

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

By Eleanor E. Dater

"In the good old days" the field trip on Sunday following the Saturday EBBA annual meeting was the best part of the meeting. We got to know each other at home stations. As EBBA grew in numbers this Sunday field trip has been broken up into small group trips. Nothing wrong with that except one has to make a choice and can't go to two places at 5 a.m.

The Saturday afternoon workshop instituted in 1962, which was Becky Gregar's pigeon, has proved an excellent innovation and partial substitute for the field trip. Work shop is the up to date name for study group. We don't work or shop, we study and receive instruction.

The neighborhood meeting that I had was definitely a study group. I invited by letter or telephone with an R.S.V.P. attached all the banders who live nearby. I am working on Goldfinches in particular and have "wonderment" about a lot of birds. So I choose a time in late winter when the Goldfinches are hardest to age and sex to have my meeting. Winter plumage is any month from late September until late March or early April. April can be a little too late.

I wanted to explain with live birds how I age and sex the birds especially females and I wanted the expert advice of all present. Every person has a different slant on color and method of describing it. Betty Dietert and Elinor McEntee are arty people and added considerable to the discussion. Marilyn Bomm is a most meticulous person on detail and kept us all on our toes. The men present asked questions and demanded good answers to every statement made. In other words we picked each other apart in a good natured way and it was fun for all of us. This was the best part of the meeting. We really went to work on it. I'm sure we learned a lot more than we anticipated about Goldfinches and plumage of many other birds. No we didn't talk about people either.

I firmly believe that the best time to have such a meeting is in September or October or after the winter sparrows and finches have arrived. Fall and winter plumages are the most difficult and present more problems than breeding plumage; consider White-throats. This doesn't rule out a spring get together but most people know the spring migrant or they should.

My suggestions for a successful meeting are: select a date when banders are "free" and your particular project is at its best for study; invite with R.S.V.P. those people who are interested. A general invitation can lead to difficulties for the host. Name a rain date. Your guests do not necessarily have to live close by but within an hour's driving time.

At present I have a considerable section of my garden planted to flowers and vegetables that attract Goldfinches. There are three kinds

of sunflowers, cosmos, zinnias, centaurea and Swiss chard. Also I scattered some thistle seeds from Nigeria that I use in winter. I have doubts about the thistles maturing this year. It may be one of the two year variety. Should Goldfinches respond favorably to my invitation I will have a study group some time this fall. Anyone interested send me a self addressed postal card and I'll return with the date. (P.O.Box 111, Ramsey, N.J. 07446.)

A bird that needs meticulous study is the White-throated Sparrow. At present no one has come up with a foolproof formula for sexing them plumage-wise. Several people have ideas. James Lowther of Toronto, Canada has a theory that appeals to me. Dr. Charles Blake and Betty Downs have different thoughts on the subject. I don't know but I wish I did. Certainly the text books are of little or no help. I would thoroughly enjoy a good argument or study on the White-throat.

And while I am on the subject of sparrows I would like to find a bander who has access to Swamp Sparrows in numbers. I have always felt that it takes a complete post nuptial molt for a Swamp Sparrow to attain full adult plumage -- the kind shown in field guides.

P.O.Box 111, Ramsey, N.J. 07446

HOW TO HELP THE BANDING OFFICE

If banders have taken the opportunity of reading Bird Banding Notes and other information recently issued by the Banding Office, they undoubtedly have been impressed by the increase in the program over the past few years. This applies not only to the number of birds banded, but to the number of recoveries received and processed by the Laboratory. A number of problems frequently arise which cause unnecessary work and could very easily be eliminated by a little extra effort from banders. Frequently two banders living within the same city (or on the same island) will retrap one another's birds. These numbers are frequently reported to the Banding Office when the original banding date was but a few days or weeks prior to the time it was recaptured. A bit of telephoning between local banders could greatly lessen the work of processing these records.

The second situation involves the banding of gulls and terns. Young birds of these species often experience a fair percentage of mortality before they leave the colony. This frequently results in many dead banded birds remaining in the colony after the young have dispersed. Thus a second bander going into the colony (or some other person) will frequently turn in a large number of bands from these chicks. This again requires much extra work for records which are of little value. Had the bander taken the effort to return to the colony after the dispersal of the birds, he could have deleted the numbers from his schedules and saved the Banding Lab this unnecessary amount of processing.

Mr. Anonymous - July 22, 1965