



Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

The Art of Pishing

Pishing is the gentle art of making all manner of strange hissing and cheeping sounds in the interest of bringing birds from where you can't see them to where you can see them. The theory is that birds are very curious and that they will investigate sounds that resemble the alarm notes of their own or other species. It is not always easy to explain this to passersby, so some bird-watchers do their pishing when alone or in the company of other pishers.

My principal complaint about pishing is that it doesn't always work. Often it yields only a dry mouth and acute frustration. I will admit, however, that some areas are better than others for the practice of pishing or pish-wishing, to be more phonetic. In my experience, one of the best locations is the Blue Ridge Parkway, though I don't know why. Just a modest amount of pishing in one place produced a catbird, chestnut-sided warbler, black-throated blue warbler, and an unidentified warbler that allowed me one split-second glimpse before disappearing back into a denser thicket. Even intense and sustained pishing did not produce a "curtain call."

I quickly forgot the vanished warbler when a male indigo bunting flew across the parkway and perched on a bare limb about thirty feet up. A close view of that dazzling blue plumage is enough to make me dismiss an uncooperative warbler from my thoughts any day. Especially when the bunting stays in view to cheerfullize me with its effervescent song of pure joy.

A little farther along the parkway I heard a slate-colored junco singing. One hadn't been on my annual list for several years, so I decided to stop and try to locate it. Upon entering a clearing no more than fifty feet off the parkway, I caught my breath as a deer jumped up just ahead of me and displayed his white tail as he disappeared into the woods. For a double reward, the junco was sitting atop an old snag, trilling its even-cadenced song.

As I watched, I thought about the people driving by. It's hard to believe, but some folks drive the Blue Ridge Parkway and never do any walking except to get some food or go to the restroom. They stop at some overlooks but don't get out of the car. They'll go home and tell their friends they have seen the Parkway. They have, it's true, but too bad they didn't *experience* it while they had the chance. Not just for the junco's song but the rustling of the poplars, the deer in a clearing, and perhaps a raven swinging on a thermal.—Excerpted with permission from *Mountain Lake Almanac* by KEN MORRISON, published by the Pineapple Press. This new book contains 101 entries that

vary from sensitive and amusing nature observations to hard-hitting views about what must be done to protect our environment. Roger Tory Peterson says, "This book is an event." A former editor of *Audubon*, Ken Morrison has been both observing and fighting for our natural heritage for more than 40 years. The soft-cover edition is \$8.95, hard-cover is \$11.95. Both are available from book sellers or by mail from Mountain Lake Almanac, P.O. Box 673, Frostproof, Florida 33843. Mailing charge is \$1.50 per copy.

Newspaper Gleanings

Environmentalists in Louisiana are fighting to save 22 Red-cockaded Woodpeckers threatened by gas wells on D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge. Drilling rights were granted before the Refuge was created.

In general, Bald Eagle populations are up: 11,819 wintering in the 48 contiguous States, compared with 9,815 three years ago. The largest gathering is said to be in Glacier National Park, which plays host to as many as 1,000 eagles feeding on salmon.

Waterfowl hunters must buy a "duck stamp"; this year it shows a Cinnamon Teal by Gerald Mobley of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. He gets no fee for the stamp, but may make tens of thousands of prints. In the past, some winning artists are said to have earned a million dollars.

There were 167 Whooping Cranes in North America last September, but seven of them died from a suspected virus carried by insects. The population was down to 15 birds in 1941. (Your reporter remembers seeing 44 out of the total population of 56 in 1970.) The deaths this year occurred at the breeding program in Patuxent, Maryland.

In Springfield, Massachusetts, a golf driving range was opened. Gulls decided the golf balls were clams, picked them up, and tried to crack them by dropping them on paved roads. The range was forced to close!

Down near Sanibel Island, Florida, a fisherman found two baby Ospreys clinging to a nest that was about to sink under the waves. Naturalist Mark Westall decided to put the chicks in a nest in the wild—and the idea worked. The adult birds adopted the chicks, and they grew to maturity. Westall says this is better than trying to raise such birds in captivity.

From the Editor's Mailbox

Regarding the matter of warblers ingesting grit (Chat 47:103-104 and 48:72,84), Martha Frederick, of Tryon, N.C., writes:

"Could it be that salt had been used to defrost ice during the winter? Salt is also used on highways, which might explain birds feeding on narrow strips of ground after snow removal." Martha's comments remind me that neighbor Gladys Baker said that birds were attracted to the ground where her mother used to empty the dishwasher, which was undoubtedly a salty spot. Emptying salt water from an ice-cream freezer outdoors might also provide a salt lick for the birds.

Mike Dunn, of Seven Springs, N.C., inquires about the significance of behavior he noted in the summer of 1983 and again in late June of 1984:

"I have seen House Sparrows snap off and fly away with the full blossoms from a common roadside wildflower, the Man-root (*Ipomoea pandurata*), a species of white flowering morning glory. This is an odd-looking sight because the blossoms are often as big as the bird itself. [Can anyone] suggest an explanation for this ... nesting material, perhaps? Mistaken identity owing to the flower's resemblance to toilet paper or other commonly used nesting materials?" Please let us know if you can think of a better explanation than gathering nesting material.