

Letter from the Editor

Lessons from caged birds

Darlene Fiske's words in her article about Great Tits in this issue caught my attention. She wrote: "These members of the Tit family are certainly attractive, but so are other introduced species such as the European Starling that we now consider pests."

These Great Tits, native to Europe, actually nested in the wild and produced four young in McHenry County last summer. The reason they are here in Illinois is because of humans. It's very likely that someone was keeping the birds in a cage somewhere in the McHenry County region, and the birds either escaped or were let go.

The House Finch arrived here because of the caged bird trade. The story goes that a trader caught them illegally, transported them out East and then released them before he could get caught. The European Starling came here, as you know, because the European settlers wanted to feel more at home and so brought their favorite species with them. No doubt they brought these birds with them in cages aboard a ship and then released them.

Much farther south, keeping caged birds presents another problem. On a recent trip to Trinidad and Tobago, I learned that many species of finches likely will go extinct on those islands because humans trap them and keep them in cages as pets.

I have mixed feelings about caged birds, especially when people know what they are doing and are careful, and when the birds are kept in zoos to help bring them back from the brink of extinction.

But the real lesson here, to me, at least, is a reminder that what we humans do to change the natural order of things in the wild has consequences – some good, some bad, and some consequences only our descendants will come to discover. It's worth it to ponder those thoughts when you're out in the field trying to get a better look at or better photo of a coveted bird.

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About Our Cover:

Michael L. P. Retter produced the cover drawing of a Roseate Spoonbill, a species documented for the first time in Illinois the summer of 2003. Michael is a regular contributor to *Meadowlark*. A longtime Illinois birder and field trip leader, Michael has worked as an interpretive naturalist at Cape May Bird Observatory.

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