

GENERAL NOTES

Anhinga in New Jersey: On September 25, 1989, I was at Island Beach State Park, New Jersey with my brother, Robert J. Miller, banding birds in our banding lane. About 10:00 a.m. we saw a bird circling high in the sky over us. It turned out to be an Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*). After a few minutes, it stopped circling and headed south, down the island. Hurricane Hugo in the South a few days before might have pushed this bird up into New Jersey as it did in Pennsylvania and New York with other Southern species.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Avenue, Prospect Park, PA 19076

Unusual feeding technique by a Snowy Egret: On September 16, 1985, I observed an unusual feeding technique employed by a Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) at Lily Lake, Cape May Point, New Jersey. The bird was found quietly stalking minnows in shallow water. It would stretch out its neck and dip the tip of its bill into the water, then gently snap its bill on the surface creating a rippling effect. The bird was probably trying to imitate an insect struggling on the surface. The egret repeatedly caught minnows using this technique, and I was able to photograph this unusual behavior at close range.

Bent (1926) does not mention this type of behavior by a Snowy Egret, and I could find no other records. The only similar occurrence I could find of lure-type fishing by a heron was of a Green-backed Heron (*Butorides striatus*) photographed in Florida by Dave Norris (1975) which apparently attracted a minnow for capture by dropping a white feather into the water.

LITERATURE CITED

- Bent, Arthur Cleveland 1926, *Life Histories of North American Marsh Birds* as reprinted by Dover 1963
Norris, Dave 1975, *American Birds*, Volume 29, 652-54.

—Rick Wiltraut, 205 Washington Street, Nazareth, PA 18064

Unusual Behavior of Black-crowned Night-Herons: In late May 1988, I saw Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) sitting on Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) nesting boxes at the Tinicum National Environmental Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After watching them for a while, I saw a Tree Swallow put its head out of the box on which the heron was sitting. The heron reached down, caught the swallow and killed it and ate it. This happened on a number of boxes in this one area where the night-herons were nesting. I talked to a few other people that

month about the sighting. They told me they saw the same thing happen in that area in late May. I am going to move those boxes from this area so this won't happen again (I hope).

Back in 1975, while banding Black-crowned Night-Herons at Absecon Bay, New Jersey, I found that the night-herons nesting on one of the islands all had dead Norway Rats (*Rattus norvegicus*) at their nests for the young to eat. Most of the rats had no heads on them. I looked into Bent (1926) on this behavior, but found no information on these actions.

LITERATURE CITED

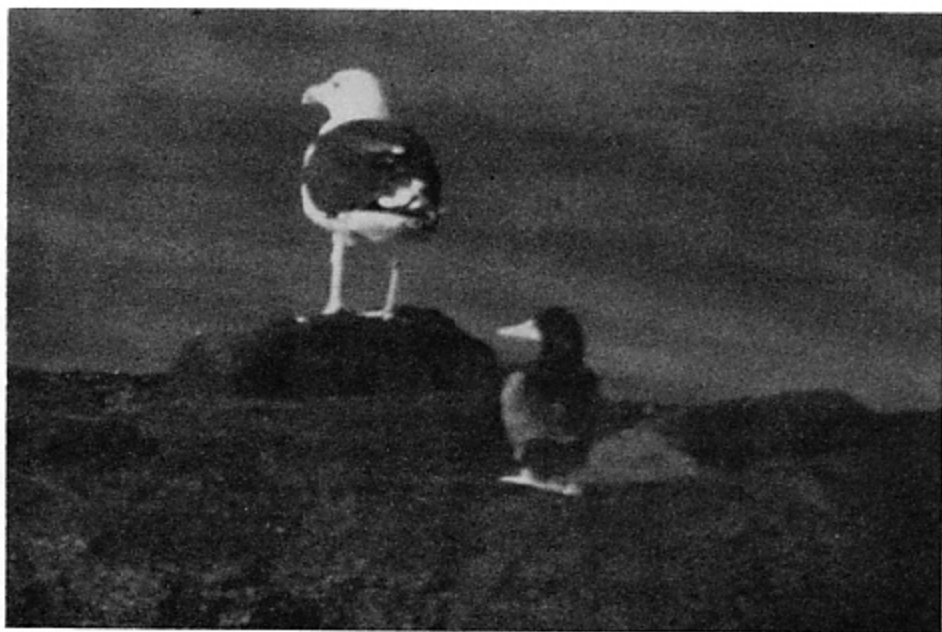
Bent, Arthur Cleveland 1926, *Life Histories of North American Marsh Birds* as reprinted by Dover 1963

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Avenue, Prospect Park, PA 19076

First Nesting of a Black-necked Stilt in Pennsylvania: On July 12, 1989, while birding in the area of the Philadelphia Sewage Ponds near Interstate 95 near the Philadelphia International Airport, I saw two Black-necked Stilts (*Himantopus mexicanus*) in the ponds acting as if they were nesting in the area. They kept circling over me in this one area, calling all the time and diving at me. I went back to my car and watched these birds with my binoculars. After a while, one bird landed and sat down on its nest. The nest had three eggs in it. I tried to get to the nest with my tall boots on, but the mud was too deep. I was going to keep this quiet for a while until the eggs hatched. On June 14, I went off on a trip to Venezuela, South America, for twelve days with a group from the D.V.O.C. I returned on June 25 and found that other observers had also discovered the stilts and word had spread. The next day I went to check on the stilt nest. I approached the nest from a different direction and found a second pair nesting approximately eight hundred yards away from the first nest. I hid in the grasses and watched the stilt sit on the nest, but I could not see how many eggs were in it. We had lots of rain in the last part of June and the beginning part of July, causing the water level to rise in the ponds. This may have been the cause of the poor hatchling success. I observed only one young bird in the first week of July, but none thereafter.

This marks the second consecutive year that Black-necked Stilts were observed in the sewage pond area. In 1988, two stilts, with what might have been young, were seen on July 1 and July 5 by Michael Brawley, but I could not find any at that location once I got the word about them in mid-July.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Avenue, Prospect Park, PA 19076



BROWN BOOBY (*Sula leucogaster*)
Cape May Point, New Jersey, September 30, 1989
Photo by Alan Brady



LITTLE GULL (*Larus minutus*)
Cape May Point, New Jersey, June, 1989
Photo by Alan Brady



WHITE-WINGED TERN (*Chlidonias leucopterus*)
Bombay Hook NWR, Delaware, July 25, 1989
Photo by Alan Brady



WHITE-WINGED TERN (*Chlidonias leucopterus*)
Cape May Point, New Jersey, June 8, 1989
Photo by Alan Brady



ARCTIC TERNS (*Sterna paradisaea*)
Beltzville State Park, Pennsylvania, May 16, 1989
Photo by Rick Wiltraut

Arctic Terns in Carbon County, Pennsylvania: On May 16, 1989, I was birding in the rain at Beltzville Lake, Carbon County, Pennsylvania, when I spotted two terns flying over the lake near the beach area. As the terns made several passes close by, I noticed that the underwings had a very thin dark trailing edge to the outer primaries, a field mark suggesting Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*). I also noticed that the primaries appeared very light from below, occasionally appearing translucent. These light primaries contrasted sharply with a dark gray inner-wing. The plate of the Arctic Tern in flight (underview) on page 97 of Peterson's revised *Field Guide to the Birds* best illustrates what I saw.

The terns eventually settled on the beach and, when viewed through binoculars, the underparts of both birds appeared very dark gray in coloration. A thin white line separated the dark gray underparts from their solid black caps. Both birds appeared short-legged and rather round-headed. One bird had tail streamers that projected beyond its folded wingtips, giving it an overall slim appearance. When viewed through a 32X Bushnell scope, I detected that this bird had red legs and an all-red bill. The other bird had a dark bill with a dark reddish base and blackish-red legs. The tail extended to the wingtips, but not beyond. I presumed that this bird was a sub-adult or a winter adult which had not quite attained breeding plumage.

I was able to obtain about twenty photographs through a 400 mm lens before the birds flew. The birds remained in the area throughout the rest of the day and were

observed by several other experienced birders who confirmed my sighting. The terns were gone the following morning.

At the time of the sighting, the weather along the New Jersey shore and eastern Pennsylvania was predominated by heavy rain and easterly winds. The birds were undoubtedly blown off course, just like the Arctic Terns which are recorded annually in late May-early June on the Great Lakes (the next ocean-like area). The weather that day also produced an adult Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) at the lake, a rarity for that locale.

B. H. Warren (1890) mentions the Arctic Tern as "a very rare straggler in eastern Pennsylvania," listing three specimens taken in the state. Poole (1964) mentions the Arctic Tern as hypothetical on the basis that the specimens in Warren's account had disappeared. The only other records for Pennsylvania since 1890 were a flock of twenty-five at Lake Wallenpaupack on May 9, 1971, reported by John E. Trainer Sr. and a bird carefully studied at Presque Isle State Park, Lake Erie, on May 17-18, 1983, by Jerry McWilliams and Don Snyder.

LITERATURE CITED

- Trainer Sr., John E. 1973, Arctic Terns in Pennsylvania, *Cassinia* 1971-72:48
Warren, B. H. 1890, *Report on the Birds of Pennsylvania*, Second Edition, Harrisburg.
Poole, Earl L. 1964, *Pennsylvania Birds, An Annotated List*, Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, Livingston Publishing Company

—Rick Wiltraut, 205 Washington Street, Nazareth, PA 18064

Common Black-headed Gull in Delaware: On December 28, 1988, an adult Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) was found by Dave and Clarence Shoch at the sewage treatment plant on Cherry Island, Wilmington, Delaware. The bird stayed until March 20, 1989, by which time it had assumed full summer (alternate) plumage.

Despite being absent for long periods, causing much frustration to visiting birders, the bird was only rarely seen away from the works; much of the local area, however, is of difficult access.

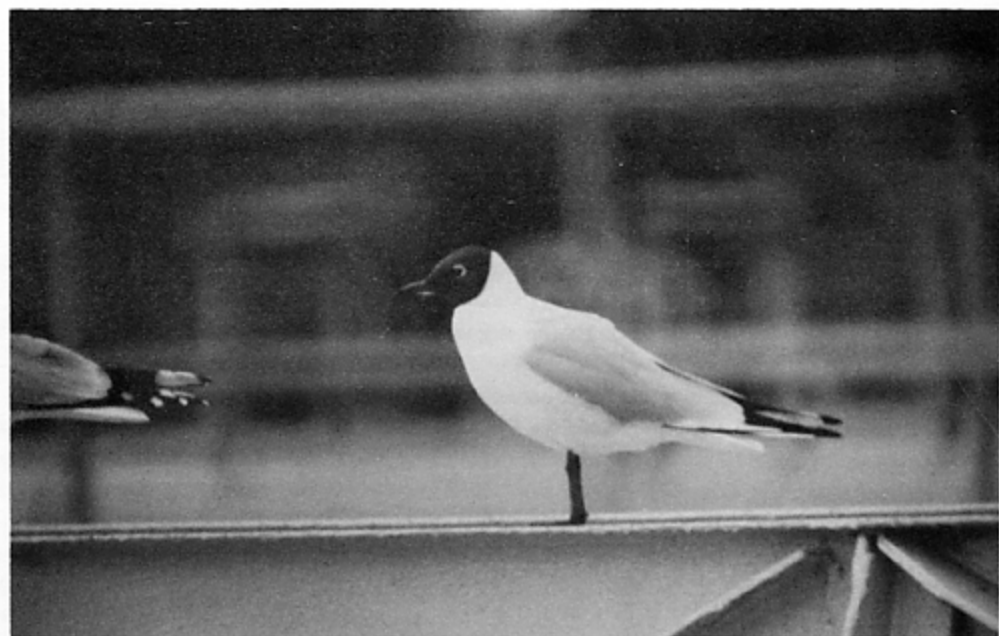
The gull fed on apparently delicious organisms, picked delicately off the surface of the three ponds in the sewage plant. It associated with, mainly, Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) and, toward the end of its stay, Laughing Gulls (*L. atricilla*). Immediately after its departure, three Bonaparte's Gulls (*L. philadelphia*) used the same pools for feeding.

Several Common Black-headed Gulls have been recorded in Delaware in recent years, but none has stayed so faithful to a particular site for so long. Interestingly, an adult Common Black-headed Gull (re?) appeared at the same site on October 31, 1989, but remained less than three weeks.

—Colin Campbell, 1206 Quincy Drive, Wilmington, DE 19803



COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Larus ridibundus*)
Cherry Island, Wilmington, Delaware, February 18, 1989
Photo by Franklin C. Haas



COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Larus ridibundus*)
Cherry Island, Wilmington, Delaware, March 20, 1989
Photo by Barbara M. Haas

Notes on a Northern Shrike in Carbon County, Pennsylvania: During February and March 1989, an adult Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) was present at Beltzville State Park in Carbon County, Pennsylvania, giving me an excellent opportunity to study the behavior and habits of this seldom-seen species. I had seen Northern Shrike at Beltzville on two previous occasions and several times in Centre and Erie counties, but this was the first one that allowed me to approach it and study it closely.

The shrike was often seen perched at the top of a large oak tree near the shore of the lake, which undoubtedly provided the bird with an excellent view of its hunting grounds. What amazed me most about this bird was its persistence as a singer. I had heard Northern Shrikes "sing" before during the winter, but never with such enthusiasm. The shrike was often detected by its singing, and it would sing throughout the day from dawn to dusk. The song was a varied combination of notes in repetition, reminding me of the songs of the Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) and the Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*). The most common note that I heard was a two-syllable "blip-blip" or a lower pitched "blup-blup," somewhat resembling the begging call of a young American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). This note was often repeated ten to twenty times, but occasionally thirty to forty times in succession. It also repeated various snapping and chattering sounds, harsh saw-whetting notes, liquid notes and trills resembling those of the American Robin and Northern Mockingbird, and mewing sounds like those of the Gray Catbird, Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*), and the distress call of the European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). I was able to tape record most of these variations at close range.

The shrike was very aggressive toward other birds in the area. On one occasion, I was watching the shrike perched at the top of a tall tree when one of two Rock Doves (*Columba livia*) flying overhead made a half-hearted pass at the bird. The shrike immediately left its perch in pursuit of the doves, eventually catching up to them and launching its own half-hearted attack on one of the birds before veering off in another direction. I noticed that the normally aggressive Northern Mockingbirds which shared the same area would seem reluctant to fly from their perches when I approached them, probably fearing an attack from the ever-present shrike. In fact, they seemed to retreat into the center of the bushes in which they were perched.

During its stay, I observed two different methods employed by the shrike for transporting captured prey. On February 26, I saw the shrike perched at the top of a small shrub. It flew down into tall grass near the edge of the lake, flew straight up out of the grass, hovered a few seconds, then dropped down again. I detected some faint squealing sounds, then saw the shrike take off carrying a mouse in its bill, eventually landing in a small shrub. When I approached it, the shrike took off again, this time carrying the mouse in its feet. On another occasion, March 4, I saw the shrike "kite" down from its perch into the grass, then take off with a mouse in its feet. It appeared that the mouse was a rather heavy load, as the shrike flew laboriously and low over the ground to a nearby shrub. Since there were no thorns on this particular shrub for impaling its prey, the shrike wedged the mouse in a crotch and proceeded to consume the head. After consuming the head, the shrike flew to a nearby bush and began to sing. A few minutes later, it returned to the mouse and continued eating, eventually pulling and tugging the mouse out of the crotch and dropping it. It flew down to the ground, retrieved its meal, then flew back up into the shrub and wedged the remains in another crotch. It ate some more, then returned to the bush to roost at approximately 5:30 p.m.

The shrike seemed to prefer Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*) bushes for roosting. On March 22, I was walking along the shoreline when I discovered a large amount of whitewash under a large Multiflora Rose bush, about twenty feet from the edge of the lake. Scattered under the bush were about 35 elongated pellets, ranging in size from those of a Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) to those of an Eastern Screech-Owl (*Otus asio*). I collected the pellets and recorded the following measurements: largest pellet, 57 mm; smallest pellet, 21 mm; average, 32 mm. All the pellets I dissected contained the jaw bones of *Microtus* spp. (probably *M. pennsylvanicus*).

—Rick Wiltraut, 205 Washington Street, Nazareth, PA 18064



WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

Whitpain Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, January 2, 1990

Photo by Jerry Pasquarella

Western Tanager in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania: On December 30, 1989, while participating with Christopher Walters in the Valley Forge Christmas Bird Count, we found in Whitpain Township an apparent female Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*). A careful description of the bird, which fed frequently on the fruits of crab apple trees along the edge of a young, second-growth deciduous woods about 2 p.m., was made on the spot. After tentatively identifying the bird by later consulting appropriate field guides, a second observation an hour later convinced us of the correct

identification. We then alerted the local birding community and reported the bird that evening at the round-up of the Valley Forge Audubon Society. The bird has subsequently been seen and often photographed by many individuals. It was last reported to us in the same location on January 21, 1990.

Some photographs of the bird reveal a dull red color on some of the forehead feathers, a fact which has caused some to speculate that the bird is a winter plumaged male. It seems to us, however, that the color is merely due to reddish staining from the ripe crabapple fruits to which the bird frequently returned to feed. No red was observed in the field and no red coloring in any of the photographs examined revealed red on the chin, a trait indicated for the winter male. A detailed description of this female Western Tanager has been filed with the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee.

Well-documented reports of Western Tanager in Pennsylvania are rather rare. The following six have come to my attention:

1. Scranton, Lackawanna Co. February 22 – March 9, 1952. Sight record. (Earl Poole 1964 *Birds of Pennsylvania*, p. 61)
2. Butler, Butler Co. August 28, 1958. Sight record. (Ibid.)
3. New Bloomfield, Perry Co. September 26, 1959. Sight record. (Ibid.)
- 4a. Birmingham Meeting House, Chester Co. December 14, 1959. Photograph. (Ibid.)
- 4b. Westtown, Chester Co. to February 3, 1960. Poole states that 4a and 4b may be the same bird. (Ibid.)
- 4c. near West Chester, Chester Co. "One male bird was seen...in several feeder areas from December 9, 1959, to January 14, 1960...banded and photographed." (West Chester Bird Club 1979, *Annotated List of Chester County Birds*, 3rd edition, p. 41.)
5. West Grove, Chester Co., December 15, 1973, to January 29, 1974. (West Chester Bird Club, op. cit.)
6. Ambler, Montgomery Co., December 21–24, 1974. Sight record. *Cassinia* 55 (1975):37.

—Edward D. Fingerhood, 541 W. Sedgwick Street, Philadelphia, PA 19119

A Great Migratory Event at Island Beach State Park: Migration is one of the most fascinating phenomena of nature. In autumn, when you get a sharp drop in temperature which always accompanies a northwest wind, it stimulates migration everywhere. When the wind is not too strong at night and does not blow the birds out into the ocean too far, a massive "fallout" of migrants results along the coast. Just such an event happened at Island Beach State Park, New Jersey, on October 23, 1989, while I was there banding birds. This "fallout" also occurred at Sandy Hook State Park, New Jersey, on the same day.

When I stepped out of my motel room at dawn, all I heard were call notes of birds going over the area. While driving down to my mist net lane in the park, large numbers of birds were seen all along the road framed by the headlights of my car. After hearing and seeing all these birds in the area, I only opened one net and soon all hell broke

loose. Birds were everywhere heading north! I filled all of my holding cages for banding birds and tried to close my mist net. It took a while to get the net closed due to the volume of birds continually getting caught in it. In the back of the mist net lane was an open area completely filled with feeding birds as they moved through the area.

Most diurnal movements of migrating birds start out at dawn and end about 10 to 11 a.m. This diurnal movement started at dawn and did not stop until 4:30 p.m.! The number of birds that went by this day was unbelievable. How many millions of birds went by in this time span from 6:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., I have been unable to put a number on. Here is a list of migrants as they occurred in abundance:

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|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1) Dark-eyed Junco | 11) Winter Wren |
| 2) Golden-crowned Kinglet | 12) Palm Warbler |
| 3) White-throated Sparrow | 13) Field Sparrow |
| 4) Song Sparrow | 14) Cedar Waxwing |
| 5) Hermit Thrush | 15) House Finch |
| 6) Brown Creeper | 16) Chipping Sparrow |
| 7) Ruby-crowned Kinglet | 17) Purple Finch |
| 8) Swamp Sparrow | 18) Pine Siskin |
| 9) Yellow-rumped Warbler | 19) White-crowned Sparrow |
| 10) Red-breasted Nuthatch | 20) Red-winged Blackbird |

Also observed were: Vesper Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark and Rusty Blackbird. Observed over the ocean were all three species of scoter. Observed over the ocean and bay were strings of cormorants, Canada and Snow geese, and many Dunlins and Sanderlings.

Over the past forty years of birding and banding birds, I have been fortunate to see three massive migrations of birds. My first was at Island Beach State Park, New Jersey, in October 1963. The second was at Ocean City, Maryland, and moved north into Delaware along the coast on April 27, 1965. I have had good days at Cape May Point, New Jersey, but there is no way to tell or write about these movements. One would have to be there and see with their own eyes the massive number of birds going through the bushes and trees.

If one were driving down the road in Island Beach State Park on this day, one would have seen large numbers of birds all along the road, but not the numbers that are moving back in through the bushes and trees. I feel that if I wasn't a bird bander, I would never have seen these two massive movements of birds as I have. How many of you birders have had Brown Creepers land on your pant legs and climb up them or have had Golden-crowned Kinglets land on your head and shoulders? These birds don't care about people being in their way, they just keep the massive movement going.

After leaving the net lane and heading back into Seaside Park, New Jersey, land birds were feeding all along the sides of the road. Once in Seaside Park, these birds were seen feeding in all the yards, trees and open places.