



# Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

## **Downy Woodpecker with Bizarre Bill**

On 13 February 1974, a mature male Downy Woodpecker with a bill  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches long came to my feeder. The upper mandible stuck upward, was useless, and probably interfered with forward vision. The bird was of normal size and coloring.

One must wonder about the frustration of the mother in feeding the bird. Obviously, she accomplished the task and the bird grew to maturity—and remained in the area until 6 March.

It could not peck, nor pick up bits of food without considerable effort because its tongue could not reach more than half the length of its elongated bill. I placed grated beef kidney suet in a shallow dish on my window sill; the bird came frequently and we could observe it from 10 inches away. The only way it could pick up a bit of suet was to turn its head sideways and pick up the bit about the middle of its bill. This took several attempts, as one might with chopsticks. Food that accumulated on the tip of the bill had to be shaken or scraped off.

A few days before it left, the woodpecker clung to one of my wire-screen suet feeders, with its wings “shivering” and its head dropped to one side. I easily caught the bird in my hand. I carried it to the dish of suet and offered the bird food at the side of its bill, and it ate readily. I removed my hand and it continued to eat.

While holding the bird, I clipped away the apparently dead and dried mandible which stuck up in front of its eyes. I was tempted to clip away about half of the  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch bill, as it seemed to be dead and transparent, but decided to let nature take its course. I also decided not to collect the woodpecker as a specimen.

The mandibles were not straight enough to close properly, and they flared outward slightly at the tips, eliminating a point for pecking.

Other Downy Woodpeckers seemed not to like this bird and frequently chased it from the feeders. With darkness, other birds went to their roosts, and my little fellow would come to the dish and eat in peace. I wondered how it found its roost in the dark. A few days after I caught it, the bird flew away and never came back. It was a conversation piece and put on a heart-breaking show.—NORME D FROST, Box 271, Tryon, N.C. 28782.

## **Possible Eskimo Curlew on Pea Island**

[Note: One of the purposes of this column is to alert bird students of the possibility of rare finds. The following observation by Dr. Sonneborn is just such an alert, referring to a bird nearly extinct and rarely recorded along the Atlantic Coast south of New England.]

On 28 April 1973, I was walking on the large sandflats at the extreme northern end of Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge (the area bounded by Oregon Inlet and the north dike of the North Impoundment). When I was about in the middle of the area, I saw three curlews through my 30X telescope. They took off and they were clearly Whimbrels, a species with which I am thoroughly familiar.

But there was a fourth bird, about two-thirds the size of the other three, generally buffy brown with no obvious rump or wing markings, and a shorter but clearly down-

curved beak. As it flew, I had the impression of buffy under-wing coverts. All the birds flew toward the ocean and seemed to land, but I could not find them again.

There are several unsatisfying things about this record in addition to the great distance involved: the failure to see leg color and the lack of leisurely study. However, the description of this bird may kindle interest in looking for this species, and perhaps give the reader some idea of the feeling I had when seeing a small curlew in North America.—DAVID SONNEBORN, Medical College of Virginia, MCV Station, Richmond, Virginia 23928.

### **Laughing Gulls in Flight**

At 15:45 on 19 October 1973, at Whalebone, N.C., I observed several first-year Laughing Gulls which were lacking three or four inches from the tip of one or the other wing. Both wings were intact in most cases, but in one case, both tips were missing.

The flight of the gulls did not seem to be affected, but doubtless they were affected. The missing tips appeared to have been cut, and not due to molt. I wonder if the wings could have been clipped by fish (possibly large Bluefish) as the gulls hovered over the schools chasing bait fish.

About 16:30 on 20 October 1973, a sizable flock of Laughing Gulls (almost entirely after hatch year) gathered over the stern of my fishing boat to catch scraps tossed in the air. I noticed that often a gull would have one or both feet tucked completely out of sight under the feathers of the belly and lower tail coverts. Usually the feet remained hidden even while the gulls maneuvered for position, but occasionally they would re-appear. No effort was apparent on the part of the gull as the feet gradually became buried under the feathers. The ability to bury the feet serves to streamline the bird in flight.—FRED S. HILL JR., 2750 Country Club Road, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27104.

[Note: James F. Parnell believes it possible that the missing wing tips represent molt, but agrees that the Bluefish might well sever a wing if the gull dipped it. "The hidden foot trick is more common and occurs regularly in gulls."]

### **A Reasoned Comment on Collecting**

The purpose of the Pan-American Society for the Protection of Birds doubtless will merit the endorsement of most CBC members. However, I question the statement attributed to Pan-American: "*many* people are concerned about the *many abuses* (italics mine) perpetrated by the bird collectors."

As a long-time holder of a Federal permit, I believe collecting and specimen preservation important and defensible. Without earlier collecting, where would we be in our knowledge of birds, their description, distribution, anatomy, relationships, etc.?

Consider the collecting and research of Wilson, Audubon, Bachman, and many others, not forgetting the Brimleys, Wayne et al. Expand this thought to include the study of birdlife world-wide. Remember also that application of the facts proves vital in the management of sanctuaries and refuges.

I emphasize my belief that wide-spread need for collecting no longer exists, at least in many countries. In many cases, recognizable photographs are acceptable in lieu of specimens. In passing, consider the predicament of the editor or reviewer who—without concrete evidence—is called on to judge the ability and credibility of any given observer.

Finally, I think building of personal collections of birdskins should be prohibited. Those now existing might be turned over to a museum as gifts or long-term loans, for future preservation and greater availability.—E. BURNHAM CHAMBERLAIN, 8 Huguenot Avenue, Charleston, S.C. 29407.

### **Earle Greene Is Lost to the 600 Club**

On 12 March, Earle R. Greene of St. Simon's Island, Georgia, died after a short illness. A professional wildlife biologist, Earle was the author of *A Lifetime With the Birds* and founder of the 600 Club. His records of the Club were turned over to Terry Moore of Atlanta, who plans to carry on the work. A memorial to Earle is being planned, and we shall try to carry news of it.

### **Bird Finding in the Carolinas**

ROANOKE RAPIDS LAKE, Halifax and Northampton Counties, N.C.: Roanoke Rapids Lake is a 9-mile-long hydroelectric reservoir situated on the Roanoke River just NW of Roanoke Rapids. It is noted for its large inland wintering population of Ring-billed Gulls, its variety of wintering waterfowl, and its attraction for many unusual inland migrating long-legged waders, gulls, terns, and shorebirds. Four main access points enable the bird watcher to view almost the entire surface area of the lake. Directions to these four vantage points are detailed below.

1. Roanoke Rapids Lake Dam (south shore): Drive west on W. Fifth Street in Roanoke Rapids to intersection with Oakwood Avenue. Turn right on Oakwood and continue until deadend at the dam. Park in the parking lot overlook and scan over the dam and the headwaters of the lake for gulls and diving ducks. Permission can be obtained from dam personnel to drive through the gates down to the lake shore. (Use telephone at gate entrance to request permission.)

2. Pete's Marina (south shore): Drive west on US 158 approximately 8.2 miles from its intersection with NC 48 at Roanoke Rapids. Turn right on SR 1400 and drive about 1.5 miles to SR 1422, which turns off to the left. Continue on this road about a mile to the deadend at the lake. Scan the lake here for loons, grebes, diving and puddle ducks, assorted gulls, and for occasional cormorants on exposed stumps on the right a low water level.

3. Mid-lake overlook (north shore): From the intersection of NC 46 and NC 48 at Gaston, drive west on NC 46 for 5.6 miles to SR 1220, which is unpaved and turns off to the left. Drive to deadend of 1220 and walk through the woods to a suitable vantage point. This is a good area for all waterfowl and gulls.

4. Vulture (north shore): On NC 46 drive west 2 miles from SR 1220 turnoff (see mid-lake overlook directions above) to intersection of NC 46 and SR 1213 at Vulture Crossroads. Turn left onto SR 1213 and continue to Wildlife landing and parking lot at lake. For variety of birds this may be the best vantage point available. A good section of the upper end of the lake can be scanned for puddle ducks, waders, and gulls. Within fairly easy walking distance to the right (west) is an extensive cattail-juncus marsh in the extreme upper end of the lake. The marsh attracts large numbers of puddle ducks in winter and herons, egrets, rails, and bitterns in spring and fall. During water drawdown (spring and late summer), the entire upper end becomes one massive mudflat. Be ready for *any* species of shorebird! Willets, Red Knots, Black-bellied Plovers, Sanderlings—these and many others have been seen. Bald Eagles are a possibility.

The best season to bird at Roanoke Rapids Lake is open to some question. Large numbers of waterfowl generally move through from early November to mid-December and again from early February to early April. Most herons and egrets appear from late July to September and in spring (April and May). Ring-billed Gulls are most common in mid-winter, large flocks of Bonaparte's Gulls move through in mid-April, and Laughing Gulls and terns appear from mid-April through May and again from late August to October.

During the past 4 years, 31 species of waterfowl (including loons and grebes), 9 species of herons and allies, 19 shorebird species, and 10 species of gulls and terns have been recorded on the lake. Undoubtedly Roanoke Rapids Lake will furnish many new surprises in the future.—J. MERRILL LYNCH, 539 Henry Street, Roanoke Rapids, N.C. 27870.

### **Little Gulls Breeding in North America**

In a letter dated 15 August 1974, Charles H. Blake of Hillsborough, N.C., commented in connection with a General Field Note by J.H. Carter III and James F. Parnell (Little Gulls at Cape Hatteras, N.C., *Chat*, 38:40) that the Little Gull is now known to breed near Toronto, in the Niagara area, and at Lake St. Clair. "The curious point," Dr. Blake added, "is that the much more abundant Black-headed Gull is apparently not known to breed in the New World." For more information on the nesting of Little Gulls in Ontario, see *American Birds*, 25:853.—EFP

### **Purple Martin News**

Over the years a number of people have inquired about subscribing to *Purple Martin News*. Published monthly by the Griggsville Wild Bird Society, "North America's backyard journal" is a lively newspaper catering to nature lovers and gardeners. Memberships in the Society are \$5.00 per year in the United States. The address is Purple Martin Junction, Griggsville, Illinois 62340.—EFP

### **Our Writers**

CBC Roundtable would like to acknowledge the achievements of all club members who have papers and notes about birds published in journals other than *Chat*. The Department Editor does not know the names of all CBC members and does not have access to all the ornithological journals, so please do not be too modest to send a reprint or a post card giving the appropriate literature citation.

"Factors Influencing Prey Selection in the American Kestrel" by Helmut C. Mueller of Chapel Hill, N.C., appeared in *Auk*, 91:705-721. Dr. Mueller found that the conspicuousness of the prey was relatively unimportant. His five tamed birds were offered a choice of varying ratios of gray and white mice on white or gray backgrounds. Individual birds showed a tendency to select the same type of prey over and over. The author also noted a tendency for the birds to select the odd animal, the one that differed in color from the majority of those offered in the experiment. "This latter tendency," he concluded, "could contribute to the selection of unfit prey and have important implications for the ecology and evolution of both prey and predator."

"Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls Nesting in North Carolina" by James F. Parnell and Robert P. Soots appeared in *Auk*, 92:154-157. In the course of their study of nesting birds on man-made dredge islands in North Carolina's estuaries, the authors found a sizable colony of Herring Gulls near Oregon Inlet in Dare County, N.C., and a scattering of breeding birds as far south as the lower Cape Fear River. One or two pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls nested at Oregon Inlet in 1972 and 1973.