

“The names of  
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Western ears, but  
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matter.”

— David S. Wilcove

## Hawaiian Extinctions

Somewhere along the way, my choice of favorite endemic bird was switched (“Endemics, Islands, and Ecosystems,” July/August 2008, pp. 42–52). The bird I had in mind was the Kauai ‘O‘o (*Moho braccatus*), not the ‘O‘u (*Psittirostra psittacea*). Ironically, both species disappeared within a couple years of each other, and both made their last stands in the Alakai Swamp (see *Evolution, Ecology, Conservation, and Management of Hawaiian Birds: A Vanishing Avifauna*, Studies in Avian Biology No. 22, Cooper Ornithological Society).

Of course, I would dearly love to have seen an ‘O‘u prior to its extinction. In August 1987, Jaan Lepson and I heard a distinctive whistled call emanating from the top of a tall ohia tree in a remote section of the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge. Try as we might, we could not see the caller, but it sure sounded like old recordings of the ‘O‘u.

Tragically, Hawaii’s native birds continue to vanish before our eyes. The Po‘ouli (*Melamprosops phaeosoma*) disappeared in 2004, and recent reports indicate that populations of the Akeke (*Loxops caeruleirostris*) and ‘Akepa (*Loxops coccineus*) are crashing. The names of Hawaiian birds may sound funny to Western ears, but the extinctions are no laughing matter.

— David S. Wilcove  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

## Barnacle Goose Origins

In “Greenland Geese in North America” (May/June 2008, pp. 46–56), Dominic F. Sherony makes a couple statements with respect to “white-cheeked” geese that merit clarification and exposition.

First, Sherony says that “only interior Canada Goose regularly breeds in Greenland (Scribner et al. 2003).” I infer that Sherony is excluding “Richardson’s” Cackling Goose (*Branta h.*

## Instructions to Contributors

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Letters to the editor (<300 words) and feature articles (<4,000 words) should be submitted to Ted Floyd <[tfloyd@aba.org](mailto:tfloyd@aba.org)>. Contributions to one of our department columns (<2,000 words) should be submitted to the appropriate department editor (see masthead, p. 4, for contact information). Overlong or incomplete manuscripts shall be automatically rejected. Non-electronic photographic materials should be submitted to Brian E. Small, 13428 Maxella Avenue #446, Marina del Rey, California 90292. Electronic photographic materials should be submitted to Bryan Patrick <[bpatrik@aba.org](mailto:bpatrik@aba.org)>.

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*hutchinsii*) from the breeding avifauna of Greenland. The Scribner et al. paper cited by Sherony (*Condor* 105:771-782) does not say, as I believe Sherony interprets it, that *interior* is the only population of "white-cheeked" goose (i.e., Canada and Cackling) that breeds in Greenland. Scribner and coauthors examined the genetic origin (found to be *interior*) of only 18 individuals found breeding in Greenland. In a 1996 paper, A. D. Fox and coauthors (*Auk* 113:231-233) confirmed Sherony's statement that *interior* breeds in Greenland, but they did not say that *hutchinsii* is absent as a breeder there. Instead, those authors listed multiple reports of "Richardson's Goose" in West Greenland, including breeders. Furthermore, D. Boertmann, in his 1994 "Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Greenland" (*Bioscience* 38:1-63), quoted a 1959 paper by F. Salomonsen (*Dansk Ornitologisk Forenings Tidsskrift* 53:31-39) as saying that *hutchinsii* occurs in West Greenland. Boertmann then goes on to say that nominate *hutchinsii* is the subspecies likely found breeding in one section of West Greenland, as well as

being the subspecies responsible for two East Greenland records.

Second, Sherony states that Barnacle Geese reach North America "from western Greenland, implying that the number of extralimital Barnacle Geese in that region might be understated." Later Sherony says, "Any family group with hybrid Canada Geese needs to be examined carefully because Barnacle Geese do not breed in close proximity to Canada Geese. Any immature Barnacle Goose should be questioned." I arrive at a different interpretation, though. If Barnacle Geese are indeed showing up in West Greenland on a regular basis, then why should we discount immature and hybrid Barnacle Geese out of hand? It is well known that immature birds may be more likely to occur as vagrants than adults (e.g., Sharp-tailed Sandpiper), and records committees have recognized the immaturity of Barnacle Geese as evidence of wild origin. For example, the New Brunswick Bird Records Committee has evaluated Barnacle Goose records from this perspective <homepage.mac.com/

*continued on page 14*

## Corrigenda

- In Dominic F. Sherony's article "Greenland Geese in North America" (May/June 2008 issue, pp. 46-56), it is stated on p. 48 that 800,000 Snow Geese winter in Maryland. The correct figure is 125,000 Snow Geese wintering in Maryland, with a total population of 975,000 wintering in the eastern coastal United States. Thanks to Peter G. Saenger for bringing this correction to our attention.
- Some ABA members may have been wondering about the fawn-colored edging of the crown feathers on the two wood-pewees on the cover of the September/October 2008 issue. This color aberration affected about one-third of the print run, and it was created by improper ink and water balance during the actual production process.

To see the cover image with the correct color balance, please check out the WebExtra for the cover image <aba.org/birding/v40n5p5w1.pdf>. In addition to showing the correct cover image, this WebExtra contains extensive perspective from authors Cin-Ty Lee, Andrew Birch, and Ted Lee Eubanks on wood-pewee identification. Of particular interest will be Lee and coauthor's analysis of the identification of the two wood-pewees on the cover.



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continued from page 11

maryspt/BRCreports/NBBRC2004.html>. It is also well known that out-of-range birds and especially those on the periphery of their ranges will often hybridize. In West Greenland, congeneric Canada Geese and (especially) "Richardson's" Geese would seem to be good candidates for interspecific mating.

Herein lies an important phenomenon that Sherony does not address. In a 2007 article (*Meadowlark* 16:82–86), I noted examples from North America of Barnacle Geese appearing within flocks of "Richardson's" Geese. In particular, two such instances involved hybrid Barnacle × "Richardson's" Geese. In the Midwest, at least, the presence of Barnacle Goose may be tied to a rapidly expanding population of "Richardson's" Goose, which makes sense given "Richardson's" Goose's more westerly flight path relative to

Greenland-nesting Canada Geese.

If Barnacle Goose is indeed regularly straying to West Greenland, where "Richardson's" Goose breeds, I would argue that hybrids with the former might be considered evidence of wild origin for any Barnacle Goose within a flock of "Richardson's." I would also argue that the immaturity of any wary Barnacle Goose within a flock of any species of Greenland-nesting geese is evidence of wild origin.

— Michael L. P. Retter  
WEST LAFAYETTE, INDIANA

#### Reply from Author:

In my article, I mentioned that among "white-cheeked geese" only *Branta canadensis interior* breeds regularly in Greenland. I based that statement on the Scribner et al. paper cited by Michael Retter and on the fact that the

Boertmann monograph (also cited by Retter) states that there are only a few probable breeding records of *B. h. hutchinsii* ("Richardson's" Cackling Goose) in Greenland. I note here that earlier authors (in the 1970s) claim that *B. h. hutchinsii* does breed in North Greenland; these authors' findings are summarized in the Fox et al. paper cited by Retter. Thus, Retter may be correct about regular breeding of *B. h. hutchinsii* in Greenland.

Any extralimital occurrence of Barnacle Goose (or any other species) requires a higher level of scrutiny than of a species within its normal range. In my article, I gave a summary of criteria that should be assessed when dealing with extralimital Barnacle Geese. I intended for these guidelines not to be "rules" but rather statements of statistical averages. I acknowledge that



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there are exceptions. For example, I cite in my article the immature flightless Barnacle Goose off the coast of Newfoundland in 1997—a bird that was presumed to be wild. I am not suggesting that all immatures are not of wild origin, nor do I suggest that they should be rejected “out of hand.” It is also possible, as Retter says, that a Barnacle Goose which has interbred with a Canada Goose could have been a wild bird, but the likelihood of that pairing seems low based on probabilistic reasoning.

In any event, if Retter is making the case that Barnacle Geese may be increasingly associating with *B. h. hutchinsii*, then I can only support his efforts to achieve further understanding of the nature of extralimital occurrences of Barnacle Geese.

— Dominic Sherony

#### Editor's Note:

Astute readers may have wondered why *Birding* would publish a letter by in-house technical reviewer **Michael Retter**. Due to his heavy travel schedule earlier in the year, Michael was not available to review manuscripts for the May/June 2008 issue. But he was unable to control his editorial impulses, and he just couldn't stop himself from reviewing the May/June 2008 articles after they were published. In addition to praising Dominic Sherony's article for its timely content and thorough analysis, Michael added perspective on several aspects of Dominic's conclusions regarding the provenance of Barnacle Geese in the ABA Area. Hence, Michael's letter—regarding an article he had not previously seen.

More broadly, I note that Michael and the other technical reviewers at

*Birding* consistently bring to the review process the degree of thoroughness, accuracy, and, well, pedantry (a highly desirable trait in a technical reviewer) that is displayed in Michael's letter on Barnacle Goose origins. The other technical reviewers at *Birding* are: **Jim Dinsmore** (who provides general biological expertise, a keen eye for all matters having to do with literature citations, and admirable intolerance for pointless verbosity); **Donna Dittmann** (an authority on taxonomy and nomenclature, a bird identification expert, and a gentle critic of imponderably dense prose), and **Bill Pranty** (always attentive to avian status and distribution, ornithological terms and terminology, and the strange nexus of the magazine's purpose and readers' expectations).

— Ted Floyd

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