

BIRD BANDING NEWS

Conducted by Wm. I. Lyon

BANDING DUCKS AT SCOBEY LAKE, MISSOURI

BY T. E. MUSSELMAN

Ever since my memorable spring of bird banding on Mr. Baldwin's plantation at Thomasville, Georgia, sportsmen have brought me occasional aluminum bands taken from ducks which have been shot along the Mississippi River. In every case I have written to the Biological Survey at Washington and they have always sent back interesting records of when the duck was banded, and by whom. This information I in turn have given to the hunters. It was so fascinating that



One leaf of a clover trap. Three Mallards are in the air and a dozen are on the water wondering what it's all about. Notice slender iron rods used to keep up the side netting.

I decided that the banding of ducks must be added to my bird banding activities.

As though it were in answer to my mental wish, Mr. Neal Monroe, a widely known hunter and sportsman of Quincy, approached me during the early spring of 1924 and asked why we could not maintain a spring duck banding station at his lodge, located at Scobey Lake, on the Charitan River, eighteen miles north of Kirksville, Mo. Immediate preparations were made, plans for duck traps and other information were received from the Biological Survey, and on March 9, after traveling nine miles in a rickety old buggy through country roads hub deep in mud, we finally arrived at the cabin.

The lake is fifty or sixty acres in area bordered by a similar acreage of swamp heavily grown with smart weeds, reeds, lilies, and other vegetable food

generally acceptable to wild fowl. An old decoy pen was quickly converted into a duck trap. A large "V" of chicken wire led to the entrance which was guarded by a drop gate released by wire from a blind some fifty yards away. Much corn and some live duck decoys were distributed about the trap, but I cannot say that our first year of duck trapping was very successful. We caught some Mallards, a few Black Ducks, and several Pintails. However our mediocre success was due to several things which the average amateur must try hard to avoid. First, the trap was too large, which made it almost impossible to catch the ducks once they were inside. Second, the side walls of chicken wire were not pegged down securely enough, so that nearly one-half of the first catch of fifteen or twenty birds escaped under the netting. Third, it was necessary for us to sit constantly in the blind in order to catch our birds, and once a few had been trapped, others could not enter the door until the birds within had been captured and the trap reset. Fourth, rain every day kept the corn fields filled with little puddles to which the ducks travelled, returning only at night to rest and feed on the lake and in the reeds. I might say that we secured more practical experience than ducks in the six days of that eventful week.

The installation of a radio in the club house gave us information concerning the weather conditions and also furnished amusement and entertainment during the evening hours.

On March 20, 1925, the second annual expedition started operating at Scobey, a week later however than in 1924. The first trap was shaped like a three-leaf clover, and was located across the lake in a small swampy bayou surrounded by four or five small willow trees. The entrance was constructed at the junction of two of the clover leaves of the trap, and was built by running two iron rods through the mesh of the wire down into the mud, leaving an entrance hole about eight inches across. The flexible ends of the wire netting extended four or five inches beyond the thin iron uprights. These loose pieces opened very easily to the ducks seeking entrance but tended to close as they came against them from the opposite sides in seeking an outlet. A three-foot strand of chicken wire about thirty feet long was stretched directly up to the entrance, thus causing the ducks to swim towards the trap in hunting the abundant food supply which was scattered in the mud and water about the trap entrance. Several decoys were staked out in front of the trap and one-half dozen hen Mallard decoys were released within.

Trap number two was a heart-shaped trap and was located at the opposite end of the lake among some large willow trees where the smart weed was very dense. A muskrat had dug a path six feet wide through this growth and had a good-sized pond about its house. We put our trap around the muskrat home which served as a resting place for our decoys and the clear water gave us ample room within for any wild birds which might be captured.

The third trap was a heart-shaped trap and was placed on a shoal in the middle of the lake. Long wire leaders ran well out into the water and rushes. The purpose of this trap was to catch scaup ducks and mud hens. All these traps were promptly set and heavily baited.

In 1924 from five to ten thousand ducks were using the different lakes in this vicinity. In 1925 probably not more than two thousand were present so that we did not expect a very large catch. Imagine our surprise and pleasure on the

first morning in trap No. 1 to find no fewer than twenty-five birds, our catch being largely Mallard drakes. About six or eight of these birds escaped by finding holes which our first day's haste had not discovered. The trap was repaired and rebaited and we went to the second one where we found a male Canvas-back and a drake Mallard. In the trap in the middle of the lake we saw two dark ducks struggling to escape. Both dived as we approached. When captured they proved to be a female Scaup Duck and a male Baldpate. Such was the start of the most enjoyable week of banding I have ever experienced.

South winds brought in many flocks of smaller ducks which increased our catch of Bluebills and teal. The capturing of an entire flock of Green-winged Teal was interesting. These little fellows were put in a burlap lined crate with a slat top. Imagine the helpless surprise of the two operators when they



One of my collecting cages, with burlap top, and several Mallards ready for banding. The writer is banding a duck. Notice that the duck's head is held between the knees. I don't advise bare arms as the ducks struggle to escape and in so doing scratch the arms badly. As the water is icy and the operator is exposed several hours daily it is well to have a big bottle of skin lotion to soothe the chapped surfaces. Immediately after banding and recording of the duck the bird is liberated.

looked from the inside of the duck trap, to see teal crawling through slats in the top of one of our crates which was located in our flat boat outside the netting of the trap. Some of the little fellows escaped, but a good portion of them were banded before they finally took to the air.

After the ducks once found food about these traps, string after string would drop in to get the luscious corn. They would circle over while we were changing decoys and putting out bait, showing very little fear. The Canvas-back was caught several times at trap No. 2, while one hen and a drake Mallard repeated in trap No. 1.

After the first day, practically no ducks escaped through the traps. We cut many four-foot saplings on which we nailed ten-penny nails at an angle. These were pushed down into the mud, the nail over-lapping the guide wire at the lower edge of the netting.

It was with regret that we had to leave the station just as the Wood Ducks and Blue-winged Teal were beginning to appear but we hope to extend our trapping long enough in 1926 to catch a large number of these. Our 1925 work was a great success; the first return came when the Survey sent word that hen Mallard No. 300550 had been accidentally caught in a rat trap at Shell Lake, Saskatchewan, Canada, by Mr. Arnold Somner on April 24, 1925. In 1926 we shall start earlier, as in this vicinity the week of March 12 to 20 should mark the height of migration of the larger ducks.

To anyone who expects to band ducks, I would advise that you follow the government descriptions and specifications for the heart-shaped trap. Once at the swamp, first find where the ducks are feeding. Bait for several days if possible before actual trapping is attempted. If possible secure a rubber wading suit (trout fishing suit) which extends up to your shoulders. Over this wear some water-proof coat. This will prevent your getting wet when, in the eagerness of capturing a duck, you slip and fall. Scaup Ducks and Coots are particularly hard to catch even when cornered in one of the "leaves of the clover". I shall use a heavy dip net in 1926 which will prevent many a wet arm in the chilling water and assure a quick capture of the bird.

The following additional details for making a clover-leaf trap may be inserted here. The clover-leaf trap is almost identical with the heart-shaped trap described in the Government Bulletin. I first used it because it fitted a small swampy inlet which mallards were using, and I found that having the additional corners in which the ducks could congregate made their escape more difficult, and their catch easier. Select any small inlet off a swampy lake, preferably where there are willow trees which can be bent over. I struck four sticks into the mud in the form of a square, probably four feet apart. Out from these I placed several other poles which I pounded into the mud, forming a crude four-leaf clover. Around these posts I stretched common chicken netting, the strands being about four feet in height. This wire must extend into the mud as all varieties of ducks will dive and swim under water when they find they cannot escape through the air. I found it necessary to cut about thirty saplings three feet long and an inch in diameter, half way up in which I drove a nail at an angle. These I pushed into the mud letting the nail overlap the bottom strand of wire, thus forcing the wire far down into the mud. No matter how severe the attack of a dozen or more wild ducks, they are unable to force an opening below. One may build the trap around a small willow tree, pull down the limbs, and stretch the top netting over the branches. After this, I bind the edges of the top netting to the side netting with flexible wire, thus preventing the ducks which fly from forcing their way out at this junction. The entrance to the trap is made between two of the "leaves" of the trap, where I leave an opening about eight inches wide. This is made by weaving two six-foot iron rods, about the diameter of a finger, through the ends of the chicken wiring and these are forced down into the mud. I allowed about five or six inches of wire to extend inward. This is very flexible and does not keep the ducks from swimming in. But once they are on the inside

and while trying to escape by swimming around the edges, the duck's weight causes the entrance to be closed until the duck is past, when it springs back to its original position. Scatter feed in front of the trap for several days before actually closing the entrance. Leave decoys out with the feed for a day or two until the wild ducks learn to come there for food. On the day when one is actually ready to begin operations stretch a strand of chicken netting from well out into the water directly up to within a foot or two of the mouth of the trap. Scatter feed heavily along this strand of netting and release four or five hen decoys inside the trap. A string of two or three decoys outside is also valuable for the first day or two. I always nail a board to a large stick and force this into the mud inside the trap until the board is just above the water. This affords my decoys a platform on which to rest and dry. I scatter a bucket of shelled corn at each trap morning and evening, and it is an unusual thing to go to a trap without finding from five to twenty ducks within. For the 1926 season I advise the week of March 9 to 17 for the big flight of Mallards, Black Ducks, and Pintails. The following week will supply fewer Mallards, with additional Blue-bills, Green-winged Teal, and a variety of other small ducks, to say nothing of the multitude of Coots. By carefully following this description I believe anyone who is willing to put the effort into the work, and who has a location that is used by spring migratory ducks can be of fine service to the Biological Survey.

Altogether we banded 122 ducks. This number included one hundred and five Mallards; six Green-winged Teal; five Scaups; two Black Ducks; and one each of Pintail, Canvas-back, Baldpate, and Coot.

You will undoubtedly be like the hunter who dropped in on me just last spring. When he saw a trap filled with flapping, quacking ducks and was allowed to get inside to capture them, he saw the Mallards dive and while trying to capture them he sat down in the cold water and mud only to come up with two fine birds under his arms. He exploded, "Golly, hunting hasn't anything on this." If you once get started, I can assure you that you will find it as interesting as the actual shooting itself. I expect to band ducks every spring as long as I live and I believe those men who were associated with me, have come to a similar determination. If you are in a part of the country where it is possible to band ducks, I want to encourage your starting this sport next spring as it will furnish you with one of the best of modern day entertainments.

QUINCY, ILLINOIS.

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

MYSTERY BANDS NUMBERS 1 AND 2—SEASON 1925.—During the course of each shooting season the Biological Survey usually receives a few reports of ducks and other birds carrying bands of unknown origin. It is believed that most of these birds have escaped either from a game farm or from a gun club where they have been kept as decoys. There is always the possibility that if the full facts were known, the record might be of service in a possible application to problems of migration that are being studied. It therefore seems desirable to report each such case in ornithological and sporting journals in the hope that the person who attached the band will write to the Bureau and supply the date and place of banding.

The first case of this nature reported during the present season was addressed to Mr. S. Prentiss Baldwin, at Cleveland, Ohio, and forwarded by him to the Biological Survey. The letter states that a duck bearing a band marked B 3776 NURP was shot at Quill Lake, Saskatchewan, during the spring of 1925.

The second case relates to a Blue-winged Teal killed on Fox Lake near Waukegan, Illinois, on October 24, 1924 (reported under date of October 22, 1925.) This bird carried a band inscribed (20) AM-6827.

It will be appreciated if anyone having knowledge of the origin of these bands will communicate with the Biological Survey.—FREDERICK C. LINCOLN, *Biological Survey, Washington, D. C.*

THE TRAP HABIT.—A Song Sparrow with the trap habit highly developed has been an interesting feature at the Tanager Hill Station (Minneapolis) this year. This sparrow was banded August 19, 1923, with band No. 77800, and was not seen again that year. In 1924 he returned on July 25, and repeated once that day, and once on the 26th, 27th, and 29th, when he disappeared.

On April 14, 1925, he returned again. He repeated on the 16th, and from that date until the end of the month was in the traps fifty-five times, averaging over three times a day. In May he kept up this average repeating 106 times. During the first four days in June he was in the traps fourteen times. His failure to appear again in June led us to believe that he had met with disaster, but on July 8 he was back again, still an addict to the trap habit; for during ten days he was trapped forty-seven times. On the 17th we carried him half a mile from the Station and released him, but in twenty minutes he was back in the trap from which he was taken. On the 18th he repeated six times and on the 19th twice, when we carried him off again; this time increasing the distance to two miles.

This is the last we have seen of 77800, the record breaker for the year, having been released from the traps 220 times between April 16 and July 19.—MRS. MARIE A. COMMONS, *Minneapolis, Minn.*

A HUMMINGBIRD IN THE TRAP.—September 24, 1925, produced an unusual thrill in the bird banding events, when a Ruby-throated Hummingbird was discovered in a new trap. This trap had been made in the shape of a heart, using one-half inch square mesh netting on the sides and three-fourth inch woven netting on the top and bottom. There didn't seem to be a possible chance to capture it, as it appeared that it could easily fly through the three-fourth inch mesh on the top, if not the half-inch mesh on the sides. By watching it closely, it was noticed that it could not grasp the upper wires and climb through. In other words its wings were made for straight-forward work and the feet not for upside down climbing, and he apparently could not escape even through such a large mesh. The trap had been baited with ripe pears in an effort to catch thrushes, and the pears had attracted the Hummingbird.

After considerable maneuvering the trap was turned upside down, the door then being at the top, and the Hummingbird was chased into an old cage that was nearby and the cage was closed with a hat and rushed to the house. It was necessary to file a number one band down until it was just barely possible to read the number and address, reducing it to the lowest possible limit. Then it was twice as large as needed; but by lapping it and flattening it out a little it was placed upon the tiny leg so it did not pinch and could not come off, and

when it was released it flew quickly out of sight. At the time the creature flew away the thought arose in regard to the weight of the band, as these little birds are said to cross the Gulf of Mexico in a single flight; and the question arose whether even the tiny amount of weight that the aluminum band would add would prove too much to be carried such a great distance. We hope not. We hope that it will be found somewhere in the winter home, and then return again to us another year. The thrill of having really trapped and banded a Hummingbird will remain long in our memories.—W. I. L.

RECORD WORK.—M. J. Magee, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, has what we believe to be the world's record in handling a single species of bird. He began trapping the Purple Finch in 1921, getting nine that season. In 1922 he banded two hundred and fifty-four; in 1923, one thousand and ninety-two; in 1924, one thousand and forty-three; and in 1925, to November 1, he has trapped one thousand five hundred and nine, making a grand total of three thousand nine hundred and seven Purple Finches. This, we are sure, is the largest total of systematic trapping of one species on record. All of this work is done within practically fifty feet of his dining room window, under some apple trees that are in the yard. There is a pipe of running water, and feed, always present under the apple trees that are near the house. The results of the fruit, and these trees bear, is positive proof of the value of the Purple Finch. Out of the sixteen bushels of apples, from two trees, there were but three wormy ones, which shows that the birds have well repaid for the food that has been given to them.

Dr. K. Christofferson, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, deserves a great deal of credit for the careful work of catching and banding the Spotted Sandpipers on the Sault River. He has a record of having banded seventy-seven young sandpipers this year, besides many other birds.—W. I. L.

FRACTURED BONES OF BIRDS ARE PROTECTED BY NATURE.—On November 4, 1925, a Hermit Thrush was trapped, which was quite a little behind the regular migration schedule at Waukegan, Illinois. On examining the bird, it was observed that the right leg had been broken just above the foot. Apparently the blood from the wound had stuck onto the feathers while the bird was resting on the ground to ease the foot, and had dried in that position thus holding the foot against the body and forming a natural splint. The leg had healed and even though it was slightly bent, it was again ready for use.

While bird-banding, we have discovered a number of healed fractures showing that birds have a way of caring for themselves in a case of emergency; and there is a good possibility that the blood on the feathers has formed many natural splints.—W. I. L.

During 1924, I was surprised to see a peculiar looking fly traveling at a high rate of speed through the feathers of a White-throated Sparrow. I captured the fly and gave it a slight pinch to kill it, and upon opening my finger it flew away. On a second White-throated Sparrow I discovered another. This time I pinched it very hard, and again upon opening my hand found that I had not injured it in the least, and it flew away as soon as released. A little later I captured one in a bottle. I believe there were, all told, about eight or ten of this fly-louse observed on the White-throated Sparrow in 1924. So far this year there have been seven observed. I have made a careful search of the feathers of all other birds

without being able to find a similar insect on any species except the White-throated Sparrow.—W. I. L.

The trappers who live in the north, where the ground freezes should be careful to select ground that has a little slope for a trap position, so that it will drain readily in the thawing season in the spring. If there is only a slight slope, it is well to trench all around the trap so as to keep the trap dry.

During the winter months, it has been found that an extra amount of sunflower seed is very beneficial in the bait.—W. I. L.

On July 13, 1924, at Waukegan, Ill., a Woodpecker was noticed working along some large trees. It suddenly flew out and caught a white butterfly, but before it could get to its perch, a Wood Pewee dashed up and took it away from the Woodpecker, while it was in the air. The Woodpecker returned to its former perch and screeched loudly but did not follow the smaller bird which had robbed it.—W. I. L.

Mr. Lyon writes to the Editor that on November 1 he banded his 2500th bird for the current year; it makes his grand total over 9000.

NOTICE

These traps are operated in co-operation with the Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture. The birds caught are marked with aluminum bands and are released unharmed. All persons are requested not to interfere with equipment of this Station.

U. S. BIOLOGICAL SURVEY.

The notice printed above is copied from the U. S. Biological Survey's *Bird Banding Notes*, No. 16, October 13, 1925. THE WILSON BULLETIN has arranged with its printers to make this notice available to bird banders as a printed placard, about 11x14 inches. These placards are made of a good quality of cardboard, and are given an albumen coating to make them semi-waterproof. They will be furnished at 27 cents each, and \$1.40 per six, postpaid. All orders should be addressed to

VERSTEGEN PRINTING CO., *Sioux City, Iowa.*

Cash must accompany all orders, since the item is too small for an account.

If our workers will assist us we will be glad to devote this department now and then to special bird groups. For instance, we may devote an early issue to the banding work on the gulls and terns; another issue to reports on the Chimney Swift. If you have done anything with either of these groups, please send your material in for publication. We want especially to know about the methods used. We would be glad to have either one of these groups ready for the next March issue.—Ed.

NOTES HERE AND THERE

Conducted by the Secretary

The Forty-third Stated Meeting of The American Ornithologists' Union met in New York City, November 10-12, 1925. All the public meetings were held in the halls of the American Museum of Natural History. The Union's headquarters was the Sherman Square Hotel.