

An Old Record of a Chimney Swift Roost.—An interesting description of a Chimney Swift roost in a hollow sycamore near Marietta, Ohio, is contained on page 180 of T. H. Harris' "Journal of a Tour into the Territory Northwest of the Allegheny Mountains; Made in the Spring of the Year 1803". Boston (1805). It reads as follows:

"In connexion with this I may mention a large collection of feathers, found within a hollow tree, which I examined with the Rev. Mr. Story, May 18, 1803. It is in the upper part of Waterford, about two miles distant from the Muskingum. A very large sycamore, which, through age, had decayed and fallen down, contained in its hollow trunk, five and a half feet in diameter and for nearly fifteen feet upwards, a mass of decayed feathers, with a small admixture of brownish dust and the exuvies of various insects. The feathers were so rotten that it was impossible to determine to what kind of birds they belonged. They were less than those of the pigeon; and the largest of them were like the pinion and tail feathers of the swallow.

"I examined carefully this astonishing collection, in the hope of finding the bones and bills, but could not distinguish any. * * *

"One circumstance which makes me suppose these the plumage of one vast flock of birds which took up winter quarters in this tree, and perished there; and not the moultings of annual visitors, is, that the feathers at the top were as much decayed as those at the bottom. As the trunk had split in falling down, I was able to examine the whole mass and found it of uniform appearance throughout. We judged that there were enough to have filled two waggons."

The above antedates the publication of Audubon's somewhat similar account by about thirty years.—A. W. SCHORGER, *Madison, Wis.*

Great Blue Heron Using Its Beak as a Spear.—This behavior, mentioned by the writer in a note on the bird life of southern Iowa, (*WILSON BULLETIN*, March, 1936) has been questioned by William P. Hainsworth (*ibid.*, June, 1936). Once in the Green Bay region of Iowa, the writer observed a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) spearing a fish. Securing the fish he found a single hole through it, indicating that the mandibles were closed at the time of the strike. Again in the Ozark Mountains, he saw a bird of the same species spear a fish which was estimated to weigh one pound. While making a photographic study of herons at Reelfoot Lake in northwestern Tennessee, he once more observed such a spearing. He also made note of immature herons striking at the object of their anger with open and also with closed beak.

The writer has seen the American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) in the act of spearing food. The New Natural History states: "In the bittern's stomach may be found mollusks, crayfish, frogs, lizards, small snakes and fishes as well as insects. Such prey is captured with great address, by spearing, as the bird wades or walks stealthily along." Dr. Frank M. Chapman states (letter to present writer, August 27, 1936): "I have submitted your letter of August 23rd to the members of the ornithological staff of the American Museum of Natural History. It appears that there are on record two instances of a Great Blue Heron striking a dog in the eye in which only one hole was made and the bill apparently, therefore, was closed. In regard to the striking of fish the evidence advanced indicated that both methods of striking were used; possibly with larger fish the bill was closed and the fish was struck, but with smaller ones the bill

might be open." Dr. T. Gilbert Pearson has stated in the *National Geographic Magazine*, that "the sharp dagger of the heron spears fish". Presumably most of the species of herons are capable of using their beaks as spears, though the Boat-billed Heron (*Cochlearius cochlearia*) has a broad, blunt bill and would be unable to use it in this manner.—LAWRENCE E. HUNTER, *Dallas City, Illinois*.

[Coues (*Key to North American Birds*, 5th ed., 2:863) states: "Food... generally procured by spearing." Surber (in Roberts, "The Birds of Minnesota", 1:186) referring to the Black-crowned Night Heron, states: "So far as I could observe, the Herons seemed to grasp the fish between the mandibles and not to pierce the body as is usually done by the Heron Tribe." The Boat-billed Heron is placed in a separate family.—O. A. S.]

CORRESPONDENCE

In the review of Pettingill's recent monograph on The American Woodcock* written by Dr. T. C. Stephens in the WILSON BULLETIN (Vol. XLVIII, No. 4, December, 1936, p. 317) occurs this statement: "The author discounts the claim that the Woodcock carries the young away in the event of danger." Since this seemed to me a misinterpretation of Dr. Pettingill's text I wrote Dr. Stephens concerning the matter, and he has been kind enough to agree that such a misinterpretation might arise, and to suggest that I discuss briefly my views and experience relative to such an act on the part of the Woodcock. I therefore suggest as being more nearly in accord with Dr. Pettingill's discussion the statement, "The author discounts the claim that the Woodcock *purposely* carries the young away in the event of danger."

It is easy to realize that to a person who has not seen it the carrying of a young bird by a parent Woodcock must seem a fantastic performance. Nevertheless, on pages 333 ff. of Dr. Pettingill's volume there are a number of eye-witness accounts of the act to which credence is given, among them an account of two such occurrences observed by the writer. I shall attempt below to amplify the notes quoted there, part of which had already appeared in the *Auk* (Vol. 47, pp. 248-249, 1930).

The first of the two observations was made on May 7, 1926. My father, a trained observer, Mr. Charles Hefner, and the writer were engaged in spraying an apple orchard near French Creek, Upshur County, West Virginia. An adult Woodcock and two young were flushed, the young birds appearing to be well under half-grown. The birds scattered, but we followed the adult, our attention being called to its peculiar flight and appearance. Since there was little cover nearby we were able to follow it closely and to flush it almost immediately. When it rose again we could see clearly that it was carrying a young bird, apparently holding it between its (the adult's) thighs. The young bird dangled below the feet of the adult, and the flight had much the appearance of the ordinary "injury feigning" behavior, with which we were familiar. All three of us again pursued closely, and a third such flight was made, the young bird still in plain view. These flights did not average more than ten feet in length, and we could easily

*The American Woodcock. By Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr. Vol. 9, No. 2, *Memoirs Boston Society of Natural History*. Boston, 1936. Pp. 168-391.