

THE POET'S CORNER

Roger Tory Peterson

Your brush strokes are
two flickers in scarlet-turning Virginia Creeper vine,
Bobwhite clustered in covey under goldenrod,
Road Runner giddyapping past Prickly Pear Cactus,
Great Horned Owl ensconced in Red Pine,
Golden Eagle eyeing valley from olympus overlook.

Your arrows - these are your guiding strokes
in A Field Guide to the Birds, the green-bound "Peterson"
tucked into belts, pushed into pockets, stuffed into backpacks.

Your arrows have led eyes of millions
squinting through binoculars
to the red-brown cap, black "stickpin"
that identifies the passerine in snowy branches.
"That's it," the new birder exclaims,
pulls out list, checks off the "Winter Chippy,"
American Tree Sparrow.

Your arrows point to crest and black necklace of Blue Jay,
reddish breast stripes of Yellow Warbler,
purple throat, decurved bill of Lucifer Hummingbird,
white tail tip of Eastern Kingbird,
"golden slippers" of Snowy Egret.
Bald Eagle with white head and tail is "all field mark."

In salt marsh in May
the birder thinking "Life Bird!"
focuses on the shorebird
prodding mud flat with Short-billed Dowitchers,
Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones, Greater Yellowlegs,
Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers,
Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers.
She has identified all with the dried out, wrinkled pages of her "Peterson."

She studies the plover in your book,
focuses glasses on the bird feeding
by greening shoots of Spartina grass.
Again, she studies your art.
Your arrow points to black undertail coverts.
She ponders your description,
"spangled with golden spots above."

Suddenly, her freckled face is all smile,
her whisper a bursting
"Golden Plover!"

Maxwell Corydon Wheat, Jr.