

Street in Raleigh, N.C. The bird flew with an acorn in its bill to a nearby telephone pole. In a matter of seconds it had worked its way nearly to the top of the pole. The bird stopped, pushed the acorn into a hole, and then returned to the base of the oak for another acorn. The same procedure was repeated, except that when the second acorn was thrust into the hole, an acorn popped out the other side. Immediately, the ludicrousness of the situation was apparent. The woodpecker was attempting to fill a hole bored completely through the diameter of the pole.

The Red-headed Woodpecker is known to wedge acorns into cracks and chinks, and its near relative, the Acorn Woodpecker (*M. formicivorus*), has a propensity for storing acorns in holes drilled for that purpose. But that knowledge in no way lessened this comedy. Because an acorn popped out on the second trip observed, the bird obviously had been engaged in the activity for some time prior to my arrival. Comparing the size of the acorn (maximum of 1 cm) to the diameter of the pole (minimum of 20 cm at the height of the hole) indicates approximately 20 previous trips.

However, the most intriguing aspect of this activity was the woodpecker's apparent "agitation" at not being able to fill the hole. After pushing an acorn in, the bird would often hitch around the pole just in time to see an acorn hit the ground. It would then move to the exit hole and chatter loudly. On occasion the bird would pick up a "processed" acorn and reinsert it.

The number of acorns pushed out at each visit varied from none to two, with one being the usual number. The bird always inserted the acorn on the same side of the pole, thereby creating distinct "in" and "out" holes. Because each acorn could be used more than once and the starting time for the activity is unknown, no estimate of the total attempts at filling the hole can be made. However, the approximate number of attempts needed before acorns were pushed out the other side (20) plus the number of observed attempts (14) yields a minimum of 34.

I watched the activity about 10 minutes. When a pedestrian passed close to the pole, the bird flew and did not return within the next 10 minutes. No further activity was seen on subsequent visits.

This is not the only report of Sisyphean behavior in the Red-headed Woodpecker. A.C. Bent (Life Histories of North American Woodpeckers, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 174, p. 202-203) records an almost identical observation reported by George A. Dorsey in 1926.

## **Warblers in Southwestern North Carolina, Including Cerulean Warblers in Clay County**

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On 9 and 10 May 1979 my tour schedule with the North Carolina Symphony allowed me considerable time to search for warblers in southwestern North Carolina. The areas covered on 9 May were in Graham County: NC 28 from US 19 to Fontana Village (0730-1030) and SR 1246 and SR 1247 west of Fontana Village (1100-1400). Areas on 10 May were in Clay, Macon, Jackson, and Haywood Counties: US 64 and US 23 to the Blue Ridge Parkway northbound to Richland Balsam (1100-1800). The method of locating birds was to drive slowly, listening for songs. Stops were made for visual confirmations and at apparently favorable habitats. Notes on nesting behavior and information supplemental to Harry E. LeGrand's 1973 warbler distribution and abundance study (Chat 39:45-54) follow. Terms of abundance correspond to those used by LeGrand.

Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*): common along US 64 between Hayesville and Franklin at elevations over 3000 feet. Blue-winged Warbler (*V. pinus*): an individual was singing the typical "beebuzz" song in Graham County. Northern Parula

(*Parula americana*): a female was seen entering a nest in western Macon County. Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*): one was observed in Graham County at a location described by LeGrand (Chat 43:20). Blackburnian Warbler (*D. fusca*): common in the Canadian Zone around Richland Balsam. Some appeared paired. Chestnut-sided Warbler (*D. pennsylvanica*): nearly 100 birds were estimated along the parkway on 10 May. A more careful survey might have indicated "abundant" status. Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*): one of two in Graham county carried nest material.

In addition, two Cerulean Warblers (one confirmed visually) were singing within hearing of each other, ¼ mile N of US 64 on Shooting Creek Road, 5 miles W of the Clay-Macon county line. This is the first published occurrence of the Cerulean Warbler in Clay County. The close proximity of the two singing males suggests the colonial behavior observed in the species at other North Carolina sites (see Chat 43:20). The habitat was mature hardwoods on steep slopes at an elevation of 3000 feet.

On four occasions I heard calls that were attributed to Worm-eating Warblers (*Helmitheros vermivorus*), but the birds were not seen. Despite the use of a tape recorder, no Swainson's Warblers (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*) were found in the previously occupied areas near Fontana Village (Harry LeGrand, pers. comm.). The other warbler species present were Black-and-white (*Mniotilta varia*), Yellow (*D. petechia*), Black-throated Green (*D. virens*), Yellow-throated (*D. dominica*), Blackpoll (*D. striata*), Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*), Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*), Kentucky (*Oporornis formosus*), Hooded (*Wilsonia citrina*), and American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*).

## Grackles Exhibit Common Defensive Behavior Against an American Alligator

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On 28 April 1979, while conducting field work on Caper's Island, north of Charleston, S.C., I observed an unusual display of aggressive common defense. As I studied a colony of nesting Boat-tailed Grackles on a small island in a brackish impoundment, a large (10-foot) American Alligator approached the colony from the edge of the pond. Although the alligator advanced with only its head above water, two female Boat-tailed Grackles and a male Red-winged Blackbird began mobbing the alligator when it came within 100 feet of the colony. Flying in tight circles above the alligator's head and uttering constant alarm cries, the three birds harassed the intruder for approximately 15 minutes. At times, the female Boat-tailed Grackles came within 2 inches of the alligator's head as though they were attempting to land.

While aggressive defensive behavior is commonly displayed by both individuals and groups of birds against such enemies as mammals, snakes, and other birds, little documentation exists on attacks on alligators (Bent 1958, Pettingill 1970). This seemingly ambitious defense is not unwarranted, however, because the alligator has been known to prey on the eggs and young of the Boat-tailed Grackle, although occurrences are apparently rare (Audubon 1834, Bent 1958).

### LITERATURE CITED

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