

**Anting by a House Sparrow.** It has long been known that many kinds of birds anoint their plumage with various substances ranging from aromatic vegetable matter to cigarette butts and crushed insects. Sometimes crushed insects or other invertebrates are subsequently eaten. A. H. Chisolm (1944) discussed this subject and drew attention to the similarity between the use of the various substances and anting.

Anting behaviour was first reported in central Europe more than 60 years ago by Heine (1929) who saw Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* putting ants among their feathers. Since then it has been recorded for between 200 and 250 species of passerine birds (Simmons 1985). Many theories have been advanced for birds anointing their plumage. They range from discouragement—getting rid of ectoparasites—to skin stimulation and to simple ritualised conduct involving either learned or innate behaviour.

Over many years I have watched birds through binoculars sunning themselves in the hope of seeing anting but without success. A search through my

notebooks, however, has revealed the following item from 6 June 1946, dealing with a male House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* at a derelict farm homestead 3 km SW of Sutherlands, South Australia. My entry reads 'It sat on the ground and sometimes lay on the ground and then pushed its bill into its mantle and beneath the wing. There was a nest of tiny black ants at the spot.'

This observation, unfortunately, had to be made without the aid of binoculars. Nevertheless, all the circumstantial evidence indicates that the sparrow was in fact, anting while being observed.

#### REFERENCES

- Chisolm, A.H. 1944. *Ibis*, 86, 403.  
 Heine, H. 1929. *Ornithologische Monatsberichte*, 37, 188-189.  
 Simmons, K.E.L. 1985. Anting. In B. Campbell and E. Lack (Eds), *A dictionary of birds* p 19. British Ornithologists Union.

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