

GENERAL NOTES

Notes on Leach's Petrel.—During the summers of 1947 and 1948, while assisting with studies of other species of birds on Machias Seal Island, New Brunswick, I was able to use some free time for the study and banding of Leach's Petrel, *Oceanodroma leucorhoa leucorhoa* (Vieillot). The number of birds involved was not large. Only seventy-five adults and seven nestlings were banded and twenty-three nests studied during the two summers. Nevertheless a few bits of information which are not mentioned in literature came to light.

Fresh digging at the burrow entrances was in evidence throughout June and July. In one instance, a burrow, which showed evidence of recent excavation, was opened on June 20, 1948. A bird but no egg was present. On July 30, there was still evidence of fresh digging but nothing in the nest. The reason for this long excavation period was unknown, but Ainslee and Atkinson (*British Birds*, 30: 234-248) mention the same puzzling activity. The normal period for excavation, according to W. A. O. Gross (*The Auk*, 52: 382-399), is three days.

In the same paper, Gross gave 3,000 burrows as an approximate number for Machias Seal Island, but the approximate number in 1947 and 1948 was probably not more than 1,000. There seem to be no predators on the island to account for such a decrease.

It may be possible that burrows are maintained for many years. Banding returns indicate that burrows are occupied for two or more successive years. Seven birds banded in 1947 were retaken in 1948. All of these were retaken from the burrows in which they had been banded. Two pairs: 47-106030, 47-106022 and 47-106025, 47-106003 were remated for the second successive year. In 1949, Dr. J. S. Hoyt recovered one bird which I had banded in 1947 and one which I had banded in 1948. Nest markers indicated that these birds were recovered from the burrows in which they had been banded.

On July 19, 1947, I felt two eggs in a petrel burrow. When removed, one proved to be that of a petrel and the other that of an Arctic Tern, *Sterna paradisaea* Brünnich. Both were warm. The tern egg could not have rolled all the way to the nest cavity because there was a right angle turn in the tunnel. It must have been pushed at least part of the way.

In 1947, banding was begun on June 14. Most burrows had eggs at that time. The first chick was found on August 1. In 1948, the first burrow with an egg was found on June 18. The first chick was found on July 20.—Janet Hawksley, Fernow Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.

Nesting and Flocking Overlap of Chimney Swifts, *Chaetura pelagica* (Linnaeus).—Late in July 1948 small flocks of chimney swifts were seen over the Cornell University campus. By early August the flocks had increased in size and on August fourth about 1,000 (estimated) swifts entered the west chimney of Bailey Hall where Dr. Paul Kellogg of the Laboratory of Ornithology, assisted by Edward Fink and the writer, made a recording of their chipping.

About 8 p.m. Eastern Daylight Saving Time on August sixth the west chimney and the opposite one on the east side of the building were inspected from the roof by flashlight. Less than 20 birds were found in the west chimney and all flew out when the light was flashed on them. At the first glance no birds were seen in the east chimney but persistent squeaking notes could be heard far down the chimney. Upon closer inspection a nest of young swifts was discovered, as well as an adult bird ten or twelve feet above it on the same (east) side of the chimney. When the light was flashed alternately on the adult and on the nest the young kept calling and the adult was obviously disturbed, moving back and forth until it finally dropped and settled on the edge of the nest where it remained.

Another adult was located in the southwest corner of the chimney and a third one on the side (west) opposite the nest. Neither of these birds seemed particularly disturbed by the light and none of the three left the chimney.

Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond control of the writer, it was not possible to check these chimneys again in the days immediately following the observation made on August sixth.

An earlier swift's nest was reported on June 16, 1948, in the Plant Science

Building about 300 yards from Bailey Hall, at which time swifts were still roosting in nearby chimneys in flocks of several hundred.

These nesting dates may not be significantly early or late but it is interesting to note that swifts apparently begin nesting before the flocks break up in the spring and continue nesting after flocking has begun in late summer.—Pauline James, Texas College of Arts and Industries, Kingsville, Texas.

Chickadee in Convulsion.—Five chickadees were at my feeding station eating sunflower seeds and peanut butter when suddenly one of the birds flew up in crazy circles, bumped the outer branches of a nearby spruce tree about five feet above the snow time and again until the circles became more narrow and they gradually amounted to a whirl downward; then he plunged into the snow, two inches of which was soft above the crust, and continued to spin about always in a clockwise manner. Now by slow degrees the circles widened and he wound up against a twig of a rose bush the end of which was buried in the snow, and he grasped it with a deadly grip and froze with his head still inclined to the right for fully three minutes.

The instant that I noticed that he was flying crazily I recognized it as a fit and watched constantly wondering if he would die in it. However, at the end of the three minutes of freezing, his head twisted farther to the right until I thought he would wring it off, he slowly turned back and looked the other way and finally flew to the spruce tree nearby apparently fully recovered.

It was 8 A.M. sunny and calm, the thermometer stood at 1 degree below zero. The Blue Jays had left after their first breakfast and did not return until 8:30 so the chickadee was not frightened by one of them. A number of English Sparrows were sitting in the rose bush and the other four chickadees were flitting about the station so there seemed to be nothing unusual to cause fright. Whether the convulsion was caused by fright, injury or an internal ailment it is impossible to say.

For the past ten years I have carried on experiments with canaries, crossing them with the American Goldfinch and the South American Black-hooded Red Siskin and their progeny. Out of about a thousand birds I have observed less than a dozen individuals that were subject to fits. In one case the condition was brought on by fright but was not very severe. This bird invariably had a fit when his cage was cleaned. Usually I held his head under the cold water faucet and he came to, though I found he would slowly recover by himself when left alone.

One other case was very severe, the bird fairly thrashing himself to pieces on the floor of the cage. He dropped off the perch oftentimes for no apparent reason and kept this up for several weeks but after some time he fully recovered and sang for many years afterward.

All other cases either ended in instant death or gradual decline, the individual never fully recovering and usually left with a condition that caused him to turn his head to the right constantly and sometimes not being able to keep his balance or to eat properly. A watery right eye or a constant irritation causing the bird to scratch the right side of the head indicated some internal ailment. If an individual did not die immediately but lingered on death seemed due to the fact that he was unable to nourish himself sufficiently.

Though such a condition has been called paralysis by Stroud in his "Digest of the Diseases of Birds" I am inclined to believe it an injury to or pressure on the brain brought on by injury, parasite, or fright.—Olive P. Wetherbee, 11 Dallas St., Worcester 4, Massachusetts.

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