

News, Notes, Comments

Disappearance of Conjunctivitis Symptoms In a Purple Finch

Conjunctivitis caused by the bacterium *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* occurring in seed-eating song birds attracted to feeders is a recent major concern. Researchers at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, have gathered considerable data on its occurrence in the House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*; Dhondt 1996a, 1996b, 1997, 1998, Dhondt et al. 2001, Hartup 1999, and Kammermeier 1999) and have indicated its presence in Purple Finch (*C. purpureus*), American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*), Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertina*), and Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*; Dhondt 1996b and Dhondt et al. 2001), as well as in Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*; Dhondt 1996b).

I have captured infected House Finches at my Schenectady, NY, feeder with the symptoms of swelling and weeping in one or both eyes. One of these birds was provided to Dr. Ward Stone, New York state wildlife pathologist, who confirmed the presence of the *Mycoplasma* bacterium (Stone, pers. comm.). I have observed similar symptoms less frequently in a breeding population of Purple Finches at my banding station at Jenny Lake near Corinth in Saratoga County, NY. Here I report on the recapture of one such infected finch which was free, a year later, of the symptoms of this disease.

This bird was banded 26 May 2000 as an after-second-year female (ASY F) with a brood patch and egg in her oviduct, fat class 0 (on a 0-3 scale), weight 25.7g. A year later she was recaptured on 17 Jun 2001 as a breeding female with conjunctivitis symptoms in her right eye. To avoid contaminating the weighing bag, I did not weigh her. I recaptured her once more on 22 Jun 2002, again as a breeding female, fat class 0, weight 24.6 g; this time she was free of any eye symptoms.

During the same 2001 summer when she was symptomatic, I recaptured one other infected finch, a second-year male (SY M), on 3 Jul with a diseased left eye. When originally banded as a

hatching-year male (HY M) on 21 Aug 2000, this bird was asymptomatic.

In the years 1999-2002 at Jenny Lake, I encountered the following infected Purple Finches:

1999 - An ASY M on 10 May, banded 13 Jun 1998 as an SY M, and recaptured 19 Apr 1999, both times symptom free. The symptoms appeared at Jenny Lake sometime between 19 Apr and 10 May.

2000 - None.

2001 - The ASY F and SY M referred to above.

2002 - An SY M on 26 Jul with symptoms in the right eye.

The following are the numbers of Purple Finches banded and returned (recaptures of birds banded in previous years, some up to nine years of age) and the occurrence rate in percent of infection based on total captures in the same four years:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Banded</u>	<u>Returned</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Occurrence</u>
1999	158	53	211	0.47
2000	137	67	204	0.00
2001	82	29	111	1.80
2002	138	44	182	0.55

Intrigued by recapturing the asymptomatic, previously infected female, I made an inquiry in Sep 2002 on BIRDBAND (BIRDBAND @listserv.arizona.edu), a bird banders' chat line with 400-450 worldwide subscribers, for information on any other U.S. or Canadian occurrences of recaptured asymptomatic birds previously exhibiting the disease.

Three responses produced further useful information: John Miles of Ontario responded that he had recaptured "a couple" of asymptomatic House Finches previously diseased when banded. Andrew K. Davis of Atlanta, GA, stated that "a sizeable proportion of birds (House Finches) that become infected with *Mycoplasma* conjunctivitis can survive the disease" based on his banding studies. The survivors were primarily birds with lesser rather than severe infection. John Gregoire

of Burdett, NY, provided the following information on birds, in each case infected in one eye, using a four-stage scale of symptoms from stage 0 = normal to stage 3 = eye nearly hidden by severe swelling:

House Finch - HY M banded 16 Oct 2000, stage 1; recaptured 1 May 2002, stage 0.

American Goldfinch - ASY M banded 2 May 2001, stage 2.5; recaptured 4 May 2002, stage 0, some scar tissue.

American Goldfinch - HY F banded 24 Sep 2002, stage 1; recaptured 18 Oct 2002, stage 0.

In the last case, recovery from stage 1 occurred some time within the 24-day interval between captures; however, the bird's condition prior to 24 Sep was not known. In all cases reported here, these birds appeared free of symptoms, but in no case was any one of them tested to confirm they were free of the disease; thus, their status as potential carriers was not known.

However, in the case of the Jenny Lake breeding female, there is some hope offered that an infected bird may recover from the symptoms and resume breeding a year later. The presence of the infection is not an automatic death sentence to the afflicted, but their potential carrier status is not known from these observations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank John Miles, Andrew K. Davis, and John Gregoire for their observations noted above, and for permission to use them; and Veronique Connolly, Gary Fowler, M. Kathleen Klimkiewicz, and Charlotte Weston for helpful responses to my requests for information.

LITERATURE CITED

- Dhondt, A.A. 1996a. Finch disease update. *Birdscope* 10(2):4.
- Dhondt, A.A. 1996b. House Finch disease spreads to other species. *Birdscope* 10(4):6.
- Dhondt, A.A. 1997. House Finch disease update. *Birdscope* 11(1):4.
- Dhondt, A.A. 1998. House Finch eye disease heads steadily West. *Birdscope* 12(1):11-12.

Dhondt, A.A., W.M. Hochachka, S.M. Altizer, and B.K. Hartup. 2001. The House Finch hot zone. *Living Bird* 20(4):24-30.

Hartup, B.K. 1999. House Finch disease 1997-1998. *Birdscope* 13(1):7-8 and 12.

Kammermeier, L. 1999. Population dynamics of the House Finch. *Birdscope* 13(2):15.

Robert P. Yunick
1527 Myron Street
Schenectady, NY 12309-4223

Possible Band-Induced Mortality in a Nesting Chimney Swift

The Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*) is subject to a host of dangers associated with its aerial lifestyle, long distance migrations, and dependence on fluctuating insect populations (Cink and Collins 2002). Some mortality is known to occur because of its habits of roosting and nesting in chimneys. Heavy rains during thunderstorms, for example, can loosen nests from the wall of a chimney, causing eggs or young to fall (Dexter 1969); occasionally some individuals die from suffocation as soot is dislodged in a chimney or as gas is produced from fires under roosts (Tyler 1940). This note documents the apparently rare death of a Chimney Swift whose leg band became wedged between the bricks of a chimney.

Workmen discovered a banded dead Chimney Swift (band 110-187134) in a chimney of a farmhouse being remodeled 3.1 km (1.9 mi) west of Baldwin City, Douglas Co., in northeastern Kansas, on 26 Jul 1982. The swift was held fast by its band between two bricks in a vertical crack about 2 m from the chimney top. The workmen indicated the leg (tarsus) was oriented with its toes (distal end) up, which possibly meant the bird was moving upwards when trapped. They saw no nest in the chimney but indicated that several old nests were found in the clean-out at the bottom. I found a single, small (5 cm length) saliva-coated twig cemented to the bird's breast feathers. Since there