CBC Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

Late Nesting in Bluebirds

How late in summer will the Eastern Bluebird nest? I've not researched the problem but was nonetheless surprised to find that three of six houses under my care contained clutches on 19 July 1978. Nesting was a little later than usual in 1978. Usually I can expect eggs as early as mid-April, but little nesting seems to have been started sooner than 1 May. Nonetheless, on 19 July one of boxes contained three nests built in successive layers virtually to the level of the entrance hole. Thus at least one of the houses was likely fostering a third brood. Seven subadults were observed in the area, one group of three accompanying a pair that had begun to brood a new clutch.

The first 2 weeks in July at Raleigh were hot and dry. About 6 days before the three clutches were observed saw abundant rainfall and lower temperatures. Do bluebirds synchronize summer breeding with availability of moisture, which might be expected to generate increased food supply? Or do they respond to the moderate temperatures that usually follow rains? I've noted that the young of the Purple Martin run the risk of starvation during hot dry periods, presumably from the supression of diurnal insect populations. Have others made observations on the breeding of bluebirds in mid and late summer?—JOSHUA A. LEE, 5104 Newcastle Road, Raleigh, N.C. 27606

What's Going on Here?

A little before 4 o'clock on the afternoon of 31 July 1978, I watched a Chipping Sparrow bathing at the edge of my fish pool. The bird flew to a perch, preened, and then moved to another perch where it sat perfectly still for a little while. Suddenly another Chipping Sparrow dived upon the perched bird, and the two tumbled to the ground. After a brief struggle, the dominant bird strutted away. Its crown feathers were erect, its breast was puffed out, and its wings were drooped. The other bird remained crouched on the ground at least 5 minutes, occasionally turning its head. Finally it took a few steps and flew to a perch. Almost immediately the dominant bird chased it out of sight. What were these Chippies doing? Did I see a family feud? Or late summer courtship antics? Does anyone have information on this kind of behavior?—ELOISE F. POTTER, Route 3, Box 114 AA, Zebulon, N.C. 27597

More on Identification of Avocet Chicks

Gilbert S. Grant of the Department of Biology, University of California at Los Angeles, offers additional information on the identification of American Avocet chicks in response to the note by William McVaugh Jr. (Chat 42:31-32). According to Grant, two very obvious features distinguishing stilt and avocet chicks are (1) that stilts have three toes while avocets have four (hind toe is rudimentary), and (2) that stilts have almost no webbing between the toes while avocets have extensive webbing. Grant further comments that the bird shown in McVaugh's excellent photograph is obviously an avocet "as you can see both the webbing and the hind toe in addition to the characters he mentions."

When Can We See Birds?

There are many members of the Carolina Bird Club who—for varied and valid reasons—cannot go on rigorous Christmas Counts or Spring Counts, or take exotic trips to the mountains or the offshore waters. But everybody can note the birds at his own backyard feeder. If you are willing to be a careful observer and record your observations, you can increase your own life list and add to the knowledge of birds in the Carolinas.

Here's a list of some (not all) of the small birds that spend the winter with us. How early do they arrive? How late do they stay? Your feeding station is one of the best places to answer the questions. Make a careful note of dates. We'll give you credit in this column if you extend any of the dates. A good place to write your observations is the "Checklist of North Carolina Birds," available for a dollar from CBC Headquarters, P.O. Box 1220, Tryon, N.C. 28782.

	Earliest Arrival	Latest Departure
Red-breasted Nuthatch (outside mountains)	25 August	18 May
Brown Creeper (outside mountains)	7 September	20 May
Winter Wren (outside mountains)	23 September	3 May
Short-billed Marsh Wren	10 August	17 May
Hermit Thrush	12 October	28 May
Golden-crowned Kinglet (outside mountains)	7 October	27 April
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	19 August	7 May
Water Pipit	25 August	23 May
Orange-crowned Warbler	5 October	19 May
Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler	28 August	1 June
Palm Warbler	25 September	10 May
Yellow-headed Blackbird	3 August	9 April
Rusty Blackbird	6 October	16 June
Brewer's Blackbird	19 October	7 May
Evening Grosbeak (outside mountains)	23 September	24 May
Purple Finch (outside mountains)	7 August	1 June
Pine Grosbeak	29 December	30 May
Common Redpoll	19 October	5 April
Pine Siskin (outside mountains)	23 October	24 June
White-winged Crossbill	17 December	28 February
Savannah Sparrow	3 August	26 May
Sharp-tailed Sparrow	1 October	27 May
Dark-eyed Junco (outside mountains)	19 September	30 May
Tree Sparrow	24 November	8 May
Fox Sparrow	26 October	18 May
Lincoln's Sparrow	12 September	14 May
Lapland Longspur	5 October	16 March
Snow Bunting	23 October	29 April

Note: These records are for North Carolina. We urge our readers and members in South Carolina to send in dates for that State.

Bird Watcher's Digest

Every now and then I receive a complaint that *Chat* is "too scientific" or "too professional." While I take this as a well deserved compliment to the many amateurs who contribute clear and concise papers and notes to our pages, I can sympathize with the dissatisfied readers. *Chat* does not have a large enough proportion of popular material. Judging from my own struggles at the typewriter, I'd say that a first-rate informal nature essay requires more effort than a purely scientific paper of comparable length. That's why much "nature writing" is anything but first-rate, and that's why *Chat* receives precious little or it, whatever the quality.

Now the bird watcher who enjoys informal essays about nature in general and

birds in particular has a magazine all his own. It is *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Edited by William M. Sheppard, the first issue appeared in September of 1978. Subscriptions to the bimonthly are available at $7.50 per year ($9.00 outside U.S. and territories) from P.O. Box 110, Marietta, Ohio 45750.

The first issue contains 32 short articles reprinted from newspapers and magazines all across the country. Regardless of the quality of the research and the writing, all the pieces radiate enthusiasm for the subject. One of the better contributions is by John Parrish of the Asheville *Citizen-Times*. Titled "Great Smokies Paradise for Bird Watchers," it is essentially an interview with Arthur Stupka, an expert on the birds of the Smokies and an articulate gentleman to boot. An article on bird banding reprinted from *Carnegie Magazine* offers a good introduction to the subject, but experienced bird watchers will find little really new to them. This piece does contain the interesting statement that a Red-eyed Vireo that left the Carnegie Museum's Powdermill Reserve banding station in Pennsylvania one September evening in 1974 was found the next morning near Raleigh, N.C., where it had struck a TV tower.

Skimming the September issue, I did not notice any of the dreadful typographical errors, misleading statements and anthropomorphism that seem to mar most newspaper stories about birds and other aspects of natural history. Apparently the editorial staff chose the articles with an eye for accuracy as well as for the catchy lead paragraph. The publishers state that more than 2,700 articles were reviewed in selecting those for the first issue. Whether the quality can be maintained for six issues per year, year after year, is anybody's guess. I believe there is a broad readership for first-rate popular but factual stories about birds. Perhaps the very existence of *Bird Watcher's Digest* will stimulate newspaper editors to recruit capable nature writers who will, in turn, provide fresh material for the digest. Such a happy coincidence would be a boon to bird clubs all across the land.—EFP

Harry Towles Davis
1897-1978

Harry Towles Davis, director of the North Carolina State Museum of Natural History from 1937 to 1966, died at Sea Level, N.C., on 6 September 1978. Davis came to the museum in 1920 as curator of geology, but his interests spanned all fields of natural history. A charter member of Carolina Bird Club, Davis served as president of the organization and edited the Newsletter for many years. Many of the young naturalists he encouraged have made outstanding contributions to science, and several now serve on the staff of the institution he once headed.—EFP