



Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

More About Rough-winged Swallows and Dot Maps

Many CBC members have expressed appreciation for the range map that accompanied the article by Steve Platania and Mary Kay Clark on the Rough-winged Swallow (Chat 45:100-102). Gail Whitehurst reports an adult carrying food to a nest in a drainpipe in Pender County 12 and 13 June 1979. Daniel M. Kaplan adds a dot for Orange County with this account dated 15 June 1982: "I first noticed a pair of Rough-winged Swallows flying around the new wing of Wilson Library on the UNC campus on 8 June. I subsequently located the nest, containing at least two young, in the mouth of a pipe about 6 inches in diameter which protrudes slightly from the wall at the basement level of the building. I have observed the adults feeding the young in the nest nearly every day since then."

Breeding birds are fairly well documented for the immediate coast, for counties with major cities in the piedmont, and for the high-elevation portions of the mountains. Elsewhere in North Carolina, particularly in the coastal plain, it is almost impossible to find any published breeding records. *It is not necessary to collect a nest or eggs to establish a local breeding record.* All we need is the name of the species, date, place, evidence of breeding, and name of the observer though further details are very useful. Evidence might be adults building a nest, carrying food toward a nest, or feeding young birds out of the nest. The species does not have to be rare to be of interest.

An atlas of the breeding birds of North Carolina is in preparation and should be published within the next 2 to 3 years by the N.C. Biological Survey. If you live in any of the counties that do not have dots for the Rough-winged Swallow, chances are very good that a map of the Carolina Wren, Blue Jay, or Cardinal would not have a dot either. Records intended for the atlas may be sent to Eloise Potter or David Lee. Accurate information on the breeding distribution of birds is very important for various ecological studies and useful to the average bird watcher as well. Your help is needed, and it will be appreciated. ELOISE POTTER, Route 3, Box 114AA, Zebulon, N.C. 27597.

Remarks on the Identification of Brewer's Blackbirds

Over the past few years I have received a number of reports of Brewer's Blackbirds, some with good details and others with none whatsoever. I have published most of these reports, but some of my fellow birders have expressed concern over published sightings from residential areas, especially from semi-

wooded habitats. I now believe that a handful of the recent published records, including a report of 1500 on the Charlotte, N.C., Christmas Bird Count in 1971, may have been of birds incorrectly identified. The following comments are helpful hints for identifying this species in the Carolinas.

Brewer's Blackbirds are birds of open country, especially of cattle feedlots. They may occur also in plowed fields, large open lawns, and pastures, but they are most frequently seen near cattle where the grass is very closely cropped. Although they roost with other blackbirds in woods and thickets, their foraging is generally limited to pastures and fields.

The species is essentially a rare migrant in the Carolinas, though it may winter in very small numbers from the Columbia, S.C., area west to the Georgia line. It is a rare though regular migrant (mainly in November, March, and April) in northwestern South Carolina and southwestern North Carolina (Asheville west). The species is very rare east of Asheville, Columbia, and Savannah, Ga.

Brewer's Blackbirds are approximately the same size and shape as Rusty Blackbirds, which also frequently occur in pastures and open lawns (as well as in swamps and wet thickets). Rusties also are not unusual on semi-wooded lawns. Male Brewer's, even in winter, still retain some glossy coloration, but in spring the birds are much more iridescent, with purple heads and aqua, blue-green bodies. Two field marks not stressed in guides, but excellent marks nonetheless, are the moderately short bill and the brilliant yellow-white eye (of the male only). The bill is shorter than that of the Rusty Blackbird, being approximately intermediate between the conical bill of the Brown-headed Cowbird and the long, tapered bill of the Common Grackle. The eyes of the males are noticeably more conspicuous than the pale yellowish eyes of Common Grackles and Rusty Blackbirds. Female Brewer's is a rather nondescript bird, with the same brownish-gray and unstreaked plumage of most female cowbirds, but Brewer's are larger than cowbirds with somewhat longer bills and tails. Female Brewer's have dark eyes, whereas female Rusties have pale eyes (though the light eye may be difficult to see at a distance).

My experience with Brewer's Blackbirds in the Carolinas might also be helpful to persons searching for the species. I birded eight years at Raleigh, N.C., and never saw the species there or elsewhere in the state. In 1970 I checked out a report of a male Brewer's from a wooded yard at Raleigh; the bird was a small female grackle. In eight years of birding at Clemson, S.C., I have seen Brewer's twice in November and three times in March. Despite the most intensive search for them in December to February, I have yet to find one in winter. On three occasions the birds were feeding in cattle feedlots, and on another were feeding with cattle in a pasture where the grass was a few inches high. On the fifth occasion the birds (a flock of ten) were in a plowed field. At Clemson I have seen Rusty Blackbirds feeding on lawns on many occasions, but all Brewer's have been in agricultural areas. HARRY E. LeGRAND JR.

Saving The Birds

A pair of Condors under observation in California squabbled and pushed their egg out of the nest. Forty days later, another egg was laid and is being watched closely.

In Maryland, 45 pairs of Bald Eagles have been found incubating. These observations around Chesapeake Bay are encouraging.

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In western North Carolina, Asheville bird club members are assisting U.S. Fish and Wildlife personnel with a survey of Great Horned Owls in preparation for a planned Peregrine Falcon hacking program. For about 7 weeks they observed nesting owls at Lake Julian Park from a blind constructed some 35 feet above ground. An article in *Asheville South*, 22 June 1982, reported that the adult owls were aware of the visitors and never went to the nest while anyone was in the blind. Park officials protected the two fledgling owls by not releasing news of their presence until after they left the nest.

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female cowbird was feeding on some birdseed. I tossed out some of my food and she flew to my feet and ate. Then, as she did not make any move to leave, I began walking slowly about the lawn. The cowbird followed me. I began scuffing my feet through the grass and, to my surprise and delight, she followed me and began looking for insects. However, this early in the spring there were none to be found, so she gave up and flew away. This pretty well convinced me that she had to be my little #5 cowbird of the summer preceding—no other bird would have responded to my actions in that same manner. We never did have the opportunity to “play cow” again. Oh how I wished that I had been able to have banded that little fledgling!

Although the pair of adult cowbirds stayed around until July, I never did have any new young fledglings to feed and study that summer—nor the next one, either. Maybe this year, come hot, sticky, dull August, I will once again have the chance to “play cow.”—GAIL T. WHITEHURST, 1505 Brooks Avenue, Raleigh, N.C. 27607