

COMMENTS ON THE BLUE MAGPIE

By H. Elliott McClure

(The following is from a letter written to the Editor dated April 9, 1962. -Ed.)

I just received the January-February 1962 issue of EBBA NEWS and was surprised to see the bird shown on the cover. My first thought was, "Don't tell me this species has also invaded America". The drawing is excellent, and the bird was obviously the Blue Magpie (*Cyanopica cyanus*) with which I was so familiar in Japan.

This is one of the most interesting species of Jays because of its broken distribution; it occurs only in the Iberian peninsula and in Japan, and in these localities its distribution is again spotty. It is not a strong flyer nor does it migrate. In Japan the flocks were small, usually no more than a hundred individuals and each flock had a very restricted range. It is not a very pugnacious species although I have had it strike me on the head when I was up a tree examining the nest. I have seen very little pugnacity toward other species.

The other Jay which we have in Japan is a typical Jay but I have never seen the Blue Magpie in close association with it. The two species may occupy the same forested or parkland habitat but not be seen in association with each other.

The bird seen in New Jersey in association with the Bluejays was probably responding in the same way that I say in two Sulphur-crested Cockatoos outside of Tokyo in 1957. These two birds had escaped from a pet shop in Tokyo and in flying about had come in contact with the several species of Egrets which occupied the large heronry several miles north of Tokyo at Sagiyama. The actions of the two Cockatoos were very interesting because they were attracted by the white birds which were the only white birds of their size in the vicinity. Obviously the Cockatoos, being gregarious, were lonely so they sought the company of other white birds. When the Egrets flew to the rice fields and waded in the mud and water searching for fish and crustacea, the Cockatoos would follow them and walk along the dikes where they fed on grass and weed seeds. Your Blue Magpie also being gregarious undoubtedly was lonely so joined the company of the Bluejays.

It is interesting to conjecture where this individual might have come from; I suspect from a pet shop in New York, for the trip across the Atlantic from Spain, even via the route used by Cattle Egrets, seems rather impossible. Such escapees as this bird are always of interest to bird watchers.