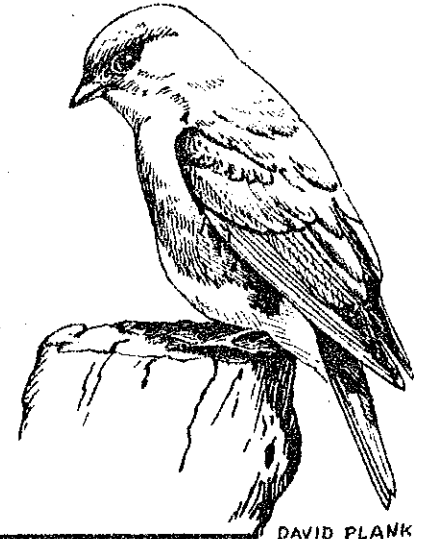


# The Bluebird

THE AUDUBON SOCIETY OF MISSOURI



DAVID PLANK

Vol. 40, No. 2

May, 1973

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S ROOST

By James P. Jackson

There comes a time when every unpaid, unheralded editor looks for a relief of his duties; I know, for I've been there. So it is with Dick Anderson, able editor of The BLUEBIRD. He has decided it is too much to edit our quarterly publication along with compiling its seasonal survey of Missouri birds and, in addition, serving as sub-regional editor for American Birds. Though we'll miss Dick's overall editing after the August issue, he has agreed to continue in compiling the seasonal survey of birds of Missouri. By time of our Annual Meeting, October 12-14, at Camp Rising Sun, we'll need a new editor for The BLUEBIRD. I will be eager -- and so will Dick -- to hear from anyone who wishes to volunteer or to suggest someone who will. How about some responses?

Regarding our Annual Meeting, October 12-14, I would like to make an appeal to every member planning to attend. How about bringing one or more guests 25 years young or younger? We need new members -- that's right, young members -- to vitalize the Society, to make it environmentally more active, and to replace older officers in the near future. Lest I insult other officers by my latter comment, let it be understood I include myself. So let the theme of our 1973 Annual Meeting be to welcome a new crowd and to give them encouragement.

And speaking of a new crowd, we might look to Springfield, Missouri. It turned out to be the only area of the state which followed through in our endeavor to have The Audubon Society of Missouri hold regional spring meetings for its local members. Some fifty members and guests participated in an all-day field trip and then gathered for an informal dinner and evening program. Much of the success for this gathering is due to Society member Rebecca Matthews who writes a column entitled "The Birdwatcher" in Springfield's Sunday News & Leader.

It is a pleasure to announce that Mrs. Matthews had agreed to serve as a Regional Director for the Society, to give increased representation and leader-

ship from Southwest Missouri.

Now, how about some increased activity from other parts of the state? From the Northeast corner? The Northwest corner? The Southeast corner?

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## STATUS OF THE BREEDING BIRD SURVEY IN MISSOURI

By Keith E. Evans, State Coordinator<sup>1/</sup>

<sup>1/</sup>Project Leader, Range and Wildlife Habitat, North Central Forest Experiment Station, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Columbia, Missouri (field office maintained in cooperation with the University of Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station).

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is a project of the Migratory Bird Populations Station, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, USDI. The Program, initiated in 1966, has grown to be a nationwide effort in which 1,404,186 birds were counted on 1,602 routes in 1972. Missouri has participated in the program since 1967. There are 37 BBS routes established in Missouri, 18 of these were censused in 1967. Twenty-four routes were censused in 1972. Ten routes have been surveyed every year since establishment.

The main objective of the BBS is to monitor bird population trends. The purpose is not in finding an accidental or visitor species in an area, or in recording what is suspected or known to be breeding locally, but in recording the numbers of breeding birds actually encountered on a route. These routes provide information for comparative population indexes over a wide geographical area. The established population trends can then be related to many plausible factors including changes in land use. The dispersed nature of the routes serves to accurately delineate the breeding range of each species. The data can be used as a "wildlife barometer" to indicate when portions of the country become uninhabitable for selected species. If trends show that a species is decreasing, management practices can be initiated before the species becomes rare or endangered.

Danny Bystrak (biologist in charge of the BBS) reported in the last newsletter that bird populations showing a nationwide increase from 1971-1972 included Bobwhite, Mourning Dove, and Carolina Wren. Tufted Titmouse showed a decrease in numbers over the same time period. Five-year trend counts indicate an upward trend in Common Grackle, Indigo Bunting, Savannah Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, and Starling. Birds with decreasing population trends over a 5-year period include Wood Thrush, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Yellow Warbler, and Tufted Titmouse.

Standardization of the survey techniques is very important to make the data comparable. The roadside routes extend for 50 stops spaced at 1/2-mile intervals. Routes were selected according to a stratified random sampling design. The basic sampling unit is a degree block of latitude and longitude. Intensity of coverage in various parts of the continent depends on availability of qualified personnel to conduct the survey. In Missouri, two roadside routes were selected at random in each degree block of latitude and longitude.

The survey is scheduled to be completed in June. Each observer states one-half hour before sunrise and makes 50 3-minute stops along the predetermined route. Routes are not run during foggy or rainy weather, or when wind speeds exceed 12 mph. At each stop the observer watches and listens for

exactly 3 minutes, counting and recording each bird seen or heard. Obviously this technique required observers who are experienced in both the visual and vocal identification of the birds in the designated area.

Missouri BBS observers helped greatly last year to ascertain bird abundance and trends. A total of 21,590 birds representing 108 species were counted on 24 routes. We hope to increase the coverage in 1973. Anyone who is interested in this worthwhile program is asked to contact Keith Evans, State Coordinator, 3418 Valencia, Columbia, Mo. 65201. We need a reserve of qualified observers to run routes that have not previously been assigned. It is important that observers pick routes they can run each year, as variability is reduced when one observer runs a route year after year.

I plan to relate Breeding Bird Survey information to you (via Bluebird) in the future. I will compare results of interesting trends between years, thus helping to keep you up-to-date on the breeding status of birds, such as the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, that are expanding their ranges in Missouri. I will also report on nationwide trends of selected birds. I also plan to prepare a map next fall showing the location and status of each route. This will help interested observers see what routes are available near their place of residence.

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#### CHICKADEES IN MISSOURI

By Rebecca Matthews

Unfrightened by sun or shadow on his day, the groundhog predicted an early spring for the Ozarks. Sure enough! The next day was one of the most beautiful spring-like days you'll ever see. For several of us birders, a walk in the woods seemed the best possible way to capitalize on this very special feeling in the air. The birds had caught the feeling too. The cardinal and titmouse had taken their songs out of cold storage, and were making the woodlands ring. Even the white-breasted nuthatch had traded in his winter "yank-yank" for the rapid-fire "yank-yank-yank-yank-yank", which indicated that he, too, was thinking spring thoughts.

As we walked we heard a simple, but somewhat unfamiliar song. "Fee-bee-bee". I whistled it softly to myself, trying to remember, and realized suddenly that we were hearing a black-capped chickadee! This was the first time I had ever heard one in Springfield.

Missouri's two species of chickadees, the black-capped and the Carolina, are almost as much alike in appearance as identical twins. There's a little difference in size, a slight difference in markings, and an indescribable something which you feel if you know one of them well, as we in southwest Missouri know the Carolina. You can be sure which is which, however, when you hear them sing.

"Fee-bee-bee", the black-capped sang again, the first note rather drawn out, the next two a full tone lower in pitch. The attractive little black and white and grey bird was friendly, or at least curious, answering as we whistled his easily imitated song. He flitted from limb to limb about our heads so we got a good look. We could see a difference between him and the Carolina, but it would take a more experienced eye than mine to be positive without hearing him.

The basic song of the Carolina consists of four rapid notes, enough higher than those of his northern cousin that it is impossible to whistle them. "Swee-bee, swee-bay", he sings, dropping on the second and fourth notes. In spring he may get carried away and repeat the song several times without stopping, but there is never an confusion between this and the more deliberate "fee-bee-fee" or "fee-bee" of the black-capped.

The black-capped is said by some to be friendlier and more responsive to man's call than the Carolina, but this is probably because of the ease of imitating the simple "fee-bee" song. I once attracted five Carolinas from some distance away to a tree just above my head by playing their rhythmic four note song on a high pitched bird whistle.

It must have been the black-capped chickadee's call which gave the birds their name, for he very precisely says, "chick-a-dee-dee-dee". The Carolina's call is a little higher in pitch, and he chatters his name, running the syllables together so rapidly you have to use your imagination to get "chickadee" out of it. In addition to cheerful call and whistled song, the chickadees have a variety of liquid phrases and scolding notes which may be confused with those of the tufted titmouse, his frequent companion.

The chickadee of Northeastern United States is the black-capped, and the territories of the species seem to be quite distinct, with the north-south dividing line being about the middle of Missouri. On the 1971 Christmas count in this state only one report north of the Missouri River included a Carolina. The three counts which reported both species were in or near the St. Louis area. The Carolina, as its name suggests, is the one which will be found in the southeastern states.

The saucy little chickadee is a year round favorite with all bird lovers. He entertains with his acrobatics as he hangs upside down on some tiny twig to capture insect or seed. He's as much at home on a tree trunk as his upside-down cousin, the nuthatch. Perhaps we like him, too, because he doesn't desert us through cold and snow, but stays to greet us on a winter walk in the woods, or comes to our feeders when we stay at home. Winter or summer, north or south, it's nice to be able to count these pretty perky birds among our feathered companions.

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#### AMERICAN-FINANCED ILLEGAL FUR RING IS SMASHED

A New York City concern that has been bank-rolling poachers in South America and other lands has pleaded guilty to operating a world-wide trade in illegal furs, mostly from rare or endangered species. The furs normally went to European processors, but the ring was discovered when a trans-shipped crate accidentally broke open in New York. Vesely-Forte, a major dealer on the world fur market, faces a fine up to \$500,000 under the Lacey Act which prohibits U.S. dealings in wildlife protected in other lands and a permanent injunction enjoins the company from further dealings in such furs. The announcement was made jointly by Robert A. Morse, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, and Under Secretary of the Interior Nathaniel P. Reed, whose organizations cooperated in the long investigation. In the past year and a half alone, Mr. Reed said, the company handled 5644 leopard and tens of thousands of ocelot, margay, otter and other skins. -- Reprinted from Audubon Leader, Vol. 14, No. 4, February 23, 1973.

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## THE BIRDER AND ECOLOGICAL NICHE

By Donald S. Heintzelman  
Curator of Ornithology-New Jersey State Museum

Few birders think of themselves as ecologists, yet most gradually develop an awareness of some basic ecological principles. For example, the importance of learning the habitat requirements for various species is an obvious necessity if one is to locate particular species of birds effectively. Obviously, one would not search for a nesting Olive-sided Flycatcher on the marshes of New Jersey's Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge. But an excursion to the state's salt meadows would be appropriate to see nesting Laughing Gulls. Of course, most birders with a reasonable amount of field experience know the habitat requirements of common species. But what about ecological niche requirements? Within a given habitat, two species can live together only if they occupy different ecological niches. This, stated formally, is the principle of competitive exclusion. That is, two species living together do not carry out exactly the same activities in exactly the same habitat or direct competition would result, and one would be eliminated from that particular niche or habitat.

How, then, can a knowledge of niche requirements aid a birder in deriving more enjoyment from his hobby? One way is by allowing him to understand better the workings of food chains and food webs. Let's consider some examples, using first the foraging ranges of wood warblers (Parulidae). Not all warblers seek food in the same locations within their required breeding habitats. Some search for food close to the ground, others at medium heights and still others at the top of tall vegetation. In other words, the ecological niches of the various species are distributed in layers, or stratified, according to the various heights which vegetation attains. Examples of warblers with foraging ranges confined to the lower vegetative strata are: Canada, Kentucky, Prairie and Worm-eating. Species with medium foraging ranges include Black-and-White, Black-throated Blue, Golden-winged, Bluewinged and Magnolia. Some high foraging species are Blackburnian and Cerulean. However, not all warblers are rigidly restricted to specific strata in conducting their foraging activities. Chestnut-sided and Hooded Warblers, for example, range from low to medium levels; but Nashville and Yellow Warblers move from medium to low ranges. And the Black-throated Green Warbler ranges from medium to high levels in its food gathering efforts. The Cape May Warbler sometimes ranges from high to medium levels.

Other factors which also permit utilization of different ecological niches are differences in a species anatomy or morphology. Among herons and egrets, for example, the Great Blue Heron is able to exploit food sources in deep water because of its long legs. Common Egrets would seek food in shallower water and Black-crowned Night Herons would confine their feeding efforts to the shallowest water of all. Hence, in these examples, the physical size of the various species determines more or less where each can feed.

Similarly, on the Serengeti Plain in Tanzania as many as six species of vultures may feed upon a carcass. Although there seems to be chaos rather than organization as the birds attempt to feed, each species occupies a somewhat different ecological niche in terms of its food requirements and related physical adaptations for food gathering. For example, the largest species--Lappet-faced Vultures and White-headed Vultures--break open the skin of a dead animal and feed upon skin, sinew and flesh adhering to bones. In contrast, Ruppell's Griffon Vultures and White-backed Vultures have unusually long necks which enable them to reach inside a carcass to eat soft internal organs. Additional

anatomical adaptations further aid them in exploiting this niche. Finally, Hooded and Egyptian Vultures are smaller birds with slender beaks. They feed upon scraps of flesh clinging to bones or scattered on the ground near a carcass after the larger vultures and other scavengers have eaten. Additionally, some individual Egyptian Vultures have learned to use stones as tools by lifting them in their beaks and flinging them at Ostrich eggs. After the shell is broken, the vulture eats the contents of the egg, thus exploiting still another food source not normally vulnerable to other birds. (This extraordinary stone throwing behavior of some Egyptian Vultures is an example of true tool use by an animal other than man.)

The woodpeckers (Picidae) of North America have evolved into two branches, each leading to increased specialization. The unspecialized flickers (Colaptes) form the base from which the two woodpecker branches are derived. On one side, the Pileated Woodpecker remains relatively primitive and more or less resorts to behavior and ecological niche affinities similar to flickers. But at the apex of this branch appears the rigidly specialized Ivory-billed Woodpecker whose niche requirements are so specific that the species has become nearly extinct due to loss of most of its required habitat (alternative habitats do not meet its niche requirements).

The other branch of the woodpeckers' evolutionary tree contains species such as the Hairy Woodpecker, whose niche centers upon tree trunks and large limbs, and the nearly identical but proportionally smaller Downy Woodpecker, which occupies a niche on smaller branches and twigs. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker has a specialized tongue with a brush-like tip; thus enabling it to feed effectively on sap oozing from holes it drills in trees. Finally, at the top of the evolutionary branch, one finds the peculiar three-toed woodpeckers (Picoides). Of course, not all these woodpecker species occupy the same habitats. Some species are distributionally separated.

The fruit-eating behavior of tanagers in Trinidad's mountainous Northern Range offers additional examples of niche exploitation and its role in governing bird distribution within a given habitat. Of the island's three attractive Tangara species, the Speckled Tanager is mainly a forest dwelling bird. While remaining in a perched position, it picks fruit and eats it whole. The Bay-headed Tanager also eats fruit, but it pecks pieces and sometimes while airborne in manakin-fashion, takes fruit. Finally, the Turquoise Tanager often occurs in flocks. This species also perches to pick fruit and seems prone to pick pieces out of large fruits. Turquoise Tanagers also mandibulate fruit in an apparent effort to reduce its size or eliminate seeds before swallowing it. Mistletoe fruit forms a large proportion of this tanager's diet than in other species.

These examples deal only with a few aspects of the complex subject of niche requirements of birds. Many important additional factors also can be involved in determining a bird's niche requirements. Nonetheless, even cursory observations of niche requirements offer curious birders an opportunity to derive added pleasure from their hobby. Why merely look at a bird when you can attempt to understand its ecological role? Of course, there are many instances when general birding activities will not enable you to gain insights into the fascinating world of ecological niche. But frequently cursory observations are adequate to hint at an animal's niche requirements. So sharpen your observational skills, and ask yourself probing questions regarding the activities of the birds you see. You may discover something new to science as well as enhance the rewards from your birding activities.

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LEAST TERN STUDY

All three subspecies of the Least Tern are close to being put on the endangered list. Robert L. Downing, a Wildlife Biologist with U.S. Fish and Wildlife, is making a complete study of the Least Tern. He has asked that any Missouri Audubon members having data on nesting Least Terns in Missouri to contribute this information. With high water on most of our rivers this may be difficult this year. However, if any Terns are found this summer, please report to Dick Anderson by September 1.

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WINTER SURVEY DECEMBER 1-MARCH 31

By Dick Anderson

Weather made big news during this period. December was generally cold and much above precipitation. St. Joseph dropped to 15° below zero December 11. Most of the state was not that cold, but at least two-thirds of Missouri was covered by two to three inches of ice, which covered not only the ground but all vegetation. This covering lasted several days with a noticeable absence of birds. January and February were near normal, but March rains were the start of one of the longest and highest floods (thanks to our levee system) in history. Rains at St. Joseph were a record 7.57 inches during March, but St. Louis was only two inches above normal.

The combination of heavy rains and flooding practically eliminated reports of loons, grebes, waders, waterfowl and shorebirds. Only a few highlights are mentioned. A black-crowned night heron wintered near Springfield (Southern Hills Lake)(N.F.). Three late whistling swans were at Squaw Creek in early December (F.L.), while three early swans were near East Prairie on February 16 (M.S.). Diving ducks were above normal at Lake Jacomo March 26 (K.H.) and Squaw Creek (F.L.), but were missing at St. Louis even in non-flooded areas (E.C.). One exception was an adult Barrow's goldeneye near Alton Dam (Missouri and Illinois sides). It was first identified by Dorothy McClaren on January 15 and later by MOB (E.C.,D.A.).

Hawks were normal to above normal. A turkey vulture reached Meramec State Park February 23 (J.I.). The goshawk invasion carried over from fall

and were common at Maryville (D.E.,M.R.) and Kansas City (K.H.). One reached Meramec State Park (J.I.) and three were at St. Louis (E.C.,D.A.). Red-shouldered hawks showed a slight increase, while sparrow hawks were up considerably over the last three years. Good details of a broad-winged hawk seen December 28 by Stan Dahlke and again on December 30 by Gale Schmidt near Sullivan, Missouri was most convincing (fide J.I.). A pair of peregrine falcons were studied at Sullivan on December 28 by Jack Emery (fide J.I.).

A sandhill crane was reported flying over Finley River March 25 (N.F.). Shorebird reports were non-existent. Gulls were near normal at St. Louis before the floods. Several "white-winged" gulls of various sizes were reported at St. Louis, but more study is needed for positive identification. A roadrunner was observed at Sycamore and another photographed at West Plains (Mary Bonner). There was an unconfirmed report of a roadrunner near Charleston on March 30 (M.S.). One of our few barn owl reports was one seen at Sullivan on February 23 (J.I.). Two saw-whet owls wintered at Squaw Creek (F.L., et al). Woodpeckers were generally down (ice storms?). Red-headed woodpeckers wintered in exceptionally high numbers in northwest Missouri (M.R.), while they were very low or completely missing throughout the rest of the state. A failure of the acorn crop plus the ice is blamed. Large numbers of red-heads were reported along the Gulf Coast, which may explain where our birds migrated to.

What could well be related are the very low numbers of blue jays reported. This species was also reported in large numbers along the Gulf Coast from southern Texas through Louisiana, Alabama and to the Florida Keys. Well worth note is the black-capped chickadee as far south as the Springfield area (N.F.). (See article by Rebecca Matthews.) Red-breasted nuthatches were reported irregularly. Apparently, many moved on south. A very late hermit thrush was at St. Joseph December 10 (F.L.). A Townsend's solitaire was found at Squaw Creek January 13 by Leo Galloway (later MOB). Good details of two Townsend's solitaires at Reed Wildlife Area on December 10 were supplied by Chris and Kelly Hobbs. A Bohemian waxwing at Maryville December 29-31 was our only report (D.E.,M.R.). Cedar waxwings were scarce in eastern Missouri, but fairly common in western Missouri.

Blackbirds were very numerous in southern Missouri, but the roos of 1/3 million at Sullivan was dissipated by the ice storm December 12. Unusual were Brewer's blackbirds at a feeder at Sullivan (J.I.). Evening grosbeaks were their true erratic selves. This was another species which passed through Missouri and was reported in large numbers on the Gulf of Mexico. However, Missouri reports include 12 in Ozark at feeders during February and March (N.F.), numerous reports at Columbia feeders until February 20 (B.G.), small groups in Sullivan from December 6 on (J.I.), a few scattered reports from St. Louis (D.A.), 17 were at West Plains (M.Bonner), some were at O'Fallon, Missouri with a high of 54 in mid-January (Bob Knickmeyer), small numbers (up to 20) were at St. James (Phelps County) until February 20 (Mrs. Wayne Turner). 15 red- crossbills were at Marycille December 15 and many were at St. Louis until December, but all moved on. They reappeared at St. Louis in late February and one was at Columbia in late March (B.G.). Pine siskins also moved south of Missouri and started to return in late March. A vesper sparrow at Squaw Creek on December 23 is the only winter record (F.L.). Lapland longspurs were common in Nodaway County in early January (M.R.).

D.A. - Dick Anderson  
E.C. - Earl Comfort  
D.E. - Dave Easterla  
N.F. - Nathan Fay  
B.G. - Bill Goodge

K.H. - Kelly Hobbs  
J.I. - Jim Irvine  
F.L. - Floyd Lawhon  
M.R. - Mark Robbins  
M.S. - Mike Sutherland



CHANGES TO THE A.O.U. CHECK-LIST

By Dick Anderson

In the April, 1973 "The Auk" (Vol. 90, #2) appears the 32nd supplement to the A.O.U. "Check-list of North American Birds". The list gives some of the many changes that will appear in the next edition of the A.O.U. check-list. Many of the changes were of the scientific name only, due to a change of genus and would not be of much interest to most birders. However, the lumping and splitting of several species will affect all birders. It is obvious that the lumpers have won big over the splitters. This means that our own local check-lists, as well as our life lists, will need to be revised. We will all lose species from our local, state and life lists. For instance, that Harlan's Hawk you worked so hard for is now just a subspecies of a red-tail.

The A.B.A., foreseeing these changes, is working out their own check-list for those who want to play the game their way. Birders will then have to decide whether to keep an A.O.U. list or an A.B.A. list, or both.

Following are the changes that birders would be most interested in.

SPECIES THAT HAVE BEEN CHANGED

1. Great White Heron is now a subspecies of the Great Blue Heron.
2. Blue Goose is now a dark phase of Snow Goose.
3. Green-winged Teal retains its name, but becomes a subspecies of Common Teal.
4. Harlan's Hawk is now a subspecies of red-tailed hawk.
5. Yellow-shafted, Red-shafted and Gilded Flicker have all ben lumped and will become Common Flicker.
6. Black-eared and Common Bushtits are lumped and will become Bushtit.
7. San Lucas Robin is now a subspecies of Robin and called American Robin.
8. Socorro Warbler is lumped with Olive-backed Warbler and will become Tropical Parula. Our local Parula will become Northern Parula.
9. Audubon's Warbler is lumped with Myrtle Warbler and becomes Yellow-rumped Warbler.
10. Bullock's Oriole is lumped with Baltimore Oriole and becomes Northern Oriole.
11. McGregor's House Finch and Guadelupe House Finch were both lumped with the House Finch.
12. Ipswich Sparrow is lumped with the Savannah Sparrow.
13. Dusky Seaside Sparrow and Cape Sable Sparrow are both lumped with Seaside Sparrow.
14. Slate-colored, White-winged, Oregon and Guadelupe Juncoes are all lumped together as Dark-eyed Junco.
15. Mexican and Baird's Juncoes are lumped into Yellow-eyed Junco.

SPECIES THAT HAVE BEEN SPLIT

1. The Thayer's Gull is now a full species rather than a subspecies of the Herring Gull.
2. Traill's Flycatcher is split into two species. Our local "fitz-bew" species is now Willow Flycatcher and the northern breeding "fee-bee-o" is now Alder Flycatcher.
3. Boat-tailed Grackle is split into two species. The East and Gulf Coast species will remain Boat-tailed Grackle. The population from Oklahoma and western U.S. south through Mexico is now Great-tailed Grackle.

SUMMARY: Three species gained--Nineteen lost.

NAME CHANGES

Widgeon will now be spelled Wigeon.  
Common Scoter will now be called Black Scoter.

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