

## GENERAL NOTES

**North American Herring Gulls nesting on a building.**—The Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) was extirpated as a breeding bird in Massachusetts about 1889, and became re-established in 1912 (Forbush, 1928. "Birds of Massachusetts and other New England States," I, p. 74). In the past fifty years it has bred in increasing numbers until now it is probably the most numerous marine bird nesting in the state. The breeding population is estimated to total about 70,000 birds (Wm. Drury, per. comm.).

Starting as a resident of islands and isolated coastal areas it has spread progressively closer to urban centers. Between five and ten years ago the vanguard of a colony became established on a peninsula of filled land jutting into Boston Harbor; by 1961 the colony had grown to approximately 750 pairs.

In June 1961 it was reported by the operators of a large pier, which covers about nine acres in the heart of the Boston waterfront, that Herring Gulls were nesting on the flat, tar-and-gravel roof of the building. The gulls were said to have begun breeding there "a few years" earlier. As the colony has grown it has become an increasingly serious economic problem since nesting material and unedible garbage clog the drains, causing rainwater to flood and damage the roof.

On 6 June 1961 about 150 nests were found. Roughly 100 contained eggs and a few had small chicks. On 28 June 1962 the colony was censused carefully in order to confirm the impression that the population had decreased and that the breeding season was less advanced than it had been in early June of the previous year. This time only 69 nests were found; 46 were empty, 21 had eggs, and two had young chicks. Many broken and punctured eggs were scattered about the roof; I never have seen such extensive cannibalism in a gull colony. The reason for the reduction in the number of breeding birds and the retardation of the season is uncertain, although it is probably partly because the maintenance men had more thoroughly and continually destroyed the nests early in the 1962 season than they had in the previous year.

This seems to be the first recorded instance of Herring Gulls nesting on a building in North America. It may well portend a wider adoption of this habit in the New World, paralleling a similar behavior by *L. a. argentatus*, first noted in Europe about 20 years ago (e.g., Salmon, 1958. *British Birds*, 51, pp. 399-401; Goethe, 1960. "Proc. XII Inter. Orn. Congress," I, pp. 252-258). If this is the first step in the exploitation of a new nesting habitat, we shall probably see a continued increase in the gull population, with colonies springing up on buildings well inland from salt water and a portion of the population feeding extensively in agricultural areas.—RAYMOND A. PAYNTER, JR., *Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 18 December 1962.*

**Notes on behavior of a Cooper's Hawk.**—I feed birds regularly in the winter at my home on the banks of the Olentangy River in Columbus, Ohio, so it is not surprising that a Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) is seen frequently in the vicinity. It is an adult male and appears to be slightly smaller than average. In the vicinity there are shrubs, trees, and lawns.

This bird comes to the yard, perches on a post, sometimes not 10 feet from our picture window, and searches for prey. The feeding birds, however, usually take cover before his arrival. The House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) usually enter a martin house or a 6-foot hemlock nearby. When the hawk detects a movement in the hemlock, he darts to it, walks around on the ground and peers up into the branches. If he sees a bird he plunges into the foliage in an attempt to capture it. Usually the small bird flies out the other direction and

escapes. On one occasion he attempted for 45 minutes to capture a female House Sparrow and was finally successful. He followed the sparrow from shrub to shrub, each time forcing the bird to flee by plunging into the close-growing branches.

On one other occasion when this hawk bore down on a sparrow in the hemlock the sparrow left the opposite side undetected. After much walking around on the ground and searching the tree, the hawk walked in under it and came out with a dried black walnut in the husk. He perched on one leg on a nearby post for about five minutes before flying to other cover with the nut still held in his claws.

On another occasion, the hawk spied and chased a Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*) that was flying about 4 feet above the water. Upon seeing the hawk, the kingfisher dropped to a six-inch altitude. Although the hawk was closing the gap in pursuit, it would not fly close enough to the water to capture the prey. The kingfisher escaped when the hawk gave up the chase.

Bent (1937. *U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull.* No. 167:112-125) relates many interesting predator-prey accounts, but my observations were somewhat different, especially that concerning the walnut.—H. GRANVILLE SMITH, *Soil Conservation Service, 311 Old Federal Building, Columbus 15, Ohio, 28 January 1962.*

**Unusual feeding tactic by a migrant Myrtle Warbler.**—In the course of seven years of work on Delaware Bay, I have observed many migrant land birds, over the open waters of the bay—nearly all in the autumn, of birds moving into the wind, which usually came from the north or northwest. The majority of these birds maintained a steady flight past our boat, although many landed aboard for variable lengths of time. Many of these birds actively searched for food on deck and rested.

On 17 October 1961, at a location about six miles WSW of Cape May Point, New Jersey, an outbound Navy destroyer passed our northbound boat. The weather was clear and the winds were out of the northwest at about 5 mph, having gradually diminished from velocities of 10-15 mph. As we crossed the destroyer's wake, I saw a small bird flying low with the wake and the wind, and within a few minutes I saw what presumably was the same bird, a Myrtle Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*), following in our wake.

The bird remained within three feet of the water and gradually moved closer to the boat. I suspected that the bird was fatigued and was attempting to come aboard to rest since its flight appeared weak and it would occasionally drop to the surface of the water with legs dangling as though attempting to land on the foam. Eventually I noted that the bird was by no means a weak flyer as it would dart off in any direction in pursuit of insects. After each foray it would return to the wake and flutter along, making occasional hovering pauses, actually picking insects from the surface of the water in our wake. On several occasions the bird caught up to the boat, flew alongside and ahead of the boat without attempting to land, then circled back to again feed in the wake. It was obvious that this bird was keeping well fed on its journey over water. After 20 minutes, or about three miles, of this performance the bird flew westward at an altitude of about 20 feet, still frequently darting after airborne insects. The wind and sea were nearly calm when the bird left.

I had not observed this very active feeding behavior for a warbler on the wing over water before, despite the fact that flies and other insects are often abundant over Delaware Bay at this season, and that Myrtle Warblers frequently rest aboard the boat. On 18 October 1961, under similar conditions (winds light SW) a very weak Myrtle Warbler hit the side of our boat in a landing attempt and drowned in the wash from a passing yacht before we could retrieve it.—DONALD E. KUNKLE, *Rutgers University, Oyster Research Laboratory, Bivalve, New Jersey, 2 February 1962.*