



Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

Martins vs. Sparrows

The number of articles on Purple Martins seems to be increasing, and that pleases me, inasmuch as I have promoted the martin for years. Still, I sometimes get a chuckle when I read these, for some bear the unmistakable stamp of my own pen. Well, that's one way to become an expert; just promulgate the profundities, and the errors, of the "experts" who've gone on before.

Most of the articles point out that House Sparrows and European Starlings are the natural enemies of the martin. That is true, but apparently not under all conditions. In the 23 years I've kept martins here at Raleigh, there has not been one starling or sparrow nest in the colony, and that's not because I've taken the old blunderbuss to the miscreants.

I've always used gourds, and there's something about a gourd that the starling doesn't seem to like. Perhaps it's because a gourd sways too much in the breeze. Sparrows have no such qualms about being jiggled, and every year that rolls around they attempt to nest in my martin's gourds, but they always give up before any eggs are laid. I don't know why the sparrows quit, but suspect that the noise around a well-inhabited martin colony is a bit disconcerting.

Martins rarely attack sparrows. Rather, they subject them to a much more cruel fate; they talk them to death. I would not like to have to perch all day long in a colony of 24 chattering martins, so to that extent I can sympathize with the sparrows.

There might be something didactic in the above. A strong colony of martins can look after itself. Provide the birds with a modest number of gourds of the right size, space the gourds out, and provide plenty of room for perching. After all, the martins can't drive friend sparrow batty with their patter if they have to perch on utility wires half a block away.—JOSHUA A. LEE, 5104 Newcastle Street, Raleigh, N.C.

Just How Broody are Bluebirds?

I've frequently read references to bluebirds being double, or even triple, brooded. The problem is that I don't know just what multiple-broodedness means. Does it mean that a given pair of birds rears out more than one brood during a given nesting season, makes multiple attempts at nesting, or what? Now I've seen bluebird eggs in the nest from early April through 1 August, but

that only proves that the birds will attempt to nest over a lengthy period of time and not that a given pair will attempt to raise as many broods as possible.

There were seven bluebird houses along my trail near Raleigh in 1982, and all were occupied. Nesting was somewhat later than usual, the first eggs appearing on 17 April. One brood was fledged from each house with no further attempts at nesting after a brood had flown. Three pairs fledged broods on the first attempt, and the remaining pairs—I can't be sure that the same pairs were involved—were successful on a second attempt. The progress of two broods—one of three and the other of five—was followed into August. These juveniles and their parents remained in the territory and might have used the nesting box for roosting. These two examples were definitely single-brooded, as was another pair. The remaining four examples, whether representing re-nesting attempts or new pairs, also reared but one brood. Could it be that bluebirds at our latitude are frequently, perhaps most often, single-brooded in the sense that one success shuts down nesting for the remainder of the season? —JOSHUA A. LEE, 5104 Newcastle Street, Raleigh, N.C.

100th Anniversary

The American Ornithologists' Union, oldest and largest of the ornithological societies in North America, is celebrating the hundredth anniversary of its founding in 1983. Its quarterly journal, *The Auk*, now includes about 1000 pages a year of papers on a wide variety of ornithological topics. The long-awaited sixth edition of the AOU *Check-List of North American Birds* will be published in time for the centennial meeting. If interested in knowing more about the AOU, please write to Membership Chairman, Dr. Gustav A. Swanson, Department of Fishery and Wildlife Biology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado 80523.

A Word for the Wilderness

In the 16 August 1982 issue of *Newsweek*, George F. Will mounted a strong defense of an irreplaceable asset in a column titled "A Word for the Wilderness." The concluding paragraphs should be kept in mind by all CBC members as we attempt to introduce our fellow citizens to the joys of bird watching and the responsibilities of conservation:

"This nation began as an 'errand into the wilderness.' The first task was to tame that wilderness, but as Wallace Stegner says, we need to preserve some of it 'because it was the challenge against which our character as a people was formed.'

"Most Americans will never care a fig about wilderness. Perhaps that means it is an elitist concern. But so what? Edith Hamilton, the classicist, once said to Ezra Pound: 'I have heard of a great Confucian who wrote a letter so difficult there was only one other man in all of China who could understand it. That is not very democratic, I'm afraid. That is aristocratic, like you, Mr. Pound.' Pound replied: 'It is democratic insofar as it provides that anyone may have the opportunity to learn enough to read that letter.' Enjoyment of wilderness may not be spontaneous and 'natural.' It may be a learned process, inviting and even requiring reflection. But it is nonetheless valuable for being an aristocratic pleasure, democratically open to all."

Newspaper Stories

Friends send me newspaper clippings all the time. These may be of no scientific importance, but they are fun to read and share. From Sanibel, Florida, comes a report that Magnificent Frigatebirds are seen in flocks of 40 or more. One tourist reported that he had noted their ability to pull out of a steep drive, built a model for the wind tunnel, and developed the F4U military bomber!

Also in Sanibel, the J.N. "Ding" Darling N.W.R. people tried to attract Black Skimmers by discing a secluded area. The soil was too black for the birds, who chose a white sandy area near a causeway that is heavily traveled. Large-scale nesting developed.

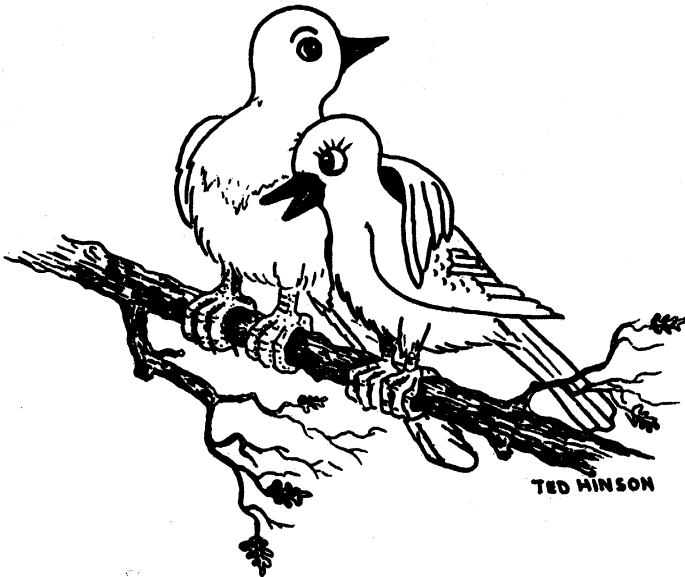
In Thailand, a pigeon was trained to carry heroin, but the police arrested the 18-year-old developer of the idea. The young man bought heroin, strapped it to the bird's leg—and the bird was home before he was.

In Wisconsin, a Whooping Crane was conceived by artificial insemination. The chick has fledged and taken its first flight.

The Air Force Thunderbirds lost a skilled flyer when a Talon jet trainer hit a flock of sea gulls at Burke Lakefront Airport in Cleveland. Gulls and black-birds are a hazard at many airports.—LCF

Superbird

Scientists report the discovery of fossil remains of a teratorn, *Argentavis magnificens*, said to be the world's largest bird that could actually fly. It was 11 feet long, with a 250-foot wingspan and a weight of 160 pounds. I suppose we should be glad it doesn't come to our feeders.



"Do you ever get the feeling we're being watched?"