Recoding Subspecies: a finer tuning of data.
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We propose using a taxonomic unit (the “Group”) for banding to help separate the breeding origins of various individuals. We all monitor birds to determine life history strategies. In this process, we need to separate genetic from cultural differences and understand the ebb and flow of segments of populations, such as subspecies. Many such separate genetic population units (usually, but not always, subspecies) we already distinguish by coding them separately because of substantial and consistent plumage differences and taxonomic precedent, such as the Winter and Pacific wrens, and the Pacific and Taiga races of White-crowned Sparrow. Other groups are separable by range (e.g., titmouse), plumage, and measurements. Some, like the Pacific-Slope and Cordillera flycatchers, are largely separable mainly by vocalizations, and thus are usually most accurately designated Western Flycatchers, and some are lumped even if good plumage criteria are usually applicable, such as Alder and Willow flycatcher, that are sometimes termed Traill’s Flycatcher. We feel that we have a need for consistent and more detailed criteria for recording such groups, and suggest that, to be effective, we should combine similar subspecies and populations into “Groups” as Sibley and others have done. Some of these we propose are well-recognized and easily separable. These include the western and eastern populations of the Marsh Wren and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, the russet-backed and olive-backed groups of Swainson’s Thrush, the Pacific and Taiga Orange-crowned warblers, various subspecies of the Song Sparrow, and the thick-billed, sooty, red, and slate-colored fox sparrows. These groups should have a substantial fraction of population separable by morphology (e.g., >75%), noting that some clines are complex (e.g., Song Sparrow) and will include several recognized subspecies. We would suggest that with the new codes necessary (e.g. Red Fox Sparrow [RFSP]), there should also be a method for noting intermediates.