



Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

Color-marked White Ibises

During the 1980 breeding season, nearly 300 juvenile White Ibises from the vicinity of Georgetown, S.C., were marked with orange wing tags. The tags are on one wing only, with black numbers and in some cases numbers in combination with letters. A report of any sightings would be useful and much appreciated *even if you cannot distinguish the number*. The purpose of the color marking is to determine the nature and extent of post-fledging dispersal. Louis C. Fink has already reported one marked bird from the Rocky Mount, N.C., area. If you see any orange-tagged White Ibises, please send the date, location, and tag number to PETER FREDERICK, Zoology Department, Wilson Hall 046-A, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514.

Woodpeckers and Galls

The Winter 1979 Newsletter from the Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology carries an item pertaining to the feeding habits of Downy Woodpeckers:

“At this time of year dead stalks of goldenrod stand erect in fields and along roadsides, enduring the winds and snows of winter. Many of the stems are marked by nearly spherical growths, called galls, which are formed by the activity of the goldenrod gall fly. An adult fly lays eggs in the terminal bud of the goldenrod. When the eggs hatch, the larvae tunnel into the soft pith of the stem, where they undergo a series of molts and then pupate. They emerge the following May as adults, which live for only a few days.

“At least one bird seems to take advantage of this source of food: Downy Woodpeckers have been observed pecking on goldenrod galls. Two biologists, Ronald Moeller and Mark Thogerson, studied predation on gall larvae by Downy Woodpeckers in Iowa. They noted that the woodpeckers worked much more frequently on galls inhabited by larvae than on empty ones. The birds probed with their bills in search of the escape tunnel, by which they gained access to the larvae. In selecting galls they showed a decided preference for those at greater heights from the ground, as well as those of larger diameter. Since size is directly correlated with occupancy by gall fly larvae, the birds probably select galls to probe on the basis of their size.

“The Downy Woodpecker preys upon these larvae, one of the many items in its diet, throughout the winter. The erect, stiff goldenrod stalks easily support the small bird as it exploits one of its few food sources other than trees and shrubbery.”

(Continued on Page 120)

THE BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' GUIDE TO BIRD LIFE

Jim Flegg, consultant editor. 1980. Blandford Press, Ltd., Poole, Dorset, England. Distributed in U.S. by Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., Two Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016. Illus. with 128 color plates. Indexed. 324 p. \$27.50.

If you are assembling bird books in preparation for a trip to Great Britain, do not allow yourself to be misled by the title and jacket blurb for this one, which purports to be "a luxurious reference book which not only provides the aids to identification found in the pocket guides but also gives all the extra details and information necessary for the birdwatcher to understand bird life and habitats." The binding and color reproduction are very nice, indeed luxurious compared to the average pocket field guide. Unfortunately, part of the copy for the title page, all of the copyright page, and two of the four pages of introductory material were accidentally omitted in the original printing and had to be inserted as a loose four-page folder. In four pages the author tries to cover the pleasures of bird study, equipment and fieldcraft, bird finding, and bird distribution and biology. Almost nothing is said about habitats beyond the fact that "each area has its specialities." Most pocket field guides have more "how to" information than this.

The 128 workman-like illustrations by an unnamed group of Scandinavian artists are printed consecutively at the front of the book. Numbers correspond to the appropriate species in the descriptive notes at the back of the book. Only 300 species are illustrated and described, and several of these (e.g. Hazel Hen, Ural Owl, and Middle Spotted Woodpecker) are not found in Britain and Ireland, an area where more than 460 avian species have been recorded. This would not be unforgivable if the accounts truly bridged the gap between the pocket field guides and the multi-volume reference works. Unfortunately the descriptive notes devote half of the space, on the average, to field identification and calls. Breeding, food, and status are generally given a superficial treatment, though some accounts of breeding habits are well done. In the sections on calls, food, and status, the author lapses into a disconcerting mixture of complete and incomplete sentences. There are other lapses, too. The dark bill of the Pochard is said to distinguish it from the Red-necked Pochard drake, which has a red bill. I assume Red-crested Pochard was intended. Although the several drawings of bird topography illustrate most of the terms used in the descriptive notes, some important terms (e.g. mantle) are not included. There is no glossary. The index to English names is a bit of a surprise: Common Gull is listed under the Cs, Herring Gull under the Hs, and so forth.

On the whole this book strikes me as something hastily thrown together in order to market a set of color pictures. The novice British bird watcher may find the book appealing and helpful, but he will soon outgrow its limited scope. Visitors to the British Isles are advised to stick to the standard field guides for Britain and Europe until they can find something more comprehensive than Flegg's well-intentioned but seriously flawed book.—EFP

CBC ROUNDTABLE (Continued from Page 103)

This article reminds me of the several times I have seen Downy Woodpeckers apparently feeding on the standing dead stalks of Cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) in winter. Sometimes the birds are hardly more than a foot or two above the ground. I wonder what insects they find as they tap noisily on the hollow-sounding woody stems.—EFP