

BULLETIN
OF THE
NORTHEASTERN BIRD-BANDING ASSOCIATION

A FEW LANCASTER BIRD BANDING NOTES

BY HERBERT PARKER

My own bird banding observations and records are, comparatively, so meagre that I should not offer them for publication if I did not realize that though mine is a most modest contribution, it may, mingled with the vast volume of accumulated data in circulation through the clearing house of the Federal Bureau of Biological Survey, confirm some significant inference of some other observer, establish some "point of departure" as the navigators plot their courses or disclose some new marvel in the study and mystery of bird migration, for mystery it still is, though nearer its solution through messages brought to us by these momentary prisoners of our traps, who leave with us on our registers records of their comings and goings through the limitless spaces of the trackless skies.

My field of observation is in Lancaster, in Worcester County, in the State of Massachusetts. My traps are located within groups of shrubs within "pull string" distance from the library windows of my dwelling house, situate on the plateau westerly of the north branch of the Nashua River, which has traced its meandering course through wide alluvial meadows, between the Harvard, Bolton and the Sterling, Princeton hills.

I rarely use automatic traps, never except when personally attended, for fear of cats and other enemies. My most constant and efficient trap is one partly of my own contrivance, including a sliding board, by which when the cage is dropped the trapped birds are immediately collected and at once released through an open door into the gathering box, so there is only a momentary confinement in the trap and one handling of a bird for examination or banding.

In winter, the traps are set for the most part within a movable shed, which serves also as a resting and feeding place for my bird visitors, and not infrequently as a dining or bed room for unwelcome grey and red squirrels and a multitude of domestic mice, with occasionally a white-footed relative from the nearby woodlands.

Very near the trapping station, and undoubtedly attracting

passing flights of migrants, is a large open-air aviary, where, in constant residence, detained rather than imprisoned, are numbers of White Crowned and White-throated Sparrows, Juncos, Tree Sparrows, Fox and Song Sparrows, and generally Purple Finches, and at times Crossbills, Pine Grosbeaks, and for a brief period Evening Grosbeaks, though these last came to a premature death through the night attack of owls, causing the frightened birds to fatally injure themselves against the wires of the cage. During one memorable summer, there were here resident a flock of a dozen or more Snow Buntings in full summer plumage, and in perfect and most entrancing song. I shall never forget the delight of one of my most distinguished visitors, John Murdoch, as he heard again this Arctic music of his exile at Point Barrow. There is now resident in this faunal island of mine a pair of Cardinal Grosbeaks, courteously sent me by the Fish and Game Commission of Missouri, the most beautiful of all my guests, and now perfectly established and contented, and evidently cheerfully awaiting the rigors of the coming winter.

Here I have noted, during the brief hours available to me, the ceaseless currents of seasonal migration. My bird banding activities have, of necessity, been confined to week-ends, and my records have been almost entirely limited to the migration periods and to the winter season. Doubtless many "returns" have escaped my notice, and very many "repeats" may have occurred unrecorded.

An analysis of my memoranda shows that for a period beginning in August 1921, and running to September 1926, I have banded nearly 800 individual birds:

Of which about 175 were Tree Sparrows, of which there were 27 returns.

I have taken more than 100 Fox Sparrows, with no Returns but many records of Repeats.

Of 180 or more Juncos taken I have recorded only one Return, though the birds have remained upon my premises for some weeks at a time.

Curiously, though I have taken about 70 Song Sparrows, I have no record of any Returns.

Of Purple Finches taken, numbering 40 or more, I have notes of only 1 Return, though they have remained around my station for many successive days.

Of about 125 Chipping Sparrows taken, I have Returns of only 13, but Repeats cover continuous periods of weeks.

Of nearly 100 Whitethroats, I have no records of any Returns.

The following detailed notes are perhaps of sufficient significance to warrant preservation in print:

RETURN RECORDS

| Species | Number | Date Taken | Date of Return |
|------------------|--------|---------------|----------------|
| Tree Sparrow | 29519 | Jan. 20, '23 | Mar. 2, '24 |
| " " | 29521 | Jan. 21, '23 | Dec. 26, '23 |
| " " | 33949 | Dec. 29, '23 | Jan. 31, '25 |
| | | | Dec. 27, '25 |
| | | | Apr. 18, '26 |
| " " | 35598 | Dec. 31, '23 | Feb. 1, '25 |
| | | | Jan. 24, '26 |
| " " | 35599 | Dec. 31, '23 | Jan. 25, '25 |
| | | | Dec. 27, '25 |
| " " | 35630 | Mar. 2, '24 | Jan. 25, '25 |
| " " | 47044 | Jan. 14, '22 | Dec. 31, '22 |
| | | | Dec. 31, '23 |
| | | | Jan. 24, '25 |
| " " | 6912 | Jan. 29, '22 | Feb. 17, '23 |
| | | | Jan. 26, '24 |
| | | | Jan. 3, '26 |
| " " | 6916 | Jan. 29, '22 | Dec. 31, '22 |
| " " | 6919 | Feb. 16, '22 | Jan. 20, '23 |
| " " | A16016 | Jan. 17, '25 | Jan. 1, '26 |
| " " | A16025 | Jan. 31, '25 | Mar. 21, '26 |
| " " | A16028 | Jan. 31, '25 | Dec. 26, '25 |
| " " | A16033 | Feb. 8, '25 | Nov. 29, '25 |
| " " | A16034 | Feb. 8, '25 | Jan. 1, '26 |
| " " | A16041 | Feb. 15, '25 | Dec. 27, '25 |
| " " | 29517 | Jan. 20, '23 | Jan. 1, '24 |
| " " | 29518 | Jan. 20, '23 | Jan. 6, '24 |
| Chipping Sparrow | A796 | Sept. 26, '25 | May 2, '26 |
| | | | Sept. 6, '26 |
| " " | A9501 | Sept. 20, '24 | May 3, '25 |
| | | | Oct. 10, '25 |
| | | | May 16, '26 |
| " " | A9502 | Sept. 21, '24 | May 1, '25 |
| | | | Sept. 1, '25 |
| " " | A9503 | Sept. 21, '24 | Apr. 26, '25 |
| | | | Aug. 28, '25 |
| | | | Apr. 25, '26 |
| " " | A9517 | Oct. 5, '24 | Sept. 25, '25 |
| | | | Sept. 6, '26 |
| " " | A9526 | Oct. 19, '24 | May 15, '26 |
| " " | A26936 | May 7, '25 | May 16, '26 |
| " " | A26949 | May 15, '25 | Oct. 11, '25 |
| | | | May 15, '26 |
| | | | Sept. 24, '26 |
| " " | A79527 | May 30, '26 | Sept. 5, '26 |
| Purple Finch | A26937 | May 7, '25 | May 8, '26 |
| Junco | A16021 | Jan. 18, '25 | Nov. 15, '25 |

I am convinced that my own limited observations warrant the belief that Tree Sparrows and Chipping Sparrows migrate year after year in the same groups, the individual birds appearing at one season returning together in the next. Certain Tree Sparrows, also in groups, appear at my station in the earlier winter, linger together, as appears from records of repeats, for some days, sometimes weeks, disappear finally for more southerly fields, returning again in the same groups, with, or to join the final northward flight about the first of May.

My records, conclusive so far as they go, certainly indicate that year after year, season after season, the same individual Tree Sparrows, pass together on their northern journey, and, after the season of their distant breeding, return again, with their old associates, and here, most of them, still in company, pass the winter together. I believe that, during the period of nesting they likewise remain together in scattered pairs throughout their chosen regions. Countless observations satisfy me that certain of their bird associates are exclusively attached to some one of their companions. If one be trapped the free bird exhibits a manifest solicitude not shared by its other fellows. If I have put one of these companions (I believe them to be mated birds) into my aviary without the other, the birds within, as well as without, the wires, exhibit a common distress which may show itself for days and is often fatal to the bird which cannot escape and which I cannot capture to liberate again. I am certain that adult Pine Grosbeaks, though wandering in vagrant and changing flocks, are nevertheless mated, evident because the males and females are so readily distinguishable. I know that if I capture one of such pair it will die, unless its mate be restored to it, either in a joint confinement or in restored freedom.

My returned Chipping Sparrows come in the same succeeding groups in which they first appear, arriving with the spring migration, remaining together here for a brief time, disappearing about the beginning of the nesting season, and re-appearing still in company, in August or September, remaining together in the same groups till they move southward with the great wave of passing migrants; but each spring assures me that they return in the same companionship, save for the fatalities attending their far hazardous journeyings.

Mr. Baldwin, to whom we owe so much by way of instruction and inspiration in this new field of bird study which he has opened to us, has disclosed distressing but conclusive

evidence of the marital instability, if not delinquency, of the house wren. I incline to fear that this unnatural tendency of a semi-domesticated bird is attributable in some measure, to intimate human association, and so the philandering wren does not deprive me of my persistent belief that honest wild birds such as I know are manifest examples of life-long matrimonial fidelity. Mrs. Whittle's pleasing biography of the constant Nuthatches again sustains my faith.

LANCASTER, MASS., SEPT., 1926.

HOME LIFE OF THE BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER

BY KATHERINE C. HARDING

ON June 8, 1926, I found the nest of a Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica c. caerulescens*) near Lake Asquam, New Hampshire. It contained three eggs and was built twelve inches from the ground, on the edge of a patch of mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*). The nest was placed between the prongs of two dead sticks, which had fallen in a horizontal position and were supported by laurel branches. The inside diameter was two inches, the outside diameter was three inches, and the depth two inches. The outer wall of the nest was built of strips of shredded bark and was ornamented with the rusty wool of the cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*) and a few small strips of birch bark. The lining was made of pine needles, fine black rootlets, and black horsehairs.

The eggs were ivory white with a blotched wreath of sorghum brown (Ridgway) chiefly around the larger ends. On June 9th at 10.30 A. M. the clutch of four eggs was completed, and on June 10th the female was incubating them. At 7 P. M. on June 21st none of the eggs had hatched, but at 10 A. M. on the 22nd one nestling was out, and two more had hatched by 12.10 A. M. The fourth egg was sterile. The period of incubation was thirteen days.

Between 12.10 P. M. and 1.10 P. M. on the 22d the male parent had not appeared at the nest. The female fed the young five times in the first twenty-eight minutes, brooding them between feedings. She then settled herself on the nest, until 12.49, when she fed them again. Between 1.55 P. M. and 3.55 P. M. on the same day the female fed the young