

The Broadwing



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Greater Roadrunner

President's Message July 2020

I hope everyone enjoyed the June issue of The Broadwing and is out photographing for June 2021, when ideally, we will be back to regular meetings. I appreciate that we have the virtual alternative, but I miss the individual contact and the recounting of recent birding experiences, and the brownies and cookies, of course.

We are once again fortunate to have an article written by Rick Wright in this issue that educates and entertains at the same time. He has also contributed a book review. There is also a little history with a story about flightless birds, even though it is birds that have intrigued the minds of men and women since the beginning of time and convinced us that one day we would fly as well. My contribution is a continuation of my morning walk around The Serpentine and The Long Water, and for no apparent reason there are pelicans on page 2.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who participates in our Zoom meetings, the quiz was enjoyable, and we plan to have another one very soon. We also got a good look at Panama. Lastly, I hope everyone continues to enjoy our weekly quizzes stays safe.

Sandy



Brown Pelicans and a friend in Sarasota, FL.



Great White Pelicans and a Great Cormorant in St. James Park, London, UK

Flightless Birds

September 16, 1903

At the beginning of the 20th century, the sky became the next frontier, and scientists raced to emulate birds. Samuel Langley, a well-known astronomer, attempted to couple steam-power with flight in his model, the Langley Aerodrome or the Buzzard. His aerodrome model was steam-powered and capable of being launched from a houseboat on the Potomac. In Langley's attempt to limit the extent to which the plane would be heavier than air, he produced a plane too fragile for powered flight. In this cartoon, Berryman shares a laugh with the many species of flightless birds as the Buzzard's third attempt at flight ended in failure. He would attempt to launch the aerodrome two more times (unsuccessfully) before the Wright Brothers made history.

Flightless Birds



A Duck Tail

Rick Wright



Common and familiar over great stretches of North America and the Caribbean, the Ruddy Duck was nevertheless a latecomer to formal ornithological history. Not until 1785—long after most New World waterfowl had been catalogued—did the English ornithologist John Latham describe what he called the Jamaica Shoveller, named for the provenance of the type specimen and its broad, spatulate bill. (Latham 1785) Latham pointed out a second notable feature at the other end of his new species: “tail plain dusky brown ... cuneiform in shape, and rather long.” (Latham 1785) Some thirty years later, Alexander Wilson “discovered” the duck again, for the first time calling it Ruddy, and again noting the peculiar tail, “greatly tapering, containing eighteen narrow pointed feathers.” (Wilson 1814)

That absurdly long, stiff, wedge-shaped tail continues to serve modern birders as the Ruddy Duck’s most salient field mark. Just how it might serve the birds, though, was a question long unsolved.

Today, we know that Ruddy Ducks use their tails to maneuver when feeding under water and, at least in males, to attract and impress the opposite sex in mating displays. (Johnsgard 2017) As obvious as that seems to us now, the Ruddy’s strange tail inspired some equally strange speculation. As late as 1903, the final, posthumous edition of Elliott Coues’s great Key observed that the bird “swims well under water, when its rudder comes into use, like a cormorant’s” tail (Coues 1903). Latham (1785), in describing the closely related and similarly long-tailed White-headed Duck of the Old World, had claimed that even when the bird was not diving the tail functioned as rudder, “immersed in the water as far as the rump.” Recounting his own experiences with living Ruddy Ducks fifty years after Latham, John James Audubon wrote that he “saw the curious manner in which they used their tail when swimming [on the surface], employing it now as a rudder, and again with a vertical motion.” (Audubon 1838)

The English naturalist and author Thomas Campbell Eyton offered a more thorough explanation of the possible effect of that “vertical motion” when he observed that “we should also suppose [the Ruddy Duck’s tail] to be connected with their motion in the water while diving, perhaps giving them the power of raising or lowering themselves suddenly.” (Eyton 1838) Eyton went on to add his own speculation on the matter, a speculation perhaps inspired by the etymology of the then current genus name *Erismatura*, “prop tail.” The long, stiff rectrices, he wrote, were “certainly of great use to them when on shore and stationary, [the ducks’] position being necessarily upright, the legs being placed far backwards.” (Eyton 1838) Ruddy Ducks in fact spend very little time on dry land, where they typically “push themselves” on their breasts rather than lean back, upright, on their tail (Brua 2020).

By far the most imaginative explanation of the Ruddy Duck’s tail was put forth by George Ord, field companion and later editor of Alexander Wilson’s *American Ornithology*. Surprisingly, Wilson never saw this species in life but in describing the two specimens in Charles Willson

Peale's Philadelphia Museum, he was struck by "a particular character of this species ... its tapering sharp pointed tail, the feathers of which are very narrow." (Wilson 1814) Ord, however, had the advantage of an apparent increase in the numbers of a species that Wilson had called "extremely rare" (1814). Ord himself collected, and examined in the flesh, at least five individual Ruddy Ducks, and over the years was shown "several other male specimens of this species" in Philadelphia, including those still in Peale's Museum and one in the collections of the Academy of Natural Sciences. (Ord 1829)

Ord observed that "the shafts of the tail feathers of all these specimens ... projected beyond the webs," in one case by a full inch, with the bare shaft branching into "rigid bristles, resembling those of the tail" of the tropical Masked Duck. Each of Ord's specimens gave "the appearance of the tail feathers having been furnished with the like process, but which had been rubbed off." (Ord 1829) The "ramified" feather tips Ord describes were later identified as the remnants of down adhering to the emerging rectrices. (Coues 1878) Abrasion of the tail feathers is a normal part of the adult Ruddy Duck's life history, too, in which simple exposure to the elements causes the "rectrices to become frayed or broken" in definitive basic plumage, often leaving bare shafts. (Brua 2020)



Ord, however, propounded a different theory. The "stiff, narrow feathers, not unlike those of the tail of a Woodpecker," suggested to him the possibility "that this Duck makes use of its tail in climbing up the fissures of rocks, or the hollows of trees" (Ord 1829), an evocative image if ever there was one.



The actual nesting habits of the Ruddy Duck would not be revealed for another nearly thirty years. In 1857, Osbert Salvin undertook his first expedition to Guatemala (Mullens and Swann 1917), a journey that would ultimately inspire the great *Biologia centrali-americana*. On that first visit, he discovered what seems to have been the first Ruddy Duck nest known to science—not in the cleft of a canyon wall or deep inside

a hollow tree, but "among the reeds on the margin of the lake" near San Miguel Dueñas, constructed of "leaves of the dead flags, together with a little down." (Sclater and Salvin 1859)

The truth is decidedly mundane, even slightly disappointing, in comparison with George Ord's romantic vision of pudgy scansorial waterfowl clambering about in the wilds of North America. But it is worth remembering that everything modern birders know, someone before us had to learn.

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Rick's VENT schedule through September 2022

- **February 22 - March 1, 2021** Guatemala: Birds & Art in the Highlands
- **April 20 - 28, 2021** France: Birds & Art in Provence
- **April 29 - May 9, 2021** France: Birds & Art in Burgundy
- **May 12 - 20, 2021** Poland: Birds & Art in Royal Krakow
- **July 18 - 31, 2021** Circumnavigation of the Black Sea
- **August 19 - 28, 2021** England: British Birdfair & Coastal Norfolk
- **September 8 - 17, 2021** Spain: Birds & Art in the Northwest
- **September 19 - 28, 2021** Germany: Birds & Art in Berlin & Brandenburg
- **May 12 - 20, 2022** France: Birds & Art in Provence
- **May 20 - 30, 2022** France: Birds & Art in Burgundy
- **May 30 - June 9, 2022** Germany in Spring: Birds & Art in Berlin & Brandenburg
- **September 7 - 22, 2022** Hungary & The Czech Republic: Birds & Music from Budapest to Prague

A London Morning Continues

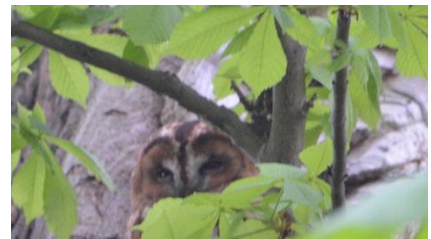
By Sandy Sorkin

This is a continuation of my walk that I started to write about in May. Some mornings have earlier starts than others and I get to cover a little more ground. But even better, I get to see some of the early morning activities of the birds in the park. Two of the most interesting sights in the morning are the mandarin ducks and the single tawny owl. A little later in the morning the little owl awakens and spends some time on the bough of a chestnut tree



It was still quite dark outside, and the tawny owl was probably going to sleep. Then he opened his eyes and looked down before deciding it was better to pursue the shuteye alternative.

Mandarin ducks are wood ducks that spend nights in the tall trees

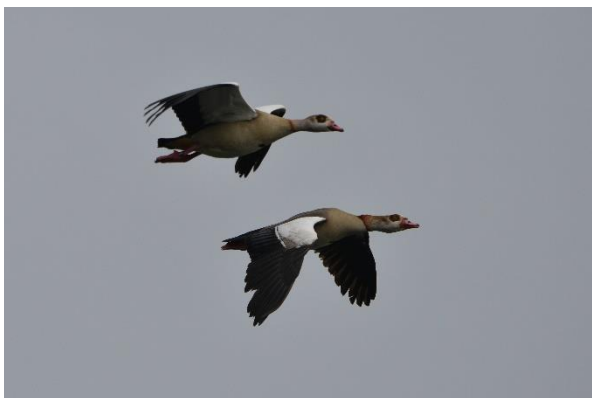


surrounding the Serpentine and the Long Water. Mandarin ducks in the park trees are difficult to photograph, but a little later in the morning they return to The Long Water to feed. Every so often their cousins the wood ducks drop by, but mostly the wood ducks are found in St. James Park a short distance away.



One question about these exquisite ducks frequently comes to mind. Which one is more attractive, the male or the female? I remain undecided but recognize that they make up one of the most spectacular pairs in the water.

When I get to West Carriage Drive that crosses the water and separates The Long Water from The Serpentine, I cross over to the other side to look for the little owl.



On the bridge there are additional opportunities to photograph the water and the birds that approach the bridge and must decide if they want to fly over or under. The pair of Egyptian geese chose to fly over while most of the smaller birds go under.

The little owl is diurnal and spends time resting on the higher limbs of the chestnut trees. My friend Sue is a daily visitor to the park to feed birds. I frequently find her surrounded by great tits, parakeets, and pigeons. A single nuthatch also watches. She still feeds the birds daily, but had to relocate to another part of the park because she was mentioned in a travel magazine and



immediately started to attract a crowd of international tourists interested in watching someone hand-feed parakeets and fend off pigeons.

The little owl sits motionless on a chestnut limb, and below Sue feeds one of the rose-ringed parakeets that are generally taking over the park. It did not take long for the tourists to realize that

anyone can feed the birds. I think wearing a blue suit discourages the pigeons. I think the lesson is that if you stand still with your hand extended, you will soon have a flock of birds and a cluster of tourists surrounding you.

Continuing north on this side of The Long Water, you see the Peter Pan statue. JM Barrie, inspired by the Kensington Gardens, commissioned the statue. It has been in the park since 1912 and located where Peter lands his boat. For more detail, you'll need to reread the book.

At the far end of the park is the Italian Garden built in 1860 as a gift from Prince Albert to Queen Victoria. It features paths, carved ponds, and fountains. The ponds are attractive to visitors, and the coots and moorhens find them to be ideal nesting locations.



The pair of juvenile coots are anticipating a parent returning to the nest with food. There is enough vegetation in the pond, so it is possible that the parents are watching from a respectful distance.





Moorhens also find the safety of the pools a choice location for nesting. The staff that maintains the gardens places wooden ramps in each pool to allow the chicks to climb out if they choose.

At this point of the walk, I usually realize that I have a very long walk back to the hotel to meet Kathy for our late morning walk together that will take us back through the

Rose Garden and then out of the park towards the shops along the southern border.

My treks through the park vary and often take me towards the monuments that dot the park. One of the monuments in the park, the Princess Diana Memorial, is an expansive amount of grass with a large circular fountain. The area is designed for walking and contemplation and attracts large numbers of small children who want to sit on the edge of the pool and dangle their feet in the water, or closely examine the flowers.

“The fountain was built with the best materials, talent and technology. It contains 545 pieces of Cornish granite, each shaped by the latest computer-controlled machinery and pieced together using traditional skills.

“The design aims to reflect Diana's life. Water flows from the highest point in two directions as it cascades, swirls and bubbles before meeting in a calm pool at the bottom. The water is constantly being refreshed and is drawn from London's water table.”



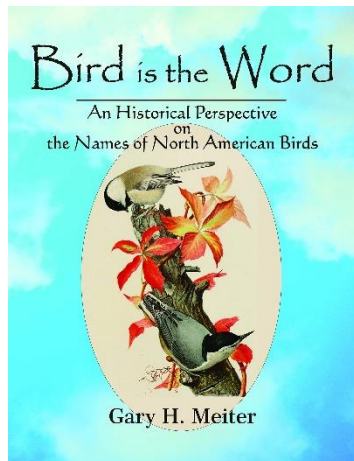
Birdwords

A review by Rick Wright, ventbird.com

***Bird is [sic] the Word: An [sic] Historical Perspective on the Names of North American Birds*, by Gary H. Meiter**

McDonald and Woodward, 2020

437 pages, paperback; \$39.95



Another one?

My shelves, like yours, overflow with books about ornithological nomenclature. And it's a sign of the times that those paper volumes weighing down my bookcases are far outnumbered by those I store as virtual "bookmarks," accessible at a click, saving me that long trudge from desk to shelf and back again. A few of all those many titles, print and e-, are good, most sloppy and naive, one or two indispensable.

One might think that the indispensables—Jean Cabanis's *Museum Heineanum*, Elliott Coues's 1882 *Check List*, the 1957 AOU *Check-list*, W.B. Lockwood's *British Bird Names*, James Jobling's monumental *Dictionary*—would be not just necessary but sufficient. But still they come: dictionaries, essay collections, extended ramblings through the field of bird words, and the obsessive birding worder has to have them all. Or most of them, at least.

The newest such title to find its way to my desk is Gary H. Meiter's *Bird is the Word*, an 8-1/2 x 11 perfect-bound brick announced by its publisher as the "definitive guide to finding and naming the birds of North America." That's a puzzling, even a misleading description of what is actually the latest addition to the encyclopedic side of the genre of books devoted to birdwords, 350 pages of taxonomically ordered names, definitions, and etymologies, dotted with quotations from other authors and regularly interrupted with essaylets (numbered "sidebars") on miscellaneous ornithological matters. Most pages feature a quarter-page illustration of one or the other of the species under discussion; many of the short essays feature portraits of the ornithologists involved in the discovery or naming of North American birds.

Like other would-be authoritative reference works, books on bird names are judged by their accuracy, their completeness, their linguistic sophistication, and their originality. But it helps, too, if the book is well written, well proofread, and well produced. In a volume about words, it is hard to overcome the initial impression created by a cover and title page that depart twice from standard usage, first by failing to capitalize the verb "Is," then by starting the subtitle with that fussy, hypercorrect, embarrassing "an."

Once inside, the reader soon begins to wonder whether there will be a single page unmarred by typographic errors: sometimes just a garbled word or misplaced comma or three, but

occasionally as grave as a misspelling of the very scientific name that is the subject of an entry. Some of those errors, especially the not infrequent replacement of the ending -us with -ous, may be due simply to a rogue “autocorrect,” but computer malfunction does not absolve the proofreader of responsibility. More serious still is the assignment of a single species to two genera: the use here of both *Ammospiza* and *Ammodramus* for the seaside sparrow testifies eloquently, even humorously, to the difficulty of keeping up in these days of taxonomic flux, but it is nevertheless exactly the kind of error a good copy editor knows to watch for.

Other production problems are probably to be laid at other feet. The decision to limit the recto headers to the names of orders is an inconvenience to the reader once the songbirds are reached; using family names would have been far more helpful than nearly 150 pages headed “Passeriformes.” Labeling the short essays scattered through the text “Sidebar 1” and so on may have been intended as a favor to the reader, but those titles at first struck me as unwanted (and certainly inelegant) palimpsest surviving from an earlier editorial stage; only when I found one referred to in the text by number did I understand that this had probably been a design decision—a poor one. No such doubt attends the annotation of the screech owl portrait on page 202, which plainly began as a note scribbled by the author but somehow made it into print. Another query, editorial or authorial, survives in a note about the relationship between the Old English and Anglo-Saxon languages (they are the same). On more than one occasion, a lengthy passage of prose is repeated on the same or a nearby page.



These and other problems deserve mention not only because they do the author a disservice, but because they might easily obscure the fact that the substance of this book is better all in all than its presentation. That substance is largely a product of compilation; nothing here stands out to me as new or original, and while much—though inevitably not all—of the information gathered for this book is accurate and interesting, it would be of greater benefit to the curious or the incredulous reader if its sources were cited, especially in those cases where Meiter’s explanations do not match those given elsewhere. The notion that the finch name *Haemorhous*, for example, is formed on the Greek for “stream” contradicts what I understand to be the currently accepted derivation from the Greek for “rump”; but what sources led Meiter to his alternative etymology? Which “early European explorers speculated” that the aninga was a hybrid of a duck and a snake? Does the dusky-capped flycatcher really have “small horny swellings” at the bend of the wing? A simple citation would offer

the reader insight into the evidence and the arguments. As it stands, readers are forced to attempt to retrace the author’s steps if they want to know more, a tiresome task with no assurance of reward.

Unfortunately, as in so many compilations of this nature, a fair amount of bathwater seeps in with the babies. (Reviewers are happily exempt from the usual proscriptions on catachresis.) Meiter seems too willing to take on faith too many of the old chestnuts passed down from birder to gullible birder over too many decades. Many of these stories have been widely refuted, or at least widely questioned, a circumstance immediately obvious in most cases if one simply consults more than one generally reliable source. Paradoxically, some writers seem to me especially eager

to content themselves with a single opinion precisely now that the internet has made it, and continues to make it, easier than ever before in history to assemble virtually all of the authorities on a given topic and to weigh their arguments and ideas against each other.

In any event, the reader is cautioned that Meiter falls into many of the same traps as his predecessors, and that anything reported here, no matter how plausible, should be considered at first with the same benevolent skepticism as any entry in any reference work. A few corrections:

Latin nouns ending -a are not (all) feminine, as any *poeta doctus* or even just a *nauta callidus* might point out. Scientific names do not “come from” Latin or Greek. The metamorphosis of the barnacle goose was not a matter of medieval “folklore,” but rather of learned, if incorrect, opinion. Gadwalls are named *strepera* for the burping calls of the male, not the infrequent quacks of the female. The English name “scoter” has nothing to do with scooting coots, but almost certainly refers to Scotland, as Willughby and Ray pointed out three and a half centuries ago. Lesson’s published works in anthropology make it seem very unlikely that he confused the Incas and the Aztecs. The Linnaean name of the chimney swift is not a reference to the Pelasgians or to any suspicion that the bird wintered on the bottom of the sea. The



hummingbird genus *Cyananthus* is not named for a largely imaginary behavioral resemblance to pipits. “Bald” in English bird names tends to mean “bald,” not “white.” The sandhill crane is not named for the Nebraska Sandhills. The pectoral sandpiper is named for its breast pattern and not for the male’s air sacs. It is nonsense to suggest that the dove’s tautonymic name has anything to do with the length of its hind toe. The three colors of the tricolored heron are not slate-blue, rust, and white. The red-shouldered hawk is *lineatus* not on the tail but on the neck. Audubon

did not name the Swainson hawk as a new species, but rather believed that it was a common buzzard. Flammulation refers to flame-shaped markings, not a color. The downy and hairy woodpeckers are not named for their nasal tufts but for the texture of their back plumage. The merlin’s scientific name is entirely unrelated to whether pigeons are “ladylike” or not. The English word “gyrfalcon” was cogently explained years ago by Paul Johnsgard as a reference to the size and power of a hawk big enough to take a crane. The Cassin kingbird (named in 1850, not 1830) is by no means “our noisiest.” “Lark,” given the existence of several cognates in other Germanic languages, is probably not derived from an otherwise unattested English word meaning “treason worker.” The American robin is not named *migratorius* for its pattern of vagrancy to Europe. Shakespeare had nothing to do with the ill-advised introduction of European starlings to New York City. The English name of the Bohemian waxwing is indeed a geographic, not a behavioral reference. The name “tree sparrow” for the sole member of the genus *Spizelloides* was not a mistake of “early Settlers”; it is entirely a book name, coined by George Edwards in the belief that the American bird was the female of the European species. Linnaeus is not the author of the genus *Junco*. The type species of *Aimophila* is the rusty sparrow. The name “bobolink” antedates William Cullen Bryant by at least two decades. The prothonotary warbler is not named for anyone’s golden robe. The Blackburnian warbler had been described—and illustrated—some years before it was formally named in 1776. Johann Friedrich Gmelin was never on the island of Hispaniola, and John Cassin never visited Japan. Myrtle warblers breed far to the west of the westernmost Audubon warblers. “Redstart” does not come from the German. “Bunting” is not likely to be related to the German “bunt.” William Swainson was 16 years dead when Walter Buller traveled to England. Grace Estes died in 1925. Robert Cushman Murphy was at the American Museum of Natural History, not the Smithsonian. Josiah Dwight Whitney, for all his merits and attainments, was not “the preeminent geologist of the nineteenth century.”

This list, a partial one, of errors and misapprehensions is not meant to suggest that this book is worse than most of the earlier works it builds on: the tally would be at least as long for almost any competing title. But Meiter does himself no favors by relying so heavily and so credulously on a secondary literature riddled with misunderstandings, uncertainties, and lies. Especially absent citations, the reader can never be sure that what is presented here as fact is not just a convenient or entertaining fiction.

I know nothing about the author, but Meiter seems—like me, admittedly—to have only a little Latin and less Greek. That obstacle is not insuperable: it is eminently possible to write (and read) intelligently about this topic without being fully in command of rules most of us never knew and the rest of us have forgot. But it is equally possible to confirm the translations in one's sources. It would have been easy, for example, to determine that "*perspicillatum*" means "bespectacled," not, as indicated here, "conspicuous." A dictionary would also have cleared up the apparent confusion here about the meaning of "-bates" in scientific names; Meite usually renders it, correctly, as "walker," but without any explanation changes his translation to "inhabitant" in his discussions of the *Dryobates* woodpeckers. I am not much troubled by these easily verified lapses in meaning—but I wish that it were not up to the reader to do the verifying.



An especially welcome element in each of Meiter's species accounts is the pronunciation aids for the scientific names. One can quibble with his insistence on pronouncing all Latin long vowels with an English long vowel, and the imposition—not consistent—of a version of the law of the antepenult unhelpfully obscures the etymology of some names. But in general these roughly phonetic transcriptions will at least

encourage readers to give most of the scientific names listed here the correct number of syllables.

Each account ends with an often extensive list of additional vernacular names for the species. Meiter begins with what are apparently the "official" French and Spanish names; most of them are spelled correctly, but Meiter's capitalization practice is not the standard for those languages. There follow Native American names where they are available, some of them followed by what I assume are meant to be literal translations into English (I remain mystified as to just how the Cree can be said to have "originated the name [oldsquaw] in the first place"). A final catchall rubric covers "other names," some of them in unidentified languages. There is no explanation of the principles by which these "other" names were chosen for inclusion, and the category comprises an uncomfortable mix of obsolete book names, subspecies names, folk names, and scurrilously contrived labels that are not and never have been names, such as the precious "ribeye in the sky" for certain waterfowl species. I was surprised to encounter a number of names that are offensive by any modern standard; their inclusion in lists that do not pretend to be relentlessly exhaustive is gratuitous.

The body of the book is followed by three appendices. The first, a list of those silly "collective nouns" produced as a party game, is a waste of paper. The second, a three-page glossary, is nicely done and helpful, though like the rest of the book it would have benefited from a careful proofreading. The final appendix is biographical, treating all of the ornithologists and others

mentioned in the main text, many of them given quite substantial sketches; these vitae are not without their errors and omissions, but if they represent original research, they are a considerable achievement. Oddly, many of the women are referred to here by their first names, the men by their last.

LIBER IV.					
AVES.	Déj.	UCCELLI.	OISEAUX.	AVES.	VOEGEL.
Avis	1 Dég.	Uccello	Oiseau	Ave	Vogel
Accipiter	2 Dég.	Sparavere	Epervier	Gorbea	Falco k.
Aloula	3 Dég.	Aloula	Alouette	Copula	Lamprol.
Alcyon	4 Dég.	Alcyon	Alcyon	Alcyon	Kyl. Vogel
Anas	5 Dég.	Anatra	Canard	Anas	Lam.
Ankr	6 Dég.	Oca	Oye	Ankr	Gaule
Apus	7 Dég.	Apule	Martinet	Gallinella cō pica	Stivaler. mart.
				may pequerinos	Karte vana
Aquila	8 Dég.	Aquila	Aigle	Aquila	Arvici
Ardea	9 Dég.	Ardea	Fleuve	Gaule	Reyer
Astur	10 Dég.	Astur	Albore	Vn genero de ave	Grop. Vogel
				archetadora	
Boncus	11 Dég.	Boncus	Ouarde	Bobo	Nach. Vogel
Bifida	12 Dég.	Bifida	Chat-Huant	Chupador de las	Guttenl. k.
Bubo	13 Dég.	Barbagani	Tetu-chere	Chupador de las	Guttenl. k.
Caprimulgus	14 Dég.	Caprimulgo		Caprimulgus	Dif. Vogel
Carduelis	15 Dég.	Carduelis	Chardonneret	Grand ave de mar	Guttenl. k.
Charadrius	16 Dég.	Charadrius	Vn grand oiseau de la mer	Guttenl. k.	Reyer
Chrysolis	17 Dég.	Chrysolis	Cigogne	Pecho roto	Ovian
Ciconia	18 Dég.	Ciconia	Coccyz	Cicenna	Kat. Vogel
Coccyz	19 Dég.	Coccyz	Coccyz	Cucillo	Dupet
Columba	20 Dég.	Columba	Pigeon	Pulono	Karte
Cornix	21 Dég.	Cornix	Cornucopia	Cornucopia	Karte
Corvus	22 Dég.	Corvus	Corbeau	Corvus	Reyer
Coturnix	23 Dég.	Coturnix	Caille	Coturnix	Reyer
Cuculus	24 Dég.	Cuculus	Coucou	Cucillo	Reyer
					Cygnus

Running to 35 pages, that final appendix would be more helpful if it incorporated an index personarum, a serious lack in a book like this. Instead, we have only indexes of scientific names and of English names, both restricted to current “official” names; readers wondering what on earth a porte-cercueil or a storm sparrow is will find themselves turning a great many pages—or looking it up elsewhere.

Meiter’s brief bibliography is a puzzle. It includes a number of insubstantial publications while omitting many of what I think of as works absolutely essential to studies of this type, among them three of the five titles mentioned as indispensable at the beginning of this review. Also missing are Alfred Newton, Bo Beolens, W.L. McAtee, Charles Swainson, Walter Skeat, Mark Cocker, the OED, the Century dictionary, anything published in anything other than book form, and anything published in a language other than English. I note only two titles published before 1900. I can only assume that the full bibliography fell victim to space requirements, but the result in any event is that the reader is entirely on her own when confronted with anything interesting, incomplete, or implausible in the accounts here.

It is the inevitable nature of a review to almost always dwell on the shortcomings of a book. Gary Meiter’s new volume is not perfect—but neither is even the most scholarly and most authoritative of the many alternatives. *Bird Is the Word* will inform and entertain many of its readers, and some of them will certainly be inspired to look deeper into the historical literature of birding and ornithology.

The MBC Bulletin Bird

Broadwing

The Broadwing is published five times a year: January, March, May, late summer, and October. **Or more often if there is a pandemic.**

Send photos, field notes, or articles to the temporary editor at MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com.

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From the Desk of the Very Temporary Editor:

Please feel free to e-mail me with any items you would like included in future issues of the Broadwing. Please include pictures and any other news that will reduce anxiety and make us smile.

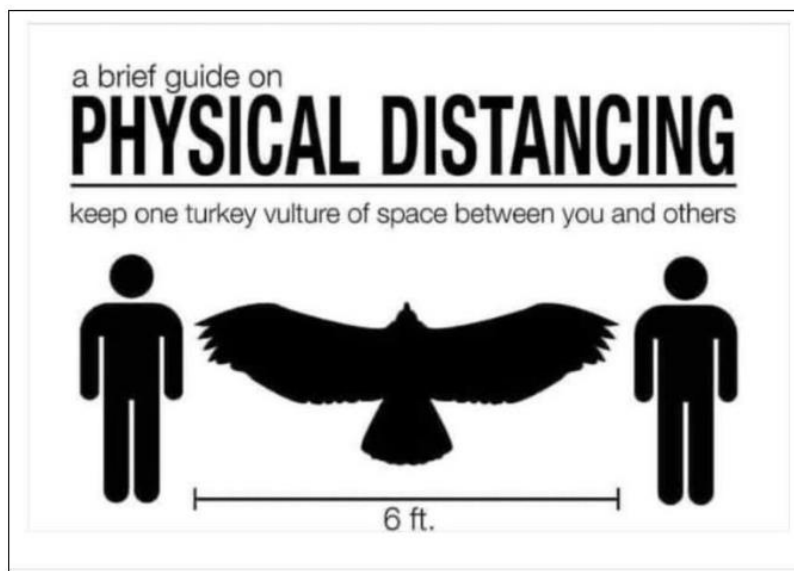
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