

FROM THE EDITOR—FAREWELL

Forty-one *Kingbird* issues ago, I embarked on what has been the demanding but enjoyable experience of editing this, the formal publication of the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs. It would have been an impossible experience had not so many of you taken the time to author the papers and notes that make this journal a credit to the Federation and to the amateur ornithologists of New York State. The hard work of the Regional Editors and of the Highlights of the Season Editor, Robert Spahn, are invaluable parts of the equation, and their work would be impossible without the much appreciated contributions of everyone who submits observations to the Regional reports. Emanuel Levine's invisible hand has made more improvements to *The Kingbird* than I can list in this space. I sincerely thank all of you for providing the material that makes *The Kingbird* a model State bird journal. But this forty-first issue is also my last as Editor. After 10 years at the helm, it is time for me to move to other pursuits and for someone with fresh ideas to guide *The Kingbird* into the 21st Century.

It is just happenstance that Don Windsor submitted the preceding commentary on the Regional reports in time for this issue. The Regional Reports are a part of *The Kingbird* that have concerned me as Editor not because they are bad or even because of the portion of my editorial duties they consume, but because they are an important legacy we leave to our successors. What Don asks reduces to, how can we make them better? I have great sympathy for his proposal, because it emphasizes content over style. He reached his suggestion by indexing *The Kingbird*. Mine comes from researching the arrival and departure dates that I made a part of the spring and fall migration issues. These tables were added to ensure that some consistent reporting of common birds across all Regions appeared regularly in *The Kingbird*. I hope my successor will continue to include them. Their value can only grow as time passes. But this first step isn't enough.

A consistent theme in reports is that the birds just aren't as "good" as they used to be. Here is a simple challenge to readers of *The Kingbird*. Find data in the Regional Reports to demonstrate the changes we feel we have experienced. In the 25 years I have lived in New York, habitats have been destroyed or matured, my responsibilities and birding habits have changed, and I've aged. I don't know how these changes affect my perception of bird numbers, but I am pretty sure I'd be hard pressed to demonstrate most changes I think I've witnessed using *The Kingbird*.

I doubt that Windsor's suggestion can be implemented, not because it is a bad idea but because it doesn't go far enough. I recognize that the

more detail one asks of birders birding, the less likely one is to get a useful response. We've all learned that arrival dates are easy to get, because we know an arrival when we see it. Departures are harder because we can't recognize one until we go afield and fail to find a bird. Unless you have an infallible memory, and most of us don't, the only way to keep track is to keep a daily checklist. Daily checklists have been used by others to measure abundance and they seem to work. But if most readers of *The Kingbird* were to submit their daily checklists, compilation of such data would place an unreasonable burden on the Regional Editors.

So what can we report? We all know that under bad conditions the number of birds we find may be reduced even when there are lots about. Our worry is that we never have a "good" day. Thus, I suggest you report an indication of how many of each species you find on your best day afield each season (i.e., your seasonal maximum), along with arrival and departure dates. As for departure dates, you won't know until after the fact when you made your peak observation, so you need to keep track of what you found each time you go out.

In this larger context, it may not matter whether you see 2 versus 4 or 20 versus 40 of a species, so you do not need to count the birds you observe. A constant change from 4 to 40, or vice versa, is another matter. A simple but sufficient crude index of abundance is to ask yourself, about how many individuals of each species did you find, and to use the number of digits in that number as the index of its abundance. Thus, 1-9 individuals becomes a 1, 10 to 99 becomes a 2, 100 to 999 becomes a 3, and so on. If you are bothered by including such a wide range in a single index, you may add a half interval, which for mathematical reasons, divides each index range at the number written entirely with the digit 3 (actually, this is an easy to remember rule close enough to the ideal to be useful), i.e., 1 to 3 vs. 4 to 9 are indexed 1 and 1.5, respectively; 10 to 33 vs. 34 to 99 are indexed 2 and 2.5; 100 to 333 vs. 334 to 999 are indexed 3 and 3.5; and so on. That index is easy to record in a checklist and easy for your Regional Editor to compile. Compiled for ordinary birds over the 10 *Kingbird* Regions, this information has the potential to provide a wealth of quantifiable information about changes in bird populations.

The next Editor of *The Kingbird* will set the goals of the Regional Reports. But it is you who observe birds and contribute to these reports that make any goal possible. You have before you two proposals. I hope you will give them careful consideration and work with your Regional Editors to make the Regional Reports of *The Kingbird* an essential tool for future ornithologists to evaluate the birdlife of New York State.

Editing *The Kingbird* has been a rewarding experience. I can only wish my successor and *The Kingbird* the best in the coming years.

Paul DeBenedictis, Editor

The new Editor of the Kingbird will be **Donald A. Windsor, P.O. Box 604, Norwich, NY 13815**