MORE ON THE TRAVELS OF HERRING GULLS

By John V. Dennis and William Pepper

At the April 22, 1961 EBBA meeting, Mabel Gillespie presented a paper on the results obtained from Herring Gull banding during the period 1929-1960 on Martha's Vineyard Island and nearby Muskegat Island, both in Massachusetts. This paper appeared in the July-August 1961 issue of EBBA NEWS.

Mrs. Gillespie in her paper has very capably summarized the results obtained from 185 recoveries. Since her presentation a number of new recoveries have been received, and also she did not include a substantial number of recoveries obtained by banders operating from Nantucket. Although Herring Gulls have been banded for years by Mrs. Edith Andrews and others from Nantucket, not until the summers of 1959 and 1960 were these operations on a large scale. During July and early August, 1960, for example, Nantucket banders operating on Nantucket and nearby Tuckernuck and Muskegat Islands accounted for a banding total of 3,800 gull nestlings -- 102 Great Black-backed Gulls, 240 Laughing Gulls, and 3,458 Herring Gulls. Mrs. Gillespie has included some of the Muskegat recoveries from these operations in her report. However, we have an additional 91 recoveries distributed between all the various island banding operations, and it seems appropriate now to group these with the recoveries already reported upon by Mrs. Gillespie. We do this now, not with the thought of altering or contradicting any of the conclusions arrived at by Mrs. Gillespie, but simply to complete the record, as it were.

Like Mrs. Gillespie we do not include as a recovery birds found dead at the breeding colonies where they were banded.

Our total of 276 recoveries (including those already reported upon by Mrs. Gillespie) are distributed between different provinces, states, and other political divisions as follows:

Prince Edward's Island	1	North Carolina	11
New Brunswick	4	South Carolina	3
Michigan	1	Georgia	4
Maine	9	Florida	23
New Hampshire	1	Bahamas	1
Massachusetts	79	Cuba	1
Rhode Island	20	Alabama	1
Connecticut	11	Mississippi	4
New York	48	Louisiana	6
New Jersey	25	Texas	14
Delaware	5	Mexico	2
Maryland	3		
Virginia	9		276

Beginning with the more northern group of recoveries from Prince Edward's Island to New Hampshire, we are struck mainly by their fewness in number. These recoveries account for only 5.8 percent of the total. Another striking feature is the short interval of time, in most cases, between banding and recovery. The average time interval is three months. The interval in three cases was between 8 months and one year, but in all other cases it was less than two and one half months. The Prince Edward's Island recovery was of a bird banded as a nestling on July 11 and recovered on August 15.

A gull at Alpena in north Michigan on Lake Huron has already been commented upon by Mrs. Gillespie who describes this recovery as "probably aberrant". This gull, recovered eight months after banding, is indeed far off the lanes of travel followed by our island gulls. We do not even have an intermediate recovery to suggest whether its route might have been by the Hudson or St. Lawrence.

We can agree with Mrs. Gillespie who describes the late summer and early fall movement northward as "slight". It might be added that all the northern recoveries, omitting the one from Michigan, were on or near the seacoast. Those recoveries not directly on the seacoast were short distances up major river systems.

Turning to Massachusetts, where 79 or 28 percent of the recoveries were located, we find that by far the greatest number are distributed on Cape Cod and the coastal mainland of Massachusetts. As mentioned by Mrs. Gillespie, the obvious route for Herring Gulls moving southward would be first to Cape Cod and the mainland and this to be followed by a coastal movement toward the wintering grounds.

Seventeen of the Massachusetts recoveries were on the same island where the gulls were reared (but not at the breeding colonies themselves), two were on nearby islands in the Elizabeth group, four were of Muskegat birds recovered on Martha's Vineyard, and fifty-six were from the Cape or the coast of Massachusetts mainland. There were no recoveries whatsoever that indicated anything but a northward or westward movement within the island breeding colonies themselves. Not even an adult gull banded as a nestling on Martha's Vineyard has been recovered westward on Muskegat, Tuckernuck, or Nantucket. This not only indicates a strong immediate northward orientation on the part of young gulls (which does not seem to be interfered with by offshore winds), but also it indicates that there is no colonization eastward by gulls from the more westward islands. Of the four recoveries of Muskegat reared gulls on Martha's Vineyard, two were September and October recoveries, respectively, of birds fledged a few months earlier. The other two were of adult gulls aged four and seven years, and recovered respectively in July and October. The July recovery is strongly suggestive of a Muskegat reared bird having colonized on Martha's Vineyard.

It might be added that only two foreign Herring Gulls have been recovered on Nantucket, both birds reared at more northern breeding colonies. One was banded as a nestling on the Isle of Shoals, New Hampshire, and recovered fifteen years later in September on Nantucket (there is an indication that the bird may have been dead some weeks or months before it was found and the band retrieved). The other recovery was a bird banded as a nestling at Manawagonish Island near St. John, New Brunswick and recovered nearly two years later on Nantucket.

The twenty recoveries in Rhode Island and the eleven recoveries in Connecticut (all coastal) are entirely in keeping with the coastal movement that takes place after the young of the year have moved northward to Cape Cod and the Massachusetts mainland. To be sure, only about half (15) of the Rhode Island and Connecticut recoveries are young of the year. The rest (16) are adults. This large proportion of adult recoveries is suggestive at least of colonization in the Long Island Sound and Narragansett Bay areas by gulls reared in the Massachusetts island colonies. Of course an adult recovery, even in mid-summer, is not necessarily indicative of breeding at the place of recovery. Many adults, even at breeding colonies, are non-breeders.

Further, in regard to the Rhode Island and Connecticut recoveries, it is to be noted that Connecticut with a longer coastline has only about half as many recoveries as Rhode Island. Quite a number of factors enter into this. Probably the most important is that Herring Gulls in this region do not scrupulously follow the inner coast, but many travel via Long Island both in their migration south and return northward. In so doing they would be expected to cross Block Island Sound, an over-water flight of about 20 miles on an average. Supporting this crossing is one recovery of a young of the year from Block Island and no less than forty-one recoveries of young and adults alike from Long Island itself.

The Long Island recoveries, in contrast to those for Connecticut and Rhode Island, reflect a much higher percentage of young birds. Arbitrarily placing young of year as birds recovered between the time of their being fledged and the following March, we find that 28 of the 41 Long Island recoveries (or 68 percent) fall into this young age group. Thus Long Island shows up more as a migration route than a possible breeding area for gulls colonizing from the island colonies of Massachusetts.

Another point of interest for Long Island is that 74 percent of the recoveries are reported for the bays and beaches of the south shore. The remaining recoveries are for inland Long Island and the north shore. Here again is further indication of outer coastal migration as compared to migration along more inland bodies of water.

Turning to recoveries in the vicinity of New York City, we find four for the north side of Long Island Sound in New York State, two for reservoirs near the Hudson, one for the Hudson above New York City, six for adjacent towns and cities in New Jersey, three for Staten Island, two for the Bronx, and eight for Jamaica Bay, Brooklyn, and Queens. This makes a total of 26 recoveries in the New York City area. Interestingly enough New York City itself (Manhattan) provides no recoveries at all.

The recovery on the Hudson was at Croton-on-Hudson about forty miles upstream from the Lower Bay. Another recovery somewhat distant from the coast in this area is from Hackettstown, New Jersey. We do not have the details from the Hackettstown recovery, but it seems likely that it might have been from a nearby lake, such as Budd Lake or Lake Hopatcong.

New Jersey, with a total of 25 recoveries, is still within an area of abundance so far as the island reared birds of Massachusetts are concerned. Quite surprisingly the ratio of adults to young has increased. Of New Jersey recoveries 64 percent are of adults and 36 percent of young (through March of the first year). This is a considerably higher average than for either the Connecticut-Rhode Island or the Long Island recoveries. This may suggest breeding, but once again we need to be cautious in view of so many uncertainties in this regard.

Maryland, Delaware and Virginia, with a total of only 17 recoveries, marks an area of sharp falling off in recoveries. Even the presence of many large rivers and bays does not seem to detain the Massachusetts gulls. Perhaps those that have gotten this far are bound for much more distant points and do not tend to linger. In this area, 76 percent of the birds recovered are young by our definition. This is the southernmost breeding area of the Herring Gull, but at present the colonies here apparently are not large.

There is little of interest to be found in the recoveries for North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, which total 18 in number. Coastlines in these states would appear to be used primarily as routes of transit to more distant points. One of these destinations is Florida which has a total of 23 recoveries.

No less than eight of the Florida recoveries are from Jacksonville and its vicinity. This large local sample may partly reflect the tendency of Herring Gulls to locate at river estuaries, in this case the St. Johns. Also there may be above average interest in reporting bands in the area. The remaining Florida recoveries are well distributed on both coasts. There is no pattern whatsoever to suggest a north Florida crossing between the Atlantic and the Gulf. Mrs. Gillespie has hinted at such a possibilty in her paper, but then added evidence in refutation of this theory.

The shortest time interval between banding and recovery, so far as the Florida birds are concerned, is four months, and the longest is one and one-half years. The average time interval is seven months.

In contrast to this evidence, which indicates that four or more months are needed to reach Florida from the breeding grounds, is a short term recovery from Andros Town (on Andros Island?) in the Bahamas. This recovery is of a bird banded by Pepper on July 25, 1957 at Martha's Vineyard and shot on October 5, 1957 at Andros Town. Andros Island lies some 150 miles east of the Florida Keys. One wonders if this bird was not heading still further south into the West Indies, and therefore was undertaking a more rapid flight than is customary with Florida destined birds. The 1957 edition of the A. O. U. Check-list states that the Herring Gull winters "throughout the West Indies from the Bahamas. . .to Barbados."

A recovery from Havana, Cuba of a bird "captured" offers nothing out of the ordinary. This bird was banded on July 4, 1956 on Martha's Vineyard by Pepper and was recovered five months later on December 1, 1956.

Turning to the Gulf coast of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, we find eleven recoveries. As in Florida the shortest interval between banding and recovery was four months. The longest interval was seven and one-half months. The average interval between banding and recovery was five and one-half months. Three recoveries are from just north of New Orleans at Lake Pontchartrain or the Mississippi River.

Texas with fourteen recoveries is slightly ahead of the combined total of the three states just mentioned. Six recoveries are from Galveston and the adjacent Galveston Bay area. One recovery is well up the Neches River north of Beaumont. The remaining Texas recoveries are widely distributed along the coast. Doubtless reflecting the longer time needed to reach Texas, as compared to Florida and the north Gulf Coast, the shortest time interval between banding and recovery was six months. The longest interval was twenty-five months. The average interval between banding and recovery was ten months.

The recovery of a gull at Vera Cruz, Mexico eight and one-half months after being banded on Muskegat seems quite normal. Our second Mexican record, however, offers the most remarkable recovery we have yet obtained. This was a bird banded July 18, 1960 on Muskegat by Pepper and recovered on February 20, 1961 at Lake Papagayo near Acapulco in Guerrero Province. Mrs. Gillespie, who refers to this recovery, cites it as evidence that gulls from the Massachusetts breeding colonies are capable of making extensive overland flights. It may be pointed out that the narrowest crossing in Mexico is the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, some 120 miles wide. After crossing this Isthmus, the gull would have to fly some 300 miles westward along the Pacific coast to reach the vicinity of Acapulco. There is a very remote chance that the gull could have reached the Pacific by

flight via the Panama Canal. However the Canal is almost beyond the limits of the Herring Gull's winter range, and moreover it scarcely seems possible that the gull could have covered the tremendous distances involved during the interval of seven months between banding and recovery. It may be added that the Fifth Edition of the A. O. U. Check-list mentions a Laughing Gull banded on Muskegat that was recovered at Acajutla on the Pacific Coast of El Salvador. One can only say that the route these two gulls took to cross to the Pacific is a mystery.

We are indebted to Mrs. Gillespie and Miss Grace Meleney for bringing us up to date on their recoveries. Also we greatly appreciate the assistance we have had from the J. Clinton Andrews, Mrs. Roy E. Larsen, Miss Mabel Depue, John Boyd, Bruce Martlett, and still others in banding Herring Gulls.

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BOHEMIAN WAXWING INFORMATION WANTED

By Mrs. John Lueshen

Because of the numerous reports of Bohemian Waxwings this year I have been making a survey. I have had some unusually interesting reports. Bohemian Waxwings have been seen from New York to California in areas seldom or never seen before.

A flock was found dead, presumed starved, in Huron, South Dakota. All available feed had been stripped from the trees there -- the remainder of the flock accepted cornbread at a feeder.

My husband and I have banded several Bohemian Waxwings. For several days only one was here. A pan of water on our doorstep in sub-zero weather attracted his attention. We then put out raisins which he readily accepted. In one day he ate 63 raisins. When others also found the food and water we baited Potter traps with raisins and as a result caught nine birds on our doorstep. They returned and were retrapped frequently for several days.

Will EBBA members please help? You can help by answering the following questions:

1. Have you seen Bohemian Waxwings this season?
   When? Where? How many?
   What sort of habitat?
   On what were they feeding?
   How often have you seen them in the past years? (Compare numbers with those seen this season).
   Give any observations of behaviorisms, or movements, or facts of special interest.
   And please don't forget to add your name and address!

Wisner, Nebraska ★★★