



Books For Banders

"SOMETHING OLD AND SOMETHING NEW"

Edited By Mabel Gillespie



There has been submitted to this department for review "The Book of the American Woodcock" by William G. Sheldon, University of Massachusetts Press, 1967. Dr. Sheldon is leader of the Massachusetts Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit which is located at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The book is a definitive study of the American Woodcock based on fifteen years of research, as well as a compilation of other studies of the species.

Banders will be particularly interested in the author's technique of trapping and netting. Those of us who are amateurs, however, can feel only despair at not being able to station graduate students here and there to follow lines of flight, or to rig "singing traps". However, the author claims that after experimenting with various methods of capture he found the best results were obtained by using mist nets. He also claims that many thousands more woodcock should be banded in order to gain further information vital to the efficient management of the species. So go to it, banders. But be sure to weigh each individual captured, and to try to age and sex it according to the information included in the book.

The chapter entitled "Breeding Habits" contains four sections. Under COURTSHIP are considered polygamy, male replacement, copulation, vocal notes in singing fields, height of flight, effect of weather, duration of performance, dawn flights, latitude, peaks of singing activity, flights in other seasons, territoriality of courting male. Under SINGING GROUNDS attention is given to size and shape, vegetation, diurnal cover, soil types, origin of Massachusetts singing grounds, and longevity of singing sites. The section on NESTING deals with construction and cover, distance from singing grounds, eggs, nest success, and clutch size. The final section on BROODS covers chicks, weight and growth, behavior, behavior of hen with brood, and brood cover.

Discussion under the heading "Territoriality of Courting Male" includes an illuminating consideration of the reasons for and definitions of territory. Territory means different things to different species. "The woodcock is a sandpiper that has become adapted to the forest. Its unique physical adaptations and behavior can be explained as adjustments to a habitat remarkable for a shore bird, but it never lost the vestigial requirement for open space for courtship and breeding. I believe that the important factor in survival of the woodcock is competition for breeding sites." Since "defense of the open space has been the factor exploited... evolution of the exhibitional and aggressive behavior has resulted. Unlike

diurnal birds that maintain their territories by means of bright plumage or a watchful perch, the woodcock, pre-adapted for strong flight and non-perching, has exploited the sky to achieve conspicuousness. The male advertises himself to females by his silhouette in the twilight sky, and by sounds. His territory includes the area encompassed by his aerial flight".

Final chapters are on Hunting, Management, and Population Dynamics. Dr. Sheldon is interested in the woodcock as a game bird and states that "only enlightened management will enable the woodcock population to withstand the increased hunting pressure of the future." Here is a case where banding is of importance through the accumulation of data which may preserve a species from extinction.

A very adequate bibliography is appended to the text. The several appendices contain pertinent material: trapping and nesting techniques, supplementing the first chapter which includes "Field Methods"; "Figures and Tables"; "List of Plants"; and "Key for Aging Woodcock from Wings" with a nice illustration of secondary feather patterns. In the main text there is a beautifully reproduced photo showing wings of both female and male, illustrating sex differentiation by width of primaries.

Speaking of illustrations, the entire text is beautifully supplemented by splendid photos by various contributors. A colored frontispiece and a number of etchings are by A. Lassell Ripley. There are also line drawings and charts.

The text is taut and direct for the most part. At times the author describes his subject with controlled enthusiasm. The following quotes have been lifted at random from the two hundred and more pages.

"As surely as the Ivory-billed Woodpecker depends on quantities of large decaying hardwood trees, or the American Brant on the presence of eelgrass, the woodcock needs the moist land on forests in early stages of succession."

"The woodcock is enough of a recluse to be an inconspicuous species. Many men have lived their lifetimes in areas where woodcock are common without having seen one. Others have flushed this unique bird from the cover beside dimly lit trails without knowing what it was."

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The mailman brought me a package just in time for Christmas containing a slim paperback which can fit easily into a man's pocket or a woman's handbag. The title is "Birds of Pennsylvania" - the text is by Merrill Wood and the illustrations by Dorothy Bordner. No, don't rush to your bookseller, but send one dollar to Publications, Box 6000, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802.

The introduction includes brief surveys of topography, migration

seasons, number of species, unexpected species, and other topics. There is also a calendar of birdlife by months.

Bird records have been compiled from the records of the State College Bird Club. Emphasis is placed on the species which a bird watcher can expect to find, and such species are the ones for which Dorothy Bordner has contributed drawings in black and white. She has done this skillfully, catching both the outstanding characteristics and the diagnostic poses. How Dorothy finds time to teach college classes, band quantities of birds, and execute such adequate and artistic illustrations amazes me. The original drawings are currently on exhibit in Pattee Library at Penn State University.

The text is terse, yet covers distinctive details. There is a general survey of each family followed by descriptions of individual species. The reasonably expected species are considered under the four seasonal headings.

The list of accidentals is amazing, many of them having occurred but once. In Pennsylvania, with no oceanic coastline, and only a bit of frontage on Lake Erie, there have occurred two species of shearwaters, four of storm petrels, the White-tailed Tropic-bird, the Gannet, even flamingos, and others. Of these unexpected species in the state "it appears that 34 per cent seem to have come from the west, 29 per cent from the south, 20 per cent from the east, and 12 per cent from the north".

In spite of observations for many years in the state, the author speaks of gaps in the ornithological knowledge of the state. "Some items needed include: (1) the pattern change of the arrival and departure of species over a long period of years; (2) the peak of abundance in relation to weather and other events; (3) the abundance of species recorded in such a way as to show status changes; and (4) data on the changes of birdlife, species, and individuals, caused by such human activities as agricultural practices, increases in human population, development of highways, airports, golf courses, and construction of artificial bodies of water." Banders might keep such items in mind when planning projects.

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In 1937 the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club published in two large volumes "Bird Studies at Old Cape May" by that eminent ornithologist the late Witmer Stone. It was not long before the edition was completely sold out, and copies were practically unobtainable. When a set did come into the hands of dealers the price was exorbitant.

The good news now is that Dover has issued the set in two paperbound volumes at \$5.50 the set. Although the text deals with observations made in Cape May County, New Jersey, it is of interest and value to all banders who handle shore and sea birds. There are 229 photographs and 277 line

drawings. There is appended a list of additional species seen since the first publication appeared, compiled by Ernest A. Choate, and a new introduction by Roger Tory Peterson. There is also a biographical sketch of the author by James A.G. Rehn.

Dr. Stone wrote not only from his wealth of information, but had a wonderful command of the English language and a delightful style of exposition. Any person who enjoys fine writing would enjoy the text whether or not he knew the difference between a mallard and a merganser.

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B.T.O. Phil Murton writes that he has a new list of prices for Pesola
BANDING Balances, nets, etc., available from the British Trust for Orni-
PRODUCTS thology, and will be glad to accept inquiries about BTO equip-
ment. Interested members should write him at his new address:
Sqn. Ldr. Philip G. Murton, 132 Lincoln St., Warner Robins, Georgia 31093.



STUDENTS The American Museum of Natural History, with support from the
NEEDED National Science Foundation, will once again consider applica-
tions from college undergraduate science majors for appointments
as student participants in a summer program of ornithological research at
the Kalbfleisch Field Research Station in Huntington, Long Island. Appli-
cants must be proficient in the field identification of the land birds of
New York. The research program provides training in censusing breeding
birds, mist netting, banding, aging and sexing birds through surgery, sound
recording and playback techniques, preparation of museum specimens, etc.
Students are in residence for ten or more weeks and receive their room and
board plus a stipend of \$600.00. Applications must be filed not later
than March 1, 1968. Write to Dr. Wesley E. Lanyon, Department of Ornitho-
logy, The American Museum of Natural History, New York, N.Y. 10024.



GRAY JAY A monograph on the Gray (or Canada) Jay is currently being pre-
STUDY pared by Nicholas J. Ilnick, Director of the Upper Peninsula
of Michigan Nature Center. Any banders who are working with
this species or have data on it are urged to write Mr. Ilnick at Route 1,
Box 119, Negaunee, Michigan 49866.