

## GENERAL NOTES

**Courtship feeding in some emberizine finches.**—Courtship feeding is well known in cardueline finches (Lack, Auk 57:169-178, 1940; Newton, Finches, Collins, London, England, 1972), however, several authors have noted its apparent absence in the Emberizinae (Andrew, Ibis 103:315-348, 1961; Lemon, Can. J. Zool. 46:141-151, 1968). These authors were referring specifically to the buntings (*Emberiza* spp.) and New World sparrows (*Zonotrichia* spp., *Melospiza* spp.). We describe herein courtship feeding in several species of emberizine finches hoping that others will look for this behavior in this group so that we may more properly evaluate the distribution and significance of this behavior in finch taxa.

On 12 July 1978, we saw 4 instances of courtship feeding in the White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys oriantha*) at Tioga Pass, Mono Co., California. The first observation followed the appearance of a pair returning from a feeding bout. Together they perched on a small lodgepole pine (*Pinus murrayana*), within 15 cm of their nest, which contained 3 eggs in their tenth day of incubation. The female crouched and gaped while vibrating her wings. The male, with insects hanging from his bill, leaned over and placed some in the female's mouth. Upon returning to the nest, the female quickly settled down and turned her eggs. The male followed her, perched on the rim of the nest, reached over her right side and fed her a second time. He continued placing food in her mouth a third and fourth time, reaching over her and almost standing on her back. The male, chipping loudly, subsequently left the nest-site and flew to an adjacent willow (*Salix* sp.). We had also seen this male courtship feeding on 10 July during the incubation of the same clutch.

On 12 March 1976, at the Anza Borrego State Park, San Diego Co., California, a Black-throated Sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*) (the female?) making sharp chip notes flew onto a small rock. A second individual (the male?) flew toward the first and fed it with 1 thrusting motion. The female made swallowing movements, then both flew off. In contrast to the White-crowned Sparrow, no displays were seen before, or after courtship feeding.

Phillips (p. 909 in Bent, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 237, O. L. Austin, ed., 1968) reported on 2 observations of "billing," or possibly courtship feeding in Rufous-winged Sparrows (*Aimophila carpalis*) in Arizona. Parmelee (pp. 1652-1677 in Bent 1968) reported that male Snow Buntings (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) frequently feed the female during egg-laying and incubation. Fairfield (pp. 1635-1652 in Bent 1968) observed a male Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) approach an incubating female with a bill full of insects, but apparently was frightened off by the close proximity of the blind. This was never observed again during many hours of watching, suggesting that the behavior was anomalous. Barlow (Kansas Ornithol. Soc. Bull. 11:2, 1960) reported "symbolic" courtship feeding in the Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) preceding copulation. Baptista (unpubl.) noted the absence of courtship feeding in Yellow-faced Grassquits (*Tiaris olivacea*), but regularly observed this behavior in the Melodius Grassquit (*T. canora*) (Baptista, J. F. Orn. 119:91-101, 1978). In the last species, courtship feeding may be preceded by song and display in the male and wing quivering in the female. Skutch (Pac. Coast Avif. 31:1-448, 1954; cited in Johnston, Kansas Ornithol. Soc. Bull. 13:25-32, 1962) noted that males of the Variable Seedeater (*Sporophila aurita*) and Buff-throated Saltator (*Saltator maximus*) fed the female at the nest. Maria Elena Pereyra (pers. comm.), Moore Laboratory of Zoology, noted that captive Black-crested Finches (*Lophospingus pusillus*) from Argentina regularly courtship feed. Lack (Occ. Pap. Calif. Acad. Sci. 21:1-158, 1945) and Orr (Condor 47:177-201, 1945) reported courtship feeding throughout courtship and incubation in several genera of Galapagos finches (*Geospiza*, *Certhidea*, *Platyspiza*, and *Camarhynchus*). Lack (1945) noted 1 instance of a pair of Vegetarian Tree-finches (*Platyspiza crassirostris*) passing food back and forth several times. Baptista (unpubl.) made several similar observations of *T. canora*.

Andrew (1961) reported this behavior as definitely absent in 3 species of *Emberiza*, *Melospiza melodia* and *Z. leucophrys*. Blanchard (Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool. 46:1-177) studied White-crowned Sparrows in great detail and did not report courtship feeding. The behavior described herein must be rare in this species. Miller and Miller (Caldasia 47:105, 1968) noted that males of the congeneric Rufous-collared Sparrow (*Z. capensis*) do not bring food to the female at the nest or elsewhere.

Courtship feeding may be more widespread among emberizines than previously thought. If confined to the nest-site, this behavior may be easily overlooked. The behavior may be rare in species from temperate regions but common in tropical forms; investigators should look for it.—EILEEN ZERBA AND LUIS F. BAPTISTA, *Moore Lab. Zoology, Occidental Coll., Los Angeles, California 90041. Accepted 15 Mar. 1979.*

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**Cleptoparasitism by Ring-billed Gulls of wintering waterfowl.**—Cleptoparasitism, or interspecific robbing of food, has been reported in several gull species, and was recently reviewed by Payne and Howe (*Wilson Bull.* 88:349-351, 1976). They reported Ring-billed (*Larus delawarensis*) and Bonaparte's gulls (*L. philadelphia*) stealing earthworms from Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) and Black-bellied plovers (*Pluvialis squatarola*). Bent (U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 113, 1921) reported Ring-billed Gulls apparently trying to steal food from Red-breasted Mergansers (*Mergus serrator*). Kallander (*Bird Study* 24:186-194, 1977) reported piracy by Black-headed Gulls (*L. ridibundus*) on Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*), and Fuchs (*Ibis* 119:183-190, 1977) studied cleptoparasitism by Black-headed Gulls of Sandwich Terns (*Sterna sandvicensis*). The purpose of this note is to report observations of cleptoparasitism by Ring-billed Gulls of wintering waterfowl in the Texas Panhandle.

Interactions between Ring-billed Gulls and wintering waterfowl were observed at Buffalo Springs Lake (91 ha), 6.5 km east of Lubbock, Lubbock Co., Texas. Twenty-four hours of observation were conducted between 09:00 and 13:00 CST from 28 January to 4 March 1978. Observations were made by driving the lake perimeter and watching gulls and waterfowl with 8 × 50 binoculars.

Species and numbers of ducks on the lake varied considerably from day to day, with low numbers on days of high human activity (i.e., boating and fishing on the warmer, sunny days); 92% of the observations of cleptoparasitism were made on stormy, overcast days.

Pied-billed Grebes (*Podilymbus podiceps*), Western Grebes (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*), American Coot (*Fulvia americana*), Ring-billed Gulls and some ducks fed on small fish that were apparently abundant and easily caught. Seven species of anatine ducks were present, with Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*) and Green-winged Teal (*A. crecca*) in greatest abundance. Aythyine ducks included Redhead (*Aythya americana*), Canvasback (*A. vassilisneria*), Lesser Scaup (*A. affinis*), Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) and Bufflehead (*B. albeola*).

Fish stealing behavior of Ring-billed Gulls was of 2 types: the "air drop" and the "surface drop." The "air drop" started when a gull, flying over ducks, suddenly plummeted downward with partially folded wings toward a duck. At the last moment the gull extended its wings and settled on the water as the duck dived. The "surface drop" was observed approximately 90% of the time and began when a gull, sitting on the water near a duck, flew along the surface toward the duck. The gull then swooped downward as if to land on the duck's back. Gulls never actually contacted a duck as the duck always dived at the last moment. This is