

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Answer by Ralph Bell -- Here is at least a partial answer to the questions of Connie Katholi about when Purple Martins lose the (1) bright yellow color inside the mouth, and (2) do all the birds-of-the-year go south before attaining the pink interior of the mouth of the adult bird?

It appears that the intense yellow of the mouth starts to disappear about three weeks after the young leave the box. However this yellow color leaves gradually and there is no evidence yet (to me) that suggests any immatures leave our area with the pink mouth of the adult.

Immatures have been captured the middle of August with varying shades of yellow mouths and already in a heavy molt.

The following are some dates with comments found in my permanent record books of young Purple Martins caught in nets:

July 24, 1964 (1)	im. with mouth not very yellow
Aug. 6, 1962 (2)	" " " " " "
Aug. 6, 1962 (1)	im. with very yellow mouth
Aug. 13, 1964 (1)	" " " " "
Aug. 13, 1964 (20)	im. caught with varying degrees of yellow
Aug. 21, 1961 (2)	im. with some yellow
Aug. 23, 1960 (1)	" " " "

The latest known hatching date for Purple Martins in this area was at a neighbor's box on August 27 and were last seen on September 4. These young (3) seemed to have a diarrhea. . . perhaps due to improper diet. This may be a clue as to why Purple Martins come back so early in the spring so as to raise their young when the proper insects are hatching.



Question by Ralph Bell -- What causes white toenails?

I have noticed this in several species. . . Catbirds especially. On September 15, 1962 I caught a Catbird that had 5 white toenails and another one with just one white toenail. On October 5 the same year, I caught 2 Catbirds at Red Creek, West Virginia that had white toenails. . . one with 6 and the other with 3.

On July 13, 1966 I caught 2 immature Barn Swallows with white toenails. One had 2 and the other just one. It seems that the largest toenail is usually involved first. It may be possible that only immatures have them, but my notes are lacking in this respect.



Question by Fred Schaeffer -- If there is anyone currently, or in the past five years, doing a breeding study on Barn and/or Tree Swallows in the Eastern Coastal area, particularly the Northeast, I would very much like to correspond with him or her. If so, please drop me a line -- write Frederick S. Schaeffer, 141-50 85th Road, Jamaica, N.Y. 11435.

I have looked in the Zoological Record and Biological Abstracts and can find only very few valuable references. I have an opportunity to study breeding behavior, but I cannot take full advantage of it until I find out just what current problems in swallow breeding have not been looked into, and what other people are studying -- so that I do not intrude into their study field.



Question by Connie Katholi -- How does one account for an adult female Starling with a dark bill in late June?



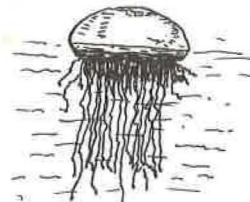
Question by Connie Katholi -- Concerning Eye Color -- The normal eye color of the Blue Jay is brown. Recently I banded a Blue Jay with one deep blue eye. The center of this eye was a pale blue similar to the shade of the back feathers. Additionally, the curvature of the eyeball was abnormal as it bulged outward to quite a degree.

Early in the spring an "injured" Wood Thrush was brought in which had been picked up beneath a picture window. When it was released after a period of enforced rest, the bird flew off competently, apparently having been only stunned. It had, however, a strange abnormality: one opalescent red eye. Later, another thrush was netted which had a similar eye, although no accident was involved to my knowledge. Thirdly, I learned of a Catbird (which had struck an obstacle) which also had a red eye. I judged it to be of a similar nature from the description, although I did not see the bird.

Could these be caused by hemorrhage? Or is it something else entirely? Can anyone comment?



Answer by Anne Shreve -- A suggested answer to Connie Katholi's question concerning the "polished" bands on White-breasted Nuthatches is -- what other bird walks down the trunk of a tree? Is it not possible that at this angle the band makes more contact with the bark? Likewise, both a Downy Woodpecker and a Red-bellied recaptured recently after a three year interval wore smooth, silvery bands. Woodpeckers, too, rub against the bark's rough surface walking up -- if not down -- as do the nuthatches.



A NEW TWIST IN NET-SETTING
By Constance R. Katholi

In the martin roost operation carried out in South Charleston, W. Va., 1964 and 1965, it was necessary to set the nets high with the tops 15 to 20 ft. from the ground. They were placed in lanes of head-high weeds which the birds skimmed in their approach to the roosting trees. The actual mechanics of this setting will not be detailed here, as many such have been designed and described. Instead I want to point out an additional feature which I consider greatly increased the number of birds netted in the short time available each evening.

A second net was placed directly beneath the top one, and actually tethered to it. Birds which tripped on the top one, but failed to become entangled, often dropped confusedly into the folds of the bottom one, their distress calls drawing others to follow them in.

This double net was an unwieldy affair to be sure, requiring a careful routine to empty it,--shelf by shelf from the bottom up, lowering it gradually from the top as the work progressed. Very few birds were entangled in more than one shelf, i.e. through both nets at the same time. Perhaps Martins do not get seriously tangled due to their physiognomy,--big heads, strong pointed wings, weak feet and generally compact shape. On the other hand, the time of day may be the controlling factor: with the coming of dusk they are quiescent, even relaxed to the point of sleep in the holding cages. Furthermore, they were in the nets so briefly that there was little opportunity to flip over and snarl things up.

