

REDWING BANDING AT TUCKERTON, N. J.

By Michael Logue

On June 13 and 20, 1959, Frank Frazier Jr. and I banded 43 young Redwinged Blackbirds along the Great Bay Boulevard in Tuckerton, N. J. This is the same area described in the May-June, 1959 issue of EBBA News ("Mist Netting at Tuckerton, N. J." EBBA News, Vol. 22, No. 3, p.53). The road runs for several miles into a large salt marsh which borders the north shore of the Great Bay. A line of bushes consisting mainly of bayberry and groundsel, from five to ten feet wide and six to eight feet high, borders the road on both sides.

The birds banded were either nestlings, or local immatures so inept of flight that they could be caught by hand. The nesting habits of Redwings here are different from their habits in a typical marsh as all the nests are in the narrow line of shrubs and are very close together, 10 to 20 feet rather than the usual 35 or more. They nest in the bushes and project their feeding territories laterally into the marsh.

The technique we used was first to locate a nest with young old enough to band or a young bird young enough to catch on the wing. The method which we found to be the most efficient was for one of us to walk down the road and the other down the marsh side of the bushes. Although most of the nests were located on the marsh side in the smaller bushes growing there, we found that to follow a "local" which had been flushed, one of us needed to be on each side of the bushes, especially since we also wanted to check both sides of the line of bushes. When a nest is approached, the male, if he is in the vicinity will begin to chuck and whistle the alarm calls. As one gets closer the bird will begin to fly overhead making more and more noise. Finally in the immediate vicinity of the nest his excitement will be at a peak and he may begin diving. At this point all the bushes in the area are searched thoroughly with one eye on the bird for more clues to the nest's whereabouts. The nests we found in the bushes were usually about five feet above solid ground. We had had some experience with Redwings and their nests working with Stanley Dickerson on his Blackbird project on Spotswood Lake and there, the usual height is about one foot above the average water level and almost none are located in bushes.

There are several factors which lead to confusion in finding nests. One is that sometimes we found active nests that produced no excitement. No male or even female seemed to be guarding the nest. We assumed that they were both away feeding at the time. Another is that the presence of young just out of the nest will lead to great confusion. The parents care for, feed and get very excited over the young for weeks after they have left the nest. When the adult bird gets excited over a "local" the

confusion develops because of the fact that a young bird is not only much harder to find than a nest, but also because there are usually more than one "local" in a given small area. Therefore the disturbance is not limited to a small distinct area. Also, sometimes the young move without the parents knowing and the parents either keep up a disturbance over the place which the young bird has left, or else they follow us all over a wide area and show no peaks of excitement around any one spot.

We found that any bird in a nest could be safely banded if it was over five days old. Any bird that at least has its primary feathers formed and beginning to break out of their sheaths is old enough. To catch a bird on the wing is a technique that has to be learned largely by experience, but both of us used basically the same method. The best way is to spot a young bird before it flies, and if the bird is a catchable one, it will be very reluctant to fly and will tire easily. If spotted, crept up upon, and suddenly lunged for it can be caught without too much effort. A second person to create a diversion to divide the bird's attention is very helpful. The more usual occurrence is that the bird or birds will be flushed as one goes thrashing around in the brush. We have found other young in the same bush from which a young bird has been flushed. A bird young enough to catch will always drop to a bush or to the ground soon after taking flight unless caught by a strong wind. We had to run after the bird in most cases, and many times the bird would fly up a second or third time, but they usually tired soon and if we could keep our eyes on them we could usually catch them.

Spotswood, N. J.

* SEXUAL MATURITY IN FEMALE YEARLING GRACKLES Two Common Grackles banded as immatures during the second week of June, 1958, when recaptured 50 weeks later, had well defined brood patches. Since aging immature Grackles in June can be done with certainty, good evidence of first year breeding in these birds was obtained.

* CAPTIVE GRACKLES DISBAND THEMSELVES Two Common Grackles that were banded and placed in captivity in early May had removed their bands when examined about six weeks later. One hundred Grackles were confined for 1240 bird-days during the interval, indicating bands were lost at the rate of one band per 600 bird-days, or about a two percent loss in the month and a half. Until studies of disbanding by wild birds can be made, observations of captive birds yield the only clue to this activity. No indication of disbanding has been observed among captive Redwinged Blackbirds.

* - The two above items were submitted by John T. Linehan, Agricultural Hall, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware.
