

## GENERAL NOTES

**Redpoll Identification -- a Problem.**—In a flock of restless, twittering redpolls, it is often difficult to observe individual birds sufficiently to differentiate between Common and Hoary Redpolls. When finally I was able to entice a mixed flock of Common and Hoary Redpolls to my banding station at Yorkton, Saskatchewan, in April 1960, I welcomed the opportunity to study the field marks of the two species close at hand. However, it was soon apparent that redpolls did not separate easily into two clear-cut species, dark and light; instead, there seemed to be every conceivable shading in between. My findings were somewhat unexpected and may be of interest to other banders.

We were first beset with the difficulty of separating the redpolls into the two species for the purposes of the official banding records. I wrote to Maurice G. Street for assistance, since he had banded 4043 redpolls at Nipawin, Sask. between 1945 and 1948. Street replied that one rarely finds two redpolls that are identical in all respects. In addition to the infinite variety of whiteness-to-darkness, the crowns varied from ruby red to brassy yellow and his measurements showed that the members of different flocks had consistently different sizes of bill and tarsus, suggesting that several geographic races visited this area at different times.

We could see that it was not a simple matter of the presence or absence of a white rump. Our approach was to divide the redpolls into four arbitrary color groups:

Type 1—had a very white wash overall, a pure white rump and pure white undertail coverts.

Type 2—had a whitish wash, but had a varying number of fine dark streaks on the rump and the sides of the breasts; the undertail coverts remained pure white.

Type 3—had a medium coloration with some whitish feather edgings, but many dark streaks on the rump and under tail coverts.

Type 4—was a dark bird, heavily streaked.

Even this classification posed problems; it was obviously somewhat artificial as each color phase seemed to blend almost imperceptibly into the other. In our banding schedules, we listed only 4 birds as type 1 or unquestionable Hoary Redpolls. Another 28 were pure white on the undertail coverts and had only a few dark streaks on the rump (type 2); I understand most taxonomists would class these as Hoary Redpolls, but in my confusion I listed them as "Hoary x Common Redpoll." Of the remainder, 41 had some degree of whitish wash (type 3) and 86 had a generally dark coloration (type 4) and the two latter groups fitted into the category of Common Redpolls.

Although some texts mention size differences between the Hoary and Common Redpolls, my wife and I could find no difference in measurements of wing chord, middle claw, exposed culmen or tarsus to correlate with the different color categories. Judging by our measurements, all of our birds could conceivably have represented a single population.

*Wing measurements*

27 male "type 4" ranged from 72 to 79 mm. and averaged 75.5 mm.

48 female "type 4" ranged from 70 to 78 and averaged 73.6 mm.

9 male "type 3" ranged from 73.5 to 77 and averaged 75.8 mm.

32 female "type 3" ranged from 71 to 79 and averaged 74.8 mm.

7 male "type 2" ranged from 74.5 to 76 and averaged 75.6 mm.

21 female "type 2" ranged from 72 to 78 and averaged 75.1 mm.

3 "type 1" measured 73, 74 and 77 mm. and averaged 74.7 mm.

Not all taxonomists agree that redpolls should be divided into two species on the basis of color. Snyder (1957) states that the relationship of the two groups is a matter for debate. Salomonsen (1928 and 1950-51) believes all forms of redpolls

should be regarded as conspecific. This problem can be solved only by taxonomists and behaviorists on the redpoll breeding grounds, and it is dangerous for a bander even to speculate.

Meanwhile, whether the perplexing redpolls represent hybrids, confusing individuals of two similar species, or are merely color phases of a single species, the bander may have a problem in separating them for record purposes. The undertail coverts and not the rump should be used as the differentiating feature, and in borderline cases the decision will be difficult to make.

Finally, I feel banders could make a small contribution to our knowledge of the movements of the different geographic populations of redpolls. Detailed measurements (including tail lengths and weights) should be kept and I would further suggest that any bander with such an opportunity should furnish the nearest taxonomist with a representative series of study specimens for the permanent record.

I wish to thank Dr. Raymond A. Paynter, Jr., for allowing me to see the redpoll study skins in the collection of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University.

—C. Stuart Houston, 2401 Hanover Ave., Saskatoon, Sask.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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**Reaction of Wood Warbler to Young.**—During several years of investigations on the behavior of European warblers towards their (mostly banded) fledglings I once made a quite interesting observation: Young Wood Warblers (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*) had been banded while they were still nestlings. I was very much surprised to see the adult male repeatedly trying to pull the aluminum ring from the legs of his young two days after they had left the nest (the female took care of the other part of the brood). During this procedure the young birds apparently had great difficulty in keeping their balance on the roosting twig. On the following days this behavior was not observed again.

It is well known that many parent birds remove everything from the nest which does not belong in it. Often they succeed in pulling rings from the legs of the nestlings when they have been banded while too young, or they even remove the nestling together with the ring. The observation reported above shows however, that this behavior is not only produced by the stimulating complex of the young, a foreign item *and* the nest, but in rare instances also outside the nest.

Examples of similar conduct for American birds are quoted in *Bird-Banding*, 25: 61 (April 1954), and the earlier notes cited therein. In only one of those cases the young bird—a Horned Lark—had already left the nest at the time (A. J. Berger). The rings had been kindly supplied by the "Vogelwatre Radolfzell" (Germany).—Peter H. Homann, A 813 W. St. Augustine St., Tallahassee, Fla.

#### LETTER

To the Editor:

In the latest issue (*Bird-Banding*, 33(4):204-05), my eye caught the account of a replacement tail molt in our Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*. While the note suggests "that the new right retrices were about 45 to 60 days old", I am sure this is an overestimate. The lesser period of 45 days is sufficient for the Gryfalcon, Peregrine Falcon, or Prairie Falcon to put in a new feather completely, including the shorter primary remiges. Even in the slow-molting Golden Eagle, a retrice does not take 60 days! The fail feathers of a juvenile Kestrel are not completely "in" when it leaves the nest cavity at approximately four weeks, but are in at least as far as the replacement retrices in the figure. I don't see how they could be more than 28 days from the dropping of the old feather, unless damage was done to the papilla