

plumage, from March 11 on. Two specimens show pronounced head moult. Their faint distinctive song carries for well over a hundred yards. A spelling made in the field was: "Tse, Tse, Tseee (prolonged), (interval), uh-tsee, uh-tsee."

Black-throated Sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata bilineata*), was singing and in breeding condition at Port Isabel as early as March 11.—S. DILLON RIPLEY, Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

CLOSE PROXIMITY OF TWO NESTS OF AMERICAN BITTERN

On May 12, 1948, in a marshy pasture 1.5 miles east of Warren, Macomb County, Michigan, I flushed an American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) from a nest containing 5 eggs. An examination of the area nearby revealed another Bittern nest 58 feet away which also contained 5 eggs. Both nests were matted platforms of marsh grass built up to a height of about 8 inches above the water, which was ankle deep in the surrounding area. The locality where these nests were found is not a typical marsh habitat but rather a wet meadow with scattered clumps of cat-tails. Bent (1926. *U. S. Nat. Mus. Bull.* 135: 75) found 5 nests of this species in Saskatchewan in an area 0.25 mile square, but does not indicate the distance between them.—DOUGLAS S. MIDDLETON, 7443 Buhr Avenue, Detroit 12, Michigan.

TWO OBSERVATIONS OF WING-FLASHING BY MOCKINGBIRDS

Twice during the summer of 1947, in Jefferson County, Nebraska, I watched the wing-flashing of Mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*). On July 1, a Mockingbird on the top of a schoolhouse was making 4-foot vertical flights. As the bird paused on the roof between flights it frequently raised and extended the wings in the manner illustrated by Sutton (1946 *Wils. Bull.* 58: 206-209) and Allen (1947 *Wils. Bull.* 59: 69-128). This observation is contrary to Sutton's conclusion that wing-flashing is done only when the bird is on the ground. Fear, suspicion, illumination of dark areas, or procurement of food do not appear to have been factors in this instance.

In Perkins County on August 7 a Mockingbird was apparently picking up insects in a fallowed wheat field. This bird flashed the wings outward in a horizontal position, not upward as described by Sutton and Allen. The wings when extended appeared to form an angle of 180 degrees. After appearing to catch and eat several insects, the bird flew to the shoulder of a gravel road, alighting in sparse weedy cover where there were 3 other birds which apparently made up a brood. They seemed to search for food for themselves, and at least 2 birds accompanied their movements with wing-flashes, which amounted to the partial opening of the wings horizontally. Wing-flashing and "begging" calls were noticeable when the adult bird appeared on the ground nearby. Twice the adult alighted near the young birds and flashed its wings as though to attract their attention. Then it moved over to a bird and fed it. Once the adult, after a series of quick dashes and wing-flashes caught what appeared to be a grasshopper.

The adult may have instinctively flashed the wings while searching for food, as Sutton suggests. Since the movements after food were made in an easterly direction, perhaps the wings did serve to take advantage of the early morning light in illuminating crevices in the rather level terrain, as Allen suggests. Wing-flashes on the part of adult and young birds as they approached each other appeared to be signals, although perhaps unintentional and unnecessary.—JOHN H. WAMPOLE, Grant, Nebraska.

CATBIRD ATTACKS SNAKE

On July 3, 1948 about 2 P.M., at Kelly Bridge, 3 miles south of the village of Slippery Rock, Butler County, Pennsylvania, in company with the late Mr. Edmund W. Arthur, and

Mr. John M. McCormick, I encountered a pair of Catbirds (*Dumetella carolinensis*) scolding furiously. We found they were attacking a snake which was about 2 feet above the ground in a crotch of a large apple tree. The snake was about 2 feet long and had its head drawn back in position to strike. An adult Catbird had advanced to within a foot of the snake, apparently trying to catch it by its thin tail.

When we came close the bird backed off a few feet and the snake resumed its climbing of the tree, going straight up the vertical side of the trunk. As soon as the snake got above our heads, the bird closed in again. At a small branch, the snake resumed its defensive position, but the bird retreated only a matter of inches. When once more the snake started to climb, the bird darted in, and, on the wing, grasped the tip of the tail, yanking the snake loose from the bark so that it fell 10 feet to the ground. There we captured it, and tentatively identified it as an immature black racer (*Coluber constrictor*); the snake escaped before we got home, so identification is not positive. The alternative is an immature pilot black snake (*Elaphe obsoleta*). At no time did it actually strike at us or at the birds.

The Catbirds had young, out of the nest, but we could see none in this particular tree. We found one fledgling about 20 yards away. Apparently the bird knew exactly how to handle the snake, and did the job like an expert, in the twinkling of an eye.—F. W. PRESTON, Box 149, Butler, Pennsylvania.

NORTHERN SHRIKE AT PLAY

Suspended from the top of a 60-foot radio antenna pole near the government school in Mountain Village, Alaska, was a 12-foot length of light rope, having on the end a large knot of frayed rope. On August 25, 1946, this rope was whipping about in a wind of 31 mph. For several minutes a Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) played an aerial game; the bird would fly down, seize the knot, and then struggle to maintain equilibrium. Apparently he did not try to fly off with his "prey", but only to hold on and remain upright without bumping against the pole. My wife had witnessed a similar performance the previous day. The knot later came off, but I was tempted to tie on another "lure" to see if the bird would play the game for a movie camera.—HENRY C. KYLLINGSTAD, Fort Yates, North Dakota.