

ON NEGATIVE INFORMATION: II

By Roland C. Clement

I found T. A. Beckett's article on THE IMPORTANCE OF NEGATIVE INFORMATION (EBBA News, 29:4:181-2) stimulating and offer some reactions.

Mr. Beckett expresses a valid concern over the loss of negative information which has resulted from recommended policy, viz., to remove all bands from pre-flight dead young in colonial birds, but his own unapproved practice of re-using such bands without reporting on the initial loss of young is no improvement.

It is the bander of colonial birds who must accumulate basic data on pre-flight mortality, since the report of a band, whether taken on or near the colonial site weeks or months later, provides little information on what was actually happening to the colony. Only the man on the ground can detect what may be causing undue mortality, and set about checking the likelihood that the suspected mortality factor is really operative. It is indeed a tragedy that so many people have banded such large numbers of birds without at the same time keeping more careful notes on the biodynamics of the population they were marking. Many banders have notes they have never published, and this too is a loss to science in the evaluation of the environmental effects of our technologies.

As to the Bald Eagle, Mr. Beckett has failed to recognize that the "sanctuary" directive of the Secretary of the Interior applies only to lands under Interior's jurisdiction. The new restriction on banding Bald Eagles is designed to spare these birds all possible disturbance during the nesting cycle, since it is not necessary to band eagles to determine their nesting success. I do hope Mr. Beckett will soon publish the results of his eagle studies dating back to 1949, since the National Audubon Society is now attempting to collate and analyze the results of the cooperative study it has organized and led since 1960. Mr. Alexander (Sandy) Sprunt, IV, of P. O. Box 231, Tavernier, Florida, the Society's Research Director, is in charge of this project and will welcome any unreported data on eagles or colonial birds.

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