

BIRD-BANDING

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A NOTE ON THE FIRST BIRD-BANDING IN AMERICA

BY PAUL BARTSCH

Being now freed from the exacting duties of a large government department by retirement, I now have an opportunity to catch up with things that should have come to print in the long ago, but which even now retain the importance attached to them when the observations were first made.

In 1903 I published "Notes on the Herons of the District of Columbia" in the Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections (quarterly issue), vol. 45, no. 1428, pp. 104-111, pls. xxxii-xxxviii, 21 figures. In this, in the account of the Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli* (Gmelin) I called attention to two colonies of this species breeding a little southeast of Benning, D. C., in 1902 and presented a tabulation of the number of nests in each colony and a detailed enumeration of the contents of part of the 76 nests in colony one made June 1, 1902, as well as of the 177 nests of colony two made June 19, 1902. In this paper, pages 108 and 109, I stated:

"There are still many unsolved problems about bird life, among which are the age that birds attain, the exact time at which some birds acquire their adult dress, and the changes which occur in this with years. Little, too, is known about the laws and routes of bird migration, and much less of the final disposition of the untold thousands which are annually produced.

"When I visited the heron colony for the first time, it occurred to me that some light might be shed on one or more of these unsolved problems, at least so far as the present species is concerned, by marking the successive broods of young birds for a number of years. I explained the situation to Dr. F. W. True, Head Curator of Biology in the National Museum, who agreed to procure the necessary bands. These were inscribed 'Return to Smithsonian Institution,' and bore the year and a serial number. Unfortunately no aluminum tubing of the desired caliber could be obtained at once, hence the bands arrived so late in the season that only twenty-three herons of the entire heronry were marked.

"These bands are mere rings, of extremely light weight, large enough to fit comfortably about the tarsus of the adult bird. The fact that the bands are closed necessitates very early application, since the foot soon grows too large to permit the ring to slip over it. Once on, there is little danger of its ever being dislodged, for the heron's toes are always partly spread as he clings to the twigs of his nest."

We soon found it desirable to split the bands so that they could be placed about the tarsus of young birds too old to slip their toes through the ring.

In 1902, due to the late arrival of the aluminum bands, only 23 birds were banded. On June 21, of these, three were found dead, one on the ground and two in the nests. Only a single return resulted from this banding effort, a specimen shot Sept. 24, 1902, at Abington, Maryland.

In 1903 both of the colonies changed location, one selecting an adjacent hillside where 39 nests were counted. This time this colony was in mixed forest and all but seven of the nests were in pines, the rest in oaks. In this colony we banded 78 young. Two of these banded birds were almost full grown and were found dead under the trees of the colony. Four additional banded birds were reported as follows: The first was captured July 19, in a street in Leesburg, Va. The second was caught July 20 in a fish trap in the Potomac below Washington. The third was shot July 18 at Pennsville, N. J. Band No. 38 was taken from a bird shot at Dividing Creek, Cumberland County, N. J., in the first week of April 1904.

In 1910 Mr. E. J. Cort reported a large colony near Marshall Hall, Md. We therefore paid a visit to this rookery and placed 367 rings on young birds.

The returns from this effort were as follows:

July 21, 1910, Darby Creek, Delaware Co., Pa.

Aug. 2, 1910, Reading, Pa.

Aug. 5, 1910, Marshall Hall, Md.

Aug. 12, 1910, Foglers Goldfish Pond, near Thurmont, Md.

Aug. 20, 1910, 1546 H Street, N.E., Washington, D. C.

August-end of 1910, Virginia Beach, Va.

Sept. 17, 1910, Rouge River P. O., 18 miles east of Toronto, Canada.

Sept. 28, 1910, Silom Dam, near Chambersburg, Pa.

Oct. 20, 1910, Asbury District, Sommerset Co., Md.

Dec. 7, 1910, St. Simons Island, Ga.

April (latter part) 1911, Banaguüises, northeast Matanzas Province, Cuba.

June 29, 1912, Laurel, Md.

Since these efforts of mine, bird-banding has become a vocation (U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service) and an avocation of hundreds of private individuals scattered through our land and licensed banders are furnished with bands by our Government.

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ON THE RETURN OF SUMMER-RESIDENT BIRDS

BY J. T. NICHOLS

Correlated with unfavorable barometric pattern and winds to bring them to my territory (Long Island, and Central Park, New York City), north-bound migrant birds were abnormally scarce there in the Spring of 1951. As I no longer believe that migrating, individual birds follow the same course in successive years to and from their nesting station, and merely transient individuals might have been involved, this was not surprising. Later it appeared that whereas some summer residents were normally plentiful in Long Island localities with which I was familiar, others were markedly scarce.