



EDITOR'S PAGE

LETTERS

The Pileated Woodpecker had been in the neighborhood, heard but not seen. Quite naturally, a sighting was not an impossibility, and we were listening and looking, glasses handy by the door. It was a sparkling clear day when the familiar raucous call sounded the alarm. Then just a flash of black looping down the lane; out the door with the glasses; and there he was, perched in the old apple tree, a couple of hundred feet away. "So what," most of our birding friends would say---"Big Deal." But what made this particular occasion a very real happening was the fact that in the same apple tree was the immature Red-tailed Hawk who had been around all summer. And the two wholly dissimilar birds were having a fine time getting to know each other.

Actually, they are both about the same size, and each apparently had a definite respect for the other, in addition to an obvious curiosity. The meeting lasted for a good five minutes: the hawk would make a fluttering swoop at the woodpecker, who would make no effort to move, and then perch again in the tree; the woodpecker would hop a bit closer, as though attempting to be friendly; both birds would fly around the tree, but both come back to perch again. There was no sense that the woodpecker, or indeed the hawk, was in any way scared or that either was aggressive. The party finally broke up, as the woodpecker took off to the woods, and the hawk sailed away down the hill.

N.B. 1. The Pileated does nest in this area. Bud Morrison from Wachusett Meadows and a neighbor, John Hitchcock, last year observed the nest and actually saw the male bring food to the female on the nest.

2. This year we have a pair of "red-tails" nearby. Quite certainly they nested, although I'm not sure exactly where.

Edward D. Densmore, in a letter to
Nancy Claflin.

THE NEW BIRD EXHIBIT IN THE MUSEUM OF SCIENCE

At Boston's Museum of Science one may now walk through what is, if not a book, at least a substantial pamphlet on ornithology. In its new Belcher Hall of Bird Biology, the museum has turned what long has been its most neglected subject into a fascinating experience. A central piece within the hall is a "bird dictionary" which has enabled the museum staff to arrange by habitat groups the stuffed specimens that formerly resided like merchandise in antiquated department store display cases. The impression made by the combined units of hall and dictionary is indeed pleasant---indeed, it may be the best integrated exhibit that the museum has offered.

The walk starts off--if you are walking in the correct sequence--with the evolution of birds. There is a touch of the dinosaur in this sector of the panorama. The assumption, which one must admit is the prevailing assumption, rests upon the idea that modern birds evolved from dinosaurs. The avant-garde idea that birds are dinosaurs, merely the last of the lot, gets no house.

We learn that birds have hollow bones, how feathers work, and then watch movies of birds in flight, very good movies that seem to hold spectators longer than any other aspect of the exhibit. We ponder painlessly the food pyramid, wrapped in visuals that make it seem less dull than it would be in a professorial lecture.

Perhaps of greater public service to those who wish only to establish the identity of a puzzling bird once seen is the dictionary itself, composed of stuffed specimens. They are grouped as birds of cities, open areas, suburbs, woodlands, marshes, shoreline and ocean. It should make that mystery bird easy to find.

Wayne Hanley, M. A. S.