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Notes

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher Killed by Entanglement on Burdock

by
A.David Brewer

There have been several recent publications on the subject of entanglement of small birds on the heads of Common Burdock (*Arctium minus*). McNicholl (1988) reviewed the literature to that date, unearthing a surprising number of documented occurrences. Not surprisingly, very small birds were the most usual victims, with more recorded instances for the Golden-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*) than for any

other species. However, birds as large as a Solitary Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*) have also been trapped (McNicholl 1988), as well as small bats. This note records the death by this cause of a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*), a species not previously documented as a victim.

On 21 August 1993, at the Mountsberg Wildlife Centre near Campbellville, Ontario, I found the corpse of a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher caught by its legs and belly-feathers on a burdock head (Figure 1). The plant was about one metre high, growing beside a patch of scrub between Mountsberg Lake and some cultivated fields. The body was fairly mummified and had clearly been there for at least a week and possibly longer. Due to the state of the specimen, the age and sex of the bird could not be determined, although it lacked the black forehead of an adult male. The wing-length (51 mm) was not helpful.

The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher is a regular but rather sparse breeder in southern Wellington County. It has become substantially more common in recent years.

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Figure 1: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher entangled on Common Burdock, Mountsberg Wildlife Centre. Photo by *A. David Brewer.*

Additional Records of Birds Caught on Burdock

by
Martin K. McNicholl

As noted by Brewer (1994), I prepared a review of instances of bats and birds caught on burdock (*Arctium* spp.) a few years ago (McNicholl 1988). The review was stimulated by the publication of several short notes on specific instances by authors who were able to find no or few references to similar observations. The only publication to that time which cited several other records was that of Taylor and Cameron (1985). Because most of the records I had found were published in regional and even more localized serials, I surmised that my review was probably incomplete. Since my initial review, I have located several additional instances, including records of two species (Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Magnolia Warbler) not mentioned in the earlier review. The purpose of this note is thus to update the earlier review.

I urge other observers to record such instances, as other small species may also be susceptible to getting stuck on the seeds of burdock. Although I have not yet found any records of wrens stuck on burdock, Hampson (1970) reported a House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) that successfully freed itself from entanglement in Beggars Lice (*Hackelia virginiana*).

As Scoggan (1979) indicates that four species of burdock have been reported from Canada (all including Ontario), all introduced from Europe or Eurasia, I have not assumed that any particular species was involved. Common Burdock (*Arctium minus*) is the species most frequently mentioned specifically in the literature that I have reviewed to date.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird
(*Archilochus colubris*)

In my earlier review, I listed two records, involving at least three birds reported from New York and Ontario. I accidentally omitted another record of a female found dead on a burdock at Shirley's Bay, near Ottawa, Ontario by Douglas Craig on 1 September 1985 (Di Labio 1986).

Black-capped Chickadee
(*Parus atricapillus*)

In my earlier review, I listed two records of one bird each reported from Ontario and at an unspecified location. In addition, Richard Tuft found a dead Black-capped Chickadee in Syracuse, New York on an unspecified date (Stegeman 1953).

Red-breasted Nuthatch
(*Sitta canadensis*)

One record of one bird has been reported from Massachusetts (McNicholl 1988).

Golden-crowned Kinglet
(*Regulus satrapa*)

In my earlier review, I listed one record from each of Illinois, Massachusetts and New York, and

four records from Ontario. All involved one or two birds except that the Illinois report involved "scores" found stuck to burdock by Floyd Hartman and James G. Needham (Needham 1909). In addition, I overlooked a record of a male found dead on *Arctium lappa* at the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary at Delta, British Columbia by Val McLeod on 4 February 1974 (Dawe 1974). More recently, Kubisz (1989) reported finding a female caught on a burdock in Resources Road Ravine, Toronto in early May 1989. Barbara Charlton (pers. comm., 18 October 1991) found and released a male from a burdock at Winona, Ontario on 12 October 1991 and reported that George Naylor had found one dead on burdock there a day or two earlier.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet
(*Regulus calendula*)

In my earlier review, I noted one record from North Dakota. In addition, Baillie (1944) reported that H.C. Bliss found a mummified Ruby-crowned Kinglet stuck on burs in Haliburton, Ontario in October 1943. In addition to burdock, Beggars Lice has trapped at least one Ruby-crowned Kinglet, apparently in Illinois (Hampson 1970).

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
(*Polioptila caerulea*)

As documented in an accompanying note, Brewer (1994) discovered a dead gnatcatcher stuck to burdock near Campbellville, Ontario on 21 August 1993.

Solitary Vireo
(*Vireo solitarius*)

The only record I located was that of Taylor and Cameron (1985) in Ottawa, Ontario.

Warbler sp.

In addition to the warblers listed below, Stegeman (1953) and Stensaas (1989) each reported finding one dead warbler of undetermined species stuck on a burdock on an unspecified date in Syracuse, New York and in September 1987 in Duluth, Minnesota, respectively.

Magnolia Warbler
(*Dendroica magnolia*)

After my earlier review was published, I discovered a record of a Magnolia Warbler found struggling on a burdock in Syracuse, New York on 20 September 1969 (Burnett 1970). The bird flew off after Burnett released it.

Yellow-rumped Warbler
(*Dendroica coronata*)

There is one report involving one bird in New York (McNicholl 1988).

Common Yellowthroat
(*Geothlypis trichas*)

There is one report of one victim in New Jersey (McNicholl 1988).

Pine Siskin
(*Carduelis pinus*)

There is one report of one trapped bird in New York (McNicholl 1988).

American Goldfinch
(*Carduelis tristis*)

In my earlier review, I listed two reports of one bird each in New York, one report of one bird in Ohio, and one report of an unspecified number of birds in Ontario. In

addition, Kelsey (1970) published a photograph of a dead goldfinch entangled in burdock on an unspecified date in an unspecified location with the remark that such deaths were not unusual.

Acknowledgements

Susan Morsean of the Wilson Ornithological Society's Josselyn Van Tyne Library kindly supplied me with a copy of Burnett (1970). I thank Barbara Charlton for sharing her kinglet observations and David Brewer for writing up his gnatcatcher observation to accompany this note.

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A Probable Wood Duck x Ring-necked Duck hybrid in Ontario

by

Bruce M. Di Labio and Michel Gosselin

Hybridization is a well-known phenomenon in birds; nearly 10% of all bird species are known to hybridize in the wild. In ducks and geese (the Anatidae), over 40% of the species have hybridized. This is the highest proportion in any bird family, and the figures are even more staggering when hybrid Anatids produced in captivity are taken into account (Grant and Grant 1992). Many factors have apparently contributed to the high proportion of hybrids reported among Anatidae: the

mating system of these birds, and the fact that females sometimes lay in the nests of other species are particularly important ones (Sibley 1957, Sibley 1994). The large number of ducks and geese which are handled each year by hunters and wildlife biologists, and the ease with which Anatids can be examined and identified to species in the field, have also certainly helped to increase the reports of hybrids.

In the wild, most hybrid pairings among ducks involve species of the same genus (congeners), but there are instances of inter-generic pairings (Grant and Grant 1992). Care has to be used when assessing occurrences of inter-generic hybrids, because the real phylogenetic affinities of several groups of species are poorly understood; the dendrograms of Sibley and Ahlquist (1990), for example, show that some of our current "genera" are inaccurate indicators of the real genetic distance between bird species.

The Casselman hybrid

On 2 June 1986, B.M. Di Labio found a duck that showed characters of a hybrid Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) x Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*) at the Casselman sewage pond in Russell County. The square tail and slightly raised rear-end were reminiscent of a Wood Duck, while the bill and body coloration pointed to a Ring-necked Duck. The bird was not closely associated with any of the dabblers present, and no Wood Ducks or Ring-necked Ducks were on the pond at that time of the year. In the hand (Figure 1), the bird proved to be an adult male, with many of the plumage features intermediate between the presumed parent species. The irides were yellow with a dusky inner ring, and the legs were yellowish-flesh, with darker joints and dusky webs. The specimen is now deposited in the Canadian Museum of Nature under catalogue number 83683.

The head of this bird bears the white chin spot and bill markings of the Ring-necked Duck. The breast displays a mixture of brown and blackish mottling, merging in the belly and flank pattern. As in the Ring-necked Duck the flanks show vermiculations, which extend over the entire belly in an attenuated form. Primaries are lighter, as in the Ring-necked Duck, while secondaries and secondary coverts are overlaid with the greenish sheen as in the Wood Duck; only a few small terminal white tips are present on the secondaries. The three penultimate primaries are widely emarginated, as is the case in the Wood Duck. The tail has the colour and shape of a Wood Duck tail, although its size (62 mm) is intermediate between the average for Wood Duck (102 mm) and Ring-necked Duck (58 mm) - all measurements are from Godfrey (1986). At 42 mm, bill length is also intermediate between the Wood Duck (33 mm) and Ring-necked Duck (48 mm). Some characters, however, are not present in either of the presumed parents, like the pale cheek pattern intersected by a "negative" of the male Wood Duck face pattern, a feature often seen in the hybrid progeny of Wood Ducks (E. Gillham, pers. comm.). The brown back and underwings are also absent in both presumed parent species. The wing measurements of the Casselman hybrid (180.4 mm) are below the mean for both the Wood Duck (223

mm) and the Ring-necked Duck (195.6 mm), although the Ring-necked Duck is our smallest *Aythya*.

In short, the diagnostic shape and coloration of the wings and tail clearly point to the Wood Duck as one of the parent species. The closely related Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*), common in aviaries, has never produced viable hybrids with any duck other than the Wood Duck, apparently because of its peculiar chromosomal arrangement (Johnsgard 1968). The combination of small size, white chinspot, bill, upperparts, and flank coloration point to the Ring-necked Duck as the most likely second parent of the Casselman hybrid.

Although the Wood Duck is known to hybridize with other *Aythya* species in the wild and in captivity, this is apparently the first instance of hybridization between the Wood Duck and the Ring-necked Duck (Panov 1989). We follow Gillham (1993) in regarding all hybrids as probable unless the actual parents are known, or unless the aspect of the hybrid has previously been documented from birds of known parentage.

Acknowledgements
We thank Eric Gillham for his useful comments and information on hybrid ducks.

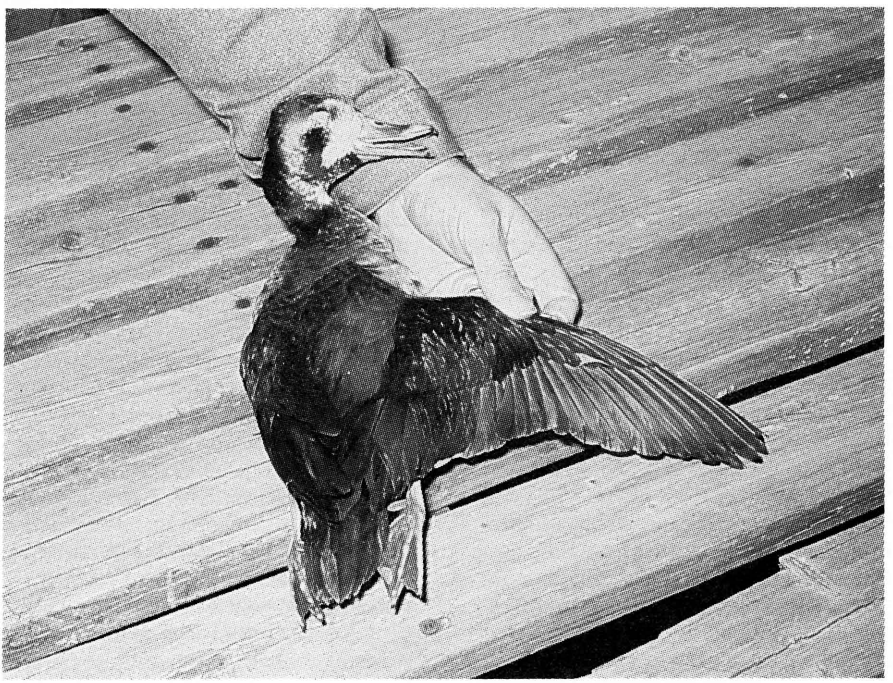

Figure 1: The Casselman hybrid in the hand. Photo by *Bruce Di Labio.*

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White-throated Sparrow Scavenges Carcass of Conspecific

by
Anthony L. Lang

The food of the White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) usually consists largely of insects, seeds, and fruit (Lowther and Falls 1968, Ehrlich et al. 1988). Here I report on a White-throated Sparrow feeding on an unusual food source: the carcass of a conspecific. I also speculate that the choice of this food source resulted from a local scarcity of the usual food of this species.

On 17 May 1994 at about 09:30h, in a small parkette at the base of First Canadian Place, a tall office tower in the downtown business district of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, I observed a White-throated Sparrow feeding on the remains of another bird. The carcass had been mostly eaten when I began the observations so it is impossible to determine how much was consumed by the White-throated Sparrow. The sparrow picked flesh from the carcass until I approached to identify the species represented by the remains. At that time I determined that the carcass was that of a White-throated Sparrow. Given the type of bill that the White-throated Sparrow has, it is unlikely that it was able to break the skin of a complete carcass. Rather, it is more probable that the bird was preyed upon or scavenged by a domestic cat, Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*), American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), or Common Grackle (*Quiscalis quiscula*), which consumed

most of the carcass. A Common Grackle was frequently observed to prey on migrant passerines in this parkette in the spring of 1992 (Davidson 1994). Although White-throated Sparrows will eat dog food in captivity (J.B. Falls, pers. comm.), there are no reports of this species eating the remains of vertebrates in the wild.

The sparrow's use of this extraordinary food source may have been due to the lack of accessible sources of this species' usual types of food. The parkette is small (approximately 36 x 30 m) and only about half of the area is covered with grass, shrubs, or trees (Davidson 1994). It is also surrounded by office towers in excess of 50 storeys in height, which probably severely restrict movements of migrant birds out ot the parkette. Given that there were approximately 10 to 30 migrant passerines in the parkette on days prior to observation (pers. obs.), the rate of consumption of insects, seed, blossoms, and fruit by these and resident birds at that time of year could often have exceeded the rate of replenishment. Therefore, the small size of the park and its use by a relatively large number of stranded migrants probably led to a food shortage. This in turn would have forced the White-throated Sparrow to search for alternative sources of food and thus to scavenge the carcass of a member of its own species.

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Book Reviews

Finches and Sparrows: An Identification Guide. 1993. By *Peter Clement*, illustrated by *Alan Harris* and *John Davis*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. Hardcover, 500 pages, 73 colour plates and 281 range maps plus line drawings. $76.95 Canadian.

This book is one of the latest in a series which includes such classics as *Seabirds, Shorebirds, Waterfowl, Swallows and Martins* and most recently *Warblers*. These extremely detailed and comprehensive identification guides are syntheses of the current knowledge on each group from worldwide sources.

In *Finches and Sparrows*, 290