

A NASHVILLE WARBLER RETURN  
EXCEPTIONAL OR MERELY INTERESTING

By L.S. Ryan

Nashville Warbler (Vermivora ruficapilla) No. 113-63686 was banded seven miles northeast of Little Falls, Minn. (460-0941) on August 23, 1966 as an U,U and returned September 27, 1968. Returns of nesting warblers are not too unusual and this could well be considered as "merely interesting". But, if it were a migrant bird, it should be considered "exceptional". Non-nesting, non-wintering, truly migrant returns are very rare.

Was Nashville 113-63686 a migrant or summer resident? In the years 1965 through 1968, 63 spring and 389 fall migrating Nashvilles were banded in this location. Summer bandings were only four; on June 27, 1966 repeating July 27 and Sept. 20; June 13 and 27, 1967; and July 11, 1968. This area is 40 miles west of the nearest nesting record listed in Thomas S. Roberts' "Birds of Minnesota". Yet it is a willow alder swamp with some tamarack; it is in the transition zone and thus falls within Roberts' description of the Nashville Warbler nesting habitat in Minnesota. While no nests have been located, the Roberts information plus the breeding season banding records make it reasonable to assume that a few birds do nest here. In spite of the 452 to 4 ratio of migratory to nesting birds, I still have to conclude that Nashville 113-63686 probably is merely an interesting breeding return. This conclusion is based on the assumption that the known rarity of migrating returns overrides the 452 to 4 ratio of migrating to breeding birds in the area.

The problem of distinguishing between migrating returns and breeding bird returns is much more frequent with our common breeding birds. I have many returning Red-eyed Vireos, Catbirds, and other common resident species where both the original banding and the return are in the migratory season. While these birds were not taken in the nesting season, I assumed that they were nesting birds whose smaller nesting territory happened to be outside of the netting area. Yet if I am wrong, some of these migratory type returns of nesting species might be truly migrating individuals. If an appreciable number of these returns are of migrating birds, then the migratory routes of individual birds may not vary as much as is now supposed. Until the migrating Robin can be distinguished from the one that has been around all summer, I guess we will have to continue to rely on the 100% migratory species for information on the migratory route variations of individual birds.

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