



Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

An Observation of Violent Behavior in Bald Eagles

The Cape Cod Museum of Natural History sponsored a boat tour down the Inland Waterway in the fall of 1983. The leader was Robert N. Scott, the captain of the vessel was Mark Carpenter, and participants included Sears Crowell and Dorothea Gifford, all of whom identified the birds involved in the incident described below as Bald Eagles. The account written by Capt. Carpenter was forwarded to this department by bird-bander Erma J. (Jonnie) Fisk, author of *The Peacocks of Baboquivari*, a book based on some of her field journals and presently being sold for the benefit of The Nature Conservancy.

On 5 October 1983 the sailing vessel *Morning Star* dropped anchor at 1430 in the South Santee River, S.C., 200 yards south of the I.C.U.

After disembarking a party in the dinghy for crabbing, I was working about deck and heard a noise above. Three mature Bald Eagles were wheeling above and slightly aft. From an altitude of about 60 feet, two of the birds repeatedly attacked the third with talons and beak. I counted three such midair attacks before the bird was forced to the water. No fish were involved. The bird hit the water 100 to 150 feet off the stern and was repeatedly attacked from above. Losing interest, the attacking eagles first circled above and then retreated to a nearby island, watching from a clump of dead trees. The eagle in the water struggled weakly to fly as the wind (SW at 15 to 20 knots) continued to push the bird away from us. . . . Eventually it was lost from sight, and a subsequent search by dinghy failed to recover the bird. The attacking pair remained in the area for several hours before leaving.

Although the observers offer no explanation for the violent behavior they witnessed, Capt. Carpenter's report does seem to eliminate competition for food as a probability. Perhaps it is significant that mating reportedly takes place in the Florida Bald Eagle population from late September through October, a period encompassing the date of the incident.

Crazy Behavior

Jefferson City, Mo., had a drought last summer. Farmers complained that hummingbirds were eating red insulators on electrified fences.

Addendum for Gail Whitehurst

Gail's delightful column, "Backyard Birding," contained some immutable laws for the unwary. May I add a few observations?

A good rule for seeing new species: Announce in a loud voice that you are tired and are through for the day. At that point, the most interesting find will appear.

Visit that particular sanctuary which hosts that one bird you must add to your life-list: The warden will assure you that the bird was plentiful until yesterday.

Entertain a neighbor who discovers you are interested in birds: The neighbor will describe in detail a bird in her back yard which just has to be an Ivory-billed Woodpecker or a King Rail. (I remember one such neighbor in Atlanta who described a Ring-necked Pheasant at his feeder. I was more than skeptical until he brought me a color photo.)

Eagle Fund

National Audubon has offered \$1,000 for information leading to arrest and conviction of the persons who shot two Bald Eagles in South Carolina. A fund has been established to increase such rewards and for an educational campaign. Send contributions to Eagle Fund, National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1268, Charleston, S.C. 29402.

Endangered Species

Our Bald Eagle population dropped from 12,843 to 12,098 (1982 to 1983) according to the National Wildlife Federation. North Carolina's winter population rose from one bird to 16.

Whooping Cranes number 80 at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, 15 at Grays Lake N.W.R. in Idaho, and 30 in captivity.

The world's population of California Condors has increased by 33%, from 20 birds to 27. This is the result of a breeding project by the Audubon Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and two California zoos.

Is the Ivory-billed Woodpecker really extinct? Peter Riggs, a student at Oberlin College in Ohio, spent 3 months in eight States interviewing 75 people who think they might have seen the bird. He said, "There are ten ivory-billed sightings which can be documented, three of them for sure."

Ironic Tale of the New Bird Book

The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding was in this reporter's Christmas stocking and is being enjoyed. The conditions of publication are ironic. The "Audubon Society" trademark is used under license from National Audubon Society. Type for this book about North American birds was set in Syracuse, N.Y., but color reproductions were made in Switzerland, and printing and binding were done in Japan!

(Additional Items on Pages 26 and 28)

- AMERICAN GOLDFINCH:** This species was noted in increased numbers in many areas of the piedmont and upper coastal plain of North Carolina during the summer, including 12+ seen by Philip Crutchfield and party in northeastern Fort Bragg on 23 July.
- RED CROSSBILL:** Douglas McNair observed a flock of nine adults, including a pair undergoing courtship activities, 1 or 2 miles E of Richland Balsam (Jackson-Haywood County line), N.C., on 20 June.
- GRASSHOPPER SPARROW:** A good count for the mountain region was 14, noted singing by Harry LeGrand in eastern Alleghany County, N.C., on 14 June. Rick Knight found another in the mountains at Bakersville, N.C., on 15 June. Rare for Fayetteville were three probable breeders on 23 July, seen by Philip Crutchfield.
- LARK SPARROW:** Lark Sparrows bred near Derby, Richmond County, N.C., in 1981, but there were no reports of the birds last summer. However, in 1983 Douglas McNair found single (nonsinging) birds at two sites near Derby on 17 and 18 May; whereas Ricky Davis had a singing male, apparently on territory, on 25 June at the same site. Thus, breeding may have occurred again this summer.
- BACHMAN'S SPARROW:** This species is apparently absent from the northern coastal plain of North Carolina as a breeder; thus, of note was a singing bird 1.5 miles SE of Glenview in Halifax County on 31 May (Merrill Lynch, Harry LeGrand). The bird was still present in mid-June (Allen Bryan). The habitat consisted of a clump of saplings within a large weedy field.
- DARK-EYED JUNCO:** One of the few breeding-season records for South Carolina was an individual observed singing from 18 to 20 June at Caesar's Head (elevation 3000 feet) by Douglas McNair.
- LAPLAND LONGSPUR:** Perhaps a record count for North Carolina was the 30 to 33 longspurs seen by Douglas McNair at the Laurinburg-Maxton airfield on 22 December 1982. [This species is certainly not as scarce in the Carolinas as the literature indicates. Inland birders should look for Laplands where flocks of Horned Larks occur. The above birds were seen in a flock of 100 larks. Such flocks are generally found in extensive plowed fields, as well as at airports. Along the coast, where the larks are quite rare, look for longspurs in short-grass habitats and in dunes.—HEL]

Newspaper Gleanings

In Duncan, British Columbia, a nighthawk with a broken wing was unable to migrate to South America. It took 4 days of diplomacy to get around the laws covering transportation of migratory birds, but the bird was taken aboard an airplane as carry-on luggage.

In Nantucket, a Western Reef Heron (which resembles a Little Blue) was spotted last spring. Experts decided this bird had not escaped from a zoo, and bird watchers came from far and near. Daphne Gemmill wrote in the *Plain Dealer* that she traveled 1000 miles in 3 days, just to see the bird. This writer is hearing reports that the 600 Club is passe. "Many observers have seen 700 species in North America," he has been told.—LCF

four distinct and separate flyways. He suggests that this concept is now coming under fire as a result of recent investigations. He also introduces a newly discovered route or flyway that extends out into the Atlantic Ocean, which he terms the "Sargasso Sea Loop"—a route taken, for instance, by Blackpoll Warblers in the fall.

There are several pages devoted to hawk migration and astounding numbers, especially of Broad-winged, seen at Hawk Mountain in 1978 and Corpus Christi in 1977. He gives instructions for watching nocturnal migrants against a full moon—no way one can identify them, of course, but exciting viewing.

The chapter on the Christmas Count is both interesting and entertaining. Pistorius covers the subject thoroughly from participation in a well-established count to the setting up of a new one. It includes everything from the recruitment of counters, the methods employed, the pre-count stake-outs, the final compilation complete with the grilling of observers on rare finds. He even mentions the "privilege" we counters have in anteing up our two dollars for *American Birds*. His descriptions of counts which he has participated in were amusing, and I believe almost all Carolina Bird Club members can relate to the events therein. He tells of the headaches and worries of the compiler, from recruiting enough good birders to cover the area to getting accurate descriptions of unusual finds and sending the final report to *American Birds*. He mentions the difficulties of counting in bad weather, extremes of temperatures, high winds. Pistorius is a serious birder (aren't we all?), but he has the gift of poking fun at the whole experience, which I found delightful.

In the chapter on the Big Day, he relates a particular experience in Vermont. His story of the trials and tribulations of trying to cover as much territory as possible in less than ideal weather conditions is great. The element of fierce competition between the two groups of birders as to which one could find the most species reminds one of our Spring Counts here in the Carolinas.

The final chapter is called, "Mapping the Birds of Summer," the latest activity for birders. Called Atlasing, it is a field activity that has been going on in Europe for several years. This program undertakes to give a far more accurate picture of the breeding birds in a given area than the Breeding Bird Censuses and Breeding Bird Surveys have done. It is the hope of the instigators of atlasing, or mapping, to cover all of North America. Atlasing has strict rules, regulations and procedures which, if properly followed, should add much information to our present knowledge of expanding and contracting ranges. It could conceivably come up with some surprises. It should be a valuable and concrete tool for conservationists to use in their struggle to preserve choice habitats. Mapping the birds of summer provides additional activity for the bird student wishing for something constructive to do in the months between spring and fall migration.—GTW

Parrot Gives it Away

In Australia, the rare Orange-bellied Parrot lives on Swan Island, where the Secret Intelligence Service runs a training school. When the Service announced plans to build an airfield, the Victoria state government said construction would endanger the parrots—and the secret training base was revealed.