

# EX LIBRIS



by Sheldon Dingle

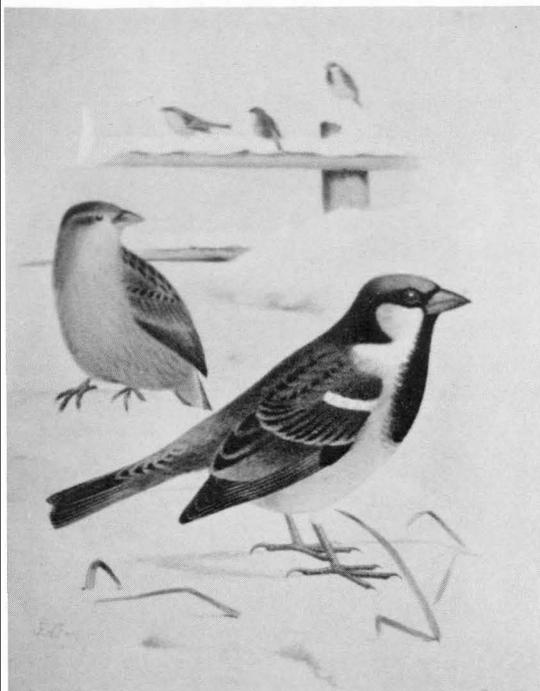
Finch people will be delighted with Edward Bartlett's *A Monograph of the Weaver-Birds, Ploceidae, and Arboreal and Terrestrial Finches, Fringillidae*. It is a very appealing book published in Maidstone by the author in 1888.

Mr. Bartlett was a better ornithologist than he was a publisher as his book has several serious flaws. On the other hand, it has a number of fine qualities that swing the balance far on to the affirmative side. Dr. Casey Wood (the world's foremost authority on bird books) lists this monograph as "very scarce". It was worth about two hundred dollars when I saw it listed in a 1974 catalogue.

The first flaw one notices is the lack of a preface or a table of contents. You enter the book blind, as it were, and immediately following the title page plunge into the actual text. A few minutes reading reveals the second flaw — a complex system of numbering the pages. Traditionally, book pages begin at one and work numerically upward. Not so Bartlett's pages. There are letter codes on the bottom of the pages and numbers at the top. The numbers are not progressive but revert back to page one many times. There is some sort of cross-coded division into sections, each section being numbered separately from the others. Truthfully, I am a little slow and haven't cracked the code yet.

The last major flaw relates to the two above faults — there is no index. Mr. Bartlett is to be forgiven this short coming as even the most clever mathematician would be baffled by the task of trying to cross-reference things to a specific page number.

If one is willing to ignore the flaws, opening the book is a real pleasure. The qualities of the volume are evident as one reads the descriptions of the birds. Mr. Bartlett begins each bird section with a



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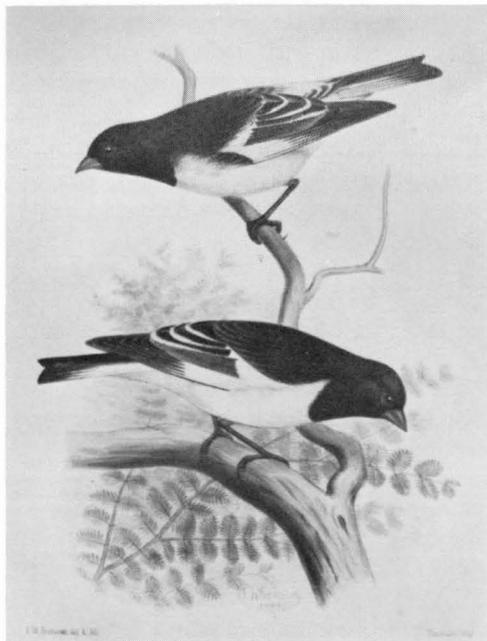
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chronological list of classification after which he gives the common name of the bird. He then lists the native habitat and the various places the bird has been introduced. The bird itself is then described in lucid detail.

A very enlightening commentary follows each scientific description. Many side lights are revealed. For instance, Bartlett quotes J.H. Gurney saying, "the cottagers put up pots of earthenware against the walls of their houses for the sparrows to nest in, not by way of encouraging them but to make them into a pie when the young ones get big enough."



Another thing pointed out is the wonderful musical ability of the Virginia Cardinal. He quotes Alexander Wilson, "From the clearness and variety of their notes, which both in the wild and domestic state, are very various and musical; many of them resemble the high notes of a Fife, and nearly as loud." A friend has a pair of these birds in his aviaries and I plan to take special measure to listen to them.

Interesting quips and quotes like this fill the book, and really enhance the readers knowledge regarding the birds in question. Another valuable feature is the field-notes that are recorded for the benefit of the reader. Because the book was written almost ninety years ago some of the field information is the first of its kind to be recorded by Europeans. Items such as social behavior, nidification, seasonal migrations, and diet are described in detail. This information can be used by contemporary bird breeders to approximate natural conditions for the captive birds.

In addition to the qualities already mentioned Bartlett's monograph contains some striking art work. F.W. Frohawk, the artist, was a master. There are twenty five plates in black and white. Six plates are colored by hand and are magnificent. Each plate depicts two or more birds, often a male and a female. Many of the birds are drawn to scale. The worth of the volume is greatly enhanced by the quality of the plates and this is one reason the book has become a collectors item.

All things considered, the *Monograph of the Weaver-Birds* is a book most bird people would love to have. Its organizational flaws are a drawback to the serious researcher but the lively conversation and the quality descriptions make the old tome a delight for the casual reader. It should have an honored place alongside your other bird books ■

## REPRIEVE FOR ILLINOIS BREEDERS

The potential threat to Illinois aviculturists from that state's Endangered Species Act has been lifted, advises William Vokoun of Downers Grove, Ill., thanks to the persistent efforts of local breeders. Meetings with the Director and Board of Conservation, who administer the Act, have resulted in the easing of restrictions, thereby encouraging the captive propagation of endangered species by private individuals. Illinois is perhaps the only state regulating the possession of exotic endangered species, an area of jurisdiction usually left to the Federal Government.

Permits for the possession and transfer of endangered species are now available, upon application, at no charge. Applications require information with regard to species kept and a description of the area and conditions under which they will be kept. Breeders must annually submit data on the number of birds kept, raised, and transferred, and to whom.

Mr. Vokoun indicates the leadership of Illinois' aviculturists is trying to ascertain whether that state's government will honor Federal regulations allowing for interstate shipment of endangered species under permit, and whether Illinois will follow Washington's lead in reclassification of those species from endangered to threatened that qualify under the 'captive, self-sustaining population rule' ■

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