

RETURN OF OYSTERCATCHER ON L. I., N. Y.
By LeRoy Wilcox

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Ever since I found the first known nest of Oystercatcher in N. Y. State on July 13, 1957, on Gardiners Island, I have been interested in learning some details of their life history similar to my 30 years work on Piping Plovers of which I am getting about 40 returns per year after trapping 1732 adults on their nests. I also found a pair nesting at Moriches Inlet (Moriches Bay) on June 10, 1960, and another pair nesting at Shinnecock Bay on June 12, 1963, the only three known nesting areas on L. I. up to 1964. On July 4, 1960, one of the young banded at Moriches was the first Oystercatcher to be banded in N. Y. State.

I did not start in a serious way to trap adult Oystercatchers until 1963 when I trapped three adults, a pair at Shinnecock Bay and a single at Moriches Inlet. I had the birds setting on hard-boiled chicken eggs while their own eggs were temporarily removed from the nest to prevent breakage.

In 1964 the pair returned to Shinnecock and after several attempts to nest did not succeed. The last nest site in a Tern and Skimmer colony was washed away so late in the season that they no longer attempted to nest during 1964.

The pair returned to Moriches in 1964, the first adult caught on its nest on June 26 was a return from last year and was probably a female, as it weighed 746 grams, with wing 267 and tail 105. The other adult was caught on June 27 and weighed 715 grams, with wing 254 and tail 97, so was probably the male. This return on June 26 was the first return of an adult in the U. S., as there had been only one return out of some 75 Oystercatchers banded in the U. S., all young, and this return was for only a young a few months old in the Carolinas. So apparently no other bander has banded any adults in the U. S. outside of the five I have trapped on their nests.

My work on these birds this year revealed the fact that the young when hatched have an all black bill and a single black pupil in each dark brown eye. The adults on the other hand have bright red bills and a yellow eye with two overlapping black pupils in each eye--giving them a weird appearance. In correspondence with ornithologists of the leading ten museums in the U. S. and after searching through most of the important books on U. S. birds, I could find no information on when the change of color of eye and bill takes place nor anything about the two pupils in each eye of adults. While discussing this matter with Dr. R. C. Murphy in American Museum of Natural History on December 3, 1964, he remembered that there was mention of this peculiar eye condition (cat's eyes as he put it) in his "Oceanic Birds of South America." There are three species in S. America and four subspecies of one of these. Under Fuegian Oystercatcher the description reads: "Iris brilliant yellow-Fuegian



Figure 1. Adult Oystercatcher. Note unusual eye.

examples, carefully examined in the flesh, all had a black spot, in the form of a crescent moon, in the yellow iris beneath the pupil." Apparently Audubon nor any other U. S. bird artist up to the present time knew of this peculiar eye condition or at least have not painted the birds showing this unusual eye condition. Don Eckelberry has seen my photograph of adults showing this eye condition, and I have also recently told another of our leading bird artists, Arthur Singer, about the eye in adult Oystercatchers. Both of them came to Moriches to get flight photographs of these adults.

Another thing that was apparently unknown was the length of time for young to develop to flight time. It took 41 days for one young that survived at Moriches before it could fly. This compares with about 35 days needed for young Piping Plovers. Much more work needs to be done to fill in the gaps not known about the life history of these birds.

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