

BIRDING TOGETHER

Jeffrey A. Gordon • President, American Birding Association

Relationships often get stuck when one or both partners have difficulty uttering a certain three-word phrase. Since I arrived in Colorado Springs a little over two years ago, I've resisted using a particular three-word phrase myself: "the new ABA."

There are a number of reasons why I've avoided those three words. First, I came into this job with a strong conviction that the organization needed more of a makeover than it did a heart transplant. The things that have made the ABA great haven't changed all that much, as I see it. It's still about great people sharing and exploring a passion for birding. Building a new ABA didn't seem as important to me as shoring up and growing the existing one.

The second reason was a general distaste for hype and a preference for results over rhetoric. As a member and occasional very-part-time employee over a couple of decades, I felt that I'd been promised "the new ABA" more

than a few times over the years, and that those promises, even if well intentioned, were ultimately largely hollow.

But I find that my feelings toward that little phrase are changing, as I believe the ABA is changing. Some signs of that change include:

- Our membership numbers, which had fallen steadily since the late 1990s, have been going steadily up since September of 2011. Moreover, our rate of recruiting brand-new or long-lapsed members is through the roof. Somewhere around a quarter of you receiving this issue of *Birding* weren't members when I took on this job. So while there's still a lot of tradition, there are a lot of fresh faces and I'd like to extend a special welcome to our newer members.
- Our financial position, as measured by our auditors, is clearly headed in the right direction. I'm delighted to report that in 2012,

thanks to numerous factors, including your generosity, we are back in the black, posting a positive year for the first time since the middle of the last decade. You can read those audits for yourself online <aba.org/about/financials.html>.

Those are two major pieces of evidence that things have changed significantly and for the better. Here are some that may be a bit less tangible but are also vitally important:

- We're more open and upbeat. We embrace many approaches to birding rather than focusing on contradictions. Listing, citizen science, photography, mindful appreciation, conservation, simple enjoyment? We'll take all of the above, please.
- We're more connected. The ABA used to be notable for its reticence to embrace the internet and social media. We paid a huge price for

ABA President **Jeffrey A. Gordon** (center, dark jacket) and *Birding* Editor Ted Floyd (center right, green jacket) join part of the large and diverse crowd at Gullapalooza 2013, a free half-day event held in Boulder, Colorado, each February and cosponsored by the ABA. Total attendance this year was at least 315, many of them young or newer birders. *Photo by © Jennie Duberstein.*






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this ostrich strategy. Now we are at the forefront of the online birding community, as we ought to be.

- We're at long last reaching younger birders, part-time birders, and others who increase our diversity as a community. No question that the ABA has spoken to and for a vital segment of the birding community, and we proudly continue to. But rather than bemoan the lack of new blood, we've reached out to birders where they are, instead of expecting them to come to us.
- We're proud. Perhaps befitting the introverted character of many individual birders, the birding community has sometimes wanted to fly under the radar. Not the ABA. We're happy to be the welcome wagon, sharing the knowledge and passion for birding we've built over the years.
- We're looking forward. Yes, we've got many hills to climb. But the past two years have shown us all that the ABA is in it for the long haul, rising to the challenge of building a bigger, stronger, more effective birding community.

For all these reasons, and many others, I am now prepared to say those three little words. Because we've all been through a lot together and I feel in my heart that it's time to just say it. So here goes. Welcome...welcome to...sheesh, I'm a little nervous here...welcome...welcome...ah, heck, just go for it...welcome to *The New ABA!!!*

Jeffrey A. Gordon

—Jeffrey A. Gordon
 President, American Birding Association
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