

BIRD BANDING DEPARTMENT

Under the Direction of Wm. I. Lyon, Waukegan, Ill.

WANTED—More Bird Banders, anywhere, everywhere. If you cannot be one yourself make it your duty to catch and tag someone else.

The possibilities of Bird Banding are limitless. It is by far the most fascinating sort of bird-study imaginable. The contributions it can make to the scientific knowledge of birds are of inestimable value. The work is within the reach of all, or at least of all who have a suitable location for a trap; it involves but little expense and requires no great experience and little ornithological knowledge.

The results will increase in geometrical progression as the number of bird-banders increase. And we may confidently expect that more people will actively take up the work as its possibilities become better understood.

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NOTES FROM SAULT STE. MARIE

My banding experience this far has been partly good and partly bad, the bad largely due to lack of time.

I have had a flock of Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona vespertina vespertina*) regularly at my feeding station every winter since the winter of 1915-16. Last year the first of the flock arrived August 24, numbered 35 to 40, the last two leaving May 25. For some reason the birds were very scary so I did not try to band any until early in March. I had no success. The birds did not mind the trap at all, perched all over it, pecked all around it and in the entrance, but would not go in. Only one bird got into the trap and that was one day when I was out of town, so it was let go without banding. I have had a drop trap made and hope to have better success when the flock returns.

Dr. Christofferson, my associate in bird work, and myself have again located the Evening Grosbeaks in the eastern part of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in summer. The first reports of the birds being here in summer came to us in 1920. On investigation we found the reports correct. We checked the birds in the same localities last year and again this year. The nearest point to the Soo is about 35 miles to the west.

A colony of Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) nest every year on a low lying island in Munuscong Bay, 25 miles southeast of the Soo.

In 1920 we visited the island, May 29, and found 52 nests, 86 eggs; June 24, 72 nests, 28 young, 148 eggs; 1921, May 28, 105 nests, 234 eggs; June 16, 1922, 15 eggs, all young out of nests; May 28, 39 nests, 75 eggs.

The nests were more scattered than usual, probably because the birds had been disturbed. We found the shells of over two dozen eggs near a camp fire.

As on June 24, 1920, there were young just hatched and eggs in the

nests. Our visit of June 26, last year, was made with the intention of banding the young, but the birds were gone. This year we went earlier, June 18, but again we were too late. However, this visit was not without results. May 28 we found quite an elaborate Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) nest on the top of a washed up stump. Three eggs were in the nest. June 18 the nest contained one young Gull and one egg. We banded the young Gull.

When down on the first trip we saw ten Black Tern (*Hydrochelidon nigra surinamensis*) flying. Looked for nests but there were none. June 18 we located five nests, all on floating mats of reeds and very crude affairs, at most but the pulling together of a few pieces of reed.

1 nest, 2 young and 1 egg

2 nests, 3 eggs

2 nests, 2 eggs

We also found two nests, Sora Rail (*Porzana carolina*). One with one egg, the other with ten.

A Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) nest with five eggs.

Nine Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phœniceus phœniceus*) nests. One with two young, two with four eggs, two with three eggs, one with two eggs, one with one egg, and two just completed with no eggs.

Two pairs of Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) and a pair of American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) were around and nesting, but we could not locate the nests.

We also saw three Red-backed Sandpipers (*Pelidna alpina sakhalina*), the first we have seen in this locality for over twenty years.

A pair of Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*) were flying around the island May 28 and 29, but had evidently proceeded on their journey north. They were not around June 18.

My list of birds banded thus far this year is as follows:

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)—One young just out of nest.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)—One fledgling.

Killdeer (*Oxyechus vociferus*)—One young.

Pine Siskin (*Spinus pinus*)—Three, two old and one young.

White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*)—Eight.

Slate-colored Junco (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*)—Thirteen.

Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia melodia*)—Fifteen.

Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus purpureus*)—One hundred and eighteen.

One repeat on ten Purple Finch, two Song Sparrows, one Slate-colored Junco, one White-throated Sparrow.

Two repeats on six Purple Finch and one Song Sparrow.

Three repeats on two Purple Finch.

I would have done better but ran out of bands May 4 just as the White-throated Sparrow migration was well under way, and did not get a new supply until June 25. I again ran out July 18, but started again July 22, cutting down No. 3 bands, which I find work quite satisfactorily. I fortunately had a supply of the No. 3 on hand, gotten in expectation of banding the young Common Tern.

Running out of bands had one advantage. For four or five days after I ran out, May 4, banded Purple Finch were in and out of my win-

dow feeding box regularly. I then noticed there were no banded birds coming in to feed, nor have I since had a single repeat on any of these numbers. Evidently the first Purple Finch to arrive moved on and were not the ones here through the summer and nesting

I have trapped and killed a large number of English Sparrows, kept tab for four weeks, June 21 to July 19, number 331. They were almost all young birds and females; got only three old ones in the lot.

A Purple Finch acts very differently from an English Sparrow when trapped. The Sparrow has one eye on you and the other is looking for a means of escape. If in the outer part of trap as you approach it almost at once finds the hole and is in the back end of the trap. A Purple Finch in the outer part of trap is so busy keeping it's eyes on you that it never sees the hole and sometimes it is almost impossible to get it to go through. In fact, if there is only one Finch in the outer part, I very often lift the trap and catch it in my hand. An English Sparrow would be out almost the moment you lifted the edge of the trap from the ground. Another difference I noted is that a Finch keeps flying back and forth, particularly around the top half of the trap, which is not protected with fine mesh screen, and, if in the trap any length of time, frequently knocks the skin off above the bill until the base of the upper bill is raw. I have yet to find an English Sparrow with a raw or bloody bill.

Usually I band morning and evening, as I seldom get home for lunch. Although I always open the back door of each trap, when I leave in the morning, I frequently find Purple Finch in the traps when I return. They get in the outer compartment, but do not find their way through the hole to the rear where the door is open.

If my supply of bands doesn't run out again I hope to do better for the balance of the year than I have done thus far.

The Juncos and White-throats always go through in force, both spring and fall, and I have always had large flocks call as they are passing through, in addition to those that nest in this locality.

I am running two traps, one a regular bander's trap with openings large enough to admit birds the size of the Evening Grosbeak. The other a regular Sparrow trap with fine mesh screen around the lower half. When I found the Purple Finch had so much trouble in finding the hole into the back compartment, particularly of this trap, I took it to a tin shop and had the hole enlarged, also the entrance, as I found, except the English Sparrow, I got more birds in the bander's trap than in the Sparrow trap.

Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

M. J. MAGEE.

July 28, 1922.

NOTE.—We banded about twenty-five Purple Finch at Waukegan just before they went north. We also were interested in their fighting ability. They were so ready to fight, in fact, that they would keep it up after we had opened our hand, apparently more interested in fighting than in escaping, and frequently when one secured a good hold on our finger he could be lifted up clear of the hand, where it would hang quite an instant, before it would realize it was free. We tried to obtain a picture of one in that position but did not succeed.

Sault Ste. Marie and Waukegan Purple Finch records show the need of more banders along the lake shore between these stations, so that there would be a chance for concentrated work on this species. If you know of any bird workers anywhere on the shores of Lake Michigan try to interest them in helping this district get started.

Dr. Landsborough Thompson's article in the July, 1921, "Ibis" criticized the "promiscuous ringing" method of placing bands, saying that the work would be more valuable if the various banders would concentrate all their efforts on a few especially worthwhile species and would not band all birds.

This article brought forth a great deal of protest in the March, 1922, "British Birds." The protests pointed out that the "promiscuous ringing" method, which is the method used in the United States, creates more interest among the collaborators and is consequently responsible for the placing of a larger number of bands than would be placed under any other system.

The same issue gives the total results of their "marking scheme," both for the year of 1921 and for the whole period of their existence, 1909 to 1921. The 1921 summary shows a total of 8997 rings (bands) placed, while the grand total is 105,435. Mr. A. Mayall heads the list for 1921 with a record of 1408, while two close seconds are credited with over 1000 apiece.

Mr. L. R. Talbot's article in the July, 1922, "Auk" proves how the contagious effect of Bird Banding is liable to act on a person. He was changed from a novice to a veteran in less than thirty days and now he is convicted for life.

Mr. S. Prentiss Baldwin was unable to go to his usual trapping station at Thomasville, Ga., this year, so Mr. Talbot went there to carry on that very important work. In thirty days he had placed 313 bands, taken 43 returns, and including repeats, had handled a total of 1804 birds, covering seventeen species, as follows: 258 Chipping Sparrows, 12 Cardinals, 7 White-throated Sparrows, 5 Juncos, 5 White-eyed Towhees, 4 Blue Jays, 4 Florida Blue Jays, 4 Brown Thrashers, 2 Field Sparrows, 2 Towhees, 2 Red-bellied Woodpeckers, 1 Mourning Dove, 1 Hermit Thrush, 1 Myrtle Warbler, 1 Palm Warbler, 1 Song Sparrow. Returns, 29 Chipping Sparrows, 5 Brown Thrashers, 4 Cardinals, 3 White-throated Sparrows, 1 Blue Jay and 1 Myrtle Warbler.

Of the return records, by far the most interesting and most important is that of a Brown Thrasher banded by Mr. Baldwin in 1915, and taken again in 1916, 1917, 1920, 1921 and in 1922.

The "Auk" of July, 1922, has an interesting article by F. C. Lincoln on "Trapping Ducks for Banding Purposes," covering the work of Mr. H. S. Osler of Toronto, in his activities on Lake Scugog, which is about sixteen miles north of Lake Ontario.

During the autumns of 1920 and 1921 Mr. Osler trapped 600 ducks, covering four species, from which there have been some interesting returns.

Probably the most interesting case among Mr. Osler's duck records is that of a Blue-winged Teal, No. 4576. This little duck was banded on September 24 in company with another of its own kind and eight or ten Black Ducks. Two months and seven days later it was killed by a hunter in the Caroni Swamp, near Port of Spain, Island of Trinidad. The flight made by the bird must have been close to 3,000 miles.

For many years it had been known that some of the Blue-winged Teals and certain other ducks that breed in North America wintered in South America. The presence of this species on the Island of Trinidad had been particularly noted, but there had been no information available to show from what part of the northern continent the birds came.

The record of this individual is, therefore, of decided interest and value. The band was returned to the U. S. Biological Survey by the American Consul through the State Department.

Trapping during the nesting season has again demonstrated the efficiency of the flat traps, and it brings to mind some of the early work with them at Waukegan, Illinois. The first all-wire trap was made about twelve inches high and almost at once the birds began to injure their heads by jumping up against the wire. The trap was, therefore, cut down to four inches, a height which proved to be just right, and which is still used in all our traps.

A good trapper is always changing or renewing his bait, for the same rule applies to birds as to animals, and one must be constantly on the watch to keep the bait or lure tempting.

In the case of birds you must frequently scrape the ground clean under the traps and begin anew. We clean the ground or floors at least once a week, using a sharp hoe and a large knife, cutting all the grass very short near the trap.

It is necessary to clean oftener in rainy seasons, as the bread and crackers sour, the fruits decay, and the grains and seeds sprout closely together and become sour and moldy.

Another trapping rule is to change the kind of bait. Change from white bread to graham crackers to corn bread well sweetened. In winter fried cakes are very good, chickadees being fond of them.

Sunflower seeds bring many birds in fall and winter, but our summer birds are not fond of them, and they sprout and sour quickly.

In fall cut pears are good, but should be renewed daily.

Mulberries are very good in season.

Cranberries are bright and attractive and keep well in cold weather, making a very good winter bait.

Coral berries or Indian currants make a good bait in winter also. They worked especially well for us in attracting Purple Finch.

The principle bait after all, however, is Persistence and constant watchfulness.

BIRD-BANDING ON BONAVENTURE ISLAND

As a member of an expedition from the Milwaukee Public Museum the writer spent the month of July, 1922, on Bonaventure Island, one of the Canadian Government's great Bird Sanctuaries, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Very little time was available for bird banding, but a short account of what was done and of the possibilities of this work here may prove of interest.

Gannets and Murres nest by the thousands on the great cliffs of this island, on ledges that may be easily reached by the use of ropes from above. Razorbill Auks, Puffins, Black Guillemots, Herring Gulls and Kittiwakes also occur in large numbers as well.

The writer placed over two hundred bands on young Gannets, only those with the tarsus as large or larger than in the adult being banded. The large young, though still in the nest and covered with down, have large fleshy legs, considerably larger than their parents. In such cases the bands should fit snugly so that they will not be too loose when the bird becomes adult.

The following methods were found the quickest and most satisfactory. Fifty of the large size Flat-strip bands were cut to approximately the proper length and the numbers entered in a small note-book. Then they were shaped around the index finger and opened to allow them to slip on readily. Filling convenient pockets with the prepared bands and equipped with sharp-nosed pliers and small cutters we are ready to start work.

It may be stated right here that great care and proper judgment must be used to prevent the young Gannets falling off the ledges. Choosing ledges of medium width and working along them from the outside rather than along the rock, moving deliberately and spending no more time in one spot than is absolutely necessary to properly adjust the band, scores may be banded without a single one coming to grief.

Most of the young stick to the nest, prepared for battle and their sharp, powerful beaks inflict many scratches and wounds on the hands. Some might prefer to use gloves, but the bands can be fitted faster and more accurately with the bare hands. Making a feint with the foot to attract the victim's attention he is quickly grasped by the back of the head and thrust between the legs, head to the rear. The band is now quickly adjusted and the bird released almost before he has had time to realize what has happened. True, he has pecked desperately at the seat of the bander's trousers, and perhaps coughed up a mackerel or two meanwhile, but no damage is done. The bander should possess a strong stomach and when the ledges are slippery after a rain, be dressed in oil-skins from head to foot. After the day's work is done the accumulation of red clay, guano, and half digested fish can be washed off. Occasionally, as one works along the ledge, an adult refuses to desert her offspring, when she also may be put through the mill, care being used to avoid her dangerous bill.

Adult Murres and Gannets can be netted easily with an ordinary long-handled net and in this way the most valuable work could be done.

In fact the banding possibilities in such a colony are almost endless, but the work should only be entrusted to persons having the interest of the birds at heart. Adults must not be kept from their young more than a few minutes at a time, and no banding should be attempted on cold, wet days. Unnecessary walking too and fro on the ledges should also be avoided.

William Duval, descendant of the original owner of the Island, is Honorary Game Warden, representing the Government on the Sanctuary. He is well informed as to the proper approaches to all ledges where the various species nest and may be secured as guide by visiting Ornithologists and bird lovers. Recently Mr. Duval has taken up bird banding and expects to carry on the work there and watch for returns. Birds wearing bands can subsequently be captured and examined. This should be especially true of the Gannets as their bands could be noticed as they stand on the ledges.

Much can be learned by banding in these great sea bird colonies. Whether they nest on the same ledges year after year, how great an age they attain, how far they roam in winter, and whether they mate for life, are a few of the things to be learned. And who knows? perhaps the status of the Ringed Murre, which occurs in fair numbers here, may finally be cleared up in this manner.

Anyone desiring to band birds in Canada should first communicate with the Dominion Parks Branch, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, Canada, in regard to permits. Mr. Hoyes Lloyd, who is charged with the enforcement of the Migratory Bird Treaty there, is an enthusiastic bird bander, and has placed many bands in Ottawa and vicinity this past summer.

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