

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEGATIVE INFORMATION

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At the present time a study is under way regarding the numbers of birds, colonies, breeding success, causes of mortality in the Brown Pelican, *P. carolinensis*. Also included will be an analysis of banding that has taken place in past years.

I am sorry to state that the study is several years late in getting under way - too many colonies have already ceased to exist. A true picture of mortality among the pre-flight young can never be obtained even by band analysis because of banding office instructions over the past years. In order to eliminate work in the banding office, we have unintentionally created biased information on a tremendous scale.

Over the years it has been stressed that banders of colonial nesters, terns, gulls, pelicans, etc., should visit the colonies and remove all bands from all pre-flight dead young and destroy them to prevent reporting by the general public. In the case of bands on dead young found during banding season, if previous reports have not been sent in, the band numbers should be deleted and marked destroyed, the general attitude being that the bands become brittle if reopened, therefore should not be placed on another bird.

I have never agreed with the above policy and have followed it only if no young of the same age could be found to place the recovered band on. In the 1964 banding season over 500 bands were removed from Brown Pelicans in one colony. On one visit over 125 bands were removed from dead birds that were fully fledged and ready for flight. This species uses a large, relatively expensive, band that does not require much opening to be placed on the tarsus. I, for one, am of the opinion that a size 8 would be a much better fit than the specified size 9.

Now, let us see what has happened as a result of band disposal according to the instructions from the banding office. (1) Thousands of bands have been placed on many species as locals, or nestlings, in the colonies and carried in the banding office as destroyed. We cannot tell how many because a few bands are dropped over-board or really lost. What has been the actual mortality? (2) A bias has been set up in the actual number of birds banded. Over the last 30 years this has run into many thousands. In the 1964 season I actually banded fully a third more young pelicans than my records show, because I reused many bands on birds of a like age. How many of a given species have been actually banded? (3) The extent of the losses of pre-flight young are now needed if we are to attempt a true picture of an assumed normal loss from year to year within a given species. In the case of the pelican a normal loss can never be acquired again for some of our important colonies have completely vanished. What is the normal loss within a species in a given colony, or between colonies? (4) It should be of interest to investigators of the future to know what caused these losses

from year to year, such as high tides, storms, disease, chemicals, etc. How can we gain this knowledge if it is not recorded on recover cards? (5) Bands cost money and each must be accounted for by the bander and the banding office. Would it not be better in the case of the colonial nesters, at least, to show what actually happened to each of the banded young? Chemicals will become an even greater factor of mortality among these species in the future years. It is a false economy to save on record keeping in an office with IBM machines and then lose the cost of bands, the efforts of the bander and the information that should have been obtained in the placing of the band. In this case the information regarding migration, age, and local movement is negative in that the bird may have never left the colony.

What is to be the policy of the banding office in the future regarding the banding of colonial nesters? All are in trouble. All are a part of the same picture, including the osprey, eagles, hawks and owls. The great puzzle to this writer is how biologists and ecologists can be extensively active in the field and fail to grasp the causes of declines that started about the time DDT was released for general home use. The effects of chlorinated hydrocarbons are much more extensive today because the family group has become greatly enlarged and their use more extensive.

We might expect a new directive from the banding office regarding all species of colonial nesters in the near future. It need not apply to the song birds and other such species if this is felt to be a burden on the banding office. With the exception of blackbirds, I deliberately band few nestlings. We can certainly hope that the directive will not show as great lack of thought as the one from Interior requiring a No Trespass zone of one-half mile around each Bald Eagle nest - and this when we are trying to gain information about the nesting success of this species. Let us hope that the directive is not taken so literally that my friend, Mr. Edward Dingle, will have to move from his house where these birds have nested in his yard for over 30 years.

I have seen the complete cycle take place in my efforts with the Bald Eagle. My permit was issued in 1949 for the purpose of banding and making a study of the Bald Eagle. Today this is the only species I am not allowed to band or even approach the nest for study. In my past discussions with Mr. Broley, he agreed that the eagles, as a species, paid little attention to man's visits to the nest and this was not a factor in nest desertions. How do we acquire new knowledge of a species without diligent field work? It will not be gained from reading a rehash of some author's book based on field work of other authors who might have been wrong in the first instance.

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