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Somewhat Updated  
2ND  
EDITION

What the **real** experts say about the new

# Little-Known & Seldom-Seen BIRDS



■ This book is *fantastic*! It's John James Audubon meets Dr. Seuss magnified by the creative genius of one of North America's best known (and funniest) bird artists. A FIELD GUIDE TO LITTLE-KNOWN AND SELDOM-SEEN BIRDS may not supplant (or even augment!) your favorite field guide. But I promise, absolutely *promise*, it will make you laugh, cover to cover.

—Pete Dunne, author of birding books and director of New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory

■ You need this book—you really do. Without it, you have zero chance of ever seeing a Multi-toed Snorkel Bill or an Eastern Spider Spitter in the wild. With this book, your chances will double! Okay, twice zero is still zero, but you'll have a lot more fun if you know what we're all missing out there. This is a beautiful treasure trove of the world's most amazing nonexistent birds.

—Kenn Kaufman, author of birding books, including KAUFMAN FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA

■ If there's one thing I adore more than birds, it's funny bird watchers. In their impossible-to-put-down book, the authors reveal themselves to be not only funny, but also clever and creative bird-watching geniuses. Every species account contains savory bits of knowledge you didn't know you needed to know about birds that (probably) don't exist, served up with visual and written puns in a silly smorgasbord that will have you turning each delightful page, hungry for another helping of laughter. John Sill's artwork brings to life these species that (we hope) only exist in the twisted minds of the three Sills, who are, after all, the funniest bird watchers on the planet. We're just not sure which planet...

—Bill Thompson, III,  
author of birding books and  
editor of Bird Watcher's Digest

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SILL / SILL / SILL

A Field Guide to Little-Known & Seldom-Seen Birds

A F I E L D G U I D E T O

# Little-Known & Seldom-Seen

# Birds of North America



BEN SILL

CATHRYN SILL

JOHN SILL

Illustrated by  
JOHN SILL

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of North America

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PEACHTREE  
ATLANTA

*To the One who has given us  
real birds that bring us  
so much joy*



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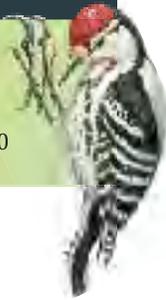
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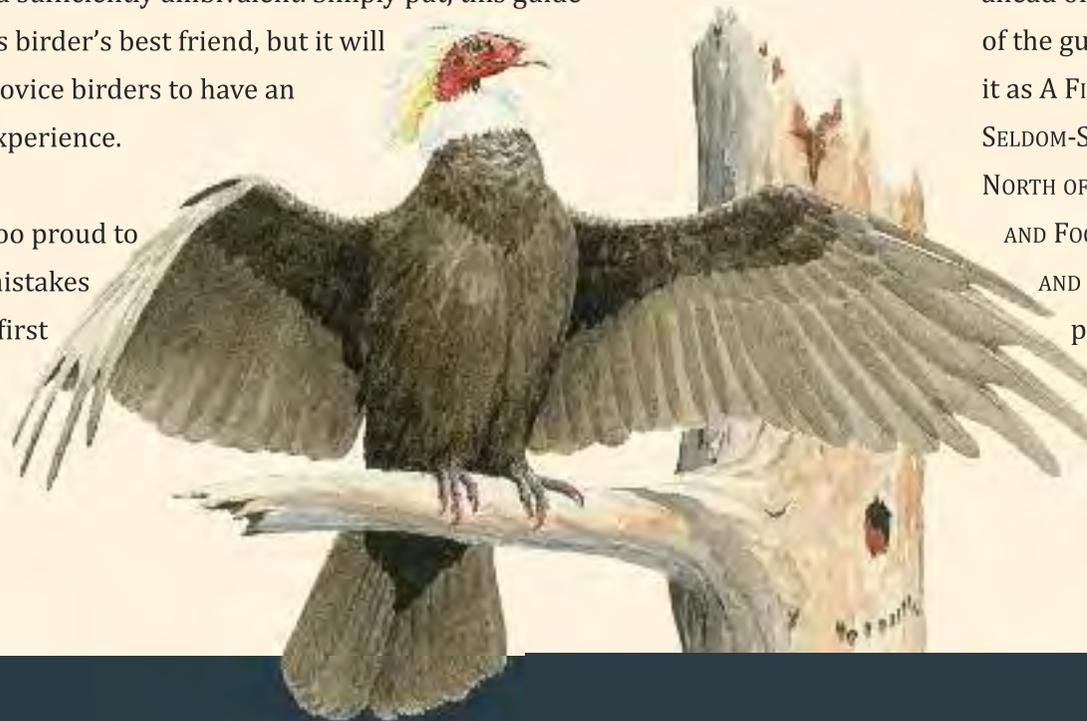


*Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition*

## INTRODUCTION

**WHEN THE FIRST EDITION** of this Field Guide was published, there was much uncertainty in the birding community. Some of the new species described were a bit speculative, since little scientific data were available at that time. Now, twenty-five years later, we are pleased to say that the birds described in this updated volume are not only accurate, but also artfully arranged and sufficiently ambivalent. Simply put, this guide is the serious birder's best friend, but it will allow even novice birders to have an adjustable experience.

We are not too proud to admit that mistakes made in the first edition were the editor's fault.



The present guide clearly elucidates where newer studies have shown that original characteristics of certain species were incorrectly interpreted as being mistakenly accepted as unconfirmed fact.

**LET IT BE KNOWN** that we have been hard at work to stay ahead of the birding frontier. To make this obvious to users of the guide, we requested that the publisher let us rename it as **A FIELD GUIDE TO LITTLE-BETTER-KNOWN AND LESS-OFTEN-SELDOM-SEEN BIRDS OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE, PARTICULARLY NORTH OF THE TROPIC OF CANCER, SOUTH OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE, AND FOCUSED ON NORTH AMERICA, NORTH OF THE MEXICAN BORDER AND EXTENDING SOMEWHERE INTO CANADA.** Much to our disappointment, this request was denied. Left with no other choice, we kept the original title.

## *The Field Guide*

### AN EXPLANATION

**AS WITH ALL PUBLICATIONS** of this type, the primary objective is to facilitate ready identification of a particular species in the field. This is usually accomplished by a combination of several factors:

- 1) a general description of the bird's appearance,
- 2) observation of its habitat, song, and range, and
- 3) actual identification by a well-respected birder in the group.



It is with some pride that we have scooped the many other field guides available today, none of which exclusively include new and seldom-seen species. Unlike these other “standard” guides, ours represents birding at its state-of-the-art best.

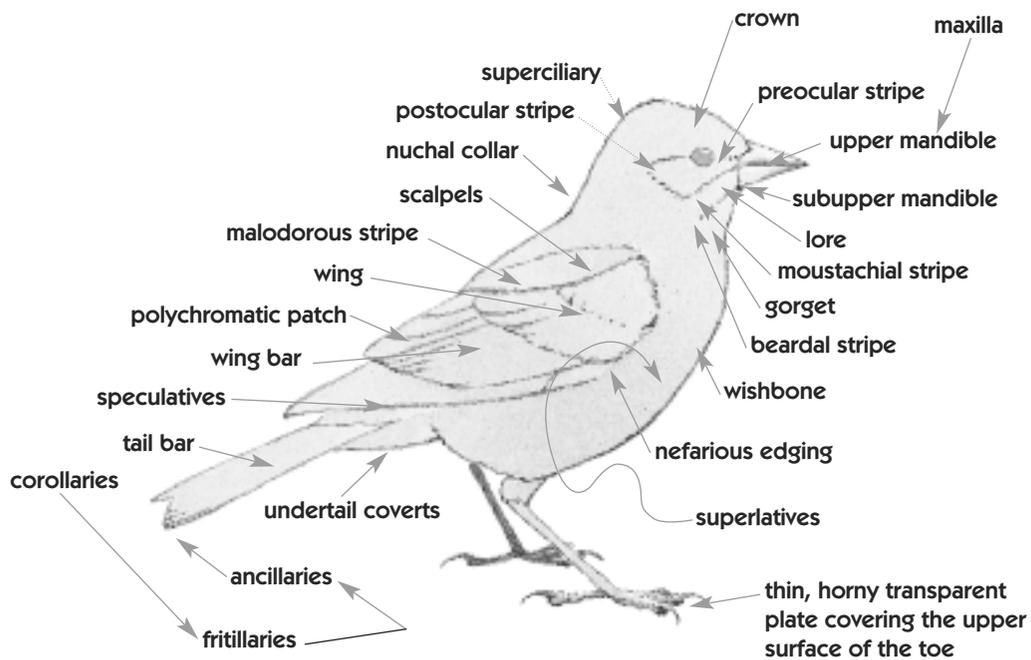
Some of the more important characteristics of this field guide are presented below:

- 1) As you expect in any quality field guide, this volume is replete with numerous accurate illustrations, detailed descriptions, observation hints, and range maps where appropriate.
- 2) We couldn't think of a second important characteristic, but you can't use numbered paragraphs unless you have more than one item.

**A CONSCIOUS ATTEMPT** has been made to eliminate the ambiguous language of other field guides. Our reader-friendly glossary includes a list of terms often found in other guides contrasted to our more lucid terminology. Remember that the most important thing in field identification is the name of the bird. With the name you can readily look up the bird in a field guide such as this.

## BIRD NOMENCLATURE

**WHILE EVERY ATTEMPT** has been made to keep the text clear and simple, we understand that many birders will become confused with the technical nomenclature needed for the proper description of the birds in this volume. The illustration below shows a completely labeled bird.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**SPECIAL THANKS** are due to those individuals who used prepublication copies of this updated field guide for actual field verifications. However, when their data did not agree with our opinions, we deleted them.

*Seriously, we would like to acknowledge the people at Peachtree Publishers who have worked so hard on the field guide. A special thank-you goes to Loraine Joyner for her creative ideas and to Vicky Holifield for her help in making sense out of our nonsense.*





Little-Known  
& Seldom-Seen  
**Birds**  
of North America

Warbling Cormorant

## Gila Gull

Apparently isolated when the prehistoric seas disappeared, this transient species is locally common in the southwestern United States. A secretive bird, it is typically observed only while feeding in flash-flood areas. While the Gila Gull closely resembles other gulls, it can be identified by its orange and black legs and the lizard in its mouth.

Song is a gargled *agua arriba! agua arriba!*

### OBSERVATION HINT

The appearance of this bird is highly erratic and dependent on local weather conditions. Monitor an internet weather site and when thunderstorm warnings are issued, travel immediately to the nearest gulch or arroyo or gully or ravine or gorge and erect an observation blind. Be sure to note previous high-water marks.

### SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT

Personal flotation device



Also illustrated: the Trans-Pecos Whiptail

## Warbling Cormorant

An average-sized, dark bird, the Warbling Cormorant can be safely separated from its close relatives by its call and its inflatable throat pouch. This species, which is restricted to coastal regions, vocalizes only on foggy days. When vocalizing, the Warbling Cormorant expands its throat pouch to provide resonance, and draws up its wings to either side of its head to reflect the sound.

Its song is a low warbled *dru-ul-ully-ully-argh-hmm-ooah-ah-ahoo-dree-eee-ahwho-mmm-mmm* followed by several soft, rather random, lyrical phrases. Its call is a deep, booming *OOOH-WHAAA!*

### OBSERVATION HINT

On foggy days, see above; on sunny days, wait for a foggy day and listen for the call. Once the warble is pinpointed, wait for the fog to clear for possible identification of the bird.



## Seed-eating Tern

This exciting bird is much more advanced biologically than its ordinary fish-eating relatives. As fish populations have been depleted, this opportunistic tern has acquired the ability to eat a wide variety of grains.

*Plummetus granolium* is the only tern that has been able to qualify for “authentic vegan” certification. It is a spectacular sight to see a flock of these birds diving headlong into a wheat field from heights of up to 100 feet.

Call is a semi-addled *chaff chaff*.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Within this tern's range, it is advised to purchase reinforced feeders.*



*Periscopus multidigitatus*  
(formerly *Periscopus quadridigitatus*)

## Multi-toed Snorkel Bill (formerly Four-toed Snorkel Bill)

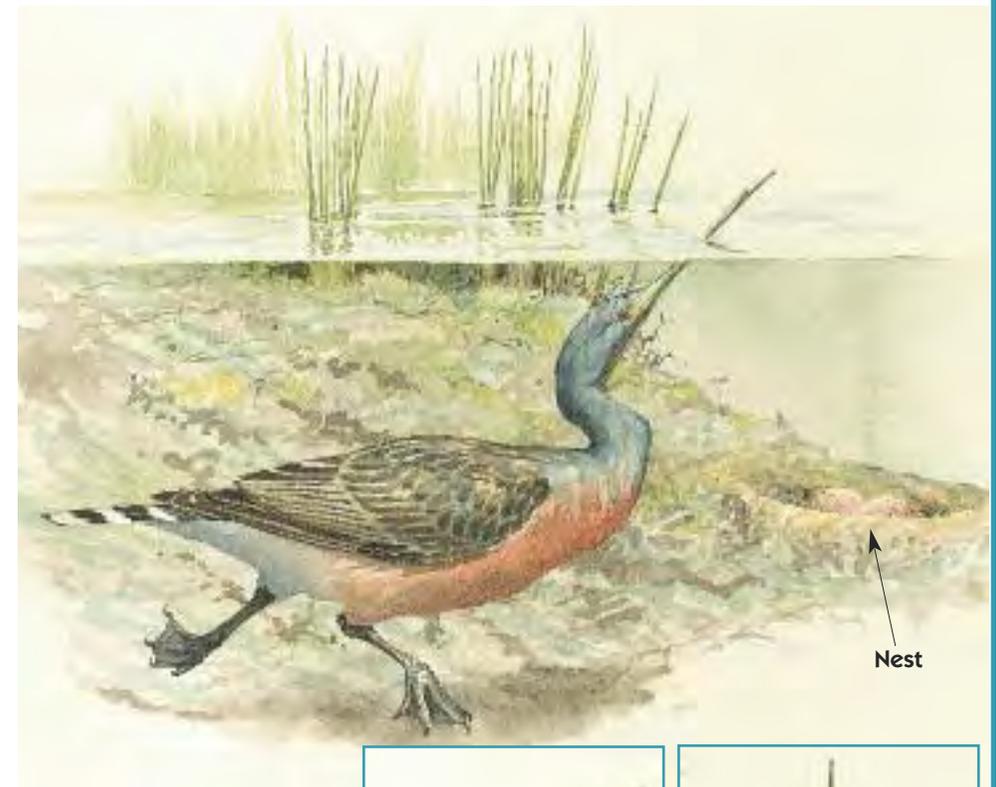
An uncommon-to-rare inhabitant of intertidal marshes, this two-foot-long bird spends most of the daylight hours under water, going ashore only at night to dry its feathers. The Snorkel Bill may be tentatively identified by its vertically oriented bill, which moves rapidly with 2 to 3 inches extended above the water surface. It nests in shallow water on old fish beds with unusually high hatchling mortality rates. Due to projected sea-level rise, many shore-nesting birds may adopt this nesting behavior. Seldom calls. Range varies.

### OBSERVATION HINT

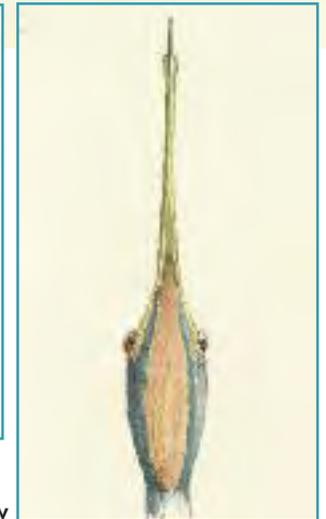
Take up a location in a dense spartina (cord grass) tidal marsh on a calm day. Constant surveillance of the marsh fringes may reveal what appears to be a short, erratically moving reed. This is either a Multi-toed Snorkel Bill or a short, erratically moving reed.

### AUTHORS' NOTE

*These birds were so little known when the first edition of this guide was published that the authors thought it had four toes. We were wrong. We still don't know for sure—thus the name change.*



Profile view



Ventral view

## Middle Yellowlegs and Least Yellowlegs

Existence of these two new species was substantiated shortly before the first edition of this field guide went to press. Both are similar to the Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs; however, they are readily identified by the fact that the Middle Yellowlegs is smaller than the Greater Yellowlegs, while the Least Yellowlegs is smaller than the Greater, Middle, and Lesser Yellowlegs, but is larger than some smaller birds.

Very recent studies have shown that this group of birds may well contain even more species (not illustrated yet). The two most likely to be added to this genus are the Yellow Middle Legs and the Slightly Yellow Lesser Legs.

### SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT

To estimate sizes, it is helpful to insert yardsticks (meter sticks) in mudflats where Yellowlegs feed.

Greatest  
Yellowlegs??

Greater  
Yellowlegs\*

Middle  
Yellowlegs!

Slightly Lesser  
Yellowlegs?!

Lesser  
Yellowlegs\*

Least  
Yellowlegs!

Very Least  
Yellowlegs??

#### LEGEND

- \* Existing species
- ! New species
- ?! Possible new species
- ?? Slightly possible new species