

"RECOVERY" - BY TELESCOPE

By Audrey Downer

Reprinted from the Grosse Bird Club Broadsheet No. 7

When I purchased a Bushnell Spacemaster Telescope with 20x eyepiece in January this year, I expected to use it during the winter to observe birds in the swamps around Montego Bay, and in the spring to spy on far-away nesters. Never did I imagine that it would be practically permanently focussed on my bird feeder, and that it would yield such exciting results.

For several years I have been banding Indigo Buntings in my garden. In 1965 I used coloured, numbered, plastic bands on birds that had been banded in 1964 and had returned in 1965. Most of the first "returns" in 1966 were these colour-banded birds, returning for their third winter that I knew of. I found that I could not read the number on the band with my binoculars, so tried the telescope. It was a cinch! Not only could I read the two numbers on the plastic band, but I could also make out two numbers on the aluminium F & WS band. It took a little time to get all five numbers on the small No. 0 band that is used for buntings, but I was able to spot several "returns" from 1965 that had not been colour-banded, and to prove myself correct when the bird was subsequently netted. At the end of the season, in fact, there were two "returns" that I would never have recorded but for the telescope, because I never did catch them.

The biggest excitement, however, was on April 17th when I spied a banded female bunting on the feeder. Routinely I checked the band number through the telescope. I could see the last and first numbers only, the first being 6. I instantly realised that this was not a bird that had been banded by me as my series start with 4 and 5. Unfortunately, we were just about to set off for the day in St. Ann, but luckily the band had been expertly applied and moved easily around the tarsus with every hop of the bird. I did not dare to put up the net before getting the number in case I frightened it away. In an hour I had got the number 61274. The second digit could have been 6 or 8. That had to do.

Fortunately the bird was still there next morning, and as I focussed on the band I saw the second number clearly as 8. In about half an hour I had the two top numbers - 61. That evening we went to Kingston and I could hardly wait to check with Roger Smith if this was one of his bandings. He assured me that 61 was not a series that had been used in Jamaica.

Now I was really excited. But would the F & WS accept this as a "Recovery?" I had not caught the bird. I wrote immediately to my co-worker on the bunting project, Dr. D. W. Johnston, and asked him to see if he could ascertain where the bird had been banded. On April 28th I had this cable: "Bird banded Clarksville Pennsylvania September 29 1963 Congratulations." There had been some scepticism to begin with

apparently, but when the number turned out to have been used on an indigo bunting it was accepted. This bird was banded by Mr. Ralph K. Bell.

IS HALF AN ALBINO BETTER THAN NONE?

By Constance R. Katholi



STARLING ♂
592-52322

Coinciding with Professor Hamilton's request for albino Icteridae and Starlings (EBBA News Vol 29, No. 1) I recently banded Starling #592-52322. It is a bird-with-a-white-tail. Strictly speaking, the six left retrices only were white, the others normal. This abnormality was scarcely noticeable when the bird was perched, but the effect was startling (like a Flicker) when he flew away. Additionally, the anal pteryla were white, as were the surrounding feather tracts on the lower belly, and also the crural feathering. There was some white in both the upper and the under tail coverts. Both these areas seemed sparsely feathered, and the white tail feathers were very worn and frayed.

(Joel Carl Welty in The Life of Birds, p.46, explains that unpigmented feathers are always less resistant to wear than pigmented ones, which is why the wing-tip primaries of otherwise white birds are heavily pigmented, for example, gulls, storks, herons, etc.)

Professor Hamilton's project is concerned with the role that coloration of birds plays in maintaining body temperature. I quote from a letter of his, March 18, 1966; "It is obvious that a black bird absorbs more solar radiation than a brown or white one. Will this in turn reduce its energy expended in keeping warm? Preliminary experiments with zilora finches suggest that this is true. If it is, then it is possible that the significance of black in birds is to enable them to get by with less energy. Partial albinos, however, are valueless for such metabolism studies."

930 Woodland Ave., So. Charleston, West Virginia 25303

