

WORDS FROM OLD LYME

"Escapes Versus Vagrants: A Comment," the article by Richard Veit published in the December issue (*BOEM* 11: 309), generated some controversy among the staff and elicited more than usual comment from the readership. Roger Tory Peterson was so kind as to send to the editor a copy of his letter to Dick Veit, and this is reprinted below.

February 28, 1984

Dear Mr. Veit:

I was very interested in your perceptive article in a recent issue of *Bird Observer of Eastern Massachusetts* concerning rarities that are dismissed as "escapes."

I recall that years ago, early editions of the British Handbook would make brief mention of certain North American passerines at Fair Isle or some other coastal points with the cautionary note - "probably an escaped cage bird," even though it was a warbler or a North American sparrow that would be of unlikely captive origin. Now, of course, we know that Fair Isle, Scilly Isle, etc., are logical spots for such vagrants to show up.

No one except Don Roberson on the West Coast questioned that the reef heron on Nantucket was a valid stray; they are not kept in captivity - at least in the U.S. On the other hand a jackdaw that had been around Nantucket last year was shrugged off and not even mentioned in print, so far as I can determine. Noble Proctor saw it and so did a number of others. So, when Davis Crompton wrote me about a "Cuban crow" at Nantucket, I assumed that he meant the jackdaw. Both have some gray on the hind neck, but have totally different bills. Davis, of course, should know the Cuban crow, having done some birding in Cuba at one point. When I brought up the jackdaw, he was very adamant about the Cuban crow. He said he knew about the jackdaw.

I thought no more about it until one of Noble Proctor's students reported a strange sounding crow at a reservoir near New Haven. Noble went to check on it and, believe it or not, it *was* a Cuban crow. This made the Cuban crow at Nantucket seem more valid. Noble, in my opinion, is the best field man we have in Connecticut; no one questions him. Furthermore, he saw both the Cuban crow and the jackdaw. The question in Noble's mind was whether some behaviorist was working on *Corvidae*. He investigated and could turn up no such lead.

Nantucket would be a logical place for either one of these two birds to turn up; but one is as unlikely as the other. Had they turned up at Ithaca or Albany, I would immediately suspect escaped laboratory birds. Incidentally, the jackdaw has been extending its range and is now resident in Iceland. Birds do have wings and they use them.

I agree with you that such sightings should be put on record and we should not always assume that they are escapes. If a pattern emerges we have not lost some basic data.

Roger Tory Peterson