

## CORRESPONDENCE

### FLYING WITH THE WIND: A CORRECTION

Editor of 'The Auk':

Near the end of my paper on the 'Effect of Wind on Flight Speeds' in the July (1939) 'Auk' I made the statement: "The dislike that birds seem to have for flying with the wind applies, I think—after the first inertia is overcome—only to strong winds, which are accompanied by frequent annoying puffs that ruffle the feathers when they strike them from the rear." In making this statement I followed the opinions of others without thinking the matter through. Dr. Harrison F. Lewis has called my attention to the desirability of a reconsideration, and has put the case so clearly that, with his permission, I quote from his letter. He says: "The puffs you have in mind must, I suppose, be accelerations of air velocity so great and so sudden that, for the moment, the air passes the bird from rear to front, more than cancelling temporarily, the *air speed* in the opposite direction that the bird, by reason of its own efforts, was enjoying a moment before. That is, the sudden increase in velocity of the air surrounding the bird must be greater than the bird's speed through still air. But the bird requires air speed in the normal direction, that is, with the air flowing past it from head to tail, in order to maintain its elevation. If this movement through the air in the normal relation is suddenly lost because an overtaking mass of air strikes in the rear a bird flying with the wind, must not the bird fall downward until the normal relation is restored? I cannot recall seeing this happen and wonder if there are records of careful observations of its occurrence."

Dr. Lewis's question is a very pertinent one, and it seems clear that only extraordinarily violent puffs would really ruffle a bird's feathers from the rear, puffs that could occur only in a wind so turbulent that no bird would attempt to fly in it. As an alternative explanation Dr. Lewis cites Lorenz's suggestion previously cited by him in the 'Auk' for January, 1939, that (in Lewis's words) "birds have a psychological dislike for flying with the wind, at least at low elevations, because then, like a motorboat running down a stream with a swift and turbulent current, their course is difficult to control, they cannot stop at will nor even advance slowly, and they must turn around and face against the current before they can make a safe landing. I am not sure that forethought for the landing, either conscious or instinctive, plays a part in this 'psychological dislike,' but the difficulty of controlling the flight after the turn down wind and while the bird is still near the ground might well account for it."

It will be seen that this incidental error, which I acknowledge with some mortification, has no great bearing on the particular subject of my paper of last July, but the correction is needed nevertheless.

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### BENT'S 'LIFE HISTORIES'

Editor of 'The Auk':

For the information of your readers, the author of the series of Bulletins on the 'Life Histories of North American Birds' wishes to report progress in the production of these volumes and ask for further co-operation. The thirteenth volume, containing the remaining non-passerine birds, parrots to hummingbirds in-