

May-June 1960

LONG DISTANCE FLYERS - THE OSPREYS  
By Mabel Gillespie

For sixteen seasons, from the summer of 1926 through the summer of 1941, my husband, John A. Gillespie, devoted much time and interest to banding fledgling Ospreys. During the latter part of this period he was ably assisted by Frederick C. Schmid of the Patuxent Wildlife Research Refuge. A few Ospreys were banded in nests in coastal Delaware, but the great majority were in Cape May County, New Jersey. In the course of these years 457 Osprey nestlings were banded. There were reports of returns and recoveries from 76 of these, a percentage of 16.6.

Nineteen reports concerned individuals that were taken in the vicinity of the nests where they were raised. Seven were found dead within three months of the date of banding. Twelve were reported within a few miles of their original nest sites in later seasons: five after two years, two after three years, two after four years, one after twelve years, one after fourteen years, and one after eighteen years. Note that there were no year-old Ospreys reported. This is either a coincidence of a fact of significance. Does it take the Osprey at least two years to reach mating maturity; and, if so, where were the one year old birds?

Of the 57 Ospreys recovered elsewhere, 38, or about two thirds, were but a few months old. It is to be expected that there would be more casualties among the younger birds. Of the remaining third, five were two years old; eight, three years old; one, four years old; two, five years old; two, eight years old; and one, seventeen years old. Again, no year-old Ospreys were reported except for a ten-month bird "found" in Colombia in May, 2500 miles from its home base.

The reports came from the following states and countries: three from Pennsylvania, three from Delaware, ten from Maryland, seven from Virginia, two from West Virginia, ten from North Carolina, two from South Carolina, four from Georgia, six from Florida, three from Cuba, one from Puerto Rico, one from the Dominican Republic, one from Colombia, two from Venezuela, and two from Brazil.

Of the two travellers to Brazil, one was recovered 800 miles inland on the Amazon River on September 24, over four years after the date of banding. Had it been back to New Jersey to breed, and if so, how could it have gotten so far away at a date when Ospreys have not generally started to migrate from Cape May County?

The other Brazilian tourist went to Rio de Janeiro. An airline official claimed that the distance from New York to Rio via Miami is 6,973 miles, nearly 7000. I make it less in a beeline with a map and ruler. The bird undoubtedly made it much more. Certainly it would not continually maintain migration flight in a straight line. Reports from other banded Ospreys indicate that they do plenty of exploring up river valleys while

migrating. Furthermore, this bird was too young for flight when banded on July 16th. Bent ("Life History of North American Birds of Prey" - U.S. National Museum Bulletin #167, P. 364) describes the Osprey's period of learning to fly, claiming it takes the nestling several weeks to learn, and even then the bird tires easily. Yet, exactly five months after banding, this bird was in Rio! (It undoubtedly got there in less than five months, since it may have been shot some time before the date of the letter from the informant.)

The three birds reported from Pennsylvania, the two from West Virginia, and nine of those reported from southern states, were found from 50 to 250 miles inland. Probably they followed river valleys, but the three individuals reported from Houtzdale, Pa., Upper Tract and Dorothy, West Virginia, had crossed mountain ranges.

Within one month of banding, two young Ospreys had reached the Carolinas, and one was at Virginia Beach, Va. Another Osprey reached Florida within a month and a half of the date of banding. Yet others lingered on in New Jersey three or four months after the date of banding. One bird reached Venezuela in five months after banding; one reached Puerto Rico in three months.

It must be noted that there may have been as much as four weeks variation in the ages of nestlings at the time of banding. The young remain in the nest for about eight weeks after hatching (Bent) and, of course, they must have attained sufficient size so that the band will not slip off over the claws.

A striking fact about the three Ospreys reported from Cuba is that all three were banded in Cape May County within two weeks' time in 1939; and all three were killed in the province of Oriente in 1942 within a month's time, three years later. One was reported dead on August 21, and the others on September 20 and 21.

What were three year old native New Jersey Ospreys doing in Cuba in August and September? Suppose an Osprey does not reach mating maturity in a year; it seems fantastic to consider that it would take three years. Furthermore, there were the instances already noted of Ospreys returning to the vicinity of their home nests after two years. While posing questions, how about the two year old Osprey reported from North Carolina in July, which had been born and raised in Cape May County, N.J.?

It was John's custom to write to the person reporting the recovery of a banded bird and ask for further information. Such information was obtained possibly 25% of the time. One of the Ospreys reported from the West Virginia mountains made headlines in a local newspaper: "Eagle is Killed!" The article contained this controversial statement: "The killing of the eagle was necessitated because it ate too many chickens".

The following comment was in a letter regarding one of the Ospreys recovered in Pennsylvania. "In regards to the bird shot with the band on which I called a rank hawk, wish to say that the bird in question was very savage and insistent in getting his chickens ... he claims about ten of his chick missed and was sure this bird had three of them he saw it take and shot it the last time it still had one in the claws."

Another reply came in connection with a banded Osprey shot in Delaware. "I am not positive the ducks were killed by the hawk, but I thought at the time that it did as it was on a tree at the pond and the ducks were dead near it. The bird was in good condition and am having it mounted at the cost of \$10.00. You can have the bird for the price of mounting if you wish. The band was in good condition."

It is more than possible that the first two correspondents were sure of seeing something that did not happen at all. On the other hand it may be noted that Bent gives Dr. Robert C. Murphy as authority in reporting an Osprey which was killed with a chicken in its talons. The Osprey was very emaciated. Thus it may occasionally happen that a bird of this species may be attracted by poultry if fish is not available. This could be the case in mountainous areas.

Bent gives a long list of localities in the Americas from which Ospreys are reported in winter. These include points in the United States along the Gulf Coast, in Central America, and in various islands of the West Indies, "probably eastern Venezuela ... probably British Guiana... Western Brazil .. and Paraguay ... rarely Argentina ... and rarely Chile". But there is no indication of the birthplaces of Ospreys reported from South American points. It is noted that Ospreys found wintering from the Gulf States south. The ones we banded, however, apparently travelled through Florida to warmer climes. None was taken in that state in mid-winter. The dates reported from Florida are September 28, four October dates, and November 15. The only mid-winter dates on which our Ospreys have been reported occurred in Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil.

Stone in "Bird Studies at Old Cape May" (1937) wrote, "While we know but little about the actual winter quarters of Cape May Fish Hawks, John Gillespie's banding work has thrown some light upon this interesting problem. One bird banded as a nestling on Seven Mile Beach on August 15, 1926 was killed at Dorothy, W. Va. on September 25, following, while another young bird banded at the same place on June 26, 1927 was shot at Upper Tract W. Va. in September of that year. The similarity of their lines of flight is remarkable."

The fact that Ospreys tend to occupy the same nests year after year is well known. John and Fred knew where the old nests were and kept their eyes open for new nest sites. Each season the adult birds repair and enlarge the old nests, and some of the items found in Osprey nests

verge on the ridiculous. The two men reported the following decorations or treasures in nests: a woman's belt; conch, oyster and mussel shells; a folded newspaper; dried wings of gull and duck; part of an old umbrella; and a shingle. W. Burritt Wright of Wildwood Crest, N.J. who sometimes joined these Osprey banding expeditions, once found in an Osprey nest an advertisement for "balanced game bird ration".

Ospreys are quite fearless in defense of their young. Oologists report attacks from the adult birds when they approach nests. It was the custom for John to keep a careful watch while Fred climbed to the nests, warning instantly of the approach of an adult bird. On one occasion Fred remarked that he remembered the female and she was a nasty customer. When he reached the nest he roped himself to the tree just in time, for the female came from behind John who did not have time to give a warning. The bird struck the side of Fred's head with enough force to have hurled him to the ground had he not been roped. The talons gouged his earlobe, cheek and forehead, missing his eye closely. But it takes more than that to stop a devoted bander.

However, as every bander knows, only the most general characteristics apply to birds of any species. Within the species birds vary greatly in their reactions and actions. So, though Ospreys in general seem to be much more fearless and aggressive than, say, Bald Eagles, one individual Osprey may be much more ferocious than the majority.

The supposition occurs: can idiosyncrasies among the members of a species extend to migration and homing instinct? Can there be some explanation of the phenomenon of strong homing instinct in some Ospreys and apparent lack of it in others? It sounds fantastic, but there is still no explanation of those exiles to Cuba.

This particular Osprey banding operation is a closed chapter, though I still hope for a pink sheet from the Bird Banding Office. The last one came in 1956, only two months after John passed away, telling of an 18 year old bird that returned to the area of its birth and was caught upon a high tension wire.

Besides the data appended below, there was much of casual and non-scientific interest in connection with these banding operations. There was the contact with the Boy Scouts of Oriente Province, Cuba, who hoped they might be of further assistance; there was the banded Osprey exhausted by a hurricane and found by Brooke Worth who took the bird home and raised it; and many entertaining replies to our requests for further information.

Particularly there still are the memories of the expeditions with their accompanying comradeship and excitement. I can still hear the hum of the reapers one July when we asked permission of a farmer to cross his field to get to a nest. After elaborate explanation on our part, he grudge-

ingly assented, muttering, "I knew everything was going to the dogs, but when the government pays people to climb trees and band birds, we've had it!"

INTRODUCTION TO CHART: All Ospreys were banded in Cape May County, New Jersey, except those qualified by the abbreviation "Del." with the date of banding. Those so qualified were banded along the northern coast of Delaware.

All Ospreys subsequently reported from New Jersey are considered returns. In one case an Osprey was reported from Sandy Hook which is some distance to the north of the site of banding. However, Ospreys range far in their search for food. Furthermore, some arbitrary line must be drawn between returns and recoveries, and in this case the state boundary seems reasonable. Finally, there is no category of repeats; though, strictly speaking, Ospreys reported within a few weeks' time of banding are repeats.

The distances were obtained by measurements with a ruler on a map and are given in round numbers (in miles). Obviously they are far from accurate, but they give some indication of the extent of Osprey flights. The greater the distance, the greater the error in calculation, but always the errors tend to lessen the actual distances.

Under the column "How Found" are listed the exact terms used on the notifications from the Bird Banding Office. Unless our letters of inquiry were answered, we had no way of determining exactly what the terms "taken", "caught", "captured", etc., meant. It has seemed, however, a good idea to include these explanations because there is interest in some of them; for instance, Ospreys caught in fish nets, or electrocuted by high tension wires.

When the explanation reads "band found" it obviously takes away all meaning from the date of the report. No one can know how long before the finding of the band the bird came to grief. To a lesser extent, any so-called recovery date is suspect since the report may not have been made immediately. However, it is not likely that such reports would be delayed for many months. Therefore it seems safe to conclude that an Osprey reported after eighteen years really lived to be eighteen years old. In the case of Ospreys that were only a few months old, the reports cannot have been delayed too long. Always keeping in mind these reservations, we have used the dates given by the Bird Banding Office to determine the ages of the Ospreys recovered.

<u>Banded</u>	<u>Reported</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>How Found</u>	<u>Distance</u>	<u>Time Elapsed</u>
8-15-26	9-25-26	Dorothy, W.Va.	Shot	250 W	1½ mo.
6-26-27	9-29-27	Upper Tract, W.Va.	Shot	250 W	3 mo.
7-4-27	8-28-27	Avalon, N.J.	Found, wing broken, died	0	1 mo.
7-11-28	9-5-28	Kunkletown, Pa.	Shot	130 NNW	2 mo.

Banded	Reported	Place	How Found	Distance	Time
6-16-29	9- 2-31	Sandy Hook, N.J.	Found Dead	110 NNE	2 1/2 yr.
6-16-29	4-12-32	Newark, Delaware	Shot (Killed two ducks?)	70 NW	3 yr.
6-18-33	6- 7-35	Pt.Pleasant, N.J.	Killed, high tension wire	105 NE	2 yr.
6-18-33	8-31-36	Villas, N.J.	Found Dead	27 ENE	3 yr.
8-20-33	8-23-33	Avalon, N.J.	Killed-Hurricane	0	0
8-20-33	5- 1-34	Edenton, N.C.	Leg & Band Found	250 S	9 mo.
7-28-35	5-11-37	Cumberland Co., NC.	Shot	350 SSW	2 yr.
7-18-36	11- 3-36	Trappe, Md.	Shot	70 WSW	3 1/2 yr.
7-19-36	9-18-36	Wildwood, N.J.	Flew into house	0	2 mo.
7-19-36	9-30-36	Beaufort, S.C.	Killed	575 SW	2 mo.
7-19-36	10-28-36	Solomon's Is., Md.	Found Dead	110 SW	3 mo.
7-19-36	5- 7-38	Peermont, N.J.	Band found in nest	0	2 yr.
7-19-36	4-29-39	Broome's Is., Md.	Caught in fish net	110 WSW	3 yr.
7-19-36	4-23-40	S. N.J. Coast	Caught & released	0	4 yr.
7- 5-37	9-20-37	Off Georgia coast	Shot	700 SSW	2 mo.
7-12-37	10-5-37	Smyrna Beach, Fla.	Shot on Indian R.	800 SSW	3 mo.
7-16-37	10-25-37	Southport, N.C.	Captured	400 SSW	3 mo.
7-14-37	1 - 38	Venezuela(Maracay?)	Shot	2500 SSE	5 mo.
7-25-37	4-19-40	Slaughter Beach, Delaware	Caught in net	25 W	3 yr.
7-12-37	4-27-40	Millsboro, Del.	Drowned in net	32 SW	3 yr.
7-14-37	4 - 49	Delmont, N.J.	Found Drowned	15 NW	12 yr.
7- 5-37	6-30-51	Wildwood, N.J. Airport	Killed, high Tension Wire	5 N	14 yr.
7-25-37	10-5-37	Cape May Court House, N.J.	Found Dead	0	3 mo.
8-14-37	9-17-37	Daufuskie Is., S.C.	Found Injured	600 SSW	1 mo.
8-14-37	9-28-37	Crystal River, Fla.	Caught	870 SSW	1 1/2 mo.
7-25-37	10-29-42	Rock Hall, Md.	Found Dead	75 W	5 yr.
7-25-37	3-29-54	Tatnall Co., Ga. - 75 miles inland	Found Dead	625 SSW	17 yr.
7- 4-38	?	Tifton, Georgia - 135 miles inland	Killed	730 SSW	?
7- 9-38	5-21-40	Blackstone, Va. - 90 miles inland	Killed	235 SW	2 yr.
7-12-38	9-16-38	Cape Charles, Va.	Killed	150 S	2 mo.
7 - 38	8-30-38	Roanoke Rapids, N.C. 90 miles inland	Shot	240 SSW	1 mo.
7 - 38	10-17-38	Puerto Rico (Juana Diaz)	Killed	1600 SSE	3 mo.
7 - 38	3-14-40	Cape May Co., N.J.	Band Found	0	2 yr.
8- 6-38	8- 5-40	Houtzdale, Penna. 225 miles inland	Washed ashore, Dead	225 NW	2 yr.

Banded	Reported	Place	How Found	Distance	Time
				0	2 yr.
				680 SSW	3 yr.
				0	4 yr.
				55 WNW	2 mo.
				125 SSW	2 mo.
				160 SSW	1 mo.
				325 SW	2 mo.
				0	2 mo.
				100 SW	3 mo.
				0	1 1/2 mo.
				100 W	2 1/2 mo.
				2500 S	10 mo.
				275 SSW	2 yr.
				1000 S	3 yr.
				1000 S	3 yr.
				1000 S	3 yr.
				3500 SSW	4 yr.
				235 SW	8 yr.
				20 SSW	2 mo.
				195 SW	3 mo.
				900 SW	3 mo.
				990 SSW	3 mo.
				2500 SSE	5 mo.
				60 W	4 mo.
				7000 SSE	5 mo.
				50 N	4 mo.
				80 W	3 mo.
				160 SSW	3 mo.
				0	1 mo.
				275 S	1 1/2 mo.
				950 S	3 1/2 mo.
				900 S	2 1/2 mo.
				1400 SSE	7 mo.
				450 SW	2 yr.
				80 NNE	3 yr.
				325 SW	5 yr.
				425 SW	8 yr.
				0	18 yr.

Summary: Total Number of Ospreys banded: 457  
 Number of Returns and Recoveries: 76  
 Percentage of Returns and Recoveries: 16.6%

Returns: Found dead within three months of banding in vicinity of nests: 7  
 Reported in subsequent years in vicinity of nests: 12

After 2 years: 5  
 " 3 " : 2  
 " 4 " : 2  
 " 12 " : 1  
 " 14 " : 1  
 " 18 " : 1

Recoveries: Total Number: 57

Pennsylvania	3	Florida	6
Delaware	3	Cuba (Oriente)	3
Maryland	10	Dominican Republic	1
Virginia	7	Puerto Rico	1
West Virginia	2	Colombia	1
N. Carolina	10	Venezuela	2
S. Carolina	2	Brazil (Manaos)	2
Georgia	4		

313 Sharp Ave., Glenolden, Penna.

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SQUEEZE-CLIPS A new shipment of Squeeze-Clips, a useful and versatile fastening device familiar to most EBBA members, has been received. Sets can be obtained from the Treasurer, Mrs. Stanley S. Dickerson, 222 DeVoe Avenue, Spotswood, N.J. The price is \$2.00, plus 32¢ postage; size "00" clips are 40¢ per 100.

FRIGHT REACTION IN BANDED BIRDS Mr. Raymond H. Bubb of 917 Madison Ave., York, Pa., writes that a Downy Woodpecker which he trapped last November was retrapped in January, and when released did not fly off, but dropped to the ground, and, using its wings, worked its way into some honeysuckle. This same bird was trapped again in late March, but this time flew off promptly when released. Mr. Bubb describes a similar reaction in a White-throated Sparrow which was moving through a hedgerow ahead of him as he walked: when it came to an open space, it did not fly over it, but fluttered along on the ground until it reached thick cover again. Comments from other banders who have had similar experiences with such reactions would be greatly appreciated.

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