

FIELD NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE _____

T8OP AND OTHERS IN MASSACHUSETTS

On December 22, 1987, I stopped to scrutinize a flock of over five hundred Canada Geese clustered around the ice-free center of Robert's Meadow Reservoir in Northampton. Four of these birds bore bright yellow neck collars with black characters: T8OP, JO3U, Z3K4, and Z3K2. A flock of Canadas is usually just that, a flock, because I cannot perceive enough variation in the birds to recognize individuals. But these four were individuals. Someone had given each of them a special status which others in the flock did not have. I decided to report my observation to help others learn about these individuals and to discover for myself what others had already learned about each of them.

Then on December 24, I went walking at Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Concord. Very few birds were present. But a flock of thirteen Canadas was in the field across the Concord River directly opposite the end of the dike. One of these birds bore a bright yellow neck collar: J92E, another individual.

Someone at the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office in Newton told me that any reports of banded birds could be made to the Bird Banding Laboratory, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel-Bowie Road, Laurel, MD 20708. This laboratory coordinates information on many different studies. I received a letter in reply from Danny Bystrak. He wrote that he had forwarded my report to Dr. R. A. Malecki, New York Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, 206 Fernow Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

It is important to report your observations of neck-banded geese to Dr. Malecki. For this information to be useful, he requests that you send all of the following data: color of neck band, complete code sequence off the neck band, name, address, and phone number of the observer, calendar date and time of observation, specific location of the sighting, an estimate of the flock size, and the habitat in which the birds were seen (lake, river, cornfield, etc.).

From Dr. Malecki, I have received information on the histories of each goose I reported. The four present in one flock on December 22 had never previously been reported together from the same place and time. But Z3K2 and Z3K4 had been so reported on three occasions--they stick together, these two. One is an adult female and one an adult male. These four geese have been reported from North Carolina to New York, from 1984 through 1987, several reports of each bird, but no previous reports were from Massachusetts. The Concord goose J92E of December 24 had been banded on February 22, 1984, in New Jersey and had since been reported only once, on March 21, 1985, in New York.

Waterfowl move north and south along the Atlantic flyway. If I were to move north and south in synchrony, I would see birds of a given species all along my route. But these banded geese would allow me to recognize individual birds. That is a level of familiarity I had not experienced before, though I understand that is how migration routes have been worked out. Although people who band birds will probably chuckle at my new perspective, nevertheless, this is the way I experienced something new in birding last December when I was too busy to spend any appreciable time outdoors.

Andrew H. Williams, Haydenville



ICICLE PLAY BY CHICKADEES

Following a fairly heavy rain the temperature dropped quickly and icicles formed in the trees. The next day was warm and sunny and the icicles were melting. It was great fun to watch a succession of chickadees, six or seven, flying to the tip of the icicle at just the right moment to catch a drop. They would also land on the icicles and slide down them to the bottom to drink the droplets. They seemed to know exactly when the droplets would fall and appeared to be having a great time.

Robert A. Richards, Ashland

IN QUEST OF THE SPOTTED OWL

The Spotted Owl is a brown, fluffy, medium-sized owl with distinctive brown eyes and a yellow bill. In California and the Pacific Northwest, its preferred habitat is old-growth forest, which is rapidly being eliminated by the timber industry, and hence, its populations are declining and even threatened in some areas, in part by the range expansion of its eastern counterpart, the Barred Owl. Living in the east, I had never seen a Spotted Owl. When on a trip to San Francisco the opportunity to search for one materialized (thanks to the generosity of two California birders, Jean Richmond and her son Robert), I was delighted.

On a sunny August morning, four of us, the Richmonds, John Kricher, and I, wound our way through San Francisco traffic and headed for Point Reyes, where the forests of Tamales Bay State Park nestle up to the water's edge. We arrived midmorning and, walking up a trail from the parking area, were immediately swallowed up by deep moist forest. The gnarled trees trailing wisps of Spanish moss were mostly oaks and digger and bishop pines. A "thunk-thunk-thunk" turned out to be a Hairy Woodpecker at eye level, pecking and probing in rotten bark and moss. A mixed foraging flock engulfed us. Several Wilson's Warblers foraged mostly close to the ground, and a single drab Orange-crowned Warbler gleaned the damp foliage. A Western Flycatcher with its yellow chin, a Hutton's Vireo sporting a white lores spot, and an assortment of Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Plain Titmice flitted around us, while a single Western Tanager splashed daubs of bright red and yellow through the forest shadows. As suddenly as they appeared, they were gone. We kicked up a small flock of Oregon Juncos, which darted along in front of us. We watched one poor junco push food into the gaping maw of a fluffy gray, already fledged, cowbird three or four times its size.

The owl had been observed in numerous places along the trail, so we scanned each tree, each limb for a proper silhouette. I have never seen so many gnarls and knots and twisted branches that proved to be owl look-alikes. Eventually the trail wound down slope, and we emerged into the sunlight at the edge of a tidal flat on which three dozen Marbled Godwits and a single Willet foraged. We followed the trail along the beach, turned with it along the forest edge, and then traversed back into the shadows of the forest. We gradually found ourselves in a more open area of oaks and pines with the sunlight spotting the forest floor.

We left the trail and lingered in an area where Jean had seen a Spotted Owl family several years before, carefully picking our way around tangles of poison oak. At one point I looked back and about 150 feet away I saw a silhouette that looked interesting, perhaps a young porcupine with quills protruding or maybe a young owl with fluffy feathers. Back we went through poison oak only to find

our "owl" transformed into a gray squirrel with its tail pulled completely up over its back. The first horrible pun of the day rolled forth: "Tale of the Great Gray ... Squirrel."

We wandered about the area for half an hour or so and then, somewhat discouraged, worked our way back to the trail. Then, John noticed "whitewash" on some ferns beside the trail, and I soon found some among a patch of dead leaves on the adjacent hillside. I looked back. John was examining a feather he had found in the middle of the trail. It was brown with soft edges, and toward the tip were two oval spots, one white, the other tan. John said quietly under his breath, "That bird is up there somewhere."

We spread out and worked the hillside along the trail, searching every limb, our excitement fading with each passing minute. The realization that the owner of that feather could be miles away by now began to crowd our thoughts. Slowly we began our trek back. I lagged a little behind, hesitant to face reality. Then came that strange mixture of feelings--surprise, disbelief, then relief, as a glance to my right revealed a picture-perfect Spotted Owl framed in the tangle of tree trunks, branches, and foliage. About sixty feet away at eye level the bird was sitting with its back to me on a lichen-covered oak branch. "Anybody interested in seeing a Spotted Owl?" They all thought I was joking but couldn't chance the contrary; so back they came.

Turning around on its perch, facing us, the owl started a protracted preening sequence, turning its head completely around to groom its back feathers. Then, facing us again, the bird slowly and carefully groomed one of its feet, which it held up to its beak. The preening progressed to the breast feathers, with head pulled back until the owl was finally working on the feathers right under its chin. One wing was raised and preened beneath, and at one point some tiny morsel was caught and swallowed. In the shade its yellow bill looked ivory-colored, perhaps with a greenish tinge, as the bird occasionally looked over at us through inquisitive brown eyes. It scratched its chin for nearly ten seconds, fluffed and shook, stretched one wing full length toward the ground, then settled back, closed its eyes, and drifted into semisleep. An Anna's Hummingbird darted up and hovered a foot or so from the owl's face. The rich brown eyes opened and watched the hummer till it darted off, then slowly closed again. The resemblance of the owl to a big fluffy cat cleaning and preening itself prompted John to remark that owls and cats are basically the same animal but that the owl kind lives in trees.

We watched this magnificent creature for a long, long time but finally tore ourselves away and headed on down the trail. John said, "Well, I really liked our Spotted Owl." And I replied, "What do you mean, *our* owl? That was *my* owl. After all, I spotted it!"

William E. Davis, Jr., Foxboro