



Books For Banders

"SOMETHING OLD AND SOMETHING NEW"

Edited By Mabel Gillespie



Some banders were fortunate enough to have a recent publication on aging and sexing birds during the 1969 period of Operation Recovery activity. Merrill Wood, Associate Professor of Zoology in the College of Agriculture at the Pennsylvania State University (and long-time EBBA member and past president) has published in soft cover, spiral-bound notebook format "A Bird Bander's Guide to Determination of Age and Sex of Selected Species".

The author writes in the preface: "This publication is for bird banders and other research workers needing to know the age and sex of live birds of the northeastern United States. The species included in this book are the perching birds (Passeriformes) and a few other species commonly handled by bird banders; omitted are all the 'water-birds', most of the hawks, all of the gallinaceous game birds, most of the shorebirds and allies, and most of the owls.

"This collection of information the author hopes will be found to be helpfully organized. It cannot be considered complete. While the keys are expected to guide the reader into observing certain characters useful in determining age and sex, the keys do not give all the details. Birds are variable biological material. Birds do not come like pills in a bottle, all alike. It takes experience to observe variations, and to separate meaningful from unmeaningful variations. For any particular species, somewhere there is certain to be a bander who has more information than is presented here. It is hoped that this knowledge will soon become available to others."

Professor Wood has consulted with various authorities, and has made full use of his observations in banding some 20,000 birds and examining 3,000 victims of accidental death. He was ably assisted by Dorothy L. Bordner and Ralph W. Condee.

This reviewer has not had an opportunity yet to use the book during a migration season. However, it was a delight to find the pertinent facts related to banding records all within the covers of a single publication. Here are the age notations such as AHY, ASY, etc. Here are the facts about incubation patches, and the technique of skulling. There is a clever key to identification of puzzling species.

The species included - covering the Passeriformes and a few others - are given a page each. This page is divided into two columns, with the comments on aging and sexing, etc., in the left hand column, and the right

hand column blank thus providing space for the individual bander to record his own observations. A sample of the method of presentation follows, from page 120 on the Blackpoll Warbler:-

Blackpoll Warbler

Band size 0

A.O.U. 661

Species similar:

1. Black-and-white Warbler in spring: Crown with black and white stripes.
2. Black-throated Gray Warbler in spring: Back bluish and cheeks yellow.
3. Bay-breasted Warbler in fall: Soles of feet black, not yellow as in the Blackpoll Warbler.

Age by skulling in summer into September.

1. Otherwise, age: Jan-May AHY, Jan-Dec U -- 2.

2. Wing chord:

66 mm or less: Female -- 3.
67-74 mm: Sex U -- 3.
75 mm or more: Male -- 3.
(Robbins, 1964).

3A. Incubation patch: Female.

3B. Cloacal protuberance: Male.

3C. Neither, sex U (if not by wing chord).

Postjuvinal molt (body feathers and wing coverts) in Aug-Sep, followed in each succeeding year by a prebreeding molt (body feathers and wing coverts) in Mar-Apr-early May, and a post-breeding molt complete in late Jul-Aug (Forbush, 1929).

There it is all on one page, and the bander doesn't have to scramble from notebook to workshop papers to banding office directives etc. Yet, as the author states, "the keys do not give all the details" and "for any particular species, somewhere there is certain to be a bander who has more information than is presented here. It is hoped that this knowledge will soon become available to others." The emphasis is editorial. Come, banders, here's a chance to do your bit.

Two EBBA members have submitted their comments on Dr. Wood's book. Tom Davis of Woodhaven, N.Y., writes as follows:

"An Identification Manual or an Ageing and Sexing Guide? This book's title describes it as a guide to ageing and sexing birds, not to their

identification. Yet, within the section on skulling birds (p. 13) Wood suddenly introduces this subject.

"He prefaces many of the individual species' accounts with 'Species similar', terse comments in recognizing differences among confusing species. Not only do these remarks have no place in the book's advertised purpose but they are poorly written, seemingly aimed at the rank amateur. Also, many close similarities are ignored, making his identification remarks far from complete.

"Only the beginner would confuse Swainson's and Worm-eating Warblers, Magnolia and Kirtland's Warblers, male Black-and-white, Blackpoll and Black-throated Gray Warblers, Bobolink and Dickcissel, Orchard Oriole and Scarlet Tanager, or Harris', White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows. His Empidonax key only gives passing mention to Phillips' definitive paper on identification, he ignores Lanyon and Bull's paper on the Oporornis warblers (Identification of Connecticut, Mourning and MacGillivray's Warblers, Bird Banding, 18(3):187-194, 1967).

"The shape of outer primaries is used to differentiate European from American Woodcock - what about the European's barred underparts? Townsend's Warbler is listed as similar to Black-throated Green but it more closely resembles a Blackburnian when the two are in immature plumage. Eyestripe color is listed as one criteria (sic) to separate Waterthrushes but the western race of the Northern possesses the white eyeline of a Louisiana. The presence or absence of wingbars is used to separate Western from Scarlet Tanager, however some juvenile Scarlets go through an uncomplete wing molt and wear wingbars through their immature plumage. House Finch, a species not included in the book, is listed as differing from the Purple Finch by narrowly streaked sides, a poor difference, more obvious in the hand are the bill and tail dissimilarities.

"Other species accounts which fail to list similar species include Ruby-throated Hummingbird (Rufous), Great Crested Flycatcher (western Myiarchus), Tree and Rough-winged Swallows (immatures), Pine Warbler (fall Blackpoll), Rose-breasted Grosbeak (Black-headed), Savannah Sparrow (Ipswich), Grasshopper Sparrow (Leconte's, Nelson's, Sharp-tailed), Henslow's Sparrow (Baird's).

"The format of 8½ x 11" is OK for use at home but unwieldy to carry into the field. A better size for all around use would have been Peterson Field Guide size or not larger than Robert's 'Manual'. The index to species on pp. 15-16 would better have been placed at the end of the book where it would be more easily consulted."

Katherine G. Price of Mt. Holly, New Jersey writes presenting an appreciation of Professor Wood's book:-

"Thank you, Merrill Wood!

"Banders at Island Beach Operation Recovery, fall 1969, were grateful and privileged to have Merrill Wood's new book to use, from September 3rd on.

"It didn't take long to see how nicely the key worked especially after one had 'looked up' some familiar species with the bird in hand.

"As the weeks went by, the book took 'new shape' for each individual bander as notes were pencilled in, some put in loose-leaf notebooks with pages plastic-covered and new pages added for additional species. Book and field research began to clarify certain points."

(This book may be obtained by sending a check for \$3.00 to: Pennsylvania State University, Box 6000, University Park, Pa. 16802. We recommend it most heartily to all banders to whom, as the first compilation of its kind, it should be exceedingly useful. We also recommend that readers re-read the portions of Professor Wood's preface quoted twice in this column. -Ed.)

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REQUEST FOR CATTLE EGRET RECORDS

A survey of the northward movement of the Cattle Egret is being made to determine the distribution and post-breeding movements of this species throughout its range. The following information is requested: name and address of observer, date, time, number, location of observation (state, nearest town, county and if possible, township, range and section), habitat, activities and weather. Cooperators will be sent proper forms and a report of the results, if requested.

Please send records and observations to Alan B. Schroeder, Norman Bird Sanctuary, Third Beach Road, Middletown, Rhode Island 02840.