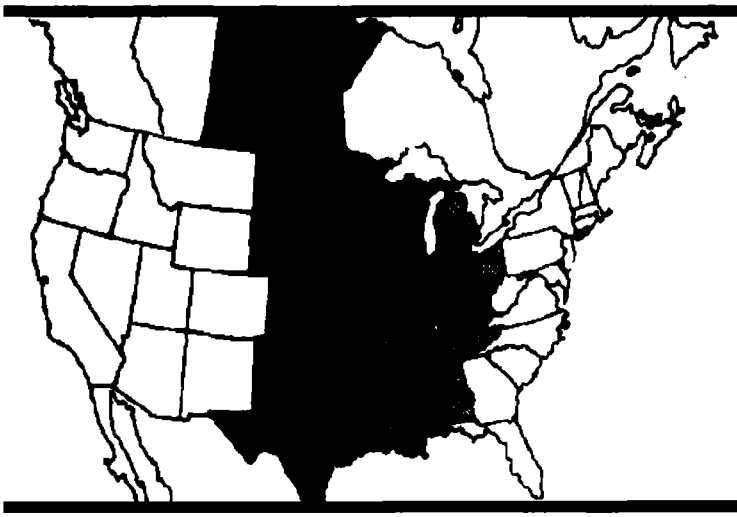

Inland Regional News

Inland Bird Banding Association Founded 1922

NATURE NOTES FROM NEBRASKA

Passerine birds to band in eastern Nebraska have been few and far between this winter -- almost no finches and few sparrows remained after the late October snowstorms. But for what we lacked in feeder birds, we have made up in accidentals and a state first record.

December brought a Pomarine Jaeger to Conestoga Lake, near Lincoln, in Lancaster County. The jaeger stayed on this small lake long enough for most local birders to see it. Then an Iceland Gull spent a few days in early January on Branched Oak Lake, ten miles northwest of Lincoln. Even though "gull experts" often disagree on the identification of this species, our bird was studied carefully by many excellent birders and all felt it could only be an Iceland. It was with a flock of Ring-bills and Herrings so size comparison was easy. The pale buffy tan of the bird, with diagnostic snowy white wing tips, small all-black bill, and obvious lack of tail band convinced us of its identity. It matched the description in Kenn Kaufman's Advanced Birding. Both Pomarine Jaeger and Iceland Gull are considered accidental in Nebraska.

These two accidentals within a month were exciting but there was more to come. An adult Lesser Black-backed Gull was found by a Lincoln birder at Pawnee Lake on 10 February and observed frequently through 26 February. There has been an earlier, unofficial report of this species for Nebraska but the observation was never accepted so this one will be the first state record. Just a few years ago Lesser Black-backed Gulls, an Eurasian species, were considered rare in the northeastern United States. Now it has become so well established that it is found all along the eastern seaboard and is apparently is steadily extending its range further west across the North American continent.

To many of you in other parts of the IBBA region, a Northern Saw-whet Owl probably would not cause the excitement it has for birders in eastern Nebraska this winter. We do occasionally see one in migration and a few times one has stayed for a few days, but for the first time, to our knowledge, one has over-wintered at Neale Woods. This is the northern division of Fontenelle Forest. Because so many people came to see it, staff organized special viewing trips to minimize disturbance for this little owl. It did not seem to mind the many visitors; in fact, the owl slept right through most of these visits! Sightings of this species are considered uncommon to rare for the state.

Ruth Green

THANK YOU FROM FONTENELLE FOREST

We have received the following letter from Donald H. Gilbert, Executive Director of Fontenelle Forest Association, thanking IBBA for donation of excess funds from our 1991 meeting:

Dear Betty and Ruth.
Thank you for your contribution to Fontenelle Forest Association in the amount of $450 for the restricted purpose of furthering Project WISE (Working to Integrate Science Education) on behalf of the Inland Bird Banding Association. You should feel a sense of pride knowing that you have contributed to one of the nation's oldest and finest nature center organizations.

As you both know, Project WISE will develop a multifaceted environmental curriculum compatible with area schools' existing science programs. It is the goal of the project for all school districts to incorporate the new curriculum supplements into their science programs and increase their use of the Forest's facilities and resources. In the end, the ultimate purpose of the project is to instill in children a respect for, an awareness of, and an appreciation of the world around them so that they may learn to live harmoniously with nature.

Thanks again for being a part of this rich heritage and please be sure to extend my sincere thanks to the Inland Bird Banding Association.

Yours truly,
Donald H. Gilbert

OHIO BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION WINTER BANDING HINTS

Banding in cold weather presents several problems. Perhaps the biggest is keeping your hands warm while extracting birds from mist nets. I have approached this problem in two ways. First, I tried wearing fingerless gloves. I found that these were a slight hindrance to removing birds from nets and my fingers did stay a little warmer, but it took a while to get used to them. Last year, I found a much better solution. I carry handwarmers, the kind that hunters use. These pocket-sized heaters run on white gas (Coleman fuel or lighter fluid) for up to 16 hr and are very inexpensive. There are models available which use chemical reactions other than combustion to produce heat. The advantage of these is that you do not have to fool with matches and they are odorless. However, only a few of these are reusable and none of them last for more than about 3 hr. The reusable type can be recharged easily by placing them in boiling water. If you need heat for more than a couple hours, you will need at least two sets. On really cold days, I carry two handwarmers, one for each coat pocket. Quickly thawing out my hands makes a huge difference in my ability to extract small struggling birds like chickadees.

If you operate a mobile banding station that is set up completely each morning and broken down at the end of the day, anchoring poles into frozen ground can be a problem. For this I cut 3/4" conduit into sections about 12" long to use as pole holders. (I have actually used some as short as 10".) I flatten one end of the section so it forms a broad point like the head of a chisel. When hammered into the ground, these pole holders will accommodate 1/2" conduit net poles and can support a taut net without guylines. They are also compact and light, a major advantage for mobile banding. When hammering the pole holders into the ground, be sure to use a rubber or plastic mallet; metal hammers will mash their tops, making it difficult to insert a net pole. A cork or an inverted 35 mm film canister can be used as a cap to keep ice out when the pole holder is not in use, but still in the ground. Also, these pole holders are great for situations where it is necessary to "bend" a net around a third pole because it allows the third pole to be free of supporting guylines.

Another solution to the pole anchoring problem is to cement a short section of 3/4" conduit into one of the two holes in a cinder block. This forms a very heavy pole holder which does not need to be hammered into the ground. Its major advantage is that it can be repositioned in seconds, but they are not readily portable. Also, these pole holders tend to get chunks of leaves and soil frozen to their undersides. This robs them of their flat bottom, making them prone to tip over in response to the tension of a net. To avoid this problem, lay them on their sides when they are not in use.

At winter feeding stations, many of us catch woodpeckers which often entangle the barbed tips of their tongues in the netting. For this problem I use a seam ripper, the kind used in sewing. The point of this instrument is perfect for a variety of delicate extraction problems. In emergencies, the sharpened edge of the seam ripper can even be used to cut a bird free from the netting strand by strand leaving the smallest possible hole.

Sometimes, a slight equipment modification can improve capture success. A few years ago, I noticed that my Potter trap would often be sprung without catching a bird. I observed the trap from a distance and quickly detected the problem. Often, chickadees would perch on the top of the door of the set trap before entering. When they flew from this perch, the disturbance would be great enough to cause the door to drop. To prevent this problem, I added a piece of wire mesh to the top of the trap so that it goes up and over the top of the door when the trap is set. This prevents birds from perching directly on the door and, as a result, I catch more birds.

-- **David Cimprich**, Ohio Bird Banding Association Newsletter, December 1991

ONTARIO BIRD BANDER'S ASSOCIATION

TREE SWALLOWS: A CURIOSITY

Since 1981, I have maintained a nest box trail in Wellington County, Ontario, north of Guelph. Although the project originally was begun to encourage the nesting of Eastern Bluebirds, I found myself enamoured with the Tree Swallows that nested in my boxes. Although I still enjoy the bluebirds, when they do nest on my trail, I tend to consider them an added bonus to the Tree Swallows. For me, the Tree Swallow is a much more interesting bird. At any rate, since 1981, I have banded almost 7,000 Tree Swallows. Obviously, most of these birds were nestlings. However, I consistently band about 90% of the nesting females. Unfortunately, my success rate for males is much smaller.

One of the consistent themes that runs through may articles in popular science magazines and in some scientific journals is the fear that nesting trails may habituate adult birds to nest in nest boxes only. This would make the birds dependent on man-made boxes and less likely to choose natural cavities. It is also suggested that nest boxes are more likely to be predated because of human activity. As a result, so the scenario goes, the species is more heavily predated and thus the population decreases because of the very boxes placed to increase the population.

However, I captured two female Tree Swallows that show that this is not the case. The first female (0940-35437) was banded as a SY-F in 1983. She was recaptured in 1984, 1985, 1988, 1990 and 1991. Each time she appeared to have successful nests. The second female (0940-35241) was banded as a nestling in 1983. Her only recapture was in 1991, during which she had a successful nest.

However, the interesting point to these two birds was: Where were they for the "other" years? Although I capture a large proportion of the nesting females. it is still possible that I might have missed them during the various nesting seasons. But I think missing the second female for 7 of 8 years is not very likely. I think this suggests that the birds probably used natural cavities in the other years. I certainly have observed banded Tree Swallows using natural cavities. I think this limited observation suggests that birds are much more flexible than we think they are. I think that these birds randomly seek cavities and do not look for a specific shape of box. We place our boxes in the most favourable positions and it seems natural to have the birds seek these locations first. In my opinion, there are many factors of greater importance than the bird's selection of a nesting site, besides the outer shape of the nest box.

-- **Dave A. Lamble**, Ontario Bird Banding Association Newsletter, vol. 37, no. 1, February 1992.