

## BLACK SKIMMER RECOVERIES

By Mabel Gillespie

William Savell's article in the Nov.-Dec. 1967 issue of EBBA News moved me to check on the data on banding fledgling Black Skimmers accumulated by the late John A. Gillespie. From 1923 to 1941 he banded 447 young of this species near various southern New Jersey coast resorts. Twenty-one of this number were subsequently reported, nearly five percent.

Of 15 young banded at the same time at Gull Bar, Anglesea, one was reported as "found" two years later at Bringantine, 35 miles to the north. A second one was found dead by the bander on an island near Brigantine six years after banding.

Twelve fledglings were banded at Gull Bar in July, 1926. Less than a month later one of these was reported (dead or alive?) by Dr. Alexander Wetmore at the same place. Three and a half years later another was caught in the wing by a fish hook at Cocoa, Florida. One gathers that the fisherman cast just as the bird was "skimming" along stream. It is interesting to note that this bird was listed by the banding office as a "return". In the early days of banding the nomenclature left much to be desired.

Of 21 young banded near Brant Beach in July, 1928, two were found dead in the vicinity a month later.

116 young Skimmers were banded in 1929. Of 53 banded near Wildwood, two were recovered. One was found dead at Hastings, Florida seven months later. The other was found dead at Tampa, Florida, 29 months later. 63 were banded near Brant Beach of which three were heard from again. One was found at Fort Raleigh, N.C., seven months later. Another was found dead at Beach Haven, N.J., 16 months after banding. The third was hit by an airplane wing at the Municipal Airport at St. Petersburg, Florida, almost six years later - the actual date was May 2 showing that this individual had not yet started north. The bird revived and was able to fly away.

Ninety-six young Skimmers were banded in 1930. One was shot the following November at Parris Island, S.C., and another the following December at Georgetown, S.C. The third was found dead eight years after banding in the area where it had been banded.

In 1932, 27 young were banded, and of these there were two recoveries. This is the first time the banding office used the term recovery in place of return. One of these Skimmers was found by William Vogt at the Jones Beach Bird Sanctuary, Wantagh, Long Island, in September, just two months later. Its right wing had been torn off at the carpal joint and the bird died later in captivity. The second Skimmer was killed at Titusville, Florida, a year and a half later.

Thirty-one young Skimmers were banded in 1936. One of these, only, was recovered. It was found injured at Orange Park, Florida, four and a half months later, and died soon after.

Sixty young were banded in 1937. Two were found dead within a month's time near the nesting area. The third was caught nearly two months later "in a fishline" at Astoria, New York. Astoria is the northern point of Queens borough near the Triborough Bridge.

In 1939 there were two recoveries from 29 banded. One was "found" at Titusville, Florida, seven months later. The other was reported from Hialeah, Florida, five months later. There were no recoveries of any of the eleven Skimmers banded in 1940 and 1941. The war restrictions on gasoline halted colony banding activities, and by the end of the war our ways of life had altered so as to interfere with banding on the New Jersey coast. It is encouraging to find that Black Skimmers still nest in the old haunts even though some of the haunts no longer exist. Gull Bar has finally been completely washed away.

That ends the data on Skimmer returns and recoveries, but in connection with a report on the species it may be of interest to note the follow up activity that John pursued, and which covered other species of which we received recovery reports. The earlier days of banding were more relaxed, and he found time to write to the person who had reported finding the banded bird. His idea was to find out, if possible, what plumage changes had taken place, the nature of the injury causing death, and any other pertinent information. There was a further result of such correspondence that he had not consciously anticipated, and that was the establishment of valuable public relations. At the risk of incurring criticism for including two subject under one title, I would like to append several such letters received in reference to Skimmer recoveries. They are reproduced here without editing.

1. "Received yours of April 21 in regard to Black Skimmer found by me on Feb. 11, 1930. This bird appeared to have been recently killed or died. Its meat was not spoiled although it was not far from it. Its plumage was white underneath and black on top without any streaks in it. Its bill was shaped similar to a pair of scissors. I still have its head in my possession as it was very pretty and unlike any I had ever seen. I found this bird floating on the surface of Deep Creek where it enters the St. Johns River, about six miles north of Hastings...If I can be of any more service to you don't hesitate to call upon me as I will be glad to do so."

2. "I do not remember very much about the birds as they were the first I or anyone in the party had ever seen, but I shall try to give all possible information. They were flying in a group of 50 or 75 in number in the most perfect formation of any birds I have seen. My first shot brought down six. They were not frightened by the boat or very much about the gun as they later flew past again. They were in the adult plumage..."

They fought me and tried to strike with the bill and also bite. #A419397 was killed also with A422610 from Charleston Co., South Carolina.

"At first we thought they were edible because of the bands. The cook skinned them and they were placed out in the air. The meat was a beefsteak color. The next morning the meat was streaked with purple. We would (here he omitted 'not') eat them, however, the cook carried them home and cooked them. He said that they tasted very fishy. That is about all I can remember."

3. "Our airport here in St. Petersburg is located at the water's edge, that is on Tampa Bay and ships taking off here are in constant danger of hitting seagulls that flock on the field in many numbers.

"This particular day we had noticed several of these Black Skimmers. We had never seen any of these birds before and were attracted by their exquisite coloring. While a ship took off, we noticed it struck some birds and Mr. B---- drove out into the field to see what happened. One of them was killed outright and the other injured. He brought it into the hangar and after doctoring it flew away. I think it was more stunned than hurt. It must have hit the wing of the ship.

"We have a lot of feathered visitors here from all over the world, one old pelican in particular that comes every year from some where in South America. I imagine your work is very interesting, and if there is any way we can be of assistance to you down here, let us know."

4. "Your letter received in reference to Bird. I don't know if it was a skimmer (not being acquainted with bird life) but the fact that it had the ring on its leg aroused my curiosity. And how it got there. So now your letter has explained that. As I can tell you there were no shots in it as far as I could ascertain, Under the neck was a break. Looked to me like it had struck a telephone wire or something, But no wounds were visible. Now I am interested to know how you got that ring on that birds leg. It must have been put there by human hands. I have never seen a seagulls nest. although Ive seen lots of seagulls. I feed them and like to watch them "flit to and fro," right here in Atlantic City, but just never gave the thing a thought, because they were never around in the winter except when they were hungry. I would like to know something more about this bi-ological Survey - what it is for and why."

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