



## Books For Banders

"SOMETHING OLD AND SOMETHING NEW"

Edited By Mabel Gillespie



In 1952 Doubleday and Company, Inc. published "Birds as Individuals" by Len Howard. The book had already been published in England. Miss Howard has a fantastic gift for taming wild birds which literally live with her. There is always a window or two open in her home, Bird Cottage, so that birds can enter or leave at will. Her parlour contains boxes and mailing tubes tied near the ceiling and over doors and windows where birds may roost for the night. Sometimes as many as seventeen birds spent nights in these cubby holes. Others perched in her bedroom. One of the fine photographic illustrations by Eric Hoskings shows the author's hands on her typewriter, with one great titmouse just taking off from her left hand while another of the same species perches on the spool cover of the machine.

She writes: "It seems evident that birds can communicate with each other by slight inflections of voice and of movement, because I find those that know me well understand much by their sensitive interpretation of my voice or least movement. For example, when Great Titmice want to peck at my butter dish, which they know is usually forbidden, they perch a little way off and look first at the butter, then at my face, hesitating although longing to help themselves, for they have a passion for butter. If I say 'Come on' coaxingly, they confidently step up and eat it. If I say 'No' just a little sternly they remain where they are but continue to look pleadingly at me and then at the butter. A shade crosser 'No' sends them hopping farther off; an angry 'No' makes them fly to the open window, but if I quickly call out 'Here, come on,' in a very coaxing tone, they at once return and hop along the table towards the butter, still eyeing me for further signs of objection."

"The most intelligent and sensitive birds watch my face and actions, putting two and two together with astonishing speed in many such things.."

This is no believe-it-or-not situation. There have been plenty of witnesses to many similar episodes. Furthermore, Miss Howard gets so well acquainted with the several families of great titmice in her vicinity, also families of blue titmice, blackbirds, robins, and other species, that she does not need to depend on the way bands are placed on their legs in order to recognize each one as an individual. Hence the title of the bok.

It is my opinion that such an ability to enter into communion with wild creatures so as to understand them and have them accept one without fear is a special gift like artistic talent or musical genius. Anyone

with time and patience can induce wild birds of certain species to feed from his hand. But to have birds understand human speech is most unusual. This ability reminds me of a book called "Kinship With All Life" by J. Allen Boone, published by Harper and Row in 1954. It is the story of the author's experiences in establishing rapport with various creatures.

"Birds as Individuals" is in two parts: the first is "Bird Behaviour" and the second, "Bird Song." (Miss Howard had been a professional musician.) Half of the first part is concerned with the lives and loves of great titmice unto the third and fourth generations, including a family tree in approved genealogical format. There was a female called Jane who "had the originality to sing a charming song during nesting season. Her gift was unique. Other female Great Titmice do not sing although they have a variety of call-notes, a scold-tone, etc.; but Jane's song was much superior to the male's...The song was begun in gay, ringing tones and gradually grew softer and sweeter as it lowered in pitch. A chime of bells dying away on the wind was suggested."

"Great Titmice" are easier to distinguish than most species. Having such close contact with them, I get to know their different facial expressions and characteristic mannerisms and poses... When the young are in moult I am able to follow day by day the changes that occur, for those with whom I am intimate are so frequently on my hand or lap, as are also their parents."

"It is extremely unusual for Great Titmice to be bigamists, but they have so much individuality that their nesting affairs have no set pattern.. Even these normal nesting affairs that are often called 'instinctive', show great variation in detail and no two couples are quite alike in behaviour to each other while nest-building and rearing young."

"With birds the time of nesting affairs is more correctly reckoned by the flowers in bloom than by calendar dates."

Miss Howard ponders on the mystery "how it comes about that a bird suddenly appears when a vacancy arises for a new mate." She has discovered that birds adjust their territorial laws to meet circumstances.

The title of one chapter is "Recognition, Friendship and Games." The author describes convincingly the show of anger and temper in individual birds she knows well. She shows how they can distinguish individual human beings. Birds recognized her after an interval of time and at some distance from her home. Birds came to her when they needed help.

The descriptions of the games birds play is fascinating, but Miss Howard must have exercised great self control when a game involved

upsetting her ink bottle. Two of the photographic illustrations show great titmice tearing open packages. In fact, Miss Howard claims "there are great difficulties in living as I do...The rooms always looking as if prepared for the sweep, with newspapers spread over furniture and books covered with cloths."

The chapter called "The Mind of a Bird" is challenging. "Many ornithologists at the present time say that bird and human mind are completely different, and that the former have not such emotions as love, hatred, jealousy, etc. clearly defined. It is thought they react automatically in set patterns of behaviour according to the stimulus." There follow accounts of incidents which make her feel "that this view is inadequate to explain the nature and behaviour of birds." One such incident seems to suggest that the bird involved had reasoning power. The author's explanation of the unison in flock flight is convincing.

If anyone is antagonized by the fact that this is a book about British birds, he should read the introduction by Roger Tory Peterson. The latter claims that British birds of many species are very like the nearly related or con-specific birds of America. He devotes several pages to comparing similar species of the two hemispheres.

Miss Howard opens her narrative by noting the attitude of an electrician who stood amazed to see wild birds coming naturally to feed from her hand or perch on her shoulder. "His whole countenance seemed to alter, his face glowed, his eyes shone and he kept murmuring: "How wonderful!" Then he said: "But why shouldn't it be like that? It ought to be like that."

My request for some audience participation has resulted in one response. Jack P. Hailman, assistant professor of zoology at the University of Maryland, wrote the following.

"In the latest issue of EBBA News you lament about the lack of reader participation and feedback. I'll spare you my complete blast on your uncritical swallowing of Lorenz' latest book (which I consider to be dangerously wrong in places, and which is certainly misleading throughout). So, to be constructive, let me just add that Reverend Armstrong's book was a good one in its time (it is woefully outdated now, and no modern ethologist would buy his ideas on "displacement" and other things). However, for the historical record, it is worth reading, and fortunately one doesn't have to go to used bookshops: Dover reprinted it as a paperback about two years ago."

The above letter arrived just as I finished writing the following paragraphs.

On September 10 the New York Times Sunday Magazine included an article called "War Is Not in Our Genes" by Sally Carrighar, wherein she takes issue with Robert Ardrey ("The Territorial Imperative") and Konrad Lorenz ("On Aggression"). Three weeks later the Times Magazine published several letters to the editor in reply. Richard G. Van Gelder, Chairman, Department of Mammalogy, American Museum of Natural History, states that Miss Carrighar is misinformed as to some of her claims, but states also that he does not believe Lorenz and Ardrey are correct.

It may be that for some time there will be embattled sides on the question of how much humankind is influenced by innate aggressiveness. If so, bird banders should be interested to note how the battle rages.

Before turning to another subject, let me include the following quotation from Miss Carrighar's article. "Biologists often call the space around a disputed female a territory. It moves when she moves and the male, going along, will not allow another male to approach within a certain well-understood distance." What is your reaction to this statement?

In "African Genesis", the first of two books by Ardrey that were reviewed early this year, the author tells of Dr. Raymond A. Dart who was professor of anatomy at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. Dr. Dart had assembled proof that "the use of weapons preceded man. Man did not father the weapon; the weapon, instead, fathered man." For many years leading scientists ignored Dart's claims: his papers were suppressed, his articles not published. "In Ardrey's opinion, Dart's tenacity and unshakable belief in his own rightness made possible our present knowledge of human origins." It is heartening to know that Dr. Dart is finally receiving the recognition he deserves. He is presently Professor of Anthropology at the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania. Also in November he was the featured speaker at one of the special events at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.

Niko Tinbergen's "The Herring Gull's World" is now obtainable in paperback, Anchor, for \$1.75.

Dover is constantly publishing in paperback more of Arthur Bent's monumental "Life Histories". Dover is also producing John James Audubon's "The Birds of America" in seven volumes. Robert Murphy's "The Golden Eagle" is now issued by Avon for sixty cents.

313 Sharp Avenue, Glenolden, Pa. 19036

