

THE COMMONNESS OF THE UNUSUAL

A. B. RAFINESQUE

Looking over the Club records as reported in *Cassinia* Field Notes for the fourteen years from 1944 through 1957, we find 238 species listed. We assume that these birds were thought worth mentioning because of the unusualness of location, season, or perhaps behavior. We are concerned here with the rarities. It would seem that the number of times a bird is reported would be in direct proportion to its rarity. This is not necessarily so. Some species carry more interest or glamor to the average field birder than others of equal status, and thus are noticed and advertised. Take the Evening Grosbeak, reported ten times in this period. Is this Grosbeak *relatively* commoner than the Prothonotary Warbler for instance (reported seven times), or is it because it comes in greater numbers at one time, is a very distinctive winter bird, and more people see it? Is there any significance in the reporting of the Golden Plover nine times and the Yellow-crowned Night Heron three times?

Just what makes a bird rare or unusual? The late Ludlow Griscom concluded after a lifetime of birding that "rare", as applied to a transient, means that the species cannot be found *annually* by the competent and active observer. He says the same thing in essence when he writes that the validity of any conclusion concerning a bird's status is absolutely proportional to the number of trips afield by careful and knowledgeable observers.

A good statistician could have a field day with any findings we might make here. But we do think that the broad picture may show some significance, and may demonstrate that some of our so-called rare birds are more common and regular than we are likely to think. Following are the higher counts computed from the fourteen years of Field Notes. The other counts, including the 89 species reported one time only, are available. Compilers and sifters of records, and students of trends may find the list useful.

Reported 10 times: Ruff, Evening Grosbeak. *Reported 9 times:* Golden Plover, Oyster-catcher, Hudsonian Godwit, Caspian Tern, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Philadelphia Vireo, Lapland Longspur. *Reported 8 times:* Glossy Ibis, European Widgeon, Common Teal, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Blue Grosbeak, Dickcissel, Snow Bunting. *Reported 7 times:* Blue Goose, Wilson's Plover, Marbled Godwit, Glaucous Gull, Wilson's Phalarope, Royal Tern, Red-headed Woodpecker, Prothonotary Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat.

Reported 6 times: Common Eider, Louisiana Heron, Golden Eagle, Stilt Sandpiper, Avocet, Gull-billed Tern, Black Skimmer, Snowy Owl, Saw-whet Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Cerulean Warbler, Baltimore Oriole, Pine Grosbeak, Common Redpoll, White-crowned Sparrow. *Reported 5 times:* Red-necked Grebe, Great Cormorant, American Brant, Harlequin Duck, Black Vulture, Northern Phalarope, Razor-bill, Dovekie, Arkansas Kingbird, Orange-crowned Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Palm Warbler, Summer Tanager, White-winged Crossbill, Eastern Lark Sparrow.