

## FIELD NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE \_\_\_\_\_

### GONE GOOSE?

On Wednesday, November 12, 1997, I witnessed one of those rare wildlife events that you hear about but seldom see. As I drove to work on an icy, wintry morning, I noticed a flock of some 15 Canada Geese crossing low over the road. They had probably just left someone's residential lawn and were headed toward the open pastures on the other side of the road. The lumbering birds had more than the traffic to contend with to cross the road; they somehow had to navigate the electric wires that paralleled the road on the pasture side. They seemed to be working extra hard to get a few more feet of lift to just barely pass above the wires before making a rapid descent into the fields. To my surprise, just after they passed over the car I was following, the last bird of the group didn't quite make it over the highest wire, but rather struck the wire and came barreling to the ground, landing on its feet on the side of the road. The bird quickly skidded off the ice-covered shoulder in time to avoid an oncoming car. As traffic prevented me from stopping, I never did see the final disposition of the goose.

Although I had heard of geese striking telephone or electricity wires, I never expected to see such a rare occurrence, and to tell you the truth I doubted whether these strikes really occurred. There is a story in the building where I work that frequent electricity outages had been caused by "goose strikes." As a deterrent, authorities had placed large plastic pink balls on the wires to make them more visible to the geese. Here in Fort Collins, Colorado, as in most other places I presume, the Goose population is somewhat out of control. Most ponds and parks seem to be colonized by these semi-feral animals, a result of a misguided attempt to reintroduce them to many areas of North America, including suburban areas. Food for the geese is plentiful, as agricultural fields and pastures provide a supplement to the usual suburban diet. As the Canada Goose adapts to human settlements and its population continues to explode, it will be interesting to monitor what types of predicaments these innocent birds get themselves into.

Nick Komar

## INLAND MARBLED GODWIT RECORD

Late on the morning of August 10, 1997, I found a Marbled Godwit, a first record for Worcester County, at the Quinapoxet Reservoir in Holden, Massachusetts. This City of Worcester reservoir is not accessible to the public; however, for the past five years I have received a license to conduct fall shorebird surveys at this site. There is only one place where the shoreline can be viewed by the public from outside the fence. This is the spot where this Marbled Godwit was seen by many observers for at least the next five days.

Very low water levels at Quinapoxet provided extensive mudflats this fall migration season. This Marbled Godwit, however, preferred the shoreline covered with large rocks, where I observed it feeding in pools among these rocks. It would feed in water several inches deep by inserting its long bill into the water and mud, sometimes even immersing a portion of its head. This feeding was successful as it consumed larvae or small worms that were visibly held in its bill before swallowing. A Greater Yellowlegs was often in the same area. Despite this Godwit's size, it was often hidden among the large rocks and several observers commented that they spent several hours before the bird was spotted.

This Marbled Godwit was the nineteenth shorebird species that I have observed at Quinapoxet during my surveys on 106 different days from 1993 through 1997. The difficulty of one person or team surveying any given area is illustrated by the fact that four additional shorebird species (Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Upland Sandpiper, and Wilson's Phalarope) have been reported from Quinapoxet during this same time period.

Robert C. Bradbury



*Marbled Godwit, Holden, MA, 10 August 1997*

*Photo by R. Bradbury*

## CEDAR WAXWINGS AND MULTIFLORA ROSES

On the morning of March 9, 1997, I watched a flock Cedar Waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) foraging in multiflora rose bushes around the southwest corner of the Arlington Reservoir (where a substantial stream flows in through a culvert). The weather was cold and sunny with a moderate northwest wind; there were about two inches of fresh snow on the ground. This flock had been being reported for several days by other birders, but no birds had been present when I had visited two days before. There were about twenty waxwings in the flock, feeding by plucking rose hips and swallowing them whole. Often, the birds plucked while they were hovering in the air. Before swallowing, they rolled each berry around in their bills a few times; I assumed they were orienting it to make it easier to swallow. Each bird seemed to be taking about three or four berries a minute—certainly not more.

The rose hips, which were plentiful, were oval in shape, and about 3 x 5 mm in size. Swallowing them appeared to take considerable effort on the part of the birds. The vast majority of the volume of these berries was taken up by a few hard, white seeds, covered only by a thin pulp and an even thinner skin.

After feeding in this manner for ten minutes or so, the birds perched on a birch tree. The branches were covered by fresh snow, which some of the waxwings ate, scooping it up with their lower mandibles.

The waxwings apparently persisted in the area for only a few days more, and when they left, the rose hips had been noticeably reduced in number but were by no means sparse. I observed a similar pattern of fairly intensive, but brief and incomplete, exploitation of multiflora rose by another, larger flock of Cedar Waxwings around this time. Forty birds were eating rose hips on March 8, 1997, along Lower Vine Brook in Lexington, Massachusetts, but were not present on several subsequent visits. Again, the bushes on which the birds had been feeding were left with significant numbers of berries still on them.

It seems likely that this introduced shrub plays an important role in the winter diet of Cedar Waxwings in our region, as it does for several other avian species. But I suspect that multiflora rose hips are viewed as a marginal food source by the waxwings, to be relied on only when nothing better is available.

Matthew L. Pelikan

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