

# EBBA NEWS

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A FRIENDLY REPORT ISSUED MONTHLY TO THE MEMBERS OF THE EASTERN BIRD BANDING ASSN.

"Let Us Band Together" Reaching Over 385 Banders Every Month

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## JACK MINER 1865-1944

Jack Miner, known intimately by many thousands of ducks and geese and by thousands of persons who visited his sanctuary at Kingsville, Ontario, died November 3, 1944. Jack Miner was the pioneer bird bander of America. He established the first complete record of a banded bird, anywhere, with dates and places of banding and of final report. The first duck Jack Miner tagged was banded at Kingsville in August, 1909 and was shot by Dr. W. E. Bray at Anderson, N. C. in January, 1910.

The work of the Jack Miner Migratory Bird Foundation will be carried on by Jack Miner's widow and 3 sons, but the foundation is in urgent need of funds to enable it to continue. The foundation had a deficit of about \$10,000.00 in 1944. Any member wishing to contribute to this very worthy cause should write to Mrs. Jack Miner in care of the Foundation at Kingsville, for full details. Possibly there are some who would like to contribute, but hesitate to do so, because they feel their contribution would be insignificant. In line with this thought, it would be a nice gesture, if some interested member of EBBA would volunteer to act as treasurer for such a fund from our membership. Anyone then wishing to donate to this foundation could then send whatever they desired, no matter how small, to this person, who could pass along the funds to the foundation in a lump sum, with or without a list of the original donors as the donors themselves might suggest.

As one member writes, "There are going to be a lot less birds in America if this sanctuary has to be abandoned."

## OHIO STARLING RECOVERIES

Dr. Lawrence E. Hicks of Ohio Wildlife Research Station, Ohio State University, has submitted a concise report on the Starlings banded by him at Columbus, Ohio which is as follows: Starlings handled, 1927-1944, 83,000. Starlings banded, 1927-1937, 34,000 (probably all dead now.) 31.6% were retaken after banding; 48.4% were never heard from again; 1.3% were out-of-state recoveries; 1.2% were Ohio recoveries; 14% were returns within 25 miles of where banded; 14.9% were repeats; 2% of recoveries exceeded 40 months after banding and 5.35% of the Starlings handled had one or more abnormalities.

| <u>Date Banded</u> | <u>Date Recovered</u> | <u>Elapsed Time<br/>In Months</u> | <u>Where<br/>Recovered</u> |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 3-6-33             | 2-16-38               | 59                                | Connellsville, Pa.         |
| 12-15-33           | 5-14-38               | 54                                | St. Catherine, Ont.        |
| 1-10-29            | 3-13-33               | 50                                | Canl Winchester, O.        |
| 2-18-30            | 12-25-33              | 46                                | Owen Sound, Ont.           |

Figuring On Your Income Tax Return?

Remember EBBA dues and other incidental expenses connected with bird banding are deductible.

"THOSE 'HARD TO TELL' BIRDS"  
(First Discussion)

Last November, when EBBA announced the suggestion of Jesse V. Miller, of New Hyde Park, N. Y., to devote an entire issue to the identity of "bird puzzles" often taken in a bander's trap, the idea seemed very sound. It is still just as sound. Such an issue is planned for the Fall of this year. However, EBBA has received so much comment and discussion already, and since a better solution to some of the puzzles maybe brought out by continuing such a discussion, EBBA jumps ahead of the schedule and submits notes so far received.

Beecher S. Bowditch of Demarest, N. J. writes: "Re 'Those 'Hard to Tell' Birds": Positive identification is, of course, a "MUST" for the bander. If he can gain access to such collections of skins as those in the American Museum of Natural History in New York, a careful study of seasonal plumages is without question of greatest benefit.

"Sexing in banding records is desirable, where accuracy can be assured. It does not seem to me, however, to be so vital as to justify too great expenditure of time and effort on the part of over-taxed banders. Guess work is worse than valueless.

"Some claims have been made on behalf of sex identification of Song Sparrows, but I'm skeptical of their reliability. Anyone who has had considerable experience with Juncos about the nest must have noted that the less colored bird of the pair, obviously the female, is still of a plumage which seen without comparison would be easily considered a male. In fact, less strongly colored adult males would be doubtless no brighter than such female plumage as referred to. When you get the fall migration with its infinite shades of color, how can you definitely decide the sex of many of your Juncos?

"The difficulty in sexing White-throated Sparrows in fall migration is even greater. In such cases it seems definitely the best practice to mark the record "sex?", showing that sex is not omitted through carelessness, but because of inability to state it with accuracy.

"Age records, too, depend for their value absolutely on assurance of correctness. Any element of doubt may render such records definitely misleading. Occasionally there are characters that are very obvious and dependable, such, as the color of iris in Brown Thrashers. Doubtless most banders are familiar with the fact that in developing young Thrashers, the iris remains hazel well after the plumage is practically indistinguishable from that of adults. Young Warblers, Sparrows and many others are obviously birds of the year until they depart on their migrations. Plumage as well as bill difference will distinguish juvenile Field and Chipping Sparrows."

Prof. O. A. Stevens of Fargo, N. D. writes: "I'm all in favor of your section on "what'sit", but I hope you flavor it with plenty of caution about "are you sure of 'em and how?" Seems to me, to be a lot of people who think they know sexes, etc., --- So far as I know, no one has ever called attention to the fact that our best illustration of Harris's Sparrow (Bird Lore 15:286) has the immature mislabeled "adult female." I think some of my good friends conscientiously call theirs, females. Sutton reported he could not tell them on the nesting ground. The same error appears on the plate for the Golden-crowned Sparrow."

With "Caution" lights blazing in every direction, comment arrives from another source as follows: "Tut, tut and softly please! "Ye Ed's" Vol. 7 No. 11 states incorrectly that Raymond Fuller of Winterton has worked out data on sex and age by numbering tail feathers of Junco captures, (or words almost the same.) NO ... As you remember from Dr. Wood's brief data, (from dissection I assume) the

Continued: ---

number of white rectrices did not always prove sex. I'm not going to do any dissecting, so the only way I could ever check on my sex guesses would be through recaptures of these birds a year later. I believe, (can't prove it) that with adults, 3 marked (white) feathers (on each side of tail) are males. Confusion comes with younger birds .... Tell your members to listen to the young Swamp Sparrow note in traps as a sure mark of identification in Fall. The idea on November Page 1 is excellent! Let's do it." (Editor's note: While Dr. Wood didn't disagree with Mr. Fuller on his Junco clues, he did wave a caution lantern around a bit. It is interesting to include a comment from a more recent letter from Dr. Wood:

"As for Juncos, I have some real stuff, according to Munro, --- Real actual undebatable proof that the white in their tails increases with age. --- not published yet."

"It would seem that by studying the tails of this species we are on the trail of some clue to the puzzle of either sex or age.

Edwin A. Mason of the Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, Easthampton, Mass. joins the round table of discussion with: "EBBA's project to gather together items which would help banders to determine age and sex is an excellent one. I should have gotten around to thinking about the matter before. However, I will make a small contribution at this time from my notes on the Swamp Sparrow in juvenile plumage, and how to differentiate between it and a Song Sparrow juvenile.

"The Swamp Sparrow in the juvenile plumage can be differentiated from juvenile Song Sparrows by the yellow skin at the corners of the mouth. In the Song Sparrow these parts are pinkish. (Roger T. Peterson's "A Field Guide to the Birds" publishes this as a sure sign also.) The Swamp Sparrow's tarsi will be found to be darker than those of the Song Sparrow at all times.

"While it is not definitely settled in my mind, it does seem possible most of the time to determine adult Swamp Sparrows from immatures in the Fall by the adult's greyer throat and superciliary line and richer chestnut in the crown. This is a project that can be studied further to advantage.

"Through my method of determining sex (BIRD BANDING '38, IX:1) I found the streaked crowns in Chipping Sparrows did not necessarily imply female sex as some books indicate.

"We probably will never attain the ideal of having all birds banded definitely determined as to sex and age, --- but it is something to be continuously strived for. EBBA's project will be of help and will stimulate further study.

To summarize this first discussion, two thoughts appear in all correspondence. 1. A warning to make haste slowly and with great care. 2. A definite need for information on this tantalizing question.

It should be noted that the 5 correspondents from 5 different states had no idea of what their fellow members had written, nor has there been any hint or exchange or prompting by "Ye Ed". Yet, these correspondents, chosen at random are very nearly in accord. All agree that the subject is difficult, yet it is thought that this first discussion brings out the fact, that fully adult male Juncos can be recognized. That a good key to Juncos, either as to sex or age, is the amount of white coloring in the tail feathers; That immature Brown Thrashers can be recognized by their eye coloring even after they have assumed adult plumage; That some accepted illustrations are not always correct; That Swamp Sparrows in immature plumage in the Fall can be told from similar Song Sparrows by the coloring inside their mouth and by their note of alarm while in the traps; and that the difference between Field and Chipping Sparrows can be distinguished by bill coloring in the Fall, but streaked crowns in "Chippies" do not necessarily imply that such a bird is a "Clinging vine."

## BANDING IN THE NEWS

The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin of November 29, 1944, carried a fine Swift story, illustrated with a photograph looking down upon a chimney filled with Swifts. This photo was taken by Charles E. Mohr, who, with Horace Groskin of Ardmore, Pa., climbed at dusk to the top of the chimney to take this unusual shot. The story weaves in the news of the recovery of the banded Swifts from notes taken in the fall season from this same chimney in Ardmore.

The Toronto Daily Star, (Canada) of November 11, 1944 carries an article about the banding work of Ross Baker. Mr. Baker has banded 1,800 birds of 63 species in his city garden which is only 19 by 40 ft. The article is illustrated by a photo of Mr. Baker banding a Blue Jay.

The same paper a week later features another banding article illustrated by a photo of banded Ring-billed Gulls. This story relates how Herb Southam of Toronto has banded 25,000 birds in his spare time. The circulation of the Daily Star is reported as 294,905.

Such stories help all banders, but many more are needed. This can not be done by any one member but it is possible with the efforts and cooperation of us all.

### Are YOU Writing on Banding?

More publicity is needed to better acquaint the general public with the advantages of bird banding, its aims and why and where they should report any banded birds shot or found dead. Local newspapers should receive articles or interesting banding experiences. An interesting scientific discovery is not necessary and in all probability the local editor will not be impressed. A human interest story has a greater chance of arriving in print. For example, Mrs. Bander is giving a garden party for a returning war hero. Preparations have been made for days. The great day arrives. Everyone has left to meet the train, but Mrs. Bander, who is putting the last touches on the garden and closing her bird traps and putting them out of the way. Approaching the last trap behind the tool house, she finds a skunk in it. What to do, How to get the skunk out of trap and not spoil the garden party? Any paper will gladly give space to relate what Mrs. Bander did under such embarrassing circumstances. If you write it yourself, write in the third person.

There are many magazines devoted to hunting or allied sports and their columns may be available for banding stories. EBBA has many good writers, why not join the ranks? "Beech" Bowdish; "Dick" Fischer; "Jess" Miller; Dr. Wood; and Horace Groskin, to name just a few, are turning out these helpful articles. Let us add your name to this honor roll.

### Are YOU Preparing a Paper?

Many ornithologists write papers for technical or lay magazines. After publication it is noticed that the writer missed useful data that would have given added value to the paper. Two recent examples linger in the mind of EBBA. One paper gave a list of state records, citing for one state, four sight only. If inquiry had been made through EBBA NEWS, it is felt certain that a member would have notified the writer that there were two mounted specimens in that particular state's museum, that should have been mentioned. The other case was very similar. If you are preparing a paper, why not let EBBA NEWS have its subject matter. Assistance and data will often-times be forthcoming from the membership. Dr. Gordon M. Meade of the Strong Memorial Hospital, 260 Crittenden Blvd. Rochester, 7, N. Y. is interested in "foot disease" of wild birds and is calling on banders for records. Have you sent your data to him?

## Is Biology Taught in the High School in Your Town?

Have you talked with the biology teacher on the subject of banding? Have you placed some old bands on the school's mounted birds and told the teacher and the classes about the bands and banding, requesting the need for information and the way to report a banded bird found injured or dead? Make a special effort to do this in 1945. The placing of a band on a bird is only the first step in banding. Our aim is to collect data, both from returns and recoveries. The cooperation of school students will be found of great value in collecting recoveries.

### A METHOD OF MARKING CELLULOID BANDS

A number or a set of letters is sometimes desirable on celluloid bands and can be placed on these easily by the following method. Mark the number on the band in India ink with a crow-quill pen, let dry thoroughly and then cover with a dab of "varnition", a label varnish that is resistant to moisture alkalis, dilute acids and oils. A dab of Duco cement be substituted but is too viscous to be as satisfactory. Since this treatment tends to open split bands it is wise, when placing them on birds, to overlap the ends and weld with a drop of acetone, as described by W. O. Nagel, in BIRD BANDING 9(2):103. ("Varnition") is a product of The Varnition Co., 5025 W. Washington Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. --- Merrill Wood, State College, Penna.

### HOUSING PROBLEMS OF THE BIRD WORLD

Edwin A. Mason of the Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, Northampton, Mass. has a very informative article in the Journal of Wildlife Management for July, 1944, entitled, "Parasitism By Protocalliphora and Management of Cavity-nesting Birds". This paper will be of great interest to everyone who has ever erected a bird house. One of the points brought out is that the best time to clean out a bird house is in the late spring, just before the birds arrive from the south. A bander that lets this chore slide is doing the birds a favor. It was found that moth balls did not discourage the larvae of Protocalliphora and the theory that the color blue is disliked by insects was proved untrue with this pest. A number of bird houses were painted blue and other colors. Blue bird houses were parasitized just as heavily as other houses. Bluebirds and Tree Swallows seemed to suffer the most from this pest, but they were also found in such nests as those of the Robin and the Song Sparrow. A careless house-keeper like the Starling has little trouble apparently.

Mr. Mason has a few reprints of this paper and they maybe available for return postage to any member desiring a copy of the article.

### BIRDS WITH ONLY ONE LEG

William Davidson of Takoma Park, Md. writes, "Recently I trapped a Tufted Titmouse minus the left leg. In-as-much as I band birds on the left leg almost without exeption, it occurred to me that this bird might have been banded and in the interim have lost the banded tarsus. However, I risked banding the same bird twice by placing a band on the remaining leg. What do you think about this procedure? The wound appeared entirely healed and the bird acted normally."

The question will enter the minds of many banders as to whether some of the one-legged birds so often appearing in the traps could have become cripples as a result of banding. While accidents are always possible, it is doubtful whether banding is to blame for even a very slight percentage of these one-legged birds. A band too large for a bird or improperly placed might cause an accident, but such instances are very few. Many more of these cripples are due to careless people. To EBBA's mind, too many people set mouse-traps and rat-traps outside their homes without taking any precautions for the safety of birds. Traps don't think and we wonder, sometimes, if humans do.

RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED

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