

STARLING MIGRATIONS

by Garrett S. Detwiler

One of the most interesting phases of banding, I have found, is not the mere handling and banding of the bird itself, but the thrill that comes when a 'pink' sheet is received from Laurel, on which is the data relative to the recovery of the bird you banded.

During the last twenty months, I have banded more than 4,800 Starlings and have received 46 such 'pink'sheets, of which only 13 were local recoveries (I.e., returns--Ed.). The other 33 present a very interesting picture which may or may not have some value and indicate a pattern in the migration of Starlings.

Some eight years before the settling of Philadelphia by William Penn, another English pioneer, by the name of John Fenwick, founded a colony on the east banks of the Delaware, in the southwestern-most portion of New Jersey, which he named Salem. The port of Salem became the fifth largest among the colonies, ranking with Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, for it had great appeal to people of British background.

Its appeal is still evident, for others of British background still flock to it. I refer to the English Starling. Salem has become one of their great Winter resorts, for they have found its environs to their liking and its people hospitable and generous with food when the ground is snow-covered.

The Starlings begin to arrive in October and reach the peak of their Winter influx during December and January. It is interesting to note, however, that banding proves that they do not spend the entire winter in Salem but confine their stay to a maximum period of about three weeks.

The trend of the migration to Salem seems to be from the North-east and East, while the migration from Salem continues clockwise toward the west, northwest, and then north. This trend is further substantiated by reference to the 'foreign retraps' made during the same period, all of which, to date, have been of birds banded to the North and East of Salem.

It might be well, at this point, to list the areas from which the above-mentioned 46 recoveries have been received and the approximate dates on which the recoveries were made.

The first recoveries, naturally, are of birds that were killed, found dead, or retrapped in Salem, itself. As previously mentioned, there have been 13 such recoveries (=returns). All 'live' retraps (=repeats-Ed.) and 'recently killed' recoveries (=returns) do not extend beyond a three-week elapsed time period.

The next group are those which were recovered in Delaware (4 recoveries - at Dover, Newark, Wilmington, and Cheswold). The migration tends to go a little South of West before definitely returning North. The elapsed time between banding and recovery of this group is approximately 4 weeks.

Pennsylvania, with 11 recoveries, comes next. The path of the migration widens to an area from Chester and Coatesville, on one side, to Norristown, Newtown, and Tinicum, on the other. The time is now around the last of February and the middle of March.

Hereafter, the path really widens out, for in March and April, Starlings are recovered in New York (2 recoveries - at St. Johnsville and Schenectady); in Connecticut (3 recoveries - at Trumbull, Lakeside, and Stratford); in Canada (5 recoveries - at Deschailions (near Quebec City), Chateauguay Bassin and Granby (near Montreal), Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island); and in Maine (2 recoveries - at Portland and Rockport).

One poor, little, crazy, mixed-up bird was banded on 20 January 1954 and was recovered at St. James, Long Island, on 6 March 1954. His flight might tend to disprove the theory of a clockwise trend in migration, I grant you. I would rather consider him the exception. However, he was found dead, so that should be a lesson to all future Starling migrants!

I would be interested in learning whether other banders, with more years of banding experience, have also noted a similar clockwise trend in the migratory pattern of Starlings.

---194 Seventh St., Salem, New Jersey

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