

FIELD NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE _____

REDTAIL DROWNS MALLARD

On February 7, 1993, at approximately 2:00 P.M., upon hearing a loud commotion with crows cawing and dozens of ducks flying out of the Powow River in Amesbury, we (Richard and I) ran to the bedroom windows only to see a hawk in the river. My first thought was that the poor thing had gotten itself in trouble, because there it was, wet up to its shoulders, turning around in circles. Then we realized it was on top of a female Mallard, and it was actually drowning the duck! After several minutes of watching, with the hawk flapping its wings and the Mallard's head occasionally bobbing up, the struggle appeared to cease. The hawk, which we had now identified as a mature Red-tailed Hawk, winged its way to the ice on the shore and dragged itself, then the duck, onto the ice. The Redtail just sat there. The duck managed to get back in the water but was obviously injured. The hawk flapped and shook, but sat on the ice for perhaps ten minutes. It then climbed a bank and sat on a stump, again shaking and flapping its wings all the while. It made its first attempt at flight by going from the stump to a branch, and again rested for another ten minutes, all the while flapping and trying to dry off. I was concerned that it could not fly and would freeze to death (by now it was 2:30 or 2:45 P.M. and twelve degrees outside), but it finally flew away. Meanwhile, the Mallard had managed to pull itself onto the ice and just sat there, again obviously very injured. For two hours we constantly checked the Mallard, and I was so relieved when I saw its head down and assumed it had died. This was approximately 4:15 P.M., and I tried to call Paul Roberts to tell him what we had witnessed. Fortunately, as it turns out, Paul was not expected in until 6:00 P.M.

We sat in our kitchen chatting, and I glanced out and commented to Richard that it looked like a hawk sitting in the top of a dead catalpa, but since I did not have my glasses on, we both shrugged it off, until Richard saw the top of the dead catalpa move. We scrambled around again and got our binoculars on it, and it was a Red-tailed Hawk. It flew to the other side of the river and took up watch. I sat on our bed, watching the hawk in the tree and checking the dead Mallard occasionally. Sure enough, at approximately 4:45 P.M., the hawk flew to the dead Mallard and proceeded to eat it until about 5:30 P.M. After finishing its meal, the Redtail flew down the river and disappeared.

Had it not been for Paul Roberts telling us about seeing an eagle drown a duck, I may not have realized just what was happening in the Powow. This was an incredible scene to witness, especially to see a Redtail drown a duck, get so soaked, and then go through the drying process. Although I am not one hundred percent sure it was the same Redtail that returned and consumed the Mallard, I do believe it to be very likely. An unforgettable experience!

Richard and Lisa Estes, Amesbury, Massachusetts

UPDATE: METROPOLITAN STATE HOSPITAL PROPERTY

In October 1992 *Bird Observer* reported on the efforts of a coalition of local environmental groups to preserve the wildlife habitat on the property of the former Metropolitan State Hospital in Waltham, Massachusetts (Andrews, J.W., and L. E. Taylor, 1992, A Key Link in Greater Boston's Wildlife Habitat: Metropolitan State Hospital, *Bird Observer* 20(5):246). The 330-acre parcel was declared "surplus" after the hospital closed. The hospital buildings and grounds occupy only one-fourth of the surplus land. The remainder of the property is part of a regional greenway and includes habitat for Red-tailed Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Scarlet Tanager, and other noteworthy species. In March 1993, the state/municipal task force working on the project unveiled a proposal developed in conjunction with the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) to preserve 251 acres of the site as a public reservation. The reservation would protect all wetlands, vernal pools, and mature woods on the property. The MDC proposal is enthusiastically supported by the environmental coalition, and residents of adjoining towns are urged to express their support for the proposal. For more information, contact the Beaver Brook Watershed Coalition, c/o John Andrews, 22 Kendall Road, Lexington, MA 02173, telephone 617-862-6498.

Brian Cassie — Natural History Tours

Rio Grande Valley—Birds and Butterflies: October 22-30, 1993

Texas' Rio Grande Valley is one of North America's premier hotspots for birds and butterflies. Late October is an excellent time to see resident and migrant birds and is the season of greatest butterfly diversity. Join the growing number of birders who are making butterflying part of their nature experience. Co-led with Jeffrey Glassberg, author of *Butterflies Through Binoculars* and president of the North American Butterfly Association. Contact Brian Cassie or write Butterflies Through Binoculars Tours, 39 Highland Avenue, Chappaqua, NY 10514.

Venezuela—The Andes and Llanos: January 14-28, 1994

On this, our fourth Venezuelan tour, we will visit the Andes, with such spectacular birds as Sword-billed Hummingbird and Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, and the world-famous llanos, seasonally-wet savannahs with overwhelming numbers of ibises, storks, and herons, as well as bizarre Hoatzins. The scenery on the tour is even more spectacular than the wildlife. Whether this is your first Neotropical tour or your fifteenth, the Venezuelan Andes and llanos promise to provide a great birding experience.

Churchill and Southeastern Manitoba: June 10-19, 1994

Brian's seventh tour here will include a full week at Churchill (many tours offer only three or four days), with ample time to search out nesting Ross' Gulls, Smith's Longspurs, Northern Shrikes, Snow Geese, and large numbers of breeding shorebirds. Polar Bears and nesting Hawk and Boreal owls have been seen on past tours. Connecticut Warblers, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Marbled Godwits are a few of the avian highlights on the Winnipeg/southern Manitoba portion of the trip.

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