

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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