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The Western Spindalis that showed on Thanksgiving Day at Markham Park in Broward County, just west of Fort Lauderdale

CHANGING NAMES

In our world approximately half the population either has, or will one day, change their names. In the school where Jewel taught there was a teacher who in the course of her career was known by three different names. She began teaching as Miss "X", and after her first marriage she was known as Mrs. "Y", which name she continued to use even after her divorce a number of years later. Finally, after remarrying late in her career she became Mrs.



"Z". She told us that when she met former students in the course of her travels, if she couldn't remember who they were, she could narrow down the time she may have taught them by whether they referred to her as Miss or Mrs. "X", "Y" or "Z". In our present culture, changing names is usually a very happy, sometimes expensive, occasion, done without a scientific study or committee recommendation, as is required with naming bird species.

With birds, changing names,



Unfortunately, generally often leads to confusion, at least for some time, until the new name becomes commonplace. When I began birding, Duck Hawk, Pigeon Hawk and Sparrow Hawk were the names of our primary North American falcons. It was some time before Peregrine, Merlin and Kestrel rolled off our tongues easily, but now we hardly even recall the old names, and young birders are not even aware there were former names for these species.



The Great Egret has been the "Common Egret," "Great White Egret," and "American Egret" at one time or another during my birding years. On our most recent Christmas Bird Count, participants in my group frequently saw either a "Gallinule" or a "Moorhen" referring to the Common Gallinule, which was its former name before it was changed to "Common Moorhen" a number of years ago, and then in 2011 changed back to Common Gallinule. The relatively recent name change explains our uncertainty about which name is current. It has long been my unscientific theory that bird names are changed to help sell bird books, so that birders will need, or at least want, the up-to-date bird names at their fingertips.

Recently a Western Spindalis (*photos above*) showed up in Florida. A Code 3 bird, (*see the last HartBeat column for Code information*) it was found on Thanksgiving Day at Markham Park, a Broward County facility in Sunrise, FL, just west of Fort Lauderdale. As I write this, a couple of days before Christmas, it is still there. The park is well known for its shooting range, and while watching the birds, there was a constant stream of gun fire in the background, sometimes automatic rifle fire, not unlike watching a war movie.



We remember recording this species on our life lists a number of years ago as the Stripe-headed Tanager. In 2000 the American Ornithological Union (AOU) determined that the Spindalis species were not really tanagers at



all, and were deserving of their own taxonomic class. They split the Stripe-headed Tanager into four separate Spindalis species, all in the West Indies. Only the Western Spindalis has ever ventured to Florida. Upon arrival at the park, we found a small group of birders already watching the bird. However, it was not particularly accommodating, as it tended to stay behind leaves and foliage, sometimes eating berries, and only coming into clear view on a few occasions. It seemed to be traveling with a small flock of about six showy Spot-breasted Orioles (*left right and below*) (a Code 2 species) which also presented more photographic opportunities.

And so, like Shakespeare's "rose by any other name ...," whether Stripe-headed Tanager or Western Spindalis, the bird is a striking and attractive species, and was clever enough to travel in good company. It probably is not even aware that it got its name change without the necessity of going through all that wedding planning, gift giving,



bachelor bash, reception rigmarole, and honeymoon travel arrangements that are entailed in our species name changing. But, like so many of our name changers, he did come to Florida.

For more on Western Spindalis, see:

www.fosbirds.org/sites/default/files/FFNs/FFNv29n1p13-25Pranty.pdf



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