

FOLK NAMES OF NEW YORK STATE BIRDS: III

W. L. McATEE

Least Sandpiper. Little oxeye, little peep (see notes on related terms under the preceding species); little sandpiper; meadow oxeye; oxeye; oxeye snipe; peep; sand skylark (it utters a series of notes or a "song" on the wing, so the name of Europe's famed aerial songster was requisitioned;) sand snipe; stint (by transfer from Great Britain, where certain small shore birds are so-called; as one meaning of "stint" is to cut short, the name would seem to refer to the small size of these species); teeter (from its bobbing movements).

Red-backed Sandpiper. Blackbreast, black-breasted snipe (from the large black spots on the lower sides of adults in breeding plumage); dunlin (British name of the bird, meaning little dun-colored one); fall snipe; frost snipe (it is commonly seen from fall to winter); leadback (the back of adults in winter plumage is brownish-gray); little black-breast (perhaps to contrast it with the much larger Black-bellied Plover; however that species has the underparts solid black, while there are only two large, oblong spots on the lower sides of this one — in breeding plumage in both cases); ox-bird (also used in Great Britain "perhaps from the full round eye," like that of an ox (Swann, 1913)); purrie (from a note like "purr"; also in British use); winter snipe.

Dowitcher. Brownback, brown-back snipe (in winter plumage); dowitch, dowitcher (spelled in various ways, this appears to be "a word of Iroquois origin — compare Cayuga and Mohawk tawis, Onondaga tawish, 'snipe'; but has been modified in form by confusion with Deutsche, 'a German' or Dutch snipe being the name that the natives of Long Island conferred on this bird in order to distinguish it from the 'English Snipe'" (Read 1931)). This accords with the claim for sonic origin of the term (J. T. Nichols in Bent, 1927) as the Indians were quite prone to form names on that principle. It is onomatopoeic. All of them — Indian, German and English — may have had independent origins); German snipe; gray snipe (in winter plumage); quail snipe (from its plump form and ruddy coloration in breeding plumage); red-breasted snipe (the underparts of breeding adults are chiefly light, pinkish-cinnamon); robin snipe (the breast is full and, as just described, reminiscent of that of the robin); sea quail (see note on quail snipe); white-tailed dowitcher (the rump and tail above are chiefly white).

Stilt Sandpiper. Bastard, bastard dowitch, bastard yellowleg (supposed to be a hybrid dowitcher x lesser yellowlegs); greenleg (the legs and feet are yellowish-green).

Semipalmated Sandpiper. Big oxeye, oxeye, oxeye snipe (the eyes with their white encirclings are prominent); peep (see note under the white-rumped sandpiper); sand oxeye; teeter (from its bobbing movements).

Western Sandpiper. Oxeye; peep.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Buff-breast; little plover (in contrast to an associate, the larger Upland Plover).

Marble Godwit. Brown marlin (this term "marlin" and others following are short for marlinspike, the bill of the bird being likened to that traditional tool of a boatswain); curlew (any large shore bird may be called a curlew); marlin; red curlew, red marlin (the general ground color is pale cinnamon); straight-billed jack (in contrast to the jack or Hudsonian curlew with obviously decurved bill, this bird has the bill slightly upcurved).

Hudsonian Godwit. Ring-tailed marlin (the upper tail coverts and concealed base of the tail are white; for marlin see above); straight-bill curlew (the bill is slightly upcurved).

Sanderling. Beach bird; beach plover; beach snipe; sand snipe; strand snipe; surf bird, surf snipe (it closely follows receding wavelets in search of the food organisms they reveal); white snipe (in fall plumage it is the whitest of the shore birds, except for the piping plover, which may be distinguished by its black collar).

Black-necked Stilt. Lawyer (from its vociferousness).

Red Phalarope. Bay bird (it lives on open waters); hen snipe (the females are larger and more brightly colored than the males); sea snipe (see first note).

Wilson's Phalarope. Hen snipe (see under the preceding species); sea goose (perhaps facetious in allusion to its diminutive size or swimming habits).

Northern Phalarope. Hen snipe; sea snipe. Probably all of the names are interchangeable for these seldom seen birds.

Pomarine Jaeger. Gull hunter (jaegers harass gulls until they disgorge food which their pursuers then seize in the air); hawk (in allusion to its predatory habits).

Parasitic Jaeger. Gull chaser; hawk; pigeon-tailed gull (from the elongate middle tail feathers, suggesting the long tail of the passenger pigeon).

Skua. Sea hawk (from its predatory habits).

Glaucous Gull. Burgomaster (town master or mayor, from its dominating other birds); ice gull (seen only in winter).

White-winged Gull. White gull; white-winged gull (with the preceding species the only New York gull without some dark markings, especially on the wing tips).

Great Black-backed Gull. Blackback gull; coffin-carrier (from the black mantle, which appears oblong in silhouette); master gull (from its dominating other species); saddle-back gull (in allusion to the black mantle).

Herring Gull. Bass gull (from feeding on some fish known as bass); gray gull, gray winter gull (the mantle is pale bluish-gray); harbor gull (a familiar species in harbors); herring gull (as preying upon herring); sea gull, winter gull.

Ring-billed Gull. Sea gull; winter gull.

Laughing Gull. Bass gull; black-headed gull; laughing gull (from its notes); mackerel gull (from being seen at the time of the mackerel fishery).

Bonaparte's Gull. Little bass gull; sea pigeon (from its general figure and small size among gulls).

Kittiwake. Mackerel gull (also in British provincial use).

Common Tern. Mackerel gull; sea swallow (from its graceful flight); sheep's-head gull (being seen at the season of fishing for the fish called "sheep's-head"); summer gull; tide gull.

Roseate Tern. Rosette (the little rosy one; the white underparts are more or less tinted with pink).

Least Tern. Fishing gull; little sheep's-head gull.

Black Tern. Black gull (the head, neck, and forebody are black in the breeding plumage; any tern may be called a gull); marsh tern (it nests in marshes).

Black Skimmer. Flood gull (seen feeding on rising tides); razor-bill (the lower mandible is compressed like a knife-blade); shearwater (the bird flies about with its prolonged and compressed lower bill cleaving or "shearing" the water); skippaug (spelled also "scapog" and "skipog" — a name by which some of the New England Indians designated the menhaden; the bird probably shared the name because of seasonal or other association with the fish).

Razor-billed Auk. Sea crow (a sea bird of about crow-size whose plumage, as seen on the water, is mostly black); sea parrot (probably from confusion with the puffin).

Brunnich's Murre. Sea crow

Dovekie. That name, used in New York, means a little dove; the bird's form is plump but otherwise there is little reason for the name; doverick duck (first term a corruption of dovekie; "duck" as a water bird); sea dove (also in Scottish provincial use).

Black Guillemot. Sea pigeon (though not very pigeon-like in appearance, the guillemots are said to be called sea pigeons for a variety of reasons, as for the shape of their bills, their laying of two eggs resembling those of pigeons, and their apparent constancy to their mates).

Common Puffin. Dick duck ("duck" as a water bird; "Dick" a familiar name, perhaps suggesting a dick or little man, as the birds do in the erect position they assume on ledges); sea parrot (from its high, curved, and colored beak; a name also in British folk use); sputs puffin (meaning unknown).

Common Pigeon. A bird naturalized in most settled parts of the country. The names, pigeon, street pigeon, blue-rock and dove (the last two also British folk names) in about that order of prevalence (pigeon overwhelmingly the most com-

mon) are used more or less throughout the United States. Blue rock is short for blue rock-pigeon, because it nests on cliffs.

Mourning Dove. Carolina dove (an old name tracing essentially to Catesby, 1731 [Turtle of Carolina]) where he painted the bird and whence Linnaeus described it); dove; ground dove; mourning dove (to some ears the notes sound mournful; however, they are uttered by the bird at the height of its joy in living); turtle dove (by transfer from a European bird of a different genus. "Turtle" derives from the apparently sonic, Latin term *turtur*, a name for the species mentioned. "Turtle" is recorded for that bird as early as 1000 A.D. As "turtle" then means dove, the combination, turtle-dove is tautonymic); wild pigeon.

Passenger Pigeon. Extinct since the early 1900's. Pigeon and wild pigeon were names in general use.

Carolina Paroquet. Substitute parrot and wild parrot, and the same legend will serve.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Cow bird (a common call simulates the syllable "kow"); rain crow (the bird is most clamorous before a rain. Wilson, 1808-1814).

Black-billed Cuckoo. Cow bird; rain crow.

Barn Owl. That name, from its nesting in barn lofts, is also a British folk name; monkey-faced owl (the heart-shaped facial disk being likened to that of a monkey); mouse owl (a very fitting name as it is a great mouser); screech owl (upon occasion, this bird utters a "hair-raising" scream; also in British folk use).

Screech Owl. Barn owl (from taking shelter in barns); cat owl (the tufts of feathers on each side of the crown, resembling ears, suggest this name); little screech owl, screech owl (an unfortunate name as the bird rarely screeches; the note most often heard is a soft, tremulous whistle, which to my ears is a musical and welcome sound. Lowell (1871) called it "one of the sweetest sounds in nature").

Great Horned Owl. Big owl; cat owl (the explanation of this term under the preceding species doubtless applies, but the alternative theory as to silent approach also enters in; it would be more noticed in this large species than in the small screech owl whose predation is of less interest to man); hen-roost robber; hoot owl.

Snowy Owl. Snow owl (from being seen in winter); white owl.

Barred Owl. Hoot owl.

Short-eared Owl. Marsh owl (it roosts and nests mostly in open grassland).

Saw-whet Owl. Little owl; saw-whet (from breeding season notes having "a general resemblance to the sounds produced by filing a large mill-saw." Brewster, 1925).

Whip-poor-will. That name, in general use, is in imitation of its common call.

Common Nighthawk. Bat (as a crepuscular flyer); bull-bat (to the preceding note add: "bull," from the sound made by its wings while dropping through the air, which is thus likened, exaggeratedly, to the bawling of a bull); hen hawk, little hen hawk (misnomers; it preys almost exclusively upon insects); nighthawk (from its nocturnal and expert flight); nightjar (by transfer from a European relative so-called in the British Isles, from its notes; that bird, however, is more closely related to the whip-poor-will); night owl (as a nocturnal bird; it is, however, no owl).

Chimney Swift. Chimney swallow (it roosts and nests in chimneys, and though feeding awing as do the swallows, is not at all related to those birds); chimney sweep (add to the first clause of the preceding note: using a once familiar name for human cleaners of chimneys); house swallow (from its frequenting chimneys; see also first note); swift (from its speed in flight).

Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Hummingbird (from the sound made by its buzzing wings); rubythroat (the throat of the male is ruby-red; apparently this name is used only as learned from books); West India bee (Van Der Donck, 1656 (1841); from its small size, buzzing wings, and striking coloration — thus to this author, doubtless an exotic).

Belted Kingfisher. Kingfisher (as an accomplished catcher of fish).

Yellow-shafted Flicker. Clape (sonic); English woodpecker (probably from resemblance in habits and calls to the Green Woodpecker of England (and other parts of Europe); flicker (sonic); golden-winged robin (the shafts of the flight feathers

and the under side of the wing are golden-yellow; "robin" as a familiar lawn bird); golden-wing woodpecker, golden woodpecker (see preceding note); high-ho (a name transferred from the Green Woodpecker, the most similar European species; in British folk usage, it refers to a laughing note of the bird); high-hold, high-holder, high-hole, high-holer (while these names have come to refer, in the United States, to a supposed lofty location of the nest (it may be low, however), they doubtless trace to British folk names of the Green Woodpecker, as suggested in the preceding note); hivel (another name apparently derived from one for the Green Woodpecker: OED has "hufel"); lark woodpecker (the black crescent on its breast, its yellow coloring, and terrestrial habits suggesting the meadowlark); partridge woodpecker (the bird is plump, more or less partridge-colored, and was long shot as game); pigeon woodpecker (the bird is plump, often perches crosswise on branches like a pigeon, and was long used as a game bird); wa-cup, yacker, yarrup, yaw-up, yecker (all sound names); yellow flicker (the shafts of the flight feathers and the underside of the wing are golden yellow); "flicker," sonic; yellow-hammer (although apparently a natural name for a yellow pouter or woodpecker, this name seems better-traced to a British folk term for the yellow bunting; it has been applied by British colonists in various parts of the world to birds with yellow in their plumages); yucker (sonic).

Pileated Woodpecker. Black cock-of-the-woods (the plumage is chiefly black; second term as a striking bird frequenting woodlands); black logcock (see note on latter term); black woodcock (same note); black woodpecker; cock-of-the-woods; crested woodpecker (the crest is conspicuous both in size and color); logcock (a striking bird frequenting trees); log-roller (as working with trees); red-headed woodpecker (the crest is largely scarlet); woodcock (as a striking bird frequenting woodland).

Red-headed Woodpecker. Redhead (the head, neck, and upper breast are bright crimson); woodchuck (a woodland creature that utters a sound like "chuck").

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Sapsucker (this woodpecker makes holes in bark, which it revisits to drink sap).

Hairy Woodpecker. Big sapsucker, sapsucker (woodpeckers, in general are called sapsuckers, but only one New York species deserves the name; see preceding note); spotted woodpecker.

Downy Woodpecker. Little sapsucker; sapsucker; spotted woodpecker.

Eastern Kingbird. Bee bird, bee-eater, bee martin (from its feeding on honeybees); field martin (in contrast to the house, or purple, martin); kingbird (in allusion to its dominating habit of driving other, often larger birds away from its nesting territory).

Great Crested Flycatcher. Snake bird (from its incorporating cast off snake skins into its nest).

Eastern Phoebe. Bee-eater, bee martin (these names may arise from confusion with the eastern kingbird, which see); bridge bird, bridge phoebe (it often builds its nest on beams or abutments of bridges); phoebe, (sonic); pewee, pewee bird, pewit, phoebe, phoebe bird (all sonic terms).

Least Flycatcher. Chebec (a widely-recorded sonic term, which is, perhaps, a book, rather than a folk name).

Horned Lark. Ortolan (name of a European finch applied to a number of species in various parts of the world, which, like it, were used for food); shore lark (from its being observed along the seashore; also in British folk usage); snow bird (from being seen in winter).

Tree Swallow. Greenback; white-bellied swallow.

Bank Swallow. That name, in general use, alludes to its nesting in burrows in banks; ground swallow has the same meaning; river swallow (rivers often have bluff banks suitable for its nesting sites; also in British use to Merrett, 1667); sand swallow (of the same import; also British, Pennant, 1785).

Barn Swallow. That name in general American, and also in British, use; from its nesting in barns; bridge swallow (it sometimes builds its nests under bridges); house swallow (in Europe, it nests chiefly about houses; it may sometimes do so in this country; or the name may have been merely transferred).

Cliff Swallow. Eaves swallow (its mud nests are often built under eaves); jug swallow (its mud nests are somewhat jug-shaped); mud swallow.

(to be continued)