

BIRD BEHAVIOR ON LEAVING THE BANDER'S HAND

By Frank P. Frazier

These observations began in 1954 and have been continued from time to time since. For the purposes of this study, I have taken 355 random observations of different birds of 26 species. The number of observations for each species varies from 124 of Juncos to 1 of a Mourning Dove.

The place where I do my banding and release the birds is beside the back door of my suburban home. Many bushes and at least six tall trees are within 60 to 90 feet away. Beyond 90 feet the actions of birds (except for those that take off high in the air for trees or woods that lie 500 feet away) cannot be observed because of intervening foliage or buildings.

Of the 355 birds whose actions are recorded here, 129 (or 36%) flew out of sight where their further actions could not be observed. Blue Jays, Redpolls, Chickadees and Wood-peckers made no effort to hide. Only 19% of the Juncos went where they could not be observed. But 30% of the White-throats and Purple Finches, 40% of the Song Sparrows and Fox Sparrows and 80% of the thrushes, Catbirds, Towhees, Starlings and warblers flew out of sight before alighting -- or hid in bushes or high on the far sides of trees.

138 (39%) of the birds made some sort of noise in the hand, on leaving the hand or immediately upon alighting. Most Downy Wood-peckers and Hermit Thrushes cried in the hand, for instance, and virtually every Chickadee said his name immediately upon alighting. All the Fox Sparrows and 60% of the Juncos gave call or alarm notes in flight. The remainder of the birds flew off silently, for the most part.

Once they lit, 50 birds (or 23% of the 226 that did not fly out of sight) just sat and looked around; 5% flitted from twig to twig; 9% mounted higher in the tree -- the Woodpeckers and Nuthatches up the trunk and the Blue Jays and others by flying or hopping up branch by branch.

The remainder performed other actions. 18 birds of 11 different species (8%) bit at their bands. 74 (33%) shook their feathers back into place -- natural enough after being handled. Only one, a Flicker, was observed to draw his beak through his feathers.

There were three other motions made by various birds: a pecking motion (although I could not see that their bills actually touched the branch or twig); a bill wiping motion (here, again, it was a gesture rather than the actual wiping of their bills -- I observed only 2 birds, both Juncos, who actually wiped their bills), and cheek wiping, once more a gesture rather than a real wiping of the cheek on a branch.

The pecking motion was made by 38 birds, 17% of those observed; the bill wiping by 55 (24%), the cheek wiping by 18 (8%). More than half of the birds observed made none of these motions.

In conclusion, I believe that little that is new can be found in observing where birds go upon leaving the bander's hand, the manner of their flight or where they light. It is possible, however, that more data on their actions in the first seconds after they first alight may add something to our overall knowledge of bird behavior.

424 Highland Ave., Upper Montclair, N.J.

SOME INTERESTING RECOVERIES

By Mrs. John Y. Dater

Junco Banded November 1, 1957, at Ramsey, N.J. Found dead May 6, 1958, at Big Stone City, South Dakota.

Junco Banded September 22, 1957, at Brier Island, Digby County, Nova Scotia (an Operation Recovery bird). Trapped and released at Ramsey, N.J., April 20, 1958.

Junco Banded October 16, 1957 at Ramsey, N.J. Recovered April 19, 1958, at Lower Saint Mary's about 3 miles from Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada.

Catbird banded July 21, 1957, at Vineyard Haven, Mass., by EBBA member Bill Pepper. Trapped and released at Ramsey, N.J. Sept 24, 1957.

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