



# Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

## Is the Gentle Bluebird Actually a Killer?

The Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*), symbol of happiness and domesticity, could also be a killer. I began to wonder back on 2 June 1981, when I found the corpse of a male beneath one of the houses on my trail here at Raleigh. The bird, a male, had not been dead more than 24 hours. The left flank was mangled and bloody. My first reaction was to suspect that some urchin with a BB gun had made a target of my bluebird—the house was hard by a rural dirt road. But when I noted that a pair of bluebirds were still in possession of the house, which contained the first of five eggs, I began to suspect that the dead bird might have been an intruder done to death by the rightful owner. Or perhaps a usurper had won the day.

On 14 April 1985, I found another dead male with blood still oozing from a wound beneath the unfortunate bird's left wing. The house where the second bird was found is behind a fence in an experimental garden, a place not overly accessible to BB-slinging hunters. A pair of bluebirds were on guard at the house, which contained a newly built nest.

Recently I read Patricia A. Gowaty's article "Bluebird Belligerence," which appeared in the June 1985 issue of *Natural History*. She presents evidence that bluebirds, both male and female, defend territories, sometimes to the death, especially when the females have a go at each other. Territorial fights, moreover, are apt to be most fierce during nest construction or the laying of eggs, a time when the male might be effectively cuckolded, or other females might dump eggs in the nest. I am just about convinced that the two casualties I have noted were either males that were killed while attempting to usurp territories, or males that were unable to defend their chosen ground, perhaps one of each. Has anyone else noted any such casualties along a bluebird trail?—JOSHUA A. LEE, 5104 Newcastle Road, Raleigh, N.C. 27650.

## Golden Anniversary

Carolina Bird Club will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 1987. The editors of *The Chat* plan to mark the occasion with some special features about the history of the club. Anyone who would like to share memories and old photographs is invited to contribute to the four issues in Volume 50. Biographical sketches of past presidents of the club and former editors of *The Chat* will be appreciated. Please send items for publication to Eloise Potter, North Carolina State Museum of Natural History, P.O. Box 27647, Raleigh, N.C. 27611.