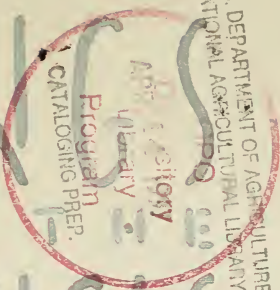


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WINING AMERICAS



Mary Beath

Have you ever gazed with delight at a sky filled with hundreds of birds, all flying the same direction? Have you ever noticed that when seasons change, the birds you see and hear change, too? Many kinds of birds follow the seasons, traveling north in the spring to nest in the United States and Canada during warm weather. When temperatures begin to cool in the fall, these birds head back south to Mexico, Central and South America, or to the Caribbean, where they find food and warmth. This almost magical yearly movement from south to north, and back again, is *migration*. Because these birds live in the New World, and spend part of the year in the tropics, they are called *neotropical migrants*.

United States
Department of
Agriculture

PREPARED BY
Forest
Service

Southwestern
Region



Larry Brock

They Rise

Birds fly free across all borders. They fly where their ancestors have been flying for millions of years, long before people came into this continent and created countries with boundaries.

Often neotropical migrants follow “flyways” above wetlands or rivers that connect Mexico, the United States and Canada. These small birds can cover thousands of miles during their seasonal journeys and they need to rest along the way. During these stopovers they also need food to eat and water to drink.

We know many of these birds by their musical voices: think of the songs of warblers or orioles. Others we know by their brilliant colors, such as vermilion flycatchers, scarlet tanagers or flashing hummingbirds. Recently there has been an alarming drop in the populations of many neotropical migrants. Why?

Threats

In both the United States and Mexico, people have greatly changed the land and waterways these birds need. In North America, wetlands have been drained. Grasslands have fewer kinds of plants. Cattle, sheep, goats and horses eat many plants important to these birds. Commercial developments and houses have replaced many wildlands. In Latin America, forests are being cut to produce charcoal and to clear land for farming.

In the dry lands of the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico, water sources are especially important to neotropical migrants. Fewer than 12 inches of rain fall during a year at most lower elevations and open water covers less than 2% of the total land, sometimes only during part of the year. Such rare wet areas have also attracted people. We build homes, grow crops, fish, boat, swim or simply enjoy being near water. Birds once depended on many plants and wetlands that we have destroyed by our human uses. In this desert land, food, resting areas and nesting places have become harder and harder for birds to find. Chemicals and junk are often dumped in

de The Wind . . .

playas or wetlands by people who don't value those areas. Human waste materials can harm or kill migratory birds, often in enormous numbers.

Why Do We Need Birds?

Most birds are small, but they eat millions and millions of insects. Without birds, insects could eat or damage most of our crops. Some birds pollinate flowers so plants can produce fruit and seeds. Sometimes when a bird eats a seed it carries the seed across the countryside and drops it in another area. New plants can be started in this way.

Larger animals eat birds, too. The disappearance of neotropical migrants can mean the land is no longer healthy for other animals.

Because birds can fly, they have been symbols of freedom since the beginning of time. The flights of migratory birds in spring and fall signal a change of season for us, and their brilliant flashing colors and cheerful songs bring us joy.



Rod Replogle

In dry country, many migrating birds look for green corridors like this one in a remote desert canyon. Above: long-billed curlew.

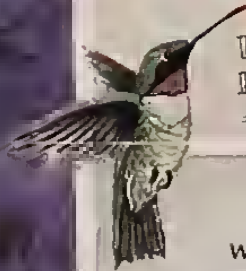
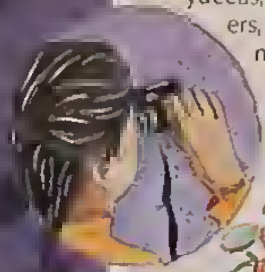
Summer In Open Woodlands

A flash of color. A sudden beautiful song. The small birds who return each spring to rolling grasslands, pinyon-juniper hillsides or rocky sage flats often surprise us. Even in this open, arid landscape, these birds go unnoticed for much of the time.

Unlike larger migrants, such as swallows or geese, these smaller birds frequently migrate at night, when the air is less turbulent. They travel in loose flocks, which drift out over the landscape as they reach their destinations. Many of these birds feed at streams or ponds but nest in grasses, underbrush, or loosely-spaced trees. They usually search for food nearby.

Although all of the birds illustrated would not be found in the same area, a surprising variety of birds can live near each other. They nest in different shrubs or trees, at different levels, sometimes even on the ground. And they find food in different places: insects on the wing, caterpillars crawling on

yuccas, sweet nectar from flowers, the fruits and seeds of many plants. Please remember that we share this pinyon-juniper land with many wild birds.



BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD

Western Tanager

The bright male and his yellow-green mate are frequently seen in the mountains of the western U.S. and Canada during the summer. In the spring they often feed on insects, later on fruits and small berries. They spend winters from Mexico to Costa Rica.

Black-chinned Hummingbird

Hummers hover in front of nectar-producing wildflowers, such as this globeamallow or the nearby paintbrush. They are especially attracted to the color red. Their long narrow beaks act like nectar-sipping straws and can reach deep into flowers. Black-chinned male hummers court

their females with a dramatic pendulum-like flight display. Their migrations are not well understood.

Ash-throated Flycatcher

This flycatcher launches itself on its insect chases from the upper dead branches of trees. Males and females look alike. They nest in holes in trees, posts, or even yuccas, and winter from southern California and Arizona southward.

Scott's Oriole

Scott's oriole can skillfully climb both drooping branches and delicate yucca flowers in search of insects or fruit. The female is lime-yellow with dusky streaks on her

back. Orioles are closely related to blackbirds and meadowlarks. The song of Scott's oriole even resembles the song of the meadowlark.

Western Kingbird

The kingbird, a type of flycatcher, chases its flying insect prey over arid savanna and pinyon-juniper bushland. It can often be seen perching on fences or telephone lines. It calls with a sharp "whit" or "whit-ker-whit." It winters from northwestern Mexico to Nicaragua.

Common Nighthawk

These nighthawks sweep the sky for insects, in daylight and at dusk. They hunt from higher up than less-

er nighthawks but have the same clearly visible white wing bars on their pointed wings. They lay their eggs directly on the ground, without a nest. During the male's aerial display, he dives toward the ground, then suddenly pulls up with a deep whirring sound.

Gray Vireo

This bird blends in well with the blue-grey color of bunchgrass, sagebrush, and junipers of its arid summer home. It prefers low dense plants, which it flits through nervously in search of its insect meals. Its song is a series of varied "chewee-chu-wee" notes. It winters in northern Mexico.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEEK

WESTERN KINGBIRD

VIRGINIA WARBLER

SCOTT'S ORIOLE

BREWER'S SPARROWS

Brewer's Sparrows

This common sparrow breeds in mountain meadows and in sagebrush flats. Its bill is similar to the bills of grosbeaks and buntings which are good for seed cracking. Sparrows are streaked with grey, brown and white, which helps keep them hidden in bushes and fields. Brewer's sparrows winter in southern Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Mexico.

Black-headed Grosbeak

Common in open woodlands, this grosbeak sings its melodious song from high perches. It feeds in the upper branches of trees. Its short, stout bill is perfect for cracking

seeds but it also eats insects. It winters in western Mexico.

Virginia's Warbler

These four-inch-long warblers search near the ground for insects and spiders. They also put their loosely-built cup nests on the ground. The eggs of ground-nesting birds often are eaten by snakes or small mammals.

Humans

Bird-watching is a popular activity for many people, but birds are also important to humans for many other reasons. Whenever we are on the land, we become part of the environment, not just observers.

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Illustration and Design: Alan Heath



Blue Grosbeak

Some neotropical migrants who spend the summer in the southwestern U.S. prefer moist and shady areas near water. **Blue grosbeaks** often search out grasshoppers and other insects in overgrown fields or marshy meadows. The females are brownish. Blue grosbeaks



Yellow-billed Cuckoo

winter from northern Mexico south to Panama. The secretive, foot-long **yellow-billed cuckoo** often sits quietly in dense streamside trees and shrubs. It is one of the few birds who eat hairy caterpillars, helping to fight deforestation. Recently, many yellow-billed



Vermillion Flycatcher

cuckoos have disappeared, perhaps partly because of pesticide poisoning of these caterpillars. They migrate to South America. Despite the brilliant color of the male **vermillion flycatcher**, he can be hard to spot because he hunts insects from the tops of cotton-



Yellow Warbler

woods or in thick stands of willow or mesquite. These flycatchers also spend the winter as far south as South America. Brightly-colored male and less colorful yellow female **yellow warblers** are the only wild birds in North America who appear all yellow from a



Bell's Vireo

distance. Though they prefer to live in shrubs beside streams or rivers, they often nest in garden trees. Barely visible among dense willows, the five-inch-long, green-grey **Bell's vireo** lives on caterpillars, aphids, larvae and spiders. These birds spend winters in



Lazuli Bunting

Mexico. The striking male **lazuli bunting** and the more subdued brown female live in woodland clearings, chaparral and streamside thickets. In the winter, they can be found in extreme southern Arizona and in Mexico.



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Painted Bunting

Larry Brock

You Can Help Neotropical Migrants

- Remember that grasslands, wetlands and areas near streams, lakes and ponds are critical to the health of our migratory birds.
- Dispose of garbage, junk, chemicals and their containers where there is no water, preferably in a dumping area set aside by your community.
- Avoid using pesticides where birds can eat treated plants or drink polluted water.
- Prevent house cats from running free and killing wild birds. Keep them in the house or under supervision when they are outside.
- Ask schools and libraries to develop programs that teach conservation and protection of migratory birds.
- Work with your community to restore or protect the places needed by neotropical migrants.
- Contact the offices of Audubon Societies in the United States or the Sociedad Audubon de Mexico for more information about birds that visit your communities.

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For More Information, Contact:

USDA Forest Service
 Public Affairs Office
 517 Gold Avenue, SW
 Albuquerque, NM 87102
 Voice & TTY: (505) 842-3292

