

Except for Blackbirds and Starlings, which are ringed in the field, all trapped birds are carried to the laboratory in individual cotton bags. The following information is recorded: trap and time of capture, age, sex, weight, length of the flattened wing (the chord measurement formerly used having been found unreliable), bill-length (from skull, except in a few species), "tarsus" length, tail length, and, where appropriate, the wing formula. Geographical races and critical species are evaluated with the aid of substantial collection of bird-skins loaned by the Royal Scottish Museum - this evaluation is of particular interest on an island which almost annually receives migrants from most parts of Europe, as well as Asia and America. Details of plumage, moult, etc. are recorded for some species. Ectoparasites are collected from many birds by the "Fair Isle" chloroform delouser. All this information is entered on laboratory chits, white for new birds and green for recaptures, and is copied later into the ringing registers, or in the case of recaptures, onto a card. The recap cards, each of which contains all the relevant information on one individual are filed under species, in ring sequence.

The main summer work, between migrations, is a population study of the Arctic Skua colony, now entering its twelfth year. From 1958 it has been combined with Mr. P. O'Donald's study of the genetics of the colour-phases of this bird. The skua work depends greatly on the ringing technique, and nearly all the adults and chicks are ringed, the former with P. V. C. colour bands in addition to the numbered ring. The adults are caught on the nest, in clap-nets operated from hide-tents, dummy eggs being used as temporary replacements for the clutch. This technique was evolved by Kenneth Williamson in 1954, and by 1958, 115 of the 120 breeders were marked. The oldest individuals have been breeding since at least 1948, in fact one pair has remained unaltered since that year.

The Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust publishes periodical Bulletins and an Annual Report, in which some of the results of each season's work are described. These publications are sent to "Friends of Fair Isle" (annual subscription 21 shillings).

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IDENTIFICATION OF IMMATURE CUCKOOS

By Joseph R. Jehl, Jr.

The highly distinctive adults of the Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos with their bright orbital rings and obvious tail patterns pose no identification problem for the bander, but the plainer immatures are sometimes confusing. Young of both species show rufous in the wings, light lower mandibles, and yellowish eye-rings. However, the following key should enable the bander to identify with certainty any young cuckoo.

Yellow-billed

Black-billed

Bill:	Lower mandible, at least basally, is light and often yellowish.	Dark, with basal half of lower mandible light -- usually bluish.
Wings:	Considerable rufous on bases of primaries and outermost secondaries.	Much rufous, but duller than in Yellow-billed.
Eyering:	Pale lemon yellow.	Deep chrome yellow.
Underparts:	Usually grayish.	Usually with buffy tinge.
Tail:	Outer retrices broadly tipped with white; central retrices dark to tip.	All retrices narrowly tipped with white which may, infrequently, wear off.
Back:	Warm brown.	Brown, with olive gloss. Feathers often tipped with white.

Clifton, New Jersey

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AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION FROM THE BANDING OFFICE Shortly before the fall migration season this year, the Banding Office distributed a number of separate sheets giving details on plumage and other characteristics to aid banders in the identification, age and sexing of difficult species. They are on the same lines as the above article, although this is an independent work and has no connection with the Banding Office's data sheets. If you have not already received a set of these sheets, they may be had upon request from the Banding Office.

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