



**MARSH WREN**

Original drawing by Justin J. Harding  
Havertown, Pennsylvania

## GENERAL NOTES

**White-phase Gyrfalcon in Lancaster County:** On November 27, 1981, Sidney Lipschutz and I were birding for Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, and Horned Larks about three miles southwest of New Holland, PA. At the intersection of Groffdale and Musser School Road we observed an unusual, large white raptor. We immediately realized that the bird was special and took field notes on the spot.

The bird was at least the size of a Red-tailed hawk. It perched on top of a forty foot tree about fifty yards from us. Its head was white with a substantial black eyeline from the eye to the rear of the head where it faded into the grayish nape. The bill was short, sharply hooked downward, was pale yellow near the cere and black at the tip.

The neck, breast and belly were pure white; however a few faint, gray streaks were on the sides near the folded wings. The legs were heavily feathered white to the yellow feet. The undertail had faint gray barring on a white ground. The dorsal side of the tail was white with heavy black barring. The end of the tail when perched was slightly rounded. The bird's back and wings were white with pronounced black spots in a bar pattern.

After about ten minutes of observation the bird flew to another tree about 250 yards distant. We were able to approach within 50 yards a second time and observe the bird again. Its flight was erratic, very fast, low and swooping. The wing beats were stiff and rapid. In profile the wings were pointed, falcon-like.

We concluded that the bird was a white-phase Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*).

The Gyrfalcon was observed in good light — a high, bright overcast — from 11:45 A.M. to 12:10 P.M. The wind was from the west at 5-10 mph, temperature about 45 degrees Fahrenheit. The bird was seen closely and well through 10 x binoculars and a 25 x telescope. Many observers had a chance to see and photograph it. The bird remained in the same general area, finding a roosting tree a mile to the northwest of where first sighted. The bird was observed through the end of the year.

We never found the Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs, but happily did find some Horned Larks after recovering from the shock of the Gyrfalcon discovery.

—Edward Fingerhood, 145 Woodland Ave., Lansdowne, PA 19050

—Sidney Lipschutz, 2602 Brown St., Phila., PA 19130

**Comments on the White-fronted Goose in Lehigh County, Pennsylvania:** Recently Terry L. Master (*Cassinia*, 1979, 57: 53) reported an observation of a White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) on a pond at Dorney Park near Allentown, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, and suggested that the bird might be feral. Apparently Master was not aware that domesticated White-fronted Geese have been living for years at various parks in the Allentown area. Certainly no bird watcher with decades of experience birding Lehigh County would consider these birds as wild individuals! Doubtless the bird observed by Master was one of the domesticated geese that sometimes roam from pond to nearby pond. Indeed, the Dorney Park pond on which Master observed the White-fronted Goose is only a mile or two at the most from other Allentown park ponds where several domesticated White-fronted Geese occurred for many years. My conclusion, therefore, is that the Dorney Park White-fronted Goose record is not acceptable as a feral bird and should not be included as part of the Lehigh County bird list.

Apparently the only acceptable record of a wild White-fronted Goose in Lehigh County is one observed on 12 October 1971, crossing Bake Oven Knob, by Robert and Anne MacClay (*Cassinia*, 1977, 56: 23). Indeed, Earl L. Poole (*Pennsylvania Birds*, 1964: 17) points out that the White-fronted Goose is casual in Pennsylvania, with most records reported from the western part of the state as would be expected.

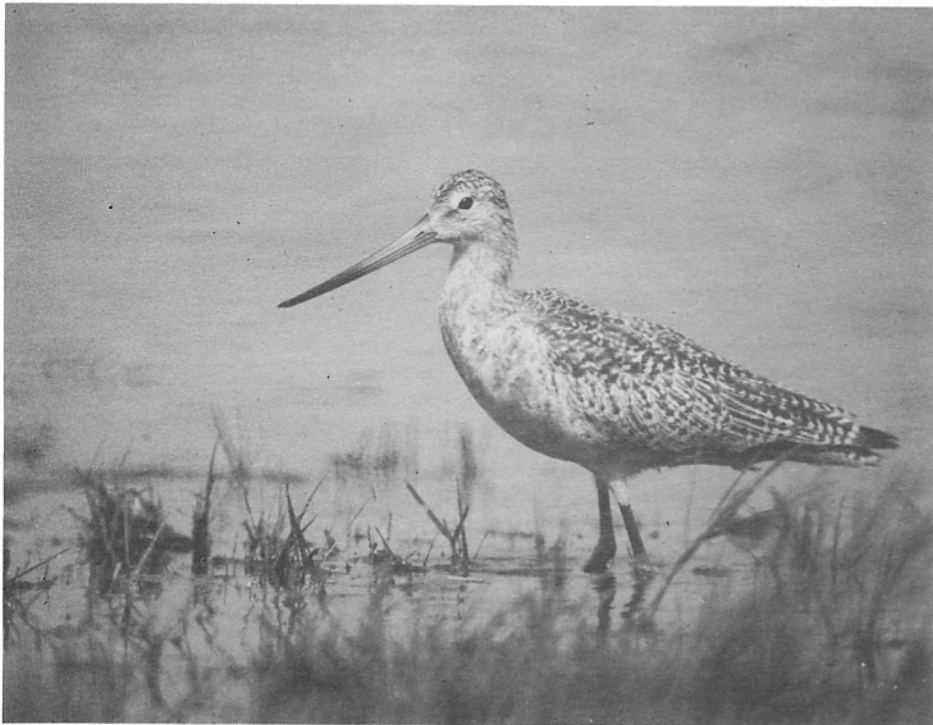
—Donald S. Heintzelman, 629 Green St., Allentown, PA 18102

**Mourning Warbler in Chester County, Pennsylvania:** The record of a Mourning Warbler in Longwood Gardens on 26 October 1979 (*Cassinia*, Vol. 58) was edited in such a manner as to appear a very doubtful record. The fact that the bird had a whitish eye-ring and that its underparts were yellow obviously does not make it a Mourning Warbler. It might still be a Connecticut Warbler.

Apart from the smaller size, which it may be impossible to be certain of unless the bird is handled, I believe the one sure way of identifying a Mourning Warbler in the field in the fall is by the intensity of the yellow of its underparts. It happened that, a few weeks before I saw this bird, I had been handling a Connecticut Warbler that had killed itself against a window.

This bird was a rather bright yellow, so much so that the question arose as to whether it was perhaps a Mourning Warbler. Measurements showed that it was a Connecticut. The Longwood bird was clearly a deeper, more intense, yellow. This convinced me that it could only be a Mourning Warbler. The eye-ring and apparent small size (compared with a Ruby-crowned Kinglet I had seen in the same bush a minute before) were supporting evidence, but I should not have ventured to record my bird as a Mourning Warbler if I had not seen that its underparts were a more intense yellow than the unusually yellow Connecticut that I had handled with Jesse Grantham a few weeks before.

—Horace G. Alexander, 275 Crosslands, Kennett Square, PA 19348



MARBLED GODWIT, CAPE MAY, NJ

Photograph by Serge LaFrance  
September, 1981

**Marbled Godwit in Delaware County, Pennsylvania:** On August 21, 1981, while making a count of shorebirds in the area of Tinicum National Environmental Center, I observed a Marbled Godwit (*Limosa Fedoa*) feeding with Pectoral Sandpipers (*Erolia melanotos*), Greater Yellowlegs (*Totanus melanoleucus*), and Lesser Yellowlegs (*Totanus flavipes*). This was the first record of this species in thirty years at this location. Previous sightings occurred on August 30, 1951, (one bird) and on September 4, 1951, (three birds). The birds were feeding then on what are now the tidal flats of the Tinicum National Environmental Center in Delaware County, Pennsylvania.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Ave., Prospect Park, PA 19076

**Little Gull at Tinicum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:** While on a round up count on May 10, 1980, I observed an adult Little Gull (*Larus minutus*) in a small pond near the Philadelphia International Airport. I approached to within 70 meters of this bird before it flew. All field marks were seen well—dark under the wings, reddish feet, and black hood. This is my first record for Pennsylvania.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Avenue, Prospect Park, PA 19076

**White Ibis in Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania:** A number of sightings of White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) occurred in the Delaware Valley in 1980. Significant among these include the following reports of immature birds. On August 14, 1980, I observed an immature White Ibis flying and perched at the Tinicum National Environmental Center. On October 18, 1980, an immature bird was also sighted at the Tinicum National Environmental Center. This represents the latest date for a White Ibis known to the writer in the Delaware Valley area.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Ave., Prospect Park PA 19076

**White Ibis in Delaware County, Pennsylvania:** On July 28, 1980, a telephone call alerted me to the presence of a wounded bird in a yard of a house in Ridley Park, Pennsylvania. I went to the home and found an immature White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) with a broken leg. The bird was taken to the University of Pennsylvania Animal Hospital where it later died. The skin is now housed in the collection of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Ave., Prospect Park, PA 19076

**Brown Booby at Cape May Point, New Jersey:** On the morning of May 26th, 1980, at about 7:15 A.M., we were looking over the sea at the end of Lighthouse Avenue at Cape May Point, when we simultaneously noticed two large birds approximately one quarter mile off shore approaching the Point from the direction of Cape May. We observed them for about two minutes as they rounded the Point and headed over Delaware Bay.

Both birds were brown, and both flew with the same flap and glide pattern, about ten to fifteen feet above the water. At no time were they more than a dozen feet apart.

The lead bird was an immature Northern Gannet (*Sula bassana*); brownish, with light underparts, a light spot at the bend of the wing, and a large dark prominent bill.

The second bird, although gannet-like in flight, was noticeably smaller. It was some six to eight inches shorter, and had a comparably narrower wing span. The head, back, and wings were dark brown, darker than the gannet, and the primaries on the bird were even a blackish-brown. The long, pointed tail was dark brown.

From underneath, the bird had a dark brown body, while the under surface of the wings showed a paler coloration through the center of the wing area, extending from the base of the wings to beyond the wrist. The bill was smaller than that of the gannet, and was a lighter color, possibly bluish-white. It was not held straight out, but held at a slight downward angle.

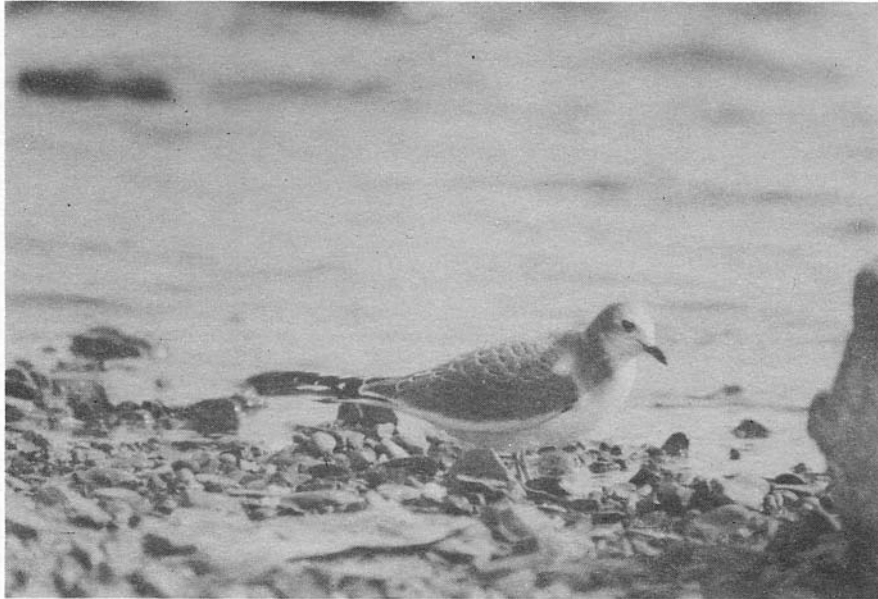
The atmosphere was extremely clear and the light excellent. We used a twenty power scope and 10X40 binoculars.

While we watched this second bird, we were sure we had a booby, and after noting our observations, we later checked the literature and plates, and are now sure that this bird was indeed an immature Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*).

A storm had moved up the coast with strong south-easterly winds about a week previous, and the off-shore winds remained south-easterly for several days, keeping some commercial fishermen ashore. This weather pattern may have accounted for the appearance of this southern species in the New Jersey area.

—Kate Brethwaite, 533 Atterbury Rd., Villanova, PA 19085

—Alan Brady, P.O. Box 103, Wycombe, PA 18980



SABINE'S GULL, SUNBURY, PA

Photographs by Stanley C. Stahl  
September, 1981



SABINE'S GULL

Photograph by J. R. George  
September, 1981

**Second Record of Sabine's Gull in Pennsylvania:** On 19 September 1981 at 1000 EDT an immature Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) was observed flying over the Susquehanna River at Sunbury, Pennsylvania, downriver from the "Fabridam," a fabric dam used to create a "lake," for recreational purposes. This was the second reported sighting of this bird in Pennsylvania, but, the first living bird of this species seen in the state. The first bird was found moribund at Presque Isle on 15 October 1979 (*American Birds*, March 1980, p. 161). This was an immature bird. The Susquehanna River Sabine's Gull was also a bird of the year.

The bird had a dark bill, dark eyes, and a continuous brownish-gray crown, nape, back, scapulars and wing coverts. From the head to the wing coverts, the feathers had a "scalloped" appearance, most of the gray and brown feathers having dark subterminal bands and light tips. The secondaries and inner primaries were mostly white, and the outer primaries dark. The tail was white with a subterminal dark band, widest in the center, with some white on the very tips of the rectrices, broader on the inner tail feathers. The tail was slightly forked. The legs were pinkish-gray with some bluish tints. The underparts of the bird's body was mainly white.

The gull spent much of the time flying over the water, circling around fishermen. It rested on shore near the dam, accepting handouts (minnows, shrimp) from fishermen and birders, approaching as close as 6 feet. Frequently, it would rest on the inflated Fabridam and the rocky islets with about 20 Ring-billed Gulls and a couple of Bonaparte's Gulls. At times Ring-billed Gulls would harass it, replacing its perch position on a rock, or flying at the Sabine's Gull when it carried a morsel of food. Once it waded into shallow water from the shore, dragging a fishing line around its tarsus, but stepped out of its hold. Boys fishing along the shoreline threw stones at it when the bird approached them at close range. When resting, it sat on its tarsi much of the time. Its flight was similar to the flight of the Black Tern, but straighter and less erratic. On the shore, it seemed dovelike. When resting on the water the wing tips were held high. The bird was last seen on 21 September 1981 late in the afternoon (*vide* Kerry Gibbons). The bird was observed by scores of people and photographed.

Sabine's Gulls have been reported only rarely in the inland United States, as the migration is primarily pelagic, mainly off the West Coast. Its status on the Atlantic Ocean is poorly known. Most inland states have at least one record of this bird. Samples of eastern states and provincial records include the Quebec Region - 19; Ontario; in New York there may be as many as 30 recorded occurrences, but only 7 confirmed (specimens taken) (John Bull, *Birds of New York State*, 1974); Indiana - photo documentation; Ohio - photo documentation; New England - 11 seen during fall, 1977; Virginia - 5; Florida - 2; Arkansas - 3; Alabama - 3 (*American Birds*, March 1978 - March 1980).

—Stanley Stahl, 302 Broadway, Milton, PA 17847

**Curlew Sandpiper at Tincicum National Environmental Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:** On July 12, 1981, while observing shore birds on the mud flats of the Darby Creek in the Tincicum National Environmental Center, I saw a Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*). The chestnut color and striking back pattern led me to first identify the bird as the Curlew Sandpiper. Further observation revealed the down-curved bill typical of this species. After further observation, I notified other experienced birders who were able to confirm my identification. The bird was seen at low tide throughout the 14th of July by many people. This is the third record of this species in Pennsylvania. The other records are as follows:

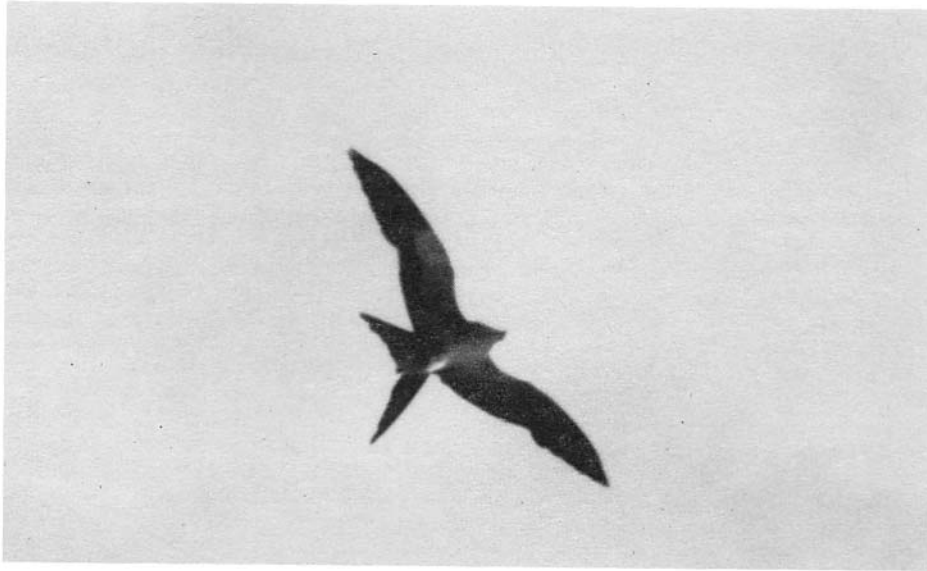
May 16, 1953, Tincicum, Philadelphia, PA, John C. Miller.

August 14, 1955, Conjohela Flats in the Susquehanna Valley, Poole, Earl, *Pennsylvania Birds*, 1964.

—William R. Stocku, 773 Braxton Rd., Ridley Park, PA 19078

**Yellow-headed Blackbird in Delaware County, PA:** An adult male Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) appeared at the bird feeder in my yard on March 1, 1981. The bird appeared for only brief periods through the day. A male Yellow-headed Blackbird also appeared at my feeder on March 30, 1980.

—William R. Stocku, 773 Braxton Drive, Ridley Park, PA 19078



### SWALLOW-TAILED KITE

photograph by Herman Kuch  
June, 1980

**More Autumn Bird Records from Bake Oven Knob, Pennsylvania (1976-1981):** In three previous reports (Heintzelman, 1969; Heintzelman and MacClay, 1976; Heintzelman and Armentano, 1964), we presented annotated records of birds observed in autumn at Bake Oven Knob, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. This note adds additional species to the autumn bird list at this site, bringing the total reported from the Knob to 162 species.

#### ANNOTATED LIST

- Ruddy Turnstone. Seventy on 17 September 1981 (Heintzelman).  
Red Knot. Three on 24 September 1979 (Mears).  
Shrike sp. One on 22 October 1977 (MacClay and many others).  
Blue-winged Warbler. One on 12 September 1976 (Brock).  
Palm Warbler. One on 23 September 1977 (Mears) and one on 15 September 1979 (Heintzelman).  
Lincoln's Sparrow. One on 23 September 1977 (Mears).

Frederick Brock, Robert MacClay, Fred Mears, and the author provided records included in this summary.

—Donald S. Heintzelman, 629 Green St., Allentown, PA 18102

**Ash-throated Flycatcher at Higbee's Beach, N.J.:** After an excellent early morning warbler flight at Higbee's Beach on September 27th 1981, only a few birds were visible later in the day. An exciting surprise, however, was the sight of an Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) found along a hedgerow about a field away from the parking area. The bird, an obvious *Myiarchus*, with rufus in the wings and tail, was silent but quite active, feeding and preening.

The bill was rather small and the head showed no noticeable crest, but had an olive brown cap. The back and upper parts were generally brownish. The most striking feature of the bird was the ashy white throat and upper chest with a primrose yellow abdomen below.

The rich yellow coloration is in contrast to the general field guide's portrayal of this species. According to Wesley E. Lanyon, American Museum of Natural History, N.Y., who has specialized in *Myiarchus*, in the fall, after a fresh molt, an adult *M. cinerascens* could be this brightly colored. If it were pale in appearance it would be a first year bird.

—Alan Brady, P.O. Box 103, Wycombe, PA 18980

—Catherine Brethwaite, 533 Atterbury Rd., Villanova, PA 19085

**Swallow-Tailed Kite (*Elanoides Forficatus*) Seen for Seven Consecutive Days in Northern Chester County, Pa.:** Just before noon on June 7, 1980, my wife was hanging some towels on a clothesline on our terrace when I heard her call, "There is a swallow-tailed kite out here." When I did not immediately appear, there were some more urgent calls to hurry and bring the binoculars.

We both had seen this species numerous times over the Florida mangroves and along the Gulf Coast to Texas. I hurried outside and there was the bird soaring in the open just above our tree tops, approximately 40 to 45 feet high. There was no mistaking this bird with its pure white head, body and forward part of the wings, the black trailing edges of the wings and the black forked tail. It carried in one talon what seemed to be some small prey. Occasionally it would lift this to its beak and pull at it.

The day was beautiful with clear blue sky and a strong westerly wind. We immediately phoned some of our "birding" friends and, since it was Saturday afternoon, about eight birders arrived within a short period of time. Several of us took pictures of the kite in flight. During the afternoon the bird flew just over the tree tops making quick motions as if catching an insect in flight. It was then that we noticed an unusually large number of dragon flies (order Odonata), perhaps in some kind of migration. The bird disappeared about 4 p.m.

The next morning, June 8, 1980, at about 10 a.m. the kite was observed in the top of a dead locust tree in back of our house. Again there was a strong westerly wind, and the bird had to use its wings to balance itself. I was able to take a few pictures of the bird with its wings partly spread, trying to hold on to the small branch on which it was perched.

In the strong wind the bird continued to soar just over the treetops, seemingly catching some kind of insects. The bird was also noted by our neighbors just over the hill, about a half mile away from our house. Again numerous birders came to see the bird. I last saw the kite at about 4:10 p.m.

On June 9, "early birders" arrived shortly after 8 a.m. The kite appeared about 10 a.m. and again, until about 4 p.m. numerous people from Lancaster, Pa., Reading, Pa., Wyncote, Pa. and other suburbs saw this beautiful bird in flight. The strong wind started diminishing about noontime.

June 10 was still cool but the wind was negligible and the sky was overcast. It wasn't until noon that I had my first sighting along with some visiting birders. The temperature got warmer and our kite soared a little higher. My last sighting for the day was about 3:45 p.m.

On June 11, 12, 13 & 14 together with other people we saw the kite on and off from about 10 or 10:30 a.m. until about 3:30 p.m. During this period the air temperature got much warmer and there was no wind. I noticed that the bird changed its flight pattern from just above the treetops to fairly high in the sky. It was during these days that I observed that the bird was seeking thermals, and when it found one it would ride the thermal to higher elevations, now and then making quick movements as if picking insects out of the air. I could only surmise that the insects were riding the thermals also and that the kite fed on them. This is only my own non-scientific deduction.

On Sunday, June 15, there was a big count of birders, but the kite was not seen all day with the exception that one birder had a glimpse of what was thought to have been the bird in the distance at about 4 p.m.—a great disappointment to all.

To summarize the record: I saw the kite several times every day from June 7 to June 14, 1980, and numerous other people saw it during this same period. During the first few days, when the wind was strong, the bird flew just over the treetops, seemingly darting about to catch insects (perhaps the large number of dragon flies that were seen during those days) that were blown up over the trees. During the warm days with practically no breezes the kite seemed to seek thermals.

—Herman F. Kuch, Jr., Pheasant Run, Birchrunville, PA 19421



AMERICAN WOODCOCK, ABINGTON, PA  
Photograph by Richard C. Bell  
October 12, 1981



VARIED THRUSH, MEDFORD, NJ  
Photograph by Serge LaFrance  
December, 1980