

Letters

A HERD OF DEAD PORCUPINES

While swathing grain in August, 1973, I found at least six dead porcupines. The grain was flattened in a circle of about 15 ft. to 18 ft. across and there were indications there had been a fight in each. The bones were gone. It is a mystery. In other years I may have found one dead porcupine but usually none.

Last year I saw a wolverine which might kill and eat porkys but, due to its scarcity, not likely.

I wonder if any other readers can throw any light on the subject. — *G. J. Hewson*, Langbank, Sask.

A TRAPPED BALD EAGLE

As a young member of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, I would like to relate an incident concerning my father, my brother (Darren, age 13), myself and a Bald Eagle.

Late in November, 1973, while we were ski-dooing along a trail north of Hudson Bay in the provincial forest, we came across a young Bald Eagle caught in a trap. The eagle was caught only by his claws on one leg. It showed

fear and aggression towards us as we approached. We then cut a small pole and attempted to hold the eagle down in order to release the trap. The eagle then showed more fear of us and would not hold still. Finally, we had to tap it on the head to stun it. Then we released the trap and inspected the bird for injuries. After several minutes had passed the bird gained consciousness and much to his surprise was able to fly away amongst the trees. — *Dwight Hayes* (Age 14), Box 1181, Hudson Bay, Sask.

TWO WHITE PARTRIDGES IN ONE COVEY

I have an incident to report that may be of interest to you. During August and September, 1973, I sighted what appeared to be white partridges in a flock of 15 or so birds, about 20 miles west of Leader, Saskatchewan. Then later in September I got a good look at them while I was combining. There were two albino chicks in this flock. The young were nearly as big as the parent.

These albino chicks had the same black crest on their breast as the other partridges but otherwise were pure white. I had a good look at them, as I was only about 20 yards away on two occasions.

I wonder if they would breed and produce more albinos if they survived the hunters? — *Emil Stock*, Box 301, Leader, Sask.

LOOKING BACK

At Some Old Bird Names

Some English bird names that were officially recognized 100 years ago have now become officially obsolete. Pigeon Hawk, Sparrow Hawk, Upland Plover, Cuckoo, Catbird and Robin appeared in Elliott Coues' "Field Ornithology . . ." and

a Check List of North American Birds”, published in 1874.⁴ In 1973, the American Ornithologists’ Union decreed that the official names of these species shall be Merlin, American Kestrel, Upland Sandpiper, Red Knot, Gray Catbird and American Robin, respectively. A history of some of the other species’ names affected by the 1973 report is presented in the table below.

<i>Species Name in 1874</i> ⁴	<i>Familiar Name and Date Originated</i> ^{1 2}	<i>Species Name in 1973</i> ³
Blue Goose	—	} Snow Goose
Snow Goose	—	
Red-tailed Buzzard	Red-tailed Hawk, 1886	} Red-tailed Hawk
Harlan’s Buzzard	Harlan’s Hawk, 1886	
Golden-winged Woodpecker	Yellow-shafted Flicker, 1957	} Common Flicker
Red-shafted Woodpecker	Red-shafted Flicker, 1886	
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Myrtle Warbler, 1886	} Yellow-rumped Warbler
Audubon’s Warbler	—	
Baltimore Oriole	—	} Northern Oriole
Bullock’s Oriole	—	
Snowbird	Slate-colored Junco, 1886	} Dark-eyed Junco
Oregon Snowbird	Oregon Junco, 1886	

The combining of birds once thought to be different species into one is the result of investigations that have shown that the birds interbreed often enough that they are different only as subspecies or that one is a colour phase of the other. The “old” (pre-1973) names are not “wrong” now, but they are restricted to the subspecies and a new name has usually been given to the new species. Other name changes involving Canadian prairie and northern birds are: Green-winged Teal becomes American Green-winged Teal to separate it from the Eurasian subspecies; Shoveler is now Northern Shoveler because there are shovellers elsewhere; Common Scoter changes to Black Scoter, a more appropriate name and Yellowthroat becomes Common Yellowthroat to blanket a dozen subspecies. Widgeon is now spelled Wigeon (to conform with pigeon?) and Thayer’s Gull has been found to be a different species from the Herring Gull rather than a subspecies of it.

There is little reason for these name changes to upset anyone. After all Sparrow and Pigeon Hawks are not appropriate names and the Upland Plover never was a plover. And if the Yellow-rumped Warbler you see has a white throat, then it is still a Myrtle Warbler. If there is doubt about the characteristics that separate it from Audubon’s, then it is a Yellow-rumped Warbler. Similarly if the Junco in front of you perfectly matches your field-guide’s description of an Oregon Junco, then refer to it, record it and report it as an Oregon Junco. If in doubt, better call it a Dark-eyed Junco. — Bernie Gollop.

¹AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS’ UNION, 1886. *The code of nomenclature and check-list of North American birds*. First Edition. University Press, Cambridge. 392 p.

²AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS’ UNION, 1957. *Check-list of North American birds*. Fifth Edition. Port City Press, Baltimore. 691 p.

³AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS’ UNION, 1973. *Thirty-second supplement to the American Ornithologists’ Union check-list of North American birds*. *Auk* 90: 411-419.

⁴COUES, ELLIOTT, 1874. *Field ornithology. Comprising a manual of instructions for procuring, preparing and preserving birds and a check list of North American birds*. Dodd and Mead, New York. 253 p.