

RECENT A.O.U. CHECK-LIST CHANGES AND THE NEW YORK STATE BIRD BOOK

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Readers of the *Auk* (1973, 90: 411-419) probably read the following article: "Thirty-second Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds." If they scrutinized the fine print following the introductory portion, they will have noticed such unfamiliar bird names as Common Flicker, Gray Catbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Oriole, and Dark-eyed Junco. Some other less startling innovations are: Red Knot, Wood Stork, Merlin, American Kestrel, Upland Sandpiper, and Black Scoter, to name a few. With one or two exceptions these names have been used one time or another as English vernaculars in the ornithological literature.

What are the reasons for these name changes? For many years hand-picked committees on classification and nomenclature, made up of professional ornithologists, have periodically published "official" check-lists sponsored by the American Ornithologists' Union (hereinafter called the A.O.U.).

Five A.O.U. Check-lists have been published within the past 85 years, as follows: 1888, 1895, 1910, 1931, and 1957. In between, various supplements have appeared in the pages of the *Auk*, the official organ of the A.O.U. These Checklists and supplements are the results of ornithological studies through the years on classification, systematics, and nomenclature. Advances in different zoological sciences such as taxonomy, biology, behavior, ecology, aviculture, genetics, bioacoustics, comparative anatomy, and paleontology have brought about certain changes in the classification and nomenclature of birds. Not only have scientific and vernacular names been changed, but interpretation of the relationships among the families, genera, and species have been vastly altered because of the establishment of new concepts in ornithology. For instance, the sequence of bird groupings is very much different today than that of 1910 when the third edition of the A.O.U. Check-list appeared.

Table I demonstrates the strikingly different arrangement of families then and now. To someone, like the writer, who first used the "Reed pocket field guide," Eaton's "Birds of New York" (1910, 1914), and Forbush's "Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States" (1925, 1927, 1929), it was necessary to familiarize oneself with the old (1910) sequence and nomenclature, and then have to relearn an entirely new sequence and very different names that appeared in the modern field guides, based on the fourth (1931) and fifth (1957) editions of the A.O.U. Check-list. The present day birder has a comparatively easy task in learning the relatively few changes now proposed and that

are expected to appear in future supplements and in the forthcoming sixth edition of the Check-list.

In the earlier lists the order started with the grebes (Red-necked Grebe) and ended with the thrushes (Eastern Bluebird); in the later lists, the order commenced with the loons (Common Loon) and finished with the finches (Snow Bunting). Table I indicates most, but not all, of the families occurring within New York — those illustrating the issue at hand, i.e. difference in sequence.

Table I — Family Sequence

A.O.U., Second ed., (1895) A.O.U., Third ed., (1910) Eaton (1910, 1914) Forbush (1925, 1927, 1929)	A.O.U., Fourth ed. (1931) A.O.U., Fifth ed. (1957) Godfrey (1966) Mayr and Short (1970) Bull (1974)
1-Grebes 2-Loons and Auks 3-Gulls 4-Petrels 5-Ducks 6-Herons 7-Cranes and Rails 8-Shorebirds 9-Pheasants and Grouse 10-Pigeons 11-Hawks 12-Owls 13-Crows 14-Blackbirds 15-Finches 16-Swallows 17-Wood Warblers 18-Nuthatches and Titmice 19-Thrushes	1-Loons and Grebes 2-Petrels 3-Herons 4-Ducks 5-Hawks 6-Pheasants and Grouse 7-Cranes and Rails 8-Shorebirds 9-Gulls 10-Auks 11-Pigeons 12-Owls 13-Swallows 14-Crows 15-Nuthatches and Titmice 16-Thrushes 17-Wood Warblers 18-Blackbirds 19-Finches

The greatest changes were the shifts of Auks from number 2 to 10, the Gulls from number 3 to 9, and the Hawks from number 11 to 5. The loons and auks were formerly considered related on the basis of general superficial resemblances. The same was true of herons and cranes with their long bills, necks, and legs; hawks and owls as birds of prey with their sharp bills and claws; and crows, starlings, and

icterids (orioles, blackbirds, etc.) with their generally black color. But in each instance the similarities were due to convergence or parallel evolution, not to close relationships. The earlier listing was based partially on an artificial classification with all of the so-called "water birds" being lumped together first, and the so-called "land birds" following them.

Today, sequence changes within families, and a reduction of genera based on modern findings is especially noticeable among the shorebirds. For instance, in the 1957 A.O.U. Check-list the two look-alike "peep", Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, were separated from each other by the dowitchers, and the Semipalmated Sandpiper was separated from the somewhat similar Sanderling by the godwits and the Ruff. Now, all of the "peep" are placed together in the single genus *Calidris*, with the former scattered "genera", *Erolia*, *Ereunetes*, and *Crocethia* considered as synonyms of *Calidris* and merged with it.

As Delacour (*Auk*, 1960, 77:217-218) stated: . . . "generic terms are meant to point out relationship between species, not slight differences. 'Time-honored' names, which tend to obscure and confuse relationships, simply should not be honored any longer when a better knowledge of the morphology and biology of the birds indicate affinities previously unnoticed."

Now, as to the vernacular species names that have been altered because of changed concepts in taxonomy, insofar as New York State is concerned, only seven forms are affected: (1) the Snow Goose and Blue Goose are considered to be color morphs or phases of a single species, just as are the gray and rufous morphs of the Screech Owl. Even though I realize that the Snow and Blue geese are biologically only one species, yet the excitement of observing a mixed flock is not diminished in the slightest because they are one and not two species.

(2), (3), and (4) The Eurasian (Common) Teal and Green-winged Teal, the Baltimore Oriole and Bullock's Oriole, and the Slate-colored Junco and Oregon Junco are now known respectively as Green-winged Teal, Northern Oriole, and Dark-eyed Junco. Because numerous hybrids or intermediates have been found between each one of these three pairs, they are considered to be but three species instead of six as formerly.

(5) The Ipswich Sparrow is now treated as an island representative or subspecies of the common, widespread Savannah Sparrow of the mainland. The former is merely a larger and paler counterpart of the latter.

(6) Two sibling and, to our eyes, identically appearing forms, the Alder and Willow flycatchers, are now proved to occur together over much of their wide breeding range without interbreeding; that is, they are reproductively isolated, and avoid competition with each other by nesting in different haabitats, and "recognize" each other by

differences in their vocalizations. They are now, as a result, considered to be two, not one species. However, during the spring and fall migrations, at which times they are usually silent, they may be identified in the field only by calling them Traill's Flycatcher, species unknown.

(7) Thayer's Gull, formerly considered conspecific with the wide-ranging Herring Gull, is now thought to be a separate species because the former does *not* interbreed with the Herring Gull where the two forms are sympatric (occur together in the breeding season). Recent experiments with color-marked individuals on the nesting grounds in the Canadian Arctic, have demonstrated that the two are reproductively "incompatible."

Therefore, we New Yorkers have "lost" five species and "gained" two. Two other name changes which affect New York birders are those of extralimital forms; that is, one member of each "pair" occurs outside of New York State or there is no *bona fide* (specimen) record for the state. In both instances these "pairs" involve the merger of two or more forms considered in the past to be "good" species. Where their breeding ranges overlap in the West, numerous hybrids have been found. They are: (1) Yellow-shafted and Red-shafted Flickers, now called Common Flicker; (2) Myrtle and Audubon's warblers, now called Yellow-rumped Warbler.

The final category of vernacular name changes involves those species where (1) more appropriate modifiers are now used in place of misleading ones, such as the over-worked "Common", (2) more correct taxonomic names are applicable, as in Upland Sandpiper rather than Upland "Plover", and (3) those conforming to international usage, such as American Robin instead of merely Robin; there are other kinds of robins. Table II below gives some examples of the foregoing.

The history of *Geothlypis trichas*, insofar as its change of vernacular names is concerned, is of considerable interest. More than any other North American species of which I am aware, the extremely numerous Yellowthroat has been burdened with no less than *four* different epithets. The first (1886), second (1895), and third (1910) editions of the A.O.U. Check-lists called this species Maryland Yellowthroat. During the period of giving every subspecies a vernacular name, the fourth (1931) edition called the northeasternmost race Northern Yellowthroat. The fifth (1957) edition, notwithstanding the fact that there are a number of species of yellowthroats, merely used Yellowthroat for the species *trichas*. And finally, the 32nd Supplement (*Auk*, 1973, 90. 412-419) has seen fit to suggest Common Yellowthroat. As it is the most widespread member of the genus *Geothlypis*, the specific epithet "Common" would appear to be an appropriate name.

In all of Table II the names in the second column are decided improvements over those in the first column. In the case of the Shoveler and the four species at the bottom, one would suppose from the former

names that these species were the only ones in their respective families. Placing a modifier in front of the name signifies that there are other species with the same root name.

Table II – Vernacular Names

Former Name	Current Name
Common Egret	Great Egret
Shoveler	Northern Shoveler
Wood Ibis	Wood Stork
Common Scoter	Black Scoter
Pigeon Hawk	Merlin
Sparrow Hawk	American Kestrel
Upland Plover	Upland Sandpiper
Knot	Red Knot
Catbird	Gray Catbird
Robin	American Robin
Yellowthroat	Common Yellowthroat

A few additional name changes not mentioned in the above A.O.U. Supplement will probably be used in the next (sixth) edition of the A.O.U. Check-list and, will, in any event, appear in the New York State bird book. The species involved are listed in Table III.

Table III – Vernacular Names

Former Name	Current Name
White Pelican	American White Pelican
White-fronted Goose	Greater White-fronted Goose
Black Duck	American Black Duck
Goshawk	Northern Goshawk
Marsh Hawk	Northern Harrier
American Golden Plover	Lesser Golden Plover
Common Murre	Thin-billed Murre
Barn Owl	Common Barn Owl
Hawk Owl	Northern Hawk Owl
Common Crow	American Crow

SUMMARY

Advancements in the science of ornithology in recent years have necessitated changes in taxonomy and in nomenclature just as they have in the past and will in the future, for the subject is dynamic, not static. Examples of sequence and name changes and the reasons for some of these changes are mentioned.

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FIELD NOTES

Hairy Woodpecker Feeding Immature Downy Woodpecker. On 17 June 1973 an adult male Hairy Woodpecker was pecking at the suet in a boxlike suet-holder fastened to a tree beside our driveway. While he was on the feeder an immature Downy Woodpecker was hitching itself around on the tree near the feeder and making begging calls. Just before he flew away the Hairy Woodpecker shoved some suet into the bill of the Downy Woodpecker.

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