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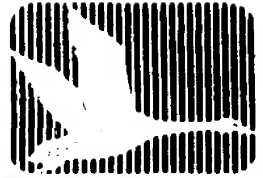
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Cover: American Robin feeding young in nest at Towson, Md. Photo by Lester Simon.



## SOLITARY NESTING BY GREAT BLUE HERONS IN MARYLAND

DAVID E. WALBECK

Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) usually nest in colonies (Hancock and Kushlan 1984). Researchers working on the Maryland Colonial Waterbird Project estimated sizes of 42 Great Blue Heron colony sites during 1985-88, although not all sites were active in all four years. Twenty of the colonies had five or fewer Great Blue Heron pairs during at least one year (D. Brinker and J. McKearnan, personal communication). Single Great Blue Heron nests were found in six colonies, three of which were multi-species colonies of more than five pairs. In all three instances where a solitary Great Blue Heron nest was found, it was known or suspected that a larger colony had previously occupied the site. Solitary nesting is very rare, and I could only find one detailed account of such a nesting (Winegardner 1983). In both 1982 and 1985, however, solitary Great Blue Heron nests were found in Maryland. Both nests were outside of the normal Maryland breeding range on the Coastal Plain (Robbins and Bystrak 1977).

In 1982, Mary Lou Heavner located a Great Blue Heron nest in a small woods of mostly white pine (*Pinus strobus*) near Pea Vine Run, 3 miles northeast of Cumberland, Maryland. The nest was 20-30 ft. above the ground in a sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) that was 140 ft. south of a house and 185 ft. north of a secondary road. Three or four chicks fledged and were fed by the adults at nearby ponds.

On June 23, 1985, I discovered a second solitary nest adjacent to the Monocacy River, 4 miles west of Taneytown, Maryland. The nest was approximately 30 ft. above the ground in a large (4.2 ft. dbh) dead sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*).

I saw one young heron in the nest during a second visit on July 20. Other hatchlings may have been present but were not in view. No further visits were made during 1985 to monitor fledgling survival. On May 23, 1986, the nest was empty and about to fall out of the tree implying that the nest was not used after 1985.

In addition to one adult heron and the one young heron, six Black Vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) were in the nest tree on July 20 and seemed to be watching the activities at the nest. Black Vultures prey on the young of several mammals (Roads 1936, McIlhenny 1939, Steirly 1966, Dickerson 1983) and reptiles (Mrosovsky 1971, Sexton 1975). Although Black Vultures are not known to prey on the eggs or young of herons, Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) occasionally kill and eat young herons (Pearson 1919) or force young herons to regurgitate food, which the vultures steal (Temple 1969).

The 1982 nest was the first Great Blue Heron breeding record for Allegany County, and for Maryland's Ridge and Valley Province. Similarly, the 1985 nest was the first breeding record for Carroll County and for Maryland's Piedmont Province. These nests did not appear to be a result of the deterioration of colonies; no colonies were known from past years at the sites of the single nests, and no old nests were found near the single nests.

The advantages of colonial nesting include the early detection and deterrence of predators, greater security for individuals in the middle of the group, and a reduced proportion of nests suffering predation as a result of the swamping of predators' food needs (Perrins and Birkhead 1983). Colonies are also thought to act as sites of information transfer, allowing individuals to locate patchily distributed food by following successful individuals (Ward and Zahavi 1973, Krebs 1974, Des-Granges 1979, Forbes 1986, but see Pratt 1980). On the other hand, colonial nesting can also increase the risks of raising another pair's young, cannibalism, transmission of parasites and diseases, and competition for mates, nests, or food (Perrins and Birkhead 1983). Presumably the benefits of colonial nesting normally outweigh the costs for Great Blue Herons, because they typically nest in colonies.

Why would these two pairs nest singly? One possible explanation is that these nesting attempts may have involved inexperienced birds. Great Blue Herons usually breed for the first time at two years of age, but nesting attempts by one-year-old birds in subadult plumage have been reported (Pratt 1973). Birds nesting for the first time may be more likely to nest alone than birds that have previously nested colonially.

A second explanation is that solitary pairs can be as successful as pairs in colonies by nesting in areas where food is evenly spaced or abnormally abundant. They would not need the feeding advantages available to a colony and would not incur any of the disadvantages of living in a colony. If this explanation is correct, solitary nests should be much more common than previously reported.

A third possibility is that one member of the pair may have been raised in a solitary nest. If the type of nesting is a learned behavior, then this bird would probably be a solitary nester. This scenario, however, does not explain how single nesting originated in Great Blue Herons.

I would like to thank Dr. Frank C. Rowher and David F. Brinker for reviewing drafts of this paper.



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# THE SEASON

## BREEDING SEASON, June 1-July 31, 1988

ROBERT F. RINGLER

For the third consecutive summer severe heat and dry weather dominated the State. Similar conditions in other parts of the country may have been responsible for the relative abundance of certain grassland species here. Some colonial waterbirds were adversely affected by severe storms on the coast. The water level at Deal Island Wildlife Management Area was perfect for shorebirds, and some spectacular numbers were found there.

Locations mentioned in the text (with the counties in which they are located in parentheses): Aquasco Farm (Prince Georges), Assateague (Worcester), Barren Island (Dorchester), Bellevue (Talbot), Big Bay Marsh (Worcester), Big Elk Creek (Cecil), Blackwalnut Point (Talbot), Blackwater (Dorchester), Bloodsworth Island (Dorchester), Bradenbaugh (Harford), Broadford Reservoir (Garrett), Centennial Lake & Park (Howard), Chestnut Grove (Garrett), Cove Point (Calvert), Deal Island WMA (Somerset), Eastern Neck (Kent), Elliott (Dorchester), Georgetown Reservoir (District of Columbia), Harford Glen (Harford), Hart - Miller (Baltimore), Hodges Bar (Kent), Hooper Island (Dorchester), Horsehead Sanctuary (Queen Annes), Hughes Hollow (Montgomery), Hurlock (Dorchester), James Island (Dorchester), Jug Bay (Anne Arundel), Kent Point (Queen Annes), Keysville (Carroll), Kings Creek (Talbot), Lake Kittamaquidi (Howard), Lilypons (Frederick), Loch Raven (Baltimore), Love Point (Queen Annes), Massey (Kent), Merkle Sanctuary (Prince Georges), Neavitt (Talbot), North Branch (Allegany), Oldtown (Allegany), Patuxent River Park (Prince Georges), Point Lookout (St. Marys), Poplar Island (Talbot), Remington Farms (Kent), Rock Hall (Kent), Sandy Point (Anne Arundel), Schooley Mill Park (Howard), Swan Point (Kent), Sycamore Landing (Montgomery), Tanyard (Caroline), Tizzard Island (Worcester), Triadelphia Reservoir (Howard unless stated otherwise), Tuckahoe State Park (Caroline unless stated otherwise), Upper Marlboro (Prince Georges), Westport (Baltimore city), Wilde Lake (Howard), Woodmark Lake (Howard).

*Abbreviations:* DC - District of Columbia, PWRC - Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, WMA - Wildlife Management Area, a "+" indicates additional observers.

*Observers:* George & Henry Armistead, Chris Beaton, John Bjerke, Rick Blom, Jim Boxwell, Ed Boyd, David Brinker, Mike Bryan, Martha Chestem, Dave Czaplak, Lynn Davidson, Sam Droege, Ethel Engle, Jane Farrell, Roberta Fletcher (reporting for Caroline Co.), Greg Gough, Jim & Patricia Gruber, Alex Hammer, Robert Hilton, Hank Kaestner, Greg Kearns, Ray Kiddy, Dennis Kirkwood, Dotty Mumford, Mariana Nuttle, Michael & Paul O'Brien, Fran Pope, Kyle Rambo, Ann Raspberry, Jan Reese, Steve Simon, Teresa Simons, Connie Skipper, Jo Solem (reporting for Howard Co.), Paul Spitzer, Jim Stasz, Mary Twigg, Mark Vekasy, David Walbeck, Robert Warfield, Hal Wierenga, Jim Wilkinson, Erika Wilson.

*Loons, Grebes.* Non-breeding summering **Common Loons** were 1 off Mallard Island in Ocean City, May 21 through July 15 (Brinker +), 1 at Broadford Reservoir from June 6 into August (Pope), 1 at Hodges Bar on June 19 (J. Gruber), 1 near Bellevue on July 2 (Armistead +), and 4 off Kent Point on July 13 and later (Davidson, Raspberry). Early migrant **Pied-billed Grebes** were 1 on Centennial Lake

on July 20 (Chestem) and 1 in DC on July 30 (Czaplak); 26 at Deal Island WMA on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson) were local breeders.

*Storm-Petrels, Pelicans, Cormorants.* Ben Yokel noted 9 Wilson's Storm-Petrels off Point Lookout on June 5. This species is being reported with increasing frequency in this part of Chesapeake Bay. Brown Pelicans are no longer news in the Ocean City area and I will note only the largest number seen this season—18 off Assateague on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson). Double-crested Cormorants continue to proliferate in the state during the summer without breeding. Virtually all the reports are from the Chesapeake Bay region and nearby locations on tributaries. This summer's reports are 1 on Lake Kittamaquidi on June 10 (Chris Ludwig), 2 immatures at Sandy Point on June 15 (M. O'Brien), 14 at James Island, Dorchester County on June 21 (Armisteads), 125 in the Bloodsworth Island area on June 22 (Armisteads), 7 at Blackwalnut Point on June 30 (M. O'Brien), 25 in the Poplar Island area on July 3 (Armisteads), 11 in DC on July 8 (Czaplak), 140 at Hooper Island on July 10 (Armisteads), 4 at Deal Island WMA on July 24 (H. Armistead), 6 at Rock Hall on July 30 (J. Gruber), 8 at Cambridge on July 30 (Reese), and 1 at Jug Bay on July 30 (Wilson).

*Hérons.* The only American Bittern reported was at the known nesting area at Deal Island WMA on July 24 (H. Armistead). Least Bitterns, though widespread breeders, often go unreported, but this summer 2 were noted at Lilypons on June 1 (Davidson, Rasberry), 1 at PWRC on June 11 (fide Droegel), 1 at Hughes Hollow on June 11 (Bjerke) and 2 there on July 31 (M. O'Brien), 1 at Cove Point on June 18 (Stasz, Boyd), 4 at Patuxent River Park on June 25 (Bjerke), and 1 at King's Creek on July 24 (Reese). Kearns found a Least Bittern on a nest at Patuxent River Park on July 30; 3 young hatched on Aug. 11 and the birds fledged on Aug. 21. Woody Martin noted about 25 Great Blue Heron nests near Bowie Racetrack and 4 nests in a new colony near Maryland City this spring. The Armisteads counted 127 nests with young Great Blues at Bloodsworth Island on June 22. A single Great Blue at North Branch on June 12 (Simons) may have come from an isolated local breeding site. The 10 Great Blues at Lilypons on June 26 (Norm Saunders) and the 5 at Denton on July 20 (Nuttle) were likely post-breeding dispersal birds. Early post-breeding dispersal of Great Egrets began with single birds at Westport in Baltimore on June 30 (Wilkinson) and Loch Raven on July 2 (Simon). Another Great Egret was far west at Cumberland on July 24 and 3 were there from July 26 through the end of the month (Simons +). The high count of Great Egrets at Deal Island WMA was 110 on July 24 (H. Armistead). Wandering Snowy Egrets were 3 on Big Elk Creek on June 11-12 (Spitzer), 2 at Love Point on June 28 (J. Gruber), and 8 at Eastern Neck on July 6 (Grubers). Closer to breeding areas were 50 Snowies at Elliott on June 19 (Wierenga, Ringler) and 200 at Deal Island WMA on July 30 along with 80 Little Blue Herons (O'Briens, Davidson). The Armisteads found 6 pairs of Little Blues nesting on Poplar Island on July 3. Migrant Little Blues were 4 immatures at Harford Glen in late July (Kirkwood) and 2 at Horsehead Sanctuary on July 29 (Gough).

The high count of Tricolored Herons was 25 at Deal Island WMA on July 24 (H. Armistead) and July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson) while 1 was across the bay at Point Lookout from July 25 through August 2 with 2 birds on July 28 (Boxwell). The June wanderings of Cattle Egrets included 3 at Sandy Point on the 15th (M. O'Brien), 1 at Eastern Neck on the 16th (Grubers), and 5 at Bradenbaugh on the 29th and 1 there on the 30th (Kirkwood). The upper part of the Eastern Shore seems to be a regular summer feeding area for Cattle Egrets from nearby colonies

in Pennsylvania or Delaware. Sightings of 150 near Massey on July 2 (Ringler) and 45 at Elkton on July 28 (Reese) are good indications. The 11 Cattle Egrets near Bellevue on July 2 may have been some of the 75 pairs estimated nesting on Poplar Island on July 3 (Armisteads). The only notable count of **Green-backed Herons** was 45 at Deal Island WMA on July 24 (H. Armistead). Reports of nesting **Black-crowned Night-Herons** were 39 young at the National Zoo colony on June 18 (Czaplak) and 45 birds at Deal Island WMA on July 24 (H. Armistead). Other Black-crowns that were non-breeders included 2 immatures at Big Elk Creek on June 11-12 (Spitzer), in Howard County 5 immatures at Schooley Mill Park on July 26 (Chestem) and another immature the same day at Centennial Park (Chestem, Helen Zeichner), and 3 at Point Lookout on July 28 (Boxwell). Reports of **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** were 1 adult at Lilypons on June 4 (Ringler, Anne Moretti), 1 adult at Chain Bridge in DC on June 5 (Czaplak), 2 adults at Williamsport on June 12 (Hammer), and 1 immature at Hughes Hollow on July 31 (M. O'Brien).

*Ibis.* Single immature **White Ibis**, a rare post-breeding visitor in Maryland, were seen at West Ocean City on July 23-25 (Warfield) and at PWRC on July 28 (Lenny Jones). Notable **Glossy Ibis** were 3 at Point Lookout on July 20-26 (Patty Craig +) with 4 there on the 23rd (Nistico), 160 at Deal Island WMA on July 24 (H. Armistead), 1 at Hurlock on July 30 and 200 flying south past Assateague the same day (Davidson, O'Briens); the latter sighting was an obvious sign of migration.

*Swans, Geese.* Non-breeding **Tundra Swans** that remained in Maryland were an adult, previously reported in the spring, at Deal Island WMA that remained through at least July 24 (H. Armistead +), 1 at St. Paul's Church pond from June 25 through July (David Lamotte), and 2 at Eastern Neck on July 22 (Blom). Reports of **Mute Swans** from the species' two strongholds in the state were 107 at Eastern Neck on June 8 (J. Gruber) and 256 at Hooper Island on July 10 (Armisteads). The latter record shows the remarkable growth of the Mute Swan population as it spreads southward along the eastern shore of the bay. Other Mute Swans were 1 at Hart - Miller on June 13 (Simon), 2 young on Kent Island at the Bay Bridge on June 25 (Hilton) and a pair with 2 downy young on Coaches Island on July 3 (Armisteads). Breeding records of **Canada Geese** included a nest on an island off South Point on June 8 (Walbeck) and an adult with a brood of 4 at Deal Island WMA on July 24 (H. Armistead). Flocks of Canadas were 40 on Big Elk Creek on June 11-12 (Spitzer), 20 at St. Michaels on June 15 (Reese), 105 at Loch Raven on June 24 (Simon), 175 in the PWRC/Laurel Golf Course area in June (fide Droegel), 44 in DC on July 10 (Hilton), and 315 at Blackwater on July 10 (Armisteads).

*Ducks.* Summer flocks of **Wood Ducks** were 30 at Jug Bay on June 23 (Mumford, Beaton), 60 at North Branch on June 25 (Twiggl), 23 at Loch Raven on July 4 (Simon), and 30 at Lilypons on July 31 (M. O'Brien). A rare breeder at PWRC was an **American Black Duck** with 1 young on June 22 (fide Droegel). A drake **Blue-winged Teal** at Lilypons on June 26 (Norm Saunders) was probably an early post-breeding migrant. On July 24 Henry Armistead estimated 45 Blue-wings at Deal Island WMA in the species' breeding area. Unusual in summer, a drake **Northern Shoveler** was in Howard County, first at Wilde Lake on June 4 (Elise Seay, Marjorie Mountjoy) and later at Centennial Lake from June 29 through July 17 (Solem, Farrell). Summering **Gadwall** sightings included 3 on Holland Island and 1 on Adam Island on June 22 (Armisteads) in possible breeding areas and 3 at Jug Bay on June 23 (Mumford, Beaton) where the species is not known to breed. Non-breeding diving ducks seen this summer included 12 **Canvasbacks** and 2 **Lesser Scaup** at Hart - Miller on June 13 (Simon), 2 Lesser Scaup on the Patuxent River



at Merkle Sanctuary on June 25-28 (Joel Rhymer), a **Black Scoter** near Barren Island on June 8 (Joan McKiernan), a female **Black Scoter** at Cove Point on June 18 (Stasz, Boyd) and 2 near Bellevue on July 2 (Spitzer). **White-winged Scoters** numbered 4 at Neavitt on June 12 (Kenny Schisler), 2 at Hodges Bar on June 18 and 1 there through July (J. Gruber), and 7, including 5 adult males, off Kent Point on July 13 and later (Davidson, Raspberry). Finally, a drake **Common Merganser** was also off Kent Point on July 12 (Raspberry) and **Ruddy Duck** sightings were a drake near Oldtown on June 8 (Twigg), 1 at Upper Marlboro on July 26 (Stasz), 30 at Hart - Miller on July 29 (Simon, Kaestner), and 3 at Hurlock on July 30 (Davidson, O'Briens).

*Diurnal Raptors.* A pair of **Black Vultures** with one chick were found in an abandoned building at PWRC in May (Woody Martin). Czaplak noted young in the **Osprey** nest on the Potomac in DC on June 1, but the nest was later abandoned. The Armisteads found 39 active **Osprey** nests on Bloodsworth Island on June 22. Non-breeding **Ospreys** that wandered inland were 1 at North Branch on June 12 (Kiddy), 1 in a kettle of vultures at Keysville on June 26 (Ringler), and 2 at Triadelphia on July 23 (Chestem). An immature **Mississippi Kite** reported at Georgetown Reservoir on June 5 (Czaplak) will be reviewed by the Records Committee. Glenn Therres reports that of 163 **Bald Eagle** nests surveyed in Maryland, 95 were active and produced 135 young. The Armisteads report on July 3 an adult **Bald Eagle** with two large young on a nest on Jefferson Island. Inland, an adult **Bald Eagle** was over High Ridge Park in Howard County on June 4 (Chan Robbins) and another adult was at PWRC on June 23 (fide Droegel). Summer sightings of **Northern Harriers** were 1 at Gortner in Garrett County on June 4 (Bjerke +), 1 at Tuckahoe SP on July 16 (Grubers), and an adult female at Lilypons on July 31 (M. O'Brien). The last two are likely post-breeding birds, but the first report is in the former breeding range in western Maryland.

Michael O'Brien also saw single **Sharp-shinned Hawks** in Garrett County on June 18 on Meadow Mountain and June 19 at Finzel within the species' known breeding range in the State. Sightings of single **Cooper's Hawks** that may represent breeding were near Schooley Mill Park on June 6 (Solem, Farrell), near Princess Anne on June 19 (Dyke), on Hoods Mill Road in Carroll County on June 26 (M. O'Brien), at Brown's Bridge in Howard County on July 9 (Farrell), and an immature at Hughes Hollow on July 31 (M. O'Brien). Rare on the Coastal Plain was a **Broad-winged Hawk** near Andrews Air Force Base on July 30 (Wilson); it may have been an early migrant. A pair of **American Kestrels** with 4 young was at Denton on June 25 (Nuttle) and an adult with 1 young was near Keysville on June 26 (Ringler). Sightings of **Peregrine Falcons** included 1 near the Kennedy Center in DC on June 1 (Peter Kaestner), 1 at Elliott on June 17 (Wierenga, Ringler), 1 at Owen Brown near Columbia on June 22 (Farrell), 4 at South Marsh Island on June 22 (Armisteads) and 1 at Big Bay Marsh on July 14 (Walbeck, Brinker). Glenn Therres reported that **Peregrine Falcons** nesting in Maryland produced 2 young at the USF&G Building in Baltimore, 1 at the Key Bridge in Baltimore, 2 at the Bay Bridge, 3 at Clay Island, 4 at Smith Island and 4 at South Marsh Island, and that a pair was present but not nesting at the US 301 Bridge over the Potomac.

*Turkeys, Rails, Crane.* Sightings of **Wild Turkeys** that are probably the result of releases by the state were single birds near Centennial on June 13 (Jane Geuder) and at Millington WMA on July 2 (Ringler). Observers reported that lower than average numbers of **Black Rails** were heard in the Elliott Island marshes this summer. The Armisteads saw an adult **Clapper Rail** with 3 downy young at Croch-

eron on June 22 and Henry Armistead heard 18 at Deal Island WMA on July 24. In Caroline County, Engle reported a **King Rail** at Tanyard on June 14-15 and another at Hog Island on June 19. Reese heard 5 **Virginia Rails** at Kings Creek on July 24. Kearns noted the first migrant **Sora** at Patuxent River on July 26. Unusual this season in western Maryland was a **Common Moorhen** at North Branch on June 5 (Kiddy), while 1 at Tanyard, June 8 through July 27 (Engle), was at a known breeding location. Reese found a dead Moorhen on the road at nearby Bethlehem on June 13. Non-breeding **American Coots** seen this summer were 1 at Deal Island WMA on June 10 (Davidson), 1 at Hart - Miller on June 13 (Simon), and 1 on the Potomac in DC, July 30 through August 6 (Czaplak). Summering in Montgomery County was a **Sandhill Crane** at Poolesville, seen from at least June 1 through the end of the period (Betty Davis +).

*Plovers, Oystercatchers, Stilts, Avocet.* Single late spring **Semipalmated Plovers** were at Hart - Miller on June 13 (Simon) and at Elliott on June 18 (Wierenga +). The only report of **Piping Plovers** was 2 on Assateague on July 3 (O'Briens). Warfield found a **Killdeer** nest with 4 eggs at Point of Rocks on June 2, and gathering flocks of Killdeer numbered 50 at North Branch on June 25 (Twigg), 90 there on July 13 (Simons), and 45 at Brown's Bridge in Howard County on July 16 (Solem, Farrell). Sam Dyke saw a pair of **American Oystercatchers** at Monie Bay from late June through July 3. Oystercatchers have been nesting on the Eastern Shore islands in the lower bay for some time and this summer the Armisteads found 2 on South Marsh Island, 1 on Spring Island, 3 on Holland Island and 2 on Adam Island on June 22, and 5 at Hooper Island on July 10. On the coast, Vekasy counted 19 oystercatchers at Big Bay Marsh on July 13. The O'Briens and Davidson found 5 **Black-necked Stilts** on July 30 at Deal Island WMA, the species' only nesting location in the State. A **Black-necked Stilt** at Big Bay Marsh on July 13 (Vekasy) was a rarity there. The only **American Avocet** of the season was 1 at Deal Island WMA on July 24 (H. Armistead).

*Sandpipers.* The 5 **Greater Yellowlegs** at Deal Island WMA on June 21 (M. O'Brien) may have been early fall migrants or non-breeding summer vagrants, but the 110 there on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson) were certainly migrants. Another migrant was flying south between Cook's Point and Blackwalnut Point on July 3 (Armisteads). The first migrant **Lesser Yellowlegs** reported was 1 at Remington Farms on June 30 (Grubers). Migrant flocks of **Lessers** were 25 at Tanyard on July 25 (Engle), 19 at Horsehead Sanctuary on July 29 (Gough), 700 at Deal Island WMA on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson), and 30 at Point Lookout on July 31 (Boxwell). A **Solitary Sandpiper** at Merkle Sanctuary on June 23 (Joel Rhymer) may have been a record early fall arrival. Also early was a **Solitary** at Loch Raven on July 2 (Simon). A **Willet** nest with 4 eggs was found at Barren Island on May 29 (H. Armistead +). Farther north in the bay than they breed were 2 **Willetts** at Swan Point on June 26 (J. Gruber). Other interesting **Willet** reports were 1 at the Blackwater headquarters pond on July 10 (Armisteads), 56 at Big Bay Marsh on July 13 (Vekasy), and 2 at Point Lookout on July 25 with 1 there on July 31 (Boxwell). The high count of **Spotted Sandpipers** was 20 at Blackwater on July 22 (Davidson). Reports of migrant **Upland Sandpipers** were 2 at PNAS on July 28 (Bryan), 2 at Easton on July 29 (Gough), 3 at American Corner on July 30 (Engles), and 2 on New Design Road on July 31 (M. O'Brien). Sightings of **Whimbrels** were 1 at West Ocean City on July 15 (Warfield), 6 at Tizzard Island on July 16 (Brinker), 10 at Ocean City on July 17 (Warfield), and 27 flying south past Assateague on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson). Rare in DC were 5 **Ruddy Turnstones** flying down the Potomac on July 26 (Czaplak).

The only report of **Red Knots** was of 30 flying south past Assateague on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson). Migrant **Sanderlings** in the bay included 2 at Hooper Island on July 10 (Armisteads) and 8 at Point Lookout on July 26 (Boxwell). A late spring migrant **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was at North Branch on June 12 (Simons), and 2 early fall migrants were at Remington Farms on July 12 (Grubers). The spectacular array of sandpipers at Deal Island WMA on July 30 included 2500 Semis, 200 **Western Sandpipers**, 100 **Least Sandpipers** and 540 **Pectoral Sandpipers** (O'Briens, Davidson). Davidson also noted 2 **Westerns** at Blackwater on July 22; other early **Least Sandpipers** included 1 at North Branch on July 3 (Twigg) and 2 at Loch Raven on July 10 (Simon). A **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Hart - Miller on June 13 (Simon) was only the second record for that month in the State. The first reports of **Stilt Sandpipers** for the season were 1 at North Branch on July 21 (Simons) and 3 at Blackwater on July 22 (Davidson). These were followed by 150 at Hart - Miller on July 29 (Kaestner, Simon), 29 at Deal Island WMA on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson), and 3 at Point Lookout on July 30 with 2 there the next day (Boxwell). **Short-billed Dowitcher** numbers built up quickly with 8 at Blackwater on July 10 (Armisteads), 26 at West Ocean City the same day (Warfield), 195 at Big Bay Marsh on July 13 (Vekasy), 75 at Hart - Miller on July 29 (Kaestner, Simon), 130 at Deal Island WMA on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson), and 1 at Point Lookout the same day (Boxwell). Early migrant **Wilson's Phalaropes** were 1 at North Branch on July 23-28 (Twigg, Simons, Kiddy +) and 1 at Hart - Miller on July 29 (Kaestner, Simon).

*Gulls.* Single adult **Franklin's Gulls** were seen in DC on June 30 and July 1 (Czaplak) and at Sandy Point on July 15 (Davidson). Summering **Bonaparte's Gulls** included 1 over the Potomac near National Airport on June 30 (Czaplak) and 1 at Hart - Miller on July 29 (Kaestner). A **Ring-billed Gull** at Broadford Reservoir on June 6 (Pope) was probably a spring straggler; Czaplak noted the first post-breeding migrants in DC with 2 adults on June 24, quickly increasing to 100 adults on June 27 with the first juvenile on July 1. Other fall migrant **Ring-bills** were 2 adults at St. Michaels on June 26 (Reese), an adult near Bellevue on July 2 (H. Armistead +), 7 at Loch Raven on July 10 (Simon), and 11 at Triadelphia on July 23 (Chestem). The high count of **Herring Gulls** for the season was 815 at Bloodsworth Island on June 22 (Armisteads); 1 at Jug Bay on June 23 (Mumford, Beaton) was unusual there at that time. High counts of **Great Black-backed Gulls** were 42 at Bloodsworth Island on June 22 (Armisteads), 55 at Hooper Island on July 10 (Armisteads), 65 at Sandy Point on July 15 (Davidson), and 72 at Rock Hall on July 30 (J. Gruber).

*Terns, Skimmers.* Summer sightings of **Caspian Terns** included 1 at Deal Island WMA on June 21 (M. O'Brien), 2 adults in DC on June 24 (Czaplak), 18 at Rock Hall on July 9 (Grubers) and, inland, 1 at Triadelphia on July 23 and 12 there on July 31 (Chestem). The Armisteads found a **Royal Tern** at James Island on June 21. **Caspian Terns** have never nested in Maryland and **Royals** have not nested for a decade. A single **Sandwich Tern** was seen at Assateague on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson). The Armisteads found 8 **Common Tern** nests with one egg each on James Island on June 21. Post-breeding dispersal brought 14 **Common Terns** to Swan Point on July 15 (J. Gruber), 23 to Eastern Neck on July 22 (Blom), and 12 to Blackwalnut Point on July 31 (Reese). **Forster's Terns** left their breeding colonies early as there were 3 in DC on June 16 increasing to 50 on July 30 (Czaplak), and 4 at Rock Hall on June 28 increasing to 245 on July 9 (Grubers); Jim Gruber noted other concentrations of 275 at Swan Point on July 15 and 325 in Swan Creek on July 30. A pair of **Least Terns** again attempted to nest on the roof of the Kennedy Center in DC from June 4 to July 4 (Czaplak). Other sightings of **Least Terns** were

1 at Kent Narrows on July 2 (Ringler), 2 at Tanyard on July 9 (Engle), and 18 at Swan Creek on July 30 (J. Gruber). A late spring migrant **Black Tern** was seen off Point Lookout on June 4 (Dick Cleary). Fall migrant **Black Terns** were 2 at Swan Point on July 15 (J. Gruber), 1 in breeding plumage at West Ocean City on July 15 (Warfield), 1 at Point Lookout on July 21 (Ann Bishop), 2 at Assateague on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson), and 1 adult on the Potomac in Prince Georges County just south of the DC line on July 30 (Czaplak). **Black Skimmer** nests numbered 26 with eggs on Barren Island on May 29 (H. Armistead +). Stasz and Boyd saw 4 skimmers at Cove Point on June 18. The Armisteads saw 1 skimmer remaining at Barren Island on July 10 and 1 at Deal Island WMA on July 24.

*Cuckoos, Owls, Nighthawks.* **Black-billed Cuckoos** were more numerous this year, perhaps in response to the presence of gypsy moths. Reports of **Black-bills** east of the common breeding range were 1 probable migrant in Worcester County on June 2 (Gough), 1 at Hughes Hollow on June 11 (Bjerke), 1 at Unicorn in Queen Annes County on June 21 (M. O'Brien), 1 heard at Chestertown on July 2 (Ringler), 1 near Bowie on July 26 and another near there on July 28 (M. O'Brien), and 1 in West Branch at Patuxent River Park, July 26 through Aug. 4 (Kearns +). A nest of **Common Barn-Owls** with 4 young was at Mountain Lake Park on June 9 (Pope). Other **Barn-Owl** sightings were 2 at Federalsburg on June 18 (Ross Robinson) and an adult with 2 young at Aquasco Farm on July 3 (Kearns +). A **Common Nighthawk** at Carey Run Sanctuary on July 8 (Hammer) was unusual there; 2 at Chestertown on July 26 (Grubers) may have been early migrants.

*Flycatchers.* An **Olive-sided Flycatcher** was reported from Herrington Manor on June 4 (John McClung). The **Acadian Flycatcher** that Reese found at St. Michaels on June 23 was unusual for that location. Mumford and Beaton counted 20 **Acadians** at Jug Bay on June 23. A **Willow Flycatcher** heard singing at Eastern Neck on June 18 (Droege) was the first for the refuge. A **Least Flycatcher** was rather far east near Little Pool on June 25 (O'Briens). A **Western Kingbird**, a species that occasionally occurs at this time in the east, was at Trout Run on June 4-5 (Dave Mehlman +). Michael O'Brien reported a probable early migrant **Eastern Kingbird** near Bowie on July 26.

*Swallows.* Czaplak noted the first fall migrant **Purple Martin** in DC on June 15. Spitzer found at least 6 pairs of **Tree Swallows** nesting in Wood Duck boxes on Whitehall Lake in Cecil County on June 11-12. A **Tree Swallow** at Brown's Bridge, Howard County on July 2 (Solem, Farrell) was an early migrant. An estimated 100 **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** were at Sycamore Landing on July 31 (M. O'Brien). Early migrant **Bank Swallows** included 1 at Jug Bay on June 23 (Mumford, Beaton) and 20 at Sandy Point on July 11 (Davidson), 7 at Deal Island WMA on July 24 (H. Armistead), and 25 at Tuckahoe State Park on July 26 (Rittenhouse). Major concentrations of **Bank Swallows** were 1300 at Eastern Neck on July 13 (Margery Plymire), 600 at Hart - Miller on July 29 (Kaestner, Simon), 950 at Hurlock on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson), and 200 at Poolesville on July 31 (M. O'Brien). Rare on the Eastern Shore was a **Cliff Swallow** at Hurlock on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson).

*Crows, Nuthatches, Wrens, Kinglets.* The Armisteads noted a **Fish Crow** nest on the steps of the observation tower on Adam Island on June 22. A **White-breasted Nuthatch** near Henry's Crossroads in Dorchester County on July 2 (Reese) was a rarity there. On June 21 the Armisteads found a single **Brown-headed Nuthatch** in a tiny patch of loblolly pine on James Island, which is just north of Taylors Island. A

few **Sedge Wrens** appeared late in the season with 1 at Finzel on July 9 (Dan Boone, Hammer +), 1 near Union Mills in Carroll County on July 28 (Droege) and 2 at Elliott on July 28 (David Sibley). Henry Armistead counted 65 **Marsh Wrens** at Deal Island WMA on July 24. Reports of **Golden-crowned Kinglets** in Garrett County included 30 at New Germany State Park on June 18 (M. O'Brien) and 2 adults feeding 2 fledglings at Pleasant Valley on June 25 (O'Briens).

*Thrushes, Waxwings.* An oddity for mid-summer was a singing Swainson's **Thrush** observed at Rockville on June 26-27 (P. O'Brien). This is the second such occurrence in this decade (see *Maryland Birdlife* 40:4). Reports of **Cedar Waxwings** included 25 late migrants at St. Michaels on June 4, and 7 there on June 15 (Reese). An active waxwing nest was found near Easton on June 7 (Terry Allen). A flock of 9 waxwings at Elliott on June 18 (Wierenga +) may have been late migrants. Adult waxwings were feeding young at Chestnut Grove in Garrett County on July 23 (Skipper).

*Shrikes, Vireos.* A single **Loggerhead Shrike** continued to be seen through the season at Lilypons by many observers. A belated report from the spring was of a **Loggerhead Shrike** at Crystal Spring Farm in Anne Arrundel County from March 28 through April 2 (Marshall Iliff). A **White-eyed Vireo** was seen feeding a **Brown-headed Cowbird** at Centennial Park on July 1 (Hammer), and in Garrett County where the species is still rare, an adult was carrying food on July 23 at Chestnut Grove (Skipper). A vagrant **Solitary Vireo** in full song was seen at Ednor Recreation Center in Montgomery County on June 28 (Robbins); it was not found on weekly visits before and after that date. An adult **Warbling Vireo** was feeding a fledgling near Woodmark Lake on June 18 (Solem, Farrell).

*Warblers, Tanagers.* A **Yellow Warbler** nest at Piney Run held 5 eggs on May 28 (Ringler) and an early fall migrant **Yellow Warbler** was on Assateague on July 30 (O'Briens, Davidson). A singing male **Black-throated Green Warbler** seen on June 12 was out of place at Buckeystown (Mumford +). Another **Black-throated Green** singing near Nassawango Church on June 25 (Droege) may have been of the southeastern coastal plain race *Dendroica virens waynei*. A **Cerulean Warbler** in Worcester County on June 2 (Gough) was evidently a very late migrant besides being very rare on the Eastern Shore. Skipper found adult **Black-and-white Warblers** feeding fledged young near Walnut Bottom in Garrett County on July 6 and Michael O'Brien noted the first fall migrant at Beltsville on July 25. Late spring migrant **American Redstarts** were 1 at the Whitehall Tract in Cecil County on June 4 (Spitzer) and 1 at Denton on June 9 (Nuttie); early fall birds were 1 near Bowie on July 26 (M. O'Brien) and 1 at Jug Bay on July 30 (Wilson). A female redstart was carrying nesting material at Woodstock in Baltimore County on May 28 (Wilkinson). An adult **Worm-eating Warbler** was feeding a fledgling at Liberty Reservoir in Baltimore County on June 25 (Ringler). The first migrant **Northern Waterthrush** of the season was at Denton on July 27 (Nuttie). A **Canada Warbler** on Tizzard Island on June 11 (Walbeck) was a very late migrant. A pair of **Summer Tanagers** was seen at Prettyboy Reservoir in Baltimore County into June (Paul Noell +) apparently nesting in forest opened up by the ravages of the gypsy moths in recent years. This is significantly farther north than the species has normally nested in recent decades.

*Dickcissels.* Throughout most of the United States **Dickcissels** appeared to be on the move, expanding into new territories in many regions. Maryland was no exception and reports came from several unexpected Coastal Plain locations in addition

to some well-known Piedmont sites. A singing male continued near Keysville through June 12 (Ringler +) at a location previously reported in the spring, and another pair was seen at Keysville on June 26 (Ringler). Two were singing at Eastern Neck on June 17-18 (Droege), 1 along Adamstown Road in Frederick County on June 19 (P. O'Brien), 1 at Greensboro on June 25 (Nuttle, C. Dorset), 8 were singing near Masey from June 28 into July (Ricciardi +) with 10 seen on July 9 (Davidson), 2 males were singing near Centreville on June 29 (Davidson, Rasberry), 1 was flying over Ruthsburg on June 30 (M. O'Brien), 3 were at Aquasco Farm on July 3 (Kearns +), 3 on Bakers Lane near Chestertown on July 12 (Grubers) and 2 singing males were near St. Marys City on unspecified dates (Ernie Willoughby +). Speculation about the cause of this phenomenon is leaning toward the severe drought in the midwest forcing birds out of their common range. However, the widespread nature of the event may mean that it resulted from a general explosion of the population in suitable habitat created by new farming practices.

*Sparrows.* **Vesper Sparrows** are rare on the Coastal Plain; reports this summer were of 1 at Aquasco Farm on July 3 (Ringler +) and 6 near Massey on July 22 (Blom), the latter with about 20 **Grasshopper Sparrows** in the same area. Michael O'Brien estimated about 30 Grasshopper Sparrows at Rockville on July 31. Reports of **Henslow's Sparrows** were 1 singing at Crystal Spring Farm in Anne Arundel County in May (Marshall Iliff) and a pair with one carrying food for young at Elliott on July 28 (David Sibley). Michael O'Brien counted 151 **Sharp-tailed Sparrows** at Elliott on June 30 and Henry Armistead counted 33 at Deal Island WMA on July 24 with 205 **Seaside Sparrows**.

*Siskins.* After Maryland's first nesting **Pine Siskins** in April there was an interesting carry over into the summer of birds that probably were not breeding. These were all single birds: at a feeder in Cumberland on June 2 (Kiddy), at a feeder in Bethesda through June 14 (David Horn), at Bowie through June 17 (Kathy Klimkiewicz), at another location in Bethesda on June 18 (Wilkinson), and in Ocean City on July 3 (Hilton).

6272 Pinyon Pine Court, Eldersburg, MD 21784

## RING-BILLED GULL WITH WHITE TERTIALS

EIRIK A. T. BLOM

Partial albinism is not unusual in birds, and has been noted in gulls on numerous occasions. The following observation is intended to add one more such sighting to the list of such plumage aberrations, and to remind birdwatchers of the potential variability in gulls.

On Monday, December 5, 1988, I was watching birds at Conowingo Dam on the Susquehanna River. There were approximately 12,000 gulls present, and I was sorting through them attempting to locate unusual species, when I noticed an oddly plumaged Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*). The bird was perched on rocks about 300 yards from where I was standing. It appeared to have an extraordinary amount of white in the tertials, but because of the angle I was not certain of how extensive it might be.

When the gull finally turned and could be seen in full profile it became apparent that the tertials were entirely white. Otherwise the bird had all the characters of a Ring-bill in second-basic (second-winter) plumage. The upperparts were pale gray,

with only three or four scattered brown feathers in the scapulars. The underparts were white, with a few small dark scallops on the sides of the breast. The head was white with a few dark streaks on the crown and nape. The primaries were dull black, with a thin white edge on the outer three, but no subapical spot was visible while the bird was at rest. The bill was two-toned, basally dull yellow and distally dark. The legs were light pinkish. I could not discern eye color.

The only part of the bird that was not typical was the tertials. They looked entirely snowy white, and seemed to be quite fresh. The striking nature of the tertial color was even more evident when the bird took flight, appearing as a large white patch on the trailing edge of the wing at the juncture of the body. Though seen only briefly in flight, dark spots were evident on the tips of five or six tail feathers. This sort of "remnant" tail band is typical of Ring-billed Gulls in second-basic plumage. The bird, once in the air, flew quickly down river and was not seen again. The sighting started at 10:30 a.m. and lasted until 11:10 a.m. Other birds observed during the three hours of observation were 7500 ± Ring-billed Gulls, 3000 ± Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*), 300 Great Black-backed Gulls (*L. marinus*), 3 Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*L. fuscus*), 1 Bonaparte's Gull (*L. philadelphia*), and 7 Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*).

1618 Somerville Road, Bel Air, MD 21014

## BOOK REVIEWS

**A FRIEND OF NATURE, SELECTED POEMS ABOUT NATURE.** Burton Alexander. 1988. Published by the Author. 6418 White Peach Place, Columbia, MD 21045. vi+54p. \$8.50.

We birders allow our passion for birds to color the rest of our lives, don't we? Especially our creative endeavors. Some of us paint birds, carve birds, needle-point birds, write books about birds, or listen to music inspired by birds. Some of us have even been moved to write poetry about birds, though we are not always brave enough to admit it. (I'm in that category.) Burton Alexander not only doesn't mind admitting it; he has published a collection of his poetry, and it can inspire all of us. In 1980, by his own account, he allotted himself time for a new hobby and began writing about 12 poems a month at first. From that collection he has selected 72 poems, photocopied them and bound them in a simple but attractive cover. I'm flattered to have received an autographed copy of the book, given because I once sent him a note expressing appreciation for one of his poems published in the Baltimore Chapter *Newsletter*. No other poems appeared in the *Newsletter*, but he determined to gather those he liked best and publish them in book form.

Any poet who can effectively use *pshh-pshh-pshh* in a poem deserves our attention, but there is more to Burton Alexander's poetry than that. His regard for birds and for all of nature shines through every line of his volume. A smapling of the titles gives a feel for the wide range of his interest: "That First Junco," "The Bird List," "The Roadside Raptor," "To a Song Sparrow Feeding a Young Cowbird." It's a book to pick up, read several pages of poems, and ponder until you walk by again. You'll recognize many of your own familiar feelings, though phrased more gracefully than most of us can. Burton's introduction ends with this wish: "I hope you will enjoy my poems and ... become a friend of nature." You won't be able to resist. So send him a check if you want one of the 50 first-edition copies.

Joy Wheeler

**SEVEN HALF-MILES FROM HOME, Notes of a Wind River Naturalist. Mary Back. 1985. Johnson Books: Boulder, Colorado. Black-and-white sketches, maps, bibliography, 186 p. \$9.95.**

Somewhere 200 miles west of Casper, Wyoming and 80 miles east of Yellowstone National Park there lies a one-mile-in-diameter concentration of natural delights. Reading Mary Back's book almost convinces you that there is no place on earth so rich in natural beauty. Her persuasiveness is the result of combining a naturalist's knowledge with an artist's eye, and doing it the way only a naturally good writer can. In 1963 her doctor told her that to aid her circulation she should walk one mile every day before breakfast. Not surprisingly, she did not elect to walk up and down the paved road. She chose instead seven one-half mile loops, with her home as center, and she walked one loop each day of the week. From those walks comes this book, full of observations and advice for people who study nature. Be observant. Be ready for change every day in what seems on the surface to be the same old surroundings. Be prepared for the unexpected. Accept your "embarrassment of riches" and share it with anyone who wants to hear your story. After all, Mary Back was 80 years old when she published this, her first book.

The modest price and the extensive observations about birds should make this an appealing book. It might even encourage others of us to share our own observations.

— Joy Wheeler.

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