

A DELUGE OF PINE SISKINS
By Elizabeth M. Woodford

During late December 1968 scattered groups of from 5 to 11 Pine Siskins were observed at bird feeding stations around Cedar Run Lake and areas adjacent to the Wharton Tract in the Pine Barrens of southern New Jersey.

Friends and neighbors called and reported Pine Siskins along with flocks of Evening Grosbeaks. Some people have never seen a siskin before and to the beginner they do look like a striped winter-plumaged Goldfinch. Eleven came to our window feeder on December 30, 1968. It soon became apparent by the end of the first week in January that we were having unusual numbers of Pine Siskins feeding each day. R. Jenkins reported more than 200 at one time on their lawn feeding on chopped peanuts. This was during the week of January 13, 1969. Previously, an October sighting was an estimate of 1000 Pine Siskins between Medford Lakes and Batsto, reported by Frank McLaughlin in New Jersey Nature News (N.J. Audubon Society).

We found many days when our trapping had to be discontinued as most birds that were entering traps had already been caught earlier in the day. Also, our banding cages were filled to the limit before we could make another round again or handle what was waiting to be banded. Our estimate and that of others, was several hundred siskins in a wave-like flight and then when they flew off others replaced them. We knew there were many more birds than we had the chance to band. Banding and recording each day's siskins was swamping us, and during our peak days we had two helpers, K. Price of Mt. Holly, N.J. and A.L. Davis of Centennial Lake, Marlton, N.J.

Our peak days were February 15 (210 birds banded), February 21 (243) and March 8 (250). It has always been our practice to band or check trapped birds as quickly as possible and release them immediately thereafter. Can you picture how many birds we were accumulating in one trap when between our peak days in February and March only one bird in five needed to be banded?

At our banding station, ten all-purpose traps of various sizes were used. A mixture of sunflower seeds, chopped raw peanuts and medium cracked corn was distributed each day in the trapping area. Feeding boxes were filled each day even though we banded mostly on weekends. We noticed as did others, that the peanuts were the preferred food.

Friends were experiencing much the same thing as we. Pine Siskins were flocking to the treetops by early morning. Their "zzsp" calls made the woods alive and they dropped from the trees like autumn leaves. Many photographers attempted to catch this spectacle.

We did not find any birds that came to our yard or others, that had

been previously banded at any other station. I followed up on one report by R. & A. Mason of Oakwood Lakes, about four miles from Cedar Run Lake, that many banded birds were appearing in their grounds. Using two traps, I found that all banded birds were wearing our bands.

A number of hawks were seen by observers who also had many Siskins coming daily. R. Jenkins watched what appeared to be a Goshawk for more than an hour on March 9. Several times, Sharp-shinned Hawks were seen chasing Siskins at Cedar Run during February. A Cooper's Hawk was scared off a number of times by clapping hands, rapping on a window, when its fearless hunting of Siskins brought the hawk within a few feet of the house. I couldn't resist attempting to help the Siskins which seemed so helpless when hunger drove them into such vulnerable positions.

A.L. Davis and J.B. Woodford saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk grab off a Siskin in one scoop. Feathers flew and the rest of the flock remained frozen for minutes afterward. Mr. C.C. Pease of Pennsauken, N.J. saw a Pigeon Hawk one Sunday watching our banding station, when he visited with his son.

One of our largest wire enclosures is about 5x7x5 feet. I watched a Sharp-shinned Hawk perch on top of the trap at about 10 am. one sunny weekday. It stayed silent for a while, not moving except to look all around. Then it hopped down and walked around the outside before finally going in through the open door and perch on a wooden bar inside the empty cage. Siskins and other birds were silent and watchful from feeders and branches nearby. The hawk seemed in no hurry to leave as he inspected the interior of the trap that he had only viewed previously from treetops overhead. An exit was made through a smaller door and the hawk landed on a dead oak limb nearby, staying for at least five minutes more before flying away.

From January 4 to May 10, 1969, we banded 1,853 Pine Siskins. On the May 10 date only eight birds were banded. The last Pine Siskin was seen near Braddocks Mill Lake by R. Jenkins on May 31, 1969. We hope they will remember our feeding stations and come back in 1970 for some interesting returns.

Cedar Run Lake, Marlton, N.J. 08053



FOREIGN RECOVERY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Alas, no response received to retraps published in the last issue. Here are five newly reported foreign recoveries - please check your records!

Bluejay 663-71392 Myrtle Warbler 121-51968 Redstart 119-56541
Red-winged Blackbird 632-91503 White-throated Sparrow 105-120114