



# Roundtable

## RECLAMATION OF A SOOTY SHEARWATER

F. M. (PAT) PROBST

On 11 and 12 June 1969 strong easterly winds blew great windrows of sea-weed and debris ashore along the coast of the Carolinas and Georgia. With this debris were hundreds of dead or dying sea birds identified as Greater Shearwaters, *Puffinus gravis*. Concerned people in the local area brought many of these birds to me for identification and for possible help. All living birds that I saw appeared to be paralyzed or toxic and died (in most instances in convulsions) within a few hours. Intermixed with the sea-weed and debris were many globs of a sticky, tarry material believed to be "Bunker C" type oil pumped from the bilges of ocean ships. The birds I examined did not appear to be heavily oiled, although some had smudges of this tarry residue on their breast and belly feathers.

Of particular interest however, was a Sooty Shearwater (*P. griseus*) brought to me by some visitors on Pawley's Island. This bird was more alert and did not appear to be as toxic as the Greater Shearwaters. He was able to hold his head up and exhibited curiosity by turning it to follow movement. At first silent and docile, he offered no resistance to handling. Examination revealed that his left leg was useless, although there was no evidence of injury or broken bones. Offered fresh water from a glass jar, he drank a small amount. He was offered small chunks of fresh fish and ate two or three pieces. He spent the night in a large cardboard box lined with newspapers, which was to be his home for five weeks.

The next morning a ration of cut fish was eagerly accepted and several pieces were eaten. My wife, Renée, who was to become Sooty's main support and comfort while he was with us, reasoned that chunks of fish and squid in a small jar of salted water could be more readily – and vigorously – eaten. This then became routine for up to six times daily as Sooty gained strength. Because of immobility, due to probable toxicity at first and because shearwaters are ill adapted for land, the newspapers in his box had to be changed quite frequently.

After each feeding and as his strength returned, Sooty was placed in a large laundry tub partially filled with water. At first he got wet thru to his skin and would be cold and shivering. While there was no apparent oil on his feathers they matted together and allowed water to penetrate to the skin. In a few days the bird began to preen, both in the water and after being placed in his box. He was kept in the water for only a few moments at first, to help clean his under feathers. Soon however, he indicated preference for longer periods in the tub and would bathe and preen while swimming around. Gradually his left leg acquired some use, although it never regained full use. The periods in the tub would be terminated by Sooty's attempts to get out of the water. Hooking his beak over the edge of the tub he would try to pull his body up and over the brim. As his strength returned he spread his wings and often succeeded in getting out unaided. To dry him off before returning him to his box we placed him on the gravel in our driveway or on the grass of our lawn. Sooty remained quiet for the first few days but then began

trying to move about. He would extend his neck and pull himself forward with his long beak hooked in the gravel or the grass. He was soon able to progress for some distance in this way and with the help of his good right leg. He soon began using his wings in a swimming motion to help him move forward. To exercise his wings further we would hold him aloft with one hand extended beneath his breast while he would move his wings in a flying motion, slowly and weakly at first but more and more strongly. It soon became necessary to place the other hand on his back to keep him from falling from our grasp.

By the end of the third week Sooty had regained enough strength to move easily about the yard. He would attempt to fly and could become nearly airborne from the ground, moving quite rapidly for some distance. To prevent his escape into thick underbrush around our yard, we would have to retrieve him. It was on one of these attempts when he first exhibited aggressive behavior. As I bent over to pick him up he turned toward me and squawked quite loudly. After that he frequently used his voice to express his displeasure at being returned to his box. While he did not exhibit as much aggression against Renée as he did against me (possibly because she fed and handled him more), it eventually became necessary to drop a cloth over his head in order to pick him up without being vigorously pecked. On several occasions he would peck me on the wrist and twist his head at the same time. This resulted in a number of deep scratches caused by the sharp hook on the point of his upper mandible. Usually he did not close his beak as strongly on Renée as on me but would nibble on her hand and arm.

After about a month we realized that Sooty had regained enough strength to care for himself; so on 19 July we took him to a tidal inlet at Huntington Beach State Park for release. Placed at the edge of the water, he quickly moved into swimming depth. From here he became airborne and was able to fly very well, in great sweeping circles.

Because of the strength of his flight we feel that he was able to resume a normal life as a soaring ocean bird. Our hope is that he took a short-cut by way of Bermuda to catch up with other shearwaters, for he was over a month behind on the circular route that they take each year around the Atlantic Ocean, returning each winter to nesting territories in the Cape Horn area.

In spite of the close confinement and his inability to move about, there was relatively little odor about him or his box. He did have a faint but pronounced pleasant musky odor to his feathers that would linger on our hands for quite a while after we had handled him. He ate well, even from the first day, and was very definite in the amount he wanted. While we removed the larger bones from the fish we left the smaller ones in place. He was able to swallow cubes of fish up to one inch on a side, although they were generally smaller.

Caring for common land birds presents relatively minor problems. But the care of a bird who requires a more specialized diet and is restricted to a pelagic environment becomes more difficult for one not equipped for this special care. However, the pleasure gained, along with the hope that we may have saved a beautiful bird, is ample compensation.

### **Welcome Back, Toncie!**

After several years of traveling and involvement in various other projects, Annie Rivers Faver is returning to the staff of *Chat* as editor of the CBC Roundtable. Having edited the Backyard Birding column for a number of years, Toncie needs no introduction to CBC members – just a warm welcome back! Items intended for the March Roundtable should be sent to Mrs. Faver at Route 2, Eastover, S.C. 29044.

### **Associate GFN Editor for South Carolina**

Julian R. Harrison, our associate editor of the General Field Notes, is a native South Carolinian, having been born and reared in Charleston where he received a B.S. in Biology from The College of Charleston in 1956. Dr. Harrison received his A.M. from Duke University (not N.C. State as indicated in a previous issue of *Chat*) and his Ph.D.

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- PROTHONOTARY WARBLER:** Two definite breeding records were reported from Forsyth County, N. C., this summer by Robert Witherington, Charles Frost, Olive Boice and Ramona Snavelly. This team of observers found two adults feeding young in a nest at Salem Lake on 8 June. Later, along the Yadkin River near Hwy 67, they saw another pair feeding young on 10 August.
- SWAINSON'S WARBLER:** A male was found singing at Kitty Hawk, N. C., on 23 June by Gilbert Grant.
- WORM-EATING WARBLER:** A male was seen and heard at White Oak Pocosin in western Gates County, N. C., on 13 June by Merrill Lynch.
- YELLOW WARBLER:** James Pullman found a nesting pair in May at Mason Farm in Chapel Hill, N. C., an uncommon local breeding record.
- AMERICAN REDSTART:** Singing males were common along the Roanoke River in the Occoneechee Neck area of Northampton County, N. C., in mid-June, as reported by Merrill Lynch and Chris Marsh. A male was also seen in Hertford County along the Meherrin River near Winton on 11 June by Merrill Lynch.
- BOBOLINK:** A lone male, apparently a very tardy spring transient, was seen near High Point, N. C., on 21 June by James Mattocks.
- RUSTY BLACKBIRD:** A late spring straggler was observed in the company of grackles in swamp habitat along the Roanoke River in the Occoneechee Neck area of Northampton County, N. C., on 16 June by Merrill Lynch and Chris Marsh.
- BALTIMORE ORIOLE:** A rare incidence of nesting in the North Carolina piedmont was recorded in Forsyth County where a pair was found feeding young in Tanglewood Park near Clemmons on 4 June by Paul Spain.
- WESTERN TANAGER:** A female tanager with clearly distinct white wing bars was observed for 10 minutes while perched on a power line at Black Mountain, N. C., on 19 July by Earl and Elizabeth Chandoin.
- SCARLET TANAGER:** On 11 June two males were seen in Gates County, N. C., in the upper coastal plain by Merrill Lynch. Sightings were also recorded by the same observer in Northampton County, N. C., in June and July.
- BACHMAN'S SPARROW:** A singing male was noted near Arcola in Warren County, N. C., on 4 June by Harry LeGrand.
- SONG SPARROW:** One found at Roanoke Rapids, N. C., on 22 July was an unexpected summer record for that locality, Merrill Lynch.

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from the University of Notre Dame in 1964. He is presently an Associate Professor of Biology at The College of Charleston where he teaches Introductory Biology, Vertebrate Zoology, Ornithology, and Zoogeography. Having served as a volunteer worker at The Charleston Museum since 1949, Dr. Harrison was recently appointed by the Museum Board as a Research Associate in Herpetology.

In 1960 Harrison married the former Margaret N. Marquardt of Sayville, N.Y., whom he met while studying at Duke. Margaret holds a master's degree from Duke where her research dealt with biochemical embryology, and she is currently Curator of Education at The Charleston Museum. The Harrisons have two children, Charles Andrew (Andy), age 9, and Susan Gayle, 7, both of whom are enthusiastic young naturalists.

Julian credits his own wide interests in natural history to the influence of E. Burnham Chamberlain, former Curator of Vertebrate Zoology at the Museum, who guided his early training in ornithology and herpetology, and to Miss Elizabeth Simons, the former Curator of Education who directed the Nature Trailers club.

Although Dr. Harrison greatly enjoys bird study, his professional research interests lie with the biology of amphibians and reptiles, their systematics, life histories, population ecology, and evolution. He will be on sabbatical leave next spring to complete a book on the amphibians of South Carolina.