

ANOTHER ASPECT OF NEGATIVE INFORMATION

By Mabel Warburton

Questions have been raised on the importance of negative information by T.A. Beckett III (EBBA NEWS Vol. 29, No.4) and again by G. Haggood Parks (EBBA NEWS Vol. 29, No.6) where each pointed out that the destruction of bands used on birds later found dead, and the deletion of entries already made, caused biased or erroneous records or, worse yet, no records at all.

Along these same lines, Mabel Gillespie in her "A Case for Serendipity" (EBBA NEWS Vol. 27, No.1) states that while planned projects are rightly stressed, "aimless banding may lead to significant discovery". Mrs. Gillespie backs up her theory with four factual writings made possible by her early years of banding whatever came to hand, regardless of whether at the time of banding there seemed any reason to band a particular bird, or a particular species.

I contend that there is absolutely no way of knowing what may come of a particular banding act.

For this reason, I take issue with the Banding Office wherein they discourage the banding of "sick or injured" birds. The reason given is that a sick or injured bird is not expected to behave in the same way a wild bird would (is he any less "wild" because he is sick or injured?).

In 1955 when I became a bander, pox virus infection was considered fatal. Also, it was indistinguishable to the ordinary bander from scaly-leg mites. Rigid instructions not having been made by the Banding Office, we banded any and all birds with either of these infections. Now in 1966 we have evidence, that pox is not only non-fatal, but that some birds have been known to live a year with the affliction, and in others, it disappears entirely in four to five weeks. Thus if we toss out, unbanded, all birds showing signs of either pox or mite infection, we are certainly creating negative information.

Many birds show signs of insecticide poisoning, flying in an aimless fashion, or flopping about with spasmodic movements. These would surely come under the heading of sick birds. A Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) band #583-96712 showed all of these signs, yet when it repeated six days later, it flew well, and again six days later still, the bird showed no signs of illness at all, flight and actions were entirely normal.

At Island Beach Operation Recovery (1966 season) a Brant (*Branta bernicla*) was taken by hand due to a wing injury. Because the Banding Office now frowns on banding injured birds, this bird was released unbanded, although he was in good condition except for the wing, and sailed down the bay in a saucy fashion once we got him to water. Had we never,

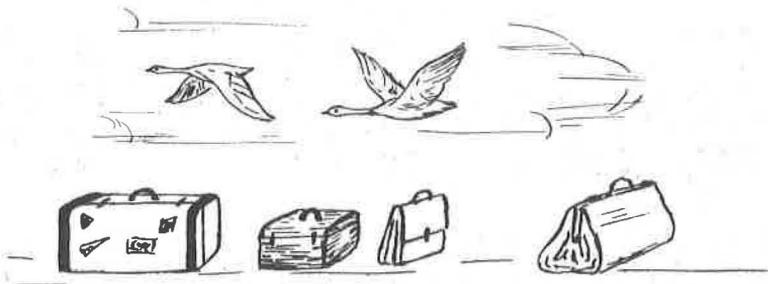
previous to this, banded birds with wing-snap, how would we have discovered that it takes two weeks for the wing to heal and the bird to fly normally again? Our Brant is now among the banded unknown, for there is little reason for waterfowl not to survive a wing injury.

In the same paragraph where it explains that we should not band sick or injured birds, the Banding Office states that the "reason we are banding birds is to learn more about the movements and survival of wild, migratory birds". Injured and sick birds do survive, but it is only by means of bands that we can determine for how long, and what movement, if any, takes place after recovery. Banding does not change the status: captivity does.

It is not my intention to suggest that non-professional banders make a profound study of bird diseases or injuries; but only that they note to the best of their ability such defects, and that by means of bands, follow up all information that comes by way of these bands. Any bander can, in this way, collect data for more serious study by another more qualified.

Any bander with common sense enough to be a bander in the first place will not, of course, band the mortally wounded or dying bird. If we are to study the whole bird, we must note the already dead (as suggested by Beckett and Parks), the sick, the deformed, the injured and the normal. To leave out a single aspect, distorts the whole picture.

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After 21 years, 18 of them banding birds, we are selling our house and correspondence should be addressed as follows effective May 1, 1967:

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