

FOLK NAMES OF NEW YORK STATE BIRDS: II

W. L. McATEE

Hooded Merganser. Fish duck (from its food habits, though it depends less upon fishes than do the other mergansers); flying-fish (although a bird, its flesh has such a fishy flavor that it may well be called a fish, for this species an exaggeration); hairy-crown, hairy-head (in reference to its ample crest); Injun (or "Indian"), this term also refers to the crest or "scalp-lock"; little fish duck; little sawbill (the bill is provided with prominent serrations); little spikebill (the beak is narrow and stick-like, not broad as in most ducks); pied sheldrake (a tautonym as sheld-pied; the plumage of the male has much contrasting black and white); pond sheldrake (more often seen in small waters than are the other mergansers); sawbill (the bill is provided with prominent serrations); sheldrake (see note on little sheldrake); shel-duck (the feminine of sheldrake, but applied to the species as a whole); spikebill, spiky (see note on little spikebill); swamp sheldrake (a good name as it is seen in swamps more than are the other mergansers); water pheasant (as a showy bird of the waters); whistler; wood sheldrake (it frequents wooded swamps and nests in tree cavities).

Common Merganser. Arctic sheldrake (sheldrake is applied to all mergansers; "arctic" indicates a cold-weather bird); fish duck; flying-fish (see notes under the preceding species); gony (applied to the albatrosses, often as "gooney", this term alleges stupidity; but is a misnomer for the alert merganser); goosander (this name, applied to the European subspecies and transferred to ours, means goose-duck); pied sheldrake (the male is pied, green and white); sawbill; shelduck (see notes under the preceding species); sheldpeg (with allusion to the pied coloration and the peg- or stick-like bill); sheldrake; shelduck; spike (from its "spike" bill); swamp sheldrake (less suitable for this species than for the hooded merganser); tweezer (possibly from the form of the bill, but the name is used in the same region as, and may be related to, "weaser", the meaning of which is unknown); weaser, weaser sheldrake, wheezer, woozer.

Red-breasted Merganser. Common sheldrake; fish duck; flying-fish, pied sheldrake (see notes under hooded merganser); red breast, red-breasted sheldrake (the lower neck and upper breast are pale cinnamon); salt-water sheldrake (keeps more to salt water than do the other mergansers); sawbill; sheldrake (also in British provincial use); shelduck; spike; swamp sheldrake (see under the preceding species); trolling spoon (the motion of the wings in flight giving the suggestion of a whirling movement like that of the object specified); whistler, whistler duck (there seems no accounting for these names except by confusion with other species which do produce a whistle, either by voice or wings).

Turkey Vulture. Buzzard (soaring hawks were known as buzzards in England (and by related terms in most of Europe) but in America the name came to be applied to the vultures).

Goshawk. Chicken hawk (poultry was found in 116 of 243 stomachs examined (McAtee, 1935) so the name is well bestowed).

Sharp-shinned Hawk. Blue darter (adults are chiefly dark bluish-gray above, "darter" from its pouncing mode of attack); chicken hawk (remains of poultry were found in only 2 of 944 stomachs examined (McAtee, 1935); hence the allegation in this name is greatly overdrawn); little blue darter; pigeon hawk (it seldom takes a bird as large as a pigeon).

Cooper's Hawk. Chicken hawk, hen hawk (poultry in 32 of 261 stomachs (McAtee, 1935), names fairly well justified).

Red-tailed Hawk. Chicken hawk, hen hawk (domestic fowls represented in 60 of 754 stomachs or in about 1 out of 12 (McAtee, 1935), the bird is not as bad as reputed); redtail (the tail of adults is chestnut above and that color shows through to the observer below when the bird is in strong light).

Red-shouldered Hawk. Chicken hawk, hen hawk (remains of chickens in only 8 of 391 stomachs (McAtee, 1935), this species not to be classed as a serious poultry enemy).

Broad-winged Hawk. Hen hawk (no remains of poultry were found in 145 stomachs (McAtee, 1935), name a misnomer).

Rough-legged Hawk. Black hawk (a color phase is largely black; but most birds

are dark grayish-brown above, with the base of the tail white).

Bald Eagle. American eagle (as the National emblem); bald eagle (the head of adults is white but not bald); brown eagle, gray eagle (bird in immature plumage); sea eagle; white-headed eagle.

Marsh Hawk. Harrier (an English name traceable to Turner, 1544, meaning one that harries or ravages); hen harrier (has the same history). Remains of poultry were found in 20 of 601 stomachs examined (McAtee, 1935) — one in thirty, not enough to condemn the whole race); long-tailed hawk; marsh harrier; marsh hawk (it is most often seen quartering open grasslands); mouse hawk (mice in 173 out of 601 stomachs).

Osprey. Fish eagle; fish hawk; osprey.

Peregrine Falcon. Chicken hawk (the peregrine is fully capable of taking poultry but does not do so as often as might be expected; chicken remains were found in 3 of 57 stomachs (McAtee, 1935); duck hawk (that is predator upon wild ducks, 9 of which were represented in the 57 stomachs); eagle; goose hawk; hen hawk; pigeon hawk (peregrines wintering on high buildings in cities prey largely on pigeons; the species doubtless was one of those called pigeon hawks in earlier days when they followed and harried flights of the wild or passenger pigeon).

Pigeon Hawk. Bullet hawk (from its speed in flight); chicken hawk (poultry, except when young, are too large for the pigeon hawk to conquer; remains of a chicken was found in only one of 727 stomachs (McAtee, 1935); pigeon hawk (this name seems to refer to the bulk of the bird, not to its preying upon pigeons, the record for which in stomach analyses is the same as for the chicken. The bird, however, probably was among the camp-followers of the wild pigeon, young or disabled individuals of which it could overcome).

Sparrow Hawk. Killy hawk (from its notes); sparrow hawk (a generally used name, but as descriptive of its predation, grasshopper hawk would be a better name. Grasshoppers and their allies in 491, and sparrows in 26, of 703 stomachs (McAtee, 1935).

Spruce Grouse. Swamp partridge.

Ruffed Grouse. Partridge (often patridge); pheasant (formerly "partridge" was well restricted to the north and east, while "pheasant" prevailed in mountains and the south. While traces of this usage remain, the tendency is for the lines to break down. Moreover, in many localities the pheasant is now the introduced ring-neck); silvertail (the gray color phase); wood-pile quawker.

Heath Hen. Now extinct. Grouse, heath hen, prairie chicken, and prairie hen were names used for it in New York.

Bob-white. That name is in rather general use, but partridge and quail also are heard.

Common Pheasant. Fennix (possibly a corruption of phoenix, its bright coloration being deemed appropriate for a sacred bird); gray pheasant (the female); pheasant; ring-neck (generally there is a conspicuous white collar about the neck of the adult male).

Wild Turkey. That name and simply turkey, as well as gobbler for the male, were in general use.

King Rail. Fresh-water meadow-hen; king rail (from its large size and bright coloration; marsh hen; red-breasted rail (the foreparts below are reddish-brown).

Clapper Rail. That name is in use (a common cry is "a harsh, clattering cackle"); marsh hen; meadow clapper (Pennant, 1785); meadow hen; mud hen; salt-water marsh hen; salt-water meadow-hen.

Virginia Rail. Fresh-water marsh-hen; fresh-water mud-hen; little mud-hen; mud-hen.

Sora. English rail (the term "English" in such names usually means the best of its kind from a sporting or gustatory point of view); little rail; marsh chicken; meadow rail; mud-hen; rail bird; sora (thought to have been derived from an Indian name of the bird).

Yellow Rail. Kicker (from its notes).

Common Gallinule. Blue water-hen (the forward underparts are slaty-gray); marsh chicken; mud-hen; red-billed mud-hen (the base of bill and the frontal plaque

are sealing-wax color); Virginia water-hen (as a distinguishable and probably southern kind of water-hen).

American Coot. Blue Peter (the general plumage color is bluish-slaty. "Peter" has Biblical reference; in treading on the floating leaves of aquatic plants, it appears to walk, and spattering along in its take-off into flight, to run, on the water); coot; crow duck (from its dark color and perhaps also from the shape of its bill, "duck" as a sizable water bird); henbill (the bill is much more like that of a hen than of a typical duck); meadow hen; Mother Carey's chicken (by strained transfer from the small petrels (see note on Leach's petrel), probably in recognition of the distinctness as a "chicken" of this somewhat chicken-like bird); mud-hen; sea coot (a misnomer, as the bird has little to do with the sea); sea crow ("crow" from its dark color; see also the preceding note); water hen; whitebill.

American Oyster-catcher. Flat-foot snipe.

American Ringed-Plover. Little ringneck, ringneck, ring-necked plover (the neck has a broad white collar, below which is a narrower black ring).

Piping Plover. Beach bird; beach flea (as a small creature inhabiting the beach); beach plover; butter-bird (because sometimes very fat); quill-toot (from its notes); ringneck (collaring much as in the preceding species, but due to the general pale coloration of the bird, the white band is less conspicuous; the black ring is sometimes incomplete); stone-runner (it inhabits gravelly as well as sandy beaches).

Killdeer. That name, in imitation of a cry, is universal; killdeer plover; killdeer snipe; ringlet, ringneck, ringneck plover (there are two white and two dark bands on the neck and throat).

Golden Plover. Big frostbird (from being seen in cold weather in fall); bullhead (that is bighead); frost bird; frost plover; goldback, golden-back, golden plover (the upper parts are speckled with yellow); gray plover (birds in immature or fall plumage); greenback (from the yellowish spotting); toadhead (bighead).

Black-bellied Plover. Beetle, beetle-head, beetle-head plover (having a beetle- or maul-like, that is big, head); black-belly, black-breast, black-breasted plover (in adult plumage, the lower parts from throat to belly are black); bullhead (meaning big head, also in British provincial use); bull-head plover; bull plover; frost bird; gray plover (for the last two terms, notes under the preceding species apply. Grey plover is the standard British name of the species and is of ancient usage); whistling plover (some of its notes are clear, ringing whistles, also in British provincial use).

Common Turnstone. Beach bird; beach robin (as a familiar, full-throated bird of the beach; its ruddy coloration is, however, on the upper, not on the lower parts as in the robin); blackheart (the upper breast is marked with black); brant bird, brant plover, brant snipe (from apparent association with the brant); calico-back, calico bird, calico plover (the back is particolored); heart bird (from the dark marking on its upper breast); horse-foot, horse-foot bird, horse-foot snipe (from feeding on the eggs of the horsefoot or king crab); Jinny (a familiar or "pet" name); maggots (maggots are seen in beach debris and birds rummaging that flotsam are supposed to eat them); rock bird, rock plover (as frequenting ledges); sea quail (latter term from its plump form and particolored plumage); streaked-backed plover.

American Woodcock. Big-eyes; blind snipe ("it's sight is noticeably dull in the full sunlight" (Trumbull, 1888); cock (a nickname); snipe (in early days this was the general name of the bird, which only later became widely known as the woodcock); timber-doodle (a fanciful appellation); woodcock, wood snipe (it frequents woodland more than does any other of the shore bird alliance).

Wilson's Snipe. Blind snipe (its close sitting, almost allowing it to be stepped on, is attributed to poor eyesight); English snipe (meaning the best of its kind); grass snipe (as an inhabitant of sippy grassland); jacksnipe (in such terms, "jack" means small, but in this case the name probably is a transfer from the English jacksnipe, a miniature of the European common snipe, to which our bird is closely related); snipe (a universal nickname).

Long-billed Curlew. Big curlew (the largest of the three American species); sickelbill, sickelbill curlew (the bill is long and curved).

Hudsonian Curlew. Creeker (from its frequenting "creeks" or guts in salt marshes); crooked-bill marlin (marlin, from marlinspike, compares the bird's bill to

the traditional tool of a boatswain; in this species, as in all the curlews, it is curved); jack, jack curlew (as being smaller than the long-billed, or big, curlew); jacksnipe; short-billed curlew; sickle-bill curlew (see note under the preceding species, to which this name is more appropriately applied).

Eskimo Curlew. Doughbird (have "a much thicker layer of fat than is usually seen in other birds, hence their local name . . . from the saying 'as fat as dough'"). (Mackay, 1892); English fute ("English", the best of its kind; fute probably from the obsolete verb of that spelling, meaning to whistle); fute; marlin (see note on crooked-bill marlin under the preceding species). Certainly a very scarce bird; indeed often deemed to be extinct.

Upland Plover. Field plover; frost snipe (an inappropriate name as the bird's stay in New York almost coincides with the frost-free period); grass plover (it is an inhabitant of grasslands); gray plover (the general tone of the plumage is brown and buffy, rather than gray; but these color terms are not well differentiated by hunters); humility, humillet (such names, applied to numerous shore birds, appear to refer to their bowing or curtesying habits); lapwing (a common gesture is to raise the wings straight upwards, where perhaps they touch, as it alights); plain plover (that is of the plains or barrens of Long Island); upland plover.

Spotted Sandpiper. Peeper (a common note sounds like peet-weet); peet-weet; potato snipe (as frequenting potato fields); steel-yard bird (in allusion to its balance-like movements); tator snip (potato snipe, which see; possibly a corruption of teeter snipe, which explanation would then cover this series of terms); teeter, teeter bird, teterer, teetering snipe, teeter snipe, teeter-tail, tilt, tilter, tip-up (from its bobbing movements).

Solitary Sandpiper. Jacksnipe (at some time or place almost any shore bird may be called a snipe or jacksnipe); teeter-tail, tip-up (from its bobbing movements).

Willet. Brown teeter (the general color above is brownish-gray; "teeter" from its bowing movements); frost snipe (the bird is scarcely present during the frosty season); humility (from its bowing or "curtesying" movements); oxide (a corruption of ox-eye; various shore birds, with full, round eyes, are called ox-eyes); willet (from its notes).

Greater Yellowlegs. Big yellowleg; great tell-tale, tattler, tell-tale (its wariness and shrill cries give all wildlife notice of the presence of intruders); winter yellowlegs (as being present in colder weather than is the summer, or lesser yellowlegs); yellow-leg, yellow-leg snipe; yelper (from its vociferousness).

Lesser Yellowlegs. Little yellowleg; summer yellowleg (as being seen in milder weather than is the winter, or greater, yellowlegs); water plover; yellowleg, yellow-legged plover; yellow-leg snipe; yellowshanks; yellow-shanks tattler (see note under great tell-tale, for the preceding species); yelper (see under the last species).

American Knot. Grayback, gray snipe (in fall plumage); red-breasted snipe (from its brownish-red underparts in the breeding plumage; any shore bird may be called a snipe); robin, robin snipe (in allusion to its plump figure and brownish-red underparts); white robin-snipe (in fall plumage).

Purple Sandpiper. Winter snipe (occurs only from fall to spring).

Pectoral Sandpiper. Brownback; fat bird; grass bird, grass snipe (it is usually seen in soppy, short grass or grass-like plants); jacksnipe (a small snipe or shore bird); kriecker (this spelling retained from Trumbull, 1888, who derived the term from the German, kriecker, a cringing one, in reference to the crouching and squatting habit of the bird; other theories are reflected in the spelling "creeker", alluding to its notes, and "creeker" from its frequenting creeks or channels in marshes); meadow snipe; shortneck.

White-rumped Sandpiper. Big oxeye (latter term is applied, both in this country and in Great Britain, to various shore birds, in reference to their prominent eyes); peep (a name given to numerous shore birds, that is sonic for some of them, but may also have the significance of "chick", in reference to their small size); white-rump.

(to be continued)