



Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

The Willet's Way

She had placed her nest at least a foot below high water mark. Obviously, sooner or later, the Willet's eggs would wash away in a high tide.

Left exposed on the open flats, they would be eaten by coons or grackles—or, lost among rotting *Spartina* stems, they would fall to pieces and rejoin the energy network of the marsh through the activities of microscopic agents of decay. That the eggs might eventually hatch never entered my mind.

But, in the three weeks that followed, I visited and revisited the nest. Often I found the thin lining of straw on which the eggs lay soaking wet, but the eggs, themselves, always looked fresh and neatly arranged.

One had to peer carefully to see them tucked away in the base of a clump of Black Rush, especially if the setting Willet happened to be at home. Usually she waited almost until I could touch her before she would bolt, her screams bringing her screaming mate to help torment the predator.

They seemed to feel their nest and its contents in far greater danger from a nosy naturalist than from rising water.

At last I took the obvious steps and sloshed out for a visit at flood tide. The Willets screamed as usual. I hardly heard them. Enthralled, I suddenly saw and understood a totally unexpected adaptation to the tideland environment.

All four eggs bobbed gently in the cool water. The circle of rush stems around the nest had caged and guided the eggs up from the sand as the tide overtook them. When it subsided, I could see, the spikes would guide the eggs back down to the temporarily underwater nest. Fortunately I had brought along my camera and photographed the eggs in their watery cradle.

Could the embryos possibly survive a twice-daily wetting and chilling? If they hatched they would prove their placement no bird-brain mistake. A marvelous and, as far as I know, previously unsuspected nesting biology would be confirmed.

They hatched. On the morning of June 11th, not an hour after tide had drained from the soggy flats, I discovered two newly hatched birds struggling out of the *Juncus* clump. Behind them lay a pipped egg. The fourth egg had vanished.

I dashed back to the cabin for my camera, found breakfast on the table, and was delayed for nearly an hour. The young birds had left when I got back, but the pictures I took of the egg shells in the damp nest should document the event.—JAY SHULER, P.O. Box 288, McClellanville, S.C. 29458. (Reprinted with permission of the author from *The Greenville [S.C.] News*, 18 June 1972).

Blue Jays in Minnesota

Bill Hilton Jr. is a CBC member working on his doctorate at the University of Minnesota. Last year he began a detailed study of the Blue Jay; he and Jean M. Vesall located 121 nests within an area of about one square mile. By October 1980, the pair had

banded 363 fledglings and adult birds. Since some of these jays overwinter and some migrate, Hilton will study the breeding success of different populations in the 1981 season. His work has been reported in *The Loon* (52:146-149). Hilton and some of his former students at the Fort Mill, S.C., high school have conducted a Christmas Bird Count for two years at the Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge. They will welcome volunteers for the 1981 count near McBee.

The 600 Club

Terry Moore (2699 Twiggs Circle, Marietta, Georgia 30067) reports 124 living members of the 600 Club, those who have seen and identified 600 species in North America north of the Rio Grande. Florida, Texas, and California are home to the majority, but Dwight R. Lee (615 species) is from North Carolina.

In an effort to start discussion, Terry offers a suggested list of which introduced species could be countable. He includes only those species that have maintained a stable breeding population. The Blue-gray Tanager was eliminated on that basis.

Mute Swan—not known to breed in the Carolinas.

Ring-necked Pheasant—breeding on Hatteras Island.

Chukar

Gray Partridge

Black Francolin

Rock Dove—I assume we all know this one.

Spotted Dove

Ringed Turtle Dove—breeding at Charleston and Winston-Salem.

Budgerigar—hypothetical breeder in the Carolinas.

Monk Parakeet—breeding near Asheville.

Canary-winged Parakeet

Yellow-headed Parrot

Red-crowned Parrot

Skylark

Red-whiskered Bulbul

Starling—no comment.

Crested Mynah

Indian Hill Mynah

Java Finch

House Sparrow—no comment.

European Tree Sparrow

Spotted Oriole

European Goldfinch

If you have information or comments on this suggested list, take the time to write Terry Moore. His interesting reports are available for \$5 per year.

A New Blackbird Roost in Greenville, N.C.

On several days during December 1980 and January 1981, I observed a blackbird roost that formed at a site not used for this purpose in previous winters. It was in a grove of mixed oak and pine woods bordered by US 264 By-pass on one side, Evans Street extension on one side, and Lynndale housing subdivision on two sides.

Species frequenting the roost were primarily Common Grackles, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and Starlings, with smaller numbers of Red-winged Blackbirds. Flocks appeared to arrive in heaviest numbers for approximately 20 to 25 minutes, with the birds flying in bands from 50 to 150 feet wide. Most birds arrived from an easterly direction with lesser numbers returning from north or northeast. Birds did not

immediately occupy the roost but circled in flocks or paused in nearby fields or trees before circling the roost site in mass groups to settle for the night. A great deal of vocalization accompanied each roosting session. Gradually diminishing, these calls continued throughout the roost well after darkness. Departure from the roost occurred in a relatively short period of time. Most birds departed in a rather uniform movement, usually 20 to 25 minutes before sunrise.

Interestingly, the roost site features no buffer zone or protective area on its borders and is near a rather heavily traveled highway. A large television tower is nearby, a fact that may aid the birds in orientation toward the roost. The understory vegetation may afford some protection from predators and cold weather. It is primarily a combination of Greenbriar (*Similax* sp.) and Cane (*Arundinaria* sp.).—JEFFREY D. SHATTERLY, Department of Biology, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C. 27834.

CBC Members in Print

The Autumn 1980 issue of *Journal of Field Ornithology* has two CBC members as contributors. KEITH BILDSTEIN and Frances Hamerstrom wrote "Age and Sex Differences in the Size of Northern Harriers" (51:356-360), PAUL A. STEWART and Harold A. Connor wrote "Fixation of Wintering Palm Warblers to a Specific Site" (51:365-367), and Stewart also wrote "Mockingbird's Defense of a Winter Food Source" (51:375).

MORRIS D. WILLIAMS, a member from Tennessee who is a graduate student at Louisiana State University, has a note in *Auk* (98:187-189) about his discovery of the nest and eggs of the Cinereous Finch, a species endemic to the coast of Peru. In an earlier paper (*Auk* 97:889-892), Williams gave the first description of the eggs of the White-winged Guan, a Peruvian species that was thought to have been extinct for 100 years prior to its rediscovery in 1977.

H. DOUGLAS PRATT is the principal author of a paper on the resident birds of the Palau Island in western Micronesia (*Condor* 82:117-131). Pratt, like Williams, is associated with the Museum of Zoology at LSU.

Cardinal Print Available

The April 1981 issue of *Carolina Country*, the official publication of the North Carolina Association of Electric Cooperatives, Inc., features John Trott's photograph of a male Cardinal that appears on the jacket of *Birds of the Carolinas*. Editor Owen Bishop arranged to have reprints made for his readers and graciously extends the offer to Carolina Bird Club members. The 8½ x 11-inch color photo is reproduced with a white border on heavy 11 x 14-inch glossy paper. Send your name, address, and \$3 for each reprint to Cardinal Photo, Carolina Country, P.O. Box 27306, Raleigh, N.C. 27611.