



Red-necked Grebe.

Larry A. Morgotch

THE BLUE LIST FOR 1976*

ROBERT ARBIB

Once again, in the face of some misconceptions about what the Blue List represents, we repeat an earlier definition. This list is made up of those species which, in all or in significant part of their range, currently exhibit potentially dangerous, apparently non-cyclical population declines. It is not intended to supplement, or to compete with official lists of endangered or threatened species. It should be interpreted as an "early warning" list, and its central purpose is to encourage increased concern and interest in and reporting on the species listed. Some of the species finding their way onto the list *may still be locally or regionally abundant*, but are included because there is enough evidence that in other

regions the species are indeed declining.

North America is divided into 23 regions (each with several subregions) for purposes of reporting four times a year to *American Birds*. Most of Alberta, southern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, eastern Montana, North and South Dakota are in the Northern Great Plains Region. The mountainous part of Alberta is in the Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain Region. Yukon and the Mackenzie Delta are in the Northwestern Canada Region.

There is no cut-off population point, above which any species may be automatically removed from the list. The Western Grebe may appear in the thousands in winter on Lake Mead, Nev. but elsewhere as a breeding bird in western regions, it is apparently on a downhill track. Critics have held that it is ridiculous to include such abundant, widespread species as Common Nighthawk, Hairy Woodpecker, and Yellow Warbler. How then do we in-

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Adult Swainson's Hawk.

Brian W. Johns

dicade that in significant areas of North America, observers are unanimous that these species are in significant declines? We were advised to quietly drop Canvasback, because various governmental agencies were carefully monitoring the population of this game bird and making efforts to manipulate its abundance. But if we omit declining species merely because someone is studying them, our list becomes inaccurate and incomplete. Most species on the list, of course, are nongame birds, and contributors to the Blue List (and all birders) are monitoring these far more closely than any governmental agency.

This year, we have had the biggest response ever to our questionnaire; it comes from *American Birds'* regional editors and subeditors, from expert field observers, and these responses reflect, in many cases, the consensus of large numbers of field observers who contribute regularly to *American Birds*. Far from representing merely the random impressions of random observers, the distilled opinions herewith presen-

ted result, then, from the combined and weighed observations of hundreds, if not thousands, of birders in the field tens of thousands of times in 1975. We question whether there are more informed analyses of the status of these species anywhere . . . [Data are given below only for Prairie Province species.]

THE BLUE LIST

1. RED-THROATED LOON. Retained on the basis of a status that is apparently unchanged from that of recent years. Observers on both coasts see no diminished numbers, but opinions in mid-continent are almost unanimous in reporting declines.

2. RED-NECKED GREBE. This year sees a more definite consensus. The species, in the opinion of most field observers reporting, within its range, is on a long, slow decline. Apparently never abundant, the status of the species is now troubling observers from the Hudson-Delaware Region, through Ontario, the Niagara-Champlain, Western Great Lakes, Middle Prairie region, to the Mid-Pacific. There are, however, a few dissenting voices in these same regions.

3. WESTERN GREBE. It may be difficult to understand inclusion of a species which winters in such enormous numbers as this one does at Lake Mead, Nev., but keen-eyed reporters from along the Pacific Coast, the Northern Great Plains, and in Colorado, note declining numbers. Elsewhere, especially in the Southwest, and in Utah, no problem is seen.

4. WHITE PELICAN. Declining populations for this species are noted from the Mountain West, Middle Pacific Coast, Southern Texas, the Great Plains regions, and the Southwest. There is, however, a minority of dissenting voices, from some of these same regions. A problem species: one on which we should have more nesting success data.

5. DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT. One of the more controversial species on the Blue List. Last year opinions were divided 59 to 41 percent for deletion; this year with a much larger response it is 55 to 45 percent in favour of retention. It is difficult in the returns to see specific trends. All reports from the Middlewestern Prairie Region — from Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky and Missouri, noted declines, as did Ontario, Minnesota, Kansas, and the Pacific Coast. Opinions were divided in the Mountain West and the Southwest. The Atlantic coast regions generally noted no declines. Freshwater cormorants should be suffering the same pesticide problems as the Osprey and Bald Eagle. Marine populations should be less affected.

6. REDDISH EGRET.

7. BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON. There is still disagreement as to the status of this species, although this year the balance has tipped in favor of retention by 57 to 43 percent. Disagreement may be based more on regional verities than differences in observer interpretation. The eastern states seem to predominate in those who find no problems with the species but from Quebec and Ontario through middle North America to the West Coast, and south to South Texas, the heron is believed to be declining.

8. AMERICAN BITTERN. Provisionally added to the list on the recommendation of field observations in the Mountain West (eleven reporters recommend), the Niagara-Champlain Region, the Hudson-Delaware Region, Utah (Bear River), Illinois, and the Southwest. It would be helpful if some meaningful observational statistics were supplied. Several comments were in the vein of D. Kibbe "may be in trouble in the region, but it is too early to

say for sure." This is precisely the time when monitoring should begin.

9. WOOD STORK.

10. WHITE-FACED IBIS.

11. WHITE IBIS.

12. FULVOUS TREE DUCK.

13. CANVASBACK. Sixty-two percent of a large cross-section of observers recommend Blue-Listing. The species is being carefully monitored by wildlife professionals, whose estimates are undoubtedly more accurate than ours. But we cannot drop a species obviously belonging on the list merely because its status is now recognized by officialdom. If and when the managing agencies succeed in restoring the species to health, it will happily vanish from our list.

14. SHARP-SHINNED HAWK. There is wide divergence of opinion regarding the well being of this species, and much comment. No less than 64 of our far-flung fact-gatherers favor continued Blue-Listing of the species, which is enough for retention. There is, however, little pattern to the placement of yeas and nays, and we wonder how reliable are observers' views on this species.

15. COOPER'S HAWK. This species received the highest total of votes for inclusion on the list of any species except Osprey, and one of the highest percentages (85%). In the Mountain West, the ratio is 88% to 12%, and in the Rocky-Mountain Intermountain it is 93% to 7%. Nonetheless, there are areas of disagreement (Southwest, California) where the middle Accipiter evidences no problem.

16. RED-SHOULDERED HAWK.

17. SWAINSON'S HAWK. Can be taken verbatim from the 1974 listing: "All western regions see serious declines, while the Midwest and prairie regions see no cause for alarm". In favor of listing overall: 75%.

18. FERRUGINOUS HAWK. "Threatened in southern Idaho, holding its own in east-central Wyoming, declining in Utah, disputed as to status in the Southwest. The consensus, by a considerable margin, is that the species remain on the list, or even be included in the official "Threatened Species" list.

19. HARRIS' HAWK.

Young American Bitterns.

Lorne Scott





20. **MARSH HAWK.** Sixty-eight reporters (68%) favor retention of the Marsh Hawk on this year's list. The sentiment is widespread, with opposing viewpoints coming from Utah, Kansas, the Dakotas, the mountain states, and the Southwest, the latter two areas being rather evenly divided pro and con.
21. **OSPREY.** Although there are signs here and there that the Osprey may be at least holding its own in scattered centers of breeding, 88% of all respondents gave it the strongest support received by any species for inclusion of the list.
22. **CARACARA.**
23. **PRAIRIE FALCON.** With almost 90% of those expressing an opinion about the status of the Prairie Falcon favoring continued listing, there seems no doubt about the status of the species.
24. **MERLIN.** In spite of reports of an exceptional coastal (New York) fall flight, and evidence at hawkwatch lookouts seeming to indicate at least a stable eastern population, over 91% of all respondents consider the Merlin to fully merit Blue List status. These views are continent-wide.
25. **AMERICAN KESTREL.** Last year, with a much smaller electorate, retention received 45% of the support; this year, with a far wider survey, support for retention drops to 40%. In large sections of the continent, obviously, the kestrel is in no trouble; of most concern is the Florida-breeding subspecies *paulus*.
26. **SAGE GROUSE.** No change in status. Approximately 72% of all those expressing viewpoints favored retention . . .
27. **MOUNTAIN QUAIL.**
28. **KING RAIL.**
29. **AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER.**
30. **PIPING PLOVER.** If increased support for retention of this species is a bad sign, the Piping Plover could be in trouble. In the last three years, the consensus for inclusion has grown from 69% to 87%. Habitat vulnerability continues to be the problem.
31. **SNOWY PLOVER.**
32. **UPLAND SANDPIPER.** Continued on the list. Although its name was inadvertently omitted from the circulated questionnaire, it was a frequent "write-in". In the Mountain West Region, for example, there were 14 retention opinions against a single deletion viewpoint.
33. **GULL-BILLED TERN.**
34. **LEAST TERN.**
35. **ANCIENT MURRELET.**
36. **YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO.**
37. **BARN OWL.**
38. **BURROWING OWL.** Status unchanged, although this year shows an increase in the percentage of those favoring listing, to 75% of a much wider base. The only areas with recommendations to delete the species were scattered, Florida, one of six, Texas, one of three, the Southwest, two of four and South Dakota, one. In the Mountain West and Northern Rockies area, the pro-retention ratio was 33-5.
39. **SHORT-EARED OWL.** Added to the list on the basis of recommendations from the Hudson-Delaware, Western Great Lakes (Minnesota, four) Mountain West (fourteen) regions. No comments accompanied any of these recommendations; the population decline may be more widespread than indicated here.
40. **COMMON NIGHTHAWK.** With 75% of the electorate witnessing no decline in populations, it might be argued that the species should be deleted. But in the Northeast, in Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Northern Rockies, and Oregon the opposing viewpoint prevailed, enough to warrant a year's extension on this controversial species.
41. **RED-HEADED WOODPECKER.** Added to the list with some misgivings, but this species was nominated for inclusion in four regions, including the Hudson-Delaware, Florida, the Middlewestern Prairie and the Southwest. More data are needed.
42. **LEWIS' WOODPECKER.**
43. **HAIRY WOODPECKER.** Overall sentiment is against Blue-Listing a species as widespread and apparently common as the Hairy Woodpecker, but we do have 33% of all those who commented, in favor of continued listing. There is no regional pattern to the returns, except the Floridians are unanimous in listing. All others in favor of retention were also east of the Rockies.
44. **CLIFF SWALLOW.** Tentatively added to the list on the basis of declines detected in the well covered Hudson-Delaware, Mid-Atlantic Coast, and Appalachian Regions.
45. **PURPLE MARTIN.** Two to one in favor of deletion, but there are enough regional questions about this species to keep it on the list this year. Blue List status for this species should probably be confined to the two coasts.
46. **BEWICK'S WREN.**
47. **FLORIDA SCRUB JAY.**