

GENERAL NOTES

Barn Owl nesting on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts.—I present for the record the singular circumstances accompanying the first known nesting of the Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) on Nantucket.

In October 1966 we acquired a Barn Owl with a broken wing that had to be amputated. The stub healed, the bird recuperated, and has lived ever since in a spacious cage in our yard. In early May 1968 we saw a wild owl near our bird's cage occasionally, and by mid-June determined it was another Barn Owl and that it came nightly. After trying unsuccessfully to tether our bird outside the cage (it is not tame and thus hard to handle), I finally opened the cage door at 20:45 on 1 July and watched from some nearby shrubbery. After about 15 minutes our one-winged owl climbed out and onto the top of the cage, where it was soon joined by the visitor. The two faced each other and snapped their bills. Every time a car passed, which happened frequently, the visitor flew off. Each time it returned our bird either fell or hopped off the cage, but usually climbed right back up. After five such episodes it did not climb up again, and the visiting owl failed to return.

Next morning we found no sign of our owl. At dusk the visitor appeared and flew over and around a nearby thicket, chiming constantly, and twice dropped into the thicket. I heard bill-snapping and concluded our bird must be there. The visitor returned each night, and the morning of 6 July our owl was back in the cage, wet with dew, and it ate ravenously. A Barn Owl visited our caged bird off and on the rest of the summer.

The evening of 19 September 1968 the local animal shelter telephoned to ask if I wanted four baby owls. They proved to be young Barn Owls, the last of seven found that day in a seldom-used Quonset hut at the Tom Nevers Naval Facility, 4.1 miles from our home. They had fallen some 25 or 30 feet to the floor when some wallboard near the Quonset ceiling let go; one was dead when found, two others died at the animal shelter. We took the four home and force-fed them. Next morning they were still alive, and we moved them into a cage in the 2-car garage under our apartment.

That night, 20 September, a Barn Owl came by, and we moved the cage of young outside and watched from a car for about 20 minutes, but the bird did not return. The night of 21 September I left the garage door open with the caged young about 6 feet inside. The next morning we found two meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) on top of the cage. That night, the 22nd, we removed the top from the cage, left the door open, and watched from a car parked so that its headlights illuminated the cage indirectly. At 19:25 an owl swooped into the garage, perched on the edge of the cage momentarily, and left. At 19:35 an owl flew in with a mouse in its beak and perched on the edge of the cage for 15 minutes. About 20:10 an owl landed on the gutter of the garage with a mouse in its talons and kept bending its head down and up in a tearing, pulling motion (I learned later it was removing the entrails). At this point it was frightened away; there was one mouse in the cage, and I left. The next morning we found mouse entrails dripping from the side of the cage, on the cement apron, and hanging from the gutter.

As the owl was so efficient at bringing mice, we decided to let it do the feeding. The following morning we found four rodents on the floor outside the cage, two voles and two deer mice (*Peromyscus leucopus*), three of them headless and gutted. We wondered if these were excess mice, or if the young were not being fed. The next day, the 25th, one young owl was so weak we suspected they were not getting

enough to eat, so we resumed force feeding immediately. The weak bird died within a few hours, but the largest young grabbed pieces of mouse on its own.

The wild owl continued to visit the young nightly and from 22 September through 26 October left a total of 124 voles, 28 deer mice, 4 rats (*Rattus norvegicus*), 1 short-tailed shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*), and 1 jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonicus*). As soon as all three young began to grab food from long wooden tweezers, we gave up force feeding and put cut up pieces of mouse on a newspaper in front of them in the morning; usually all were gone by noon. The wild bird continued to feed them at night, for we found partly eaten mice when we looked in after dark.

At no time could the young be considered tame, and they never got used to being handled. When we removed them one at a time for feeding, they pushed against each other, hissed, and struck out with their claws. All three fledged successfully, the last flying away 26 October.

I learned later that the Quonset hut at the Naval Facility was visited regularly by night watchmen, who often saw an owl flying in or out of the hut's constantly open doors, and who maintain they never saw two adult owls together. After the owl started visiting our young birds, owl appearances at the Naval Facility became less frequent and soon stopped altogether. At no time did we ever see more than one adult Barn Owl near the young or on our property.

In birds in which both adults care for the young, the inability of one parent to participate usually leads the other to abandon the nesting effort, and we have no reason to believe Barn Owls are an exception to this generalization. Nevertheless we would like to believe that a female Barn Owl mated with our one-winged captive, went 4 miles away to nest and hatch seven young, then found them in our garage and helped us feed them until they fledged. We don't know our captive's sex, but it has never laid an egg. Nor do we know the sex of its visitor, or of the bird that helped us feed the young. If this wild hypothesis be true, it is certainly most unusual.—
EDITH ANDREWS, *University of Massachusetts Research Center, Quaise, Nantucket, Massachusetts 02554.*

The Yellow-billed Tern (*Sterna superciliaris*) in Uruguay.—The pertinent literature (Wetmore, 1926; Friedmann, 1927; Murphy, 1936; Meyer de Schauensee, 1966; Haverschmidt, 1968) refers to this species essentially as an inhabitant of South American inland lakes and rivers. From October through March (spring and summer in the Southern Hemisphere) it is fairly common in coastal Uruguay, where it enjoys a discontinuous distribution in the estuaries and rivermouths along the Rio de la Plata and the Atlantic coast. Its favorite haunts are the shallow expanses of brackish waters behind barrier beaches. These broad sounds are usually 30 to 90 cm, rarely as much as 3 m deep, with either sandy or muddy bottoms. The waters are often turbid from silt or microplankton; their temperature and salinity vary seasonally and with the influx and outflow of sea waters caused by winds and tides. The Yellow-billed Terns fish over these water, and occasionally follow the streams of brackish water out of the inlets to the sea. The stomachs of four specimens I collected were full of small fish.

Wetmore (1926) and Friedmann (1927) have commented on this species' resemblance to the Least Tern (*S. antillarum*) in habits and behavior. It flies more hurriedly than the larger terns, with rapid beats of its narrow, pointed wings conspicuously bent at the carpal joint. It fishes at a considerable height, often hovering high above its prey before diving on it vertically. Quarrelsome and noisy, its voice is a strident "kirrik-kirrik" many times repeated, and also a shorter "kirr-kit."