

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

In order that future issues of EBBA NEWS may appear soon, it is necessary that members supply the Editor with material. Soon after each issue appears, the Editor receives very complimentary letters from a half dozen or so of members saying how much they enjoy EBBA NEWS. While this may be very flattering, it must be kept in mind that the quality of this publication depends on the quality of the material submitted for publication rather than on the capabilities of the Editor. Therefore, if EBBA NEWS is to continue to be an interesting and worthwhile publication, it is imperative that additional material be sent to your Editor.

In the last issue, it was announced that mail for the Editor should henceforth be addressed to the Editor at Route 4, Easton, Pa., rather than to Lafayette College, since the Editor is no longer associated with that institution. Despite this notice, mail continues to be addressed to Lafayette, resulting in a delay in reaching the proper location.

The Blue Jay symposium, delayed for many months by the paucity of material relating to this species, will appear soon. If any members have additional material on this species, send it to Mrs. Albert E. Conway, Route 4, Easton, Pa.

A symposium on the Song Sparrow will be prepared by Mr. Homer F. Farrand, 7 Guest Lane, Wilmington 3, Delaware. Material relating to this interesting species should be sent to Mr. Farrand by October 1. Reference to the previous symposia on Juncos, White-throats, and Robins, will give you an idea of what to submit.

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IN DEFENSE OF THE STARLING

by Rev. Garrett S. Detwiler

The March-April issue of EBBA NEWS was the most welcome part of a whole batch of mail received the other day. In accordance with my custom, I sat right down and read the issue from cover to cover.

I was just a bit disturbed by the very last article contained in the NEWS entitled, "A Difference of Opinion", written by Mrs. Mary W. Lair of Landenberg, Pennsylvania.

Ever since I accepted your invitation to write a few words about my initial banding endeavours at Salem, New Jersey, I have received a number of letters from other EBBA members. Not a few of them have taken me to task for losing a wonderful opportunity to destroy the Starlings which (they think) I so foolishly banded and released.

Feeling the something should be said in defense of the oft-maligned Starling and, incidentally, in defense of my own actions, I thought it best to send you this statement, hoping that it would clarify my position and, perhaps, get me off the hook.

At the outset, let me make it clear that I am fully cognizant of all the contemptible and obnoxious habits, characteristics, and conduct of Starlings, none of which do I sanction or condone.

At the same time, however, I believe we should temper our judgment with mercy and consider some of the good qualities of this detestable foreigner who has, supposedly, become such a problem in our midst.

Those of us who witnessed the Japanese beetle scourge in New Jersey some years ago will never forget the stripped fruit trees and shrubbery that was left in its wake each year. I well remember one apple orchard in which there was not a single leaf left upon the trees and in which the unripe fruit was consumed down to the core.

Today, the beetle plague is little more than a memory. The destruction of myriads of beetles was not brought about by man-made devices that were pressed into service, despite their ingenious construction and weird design. Nevertheless, the plague is past and gone.

After many hours spent in observing hundreds of Starlings through binoculars, I am convinced that it was not the trapping of adult beetles in man-made traps but the consumption of the beetle grubs by none other than the detestable Starlings that delivered us from this modern day plague. One has but to focus his glass upon any lawn

visited by Starlings to verify this conviction and to substantiate this conclusion.

It might prove enlightening for those who condemn the Starling to conduct a study of the contents of the stomachs of these birds, ascertaining the principal ingredients of their diet and thereby establishing the value of this particular species. Such a study, conducted by those properly equipped and qualified, should prove most revealing. Who knows, if I am pressed far enough, I might attempt such a study in my own defense!

The Starling is roundly criticised and condemned for his pugnacity and for his nest robbings habits, but no one condemns any other species of bird that unceremoniously ousts him from his winter quarters when the nesting season begins in the spring.

Salem, New Jersey, is an area frequented by hundreds of Purple Martins that take up residence there each summer. All who have ever had Purple Martins know that the Martins are second to none when it comes to dislodging Starlings from the colony houses. The Martins go about their task in a systematic and ruthless manner, the like of which is never used by the Starlings. They will gang up on the unsuspecting Starlings and actually "dive-bomb" them into the earth if their right to the colony house is disputed, yet no one would criticize the conduct of the Purple Martins even though the same conduct is condemned as detestable on the part of the Starling!

A bird-banding friend of mine succeeded in getting a pair of Crested Flycatchers to build in a box that he had erected in his garden. After the nest was built and the eggs laid, my friend noticed a House Wren departing from the opening in the box. An inspection of the interior revealed that each and every egg had been pierced by the bill of the Wren. However, no one would proceed to destroy all House Wrens because of the conduct of this one infuriated (?-Ed.) bird, even though a study might reveal many other similar acts of vandalism on the part of House Wrens.

Some years ago it was considered right and proper to destroy all hawks just because a farmer lost a chicken now and then. We have advanced beyond that point today, and our conservationists are acclaim-

ing our hawks as great boons to the farmer because of the great number of rodents found in their diets.

Could it be that we are too prone to condemn the whole group upon the basis of the undesirable habits of a few individuals and, at the same time, overlook the great good done by the many others of the same group?

So, until someone comes along with evidence based on established facts that will disprove my above-mentioned conviction, I am going to take my stand with the detested Starling which I believe was responsible to a great degree for ridding us of the Japanese beetle plague. If it is true that the Starling did accomplish this great feat, then I, for one, can overlook some of his less desirable traits and be eternally grateful for the one great service that he has rendered to all those residing within the area covered by the EBBA.

--323 Fenwick Avenue, Salem, N.J.,

August 16, 1954

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MORE ABOUT STARLINGS

Mrs. Bradley Fisk, Editor of Audubon Outlook, publication of the Buffalo Audubon Society, 20 Berkley Place, Buffalo 9, New York, writes as follows about Starlings:

"I thought you might be interested in the following note. What conclusion is to be drawn from it, except that, as a ham actor, perhaps, the Starling is pleased with the unaccustomed praise and attention he receives and comes back for a repeat, I don't know.

"In the last two winters, I have banded 131 Starlings in my city back yard in Buffalo. A Starling, once banded, rarely returns to my premises to feed, although several have been picked up dead in the neighborhood, so evidently they do not leave the locality. Only five have ever returned to my traps.

"Of the five, two had been used for demonstration purposes at Girl Scout meetings. One, yellow-banded to distinguish it, was released in Williamsville, about 10 miles north of my home, on January 26, 1953. Four days later, it returned to my trap as if to show me it could find its way around.