



## President's Message

Many of us sighed heavily (vocalizing disappointment and envy) back in 1992 when we learned about the multi-volume Lynx publication "Handbook of the Birds of the World." Much like the "Birds of North America" published by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, HBW is a treasury of information on birds; each volume's comprehensive species accounts, artwork, etc. provide a feast for both our eyes and our brains. Why did we sigh? The original cost of HBW was more than \$4,500; today the 'discounted' price for the full 17 volume print publication is just under \$3,800. Not small change for most of us birders.

Though not as expensive, the original print edition of Cornell's BNA sold for around \$2,000. With the final pages of the printed version of BNA completed some time ago, Cornell moved to establish an online version, accessible for a relatively modest annual subscription of \$42. Lynx has now followed suit, offering HBW Alive for only \$41/yr (BNA covers 700+ species; HBW covers almost 10,000 species, though the BNA coverage of 'our' birds is perhaps more thorough than HBW Alive).

So now, via two separate efforts, available to us are two tremendous resources/archives. Both promise to keep these sources current, updating them promptly as new information becomes available via the technical literature on ornithology. Certainly the subscription costs will creep upward as time passes, but still, what a bargain – comprehensive, current information about the birds we watch, hope to see, or even those we know we'll never see or hear, but still fascinate us.

By now you're probably wondering: Why the hyperbole about these online subscription databases? Does Fisher own stock in Lynx? Is he a paid promoter for Cornell? The answer to both questions is no, but this background is context to an appeal for support, extended to you – the members of IOS. And to the members of the greater birding community here in Illinois.

One of the treasures of "*Meadowlark*" is the now 21 years of seasonal reports contained in our flagship publication. Diligently and ably compiled by a succession of some of the state's best and most dedicated birders, this dataset is an extraordinarily valuable resource to a broad spectrum of people interested in our birds – from the ornithological community to the casual birder, wondering if the Eastern Phoebe he just saw in mid-November is unusual. Your Board's goal is to convert the print seasonal reports into a searchable online database, located at a public repository for this type of data. Our first choice is the Midwest Avian Data Center <http://data.prbo.org/partners/mwadc/>. We also plan to work cooperatively with the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee, to incorporate the IORC dataset into the same searchable archive. This conversion is a daunting task, requiring more time and effort than we could reasonably ask one or more volunteers within IOS to provide. So we are now searching for companies who do this as a business. And we are looking for a donor organization that might provide a match grant to IOS. So my questions to you, our members are: Do you think this searchable database would be a valuable asset to IOS members and the birding community in general? If you do, would you be willing to contribute to this targeted fundraising? Give me a call, or let me know what you think by email at [president@illinoisbirds.org](mailto:president@illinoisbirds.org).

I look forward to your comments!

*Robert Fisher*

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