

## A SQUALK OF A SORT

By Beecher S. Bowdish, Demarest, N.J.

I'm one of the old grandpas in the banding game; I was one of a small group, under the leadership of one Cole (if I can trust my tricky memory), which, at a Cambridge meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, foregathered in a quiet corner and laid the foundations for the old, original American Bird Banding Association, the first organization of bird banders in this country to do systematic bird banding; Howard Cleaves was "the works", and at least when he passes on an epitaph must remind posterity of the grand job he did!

Since those historic days, I have plodded along the banding way, content, perforce, to help pile up the masses of banding data from which the analyst will dig out the answers to problems in avian life which depend so largely on bird banding study. However, in recent times, I find myself being told, by implication, at least, that unless I am working on a "project" which banding may serve, I cannot expect to get anywhere! Probably I will not get anywhere without projects; anyway I'm quite sure I'll get nowhere with projects; you can't teach old dogs new tricks!

Although in my banding experiences I've never found my way into the sacred precincts of "projects" I have not let slip unnoted, special conditions relating to the birds I've handled. Anything out of the normal with any of them, I've recorded; if such cases involved pathological conditions, I've brought them to the attention of pathologists, wherever possible. This has involved as much unproductive labor as, I suspect has much of the "project" effort, in order to glean from the mass of unproductive cases, the comparatively few worthwhile ones.

A male cowbird which I had banded, apparently in good, normal condition, several weeks later was brought to me by a neighbor who had found it on his grounds ailing; I put it in a cage with food and water, which it apparently partook of, but it was so obstreperous in its desire for "out" that I complied; a day or two later the same neighbor brought the bird back to me, evidently worse; it showed no interest in food or water, and died that night. The body of the cowbird was rushed to a pathologist by first class mail; he found a case of a form of tuberculosis not theretofore recorded in a bird.

The same pathologist, in the case of a catbird, lingering at the home of a friend after normal fall migration, which I had brought to my home to try and care for, but which died the first night, found to be

practically eaten alive by intestinal worm parasites. A great blue heron was observed by some boys, standing on the bank of a North Newark stream, holding a small fish in its bill. A short time later, when the boys passed the spot again, the heron laid dead, the fish, which the bird was too weak to swallow, still in its bill. Larvae of a fish parasite had "bored from within", another case of a bird practically eaten alive. The bird's abdominal cavity was practically swarming and crammed with the larvae, which were eating their way out through the skin.

In the years ago, my friend, Dr. C. Brooke Worth, before he went away to the far corners of the earth, used to make me feel that I had something worth while in sending in pathological avian cases, with his so complete, detailed reports; when he came back to his old time home town of Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, I made bold to ask him if he would be willing to tackle some more specimens; he graciously consented, but told me he was in a different hook-up than before and I'd have to be considerate and make allowances for his handicaps. I've not been bothered by his handicaps but again much pleased with the way in which Brooke digs out everything there is in a case and sets it out in detail. Here is an example of a report which admirably serves the double purpose of detailed information of findings, with stimulation to the bander to continue his part in making such findings available:

September 26, 1956

Dear Beech: Re: Catbird 54-131964

1. Thank you once more for the opportunity to examine a specimen.
2. Uncle Sam's post office people had their usual way with fragile parcels, for some of the abdominal viscera were squashed out through the vent (various loops of the lower intestine).
3. This bird does not seem to fall into the category of the two sent to Beaudette on former Fall occasions. There was no "reeking" evidence of internal parasitism, although my examination of the intestinal tract was limited somewhat by post office damage. Nevertheless the loops of gut that I was able to examine contained no remains of large parasites. The moderate degree of decomposition that existed would, however, have done away with evidence of smaller tapeworms and roundworms.
4. The body cavity in general evidenced the results of a heavy blow of some sort. There were widespread hemorrhages between the body wall and viscera. Again, no parasites were found in the body cavity.

5. There were minor hemorrhages in the skull at its base. Ossification of the skull suggested that this was a bird of this year's birth, although I would not feel sure of this.
6. The bird was in a late stage of moult, with many of the contour feathers in a late stage of expansion. No evidence of internal parasitism was found. Likewise no evidence of pre-migration fat stores was found.
7. It would appear the the catbird died a violent death. Perhaps it was a "misfit" in the Darwinian sense, since no stores of migratory fat had accumulated, and since it was stupid enough to get itself into fatal trouble. But this is probably a stupid guess on my part too. I opine that this death, as is the case in most avian ones, must remain mysterious to us.
8. Send me another bird fit for a poetical report!

Sincerely,  
Brooke

Worth's evident appreciation of specimens I sent for pathological examination led me to write to him: "Obviously you're kinda good hearted, as I sorta instinctively suspected. Here I've been feeling guilty of inflicting on you the job of wrestling with avian remains in varying stages of decomposition, 'non-decomposition assured' to the contrary notwithstanding and behold, in the innate goodness of your soul, you bless me for it!"

Yes, I believe it is worth while to help investigation of bird deaths, even if it be not a "project", especially if one is working with a pathologist like Brooke.

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Send in your copies of  
1956 banding totals to  
EBBA NEWS. . .  
Send also figures on  
your returns for the  
new feature: "What Is  
Returning Most to Whom?"

