THE PSYCHIATRIC APPROACH TO BIRD IDENTIFICATION
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From time to time, people have been known to seek psychiatric aid for stress syndromes brought on by long and/or constant exposure to birding. The following syndromes (I won't call them problems) may be catalogued in the perhaps-to-be-published FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDERS.

Identification compulsion may be familiar to anyone reading this note: every bird seen must be identified. The necessary application of a name to every bird, no matter how poorly observed, promotes misidentification, of course, but, let's face it, it's an easy trait to acquire. This compulsion peaks at different times in the learning curve of different birders but eventually disappears as a source of errors in most of them. My best example concerns myself. While scanning a huge flock of Common Black-headed Gulls in a flooded field in Israel at the end of January, I found a bird in the midst of the flock with an entirely black head and breast. My mental computer sorted for “bird with black head and breast the size of small gull” and came up with “male Ruff in breeding plumage” as the only possibility. Ignoring the fact that a single roosting shorebird is unlikely in the midst of a gull flock, ignoring the very poor look the bird provided, even ignoring the unlikeliness of breeding plumage in January, I was excited (and, unfortunately, communicative) about my find until the entire flock took to the air and my Ruff turned into a thoroughly oiled gull!

Quick identification compulsion is a variation on this theme: you must be the first in your group to identify the bird. With greater experience and skills this competitive compulsion will lead to praise more often than embarrassment; thus it is commonplace even among experienced birders. The notion that birding is as much sport as it is art or science is repeatedly confirmed by such behavior. I remember vividly wanting to be the first in our group to find a Swallow-tailed Kite on a field trip years ago in Florida and finally spotting one gliding toward us at a great distance. My satisfaction was brief as more observers found the bird and one asked, “isn't that a Wood Stork with its legs looking like a forked tail?”

The more thoroughly one has been ravaged by identification compulsion, the more likely one will be infected by complications from identification ego: every identification must be defended to the utmost. This syndrome will sharpen the wits of any of its bearers, preparing them for confrontations with skeptical friends and review committees. The ability of observers to reconstruct so many details about a departed bird may at times stem from the need to continued on PG 3

NEXT MEETINGS
The next meetings in Seattle will be on first Thursdays, 7 November and 5 December. The program at the December meeting will be “Reproductive Strategies in Female Gulls,” given by Dr. Gary Shugart, Collection Manager at the Slater Museum of Natural History. Gary studied Herring Gulls in the Great Lakes, and he will show and tell about the surprisingly many options open to a female colonial bird.
PLUMAGE DESCRIPTIONS
Excerpted from
The Shorebirds of North America

The observer who is interested in noting or recording more precise information than a mere list of species and numbers of shorebirds he encounters will find many practical advantages in understanding the patterns of plumage succession that seem baffling to the novice. This subject is outlined here (and see diagram on back page), with some indication of variation in different species.

THE FIRST CYCLE
The downy stage is followed by the Juvenile plumage. This consists of the entire feathering of the individual. Later, the Juv. body-feathering is replaced by Basic I ("first winter") plumage, but the Juv. wing (and often tail) are retained. Still later, the body-feathering again is renewed, this time by Alternate I ("first summer") plumage, but still the Juv. wing (and sometimes tail) are retained. Some Juv. feathering thus remains, progressively more abraded as time passes, throughout the entire first cycle.

The Juv. body-feathering may be replaced by Basic I very soon, before the young migrate (as in Wilson’s Phalarope); in many cases it is replaced more gradually, including during migration (various plovers, some “peeps,” etc.). In a few it may not be replaced until after migration (Buff-breasted Sandpiper). In the first instance we seldom see the entire Juv. plumage in latitudes of the contiguous United States; in the second we see it, or with incoming Basic I intermixed, in the third we see it in its entirety but do not see Basic I acquired and worn on winter range.

In many species, a considerable number of migrants in their first spring are in Basic I; in others, the body-feathering is in transition from Basic I to Alt. I.

As a rule in birds generally, Juv. and all Basic plumages tend to be somber; in some species having seasonal differences in coloration; the Alt. plumages are the vividly colored ones. Not all shorebirds go by the book, however. At least many of the Calidris sandpipers and two phalaropes (Red and Northern) have Juv. plumages as “bright” as Definitive Alternate ("adult summer"). Also, many shorebirds (Semipalmated Sandpiper, Willet, the godwits, etc.), from late winter or spring to some time in summer (age 1 year), wear an Alt. I plumage consisting of more or less body-feathering that is intermediate in some respects between a somber Basic and a differently patterned and/or colored Def. Alt. plumage. Many birds in this condition, occurring in boreal summer on winter range or in our latitudes, have been reported as wearing “winter” plumage. The new feathers may not be colored or patterned just like Def. Alt. ones, but they represent a true Alt. ("summer") plumage nevertheless. The extent of occurrence of this phenomenon in shorebirds has not been thoroughly investigated.

THE SECOND CYCLE
Some time, usually beginning well along in summer or later, when birds are slightly over a year old, a molt of all feathering begins; the new incoming plumage is designated Basic II. New body-feathering generally appears first, the new flight feathers of the wing often much later. Especially those birds that make very long uninterrupted flights (the Golden Plover, Hudsonian Godwit, etc.) cannot “afford” the handicap of undergoing wing-molt while they are migrating.

In late winter or spring, the somber Basic II body-feathering is replaced by Alt. II, but Basic feathering of most of the wing (in some, also the tail) is retained. Apparently in some species (such as Long-billed Dowitcher), if individuals spend the boreal summer away from breeding range (or perhaps even go to it but do not breed), they may acquire only a few vivid Alt. feathers; then either the molt is halted or else some somber Alt. feathering (such as seen under the preceding cycle) is acquired. Again, little dependable information exists.

For most shorebirds, the second is the earliest definitive cycle—that is, all their subsequent cycles are a repetition of the second.

THE THIRD CYCLE
This-and succeeding-cycles are essentially a repetition of the second. Plumages of the third are designated III, and so on.

Notes
The Oriental Plover, which has a tenuous place on our list, requires three cycles before the birds are “fully adult”—that is, in definitive plumages which are repeated in all subsequent cycles. The Ruddy Turnstone in Alt. I plumage approaches definitive conditions but has recognizably different head-coloring and other diagnostic features. In Philomachus pugnax the male (Ruff) has three plumages per cycle, acquiring a female-like Supplemental plumage which is worn while in late winter; the female (Reeve) has only two plumages per cycle. Thus, at appropriate season, it would be a natural mistake for the uninformed observer to identify a Ruff as a Reeve. In the dowitchers the vivid Alt. plumage of breeders is retained later in fall by the Long-billed than by the Short-billed; knowledge of this difference in timing is helpful in distinguishing the species in September. Scores of less striking examples of the practical application of knowledge of shorebird plumages could be mentioned.
THE USE OF A SECOND PLATFORM BY PIED-BILLED GREBES
Jean Cross
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While making a weekly survey of a marsh northeast of Monroe, Snohomish County, Washington, on 19 June 1991, I noticed two Pied-billed Grebes (Podilymbus podiceps) building a nest platform. I returned every day to watch the process. On 22 June one of the grebes was settled on the platform about 2'-3 inches above the water level.

I returned often, and on 17 July one of the adults was sitting on the nest with wings high and tail area fluffed. A second adult came to the nest, and out popped the heads of two young that were then fed. The second grebe returned a few times with vegetation from below the water surface and tucked it in around the brooding adult.

On 24 July, five chicks were swimming and diving with one of the adults which occasionally fed them. Eventually several chicks climbed onto the adult, and all swam to and boarded a platform 20 feet from the nest platform. The second platform was made from fresh vegetation, whereas the old platform was yellow and flattened.

During subsequent weekly visits I did not see either platform used. The nest platform once had a fresh cattail stalk laid across it. The second platform became lower and lower in the water.

On 11 September, while the surviving three young grebes were making short low practice flights, I looked again at the platforms. The nest platform was still floating well, with the top at least two inches above water and new grass growing out of it. Only a few floating strands remained of the second platform, which presumably had been more poorly constructed.

THE CHRISTMAS COUNT AT GRAND COULEE

I intend to establish a Christmas Count centered in the Steamboat Rocks State Park area near Grand Coulee. I am soliciting participants now, knowing that many other counts may occur on this day.

My visits at this season have impressed me that the “Coulee Lakes” region harbor a good array of birds in early winter, especially waterfowl. Bald eagle roosts here contain more individuals than anywhere else in eastern Washington. Scarce northern raptors are possible in the wheatland/shrub-steppe mosaic above the brush-lined coulees. Water birch and aspen offer another habitat and conifer forests with their resident species grow in some areas where basement Okanogan Highlands terrain is exposed. Finally, Grand Coulee and Electric Cities have extensive ornamental plantings which may contain surprises at this season.

The date I am proposing is Saturday, December 21, 1991 for this year. Those WOS members who want to challenge the often bitter elements in interior Washington this Christmastime, please drop a line to Andy Steptniewski or call (509) 877-6639.

These brief descriptions should allow recognition of the great classes of birding syndromes, an important step on the way to therapy. Birding counselors are few and far between, and you may have to treat these syndromes yourself, but be reassured to know you are not alone. And in any case, when you are cured remember the real identification problems are enough of a challenge to last a lifetime.

PSYCHIATRIC APPROACH
Continued from Front PG

assuage this destructive trait. Ask yourself—do you get an adrenaline rush, with all the symptoms of the “fight or flight” response, when someone questions an identification?

The third major malady, identification anxiety, is the most insidious: to misidentify a bird is a sin. The assumption here is that not only should all birds be correctly and defensibly identifiable immediately, but there is no moral room for a mistake. To be caught in flagrante delicto in a bird misidentification certainly brings on many of the same feelings as a flashing red light right behind you on the freeway. Which of these two cases brings out the quickest and deepest guilt feelings in you?

Finally, the worst syndrome, fortunately the least likely to afflict most of us, is identification paranoia: birds are out to fool you. This may lead to the suspicion, for example, that dowitchers of one species occasionally call like the other—just for the fun of it. Think about those Least Sandpipers that blacken their legs by wading in mud....
Shown here in schematic arrangement are the plumages common to most shorebirds during their first two years.

**Shorebird Plumages**

- **Juvenile**
- **Basic I**
- **Alternate I**
- **Base II**
- **Alternate II**
- **First Cycle**
- **Second Cycle**
SONGBIRD DECRESCENDO:
Bird Decline Linked To Change In U.S. Habitat
reprinted from Valley News, New Mexico
by Nancy Serrell

A Dartmouth College professor and his colleague from Tulane University are supplying a piece in a puzzle scientists throughout North America are trying to solve: Why are fewer songbirds flying north each spring? The answers may be closer to home than many have suspected, says Richard Holmes, a Dartmouth ecologist, and his former student, Thomas Sherry.

Several theories have been advanced for the downswing in migrating birds, but the most popular focus on a loss of habitat. But which habitat? Here, in birds’ summer breeding grounds? Or in their wintering grounds—the tropical forests of the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico and the West Indies?

“There’s been quite a controversy on this,” said Holmes, who teaches biology at Dartmouth. For years, scientists looked to the wintering grounds, where some estimate that trees are crashing down at a rate of 54 acres per minute.

But research by Holmes and Sherry offers strong evidence that the decline may be related to wide-scale habitat deterioration in North America. A report of their research funded by the National Science Foundation, will appear in Ecology and Conservation of Neotropical Migrant Landbirds, to be published this fall by Smithsonian Institution Press.

“For years I wasn’t convinced there really was a decline,” said Holmes. But Breeding Bird Surveys conducted by the United States Fish and Game Service since the 60s have confirmed what researchers have long suspected: The overall population of birds migrating to North America has decreased by about 3 percent annually since the late 1970s.

In an attempt to find reasons for the decline, researchers are collecting hard data under conditions that are as controlled as the outdoors will allow.

Holmes has been studying migratory birds in the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest, a U.S. Forest Service area of the White Mountain National Forest, since 1969. Since the early 80s, he and Sherry have concentrated on two species of warblers, American Redstarts and Black-throated Blue Warblers.

Holmes’ research at Hubbard Brook has focused on a counting, or accounting, of the birds’ nesting successes and subsequent populations in specific small plots. “It’s a population demography study, like the census. We’re counting adults and new young produced and trying to see how well they survive—how many are lost to predators, how many to starvation.”

Each summer, he and his students catch 400 to 500 young birds as they emerge from their nests, and then slip tiny metal bands, coded and numbered, around one leg of each bird.

What Holmes and Sherry have found is a strong correlation between a successful breeding season in the areas under observation and a robust population of birds returning the following year, regardless of what goes on in the overwintering grounds.

Hubbard Brook is an example of an undisturbed nesting area. In heavily forested areas of the country such as those found in New Hampshire, migratory bird populations have remained relatively steady. Though there have been variations in bird population, the changes have been within expected limits, explained by natural phenomena such as weather or food supply.

But birds that spend summers in forests that have been broken up by development are showing severe declines, and researchers believe that the reason is habitat degradation.

Forest fragmentation—the housing development that supplants 200 acres of woods, the shopping center that
WINTER BIRD ALERT:
Research on Winter Fattening Underway in Washington

I am a postdoctoral researcher in avian ecology at the University of British Columbia, B.C. Since 1976, I have been conducting a long-term study of ecological energy storage strategies used by small birds to maximize the chance of surviving the temperate winter. My past research sites were located in Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Tennessee, and British Columbia. Having returned to the United States (Seattle) recently to live, I am now expanding the project to include Washington.

I am interested in comparing the fat resources of ground-feeding species (Dark-eyed Juncos, Song, Fox, White-crowned, and Golden-crowned Sparrows) with the fat reserves of the tree-feeding species (American Goldfinch, Pine Siskin, Purple and House Finches, Evening Grosbeaks, Red Crossbills, Red-breasted Nuthatch, any woodpecker species). The goldfinch, junco, *Carduelis* finches, and Song Sparrow are of particular importance in my studies, as I have a large data set on geographical variation in winter fat in these species.

I request that any parties interested in allowing me to band winter birds at their feeders contact me at: Dr. Christopher M. Rogers, 5233 188th SW, Lynnwood, WA 98037, phone (206) 771-6417. My banding and examination procedure is completely non-invasive; birds are released unharmend. In return for your kindness I can offer you an introduction to bird banding techniques and to ecology and life-histories of winter birds. In addition, one can learn a great deal about natural history of birds by watching banded individuals return to feeders in winters following banding.

Concern for the deposed songbird has galvanized several groups to work on solutions to the problem. One group attempting to coordinate research, management and education is the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Program, which draws its membership from federal, state and local government agencies, tribal governments and such organizations as the Smithsonian Institution. A goal of the group: “to begin to manage the land we’ve got in wildlife refuges, national forests, current government lands,” Holmes said.

Planning can help preserve large, undisturbed tracts in these areas, but long-term solutions will require a deeper understanding of how-and why-particular species choose different habitats, he said. “There are lots of questions to be asked and figured out.”

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE INFO SOUGHT

(1) I would be very interested in learning whether the high-pitched whistled note heard in spring from this species is normally two-noted or three-noted in your part of the state. Susan Smith, who has just written a book about the species, informed me that the three-noted whistles are not reported from anywhere in its range except western Washington.

(2) I would also be interested in learning of the general status or individual Black-capped Chickadee records from anywhere on the Olympic Peninsula, especially the wetter western half. There is some discrepancy in the published record.

Send information to Dennis Paulson, Slater Museum, University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, WA 98416, (206) 756-3798.

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