



Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

All You Ever Wanted to Know about Seaside Sparrows—and More

The Seaside Sparrow: Its Biology and Management is now available for \$15 postpaid from the North Carolina State Museum of Natural History, P.O. Box 27647, Raleigh, N.C. 27611. Edited by Thomas L. Quay, John B. Funderburg Jr., David S. Lee, Eloise F. Potter, and Chandler S. Robbins, this 174-page softbound book is the proceedings of a symposium on the Seaside Sparrow held at Raleigh in October 1981. In addition to the keynote address by F. Eugene Hester, now Deputy Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the book contains 17 scientific papers presented by authorities on the species, including Oliver L. Austin Jr., Herbert W. Kale II, John William Hardy, and William Post. Vicky McDonald's extensive annotated bibliography of the literature on the species will be a valuable aid to future researchers. The book features a full-color 8½ x 11-inch frontispiece by John Henry Dick showing the nine races of the Seaside Sparrow. A phonograph recording prepared by Dr. Hardy demonstrates the various vocalizations mentioned in the text. When ordering publications from the Museum, please make checks payable to NCDA, Museum Extension Fund.

Raptors in the News

Peregrine Falcons, raised in captivity, have been released on Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina. They were kept in cages until familiar with the surroundings, meanwhile being fed by unseen human caretakers.

Bald Eagles have been released in other areas, and at least one pair nested near Lake Mattamuskeet in Hyde County, N.C. Two young hatched in the nest, which is at an undisclosed site on private property.

Incidentally, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has declared the Bald Eagle the "animal of the year."

Newspaper Gleanings

The national spelling bee was won by a boy who knew how to spell "towhee."

Bird-listers, eat your hearts out. Three Kenyans identified 290 species in a 24-hour period. Olive Thrush and African Wood Owl came in the last 30 minutes. According to the press, rules provide for a stretch of 24 hours from midnight to midnight, with the

team limited to four members. Each one of the four must see (or hear?) 95% of the birds to make the count official. The Kenyan team covered 334 miles.

It is estimated that 150,000 pairs of Herring and Ring-billed Gulls create a nuisance in Lake Ontario near Toronto, Canada. A peninsula of compacted trash was built for parkland, and the gulls discovered it. Local beaches had to be closed because of the droppings. Now citizens of Cleveland, Ohio, are worried by an influx of gulls.

Chief of Staff James Baker opened his window in the White House office, and a bird flew in. The General Services Administration tried—without success—to get the bird out; finally, it flew off of its own will. According to UPI, no one was sure whether the bird was a catbird or a mockingbird. (Reminds me of the Song Sparrow we found inside a burglar-proof vault in a bank in Atlanta, Georgia.)

Roger Tory Peterson, from an interview in the *Chicago Tribune*: “Birds don’t have any more freedom than we do; there are definite restrictions. . . . Ichthyologists are birders with bum ears, so they turn to fishes. . . . Columbus was the first American bird watcher, and he followed a flock of birds that cut 200 miles off his trip and may have prevented mutiny. . . . I have seen 4,000 species out of a possible 9,000 or so—but I have never seen a Bachman’s Warbler.”

More About Warblers Ingesting Grit

My note about warblers ingesting grit (Chat 47:103-104) has prompted comments by several readers. Two reports seem appropriate for Roundtable.

Cornelia S. Chapin, 67 Baynard Park Road, Hilton Head, S.C. 29928, writes in a letter dated 12 February 1984: “Your article was of particular interest to me as I have been mixing ground eggshells in my feeder seeds as well as scattering them on the ground. Much to my surprise, a male Yellow-throated Warbler and a pair of Pine Warblers come every day to the feeder. My husband and I have watched them eat the eggshells with apparent gusto. Other birds like thrashers, wrens, towhees, sparrows, chickadees, and titmice also eat the shells. Would you believe they consume a dozen eggshells per week? Could it be the minerals the birds seek as well as grit?”

Joe Jones, Route 2, Box 302, Berryville, Virginia 22611, kindly sent me a copy of his “Bird Notes” column from the *Albany* (Georgia) *Herald* of 6 April 1980. After commenting on the large influx of northbound American Robins and Yellow-rumped Warblers, the author continues:

“Wondering what it is the Yellow-rumped Warblers eat on the ground, I learned I’m not the only Albany birder to whom this is a mystery. When I talked about it with Mrs. Jim Parsons of Cherry Laurel Lane, whose lawn was also alive with Yellow-rumped Warblers on March 26, she said she was so curious as to what they were eating she employed a magnifying glass in an attempt to find out. She drew a blank.

“Using the glass, and expecting to see minute forms of insect life, she examined the ground where the warblers had been feeding and discovered nothing she could imagine would be of interest to them.

“‘Some of them were eating in the driveway,’ she said, ‘so I examined it, too, but couldn’t find anything but gravel. I don’t see how it could have been that. They were

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good numbers this winter, the only crossbill report was one Red near Cashiers, N.C., on 8 January (Douglas McNair). Despite their having been common in the fall at nearby Highlands, McNair was unable to find any Red Crossbills in that town in the winter.

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pecking at the driveway long enough to eat more gravel than they could have lifted off the ground.'

"So we are still wondering what the warblers found so attractive on lawns and driveways. Although the eyes of such birds are better suited than are man's to detect and identify tiny objects at close range, it seems scarcely possible that the warblers are able to recognize and devour morsels too small for Mrs. Parsons to see through her magnifying glass."

John V. Dennis (*A Complete Guide to Bird Feeding*, Knopf, 1980) recommends providing both grit (preferably seashore sand or ground oyster shells) and eggshells at feeding stations, the former for use primarily as a grinding agent and the latter for the calcium content. He points out, however, that several kinds of grit are useful sources of minerals. Dennis notes that supplying grit is especially important when the ground is covered with snow. Desperate for grit, birds sometimes peck at the crumbling mortar of old brick buildings and congregate dangerously close to highways where narrow strips of ground have been cleared during snow removal.

Although there now seems to be convincing evidence that warblers frequently peck grit, their bills do not appear to be well adapted for the process. Perhaps the birds Mrs. Parsons observed remained capable of flight because they were successful in only a few of their many attempts. On sandy Hilton Head Island, birds suffer no shortage of grit, so the warblers' regular consumption of Mrs. Chapin's eggshells should be primarily for the mineral content. After receiving her letter, I put out eggshells, but my birds have not yet developed a taste for them.—ELOISE F. POTTER, Route 3, Box 114 AA, Zebulon, N.C. 27597

NEW PERIODICAL

NEW JOURNAL: *WingTips*, quarterly; Helen S. Lapham, editor and publisher, Box 226, Lansing, N.Y. 14882; subscription price \$8 per year (guaranteed rate for first 3 years to charter subscribers). Sample copy of first issue will be sent free upon request.