

eyepiece. The bird remained in a small shallow pool, feeding continuously at a distance of 75 meters. Everyone had several excellent looks and it was still feeding when we left the area. Its plumage appeared as pictured by R. S. Palmer (1962, *Handbook of North American Birds*, Vol. I, p. 454). According to the Report of the New York State Avian Records Committee (*Kingbird*: Fall 1981), the White Ibis is on the list for which reports are sought. This is the first report for Clinton County and according to the range map in Palmer (1962, p. 525) the only other straggler reports in the Northeast have come from Vermont and the Province of Quebec.

Accepted reports listed in the NYSARC's report (*Kingbird*, 1981: p. 206) state that there have been 11 state sightings recorded as of September 1980.

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Yellow Rail at East Patchogue: On 23 October 1982 a Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) jumped up in front of me as I walked through a patch of Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum*) on an area of dredge spoil material on the north shore of Great South Bay, east of Mud Creek in East Patchogue, Suffolk County. The area was covered mainly by Reed Grass (*Phragmites australis*), interspersed with pure stands of Beach Grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*), Northern Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*), and Switch Grass. My first impressions were of an injured bird, since it flew so weakly, dangling its legs beneath its body. I could see its short bill and buffy overall coloration, and, as it turned fully away from me, the two white patches on the trailing edges of the wings. I ran to where it had landed, about thirty feet away, but it did not reappear then or later in the day when I returned with Barbara Spencer, Karen Rowley and Keith Rowley to look for it.

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Ring-billed Gulls Hawking Ants: On 28 September 1982, I observed a flock of approximately 30 Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) that appeared to be hawking insects over a sandy dredge spoil area on the north shore of Great South Bay in East Patchogue, Suffolk County. Around me were thousands of flying ants emerging from the ground and flying in the direction of the gulls. While I tried following an individual ant and then an individual gull with my binoculars, I was unable to observe an actual capture, because the gulls were about 75 yards away. Each gull, just before grabbing something, raised his head, stalled a bit in the air and snapped its bill. After opening and closing its bill as if crushing something, the gull would fly on and circle for another pass. Not surprisingly, a number of Monarch Butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) flying among the gulls and ants were ignored.

Bent (1921) states that in the western plains Ring-billed Gulls follow the plow "... picking up worms, grubs, grasshoppers and other insects." He also

quotes Dr. J. A. Allen who reports that Ring-billed Gulls "... at certain hours of the day rose in the air to feast on the grasshoppers ... and it was a curious fact that the gulls captured the grasshoppers in the air ... sailing around in broad circles, as though soaring merely for pleasure, ... [seizing] the flying grasshoppers as easily, if not as gracefully, as a swallow ...". Both Dennis Puleston and Barbara Spencer (pers. comm.) report having seen Ring-billed Gulls feeding on flying ants. Lauro (1977) reports that on 13 September 1976 nearly 3,000 gulls of three species (Herring, Ring-billed and Laughing) were seen hawking ants on an eight-mile stretch of the barrier beach west of Captree Bridge on Long Island.

The smallness of the prey in this case raises questions about how efficient hawking might be for such large birds. Recent reports state that insects have a higher percentage of protein than traditional meat sources and suggests their use as human food. Maybe the gulls have learned that insects are a good protein source. It wouldn't be the first time an animal discovered something before we did.

Bent, A. C. 1921. *Life Histories of North American Gulls and Terns*, Dover Publ.: 137.

Lauro, A. J., 1977. Gull predation on an ant swarm, *Kingbird* 27 (2): 87

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Unusual Bird Tragedy: On 26 May 1982 I received a phone call informing me of a dead bird hanging upside down on the trunk of a tree. Investigation revealed the following facts. A medium-sized Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), 14 inches in diameter at chest height and located on the lawn of a private home in a residential section of Monticello, Sullivan Co., had received the attention of a woodpecker. Closer inspection proved that a Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) had excavated two holes in the trunk of the tree. The top hole, a typical excavation, an oblong approximately four inches by nine inches and about nine inches deep, was six feet above the ground on the westerly side of the tree. Below this hole was a second smaller one, two feet above ground level and measuring about three inches by five inches and six inches deep. Both excavations revealed evidence of the presence of Carpenter Ants. Small amounts of pitch had exuded from both excavations. From the bottom hole, hanging head downward, and suspended by two toes of each foot was the carcass of an adult male Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*). Further examination showed that the bill, with a few small pin feathers adhering to the tip, was tightly cemented shut by a quantity of pitch, requiring some effort to pry open. Closer examination showed the breast muscles to be very thin and in poor condition.

In conclusion we are left with several questions. (1) Why did it not fly away? (2) What caused the death of the bird? (3) How long dead before being discovered (no evidence of decay)?

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