

Fifty Years Ago in *The Chat*—June 1958

B. Rhett Chamberlain and Thomas W. Simpson provided a summary of changes in the fifth edition of the *AOU Check-List of North American Birds*, which was published in 1957. This was the first new edition since 1931 (and would be the last until 1983). The authors began with some tongue-in-cheek complaints about all the new names that birders would have to learn, such as Peregrine Falcon instead of Duck Hawk, Whimbrel instead of Hudsonian Curlew, and Swainson's instead of Olive-backed Thrush, then explained that the new Check-List summarized the current opinions of ornithologists regarding the relationships of North American birds. Most important, this was the first edition that provided standard common names for species, and it discontinued common names for subspecies. For those species that were divided into subspecies, previous editions provided common names for each subspecies, but no single common name for the species as a whole. As Chamberlain and Simpson noted, the new emphasis on species-level names meant that "Sight records should not now be colored by the 'false accuracy' of presumptive subspecific identification through binoculars."

Because of the lack of a general standard set of common names for species, each publication adopted its own standard species names, resulting in multiple standards. In 1953 *The Chat* had published a list of common names that was to be its standard. Some of these names seem to have been at variance with more widespread usage (for example, Small-billed Water-Thrush instead of Northern Water-Thrush), and some of them (for example, Marsh Wren and Sedge Wren) foresaw later AOU changes. This list already adopted Peregrine Falcon and Swainson's Thrush, which the authors noted in text as new names in the AOU fifth edition.

On *The Chat's* list of common names, the fifth edition changed 49 in some way, including 16 changed only by deletion of a hyphen. Among the changes were

New	Old
White-tailed Tropic-bird	Yellow-billed Tropic-bird
Great Cormorant	Common or European Cormorant
Common Scoter	American Scoter
Sora	Sora Rail
American Golden Plover	Golden Plover
Whimbrel	Hudsonian Curlew
Short-billed Dowitcher	Dowitcher (split)
Long-billed Dowitcher	
Black-legged Kittiwake	Kittiwake
Razorbill	Razor-billed Auk

Chamberlain and Simpson's summary ends with an admonition to "Browse through a copy of this book when the chance arises. Look up the Cattle Egret and its reported distribution. Note the terse comment on the Carolina Parakeet and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Note too the usual winter ranges of the Broad-winged Hawk and the Baltimore Oriole. You will

probably be intrigued by many of the entries in the Hypothetical List.” I find this selection of species accounts somewhat enigmatic. Since the Broad-winged Hawk account indicates that the usual winter range is far from the Carolinas (although three US records, none from the Carolinas, are mentioned), I wonder if this was a cautionary note to some who had claimed winter sightings; or it may simply have been an optimistic comparison with the Baltimore Oriole account, which likewise describes the winter range as tropical but mentions that the species has been recorded occasionally in the eastern US “especially since about 1951”.

Distributional notes of modern interest in this issue’s General Field Notes included a note by Joseph R. Norwood on Wood Ibis (now Wood Stork) nesting inland at Lennons Marsh, near Lumberton, NC. Among large flocks of herons coming to roost on 28 August 1957, he and James L. Stephens, Jr. observed three Wood Storks, described as the first seen at the marsh since 1955, the last “large flock” having been seen in 1943. They noted Robert Allen’s report that the population was “alarmingly low since they have not had a successful nesting season in Florida in some years.”

Harry T. Davis of the NC State Museum published a “confirmation of old reports” of Sandhill Crane in NC. Apparently, previous reports of Sandhill Crane in the state were regarded as little more than rumors, but in November 1957 the State Museum received two heads of Sandhill Cranes that had been shot on 19 Nov 1957 near Lennon’s Marsh in Robeson County by a hunter who mistook them for Canada Geese. Only the heads were preserved, the bodies having been “plucked for eating”.

Edna Lanier Appleberry (CBC President) reported two isolated sightings of female Ruby-throated Hummingbirds at locations three miles apart in Wilmington in Dec 1957 and March 1958. The editor added a note that these might more likely have been Rufous Hummingbirds, with the comment “We believe that they cannot be separated in the field without considerable experience.”

Robert A. Norris reported collecting the first specimen of Western Meadowlark in South Carolina. He had observed the bird during a project involving trapping and marking Eastern Meadowlarks, and collected it because it appeared to be a Western. The skin was sent to meadowlark expert Wesley Lanyon of the American Museum of Natural History, who confirmed the identification “with the same degree of assurance as marks the morphological identification of any meadowlark at the present time.”

— *Kent Fiala, editor*