CBC Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

What is a "Valid Nesting Record"?

Recent correspondence with several CBC members indicates considerable confusion regarding the requirements for a "valid nesting record." Reports of attempted or presumed nesting can be based on many things: a male singing and defending a territory, an adult carrying nesting material, adults copulating or engaging in courtship rituals normally performed at the nest site, a nest still under construction, a banded or collected female having a brood patch or well developed eggs in the oviduct, adults feeding preflight young away from the nest, or an abandoned nest of proper description. A valid nesting record, in the opinion of this editor, must be based upon the discovery of an active nest with eggs or young birds. If the record constitutes the first known nesting for the state or a major range extention within the state, it should be documented by additional observers, photographs, or, if circumstances permit, the preservation of the nest in a museum collection. Publication of evidence of attempted nesting, while not as exciting as a report of successful nesting, serves a useful purpose in the ornithological literature. Both authors and readers, however, must be careful to distinguish between indications of probable breeding and positive evidence of nesting.—ELOISE F. POTTER

Christmas Bird Count, Tryon, N.C.: Setting the Record Straight Regarding Pine Siskins

In his comments on the 1976 Christmas Bird Count, Editor Harry E. LeGrand Jr. wrote (Chat 41:37): "I seriously doubt the validity of most of the 230 Pine Siskins from 14 counts; Tryon's 125 are quite unlikely." This statement was based on LeGrand's extensive field work and on reports from active bird students indicating an almost total absence of Pine Siskins in the Carolinas during the winter of 1976-1977.

Martha S. Frederick, compiler of the Tryon bird counts, informs us that Robert Gibbs, "a very competent birder and a retired National Park Service Supervisor, saw at least 110 of these birds near the Pacolet River on count day. Ten more were seen by him and Mrs. Gibbs at their feeder that day." While the feeder birds could have been stragglers from the flock previously counted by Mr. Gibbs, there seems to be no reason to doubt that a large number of Pine Siskins were in the vicinity of Tryon on 30 December 1976. The editors thank Mrs. Frederick for setting the record straight. We hope that Mr. Gibbs and others who reported Pine Siskins on the 1976 CBC understand the reasons for Mr. LeGrand's skepticism and realize that no personal offense was intended.—EFP

Birds and the Wright Brothers

"Birds are the most perfectly trained gymnasts in the world and are especially well fitted for their work, and it may be that man will never equal them, but no one who watched a bird chasing an insect can doubt that feats are performed which require three or four times the effort required in ordinary flight. I believe that simple flight at least is possible to man. ..." So wrote Wilbur Wright from his home in

Dayton, Ohio, in 1899, a few years before he and brother Orville came to North Carolina. The words are taken from one of hundreds of letters in *Miracle at Kitty Hawk, The Letters of Wilbur and Orville Wright,* edited by Fred C. Kelly and published by Farrar, Straus and Young, New York, in 1951.

Still in Dayton, Wilbur wrote about his obsession with flight. "The flight of the buzzard and similar sailors is a convincing demonstration of the value of skill and the partial needlessness of motors."

In the same letter, "My observation of the flight of buzzards leads me to believe that they regain their lateral balance when partly overturned by a gust of wind, by a torsion of the tips of the wings. If the rear edge of the right wing is twisted upward and the left downward, the bird becomes an animated windmill and instantly begins to turn, a line from its head to its tail being the axis."

By 1900, the Wrights had made camp at Kitty Hawk, and Orville wrote to his sister, "We have succeeded in killing two large fish hawks each measuring over five feet from tip to tip; in chasing a lot of chicken hawks till we were pretty well winded; and in scaring several large bald eagles."

Wilbur's note book contains references to the brothers' study of birds. This from 1900, "The buzzard which uses the dihedral angle finds greater difficulty to maintain equilibrium in strong winds than eagles and hawks which hold their wings level. Hawks are better soarers than buzzards but more often resort to flapping because they wish greater speed. A damp day is unfavorable for soaring unless there is a high wind. No birds soar in a calm."

Notes on the Fish Crow Inland and Nest Defense

The article on the "Changing Status of the Fish Crow Inland" (Fink, *Chat* 39:67-71, 1975) has made me pay far more attention to crows than I did in the past. This spring I have listened for Fish Crows from Winston-Salem to the Outer Banks. I didn't hear any at Winston-Salem, but that doesn't mean they were not present. I was just too busy enjoying conversations with CBC friends. Fish Crows were present, but outnumbered by Common Crows, in the areas I covered on the Raleigh and Roanoke Rapids Spring Bird Counts. In both cases I was working near a river.

On 12 April 1977 I heard a Fish Crow calling from a stand of pines on a ridge between Tar River and Cypress Creek near Lake Sagamore in Franklin County, N.C. Fish Crows were heard in the same vicinity on several dates between then and mid-May, but I never found a nest or other evidence of breeding. On 11 May, however, I was surprised to hear distinct Fish Crow calls coming from a roadside thicket only a few feet from my car. The caller was a Yellow-breasted Chat!

On 7 May I heard a Fish Crow calling from the tall pines in my yard. Almost immediately it took flight with a male Common Grackle and an Eastern Kingbird in hot pursuit all the way across the fairway. It continued to call from distant pines for quite some time, but apparently it did not return to my yard.

Nest defense is a fascinating aspect of bird study. Despite the commotion, there usually does not seem to be any physical contact between the defender and the invader. On 22 May I was attracted by the squawks of a Brown Thrasher. A Blue Jay departed hastily, leaving behind a shower of contour feathers, I counted 10 that landed in the driveway and may have missed a few that drifted into the bushes. Obviously the Brown Thrasher hit its target.—ELOISE F. POTTER, Route 3, Box 114 AA, Zebulon, N.C. 27597.