

# BIRD-BANDING

A JOURNAL OF ORNITHOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

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VOL. XVI

OCTOBER 1945

No. 4

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## TRANSOCEANIC RECOVERIES OF BANDED BIRDS

BY MAY THACHER COOKE

Thirty-five species of water birds are listed in the A. O. U. Check-List as breeding in both Europe and America, besides several more that are represented by different races on the two sides of the Atlantic. Individuals of seven species from the first group and of four from the second are known to have carried bands across the ocean. In addition, banded individuals of four species known in America only as rare or accidental visitors have been recorded. One land bird that went from the United States to Iceland brings the total to 16 species and 43 individuals. These figures include 15 Kittiwakes, whose movements have already been traced in a previous article (*Bird-Banding*, Vol. 16, pp. 58-62).

While the majority of these transoceanic flyers have been birds of the year, they range in age from a European Widgeon, that was collected on Prince Edward Island 53 days after it was banded in Iceland as a juvenile, to an American Caspian Tern that was more than twelve years old when it was found dead in England. The shortest flight was from Iceland to the east coast of Greenland and the longest was from East Prussia to Mexico.

A study of these transoceanic flights and of the records of birds observed at sea, seems to indicate that such flights are less extraordinary than has been generally supposed. Also there is evidence that there may be a fairly regular migration between Iceland and continental North America.

These 43 birds represent eight banding projects, or "bird-ringing schemes" as they are usually called in Europe. The foreign countries and projects represented are:

*Russia*: Only Kittiwakes have been recorded carrying Russian bands.

*Germany*: "Vogelwarte Rossitten," bands so marked, with "Germania" added. Rossitten is situated on the Kurische Nehrung, East Prussia, about 40 miles south and west of Memel.

*Denmark*: Two projects, Copenhagen and Viborg. The Zoological

Museum of Copenhagen has been responsible for banding in Greenland as well as in Denmark. Bands have not been seen.

The Dansk Ornithologisk Central at Viborg has carried on extensive operations both in Denmark and in Iceland under the direction of P. Skovgaard. Bands marked "Adresse P. Skovgaard, Viborg, Danmark, Europa," somewhat abbreviated on the smaller sizes. All of the American recoveries have been of birds banded in Iceland.

*Netherlands:* The banding project represented seems to have been a private one. Bands are marked "Cogels—Ossendrecht—Holland."

*Great Britain:* "British Birds" marking scheme. Bands are marked "Witherby—High Holborn—London." Banding is restricted to the British Isles and nearby islands. This work is now under the direction of a committee of the British Trust for Ornithology and the return address is now "British Museum Nat. Hist., London."

*Iceland:* Since 1931 the National Museum at Reykjavik has been conducting banding operations. Bands are marked "Mus. Nat. Reykjavik," and "Iceland" on the larger sizes.

#### EUROPEAN WIDGEON. *Mareca penelope*

The recoveries of banded European Widgeon point to the probability of a more or less regular migration between Iceland and America. Whether or not all of the Widgeon occurring in eastern North America come from Iceland may be open to question, but, at least, all of the banded ones have come from there. All but one of these were banded with Skovgaard bands, and while we have no definite information as to whether the birds were young or adult, it seems fairly safe to assume that most, if not all, were young. Many Widgeon banded in Iceland for Skovgaard were recovered in the British Isles and Europe. The only Widgeon banded by the Reykjavik project to be taken in America was banded as a young bird; others, banded as adults, were recovered in Europe.

Recoveries in America extend from Newfoundland to the Lesser Antilles, and every one is less than a year after banding.

P. Skovgaard V 2014, banded at Husavik, northern Iceland, July 2, 1926, was captured December 1, 1926, at Hawk Point, Cape Sable Island, Nova Scotia.

P. Skovgaard V 3563, banded at Husavik July 17, 1927, was killed October 5, 1927, at Stephenville Crossing, Newfoundland.

P. Skovgaard K 8052, banded at Husavik, Iceland, July 2, 1927, was shot November 14, 1927, at Great Pond, Eastham, Mass.

P. Skovgaard A 3778, banded at Husavik, Iceland, August 15, 1929, was killed November 29, 1929, at Colton Lake, Cambridge, Maryland.

P. Skovgaard V 6202, banded at Litla Arsskogssandi, Iceland, July 12, 1930, was killed in December, 1930, at Currituck Sound, North Carolina.

P. Skovgaard M 2640, banded at Myvatn, Iceland, in July, 1937, was found about October 28, 1937, on Barbuda Island, British West Indies.

Mus. Nat. Reykjavik 4/684 was banded as a *juvenile* at Sandur in Athaldalur<sup>1</sup>, North Iceland, August 4, 1936, was shot September 26, 1936, at Hopefield, Kings Co., Prince Edward Island.

EUROPEAN PINTAIL. *Anas acuta acuta*

The Pintail is one of the species that breeds throughout much of the north temperate zone, but the birds of America and the Old World are considered to be different races. It is therefore rather interesting that an Old World bird raised in Iceland has reached Canada and a bird banded in California went to Siberia.

P. Skovgaard V 4720 was banded as a juvenile in Athaldalur near Husavik, northern Iceland, and was killed about May 1, 1932, at Bradore Bay, Quebec, near the western end of the Strait of Belle Isle. This is the first recorded occurrence of this race in eastern North America.

AMERICAN PINTAIL. *Anas acuta tzitzihoo*

In this discussion of transoceanic flights should be included the American Pintails that carried bands part way across the Pacific Ocean. The Pintail is a regular winter visitant to the Hawaiian Islands (in smaller numbers than formerly, though in rather large numbers in the winter of 1944-45) which involves an oversea flight of at least 2000 miles. On March 6, 1935, 50 Pintails banded on San Francisco Bay near Irvington, California, were shipped to the island of Molokai, Hawaii, where they were released, probably about March 15th. Only one of these birds has been heard from, 35-519649, which was shot December 4, 1936, at Los Banos, California, about 75 miles southeast of the place of banding.

On November 5, 1942, a small flock of almost exhausted Pintails landed at Palmyra Island (162°05'W, 5°53'N) approximately a thousand miles south and west of Honolulu and 3000 miles from the American mainland. One of them was a drake wearing band 40-693910 which had been affixed at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in Utah, on August 15, 1942, when the bird was released after having been treated for botulism. In 1939 a Pintail (not banded) was found exhausted in the surf off Jarvis Island, nearly 500 miles farther south.

In the summer of 1936 one of the natives of St. Lawrence Island, Bering Sea, made a visit to Indian Point, Siberia, and on his return brought with him band No. 35-558016, taken from a duck that had been killed there the previous spring. This bird was a Pintail that had been banded at Los Banos, California, on January 3, 1936, by Dwight G. Vedder and the case is of particular interest because the breeding Pintail of eastern Siberia is considered to be the typical race, *D. a. acuta*.

<sup>1</sup>Icelandic names are spelled as in the English version of the reports published by the Museum at Reykjavik, with the Icelandic letter *edh* transliterated as *th* on the authority of Webster's and Standard dictionaries.

EUROPEAN TEAL. *Anas crecca*

Casual or accidental occurrences of the European Teal have been reported from Greenland to North Carolina.

Band number 5/45 Mus. Nat. Reykjavik, Iceland, was placed on a juvenile European Teal on July 31, 1933, at Grimsstathir, Myvatn, Iceland. This bird was killed early in May, 1934, near Frederiksdal, Greenland. Since this species is not known to breed in Greenland, this bird recovered at the southern tip of that island must have been on the way back to its breeding grounds in Iceland. Where had it spent the winter that it should be returning from the west?

OLD-SQUAW. *Clangula hyemalis*

The Old-squaw is one of the birds that, breeding throughout the Arctic regions, has furnished a single instance of proved transoceanic flight. A bird was killed at Christianshaab on Disko Bay, West Greenland, on May 27, 1929, that had been banded (D 1509) at Myvatn, northern Iceland, on July 15, 1928, for P. Skovgaard. No information is available regarding the age of the bird at banding but it was probably a young bird. The Old-squaw breeds on both coasts of Greenland and eggs have been taken in the region about Disko Bay by June 15, so it seems probable that this bird would have bred in Greenland.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER. *Mergus serrator*

The apparent breeding in East Greenland of a Red-breasted Merganser hatched in Iceland is interesting, even though the two islands are separated by only a few hundred miles.

Band number 3/452 Mus. Nat. Reykjavik was placed on a juvenile of this species at Grimsstathir, Myvatn, Iceland, July 4, 1935, which was shot July 22, 1939, at Tasiussarsuk, Angmagsalik, East Greenland. The date of recovery indicates that the bird was at or near its breeding ground.

LAPWING. *Vanellus vanellus*

Among transoceanic travelers, the shorebirds are represented by one specimen each of two species: the Lapwing which is of only casual occurrence in America, and the Purple Sandpiper which is circumpolar in distribution.

In the great flight of Lapwings, numbering several hundred birds, which reached North America in late December, 1927, and spread from northern Labrador to Nova Scotia, there was one bird that wore a band.

Lapwing X 5046 Witherby—High Holborn—London, was banded as a nestling in May, 1926, at Ullswater, Cumberland, northwestern England, and was killed December 27, 1927, near Bonavista on the east coast of Newfoundland.

PURPLE SANDPIPER. *Arquatella maritima*

Purple Sandpiper 6/3731 Mus. Nat. Reykjavik was banded as an adult at Hafurbjarnarstathir, southwestern Iceland, May 20, 1942, and

was killed by an Eskimo at the end of April, 1943, 30 miles west of Cape Dorset, Baffin Island, Canada.

This recovery is quite surprising since the bird was an adult, and presumably breeding, when banded, and would, therefore, be expected to return to the same breeding place in succeeding years. It is usually the young birds and non-breeders that wander. However, the date and latitude of its capture make it probable that it would not have returned to Iceland that year.

#### NORTHERN SKUA. *Catharacta skua*

As a breeding bird the Northern or Great Skua is largely confined to the Old World. It is not known to breed regularly in America, but may do so occasionally, probably in the region about Davis Strait where immature birds have been reported. In winter it is tolerably common on the fishing banks off Newfoundland and occasional as far south as Nantucket. Two birds banded abroad have been taken in North America.

3/189 Mus. Nat. Reykjavik was banded as a juvenile at Kvisker, southeastern Iceland, on June 16, 1935. On August 4, 1937, it was shot in Davis Strait, southwest of Godthaab, Greenland, at 63°35' north, 52°10' west.

401218 Witherby—High Holborn—London was banded as a nestling on July 3, 1939, at Hermaness, the northernmost point of the Shetland Islands. On February 4, 1940, it was found dead at Swampscott, Mass.

This record is of more than ordinary interest since it represents the first bird "ringed" in Great Britain to be reported in the United States and is the fourth specimen of the Skua to be taken in Massachusetts. The specimen is preserved in the museum of the Boston Society of Natural History.

#### HERRING GULL. *Larus argentatus*

Herring Gull 36-648130 was banded as a juvenile at Little Wood Island, near Kent Island, New Brunswick, August 13, 1936, by Dr. A. O. Gross and came aboard a ship at sea in 46°30' north and 14° west during November, 1937. This would be about 300 miles northwest of Cape Finisterre, Spain, and well within European waters.

In recent years the separation of the American birds as a different race has been revived so that this is another species represented by different forms on the two sides of the Atlantic. So far as is known this is the first record of the occurrence of the American Herring Gull in Europe, and it is especially surprising as the Herring Gull does not ordinarily reach the pelagic zone, but is confined to coastal waters.

#### BLACK-HEADED GULL. *Larus ridibundus*

Two Black-headed Gulls banded as nestlings in July, 1911, at Rositten, East Prussia, on the shore of the Baltic, were found in America within the next seven months. One was shot on the island of Barbados,

B. W. I., in November, 1911, and the other near Vera cruz, Mexico, in February, 1912.

No. 851 Cogels—Ossendrecht—Holland was banded as a juvenile June 21, 1932, at Groote Meer, near Ossendrecht, Province of Noord Brabant, Netherlands. In September, 1933, this bird was "collected" by a native at Stag Bay, Labrador.

A fourth banded gull was shot at Badger, Newfoundland, October 26, 1943. This carried band Mus. Nat. Reykjavik 5/2278 and was banded as a nestling June 16, 1943, at Grimsstathir, Myvatn, Iceland.

This is a species whose range has apparently changed in quite recent times. Older writers list it as only casual in Iceland, usually in winter. In 1910 a single nest was reported, the first record of its breeding there. In the years 1932 to 1939, inclusive, 100 young birds were banded for the Museum of Natural History at Reykjavik. It seems quite possible, therefore, that Iceland may be the source of the Black-headed Gulls that have occurred in recent years on the New England coast.

#### GULL-BILLED TERN. *Gelochelidon nilotica*

The Gull-billed Tern is another of the cosmopolital species considered to be represented by different races on the two sides of the Atlantic.

Zool. Mus. Kobenhavn, Danmark RK 2929 was placed on a day-old Gull-billed Tern at Tipperne, Ringkoebing Fjord, Jutland, on June 17, 1935. Eighty days later, on September 4, 1935, it was shot at Maynard's Swamp near St. Peter, Barbados, British West Indies.

#### ARCTIC TERN. *Sterna paradisaea*

For the sake of completeness it is necessary to include the Arctic Tern, though it is now pretty well established that the species regularly crosses the Atlantic on its spring and fall migrations. In spring, the bulk of the species crosses the ocean within a week in late May and early June, though some may come as early as April. On June 3, 1933, many were seen feeding in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and others were arriving from the ocean. The return passage takes place in August and September, the height being the first week in September. In clear weather they are reported to fly between 100 and 500 feet above the water, while at other times they keep just above the crests of the waves. Various observers report that they do not alight on the water but will rest on floating wreckage. They apparently seldom feed during the trip, perhaps because suitable food is not found at sea. (See Wynne-Edwards, Proc. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist., Vol. 40, pp. 324-329).

Three definite records have been obtained, all banded in North America.

A.B.B.A. 1258 banded as a nestling at eastern Egg Rock, Maine, July 3, 1913, by Dr. John C. Phillips was found in August, 1917, floating in the Nun Branch of the Niger River delta, near Ikibiri, southern Nigeria, West Africa. This bird was first reported as a Common Tern, but since it was banded in a colony where a few Arctic Terns were breeding, the recovery in Africa indicates that it was probably this species.

Biological Survey No. 548656 banded as a nestling on the Red Islands, Turnevik Bay, Labrador, June 22, 1927, by O. L. Austin, Jr., was found dead October 1, 1927, near La Rochelle, Charente-Inferieure, France; and B.S. 548138 banded as above July 28, 1928, was found dead November 14, 1928, at Margate, 15 miles southwest of Port Shepstone, Natal, South Africa.

CASPIAN TERN. *Hydroprogne caspia*

The first bird banded in the United States to be recovered in Great Britain was a twelve-year-old Caspian Tern found dead near Whitby on the east coast of England. Caspian Tern 566280 was banded as a juvenile July 14, 1927, in the colony on Shoe Island, Beaver Island, Lake Michigan, by William I. Lyon. In August, 1939, it was found dead near Whitby, York County, England. The band was sent to Washington for inspection and a rubbing of it has been preserved. It seems worth noting that only a few weeks before this the Skua, which was to be the first British-banded bird recovered in the United States, had been banded.

PUFFIN. *Fratercula arctica*

Two Puffins banded as nestlings on St. Kilda Island west of the Hebrides found their way to Newfoundland four months later.

Witherby—High Holborn—London RV 4692 was banded August 10, 1939, and was recovered December 20, 1939, at Herring Neck, Newfoundland.

RW 3439 was banded August 4, 1939, and recovered December 21, 1939, on Bonavista Bay, Newfoundland.

The dates and localities of recovery suggest that the two birds might have been traveling companions, but they did not tell us about it. Since this species is supposed to migrate only a short distance, this journey of nearly two thousand miles made simultaneously by two individuals is all the more surprising.

SNOW BUNTING. *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Only a single land bird is included in the list of transatlantic flyers. About April 18, 1941, a large flock of birds landed on a west bound ship when it was some twenty miles from Iceland. Among them was one wearing band 41-107510 which proved them to have been Snow Buntings. This bird, an adult female, had been banded January 20, 1941, at Millbrook, Dutchess County, New York, by Frank Wilson Trevor. The majority of the birds died on shipboard, but four lived until the boat sighted the Canadian shore.

Fish and Wildlife Service,  
Washington, D. C.