

## Migrating Birds That Only Visit For a Little While

By Art Arenholz

Many birds that migrate to our area in fall like us so well they stay for the whole winter. But quite a few birds spend only a few days here and then continue on South.



Perhaps the most obvious of these short-time visitors is the American White Pelican. This bird is huge and a wonderful -

flier. All white except for black flight feathers on the wings, Pelicans migrate in flocks and often fly in a line or circle in a thermal to gain altitude. A large orange-yellow bill helps distinguish this bird from other large black and white birds.

Another large black and white visitor is the Osprey. He is black above, white below; with a white head that shows a black cheek patch. This is our only raptor that hovers over water and dives feet first to catch a fish. Osprey -usually flies with a "crook" in its wings.



A third brief visitor in fall is a shorebird, the Willet, which when standing, is hard to identify. The body is dark gray above, and light, gray below; legs are blue-gray - and the bill is heavy, long, dark and straight. But when



the Willet flies, it displays a dramatic black and white wing pattern, and I think: "Oh, it's a Willet."

Two gulls and two terns visit us during migration. Gulls and terns look alike, so here are some helpful tips:

1. Gulls' tails are rounded or squared off; terns' tails are forked.
2. Gulls pick food items from the water and rarely dive. Terns fly with the bill pointed

at the water and dive head-first into the water

3. Gulls often swim; terns rarely swim.

Our two gulls visit us in small flocks and both have black heads until late summer. Franklin's Gull has a white band near the wing tip, which separates the dark gray upper wing from the black wing tip. In fall, Franklin's head is white, except the cheeks and back of the head are dark.

Bonaparte's Gull is smaller, with a light gray upper wing and a white wing tip. In fall, Bonaparte's head is also white except for a small but distinct, ear spot. The difference in the fall head patterns is often the best. I. D. mark.

Unlike the gulls, the terns are often seen alone. The Forster's Tern is the more common of our two terns. In late summer, Forster's is very light colored, with a black cap. The bill is orange with a black tip. In fall, Forster's head is white with a wide, dark eye stripe.

Our other tern is the handsome Black Tern. In summer, Black Tern is much darker than other terns, with a black body, dark gray wings and a black bill. But in late summer, Black Tern is not black. The body is white, and the white head has a darkish cap, quite unlike the dark eye-line of a fall Forster's Tern. Like the gulls, the best L.D. mark in fall is the head pattern.

Besides these black and white birds, fall brings us a number of colorful, brief visitors.

After nesting in the high forest, the Western Tanager often stops by on the way south. The yellow body and yellow wing bars, with dark wings and tail look the same as in spring, but the male loses almost all of his red head by late summer. The heavy bill helps to distinguish Tanagers from the sharp-billed Orioles.

The Wilson's Warbler adds a welcome touch of color in the fall. Wilson's is a golden yellow with a dark cap and most often catches



insects in Coyote Willow and other low shrubs. Another clue: Wilson's catches more insects in mid-air than most warblers.



The male Lazuli Bunting reminds me of a small Western Bluebird, except Lazuli have two bright, white wing bars. It

often feeds in weedy fields and comes readily to seed feeders.

The Hermit Thrush, like its larger cousin, the American Robin, is often found on the ground. Hermit Thrush has a spotted breast, dark back and a reddish-brown tail.



Our final colorful fall visitor is the Western Bluebird. The "blue" is in the head, wings and tail, while the chest and back are rusty red. When you, the bluebird and the sun are in the right position, especially when the bird flies, the blue color makes you say: "Wow."

So don't, wait for the Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes to arrive. Fall migration, which starts in August for some birds, brings to our Refuge birds we can see only during migration. Come and enjoy.