

BOOK REVIEWS

STORIES ABOUT BIRDS AND BIRD WATCHERS

Mary Beacom Bowers, ed. 1981. Atheneum, 597 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. Illus. by Bob Hines. 234 p. Hardcover, \$12.95.

RANDOM RAMBLINGS OF AN EVERYDAY BIRDPWATCHER

Yulee Larner. 1980. Ramblings, 1020 W. Beverley Street, Staunton, Virginia 24401. Illus. by Mary Pemberton. 60 p. Softcover, \$4.60 ppd. (Virginia residents add 16¢ tax.)

If you enjoy the Backyard Birding department of *Chat* and informal nature essays in general, you will want to read both of the books listed above. *Stories About Birds and Bird Watchers* is a collection of choice articles from *Bird Watcher's Digest*, which has been edited since its debut in 1978 by Mary Bowers, a native Tar Heel and a graduate of the University of North Carolina. Mrs. Larner is a nature columnist for the *Staunton News-Leader* and chairman of the records committee of the Virginia Society of Ornithology. Some of her columns have been reprinted in BWD.

The informal essay has an honorable place in the ornithological literature. It can attract and educate people who appreciate the beauty of nature but are not yet ready for scientific papers. It can toss out ideas not adequately documented for formal publication and encourage people to confirm or refute those ideas. It can stimulate curiosity and enthusiasm. It can promote conservation. It can preserve the human side of bird study, the meaningful personal experiences that almost never appear in the pages of scientific journals.

I have just one complaint about BWD and numerous other publications that cater to the needs of the amateur naturalist. Their editors almost to the very last one follow style manuals that dictate treating the English names of birds as common nouns. I believe that common names duly adopted by an appropriate scientific body are proper nouns and should begin with capital letters. Then the reader is not left to wonder if the writer means the species Common Tern or just any old tern that is common in the given area. After all, a Common Tern may be not at all common at certain times and places. Can you imagine the possibilities for confusion in a sentence about a rare common tern? Mrs. Larner, with her background in scientific publication, wisely uses up-style in her book. I hope other editors of popular nature publications will soon follow her fine example.—EFP

[NOTE: *Bird Watcher's Digest* appears bimonthly. Subscriptions are \$9 per year from BWD, P.O. Box 110, Marietta, Ohio 45750. The March/April 1981 issue has an article by Lee Jones, a North Carolinian who went to California to attend graduate school and now has a Ph.D. and his own business in Topanga.—ED.]

ON THE ROAD WITH JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

Mary Durant and Michael Harwood. 1980. Dodd, Mead & Company, New York. Several hundred black-and-white photographs. 638 p. \$19.95

The authors, a husband-and-wife team of professional writers, spent 13 months retracing the travels of Audubon from Mill Grove, Pennsylvania, to the Dry Tortugas, Texas, Labrador, and Montana. Using the artist's voluminous writings as a guide, they looked for the places he described and tried to find descendants of people who knew and even entertained Audubon. Most nights, they camped in a tent and bemoaned the unkempt condition of many camp grounds. They looked for birds in the places where

Audubon found them, sometimes with success and sometimes not. The Carolinas are well covered, of course.

I found the book highly entertaining, with many insights into Audubon's character, as well as that of his wife, Lucy Bakewell. Audubon's weaknesses and strong points are thoroughly explored. Besides a general index, there is a bird index with fascinating names: tickle-asses, tinkers, tell-tale godwits, loppers, Cincinnati gulls, and bullbirds. It was a personal satisfaction to me that Audubon confused the Lesser Scaup and the Greater Scaup, my own *bete noir*.—LOUIS FINK

BACKYARD BIRDING

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Like Catchin' Fish in a Barrel

Red-shouldered Hawks are permanent residents along Moccasin Creek, which forms the boundary between Wake and Franklin Counties near Zebulon, N.C. At all seasons of the year these birds hunt for snakes, salamanders, frogs, and ditch eels (*Amphiuma*) in the many small wooded tributaries, including the spring at the bottom of my hill. On many occasions I have seen small birds freeze or take cover when a hawk circled the yard. Once the neighborhood birds mobbed a Red-shouldered as it innocently tried to dine on a freshly caught *Amphiuma*. This gave me the impression that small birds do not distinguish between Red-shouldered Hawks, which prefer aquatic prey, and the other *buteos*, which are more likely to take warm-blooded prey. However, the events of 30 and 31 January 1981 strongly suggest that small birds do know one hawk from another.

Light snow began falling the morning of the thirtieth. By noon the ground was lightly covered, and before nightfall 2 or 3 inches had accumulated locally. About 0900 a subadult Red-shouldered Hawk perched in a tree some 25 feet beyond the feeder farthest from the kitchen window. Many small birds—Cardinals, Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, Dark-eyed Juncos, White-throated Sparrows, Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, Pine Warblers, and assorted woodpeckers—continued to feed and remained undisturbed even when the hawk took flight.

About 1030 the next day, the Red-shouldered sailed past my study window, apparently en route from the feeding area to the spring. At 1615 the big bird was again perched near the feeders, and the small ones again appeared unconcerned, although they prudently avoided drinking from the water trickling over a rock at one end of the fish pool, almost directly under the hawk. The moving water maintains a small circle of open water at the base of the rock even when the rest of the surface is frozen solid, as it was on the thirty-first. I watched the hawk constantly, hoping to get a good look at the wing linings when the bird flew. The hawk was obviously alert and watching for prey, but it made no attempt to molest the feeding birds—not even the one bold soul that perched on a limb no more than 10 feet above its head. About 1650 the hawk suddenly dropped to the small circle of open water. Although the bird's head, body, and feet were hidden by a rock, I could see the wings flapping several times before they came to rest held partly open by the rocks on each side of the bird. The hawk raised its head and stood motionless. A few moments later it hopped to a flat rock nearby, clutching a large frog, apparently a Bullfrog because the venter was white with many dark spots. A minute later the hawk flew away with its prey. "Like catchin' fish in a barrel," I thought. Although the small birds paid no attention to the successful hunting expedition, they returned to drink at the pool shortly after the hawk departed.—ELOISE POTTER, Route 3, Box 114AA, Zebulon, N.C. Zebulon, N.C. 27597