

## GENERAL NOTES

**Verification of Australian Common Tern Recovery.** — Few people who work with banding records to any extent are fortunate enough to escape the annoyance and frustration engendered by finding a potentially valuable recovery rendered useless by incomplete or apparently inaccurate data that cannot be verified. The commonest source of such errors is faulty reporting or misreading of the band number by the finder, but banders also occasionally make mistakes, both in reporting numbers and in identification. Banders' errors can often be checked and corrected, but almost never can a record be verified on the recovery end. By the time the discrepancies are noted, the unreported or questionable details have usually been forgotten and the bird and the band it bore have long since vanished. The careful analyst is forced to discard such questionable records (cf. Hickey, J. J., "Survival Studies of Banded Birds," 1952). This he is often reluctant to do, especially when the recovery is an outstanding one.

One of the most famous of these is the historic first trans-Atlantic tern recovery, the bird banded 3 July 1913 on Eastern Egg Rock, Maine, as a Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) chick by the late Dr. John C. Phillips (a highly capable, meticulous ornithologist of unquestioned integrity), and reported in 1920 as "found dead by a native in August, 1917," floating in the Nun Branch of the Niger River Delta on the coast of Nigeria, West Africa. Though the date of finding was obviously uncertain, there was no question of the band number—ABBA 1258—, and the record was accepted at its face value. F. C. Lincoln published it, first in U. S. Bur. Biol. Surv. Bull. 1268, "Returns from Banded Birds, 1920 to 1923" (1924), and again in his paper "Notes on the Migration of Young Common Terns," *Bull. NEBBA*, 3: 23-28, April, 1927.

It remained unquestioned until the late 1920's, when we began to get a few transatlantic recoveries of Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*). In 1929, shortly after I published "Migration Routes of the Arctic Tern" (*Bull. NEBBA*, 4(4): 121-125), Lincoln called the Phillips recovery to my attention and suggested that it, too, might be an Arctic instead of a Common. He pencilled a notation to that effect on the old ABBA card of the record, which is there today, and so recorded it in print on pp. 38-40 (including a map) of his "Migration of Birds" (Circular 16, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1950).

The evidence now at hand indicates that the Phillips bird could have been and most likely was an Arctic. A few Arctic Terns nest with the Commons at Eastern Egg Rock and, as the chicks of the two species are practically indistinguishable, failure to spot the occasional Arctic mingled with the Commons in a ternery during a wholesale chick-banding operation is no reflection on the ability or carefulness of Dr. Phillips or of any other bander. Furthermore, there have now been a dozen or more European and African recoveries from the some 15,000 Arctic Terns banded in eastern North America, and not a single other transatlantic recovery from the some 750,000 Common Tern bandings. In the face of such evidence, it is certainly tempting to add the Niger recovery to the mounting data on the migration of the Arctic Tern and to say we have no evidence of possible mingling of the North American and European populations of Common Terns.

I thought of this when G. M. Dunnet reported the recovery on the west coast of Australia on 1 January 1956 of a Common Tern banded as a chick at Marum, southeastern Sweden on the Baltic Sea, 9 July 1955 (*CSIRO Wildlife Research*, 1(1): 68). The recovery was as remarkable as that of the Phillips bird in a number of ways. The bird had made one of the longest recorded flights by an individual of its species, and had gone much farther south and east than European Common Terns generally do. On geographical grounds one would expect any Common Tern reaching Australia to be one of the poorly defined Asiatic races rather than from the nominate population of Europe. Indeed, Australian ornithologists had assigned the three previous Australian records of *Sterna hirundo* (one from Cape York, one from Lord Howe Island (Hindwood, *Emu*, 44: 41-43), and one from Cairns (White, *Emu*, 46: 98-99), all on the Eastern side of the continent) to *S. h. longipennis*, the eastern Asiatic race, which winters fairly regularly to neighboring New Guinea.

However, Dunnet shortly published corroborating details (*Western Australian Naturalist*, 5(4): 86-88) that certainly seemed to authenticate the record. One Kevin Reid had found the bird "exhausted" on a beach near Fremantle; he had taken it home where it died the next day, then buried it and forwarded the band

to Dunnet. Dunnet wisely hastened to the spot and dug up the carcass, which by then was too decomposed to skin, but he was able to preserve it in alcohol. His description of it gave correctly all the specific characters differentiating *hirundo* from *paradisaea* and *dougalli*.

When Dunnet announced in the next *CSIRO Wildlife Research* (1(2): 134) the recovery at the same spot near Fremantle on 15 May 1956 of an Arctic Tern banded 5 July 1955 in the USSR on a western arm of the White Sea, only about 670 miles northeast of Marum, my latent doubts of the identity of the first recovery were rekindled. *S. paradisaea* evidently reaches western Australia fairly regularly. Though this was the first banding recovery, the species had been taken there several times previously, and it winters commonly in more southerly waters near by. As both *hirundo* and *paradisaea* nest in mixed colonies on the Baltic shores just as they do on our New England coast, the possibility of a misidentification by both the Swedish bander and Dunnet had to be taken into account, especially in view of the close similarity of the two species in juvenal dress and the difficulty of differentiating between them by one not fairly familiar with both species or with an adequate series of specimens at hand for comparison.

When writing my friend Dr. D. L. Serventy of CSIRO on other matters, I took the liberty of mentioning my doubts of the Common Tern recovery, and suggesting that he check the specimen's identity. Instead he "passed the buck" back to me by notifying Dr. W. D. L. Ride, director of the Western Australian Museum where Dunnet had deposited the specimen, who in turn most generously forwarded me the specimen by air mail. It arrived in excellent shape.

Though its tarsus and bill measurements and the color pattern of the inner vanes of the primaries showed it to be *hirundo*, to make sure I took the bird to Washington and checked it against the National Museum series of immature birds of both species. This left no doubt of its identity. While the very slight sub-specific characters differentiating the races are seldom demonstrable in an immature specimen, particularly one in pickle, the bird is unquestionably *S. hirundo* and, from its birthplace attested by the band it bore, ostensibly *S. h. hirundo*.

So, thanks to Dunnet's foresight and diligence in tracking down and preserving the specimen when the band was reported, even before he knew of its importance, there is no doubt of the validity of this remarkable record. One wonders now of its significance. For one thing it suggests the possibility of wide mixing of population stocks, particularly among seabirds, despite their demonstrated site adherence, and suggests the advisability of re-examining the slight morphological characters that differentiate the races of *Sterna hirundo*, among others. For another it suggests that Dr. Phillips *might* have been correct in his original identification of that old record. Unfortunately, we'll never know.

The Australian recovery is indeed extraordinary, but by this time we should be astonished at nothing. As the late Professor Peter Sushkin was fond of remarking when confronted with startling records of strays far from their normal habitats, "After all, what is so remarkable about it? Birds have wings, and this just shows they sometimes use them!"—O. L. Austin, Jr., Florida State Museum, Gainesville, Fla.

**Banded Mourning Dove recovered in South America.**—Apparently the only known record of the Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*) migrating to South America is a recent recovery of a banded dove. It was banded in northern Iowa at Wallingford, Emmet County as a nestling on June 1, 1956 by William Brabham, banding under my permit authority. Under date of May 4, 1957, a letter from Alberto Montoya to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service stated that band number 573-45102 was taken from a bird killed today [May 4] at a laguna situated 20 kilometers south of the city of Cartago, Valle, Colombia. The place of recovery is approximately 325 miles north of the equator at 4°34' N. Lat. and 75°53' W. Long. This is over 2700 miles as the crow flies from the place of banding and is one of the longest journeys recorded for the species.

It appears from the 5th edition of the A.O.U. check list that this is the first record for the species in South America, though it is known to winter south to western Panama. In time additional recoveries from the cooperative dove nestling banding program should give more exact information on the extent of the migration south of the border. In the first year (1956) of intensive nestling banding, some 30,000 were banded through the cooperation of the volunteer banders, state game