

growing scarcer as one moves east and becoming rather rare as the easterly border of the state is reached. Its numbers apparently fluctuate rather widely. Fifty years ago it seems to have been more numerous than it is today. A quarter century later several writers mention a marked decrease in numbers, the lethal effect of the automobile being given as one reason for its decline.

A perusal of the "Kingbird" discloses numerous references to the Red-headed Woodpecker. Since 1950 it has been seen or found breeding in a number of areas where it had previously been absent, and seems to be making a gradual but fairly widespread recovery in much of the state. A recent issue of the Kingbird (1956, 6(3):97) mentions probable increases of this species in Oswego and Oneida Counties just south of the area under consideration. The editor for Region V makes the pertinent comment, "this may indicate an actual population increase or more observers, probably both." — J. B. Belknap, Gouverneur.

An experience with the Greater Shearwater. — For an observer like myself who rarely gets offshore, nothing could be so exciting as to watch at close range a Greater Shearwater (*Puffinus Gravis*). Such was my experience last summer. Greater Shearwaters are seldom seen from shore. Usually when they can be observed, they are around fishing boats five to ten miles or more out in the ocean.

August 26, 1956 was a day set aside for the family to picnic. We selected our place on the beach at Westhampton and proceeded to prepare for the annual outdoor barbeque. While this was being done I assembled my tripod and Balscope, and set them up overlooking the ocean. There was a slight wind from the southeast.

Hours had passed when at about three p. m. a flock of birds were seen working their way eastward. Common and Least Terns made up the greater part of this group; with them were also a few gulls and two dark birds that would dip from one side to the other.

In the scope, these birds revealed themselves to be Greater Shearwaters. They were working their way towards me about 100 yards off-shore. I wondered how close I could get to them. Surely I could swim 100 yards in the surf before they arrived. Without a second thought I took off for the water.

It was about ten minutes before my experiment became a reality. Here I was bobbing in the water, no more than 25 feet from one and 150 feet from the other shearwater. They would flap, then sail from one side to the other or circle about. One started in my direction while the other one left. The remaining Shearwater seemed to spot me, and then circle around me. Surely, I thought, it wouldn't dare attack.

The Greater Shearwater, 18-20 inches long and with a wing-spread to almost four feet, is a fishing petrel, which follows moving shoals of surface-swimming fishes as well as squids that come to the uppermost layers of the ocean during the hours of half-light or dark days (Murphy, *Oceanic Birds of South America*, 1936, p. 663). Herbert K. Job states in "Birds of America" (1936, p. 82) that their food consists of floating animal or vegetable matter, besides such marine organisms as small fish.

Perhaps I looked like some floating animal or piece of vegetable matter for it came rushing at me about to make the belly-landing characteristic of the species and was only an arms length away now. I could see that big, dark, hooked bill and wondered what would happen to my arm if I grabbed it. I saw its dark tarsus and light feet which were a sort of pink or flesh color. The eye looked dark; I didn't notice any distinguishing color.

I splashed some water as I started to back away from the attack, never once taking my eyes off it. This move seemed to startle it, and the Shearwater started to reverse action with wings flapping furiously, like those of a tern hovering above a prey. As it lifted its body, tail end down, I could see the white patch on the rump very clearly now. Then it started to take off. My blood pressure started to return to normal, but I realized it wasn't through, for circling it came toward me again. This time I prepared myself for a deep surface dive. However, it was not necessary, as the Shearwater looked at me and probably decided that I wasn't quite what it was looking for.

With its departure I returned to shore and to my family. "Well!" they wanted to know: "Did you get close enough?" "Close enough," I responded, "Yes sir, close enough for a long time to come!" — Alan H. Penberthy, Freeport.