

JOHN A. GILLESPIE 1894 - 1956  
A Profile by Garrett S. Detweiler

One of the most respected and beloved banders in the ranks of EBBA was former president John A. Gillespie. His was a long and eventful period of banding under permit #2524, issued in 1922.

During 30 odd years of banding, John Gillespie became a recognized and accepted authority on identification, banding over 11,000 birds of 126 species. His main endeavors were among the larger birds because of the greater possibility of recoveries. Therefore, he traveled to the New Jersey shore to band skimmers, terns and gulls; to South Jersey, Delaware and East Maryland for ospreys and eagles; to Martha's Vineyard and Muskeget Island for more gulls and terns. In addition, he climbed trees to band eagles hawks and owls, often being accompanied by Frederick C. Schmid, now of the Fish & Wildlife Service, "who did most of the climbing and then let us take the credit for banding."

Undoubtedly his favorite bird was the White-throated Sparrow. Of this species he banded over 1,200 and learned to imitate its call to perfection. He often used this distinctive whistle to call his children.



Mrs. Gillespie ... and future banders



John A. Gillespie and Immature Sparrow Hawk

One time, just as he was about to whistle, a White-Throat beat him to it. His daughter answered, "We know you're behind that tree, Daddy. You can't fool us!"

John Gillespie was blessed with a partner who shared his love and enthusiasm for bird study in general and bird banding in particular, for Mrs. Mabel Gillespie not only stayed home baby-sitting during the early

part of their married life, but also did "the backyard banding when John was off with assistants on banding forays in South Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania."

"John," Mrs. Gillespie recalls, "was interested in ferns for years and we have some 25 species on our small property here. We had a collection of mounted specimens that received considerable acclaim at exhibits. The same was true of seaweeds. On vacations John loved to bring buckets full of dainty, brightly colored bits to the cottage and mount them on cardboard. He took prizes for these in hobby exhibits.

"He also became very much interested in rocks and minerals, largely because our son John, who is a spectrographic analyst, indulged in real busman's holidays by prospecting far and wide. Our cellar is full of specimens from fossils to fool's gold.

"If the cellar was full of rocks, the living room was full of recordings. We shared an intense love for symphonic and vocal music, and listened to music in our home from breakfast to bedtime. And outside was the music of birds.

Since John's death I have known the solace the company of birds can be. Far from feeling the loneliness of going on alone, I felt happier and less lonely when I was watching or banding birds. John was always a far keener observer than I, but I surprised myself by quicker flashes of recognition than I had formerly possessed. Who shall say John was not with me, still spurring me to independent identification?"

In an article in the Chester, Pa., Times of March 16, 1956, we read, "He wanted to be a scientist, but life bent him otherwise. Instead he became a buyer for the Sun Oil Company and was employed there almost all of his business life. What a lesson there is in the life of this frustrated scientist! He used what he had, and how he used it! If each of us could or would use his potential as fully as did John Gillespie, what a community ... what a world this would be."

Our best wishes go with you, Mrs. Gillespie, as you embark on your trip to the South Pacific. May we suggest that you take along a few bands, as one never knows when they might come in handy. We look forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting in April on your return.

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SEXING STARLINGS  
By E. Alexander  
Bergstrom

Your Sept.-Oct. issue quotes Lawrence Hicks on the color of the bill determining male or female. The pink or blue is in the rami of the lower mandible (next to the feathers of the throat), not the main part of the bill, and it holds true only during the breeding season. This is one of several characters discussed by Brina Kessel (Bird-Banding, 22:16-23), for age and sex of the starling.

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