

Van Bree (1957:252) suggests that a difference in size in two groups of Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) may be due to the older birds laying the larger eggs. A careful reading of the text suggests that "older" here means more mature and vigorous.

Richdale (1957:113-115) in his studies of Yellow-eyed Penguins (*Megadyptes antipodes*) found that length of eggs increased for several years, but decreased in old age. He found that the egg width also increased and then declined in a somewhat similar fashion, and a very similar phenomenon was true of egg weights.

Perhaps I might add here that in the course of our measurements of the eggs of several hundred species of North American birds, we seem to be finding that the least variable quantity is the breadth, not the length, still less the end curvatures that effectively define shape. In other words, of the readily measurable dimensions of the egg, the standard deviation when expressed as a percentage of the mean, *i.e.*, the "coefficient of variation," is in almost all species less for breadth than for anything else. Thus a "significant" level is reached with more certainty, or less testing, for breadth than for length or shape.

This probably means that in assessing the effect of age upon egg size, it might be well to pay special attention to the breadth of the egg, as Andersen seems to have done, though not for this reason.

The fact that there does seem to be a difference in size of eggs laid by those birds (usually the larger birds) that lay as "pullets" and of those laid by fully mature birds, complicates considerably the problem of defining what is the "average" size of the eggs of such species. This is true even of a well-defined local population of that species, because it depends on the age composition of that population, and this may vary widely from time to time, according to hatching and rearing success of recent seasons.

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**Use of Concealing Posture by a Screech Owl.**—On December 5, 1955, at the Horticultural Experiment Station, Vineland Station, Ontario, a Screech Owl (*Otus asio*) was noticed perched on an exposed limb about ten feet from the ground and twenty-five feet from a house. It was 4:00 p.m. on a dull, cloudy day and dusk was falling. The owl sat in a partly crouched position with fluffed plumage. A House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) flew into a trellis about twenty feet in front of the owl. The latter immediately twisted its body sideways to the sparrow, raised the front margins of the wings slightly and held the rear margins tightly against the back, at the same time compressing the body plumage and so presenting a very narrow silhouette as seen from the sparrow's position. The owl's head continued to face the sparrow. The pose was similar to, if not identical with, the

"concealing" posture that the Screech Owl often assumes on the approach of a person, which is well described by Durfee as quoted by Bent (U. S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 170:255-256, 1938). As I was observing the owl at nearly right angles to the line along which its attention was fixed I could not see whether it had the nearly closed, oblique eye slits and stiffly erect ear tufts of the typical "concealing" position.

After a couple of minutes the sparrow flew away and the owl immediately relaxed into its original position. A group of noisy children and a dog passed within twenty feet of the owl but its only reaction was to turn its head. Soon another sparrow lit on the trellis; the owl immediately resumed the "concealing" posture. Four other sparrows joined the one on the trellis and one by one they dropped to the ground and foraged among fallen leaves, gradually approaching the owl until they were about ten feet from the spot above which it was perched. All the time the owl oriented its posture toward the nearest sparrow, shifting as first one and then another approached nearer. In about ten minutes the sparrows flew away and the owl again sank into its normal position.

If the posture described was indeed the "concealing" one, why was it assumed toward the sparrows but not toward the children? Perhaps the owl was afraid of being mobbed by the sparrows, although I have never seen them bothering any of the numerous owls noticed at the Experiment Station. Or does the Screech Owl assume this posture in the presence of prey? Darkness was approaching and in a short time the owl would probably be hunting.—WM. L. PUTMAN, *Vineland Station, Ontario, Canada.*

**Correcting an Old Albatross Error.**—The Peabody Museum of Salem has in its maritime department a collection of some two thousand log books covering voyages to the seven seas, and its curator, Marion Brewington, has called my attention to certain items in them. It seems to have been a fairly common procedure for whalers to mark or band sea birds, often by tying about the neck a small bottle or tin box containing a message, in the hope that it would be found by another vessel and eventually reach home port.

By far the most interesting item refers to a bird mentioned by Robert Cushman Murphy in "Oceanic Birds of South America" (vol. 1: 546, 1936) as follows: "In the Brown University Museum is a manuscript taken from a vial which was found tied to the neck of a Wandering Albatross. The bird was shot off the coast of Chile by Captain Hiram Luther on December 20, 1847, in latitude 45° 50' S., longitude 78° 27' W. The note reads: 'Dec. 8th, 1847. Ship 'Euphrates,' Edwards, 16 months out, 2300 barrels of oil, 150 of it sperm. I have not seen a whale for 4 months. Lat. 43° S, long. 148° 40' W. Thick fog, with rain.' According to these figures, the albatross had travelled 3150 nautical miles (5837 kilometers) as the crow flies during the twelve-day interval between the writing of the manuscript and the shooting of the bird."

The quoted date and locality of capture—and thus the distance of this remarkable flight—appear to be incorrect. Captain Luther wrote in the log book of the CACHALOT on December 30, 1847—Latitude 43° 24' S, Longitude 79° 5' W: "Caught a Goney with a bottle around his neck containing a piece of paper rote by Capt. Edwards, Ship Euphrates of N Bedford, in Lat 43°, South, Long, 148° 40' W, reporting her with 2300 bbls, 150 of sp oil, 16 mo."

This reveals an error of ten days in elapsed time, plus minor mistakes in both latitude and longitude. As figured at the Peabody Museum the flight covered 3050 miles (by rhumb line) in 22 days, for an average of 138.6 miles a day, instead of