



## BANDERS' SHOPTALK

Banders' Shoptalk is an informal discussion among banders who wish to share their notes with others. It can consist of large, small or tiny articles, questions, answers or just lines. Contributions need not be typed as long as they are readable. The emphasis is on creating a readily available communications network between banding stations on discussion of wildlife techniques applicable to banding and related field work. Your continued interest in our efforts are appreciated!.....

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Mrs. Erma J. Fisk of 17101 S.W. 284 St.,  
Homestead, Florida 33030, writes:

The practice of "skulling" each bird one handles is raising problems of ageing by plumage alone. For instance:

**OVENBIRDS** - The tertial tips alone should not be relied on as a characteristic for HY birds. Two unossified birds taken at Manomet August 21-23, 1971, lacked the rusty tips. At my Florida station the tips are often found to be worn off by late October. On the other hand, a fall Florida HY bird of 1970, retaken February and March 1971 still had its rusty tips. An HY Ovenbird taken at Powdermill Nature Reserve on Sept. 8, 1971 also had no rusty tertial tips.

**HOUSE WRENS** - Contrary to Wood (A bird banding guide to Determination of Age and Sex of Selected Species) I find these cannot be aged by the presence or lack of white tips on the wing coverts. A July Adult, singing on territory at South Orleans, Mass., in 1970, was taken with tips. A Florida bird, October 1967, as HY returned a year later with tips which had increased from 3 on each side to 8 on the right, 6 on the left. A bird examined at Irish Grove, Md., on Sept., 18, 1970 was unossified with no tips. Of two unossified birds taken at Manomet, Mass., August 7, 1971, one had tips, one not. On Sept. 8, 1971 an adult bird with tips was taken at Powdermill N.R., and on 10 September an Immature without tips.

How do we classify birds whose degree of ossification does not match with plumage characteristics? A Least Flycatcher taken Oct. 29, 1970 at Homestead, with white wingbars was only 80% ossified. Do we know how long it takes a Least to ossify entirely? Perhaps two years? Should we age them by plumage, by skull or call them unknown as to age?

Male yellowthroats with black masks well bordered by gray in fall have always automatically been considered adults. But September 25-November 5, 1970 at Homestead, of 21 birds in this plumage had only one or two degrees (on a scale of three) of ossification. Can anyone offer any suggestions?

Although the black mask is primarily acquired when this species undergoes its First prenuptial molt (First prealternate molt), anywhere from feathers which are black at the base to those all black can be found, in addition to the ashy edgings after the partial postjuvinal molt (First prebasic molt) this bird undergoes, according to Dwight (see references) about the middle of July. Editor

EYE COLOR: The accepted way of ageing White Eyed Vireos is by the eye - white or a very light gray for adult, brown or brown gray for immature. I regret to puncture this simple system. Between Sep. 25-Nov 5, 1970 I banded 121 W.E. Vireos and had 5 returns going back to October 1968.

1 bird banded Jan 1969, re taken three times, still had a dark gray eye.

20 birds with 100% ossification had gray eyes of varying shades, none as in the adult's light gray or white variety.

11 ossified birds had gray-brown, brown-gray, or brown eyes.

9 birds with white eyes, or gray sufficiently light to be assumed adults skulled as 10-75% ossified. These birds were examined in bright Florida sublight with a 12 power jeweler's loupe.

I suggest that careful records be kept to the exact eye color/ossification configuration of each bird banded and handled at all stations engaged in frequent W.E. Vireo banding.

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHERS: This species is common on South Florida but they slip so easily through even a small meshed net that they aren't so often captured. I have banded 49, with 7 returns, from late September into March and handled a few summer birds at Manomet, Mass. One was a mid January bird, one banded unknown on October 4, 1968 returned February 2, 1971 with the black tips of an eyeline (both these had the eyeline out of all the others handled), just emerging from quills after the pre-nuptial molt (photo, Everglades National Park collection).

Weston, writing in Bent (see references): "The distinguishing mark of the male Gnatcatcher in breeding plumage . . . the black forehead and line over the eye. It seems to be not generally known that this distinguishing mark is not present in winter specimens". He states further: "young males lack the black frontal band during the first fall and winter and females never have it". In view of this and my own experience, I would judge that only birds in breeding plumage can safely be sexed and no fall birds at all.

In Dwight, we find the following: "The black frontal band and supra-

loral lines are acquired (by a partial prenuptial molt), the crown becoming bluer. . . . young and old become indistinguishable." In ye editor's opinion then, those birds which have the black frontal marks and superciliary lines if captured after January 1 (according to Banding Lab's age coding system) can be termed ASY- Male. Those so marked and captured in fall would also be ASY but you could really only call TY's by means of returning banded birds. Since females never have these markings, we could not, for instance, call a bird without these markings in the fall AHY unless they are 100% ossified and we could never sex them unless they have these markings. Not ever having banded Gnatcatchers I am not qualified to talk so I would suggest further investigation into this and any suggestions you may wish to offer, are welcome. Editor.

Additional notes offered by Mrs. Fisk will be presented in later issues.

#### References cited in text:

Wood, M. 1969

A Bird-Bander's Guide to Determination of Age and Sex of Selected Species. College of Agriculture, Pennsylvania State Univ. University Park, Pa. \$3.00.

1970

Corrections to abovementioned publication.

Bent, A. C. 1949

Life Histories of North American Thrushes, Kinglets and their Allies. U.S. National Bulletin 196. Republished in 1963 by Dover Publications Inc., 180 Varick Street, New York, N.Y., 10014. \$2.75.

Dwight, Jonathan, Jr. 1900

The Sequence of Plumages and Moults of the Passerine Birds of New York. Annals N.Y. Acad. Sciences 13(1): 73-360.

Note: Not many Dwight volumes are in circulation. I recently heard that some might be available in England. One excellent and very large book seller to canvas for these type books in Europe is BLACKWELL's in Oxford, England (that's about all the address necessary as it is a very well known store). If anyone knows of a more definite source, please let us know! I received my copy, in 1957-8 as a gift from a Mr. Joseph Nielsen of Brooklyn, New York. At the time it was just "an old book" to me, but now that I am an active bander, his gift was extremely valuable and for the first time, I like to gratefully acknowledge it here. Editor

HAROLD E. BURTT of 2163 N. Starr Road, Columbus, Ohio 43221 offers the following addition to Shoptalk:

I was interested in the suggestion on p. 186 (Schaeffer and Bub) about studying the behavior of birds after release. I started taking notes immediately but it took only two days to discover some methodological difficulties. I was noting the direction (azimuth) the birds took and I found that it depends on how you release them. If you hold the

bird right-side-up in your hand and open the hand he usually goes in the direction his head is pointing, i.e. you orient him yourself. That tells nothing of importance. So I thought I would let the bird orient himself.

I made a "release cage" of hardware cloth, a cylinder, about 16 inches in diameter and 9 inches high with the top open. This was mounted on a vertical rod so it was 7 feet above the ground. A piece of fiberboard was laid across the top for a lid.

The bird was placed inside and allowed 15 seconds to orient itself and then the lid was removed, and the azimuth, etc., noted.

But I now found that if, for example, I pulled the lid off the south side of the cage, the bird went north. Whether it was because the north area opened first or whether the big moving object to the south "scared" him to flee north I do not know. Anyway, it was an obvious error in technique. So I arranged a small vertical rod going up through the center of the cage and attached to the center of the lid. This can be manipulated from below where I sit on my chair. The lid goes straight up in a horizontal position. All directions are equally visible and the azimuths the birds take appear no longer predictable. Maybe I'll find some species differences - or something. The main point is that if any of the readers are contemplating the study of behavior after release, watch out HOW you release them.

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AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY - ORNITHOLOGY DEPARTMENT. We are advised that a photographic file is available for use by responsible researchers, of extralimital species and rarities. Researchers wishing to use these services should first contact the Museum. The Museum is located at Central Park West at 79th Street in New York City (ZIP: 10024) and can be reached by phone by calling 212 - 873-1300. Ask for the Ornithology Department. This department also houses and maintains the most excellent bird skin collection in the United States.

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DEADLINE ON PHOTO CONTEST IS 31 December 1971. For details see July-August 1971 issue, page 1901