

Birds in action

This is the fourth in our series of occasional photographic features 'Birds in action' (see also *Brit. Birds* 68: 420; 69: 399-402; 71: 68-75). The object of the feature is to present photographs that are not simply portraits, however good, whether at or away from the nest, but which are good-quality shots of birds doing things—feeding, flying, bathing, singing. Action of this type is a valuable ingredient of any bird-photograph; many bird-photographers would aver that their ideal photograph is one that is well composed and aesthetically pleasing, correctly exposed with at least the essential interest of the photograph in critical focus, and above all showing the bird (or birds) *doing something interesting*. If the photograph is of a bird indulging in an unusual or unrecorded form of behaviour, so much the better.

Inevitably, such photographs need more than the usual luck or skill; both these elements are needed for a 'wait-and-see' shot from a temporary hide of, for example, a Goldfinch on a seeding thistle-head. But the thrill of obtaining a good-quality photograph of a bird in action away from the nest is, for the bird-photographer, well worth the prior fieldwork and the long, uncomfortable, and sometimes fruitless waits in a hide.

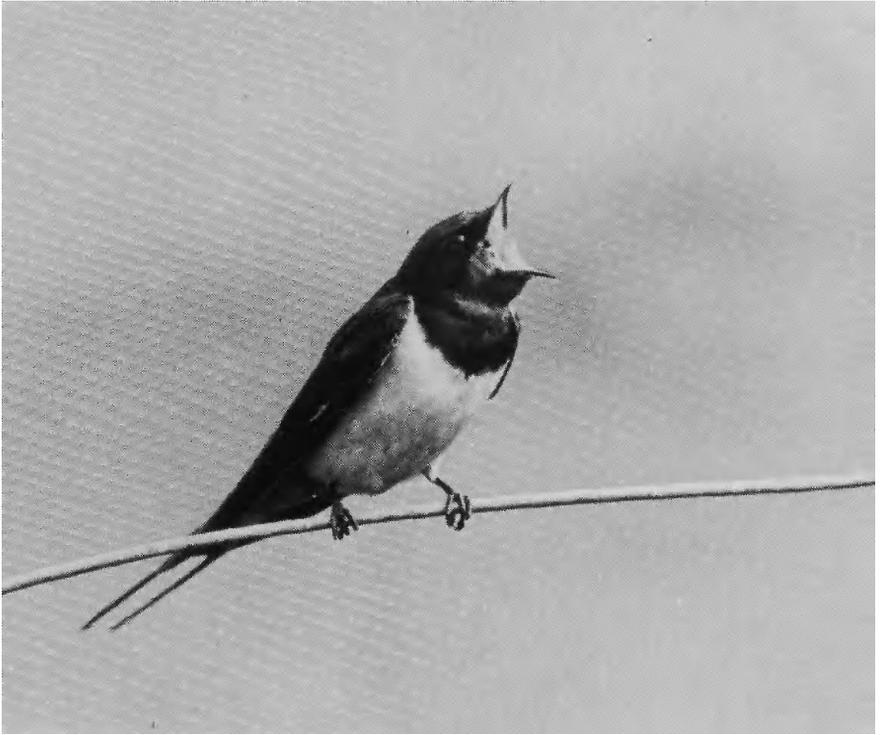
We do not know how all the photographs we feature on this occasion were taken, but some were certainly the result of just such a process. All, however, epitomise that which is best in photographs of birds 'doing something interesting'.

Mike Wilkes's shot of a Swallow yawning (plate 174) is a good example of a 'contrived' wait-and-see photograph. Having located a nesting pair, he provided the wire perch, set up a hide, and the bird shown in the photograph used the perch almost immediately, probably having a rest after visiting its nest.

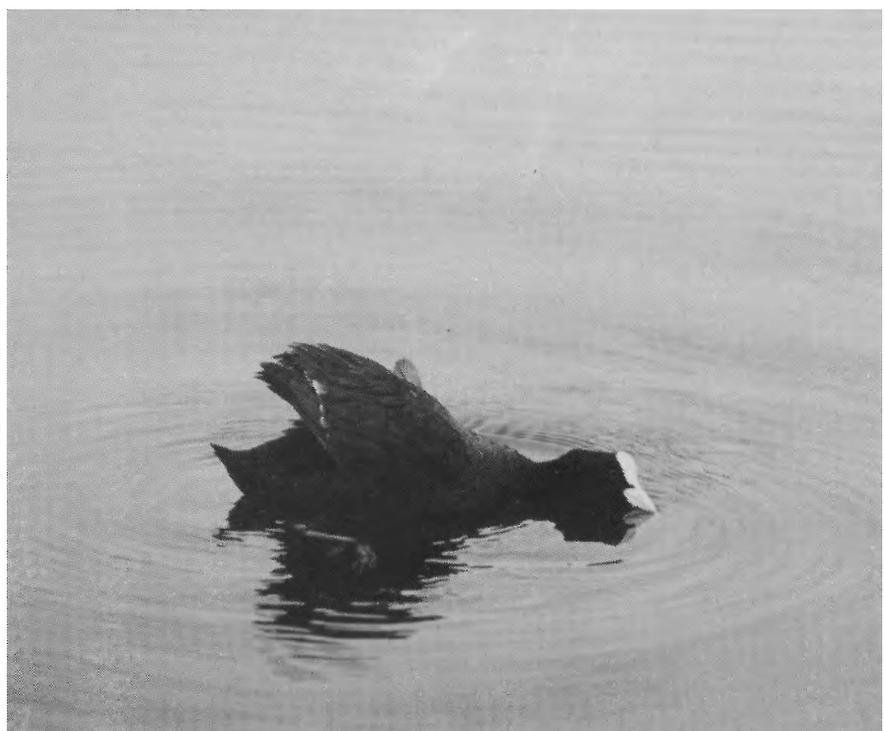
His second photograph is the only one in this series of birds at the nest: an attractive composition featuring the noisy activity of a pair of Rooks at their nest in the top of a hawthorn bush (plate 178). This scene shows the arrival of the male, his pouch filled, from whom the female took food to give to the young.

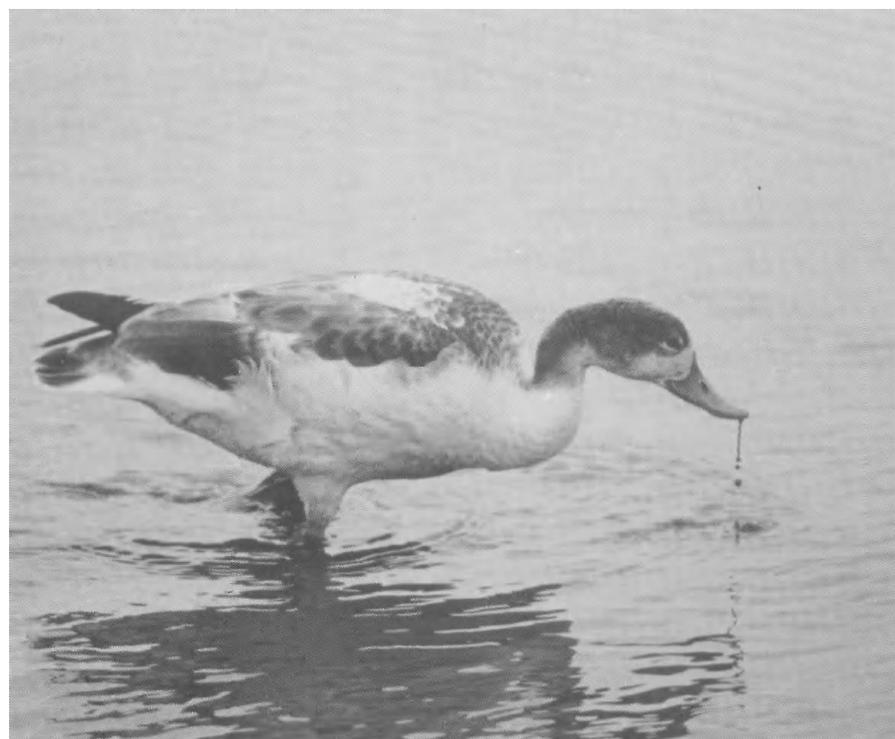
Frits Houtkamp's delightful photograph of a Greenfinch feeding (plate 175) has all the hallmarks of another well planned wait-and-see shot, and must have given him a great deal of satisfaction.

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- 174 & 175.** Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Worcestershire, August 1977 (*M. C. Wilkes*); Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*, Netherlands, December 1978 (*Frits Houtkamp*)
176 & 177. Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*, Cornwall, June 1972 (*J. B. & S. Bottomley*); Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Cornwall, November 1969 (*J. B. & S. Bottomley*)
178 & 179. Rooks *Corvus frugilegus*, Worcestershire, May 1977 (*M. C. Wilkes*); Coot *Fulica atra*, Warwickshire, June 1972 (*S. C. Porter*)
180 & 181. Redwing *Turdus iliacus*, Banffshire, December 1976 (*J. Edelsten*); juvenile Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, Suffolk, August 1976 (*R. J. Chandler*)
182 & 183. House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*, Cornwall, July 1976 (*J. B. & S. Bottomley*); Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*, Co. Cork, May 1978 (*Richard T. Mills*)











Inevitably, it seems, we select a photograph by Brian and Sheila Bottomley for this feature; on this occasion, the quality of their work has forced us to include no fewer than three. The first is a marvellous photograph of a Grasshopper Warbler 'reeling' (plate 176), obtained at close range by stalking: one can almost hear that monotonous churr, so evocative of long summer days—and nights! Their second shot is of a Lapwing displaying (plate 177), not in defence of its nest site, but to protect its winter feeding territory on a Cornish estuary.

The third of the Bottomleys' photographs (plate 182) is a charming domestic scene, appropriate to the nest, but of added interest because the juvenile House Sparrow is being fed by its parent away from the nest. This is a superb example of the type of photograph that makes wait-and-see work so worthwhile.

The displaying Coot (plate 179), photographed by the late S. C. Porter, is another shot full of action. The ripples add considerably to the picture, indicating movement while at the same time both framing the bird and adding interest to the reflection of the bird in the water.

Redwings feeding on berries in the autumn and early winter are not an uncommon sight, but photographs as attractive as that by J. Edelsten (plate 180) are most unusual. The composition is delightful, and the moment of shutter release has caught well the brief movement between the plucking of the cotoneaster berry and its being swallowed.

The juvenile but full-grown Shelduck (plate 181), photographed by Dr Richard Chandler, similarly catches the bird in one of those brief moments when it raises its head after an extended period of filtering ooze, dribbling as it does so. Again, the movement of the bird is shown by the ripples and broken reflection.

The final photograph, too, is all action: Richard Mills's fine picture of a Canada Goose, honking loudly, skiing on the water surface, and spraying water everywhere as it threatens an intruder (plate 183).

May we encourage bird-photographers who have good quality black-and-white photographs of birds in action to submit them to us? We hope to repeat this feature occasionally, and will welcome prints from which to make a further selection.

R. J. CHANDLER, DON SMITH and J. T. R. SHARROCK