



President's Message

Ever changing taxonomy

Have you done it yet? Looked at that state list, or your home county list, or that list of species seen in your local patch, or your yard, and said to yourself, "Oh, darn, I know there was a major reordering recently, announced by the American Ornithologist's Union (AOU)." And, of course, a few names were changed in the process.

Some of the really dedicated listers among us surely jumped right on this project when the 52nd Supplement to the Check-list of North American Birds was published in late summer of 2011. And then of course, there are some of us who are slightly less diligent in reshuffling the taxonomy deck... though I'd like this column to serve notice that the rumors are absolutely untrue. I did not insist in continuing to label Merlins as Pigeon Hawks, or Peregrines as Duck Hawks, when these species zipped by the Greene Valley hawkwatch this fall. I'm absolutely OK with name changes. It's just that the overwrite on my diminishing little gray cells (stealing shamelessly from Agatha Christie's diminutive Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot) does take time and concentration.

Wait, you ask, what does a fictional Belgian detective have to do with taxonomy? Well, he preached the need for order and method to get it right, exactly the same philosophy as AOU...I think.

Check out the IOS website. There you'll find that the official Checklist of Illinois Birds, as established by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IORC) reflects all the changes in species order, names, etc. from the recent AOU report. This essential update was carried out by Bob Hughes, IORC and IOS member, and one of our state's finest birders.

Also available on the website is the current iteration of the Field Checklist of Illinois Birds, an essential carry-along when you're out birding. You can download it as a pdf, then print it double-sided on 8.5x14 paper or light card stock, fold it, and slip it into your pocket. This 3rd edition of the IOS Field Checklist includes 348 species and one unestablished introduction [African Collared-Dove]. It was modified from the 2nd edition by IORC Secretary Doug Stotz and IOS Board member Urs Geiser. Special thanks are due to Urs for undertaking the tedious task of reshuffling species names and order of appearance, while maintaining the integrity of the size and quadrfold layout. Anyone who has extensively modified a document in Word format knows how challenging that can be!

For those of us who have the 'old' list in our memory banks, the name changes are pretty benign. Common Moorhen is back to C. Gallinule (where it started many years ago) and the word Eastern now appears in front of 'our' Whip-poor-will. I'm pretty sure most of us will just say Whip-poor-will, secure in the knowledge that the now split Mexican Whip will not be found in Illinois anytime soon. But those darn warblers!! Ovenbird is now first, and Black-throated Green is just ahead of Canada. That's going to take some getting used to!

With the continued rapid advances in genetic sequencing science, we can be certain that the little gray cells of ornithologists and taxonomists within the AOU are working overtime. Another taxonomy reshuffle will surely be written across the sky in two or three years.. Do you think the AOU retirement funds own big chunks of stock in field guide publishers? Hmm...

— Robert Fisher

Publisher

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