

BULLETIN
OF THE
NORTHEASTERN BIRD-BANDING ASSOCIATION

THE BANDING OF COMMON MURRES

BY HARRISON F. LEWIS

THE Common Murre (*Uria t. troille*) is the most stupid bird of my acquaintance. Nevertheless, it is a bird which arouses strong interest, probably due largely to its very simplicity, which causes it to be astonishingly confiding as well as unusually ludicrous.

An important part of the present breeding-range of this species in eastern North America is the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where the banding to which this paper refers has been carried on for three seasons, from 1923 to 1925.

On certain of the islands which fringe that irregular coastline, notably on the St. Mary Islands, Common Murres incubate their eggs in colonies which contain from half a dozen to about four hundred birds apiece and which are sheltered in cracks or small caverns in the bed rock. It is in such breeding-places that, by enduring the filth and the insect parasites, the bird-bander may catch moderate numbers of adult Murres, with no other apparatus than a slender stick, used for dislodging birds from narrow places. At least two persons should work together, and a company of three or four is preferable, for the large "Murre cracks" have many exits, and even the smallest ones seldom have less than two. It is intended to add to the outfit in future one or more large sacks, into which Murres can be put until there is time to band them.

Within an hour or two after the banders have completed their work at a Murre colony and have moved on, the Murres are all back on their eggs, and normal conditions appear to have been resumed. In order not to disturb the birds unduly, no colony has so far been raided for banding purposes more than once in a season. Moreover, very little attempt has been made to catch adult Murres for banding purposes in unsheltered colonies in the open, because all adult birds in such colonies will usually fly away and escape unless they are surprised by the banders running among them at top speed, a practice which, except with very small colonies, is dangerous

to the eggs and young. Only a very few adult birds can be captured in such a situation in any case, but young Murres may sometimes be banded in exposed colonies, although the young usually take to the water not long after they are large enough to band.

The number of Common Murres which I have banded in this region up to the present time is 259. From 87 birds banded in 1923 and 1924 there have been secured 14 returns, or 16.1% of the number banded. It is too early to expect returns from the 172 birds banded in 1925. The large, adjustable bands were used in all cases.

No Murres which were banded as adults have provided returns from points outside of the region where they were banded. In fact, each such Murre which was recaptured was found on the island where it was banded, and, in each case where the details are known, was at the very locality of its banding.

In one case fourteen Murres were banded in one small colony by me on July 24, 1923. This colony was attacked by a dog about July 24, 1924, and many of the incubating Murres in it were killed, while the others were driven away for the rest of the season. Three of the dead bodies bore bands and furnished returns. I visited this colony again on July 17, 1925, and caught several incubating Murres, three of which bore bands placed on them at that place in 1923. This evidence points to the possession by adult Murres of a strong, unreasoning attachment for their breeding-place.

Only two returns have been secured from Common Murres which were young of the year when banded. In neither case was the bird recaptured in or near the breeding-area—a striking contrast to the returns from Murres banded as adults. Both were banded by me on August 12, 1923, on an island about twelve miles southwest of Harrington Harbor, Saguenay County, Quebec, and both were killed in Newfoundland—one on June 2, 1924, at Bonavista Bay, and one at Hermitage Bay. The latter was reported on July 9, 1925, but the date of killing was not given.

One of the interesting problems in relation to the Murres is that of the status of the so-called "Ringed" Murre (*Uria ringvia*); that is, a Murre which has a conspicuous white ring around the eye, with a white stripe behind it. Birds with these markings are to be found in the colonies with the other Murres, and have been considered by some a separate species, by others a color-phase. Of 172 adult Common Murres

banded in 1925, without any attempt to select either form, 27, or 15.7%, were of the "Ringed" type. An adult "Ringed" Murre, banded by me on July 8, 1924, at the St. Mary Islands, was there recaptured and again released by me on July 16, 1925, and another one banded by me on the same islands on July 11, 1924, was recaptured and again released there on July 17, 1925. In both cases the birds appeared unchanged when caught the second time.

On July 20, 1923, in the Boat Islands, I banded an adult Common Murre which presented an intermediate aspect, as it had a faint white streak behind the eye, but had no white eye-ring. This bird has not been recaptured.

Continuation and development of these banding operations may be expected to yield additional information concerning these innocent waterfowl.

THE FOURTH BANDING EXPEDITION TO THE SANDY NECK BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON COLONY

BY CHARLES B. FLOYD

It has been the custom each year since the founding of the Northeastern Bird Banding Association for a small group of enthusiastic members to visit the famous colony of Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax n. naevius*) at Sandy Neck, Barnstable, Massachusetts, to study its occupants and band their young. The proper time for this trip is the third week in June, regardless of the season, whether early or late, for then the fledgling herons are nearly full grown, and weather conditions are good.

This year (1925) marks the fourth expedition undertaken for this purpose, and has resulted in the banding of fifteen hundred herons, an increase of one hundred per cent over the greatest number banded on any previous trip. The total of all the young herons born in this colony on whom aluminum bands have been placed is now twenty-five hundred.

Details of this interesting colony and its environment are not necessary at this time, for our President, Alfred O. Gross, has recently made extended studies of the life-history of this