-knees. I had never heard or seen this species in life; I only knew their voice from recordings. The last confirmed record of this species in Guatemala was from 2007. Thick-knees are considered by some to be extirpated from Guatemala. My dad throws the truck into reverse and we make for their voices in the darkness. While my dad goes to ask for permission to enter a private farm, I make a couple of recordings. The next day we returned and photographed several individuals. Three months later, on April 8 and 9, I discovered thick-knees again at a location nine mi. (15 km) from the first sighting, including an egg laid in a scrape in the soil. Not only are there still thick-knees in Guatemala, but sively birded, range maps for many birds are incomplete. Maps show the Pacific Screech-Owl's range as a thin belt along the Pacific Coast. I was thunderstruck to hear this species in one of Guatemala's inland desert valleys near the Heloderma Natural Reserve. I double-checked. I made audio recordings. I returned later to the site and made more recordings. I began to think about why Pacific Screech-Owls would be in a thorn forest in the middle of Guatemala. It is like connecting the dots or fitting pieces in a puzzle. The range of Pacific Screech-Owl is another excellent example of how birding, and especially doing a big year, can contribute to science, especially when it's in an underbirded area.

La Avellana, Santa Rosa
My dad and I are driving toward the Pacific Coast. We stop at a random location to change drivers, and, above the cacophony of the frogs in a nearby wetland, I hear the distant but distinct cackling of Double-striped Thick-knees. I had never heard or seen this species in life; I only knew their voice from recordings. The last confirmed record of this species in Guatemala was from 2007. Thick-knees are considered by some to be extirpated from Guatemala. My dad throws the truck into reverse and we make for their voices in the darkness. While my dad goes to ask for permission to enter a private farm, I make a couple of recordings. The next day we returned and photographed several individuals. Three months later, on April 8 and 9, I discovered thick-knees again at a location nine mi. (15 km) from the first sighting, including an egg laid in a scrape in the soil. Not only are there still thick-knees in Guatemala, but
The woodpecker continues to call from a moderate-sized oak straight in front of me. Scanning the tree with binoculars, I pick it out immediately. It is obviously a Yucatán Woodpecker. The small tail is the thing that strikes me first. Then, taking a close look at the bill, I can see that it is proportionally smaller than that of the Golden-fronted. I get the photos needed to confirm this record. Yucatán Woodpecker—a new species for Guatemala!

Guatemala’s national council for protected areas (CONAP) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) work together to protect the Laguna del Tigre National Park. The park is threatened by land invasions and the rapid expansion of the African palm oil industry. From satellite images, I can see that the stand of oaks they seem to be doing quite well.

In 2013, I started a Facebook group called “Birding Guatemala”. The idea was to create a forum for people to post sightings, ask identification questions, share advice, and generally to promote birding in Guatemala. The group started with just eight people but quickly grew. Soon, several of the group members began to take birding seriously and started to use eBird. I had new friends, and Guatemala had new birders. One of my “Birding Guatemala” friends was with me when I found the second location for Double-striped Thick-knee. Today, “Birding Guatemala” has 266 members.

January 26, 2014.
Río Sachel, Petén
I’m sitting in a small kayak on a narrow, crocodile-inhabited river following a lead left by my brother. One month earlier, my brother identified a Yucatán Woodpecker at this location. This was a first record for this species in Guatemala, but the photo he got was not 100% conclusive—mostly because he was digitinng with his iPhone. Now I’m trying to confirm his record as well as add a great bird to my big year list. I am surrounded by branches and vines, and getting attacked by mosquitoes. The possibility of being mauled by a crocodile weighs heavy on my mind. Suddenly, I hear a woodpecker call reminiscent of a Golden-fronted Woodpecker but somehow softer, less shrill. I paddle toward the call. Silence. For a moment, I fear the bird flew away. I continue into the thicket until I’m walled in. It is time to get out of the kayak even though I’m still in about a foot of water. Once I hit the shore, the habitat opens before me, revealing tall grass and a few oaks.

January 26, 2014.
Río Sacluc, Petén
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The woodpecker continues to call from a moderate-sized oak straight in front of me. Scanning the tree with binoculars, I pick it out immediately. It is obviously a Yucatán Woodpecker. The small tail is the thing that strikes me first. Then, taking a close look at the bill, I can see that it is proportionally smaller than that of the Golden-fronted. I get the photos needed to confirm this record. Yucatán Woodpecker—a new species for Guatemala!

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calls. I jump out of the car with the camera and start taking photos.

This is the first Guatemalan record of Giant Wren. As I photograph this pair, the second pair comes in, attracted to the vocalizations of the others. Later that day, we find one more pair of Giant Wrens further from the Mexican border. These I also manage to photograph.

I have to admit a certain satisfaction on finding these wrens in Guatemala. Mexico has more than 100 endemic bird species. Guatemala has zero. By demonstrating that Giant Wrens live in Guatemala, Mexico might be saying “adiós” to one of its endemics, but Guatemala is adding one to its species list.

In order to communicate about my big year, I needed a blog. My oldest brother created one for me, and it’s a really cool one at that: bigyear.cloudforestconservation.org/johncahill. I add my observations to eBird, and they show up on my blog automatically.

---

March 31, 2013.
Aldea Limones,
San Marcos
It’s hot. We are near the Pacific on the coastal plain in the southwestern corner of Guatemala. On our hit list is Giant Wren! The species is endemic to Mexico, so why look for it in Guatemala? The answer is: because in a big year, you scrape for every remote possibility.

We are driving down the road. I’m using Google Maps on my iPhone and telling my dad where to turn. The satellite imagery is really helpful. I’m looking for patches of good habitat. We turn into a tiny village. First right, then left, then right again. As we reach the edge of the village, the houses are farther apart. Bushes and tall trees fill the spaces between the homes. The habitat looks perfect by the time we hit the Suchiate River (Guatemala’s border with Mexico). We stop the car near the river. I play a recording of a Giant Wren and immediately a pair responds, flying up to a tree branch just in front of me and singing. From behind me another pair...

Yucatán Woodpecker was first discovered in Guatemala by the author’s brother, Peter, in 2013. This year the author was able to confirm the species’ presence as well as discover another population along the Río Sacluc.

continued on page 18
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Continued from page 16

cally, in chronologic and taxonomic orders. A little blue dot shows up on a map of Guatemala for every checklist location I have submitted to eBird in 2014. My photos update automatically, too, from my Tumblr page. There is also a page that connects the birds I see in 2014 to a huge reforestation project in Guatemala.

Birding in Guatemala is in its infancy, but it is growing. Guatemala is a biologi-
cally rich country with amazing natural resources for birds and birding. But it is also a developing country and changing quickly. Will Guatemala be able to develop economically without wrecking its ecology? I believe that birders can help Guatemala. Having more birders can help Guatemala become more environmentally aware.

As of July 2014, I had encountered 623 species this year within Guatemala. I am trying to do what I can in Guatemala for bird conservation. We need to develop a passion for birds, an ethic for conservation, and an open-source approach to sharing what we are learning about birds. Birding—especially in conjunction with eBird—can help make that happen in Guatemala. For me, 2014 is all about getting out there and seeing birds. For science, for conservation, for Guatemala, and for fun.

Cerro de los Cuervos in the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes is one of the best places to see Goldman’s Warbler (inset), currently considered a very local resident subspecies of Yellow-rumped Warbler. Photos © John Cahill

Left: Fulvous Owl. One of the most memorable experiences of the year was getting a glimpse of this regionally endemic cloudforest species. Photo © John Cahill

Right: The author looking for American Dippers at Posada del Quetzal with his good friend Germán Velásquez. Photo © John Cahill
ABA Event

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Birders throughout the ABA Area wait in anticipation every summer for the latest changes in the American Ornithologists’ Union’s (AOU’s) Check-list of North American Birds. These updates are automatically accepted by both the ABA and Clements checklists, and splits of currently recognized species result in “armchair ticks”, added entries on birders’ life lists that require no additional effort.

Older birders may remember that checklist changes were not always a source of happiness. Perhaps the most infamous checklist update occurred in 1973. It resulted in the downgrading of numerous species into subspecies, leading to the loss of Great White Heron, Eurasian Green-winged Teal, Harlan’s Hawk, two species of flicker, Black-eared Bushtit, Audubon’s Warbler, Bullock’s Oriole, Ipswich Sparrow, two species of Seaside Sparrow, and three species of junco. Since 1973, some of these birds have been returned to full species status (e.g., Gilded Flicker, Bullock’s Oriole), while others have been subject to recent checklist change proposals which did not pass (e.g., Yellow-rumped Warbler). Today, there are often debates over whether a species should be recognized, with recent conflict over birds such as Fox Sparrows and crossbills. Much of the change in how we recognize what constitutes a species has come about due to new technology such as gene sequencing or analytical analyses of plumage and vocalizations. But much of the debate over recognition of species actually stems from changes in how we think about what a species is.

Of course, a species is not just a tick on a checklist. It’s a basic unit used by biologists, conservationists, and policy makers to identify a group of organisms. Because of this, how we classify species can have major consequences on regulation and conservation. Changes in how species are recognized can lead to differences in how we recognize where biodiversity hotspots are located (Agapow et al. 2004; Isaac et al. 2004) and can influence population monitoring, allocation of resources, and funding for conservation (Daugherty et al. 1990; Sangster 2000; Isaac et al. 2004; Zink 2004; Johnson et al. 2005; Rising 2005). This means that the criteria we use to recognize species are not merely an esoteric concern of scientists, but have real-world implications for the birds themselves.

In this article, I give a brief history of how scientists, and specifically ornithologists, have looked at species concepts; I also provide an (incomplete) overview of the challenges and future directions in defining bird species. At present, more than 22 species concepts have been named (Mayden 1997); however, many of these have not been widely adopted or were focused on problems that ornithologists thankfully don’t have to deal with (like species which reproduce asexually). For that reason, I limit this discussion to a few commonly cited species concepts relevant to bird speciation.

Origins of Classification

The concept of “a species” was first introduced by Carl Linnaeus, the father of taxonomy, in 1735, in the work Systema Naturae (Linnaeus 1735). His greatest innovation was the creation of the binomial system (Genus species) for referencing organisms.
Linnaeus’ views on species derive in part from earlier Greek philosophy, especially the works of Aristotle. Linnaeus believed that species and genera were discrete categories that remained stable over time and reflected real entities. Thus, the taxonomy created by Linnaeus reflected categories of similarity, and not any form of implied descent from a common ancestor. These ideas were carried over into the Typological Species Concept (TSC). Under this species concept, a species is distinguished on the basis of discrete features of anatomy that distinguish it from other species.

Early use of this concept led to over-recognition of different species, mostly due to poor sample sizes available to researchers and poor communication among scientists. The publishing of Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species in 1859 presented further problems: If species gradually evolved into other species, then we should expect a wide range of intermediate forms. Indeed, in that book Darwin highlighted the ramifications of evolution for our understanding of species when he wrote, “It will be seen that I look at the term species, as one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety, which is again, in comparison with mere individual differences, is also applied arbitrarily, and for mere convenience sake.” These inherently arbitrary lines that we use to separate species from mere races, varieties, and subspecies have created a problem that scientists continue to grapple with.

Integrating Evolution and Speciation

Although Darwin’s theory of natural selection was published in 1859, the TSC would remain the only species concept used for much of the next half century. This did not change until the modern evolutionary synthesis, which integrated genetics and natural selection. After that, an appreciation of the importance of reproductive isolation in speciation processes was developed, most notably in landmark works by Theodosius Dobzhansky (1937) and Ernst Mayr (1942).

The work of the above authors ultimately led to the creation of the Biological Species Concept (BSC), one of today’s most well-known species concepts, and the concept explicitly and currently used by the AOU. The BSC defines a species as “groups of actually or potentially interbreeding natural populations which are reproductively isolated from other such groups” (Mayr 1940). The BSC provided a clear, (supposedly) testable criterion for delimiting species. Unlike the earlier TSC, the BSC was not solely focused on categorization but also on the process whereby species become distinct entities, with an emphasis on formation of reproductive barriers. These barriers could take two forms. Prezygotic barriers prevent fertilization of eggs or mating

Indigo and Lazuli buntings regularly hybridize where they overlap, yet they are not widely considered the same species. Why not? Read on to find out!

Photo © Scott Carpenter
between two species from ever happening; thus, they prevent the formation of a zygote. They can take the form of differences in reproductive timing, display, vocalization, or reproductive anatomy. Postzygotic barriers occur after fertilization and result in sterile hybrids or hybrids that are either less adapted to the environment than their parents or less able to produce offspring. These barriers exist in the wild, but may not be present in captivity. The BSC revolutionized taxonomy because it transformed what had been a glorified filing system into an adjustable framework that allowed for testable hypotheses.

Italian Sparrow (right) is the result of (long-ago) hybridization between Spanish Sparrow (left) and House Sparrow (center). Even though Italian Sparrow has a hybrid origin, Spanish and Italian sparrows have been found to only breed with their own kind in areas of sympatry in southern Italy. Photos © (left to right) Jan Wegener, Jacob Spendelow, Mark Piazza.

This isn’t to say that the BSC is perfect. The concept’s emphasis on interbreeding (or lack thereof) has meant that the theory is hard to test in populations which exist in allopatry. For instance, many birds show regional variation across different island chains with no evidence of intermingling of populations. If two taxa never come into contact but are closely related, how does one determine whether they can interbreed? Ornithologists often must use vocalizations and differences in plumage to attempt to make this determination, but voice is often plastic within songbirds, and using plumage differences requires a certain degree of arbitrariness in designating what level of distinctiveness is necessary.

In addition to difficulty with allopatric species, the BSC also has trouble dealing with hybridization. Many closely related species have hybrid contact zones, including Carolina and Black-capped chickadees (Bronson et al. 2005, 2003), Lazuli and Indigo buntings (Baker and Boylan 1999; Carling and Brumfield 2008), and Townsend’s and Hermit warblers (Rohwer and Wood 1998; Rohwer et al. 2001). Generally speaking, if a hybrid zone remains comparatively narrow and doesn’t widen over time, then the hybrids produced from such interspecies coupling are not likely to reproduce and probably will not contribute to the two species merging into one. How narrow a hybrid zone must be to constitute a barrier to speciation is subjective and varies from species to species (Cracraft 1997), and there are plenty of taxa with apparently stable hybrid zones that are currently not considered separate species, such as Myrtle and Audubon’s warblers (Brelsford and Irwin 2009) and “California” and “Woodhouse’s” scrub-jays (Delaney et al. 2008).

### The Rise of Historical Species Concepts

The BSC focuses on what is happening today: Are two populations readily interbreeding? But some scientists have argued for a more historical approach to defining species—one which emphasizes the evolution of populations through time. Perhaps the most frequently cited historical approach is the Phylogenetic Species Concept (PSC). Under this approach, species are delimited according to their position within a phylogeny. A phylogeny is a diagram showing the branching pattern of ancestry and descent, created by scientists to study evolution. These diagrams are created by assembling a dataset of traits which indicate similarity between species; these traits could represent parts of the anatomy, plumage, or genes. Computer algorithms are used to analyze the data and group species together on the basis of shared traits. For a species to be recognized under the PSC, all members of a population should be more closely related to one another than to other populations. Species which fulfill this criterion are considered to show monophyly. They should
also have some sort of unique trait or set of traits that separates them from other populations/species; this is referred to as diagnosability. Unlike in the BSC, the ability to interbreed is not the primary criterion used in delineating species, although reproductive isolation often leads to diagnosability and monophyly over time.

The PSC has been endorsed by many researchers, as it can easily accommodate issues of allopatry and hybridization that are troublesome within the BSC. But the PSC has been heavily criticized; diagnosability can be subjective, and it’s uncertain how different a group of organisms must be to be considered a separate species (Lee 2003). In addition, phylogenetic diagrams may vary by which genes (and how many) are used. This can sometimes manifest in misleading differences in how species should be organized (Moore 1995), as well as in misdiagnosis of species and/or in different delineations being recognized by different studies. Finally, some researchers have worried that application of the PSC may lead to an overproliferation of species, making it difficult to concentrate conservation efforts (Isaac et al. 2004).

What about Subspecies?
The species is probably the most familiar “unit” of biodiversity, but there are units below it. The most well known is the subspecies. Subspecies constitute units of geographic variation below the rank of the species. This geographic variation can take the form of differences in plumage coloration, body size, and size and length of features of the anatomy, such as bill depth or wing length. In recent decades, many birders have paid increasing attention to subspecific variation because they enjoy the identification challenges; some birders are holding out for the possibility that a subspecies may later be elevated to species rank. Species concepts have received extensive coverage and debate in the literature, but the subspecies concept has been largely neglected. What debate has occurred has focused on how exactly to define them as geographic variants, and whether they should be used at all (Wilson and Brown 1953; Amadon 1949; Patten and Unitt 2002; Remsen 2010; Zink 2004; Burbrink 2001).

Statistics are frequently used in the recognition of subspecies (Amadon 1949), which has led to “the 75% rule”. It states that a population is a subspecies when at least 75% of the population can easily be identified as belonging to that subspecies. Other authors have argued for even stricter guidelines, calling for 90 or even 100% accuracy (Patten and Unitt 2002; Remsen 2010). Unfortunately, most subspecies were described before these rules came into place, in the 1800s and early 1900s, and most checklists—even works such as the Handbook of Birds of the World and Clements—largely just parrot the subspecies classification from works well over a half a century old (Remsen 2010). Even proponents of subspecies are skeptical at how many are valid; Remsen (2010) roughly estimated that around three-fourths of all described North American bird subspecies are invalid.

Because of the dubious nature of many currently described subspecies, some researchers have called for wholesale abolition of the concept. Subspecies have traditionally been based on plumage and anatomical characteristics, but many of these features may vary continuously within a population and are inappropriate for use in defining discrete units. An example of this can be seen in birds like Song Sparrows, which show extensive variation in darkness of their plumage, but these changes are subtle and populations grade into one another. (This is referred to as clinal variation.) A subspecies defined on the basis of tail length might designate a completely different entity than one based on bill length; the two features needn’t show the same pattern of geographic variation. Finally, (usually old) subspecies classifications often strongly disagree with (usually new) phylogenies based on genetic data, suggesting that subspecies may not properly define evolutionary units.

Species Concepts: Today and the Future
With all the taxonomic concepts described above (and many more!), scientists continue to rigorously debate not only the most appropriate concepts to use for their field, but also how to apply them. Nowadays, there is strong appreciation for the use of phylogenies in making decisions about what constitutes a species, and this has driven the current trend towards more splitting than lumping. Recently, near-ly every successfully passed AOU proposal for species splitting has incorporated a gene-based phylogeny. When a proposal that includes this information fails, it is usually due to limited sampling of individuals, limited sampling of genes, or both. In 2013, proposals advocating splitting Sandwich Tern and Nutting’s Flycatcher ran afoul of the above issues. Belief in the importance of monophyly of species also has become more important, and was a ma-
Major factor in the splits of Northern Oriole and Yellow Wagtail. Reproductive isolation remains a major component of how the AOU’s North American Classification Committee (NACC) makes its decisions, but aspects derived from other species concepts have slipped in. Study of bird vocalizations using sonograms and use of statistics in looking at differences in shape and plumage in birds has also resulted in taxonomic change.

Unless they are rumored to be full species in disguise, subspecies are still largely neglected by researchers, and the last edition of the AOU Checklist to reevaluate them was published in 1957. However, Remsen (2010) has recently advocated treating phylogenetic species as subspecies under the BSC. This proposal would nicely accommodate subspecies as units for evolutionary analysis, and would translate the “75% rule” to diagnosis of species under the PSC. If this concept could be widely implemented, it would mean that bird checklists could include both species concepts in their application. I suspect, though, that it will take decades of taxonomic research before we can thoroughly evaluate North American (let alone worldwide) bird populations at the subspecific level, and until then subspecies may continue to be dubious taxonomic units.

**Future Challenges**

One problem I foresee for future taxonomic committees is dealing with cryptic species, exemplified by many of the storm-petrels. For instance, Band-rumped Storm-Petrel is now known to represent several populations which segregate for breeding by island and time of year (Friesen et al. 2007; Monteiro and Furness 1998). Increasing evidence supports these forms as being reproductively isolated species, but there are few morphological differences between populations. Almost certainly this phenomenon exists in other pelagic seabirds, and possibly other bird groups.

Hybrid speciation is a major factor in plant evolution (Soltis and Soltis 2009), but until recently has not been strongly advocated in birds. Though still rare, there is evidence that hybrid speciation in birds might be more important than previously considered, though, and may have played a role in the evolution of “Audubon’s” Yellow-rumped Warbler (Brelsford et al. 2011), Italian Sparrow (Hermansen et al. 2011), and Pomarine Jaeger (Blechschmidt et al. 1993). Hybridization has the potential to seriously bias phylogenetic analyses, and the taxonomic status of some of the above species is still debated.

By now, most birders have heard about crossbills and the potential taxonomic headache they pose. Crossbills are probably now the superstars of sympatric speciation in birds (Smith and Benkman 2007). There are at least 10 described call types in North America. Each call type corresponds to a population that seems to feed on certain types of conifers. These populations show only limited segregation by geography and imperfectly known degrees of reproductive isolation (Benkman et al. 2009; Irwin 2010; Groth 1993). While crossbills have achieved the most attention, with even a recent proposal to elevate the “South Hills Crossbill” to species status (Benkman et al. 2009), call note differences have been noted in other related finches (Sewall et al. 2004; Adkisson 1981). Might there be more cryptic sympatrically-evolving populations amongst Evening and Pine grosbeaks? Future research will tell.

These are just a few of the current hot-button issues in bird speciation and taxonomy. No doubt, more will appear over time, and these will influence how species concepts are interpreted and applied. The science behind taxonomy, much like the birds we so enjoy watching, is a constantly evolving field.

**Glossary**

**Allopatric Speciation.** Speciation that results from populations being in allopat-
Many birds still have a contentious taxonomy. For instance, it’s still uncertain if “Myrtle” (left) and “Audubon’s” (right) Yellow-rumped warblers should be treated as separate species. There is evidence that suggests “Audubon’s” may in fact have originated as a hybrid swarm between more northerly “Myrtle” Warblers and Mexican “Black-fronted” Warblers (not shown). Photos © Robert Royse

try, with subsequent divergence in ecology, behavior, appearance, and/or other characteristics.

**Allopatry.** Segregation of populations by geography.

**Biological Species Concept (BSC).** Species concept which says that species are populations of interbreeding or potentially interbreeding individuals and that members of a species cannot produce viable offspring with other species.

**Clinal Variation.** Variation that occurs on a gradient (i.e., gradually changes from one population to another), without a distinct “break” between populations. Often associated with changes in climate.

**Diagnosability.** The quality of having traits that allow a group of organisms to be distinguished from other groups.

**Lump.** When scientists decide that two or more species are better treated as one species, the resulting action is a lump. Also used as a verb (e.g., Yellow-shafted and Red-shafted flickers are currently lumped together as Northern Flicker).

**Monophyly.** The quality or state of being monophyletic. Monophyletic describes a group of organisms (in a phylogeny) that all share a common ancestor.

**Morphological.** Pertaining to morphology, which is a set of physical characteristics.

**Phylogenetic Species Concept (PSC).** Species concept which says that species are the smallest distinguishable cluster of populations within a phylogeny and that members of species share a common evolutionary history.

**Phylogeny.** A reconstruction, based on analysis of shared traits, of the evolutionary history of a group of organisms. It is usually depicted in a tree-like diagram.

**Reproductive Isolation.** A state whereby a species can not produce offspring with another species, through differences in behavior and anatomy.

**Speciation.** The evolutionary process by which two or more populations of one species diverge to become separate species.

**Species Concept.** A set of criteria used to define what species means.

**Split.** When scientists decide that a taxon (often, a species) is really two or more taxa, the resulting action is called a split. Also used as a verb (e.g., Rufous-sided Towhee was split into Eastern Towhee and Spotted Towhee).

**Subspecies.** A geologically discrete population of organisms which share features (e.g., plumage, bill shape, size) that separate them from other populations, but which have not yet acquired reproductive isolation. (The plural of subspecies is subspecies.)

**Sympatric Speciation.** Speciation of geographically overlapping populations, usually driven by ecological adaptation.

**Taxa.** Plural of taxon. A taxon is a biological group or classification of organisms. Classes, orders, families, genera, species, and subspecies are all various levels of taxon.

**Taxonomy.** The study of the classification of organisms (taxa), based on their shared characteristics and relatedness, and the subsequent nomenclature (i.e., naming) of those classifications. Taxonomic describes things related to this pursuit. Taxonomy also refers to a specific classification scheme, or “list”. For example, the AOU and the British Ornithologists’ Union utilize different taxonomies.

**Typological Species Concept (TSC).** Species concept which says that a species is a group of organisms for which the presence of discrete morphological features (e.g., plumage pattern, bill size) differentiates it from other species.

**Zygote.** A fertilized egg.
species & Subspecies: A Brief History

References


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**ABA Birding Rally**

**Spearfish, South Dakota**

**When:** June 17-21, 2015

**How Much:** $1395 early bird registration price!

After December 1, 2014 the price will be $1595

**Hosts:** Jeff Gordon, Liz Deluna Gordon, Michael Retter, Jen Brumfield, Doug Chapman, Ted Floyd, George Armistead, and others.

The Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming are a unique mountain range, with isolated breeding populations of Black-backed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, and Virginia’s Warbler. Here, the deciduous forest of the east meets the pine-woods of the west, and the boreal forest of the north meets the desert scrub of the south. In addition to the Black Hills, field trips will cover prairies, riparian areas, and even Mount Rushmore. **Let’s rally in Spearfish!**

For more details and registration, go to: events.aba.org

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On April 21, 2014, at 9:28 a.m., in Angelina National Forest, Texas, a team of dedicated birder/photographers armed themselves with cameras and headed out to set a new North American record for the number of species of birds photographed in a 24-hour period.

Tom Stephenson and I were part of that team, along with Cameron Cox and Sam Galick, and we succeeded. By the time we ended our run the next morning, more than 400 miles away in Uvalde, Texas, we had photographed 208 distinct and identifiable species. What follows is an account of our day, what we learned, and what we hope for the future of this exciting new kind of birding challenge.

First, a bit of background. I have always used a camera as a tool for birding, and have found that taking photos has rapidly accelerated my learning process. When you photograph a bird, you get to look at it twice—once in the field and once at home. You also have to ID it twice. That process of attempting to name all your photos can get thorny if you get a photo of, say, just a tail, or an oddly plumaged gull—and so you’re often forced to consider the more subtle aspects of the identification process in order to make sure you put the right name to the bird. Back in the field, that work pays off when you apply those newly learned (or re-learned!) points to the birds in real life. For me, then, photography created a feedback loop that really moved my skills forward, and also gave me images to enjoy and share.

Today, cameras are nearly ubiquitous in the birding world. Most of the birding groups Tom and I lead include a high proportion of people with cameras. And why

Sam Galick shooting on the fly in Angelina Forest, Texas. Photo © Scott Whittle
not? Cameras have become cheaper and easier to use, and they give us the opportunity to bring something back from our experience in the field, something we can share with others and that can help effectively spread the excitement of birding.

Tom, Sam, and I did our first photo-based birding contest at the World Series of Birding in New Jersey in 2009. That year we competed in the digital camera category and came up with a very respectable 133 species. More important than the number was the excitement of the event—racing around the state on our own route, diving into the brush after an elusive Hooded Warbler, shooting out the sunroof at darting Barn Swallows, or getting that first pre-dawn bird: a Wild Turkey in a tree! I was hooked, and I know Sam and Tom were as well. But there were a couple of issues with the logistics of that event. First, we were required to submit all photos by 10 p.m., which meant a lot of processing in the car. Second, the event started at midnight, and while there are some interesting nighttime shooting possibilities, those dark hours were really not that...
useful for a photo-based team.

With this past experience in mind, Tom, Sam, and I started mulling over the idea of setting a photo big day record for the whole U.S., and promoting this idea as a valid and exciting event nationwide.

We decided we needed a new set of rules specifically aimed at photography. For example, why not have the 24-hour period start at any time of the day, which would allow the contestants to divide up the shooting between two different kinds of habitats, using the dark hours to drive between the areas? We wanted to make sure the checklist was finalized at the end of the 24-hour period, so we decided to photograph the checklist with the same time and date stamp used by the photos. Then it would be okay to take more time to organize and name the photos—up to a week. Any bird discovered later in a photo and thus not on the checklist couldn’t be counted. If a photo of a bird turned out to be unidentifiable, then that bird had to be removed from the count. Lastly, if a bird was listed on the checklist but not actually photographed at all, there would be a one-bird penalty. This prevents a contestant from submitting a list with many possible species and then trying to find those species later in the photos (the “shotgun” approach), as within a large group of shorebirds or gulls. In other words, contestants need to know what they’ve photographed at the end of the day.

The ABA has been very involved in this project, and is working to become the body of record for photo big days in the future by adding a photo category. The association added a photo category to big day records. If you’re an ABA member, you can officially register your efforts on the ABA website. Additionally, New York City Audubon has created a website <photobigday.org> that allows photo big day teams to easily register and raise money for the charity of their choice.

One of the appealing aspects of a photo big day is that it really levels the playing field for all kinds of birders. You don’t have to be a known expert for your results to be believable. Even a beginner working with a camera can produce verifiable results.

Because there is an identifiable photo of each species, the results can be accurately judged by a competent third party. That makes these contests more resistant to “loose” sightings. Also, a photo big day can be done by anyone at any time. It would be great to see photo big day events in which teams start at the same time and place and pick their routes. But we’re also excited to see individuals set photo big day records for their yard, local park, or state.

Because photo big days involve a verifiable and level playing field, we’ve found that the idea appeals to young birders. For example, Dessi Sieburt, an 11-year-old birder from Montrose, California, got excited about doing a photo big day, and went out and set the record for Antelope Valley at 84 species while raising money for conservation. Our congratulations to Dessi!

What’s so amazing about photo big days is that you can share the experience with everyone by posting your images on the internet. We predict that photo big days will be a fun pursuit for all kinds of birders for many years to come.

Special thanks to the ABA and New York City Audubon, as well as Zeiss Sports Optics for generously donating scopes and digiscoping gear for the day. We fervently hope that our experience in Texas will inspire others to join us in photo big days, and that at least a few people will take a shot at our record—although we plan to break it ourselves next year! With the ever-increasing excitement around digital photography and birding, it makes perfect sense that this kind of competition will become the birding game of the future. Let’s get shooting!
The following is a quick timeline of the photo big day in Texas

**April 21**

7:00 a.m.: Left our hotel in Winnie, Texas, and headed north for our starting point in the piney woods of Angelina National Forest. We'd been scouting for several days, and our strategy was to combine a run from the piney woods, through High Island, and down to Galveston, and then drive west during the night to an area with a much different habitat in Uvalde, Texas, thus maximizing our opportunity for species diversity.

9:00 a.m.: Arrived in the forest and started scouting around. Target birds included Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Bachman’s Sparrow. We located a group of the woodpeckers, and got in position to start.

9:28 a.m.: Start! Our first shot was Red-cockaded Woodpecker, and then the four of us spent a frustrating 10 minutes on Bachman’s Sparrow, which has a nasty habit of diving into a bush and staying there. A great example of why a photo big day is different from a regular Big Day. Even though those sparrows were singing around us everywhere, we needed that photo, and we never got it. A valuable lesson there, and next time we won’t waste minutes on overly skulky species (the same applies to Marsh Wren and Sedge Wren).

We did get a few other shots there, including Pine Warbler, Pygmy Nut-hatch, and Red-headed Woodpecker. Cameron’s amazing knowledge of the area quickly became evident as he drove us from quick stop to quick stop, accumulating a number of other...
er species, such as Common Loon, American Robin, Northern Flicker, and a lucky flyover through the sunroof: Mississippi Kite. Another important lesson there: Always have a car with a sunroof!

10:47 a.m.: Cameron got us to a spot for Prairie Warbler, where we also picked up Red-tailed and Broad-winged hawks. Cameron disappeared into the thick brush, and returned triumphant with his Prairie Warbler shot a few minutes later. One rule is to stay within earshot of each other, so there was a fair amount of yelling back and forth throughout.

11:08 a.m.: Another stop at a fish hatchery and we got a surprise pair of Greater Roadrunners running across the road. You have to love those bonus birds.

12:03 p.m.: We arrived at Martin Dies, Jr. State Park, our
last stop in the north. Highlights included Anhinga, Great Crested Flycatcher, and White-eyed Vireo. Hooded Warbler eluded us, despite locating several, but, amazingly, Swainson’s Warbler did not. While Cameron, Tom, and Sam staked out one side of a thicket, Scott snuck around the other side and got some hazy photos of the bird happily turning over leaves and feeding on the ground.

1:32 p.m.: Racing to High Island now, we shot birds at freeway speeds out the window as we passed through Beaumont. Rock Pigeon and White-winged Dove—check!

2:05 p.m.: A quick stop for gas and sandwiches. We’re at a meager 68 species, but many are shots we couldn’t have gotten further south. Onward!

3:04 p.m.: After dipping on our pre-scouted Yellow-headed Blackbird, we found that our best shorebird spot was also weak. Caracara and Snipe were consolations. Along the way, we also spotted a strange pair of Nighthawks flying by, one appearing significantly smaller than the other. Lesser Nighthawk? Later we’ll find that the photos indicate two Common Nighthawks, but for the moment we were stoked! And this is a good example of one of the rules for the day: If you shoot a bird and think it’s something it’s not, it doesn’t count, but there’s also no penalty for having put it on your checklist.

3:16 p.m.: Sam shot a flyby shorebird without knowing what it was. Turned out to be a Buff-breasted Sandpiper! Sam definitely has super-human flight-shot chops, and he earned the MVP shooter award for the trip.

3:55 p.m.: Now at Anahuac, Scott shot what he thought was a Seaside Sparrow and didn’t give it another thought—until we realized days later that it was a Swamp Sparrow. Ouch! That costs us that bird, because Swamp wasn’t on our final list.

5:23 p.m.: High Island was as quiet as we’d seen all week. In fact, the whole day had been a very poor migration day. We can only imagine what our numbers would have been like with a good one! Nevertheless, Inca Dove, Bronzed Cowbird, and a few warblers were added to the list.

6:47 p.m.: We made up species now at a fast clip with terns, gulls, and more shorebirds along the Bolivar Peninsula—American Golden Plover, Gull-billed Tern, and a host of others. We were on a roll and racing the sun. We wanted to get the Galveston Ferry with a little bit of light left to look for Magnificent Frigatebird.

8:01 p.m.: Our last shot with daylight was a Laughing Gull. No frigatebird for us! On the far side of the ferry we decided to try one gull roost to see if we could shoot at night. Sure enough, we were able to get distinguishable photos with a handheld camera at its highest ISO setting in near-total darkness. Wow! An interesting thing to know for our next photo big day…

9:00 p.m.: Dinner at a local taco place, and a tally for the day. Last we checked we were at 68. Amazingly, we were now up to 168! A very solid first leg for the trip, and it put us in striking range of 200 species.

9:30 p.m.: Now for the long drive to Uvalde, five hours west. Cameron once again came through by driving most of it, and we arrived at a little Uvalde motel at 3 a.m., with a wake-up call for 6 a.m. We crashed for a few
hours, but not before photographing some of the cool moths fluttering around the hotel lights.

• April 22

6:00 a.m.: Up again, gas station coffee, and on the road to Chalk Bluff Park, a spot that Tom and Sam have scouted and that has a host of good species for us to try for.

6:53 a.m.: Pre-dawn shots of Cassin’s Sparrow started the day, followed by Vesper, Black-throated, White-crowned, Clay-colored, Lark, and Field sparrows. We did so well at this spot that we decided we had time to hit one more—Neal’s Lodges.

8:11 p.m.: Curve-billed Thrasher and Western Kingbird both got photographed along the roadside. We were getting good at shooting from a moving car!

8:45 p.m.: With about 45 minutes left, we arrived at Neal’s Lodges and added a few final species, including Black Phoebe, Painted Bunting, and Yellow-throated Warbler.

9:28 p.m.: Tropical Parula and Great Kiskadee both eluded us, but we were pretty happy with our morning when we photographed our final list of birds. At the time, the list was 210 species, but, because we misidentified Lesser Nighthawk and Seaside Sparrow (which turned out to be a Swamp Sparrow), the final tally was 208. A new North American record! We celebrated by driving on to do some more birding, of course, with Golden-cheeked Warblers at Lost Maples State Natural Area. Later that day, we got a flat tire, and were just grateful that it didn’t happen during the race.
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My birding beginnings date to the fall of 2003. While walking my dog, I spotted a cute little black-and-white bird and wondered what it was. My perusal through an old Peterson field guide eventually found a match: Black Phoebe. After repeating this “puzzle” another time or two, I was hooked.

I thought birding would be an inexpensive, fun hobby, with my only needs being a pair of binoculars and a field guide. Wrong! Not only did I need more and more equipment, but I needed to travel. Thus a trip to Nova Scotia in the summer of 2006 led to a chance meeting with birding expert Paul Lehman. He challenged me to do my first San Diego County big year in 2007. I ended up with 350 species.

I started 2013 off quietly, with the goal of topping my previous record. Jay Keller had a record-setting San Diego County big year in 2012, which helped plant the seed of another big year for me. So, on the morning of January 1, I recorded 52 birds—hardly a record-breaking number—but the full potential of my home county lay waiting to reveal itself.

San Diego County is a great birding playpen:

1. The county is large, including some 4,526 square miles of land plus ocean...
waters. (San Clemente Island sits off northern San Diego County. Unfortunately, it belongs to Los Angeles County. Going by the nearest point of land, Los Angeles County includes waters to our west and even waters west of Mexico—much of it formerly considered part of San Diego County.)

2 • The total number of species recorded in the county as of the end of 2013 was 514, more than that of many states and provinces.

3 • The habitats are diverse. The county encompasses rocky and sandy shorelines, cities with pockets of coastal scrub and chaparral, as well as exotic plantings. The urban sprawl contains neighborhoods, creeks, and parks with watered flowering trees and gardens that are attractive to spring and fall vagrants and wintering rarities. Although major tidal mudflats are present, other shorebird habitat is scarce; for example, there are no viable sewage ponds or mud-
San Diego County 2013 Big Year

edged freshwater lagoons. A couple of the larger lakes and reservoirs sometimes provide meager shorebird habitat. The county continues over the Laguna and Cuyamaca Mountains, where a few mountain peaks top 6,000 feet. The highest is Hot Springs Mountain, with an elevation of 6,535 feet. Continuing east takes one to the semi-desert and desert habitats at Jacumba and the Anza-Borrego Desert.

4 • Birding habitat continues westward and offshore via pelagic trips. Taking many boat trips is crucial, but some pelagic birds can be seen by doing sea-watches from La Jolla.

5 • Quick communication enables news of rarities to be disseminated rapidly through the use of the county-wide email list and a text messaging group.

6 • There is plenty of help and support given by many wonderful top-notch birders in this county (most important!). To these I added dedication and determination. I bired almost every morning before work, sometimes pushing work to a later start from my usual 9 a.m. I bired during some lunch breaks and sometimes after work. I put 47,000 miles on my car alone, not counting the trips done in friends’ cars. And we put in 773 statute miles (690 nautical miles) on one friend’s boat, not including my other scheduled pelagic trips. To the best of my knowledge, I missed only 21 species that were seen by others in the county in 2013.

At the start of my 2013 big year, San Diego was hosting a great number of wintering rarities. I focused on seeing the Eastern vagrant warblers, which included Chestnut-sided, Pine, Bay-breasted, Black-and-white, Black-throated Blue, and Prairie. Pacific Golden-Plover, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Thick-billed Kingbird, Painted Redstart, Hepatic Tanager, and Evening Grosbeak were also present. Sparrows included Swamp, Harris’s, and Nelson’s (high tides over six feet push these up so they can be seen). At the end of January, my total had reached 213 birds.

Manx Shearwater was added on February 14, and was extra sweet since it was a new county bird for me. I made multiple February trips to Borrego Springs and the Anza-Borrego Desert for special “Sage” and Black-throated sparrows and Crissal and Le Conte’s thrashers. The mountains were another priority at this time: a small, wintering flock of Cassin’s Finches, plus singing Fox Sparrows and calling Mountain Quail. Some important returning breeders started showing up late in March, including Gray Vireo. March ended with 302 species.

The spring turned out to be average, but looking for local breeders and migrants kept me busy. Beautiful Calliope Hummingbirds come through San Diego at this time of year. And I found a Franklin’s Gull at Sweetwater Reservoir on the very sandbar Paul had suggested I check! With much effort, I managed to see Least and American bitterns. Spotted Owls were seen, but alas, the Flammulated Owl had to be counted as heard only. A May trip to Borrego Springs for Brown-crested Flycatcher also turned up a rare Bronzed Cowbird, much to the joy of many county birders. Friends with a high-clearance vehicle birded the top of Hot Springs Mountain with me, helping me turn up Dusky Flycatcher and White-headed Woodpecker. A Pigeon Guillemot landed in front of me on my first try for this locally rare species at La Jolla Cove. But even more amazing was the immature Masked/Nazca Booby which came back for a second day there.

July is usually slow, but that year San Diego County put on an amazing show. Matt Sadowski (while working) found a Stilt Sandpiper, an exceptional adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (a new county bird for many, including me), and a first-county-record Lesser Sand-Plover! Another friend found a Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel
back at La Jolla Cove. I successfully relocated all of these. My biggest miss was also in this month: Yellow-billed Cuckoo never even called despite multiple attempts. I came home from several of these fruitless excursions with hitch-hiking dog ticks instead. Not an acceptable trade.

I carried out additional searches for shorebirds in August, using a small skiff to motor around Lake Henshaw. Only Pectoral Sandpiper was added to my shorebird list. But one such trip yielded an unseasonal and very rare Black Swift, which I had missed during its usual migration period in May. Luckily for me, it was one of the birds “resurrected from the dead” for a spot on my year list. A pelagic trip with friends added Red-billed Tropicbird and Craveri’s Murrelet.

I continued to strain for shorebirds in early September until a friend helped me add Baird’s and Semipalmated sandpipers. Blue-footed Boobies invaded San Diego and much of California. Yellow-green Vireo, Red-throated Pipit, Ovenbird, and Magnolia Warbler showed up. And I added my very own Scaly-breasted Munia (Nutmeg Mannikins at the time) once this exotic species was formally accepted to the California and ABA checklists. September ended with my total at 364 birds, only five behind last year’s record-setting 369.

October was filled with as many pelagic trips as I could take. I saw Flesh-footed Shearwater, South Polar Skua, and southern California’s amazing first-ever Great Shearwater! Crested Caracara, Great Crested Flycatcher, and Golden-crowned Kinglet, all found by Gary Nunn, turned up at various places in the county. The appearance of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker actually preceded my finally seeing the more-common-for-this-area Red-naped Sapsucker. A Northern Parula finally turned up. Terry Hunefeld spotted a first-county-record Le Conte’s Sparrow on a Friday, but I was stuck at work, and the bird was gone the next day. Sometimes work just gets in the way of birding.

There were many Eastern warblers I still needed, but the fall had not been very good for them. So, on November 3, I was thrilled to finally see a Blackpoll Warbler. Even more thrilling was when Paul and I found a Mourning Warbler in our front yard upon our return home! This casual stray was a new county bird for me. As November progressed, I added other birds: Gray Catbird, Black Scoter, Orchard Oriole, Black-legged Kittiwake, and Blue-headed Vireo.

December brought further additions to a screeching halt. It turned quite cool compared to a typically mild San Diego winter. The darkness and the chill did not inspire me to get going before work. December brought great birds, but I had already seen them in the year. These included another Masked/Nazca Booby and several additional Blue-footed Boobies.

I ended 2013 with 388 species. For only three of these species I was the sole observer; two species were heard-only. Not only is this a new record for San Diego County, but it is also the highest total ever for a single county anywhere in the ABA Area. It was a result of my own efforts, coupled with the county’s high species and rarity-rich list and a core of active birders generously sharing information in a timely manner.

During my big year, my dog, Roxie, remained loyal in spite of her master’s many absences, and the local oil-change shop was happy to see me (and my car) on a regular basis. I sincerely thank Paul Lehman and many others for their help and support!
Amid the rightly prominent public attention given to Peregrine Falcon conservation, a large-scale but less widely known project is focusing on the Peregrine’s close relative, the Aplomado Falcon. The goal is restoration of the Aplomado to its former breeding range in the U.S., where its subspecies *septentrionalis* is officially listed as endangered. This beautiful falcon is resident throughout much of South America, Central America, and Mexico. Its northernmost natural range limits traditionally reached the U.S. along the coastal savannas of southern Texas and across the Chihuahuan Desert in southeastern Arizona, southern New Mexico, and western Texas.

It was once fairly common in those northernmost regions, at least locally, but populations gradually dwindled during the past century, until the last reports of nesting in the U.S. came in the 1940s and early 1950s. An exciting resumption of successful breeding occurred in 2002 in southwestern New Mexico, where a resident pair fledged three young after a decade of wild Aplomados being present in that area. In his regional nesting season summary in *North American Birds* (56:468), Sartor O. Williams III hailed the occurrence as a turning point for the species’ conservation efforts.

EDITOR’S NOTE: The ABA’s Recording Standards and Ethics Committee just passed a change to its recording rules that allows birders to unequivocally count Aplomado Falcons seen in coastal Texas on lists reported to the ABA (see p. 47 for details), regardless of whether those populations are established. Certainly, there’s much more to know about the conservation and repatriation efforts of these fascinating birds than whether you can check the box next to their name. Read on!
The falcons’ prey. Alberto Macías-Duarte and coauthors explain the complex ecological relationships of drought, habitat, prey abundance, and reproduction in a detailed 2004 analysis (Auk 121:1081–1093).

Another factor may have been the same hazard that so severely affected the Peregrine Falcon: contamination from toxic organochlorides in pesticides. Researchers in the 1970s found high concentrations of one such chemical, DDE, in Aplomado Falcons from Mexico. DDE, a metabolic residue of DDT, accumulates in the food chain and is ingested via contaminated prey. Reproductive failure is among the most notable of its damaging physiological effects. DDE in a female bird’s reproductive system causes abnormally thin eggshells, which are so weakened that they break.

Lloyd F. Kiff, David B. Peakall, and Dean P. Hector compared Aplomado eggshells that had been collected in Mexico during the pre-DDT era with eggs they sampled there in 1977 when the long-lasting chemical was still present in the falcons’ bodies. Eggs in the latter sample showed elevated levels of DDE and corresponding degrees of thinning similar to those documented for the Peregrine Falcon. Kiff and his colleagues published their find-

casion as “the first successful nesting by naturally occurring Aplomados in New Mexico—and the United States—in 50 years”. But he also expressed concern that the proposed future releases of captive-bred birds of (relatively wet) tropical lowland origin into high desert grasslands could threaten natural recolonization of the historic range by diluting the gene pool with birds unsuited to the new habitat. The 2002 nest by wild birds in New Mexico was the last of its kind known to be successful in the U.S.

One factor in the decline is all too familiar in our time: degradation and loss of essential habitats, caused by human activities. In west Texas and New Mexico, native grasslands with sparse tree yuccas and other desert shrubs—key Aplomado habitat—have been ruined by overgrazing of livestock and by conversion to agriculture. In southern Texas, coastal prairies have been degraded or destroyed by extensive human development, and by succession from traditionally open grasslands to more dense brush inappropriate for the species.

Compounding those disastrous effects on habitat are severe droughts, which have reduced

This pair of Aplomado Falcons was photographed in coastal prairie off Texas Route 100 near Los Fresnos. This area and nearby Old Port Isabel Road are fairly dependable locations for birders to find the species.

Photo © J. Marty Paige
Aplomado Falcons in the ABA Area

Aplomado Falcons were first listed as a species in 1980 in *Proceedings of the 17th International Ornithological Congress*, available at <tinyurl.com/APFAspecies>.

A more recent study reported by Miguel A. Mora and colleagues in 2008 (*Environment International* 34:44–50) indicated that DDE and other toxic contaminants may no longer be a threat to Aplomado Falcon reproduction in south Texas, but they may still be having negative effects on Chihuahuan populations. No study has been sufficiently extensive to assess the degree of DDE contamination and possible reproductive failure in the species as a whole.

Could the Aplomado Falcon possibly be restored in some portion of its original U.S. range? A large-scale attempt at restoration began in the early 1990s, led by The Peregrine Fund (the organization famed for its role in increasing the Peregrine Falcon's numbers). The story of this major conservation effort is summarized in a 2013 review by W. Grainger Hunt and 12 coauthors in *The Journal of Raptor Research* (47:335–351).

More than 1,800 Aplomado fledglings bred in captivity by The Peregrine Project were released in their natural habitat by hacking during a decade-long period. In coastal south Texas, 839 were released at 21 sites during 1993–2004, supplemented by releases of 35 individuals split between two additional sites in 2012. In western Texas, 637 birds were hacked at 11 sites during 2002–2011. In southern New Mexico, 337 birds were released at 10 sites during 2006–2012.

Hunt, a senior scientist at The Peregrine Fund, says that reproduction has tended to be good in south Texas, with yearly averages of 1.5 to 1.9 fledglings per territorial pair, and that perhaps at least 500 young have fledged since 1995. Much of the success in south Texas is attributed to a novel design of artificial nest structures that prevent predation by Great Horned Owls, another factor thought to be involved in failures of Aplomado nests.

Geographically, the success has differed notably. Numbers in two coastal Texas populations have remained fairly stable since 2008. A Matagorda Island population and a Brownsville area population each had 14 pairs in 2013. But the story is discouragingly different in west Texas and New Mexico, where not one pair could be found by 2012.

Correspondingly, future conservation efforts must differ, according to Hunt and his colleagues:

- They believe that the Matagorda Island population near Rockport is likely secure as it is presently managed. However, they warn that the Brownsville area population is threatened by human development and predation by brush-associated raptors. This latter area requires new protection and habitat management, as well as establishment of additional large areas of open savanna in coastal Texas. *(The densest Aplomado aggregation lies between Brownsville and Texas Highway 100 west of Port Isabel—many birders’ favorite location for finding the species.)*

- By contrast, the authors believe programs in western Texas and southern New Mexico cannot succeed under current environmental conditions. Their conclusion is that “Given long-term predictions of increasing drought, it is questionable whether Aplomados can regain their former distribution in the Chihuahuan Desert.” Thus, reintroduction may have failed in that region at least partly because of low prey availability.

Artificial nest structures, called hacking platforms, protect young Aplomados from predators such as Great Horned Owls. This structure is in New Mexico. Photo © Nick Dunlop
The Peregrine Fund created the overall restoration effort in 1996 and the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO) currently maintains a project monitoring nest productivity of a small population of Aplomado Falcons in Chihuahua, Mexico; their numbers have plummeted because of drought and conversion of grasslands to agriculture. According to the Fund’s latest report, published in September 2013 <peregrinefund.org/aplomado>, the number of occupied territories decreased from 25 per year from 1997–2004 to eight in 2010. More recently, of only three observed nesting attempts, just a single fledgling was produced.

The Fund’s report concludes, “If the current trends in grassland conversion and reproductive success continue, the last known desert-dwelling Aplomado Falcon population in Chihuahua will become extinct during this decade”.

RMBO wants to forestall such a fate. Its program includes an effort to engage landowners in maintaining their acreage in ways that are both profitable and environmentally friendly to Chihuahua’s grassland birds. RMBO’s goal is to support five successful breeding pairs of Aplomado Falcons and enroll 500,000 acres by 2020 <tinyurl.com/APFA-RMBO>.

RMBO’s hope is a poignant epilogue to a June 1980 article in Birder’s Guide (pp. 92–102) by Dean P. Hector, an authority on the species. The article is titled “Our Rare Falcon of the Desert Grassland”, and it taught many ABA members for the first time about the Aplomado Falcon’s biology, identification, and troubled population.

Hector noted that the species had virtually disappeared north of the border, and it had declined in other parts of Mexico. “Perhaps, someday, this colorful falcon will once again nest regularly in the grasslands of the southwestern United States”, Hector wrote optimistically.

Looking back 34 years later, now as an assistant professor at Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, Texas, he comments to Birder’s Guide, “Reintroduction work has obviously made it easier for our birthing public to see this dashing falcon north of Mexico. It has also created the perfect flagship species for grassland restoration projects in northern Mexico, and it has accelerated an anticipated northward range extension. Maybe one of these days I will actually be able to watch them chasing White-winged Doves near my home in central Texas, just like I used to do in northern Veracruz”.

**Acknowledgments**
I thank Grainger Hunt, Dean P. Hector, Sartor Williams III, Michael L. P. Retter, and Ted Floyd for their comments and improvements on previous drafts.

**Glossary**

**DDE:** Dichlorodiphenyl dichloroethylene is an organic chemical that enters the environment as a residual, or “breakdown”, product of DDT. This compound, not the DDT itself, is the contaminant that accumulates up the food chain, is ingested via prey, and persists in a bird’s body for many years as an agent of reproductive failure.

**DDT:** Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane is a synthetic chemical compound developed in the 1940s to combat insect-borne human disease when used as a pesticide. It has been used widely to control insects in environments ranging from huge crop fields to residential gardens. Because it is a hazard to humans’ and other animals’ health (emphasized in Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring), its use as an agricultural insecticide has been banned in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, but it is still permitted for controlling mosquitoes and other disease vectors.

**Hacking:** The controlled release of young birds from an artificial box or platform to introduce captive-bred fledglings into their natural habitat. The technique prepares the young for independent hunting in the wild. Fledglings are housed, fed, and trained to fly and hunt on their own. The method has succeeded widely in restoring endangered raptors to their former ranges.

**Organochloride:** An organic (carbon-based) chemical compound with at least one covalently bonded chlorine atom. Among the better-known organochlorides are DDT (a pesticide), “carbon tet” (a dry-cleaning agent), polyvinyl chloride (PVC plastics), and chloroform. These pollutants can be toxic to plants, birds, and other animals (including humans). Organochlorides of many forms can enter the environment via waste disposal, agricultural runoff, and incinerator effluent. The compounds persist in the environment long after their use has ended.
Every summer, birders anxiously await publication of the “Check-list Supplement” by the American Ornithologists’ Union’s North American Classification Committee (NACC). The Supplement details revisions to its Check-list (for instance, lumps, splits, new species, new classifications). This “Check-list Redux” is the fourth annual summary appearing in ABA publications. It aims to explain in straightforward terms what has changed and how those changes impact anyone birding in the U.S. or Canada. Illustrations, photos, charts, and maps are employed where applicable.

As a general policy, the AOU accepts as additions to the Check-list any species the ABA’s Checklist Committee (ABA CLC) adds to its list that are not already on the AOU’s list. See the ABA CLC’s annual report in the November/December 2013 issue of Birding for details on those species. Likewise, the ABA CLC automatically adopts all taxonomic changes accepted by the NACC.

You can read all the proposals on which the NACC voted this year by visiting its webpage <checklist.aou.org>. Species marked with an asterisk below are those which do not appear on the ABA Checklist, either because there are no currently accepted records in the ABA Area or because they are non-native species which have not yet been admitted to the list. When a split is discussed, the species that retains the scientific name of the “old” lumped species is listed first. These days, almost any change in taxonomy is due (at least partly) to analysis of new genetic data, so that is not always mentioned below.

**Clapper Rail Split**

- Mangrove Rail* (Rallus longirostris)
- Ridgway’s Rail (Rallus obsoletus)
- Clapper Rail (Rallus crepitans)

Recent genetic studies have looked at the relatedness of the New World “big rails”, that is, what we have traditionally known as Clapper Rail and King Rail. It turns out that the “King Rails” resident in Mexico (longirostris) are more closely related to the Clapper Rails on the Pacific Coast of the U.S. and Mexico. Not only that, but East Coast Clapper Rails are more closely related to the eastern U.S. King Rails than they are to the other populations of “Clapper Rail”. In other words, the King and Clapper rails that occur in the eastern U.S. are sister taxa (perhaps not surprising given their limited hybridization both there and in Cuba). The “King Rails” of interior Mexico and the “Clapper Rails” of the U.S./Mexican Pacific Coast are also sister taxa. In order to reflect this new knowledge, King Rail was split into two species, and Clapper Rail into three. (For an article on the different “Clapper Rails” in the ABA Area, check out the September/October 2013 issue of Birding.)

Finally, Robert Ridgway has an English bird name to celebrate his storied contributions to North American ornithology! Ridgway’s Rail includes the “California” (obsoletus), “Yuma” (yumanensis), and “Light-footed” (levipes) subspecies, plus others farther south in Mexico. Any “Clapper Rail” observed in California, Nevada, or Arizona is this species.

The name “Clapper Rail” was retained for the birds on the East Coast of the U.S. (this species also extends partially into Middle America and the Caribbean), but its scientific name has changed. Besides genetics, other differences between Ridgway’s Rail and East Coast Clapper Rail include the former’s generally brighter coloration and propensity for some populations (especially “Yuma” Rails) to nest in freshwater marshes. East Coast Clappers are restricted to saltmarsh.
though these populations are now considered “Clapper Rails” by the NACC, but we are left to speculate as to which species those populations really belong.

**King Rail Split**

- **King Rail** (*Rallus elegans*)
- **Aztec Rail** (*Rallus tenuirostris*)

"King Rails" found in freshwater marshes of interior and western Mexico are now split as "Aztec Rail". They average larger and with more subdued patterning and coloration than King Rails from the eastern U.S. and Canada. Since Aztec Rails don’t occur outside Mexico, and the U.S./Canadian King Rails have kept their scientific names, this change doesn’t impact the ABA Area. “King Rails” resident in coastal Veracruz are currently classified as belonging with the eastern U.S. King Rails, but they were not sampled in the study that resulted in this split, again leaving us to speculate as to which species they belong.

**Arctic Warbler Split**

- **Arctic Warbler** (*Phylloscopus borealis*)
- **Kamchatka Leaf Warbler** (*Phylloscopus examinandus*)
- **Japanese Leaf Warbler** (*Phylloscopus xanthodryas*)

Like the previous two split rails, this is a split of the “A = A + B” variety. Whereas the rails involve populations with allopatric (non-overlapping) ranges, that’s not the

Mangrove Rail is thought to be restricted to coastal South America and, thus, is not found in the ABA Area. However, the “Clapper Rails” of Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras, Belize, and the Yucatán Peninsula were not sampled in the study upon which this split was based. It appears as though these populations are now considered “Clapper Rails” by the NACC, but we are left to speculate as to which species those populations really belong.
These three species are almost identical in appearance, but differ markedly in voice. That makes it nearly impossible—for now—to identify sight records of silent migrants. And most migrants are unfortunately silent. It is thus unknown which species are represented by many records of migrant birds on Alaskan islands and in western Canada, the Lower 48, and Mexico. Now, what to call these unidentified birds? We can’t call them Arctic Warblers, because no one will know whether we mean the “new” more-restrictive species or the “old” more-inclusive one. I suppose we will have to settle for “old Arctic Warbler.” “Arctic Warbler sensu lato” or “Arctic/Japanese Leaf/Kamchatka Leaf warbler”—have fun calling that last one out in the field!

If you’ve seen an Arctic Warbler in Denali National Park, then you’ve still seen an Arctic Warbler. The “new” Arctic Warbler is the species that breeds in Alaska, all the way west to Scandinavia. It migrates to southern and eastern Asia for the winter. The AOU supplement lists four records of the “new” Arctic Warbler for California; it also states that Kamchatka Leaf Warbler is casual in the Aleutians (Howell et al. mention 19+ on Attu in one day) and that two records of “Arctic Warbler” from the Northwest Territories are not conclusively identified to species. It has been speculated that a record from Baja California involves Kamchatka Leaf Warbler. Japanese Leaf Warbler has no confirmed records and is not placed on the Check-list.

Note that the sixth edition of the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America mentions and illustrates xanthodryas, but the authors are really referring to what we today call examinandus. Kamchatka Leaf Warbler (examinandus) and Japanese Leaf Warbler (xanthodryas) were formerly considered the same subspecies (xanthodryas) of Arctic Warbler. So Kamchatka Leaf Warbler first became its own subspecies, and now is considered its own species—quite a step up! For details on differences among the three species, see Howell et al.’s Rare Birds of North America (2014). Also check out <tinyurl.com/arcticwarblers>, where you can listen to the different vocalizations.

**Shy Albatross Split**

- **White-capped Albatross** *(Thalassarche cauta)*
- **Salvin’s Albatross** *(Thalassarche salvini)*
- **Chatham Albatross** *(Thalassarche eremita)*

All three of the “Shy Albatrosses” nest on islands of the South Pacific; any appearances they make in the ABA Area are as vagrants.

Most records pertain to White-capped Albatross, of which there are a handful of records off the Pacific Coast of the Lower 48. From below, the basal half of its primaries are white. Adults have pale gray necks and cheeks with contrasting white caps and napes. Their bills are pale gray-green with a yellow tip. There are two subspecies. Adult “Tasmanian Albatrosses” (cauta) have a yellow ridge along the base of the culmen; they breed off Tasmania. Adult “Aukland Albatrosses” (steadi) have this area gray-green, like most of the rest of
the bill. First-year birds of both subspecies sport a pale gray bill with a dark tip.

There are two records of Salvin’s Albatross in the ABA Area—one from off the Aleutians and one very recent record from off central California.

Salvin’s nests off New Zealand and, recently, in the southern Indian Ocean. Adult Salvin’s have a medium-gray hood (including the nape) with a white forehead, and a dusky bill with a yellow culmen ridge and a dark tip. First-year birds have a dark gray bill with a dark tip. All ages show completely dark primaries from below, making the black in the “hand” more extensive than in White-capped. (This is somewhat analogous to separating the borealis and diomedea subspecies of Cory’s Shearwater.)

Chatham Albatross is not yet confirmed for the ABA Area, but it may be added to the Checklist before long. Two records (perhaps of the same young) Shy Albatross off California are currently being re-evaluated after Steve N. G. Howell identified them as Chatham Albatross based on (orangeish) bill color. The AOU is waiting for the ABA CLC to act on this record. Adults have an ochraceous orange bill (with small dark tip to the mandible) that sharply contrasts with a dark gray hood. As in Salvin’s, the hood covers the nape, and the forehead is white. All ages have the same wing pattern as Salvin’s. First-year birds have an ochre-gray bill with a dusky tip. Chatham Albatross nests only in the Chatham Islands off New Zealand.

For more on these albatross species, their identification, and their records within the ABA Area, see Rare Birds of North America; Steve Howell’s Petrels, Albatrosses, & Storm-Petrels of North America (2012); and the sixth edition of the National Geographic guide.

Brown Hawk-Owl Split

- Brown Hawk-Owl* (Ninox scutulata)
- Northern Boobook (Ninox japonica)

This split separates resident Ninox owls of southern Asia (scutulata) from the highly migratory ones of eastern Asia (japonica); the latter are now called Northern Boobook. The two also differ in voice. Two records of Northern Boobook exist from Alaskan islands. I believe that the English name of N. scutulata would remain “Brown Hawk-Owl”, but the Supplement could be read to suggest that it might be “Brown Boobook” should it ever be added to the Northern American list (a very unlikely scenario).

Nutmeg Mannikin Changed to Scaly-breasted Munia

Lonchura punctulata, added to the ABA Checklist just last year, has had its English name changed from Nutmeg Mannikin to Scaly-breasted Munia. It has long been known in the pet trade as “Spice Finch” or “Nutmeg Mannikin”, but neither name is now widely used by ornithological authorities. The species has no particular association with nutmeg (or other spices), or even Indonesia’s Banda Islands whence nutmeg originates. For largely extralimital species, the NACC generally follows regional authorities on issues of common name usage. Almost all other taxonomic authorities call this species Scaly-breasted Munia, and, thus, the AOU has followed suit. This change also has the benefit of eliminating some potential confusion among birders who, when reading “mannikin”, may mistakenly infer a relationship with the Neotropical manakins of the family Pipridae.

Black-Hawks Changed to Black Hawks

The black-hawks of the genus Buteogallus have lost the hyphen from their “last name”. This affects three species: Common Black Hawk, Great Black Hawk*, and Cuban Black Hawk*. Great Black Hawk has no accepted records from the ABA Area, but it occurs rather far north into Tamaulipas, so it wouldn’t be an outlandish prospect to show up in southern Texas. (Records of this species from Florida have been treated as suspect.) Cuban Black Hawk has been recorded in Georgia, but that record was not accepted by the ABA CLC. This change in names is taking place because the “black hawks” are a paraphyletic group. That is, they are not each other’s closest relatives. Some black hawks are more closely re-

Pallas’s Leaf-Warbler Changed to Pallas’s Leaf Warbler

Much as with the black hawks (above), the Phylloscopus leaf-warblers were found to be a paraphyletic group. So goes the hyphen.

Scientific Name and Check-list Sequence Changes

The genus Geotrygon (quail-doves) was found to be paraphyletic. Therefore, it was split into three genera. Ruddy and Key West quail-doves are still in Geotrygon, so the only consequence for ABA Area birders is a reshuffling of the sequence of some of the doves. Why the hyphen didn’t drop out of “quail-dove”, as it did in Northern Hawk Owl, is unclear. Coming after Spotted Dove, the new dove sequence is as follows.

Zebra Dove* Passenger Pigeon Inca Dove Common Ground-Dove Ruddy Ground-Dove Ruddy Quail-Dove Key West Quail-Dove White-tipped Dove
The Old World family Megaluridae has had its name changed to Locustellidae. Middendorff's Grasshopper-Warbler and Lanceolated Warbler are the only species in this family on the ABA Checklist.

The estrildid finch genus Lonchura was found to be paraphyletic. Therefore, it was split into three genera. Also, the genus Padda was absorbed into the “new” Lonchura. The new scientific names and the new checklist sequence are as follows.

- Bronze Mannikin* (Lonchura cucullata ➔ Thectocercus acuticaudatus)
- Green Parakeet (Aratinga holochloa ➔ Psittacara holochlorus)
- Mitred Parakeet* (Aratinga mitrata ➔ Psittacara mitratus)
- Red-masked Parakeet* (Aratinga erythrogeus ➔ Psittacara erythrogenys)
- White-eyed Parakeet* (Aratinga leucophthalma ➔ Psittacara leucophthalmus)

The author thanks Jon Dunn, Andrew Kratter, Paul Lehman, Todd McGrath, and Bill Pranty for their assistance with the preparation of this article, and all the members of the AOU NACC for their diligence in maintaining the Check-list.

**Notable Proposals That Were Not Accepted**

- Lump of Thick-billed Parrot and Maroon-fronted Parrot.
- Split of Siberian Stonechat from Common Stonechat.
- Split of Curve-billed Thrasher into Plateau Thrasher and Palmer’s Thrasher.
- Transfer of American Goldfinch, Lesser Goldfinch, and Lawrence’s Goldfinch into their own genus, Astragalinus.
- Removal of Azure Gallinule from the AOU Check-list.

**On the Horizon**

One recent paper (<tinyurl.com/three-WESJ>) suggests a three-way split (California, Woodhouse’s, and Sumichrast’s) of Western Scrub-Jay. It finds, unsurprisingly, that “California” Scrub-Jays are more closely related to Island Scrub-Jays than they are to “Woodhouse’s” Scrub-Jays. The NACC voted against this proposal in the recent past, but it’s probable that the committee will re-examine the situation in light of this additional evidence. The vireo family may be in store for a major reshuffle, including splitting of the genus Vireo. A three- or four-way split of White-breasted Nuthatch is also ripe for consideration. (See the May/June 2014 issue of Birding for details.) Concern that the zone of contact/overlap in central Arizona has not been thoroughly studied will likely put off any immediate reconsideration of a Curve-billed Thrasher split.

**Be sure to visit the ABA Blog at <tinyurl.com/2014AOU>, where you can find additional Check-list changes that affect Middle America. You’ll also find discussion by ABA members of these Check-list changes. We hope to hear from you!**
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### 2013 Year Lists

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Printed below are some of the top lists from Listing Central <listing.aba.org>. To make sure your lists qualify for inclusion in next year’s Listing Snapshot, be sure to have your 2014 totals uploaded by 1 June 2015.
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<td>1489</td>
<td>Claes-Göran Cederlund</td>
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<td>1482</td>
<td>Elaine Nye</td>
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## 2013 Listing Snapshot

### World - Top 50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Claes-Göran Cederlund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Peter Kaestner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bob Bates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Joe Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Robert Walton</td>
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### World [Photographed] - Top 25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Josep Del Hoyo</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ron Hoff</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Stephen Ashby</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Matthew Matthiessen</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Tony Menart</td>
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</table>

### All-Time List

#### ABA Area [By Year] - Top 25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sandy Komito</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Neil Hayward</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>John Vanderpoel</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jay Lehman</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bob Ake</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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here are two committees mandated by the ABA’s bylaws that fulfill essential functions relating to birders and birding in the ABA Area and beyond. The Checklist Committee (CLC) keeps the official, evidence-based list of birds that have reliably been recorded in the ABA Area. The Recording Standards and Ethics Committee (RSEC) maintains and revises our oft-cited Code of Birding Ethics as well as a compendium of Recording Rules and Interpretations. The RSEC thus provides guidance about good and responsible birding behavior and helps birders report list totals on a level playing field.

The RSEC met this July in central Illinois at the rural Carlock residence of the committee chair pro tem, Matt Fraker, to finalize prospective changes to the Recording Rules and Interpretations and to lay the groundwork for a thorough update to the Code of Ethics. This brief note will give you a “quick and dirty” rundown of how these new rulings might affect you. But if you want to dive deep into the finer points or raise questions, it is easy to interact directly with the RSEC. Simply go to <listing.aba.org/rsec> and get started, or email rsec@aba.org. So, on to the changes:

1. **Exterminated Exotics Now Count** – Formerly, once an exotic species was removed from the main body of the ABA Checklist, that meant that you could no longer count it on your ABA lists. No longer! Species listed on the ABA Checklist in “Appendix: Part 1, Exterminated Exotics” may now be counted if you saw them while they were on the main list. So, if you saw Crested Myna in Vancouver before it was extirpated in 2003, you may again count it on your lists submitted to the ABA.

2. **Collaborative ID is OK** – Previously, the Recording Rules were quite restrictive about counting birds that one did not identify completely on one’s own. Interpreted strictly, they deemed that birds identified “after-the-fact” (e.g., based on photographs) were not countable unless you took the photo yourself and noted all relevant details onsite. We believe that these rules were increasingly in conflict with birding in the internet age and that they were not in the spirit of helpful “collaborative identification”. You are now explicitly allowed to count birds identified later with the help of others. Examples include hummingbirds subsequently IDed by DNA analysis and murres IDed only from photos taken by someone else as the birds quickly flew away from an approaching boat.

3. **More Latitude on Rehabbed Birds** – The rules were a bit unclear about whether rehabbed birds, having been forcibly transported or assisted by humans, were countable. We decided that birds that have been transported or assisted by humans for rehabilitation purposes are countable. So, for example, you could still count a rehabbed Red-footed Booby at its release location even if that location is not where it was initially taken into captivity, so long as you wait for it to resume “normal, unrestrained behavior”.

4. **No More “Bander Loophole”** – We strongly support banders and banding efforts, and we recognize their significant contributions to ornithology. We also desire a level playing field for all birders. So we’ve changed the rules so that banders are no longer considered exempt from the restrictions on counting restrained birds. A bird in a mist net, in a bag, or held in a hand is no longer countable on ABA lists by anyone. All birds (including owls) released from banding stations are still countable by all once they resume their normal, unrestrained behavior.

5. **Rooftop Mics Count** – In some cases, advances in technology and techniques have necessitated new rules. If you are listening in your house to nocturnal migrants overhead via a rooftop microphone, you may count those migrants, but you must be in the building the mic is on and listening in real-time—you may not count birds you only heard later on a recording. We believe that a rooftop mic is essentially an aural magnification device (like a giant hearing aid), similar to how a telescope is a visual magnifying device. You may not count birds seen remotely via webcam.

6. **Reintroduced Indigenous Species May Count** – To be counted, individuals of native species that are part of a reestablishment program no longer have to meet the ABA CLC’s criteria for establishment. An individual may now be counted if it belongs to a population that has successfully hatched young in the wild. As examples, Aplomado Falcons in coastal Texas and California Condors in western states may now be counted on ABA lists.

Another topic we discussed but haven’t voted on is whether an exotic species is countable if seen prior to its official addition to the ABA Checklist. The decision will be announced on our website.

We also adopted a set of rules for what constitutes an ABA Area Big Year to clarify some of the specific issues and situations that big year birders face.

In the coming months, we plan to thoroughly review the ABA Code of Birding Ethics and to produce an accompanying document to clarify ambiguous circumstances. Our new interactive website <listing.aba.org/rsec> will be used to field questions and foster discussions on countability and birding ethics. If you have a situation or question that you would like clarified, please share it with us! It’s as easy as visiting our webpage and filling out the submission form. We will evaluate your submission and be sure to inform you of any subsequent decisions or statements. We hope to hear from you!
Humans seem to be naturally predisposed to hunting, collecting, sharing, story-telling, and competing. We enjoy the chase and the satisfaction of reaching a goal. Listing and competitive birding are fun. Just how much fun we're having is no more evident than in county listing. There are more than 18,000 U.S. and Canadian county life lists entered by ABA members in the digital Big Day & List Report. When we started this endeavor two years ago, and published county life list totals for the first time, I knew it would be popular. But this is beyond expectation, and interest just keeps growing.

State and provincial life lists are very popular, too, with just over 10,000 entries. More than 1,000 of you have entered an ABA Area life list, 255 have entered a Canadian life list, and 261 have entered a Mexican life list. All of these totals greatly exceed the number of submissions in any of our formerly printed Big Day & List Reports (which ceased two years ago). The new system's easy-to-use data entry and maintenance, plus its browsing and searching capabilities, have paid off. More people are playing the game, which was a big point of the switch.

In 2013, we followed along with two exciting competitive birding adventures. A new ABA Big Day record was set on April 25 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Team Sapsucker. They chronicled that amazing day in last year’s Birder’s Guide to Listing & Taxonomy (“The Perfect Storm for 294: A New Big Day Record, November 2013”). The team tallied an almost unbelievable 294 species that day during a journey of well over 800 miles. This year, Team Sapsucker attempted to break 300 species in one day with a route they call “El Gigante”. They fell short and tallied “only” 275 species on a route that started in southeast Arizona and ended in San Diego, California. With their dedication, they’ll get to 300 soon enough.

Besides a new ABA (and Texas) record, 2013 saw a couple of other new state big day records. Michael Hilchey, Raymond VanBuskirk, and Cole Wolf set a new record for New Mexico: 204 species. I was part of a team that included Birder’s Guide Editor Michael Retter, Adam Sell, Robert Hughes, Jeff Skrentny, and Larry Krutulis that set a new big day record for Illinois: 191 species—beating the previous record of 184, which stood for 16 years.

The other huge news item of 2013 was Neil Hayward’s “Accidental Big Year”. Neil was having a pretty good year and realized by April that he was on track to make a run at Sandy Komito’s legendary 1998 total of 748 species. And run he did! He finished the year with a gross total of 750 species, including three provisional species that may or may not be countable based on what the ABA Checklist Committee does with them. Right now his total for the 2013 ABA Year List is 747, but 749 is almost guaranteed. Two provisional species—Rufous-necked Wood Rail (New Mexico in June) and Common Redstart (St. Paul Island, Alaska in October)—are well documented with photographs and are almost certain to pass muster. His potential #750 is, if accepted, a first ABA Area record of Common Sparrowhawk on Adak Island, Alaska, but that one’s far from a slam-dunk. No matter how you slice it, it looks like we have a new ABA Big Year champion, and the number to beat is now at least 749.

I took a look on the ABA Blog at how technology and other factors helped Neil achieve such a high total (<http://bit.ly/1ms5RKJ>). I wrote then, “Both the mechanics and the playing field of doing an ABA Big Year have changed dramatically in the past 15 years, and the changes definitely fall in favor of the birder. I think that for a future big year birder that’s off with the starting gun on January 1 and puts in the kind of effort chasing rarities that Komito did in 1998, that 760 is probably in play.” There should be some fun big year attempts ahead.

As was the case last year, we’re still behind the number of big day totals published in the last printed Big Day & List Report (Fall 2012). So, please, if you’ve done a big day—even if you submitted it for a previous Big Day & List Report—please log in at <http://listing.aba.org> and enter your big day totals. I and many other ABA members look forward to reading about your adventures.
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