



The piece de resistance for this issue is "The Psychology of Birds" by Harold Burtt, PhD. It is subtitled "An Interpretation of Bird Behavior" and is hot off the press. It was most cooperative of Dr. Burtt to produce this text just at the time we are concentrating on bird behavior in this corner.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to attend the recent annual EBBA meeting will recall the paper read by this author at the Saturday morning session. This was entitled "Behavioral Research as a By-Product of Banding". What could have been timelier? How pleased must have been Earl Baysinger and all his Patuxent confreres.

As you know, that remarkable and active group, the Brooks Bird Club, managed the details of the EBBA meeting in most efficient and friendly manner. Betty Vossler had written me in advance, offering to meet me at the airport. Then she loaned me her copy of Dr. Burtt's book. I promptly revised my tentative schedule in order to tell you about it at once.

The paper cover of the book states that "Dr. Burtt took up bird watching as a hobby when he retired after being first a professor of psychology and then for two decades chairman of the Psychology Department at Ohio State University. He was soon caught up with studying bird behavior - though there are significant differences. One of the differences, of course, is that birds cannot talk. There's no point in asking a Bluejay why he is screaming".

Dr. Burtt is surely a most satisfactory instructor. In giving his paper he spoke distinctly and clearly and could be readily understood in the rear of the room. He speaks distinctly and clearly in his book, also. There are no unnecessary phrases and a welcome lack of polysyllabic words. The general outline suggests textbook style, but the narrative is consistently entertaining. It is written for the general public rather than for graduate students, though I suspect the latter might learn from it.

In discussing vision there is no technical consideration of rods and cones, but short paragraphs about acuity, color vision, brightness vision, visual equipment, location of eyes, and focus. Under acuity the first of two paragraphs is as follows: "The bird's visual equipment and facility appear to measure up to his need. A case was noted earlier of a thrush which looked upward and registered alarm, while a man had to use binoculars in order to find the alarming hawk. The same observer reported that

a Hobby (small European hawk) could see a dragonfly at 200 yards whereas the man's limit was 90 yards."

Almost every point the author makes is strengthened by reference to recorded observations or experiments, with notations referring to the book or article from which the reference was taken. At the close of the text there is listed a detailed bibliography. You are left wondering how Dr. Burtt ever encompassed so much reading, especially when you encounter the statement that during a single winter he banded 17,000 blackbirds.

Some of the ten chapter headings are "The Major Drives and Motives", "Instinctive Behavior", "Aspects of Learning", "Social Behavior of Birds", "How Birds Communicate", "Personality and Intelligence". My attention was particularly stimulated by a section in the chapter on communication which was entitled "Female Song". To quote a portion: "The preceding discussion implies that most singing is done by male birds, but occasionally a female will do a little on her own account. This is fairly common with Cardinals, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Purple Finches and Gray-cheeked Thrushes; it occurs less frequently with the female Summer Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Towhee, White-crowned Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow. The female Mockingbird does a sort of territorial song in the non-breeding season, and the female Wood Thrush sings a little while incubating. We noted earlier how some female birds have their individual call notes during the nesting period."

This brought to mind the time many years ago when my husband noted that a female House Wren sang. He submitted this item for publication, but without success because everyone knew that female birds didn't sing. Formerly the high and mighty authorities were rather opinionated, even taking a dim view of bird banding. We bird banders (and watchers, too), often without professional training, have succeeded in overthrowing much of the old professional narrowness, but mainly because we have furnished overwhelming ammunition by publishing our observations. By holding birds in our hands or recognizing them by their bands we have had opportunities to note, for instance, personality variations among members of a single species. Yet only by making such observations available to the ornithological fraternity at large do they have any value. In other words, banders should publish more. Since a periodical like EBBA News exists, the non-pros need not risk rebuffs from the scientific journals.

Without apologies for digressing into moral exhortation, I would like to mention a few more bits from Dr. Burtt's book. "Sometimes the bird uses supplementary procedures to startle the insects. The Mockingbird has conspicuous white bars in its wings and spreads them to flash this white stimulus and thus startle the insects, as has been observed quite frequently in the southern states. When Mockingbirds winter in the north they seldom do this wing flashing. There are no insects available then, and there is no point in trying to flush non-existent food."

Speaking of the Killdeer act: "One may uncritically interpret this broken wing behavior as a very clever and intelligent procedure that the bird figures is a good way to distract a predator. It is probably nothing of the sort but merely an instinctive tendency that has some survival value...It is one of those cases where we have to be careful in interpreting a bit of behavior by a higher process when it can just as well be explained by a lower."

"The birds have little resourcefulness when judgment is needed and may, for example, starve in the presence of unaccustomed food." Several similar statements follow. I have tried to sound enthusiastic about this book, as I truly am, but there are a few such statements that I am tempted to challenge. This fact I am sure adds to rather than detracts from the value of the book.

The publisher is the MacMillan Company and the price is moderate. The text is a little over two hundred pages in length. The chapters are prefaced by full page illustrations in black and white by Peter Parnall.

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A book recently published by Charles E. Tuttle Co., Rutland, Vermont, is "Birds of South Vietnam" by Philip Wildash. The publisher's blurb states: "Philip Wildash has been interested in the study of birds throughout his life. A member of the British Ornithologists Union, he founded the Cyprus Ornithological Society and the Ornithological Society of Vietnam, and is currently vice-president of the latter organization. He has had a chance to study birds in many parts of the world, having served with the British Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service for eight years. He is currently with the British Embassy in Saigon, where he has spent the last two years."

In 1931 Dr. Jean Delacour and Pierre Jabouille compiled a standard reference book called "Les Oiseaux de l'Indochine Francaise" which was of course written in French, was bulky, and is now out of print and a collector's item. The present book is not bulky and is written in English. It includes a list of the birds to be found in the region with brief descriptions and illustrations in color of most species.

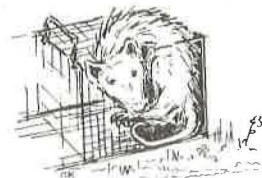
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The Urner Ornithological Club of Newark, New Jersey, devoted Vol. II, No. 2 of the Urner Field Observer - the 30th Anniversary Issue - to "The Medders' - A Memoir of Elizabeth's Great Salt Marsh" written by the late Charles A. Urner. (Refers to the now-despoiled "meadows" near Elizabeth, New Jersey. -Ed.) The foreword notes in part: "Sooner or later it (the marsh) will be reclaimed and obliterated...and memories of the meadow will fade from the minds of our people." They follow a number of delightful vignettes which perpetuate in memory or imagination the original, unspoiled expanse of marsh.

This is of particular interest to me since for many years my husband

and I were privileged to receive Charles Urner's Christmas greetings, usually in the form of poems about some aspect of the marshlands.

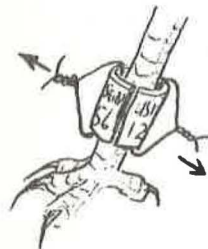
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AN EASY METHOD FOR REMOVING BANDS

By Alan M. Craig

(Reprinted from the Western Bird Bander, Vol. 43, No. 1, January 1968. The author is President of the W.B.B.A. -Ed.)



A band can be removed easily from a bird's leg with a pair of banding pliers and two pieces of fine wire, each about two inches long. The wire on which small bands are supplied works very satisfactorily for this purpose. The wires are carefully slipped through the inside of the band on opposite sides of the bird's leg, and the two ends of each piece are twisted together to form two triangular loops. Finally, by inserting the jaws of the pliers into the two loops and slowly opening the pliers, the loops are pulled away from the bird's leg and the band is forced open. With reasonable care there is no danger of damaging the bird's leg.

712 Tarento Drive, San Diego, Calif. 92106



OBSERVATIONS NEEDED Last year 1342 adult Common and Roseate Terns were banded on Great Gull Island, a research sanctuary in eastern Long Island, N.Y., operated by the American Museum of Natural History and the Linnæan Society of New York. These terns were color-banded in various combinations and information is now solicited on all observations of color-banded terns - band color combinations when they can be seen, right and/or left legs; date, locality, and all possible details of the bird's activity while being observed. Readers are requested to send information to Catherine Pessino, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th St., New York, N.Y. 10024.