

PROGRESS OF THE WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW STUDY

By Ralph K. Bell

I want to thank all those banders that were kind enough to send me information on the White-crowned Sparrow from their respective areas. The response was heart warming and each year I am more convinced that banders are wonderful people. Some spent considerable time and effort preparing their reports and all contributors will be acknowledged when the report is published.

The data received will all be evaluated, but probably not before next winter when I hope there will be more time to really dig into it. But some things are already evident. The E. White-crown is most certainly enlarging its winter range over much of the eastern United States, as each year new areas are adding White-crowns to their Christmas census lists.

The breeding range of the E. White-crown comprises the Labrador Peninsula and thence westward across the southern half of Hudson Bay to its western shores. This information was kindly supplied by Ronald C. Clement of the National Audubon Society. There was some question as to the possibility of its breeding in northern Maine, and upon the advice of Mrs. James R. Downs, I wrote to Christopher M. Packard of the Portland Museum of Natural History, and he confirmed that it was purely a migrant in Maine.

Mr. Duvall, of the banding office, has been very helpful by sending me a list of all recoveries of the E. White-crown. These recoveries indicate the main wintering ground is in central Texas. While White-crowns are listed in greater numbers on the West-central Texas Christmas counts, my guess is that many of these are made up of migrants other than those from the Labrador-Hudson Bay breeding area. When I started this study, I thought perhaps the Ky.-Tenn. area was the main wintering ground, but now I know this is not true. A large percentage of the migrants continue on southwestward and cross the Mississippi.

I wrote to the man at Battle Harbor, Labrador that reported the recovery of the White-crown there, to ask if he could give me any information about the White-crown on its breeding grounds; such as arrival dates, departure dates, density of the species in that area, type and location of nests, number of eggs per nest, etc. To be sure we would be talking about the same bird, I sent him an excellent picture of the White-crown sent me by bander Raymond H. Dubb. The reply to my queries was very interesting, and I would like to share his letter with you - written in his words. Dear Mr. Bell: Today I received your letter regarding the White-crown. I will certainly gather what information I can about the White Crown and will send it along to you. My children are very interested in looking for and finding nests in the spring, and we will advise as to how many nests we find, the number of birds in each nest, how far apart they are, and so on.

I am afraid that we do not know the correct names of all the different birds that visit here each spring and fall. Of course we have names on them, but I don't imagine we have the right names. For instance we never heard of the White Crown being called anything but 'White Cap.' It would be nice to know the names of these birds then we could advise what we have. We have one which we call mud lark, another wagging tail, another ringer, another tom tit, and a lot more so you see you are not sure what we have unless we have the correct names. We have a few birds that stay around here all the year such as crow, sea gull, jay, and a few others. Do you have any of these your way. I guess the old crow is everywhere. Most ducks leave here in the spring and fly north except for a few that hang around in bays to build their nest and hatch out young. Yours truly, Doug.

I will write to him and ask that he advise the children not to destroy any nests or scare the young from the nests before they are ready to fly. Perhaps we may have another kind hearted man here like Monsieur Thomas Brousseau that G. Hapgood Parks wrote about. I am going to send him Peterson's Bird Guide and hope we gain another friend in the far north.

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WATCH FOR MARKED BIRDS!

From a letter to Allen Duvall from Dr. Telford H. Work. . . .

A further step in the investigation of migratory birds as potential disseminators of arboviruses was undertaken in March and April by a field and laboratory team from the Arbovirus Unit of the USPHS Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta, Georgia. With Walter P. Nickell of the Cranbrook Institute of Science as Consultant, the team, consisting of Rexford Lord, Herbert Maxfield, and Telford H. Work, set up initial operations in Stamm Creek Valley from March 14 to April 3.

White feathers were attached to the backs of 1052 birds, predominantly orchard orioles, catbirds, and indigo buntings, but including other species in small numbers.

On April 5, similar activity was initiated in the Delta Wildlife Refuge of Louisiana, where yellow feathers were used to mark 458 birds released.

One objective of the study is to make as many observations and/or recoveries of these marked birds in the United States as possible. If you observe any of these birds, your finding, including all the usual data on location, date, habitat, weather, etc., should be reported to the Arbovirus Unit, Communicable Disease Center, Atlanta, Georgia 30333 (telephone 404 634-5131). More important, if you learn of the whereabouts of a residential marked bird which might be investigated, immediate notification will be appreciated.