

BANDING NOTES ON THE STARLING AT MEADVILLE, PA.
By Robert C. Leberman

To say that the introduced Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) was a generally unpopular member of our North American avifauna would be putting it rather mildly. Some people tolerate it, most bird watchers are inclined to rather despise it, and a few of my hardy "birder" friends choose to ignore the species altogether -- even to the degree of refusing to list them when they are keeping score on the local Christmas counts.

Choose to ignore it, hate it, or wring its neck at every opportunity if you will -- nonetheless it is here to stay; one of the most abundant of our eastern birds. It would seem at least that the Starling deserves the minimum courtesy of being studied by us bird banding addicts.

Armed with a new banding permit in May of 1958 we set out to ring every feathered creature that we could get our hands on; the pugnacious Starling having been one of the most frequent of those captured. Only the Evening Grosbeak has exceeded it in total numbers taken and in the number of recoveries received. An examination of our banding files from May 1958 through December 1962 shows the following statistics:

TABLE I

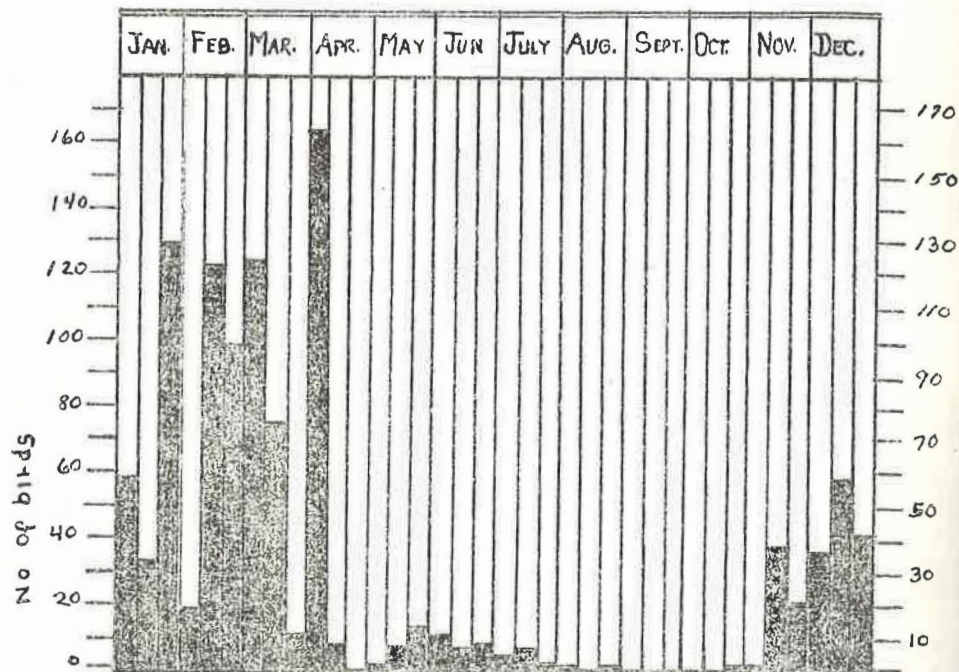
Number banded	
1958	76
1959	254
1960	331
1961	360
1962	71
Total	1092

Number of repeats	12
" " returns	22
" recovered	27



FIGURE 1

Number of Starlings banded at Meadville, Pennsylvania
by "ten day" periods -- 1958 to 1962



Despite the fact that over 1000 Starlings were banded during this period they are not particularly common at our Saeger Hill station, which is situated about three miles southeast of Meadville. Most of the birds that we have captured were taken during the colder months of the year when there is more than the usual amount of fresh snow on the ground. Then, hard pressed for food, the birds invade the local feeding stations -- including our own -- sometimes in large flocks. FIGURE 1 graphically shows the season of the year (by "ten day" periods) when our Starlings are banded. It will be noted that we first begin to take them in numbers after the first week of November -- past the peak of their autumnal migration. There are probably a couple of reasons that would seem to explain why we have failed to take the birds during the early part of the fall passage. There is no snow to bring them to our feeding station; they probably feed in large flocks in more open rural areas. Their diet at this time, too, consists to a large degree of fruits (wild and cultivated) which they can find in quantity.

As can be shown by TABLE II, Meadville, like most areas, has two distinct population classes of Starlings -- resident and migratory.

Apparently most birds banded between mid-November and the first week of February are resident. There may be cases of more or less "local migration" within this group, e. g. the case of the first bird in TABLE II (no. 1) which was banded at Meadville on January 01, 1959. This bird was shot near Linesville, Pennsylvania 16 air miles to the west of the point of banding on April 10 of the same year. This recovery could, seemingly, more easily be explained by the wandering of a "resident" bird over the case of a true migration. There are several listings on this table indicating winter banded birds taken during the breeding season and summer months in the general Meadville area.

TABLE II

Recoveries of Starlings Banded at Meadville, Pennsylvania
as Reported by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Date Banded	Recovered At	Date Recovered	How Obtained
1. 01-01-59	Linesville, Pa.	04-10-59	shot
2. 12-30-58	Meadville, Pa.	04-04-59	"
3. 03-13-59	Guys Mills, Pa.	1959	"found"
4. 04-03-59	Meadville, Pa.	05-29-61	trapped (not banding)
5. 08-05-59	"	06-23-60	found dead
6. 07-04-60	"	12-02-60	" "
7. 12-01-59	"	03- -60	"found"
8. 02-07-60	few mi. e. MdvL.	01-29-61	found dead
9. 02-16-60	Stoney Creek, Ont.	06-06-60	killed by a cat
10. "	Hazard, Kentucky	02-05-61	"killed"
11. 03-03-60	Conneaut Lake, Pa.	03-10-60	shot
12. "	Meadville, Pa.	08-07-61	found dead
13. 03-04-60	few mi. e. MdvL.	02-02-61	" "
14. 03-05-60	Meadville, Pa.	06-16-61	killed by a cat
15. 02-22-60	"	03- -60	"found"
16. 02-29-60	Pittsburgh, Pa.	02-19-61	found dead
17. 03-01-60	Meadville, Pa.	02- -61	shot
18. 04-01-61	"	05-14-61	"
19. 04-02-61	"	"	"
20. "	"	"	"
21. "	"	"	"
22. "	"	"	"
23. "	"	"	"
24. "	"	07-18-61	found dead
25. "	Corry, Pa.	05- -61	" "
26. 12-28-59	Sigel, Pa.	05-11-61	found shot
27. 01-22-61	Meadville, Pa.	06-08-62	found dead
	"	02-07-62	shot

* * * * *

Apparently spring migrants first arrive in numbers in our region beginning with the second week of February and continuing through the first week of April. Two birds that had been banded on February 16, 1960 are representative of this highly migratory class. One of them was killed by a cat approximately 115 miles to the north on its breeding grounds at Stoney Creek, a suburb of Hamilton, Ontario on June 6 of that year. (Did this bird migrate directly over Lake Erie, or move the long way around easterly toward the Buffalo area?) The second individual was "killed" (probably on its wintering grounds) near Hazard, Kentucky on February 5, 1961 about 350 miles to the southwest.

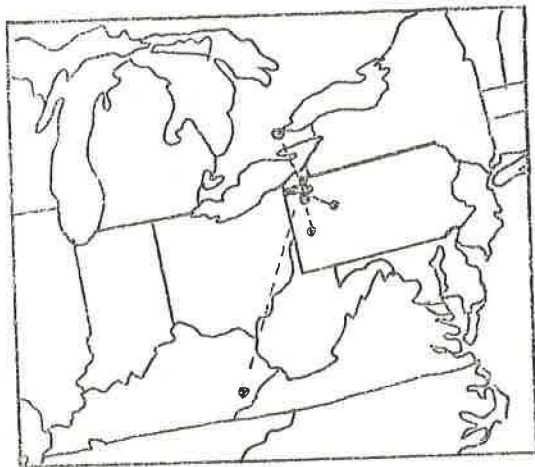


FIG. 2. Map showing place of recovery of several Meadville banded Starlings.

That all birds banded from a given flock are not necessarily traveling toward the same destination is obvious. Of a large gathering captured on April 2, 1961 we have recoveries of four that were shot locally during the next few days. (All four plus one from the previous day, a Tufted Titmouse, and a Rufous-sided Towhee were shot by the same individual during the next few days a few miles from this station, and reported by letter of May 14 to the FWS.) Two others from this flock were taken some days later in entirely different directions. One was found dead at Corry, Erie County, Pennsylvania (about 32 miles to the northeast) in May, while the second was found "shot" at Sigel, Jefferson County, Pennsylvania, 60 miles to the southeast on May 11. This last recovery is particularly interesting in that it seems to represent, at least from the information available, a case of "reverse migration".

Varied schemes seem to have been tried to rid an area of its Starling population. Recordings of alarm calls reportedly have been used to frighten the birds. Electrical shocks have been tried, metal foil has been dangled, boards clapped, guns fired, bells rung -- you name it, it's probably been tried at one time or another by some desperate Starling hater. Our own method seems to be one of the most effective: we band them! Notoriously trap shy, once caught they rarely return to the area of the mishap. As shown in TABLE I, only 12 (or approximately 1%) of our birds have ever repeated at our station, and only 22 returned more than three months after the date of banding. Seldom have we seen banded birds at our feeders.

The traps we use include several three-cell Potters in which perhaps half of our birds have been taken. Most of the others were captured in an Australian Crow Trap (a large V-top trap in which the birds enter from the lower half of the V but cannot figure how to get out the same way and fly toward the closed top.) While we have used mist nets throughout the later spring months, summer and fall, Starling are rarely found in the area of our station during these months so we have infrequently taken them with this device. Other banders, however, have reported them easier to net than to trap at their stations.

It seems likely from both recoveries and field observations that most of the resident Starlings which we have captured roost within the city of Meadville -- particularly in those sections bordering French Creek. Many of these birds then radiate out during the day to the surrounding farm lands to feed. Most migrant birds passing through our area, however, probably roost in Conneaut Marsh. On almost any evening in late summer and fall one can watch from a vantage point on Saeger Hill flock after flock of these birds heading in the direction of the marsh, which is about six miles to the southwest. At the marsh the birds assemble from many miles around in all directions. It would be a Herculean task, if not impossible, to estimate the total number of birds using this site during the peak of migration. The 75,000 Starlings reported by Ronald Leberman (in local Field Notes) from Geneva is for only a small section of this ten mile long swamp. The total number, if known, would probably be astounding.

Physical defects and various injuries seem to be very much more frequent in Starlings than any other species we have handled at our station. No attempt has been made to examine each bird carefully for such abnormalities, but when they are obvious we have taken notes. One or more missing toes are probably the most frequent defects. We occasionally find "curlew" and "godwit" billed individuals. Mandibles which are shorter or longer than normal are not uncommon, and split or broken bills are quite numerous. One bird had a tremendously long hind toe nail which was twisted up around the leg making the foot useless, while the same individual's upper mandible was very much shorter than the lower. Swollen legs and various odd growths are now and then seen. Partial albinism is reg-

ularly met with -- most often as only a few inconspicuous feathers, but much white is not rare. One of our most interesting (and beautiful) cases was of a bird we took which had blue-white wings and tail. The rest of the plumage was also very light, being a blue-gray color. Its right foot was severely deformed. Another bird had a light cream-colored eye (Starling eyes being normally dark brown -- with a light ring in the female.)

I have found much of interest in the study of Starlings. But, like most banders, answering a few questions has only presented me with a dozen more. So, guess I'll continue to band the Starlings that happen to come my way -- a bander is never satisfied.

R. D. 1, Saeger Hill, Meadville, Pennsylvania.



MIST NETS

Having difficulty getting the nets you need? Below are sources which can furnish nets of many different lengths, heights, colors, mesh sizes, etc.

EBBA NET COMMITTEE -- Members wishing to purchase nets are asked to send a stamped and self-addressed envelope (4x9") for a listing of nets now available.

Write - EBBA Net Committee, Mrs. Eleanor E. Dater, Chairman,
P. O. Box 111, Ramsey, N. J. 07446

NETS SOLD BY NEBBA -- The Northeastern Bird-Banding Association imports nets as a service to members and other netters.

Write - Mr. E. A. Bergstrom, 37 Old Brook Road, West Hartford 17, Conn.

BLEITZ WILDLIFE FOUNDATION -- As a service to scientific investigation, the Bleitz Wildlife Foundation has available a new price list containing several new types of mist nets, net poles, and other banding supplies.

Write - Bleitz Wildlife Foundation, 5334 Hollywood Boulevard,
Hollywood 27, California.