



Roundtable

... with Annie Rivers Faver

Another Possible Explanation for Anting

I was very much interested in the article in the March 1972 issue of the *Chat* – “What on Earth is Anting?”. I have observed it only one time. Last 19 August (1971) I noticed a Catbird that was anting in my backyard and returned to get my wife to come see it. When we returned to the yard, the bird had flown to a low branch in a holly tree, but soon returned to the ground and continued behaving as described in the *Chat*. I failed to record the time of day, but believe it was about the middle of the afternoon.

On this particular occasion, the ground was alive with swarming ants – both winged and without wings. I do not know the name of the variety of ants, but I know from past experience that this particular variety carries the strong, distinct odor of citronella, which was used for years as a mosquito repellent until more effective synthetic repellents replaced it.

I quote from the article: “The most intensive anting took place within 48 hours after rainfall during and following prolonged wet spells in August, such as those associated with the passing of tropical storms.” Prolonged wet spells would certainly be a good time for mosquitos. Until it is proved or disapproved, I believe that anting is done to repel mosquitos, which is at least as logical as the other reasons submitted. –FRED S. HILL JR., 2750 Country Club Road, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27104, 29 May 1972.

Are There Any Records of Birds Feeding on Mushrooms?

Every morning I throw baby-chick scratch feed and sunflower seeds out of my kitchen window, as well as supplying the two window feeders. This had been a week of continual fogs and rain, and there were clusters of brown or light tan mushrooms on the stump of the pecan tree and along through the grass where the roots of the tree had been near the surface. In checking on the feeding birds, I noticed one White-throated Sparrow scratching and feeding on the cap of one of the mushrooms. I called Kay Sisson in Columbia and asked if she had ever heard of such a thing. She suggested that possibly there were insects or worms in the cap. So I went outside . . . the bird had gone by then . . . but there was no sign of insect life, although the top of the cap had been broken by the bird’s scratching and the inside had been pecked like a bird would feed on a slice of bread. It had been feeding vigorously, and apparently enjoying the feast.

From my book, the Golden Press issue on “Non-flowering Plants” by Shuttleworth and Zim, I chose the picture of the “Jack-O’-Lantern” or *Deceiving Clitocybe* as most closely resembling the mushrooms. Many of the mushrooms were torn up and scattered, but I never did see anything else feeding on them. I have seen squirrels eating the common white “button” mushrooms along the edge of the woods along the driveway. –ANNIE RIVERS FAVER, Route 2, Box 4, Eastover, S.C. 29044.

A Question About Brown Creeper Behavior

Regarding the feeding behavior of the Brown Creeper, A.C. Bent comments in his *Life Histories of North American Nuthatches, Wrens, Thrashers, and Their Allies*: "We think of the creeper as always climbing upward over the bark in a straight or spiral course until, after reaching a fair height on the trunk, he drops to the base of another tree to ascend it in like manner. This is his ordinary way of feeding, but he often varies it. We may sometimes see him take a short hop backward to reinvestigate a crevice in the bark, or take a hop sideways to broaden the field of his research, and, as we have noted under "Nesting," a bird may visit a slender branch and even perch on it, and he may also hitch along the underside of a horizontal branch, his back to the ground." Nowhere does Bent offer an explanation for the fact that creepers sometimes spiral and sometimes do not, nor for their apparent preference for the underside of horizontal limbs, although he seems fascinated by this particular aspect of their feeding behavior.

Our home is located in a mixed pine and deciduous woods, and the house has vertical fir siding with a stain finish. Nearly every winter we have a resident Brown Creeper that feeds on insect goodies in crevices of our siding as well as in the bark of our trees. This winter we have made a special effort to note whether the bird ever feeds in full sunlight. We have watched our creeper move straight up the shady side of one tree after another without ever visiting the sides in full sun. We have watched the bird move up various planks on the house, carefully avoiding those in full sun. When feeding on the shady side of the house, the bird will go up one plank and fly to the base of the adjacent one. We have watched it spiral tree trunks on overcast days, and once it spiraled into dappled sunlight on a sunny day. Sometimes the bird will zigzag up the shady side of a tree, venturing to the very edges of the sunlight but never moving into it. Once I watched a creeper foraging on the underside of a horizontal limb that turned sharply downward about 10 feet from the main trunk of an oak. When the bird reached the bend and would have had to move into full sunlight had it continued out the same branch, it returned to the trunk and moved to the shaded underside of the limb above.

Although such factors as wind direction or the relative abundance of insect larvae on the north side of trees might have influenced our Brown Creeper, we presently believe that the bird avoids full sunlight because its protective coloration is more effective in shade than in sun. The fact that creepers freeze at the approach of danger tends to support our theory.—ELOISE F. POTTER, P.O. Box 277, Zebulon, N.C. 27597, 25 January 1973.

CORRECTION: Spring Bird Count—1972

J.H. Carter III has called the Editor's attention to an unfortunate error in the Southern Pines, N.C., column of the species table for the 1972 Spring Bird Count (*Chat*, 36:77). The numbers for Killdeer (3), American Woodcock (1), Spotted Sandpiper (7), Solitary Sandpiper (5), Greater Yellowlegs (3), and Lesser Yellowlegs (1) were printed one space too high. This results in erroneous listings for Wilson's Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Upland Plover, and Willet (which were not found at Southern Pines) and for the Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs (both of which were found). The original copy for the table was correct, so the total individuals column is printed correctly. Only the Southern Pines column should be altered in your copy of the September 1972 *Chat*, page 77.—ED.