INFORMATION PLEASE SESSIONS
1965 Workshop Report by Dorothy L. Bordner

The "Information Please" sessions at the annual meeting were well attended and the questions raised covered a variety of topics. Questions on ageing and sexing were raised in every session which indicates that they are major problems for banders.

From the discussion of Slate-colored Juncos it was apparent that many ideas for ageing and sexing have been tried with varying success. The eye color of immatures is gray and of adults a dark red. The gray color persists in part of the eye until quite late in the year. Both skull ossification and eye color are good for ageing in fall migration. However, more work is needed to determine how long either of these methods remain diagnostic. Lengths (wing or bird) cannot be used to determine either age or sex. The overlap areas are too great. Other ideas which need more study before conclusions can be drawn are bill color--one color for male and dark tip for female--and amount of white in tail. The comment was made that the white in the tail may be a signal device.

White-throated Sparrows have two distinct color phases--bright and dull--and cannot be aged or sexed by color brightness.

Only the adult male Purple Finch can be sexed. The adult plumage is acquired after the first postnuptial molt.

The mouth color of Catbirds is the best criterion for ageing them, i. e. light in immatures and black in adults. This character lasts longer than eye color or condition of the under tail coverts.

During breeding season the presence of a brood patch is good for sex determination in Robins and Catbirds. It was pointed out that young birds also have bare patches late in the season so care must be taken.

Young of many species have naked thighs in fall. Also, the under wing coverts are sparse and very downy.

When and what nestlings can be safely banded? Many banders present did not band any nestlings while others did large numbers of certain species. The number of returns and recoveries from nestlings is very low. Nestling banding is probably not of much value unless done in large numbers over a period of time. Predation and desertion are two dangers in nestling banding. Both vary greatly from one species to another. Nests located on or near the ground are more easily found by predators after handling. Nests of birds such as phoebes and swallows located in protected spots on buildings and bridges are relatively safe from predators (other than man) as are bluebirds, wrens, and others which nest in houses. None of the species mentioned will desert easily.

(I even had a phoebe stick to her nest when the floor of a bridge was replaced right over her head!) Under ordinary circumstances nests should not be visited more than once a day and for banding purposes once a week is often enough. Contact with the nest or its contents should be avoided until the time of banding. A "snoop stick", made by fastening a bicycle mirror to a broomstick, aids in observing contents of nests above eye level. Nestlings should not be banded until the foot has developed so there is no chance of the band slipping down over it. Also, in some species, e. g. Barn Swallows, the leg is larger than normal at one stage of development and nestlings should not be banded until after this period.

Miscellaneous bits of information included the following:

Celluloid bands are best for color banding terns.

Tethered nets can be used under varied wind conditions and are more effective than untethered ones.

Black nets are best for most general banding.

Twigs and pins may be used to regulate the flow of water in a water drip trap.

Series banding is a good idea <u>if</u> enough birds of one species are being banded -- otherwise use the bands in order.

Bands should be replaced <u>only</u> if badly worn -- not just because they have been on the bird a certain length of time.

Since some individuals of a species may be larger or smaller than average, always use the band size that fits best.

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