

Mexico belongs in the ABA Area, for sure. It makes sense for all the reasons stated by Retter, and we would be doing Mexico a tremendous favor if we encouraged more tourism south of our border. We would also be doing the ABA membership a big favor, since incredible birds are waiting for us in Mexico.

I hope the ABA will do the right thing and change the ABA boundaries.

— Joe Sweeney

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Juvenile or Juvenal?

In a recent letter to the editor (September 2009 *Birding*, p. 14), Steve N. G. Howell advocated dropping the term “juvenal” from the birder’s lexicon. In a response, Ted Floyd agreed that the term is unhelpful and wondered if Jonathan Dwight’s coining of the term (in his *Sequences of Plumage and Moults of the Passerine Birds of New York*, published in 1900) was intended half-jokingly. Floyd argued that the technical meaning of the term “juvenile” is widely understood among modern birders to refer to birds in “juvenal” plumage, thus obviating the term “juvenal.”

As a matter of editorial policy, Floyd stated that *Birding* would henceforth

synonymize the terms “juvenal” and “juvenile,” so that only “juvenile” would appear on the pages of this publication. This unilateral change overturns the careful work of an editorial committee headed by the late Claudia Wilds, which established decades ago that *Birding* would adhere to Humphrey-Parkes terminology as a matter of editorial policy.

Unfortunately, I still often hear the term “juvenile” used for any young bird, regardless of plumage. Young gulls, sparrows, and even warblers are referred to inappropriately as juveniles in casual conversation, on field excursions led by local amateurs, and even by professionals who argue that such use remains technically correct. Rarely are these birds actually in juvenal plumage; instead, they are in formative or some other immature plumage. Furthermore, when the term “juvenal” would be totally appropriate, as in the young of many hawk species, I all too often hear these birds labeled as “immature.”

In recent years, keen birders have been making advances in field identification through a clear understanding of the fine points of molt and plumage terminology. However, these concepts are not yet fully understood or used properly

by the rest of the birding community.

The real distinction between “juvenal” and “juvenile” was dealt with effectively by Eugene Eisenmann in a 1965 note in the *Auk* (“The use of the terms ‘juvenal’ and ‘juvenile,’” vol. 82, p. 105). He pointed out that many ornithological texts still used the term “juvenile” as a synonym for “immature,” meaning a bird in any plumage before “definitive” (adult) plumage. In museum collections, Eisenmann noted, specimen labels frequently say “juvenile” for birds that are not, in fact, juveniles.

Yes, this was more than 40 years ago, but I agree with Eisenmann. Retention of the appropriate term “juvenal” is still warranted and has no downside that I can see. In this case I think more compelling reasons are necessary to move from an established, precise term to a vague one.

If standard terminology appears obfuscatory or affected, it may be worth taking the time and effort to understand it. If we do not understand a term, the solution is to try to understand it, not to change it to a new term or spelling we think we understand but which actually has a different meaning.

I believe *Birding* should be a leader in bringing clarity and understanding to

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