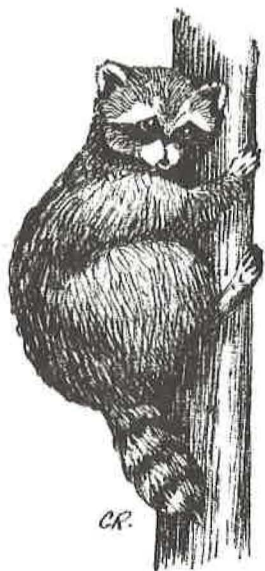


A Bird Bander's Diary

by
Ralph K. Bell



June ~ July

June 1, 1971....All spring I had anticipated a big year with our Purple Martin colony as we had 60 to 70 pair around. There had been no severe cold waves and therefore no mortality from starvation. Spring cold spells are sometimes a major problem and can keep Martin populations at a low level.

But this morning my wife noticed Purple Martin wings in our driveway and it was soon evident that tragedy had struck our Martin colony. It is 18 feet from the ground to our 30-room Martin box but a Raccoon had somehow managed to climb the painted 5 inch diameter iron pipe and then enjoyed a bountiful meal of not only eggs and tiny young but adults as well. The paw of the racoon is shaped much like that of the human hand and it is a very simple matter for them to clean out the nests of many hole nesting species. One should not blame the Raccoon for eating the Purple Martins because down through the ages nature has provided a system of checks and balances with snakes and racoons being especially adapted to prey on hole nesting species.

Evidently, adult Purple Martins are reluctant to leave the nest at night since so many were caught and eaten. With plenty of food available, the Raccoon would often bite off the heads and wings and cast them off as useless. The top of the box was used as a table and several

discarded wings were left there.

Since we have three martin boxes, I immediately checked the others. The ten room box that is used for trapping birds (EBBA News 26(2):43-49) was not disturbed, but the big 38 room box out in the pasture field had also been visited as heads and wings were scattered over the ground under the box. The pole for this box is a discarded electric pole and fresh racoon claw marks were everywhere.

During the summer of both 1966 and 1967, a racoon had cleaned out my Mother's 10-room martin box. This box was only about 300 yards away and this could possibly be the same animal. Anyway, I could be sure of one thing the racoon would return and I immediately put aluminum collars on all the poles.

Although not all of the nests were disturbed, the remaining martins were flighty and seemed very nervous and some of the martins evidently left the boxes. But after I returned from the Brooks Bird Club Foray at the Greenbrier Youth Camp (not far from White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.) on June 12, the martins had quieted down. There had evidently been a regrouping of pairs and more eggs were laid.

June 26 The racoon came back last night and somehow made it up over the aluminum giards. We didn't notice any disturbance during the night but there were more heads and wings under the same 2 boxes, and this time there were wings from half-grown young. An uneaten leg of an adult banded Martin was left on top of one of the boxes. In checking my records, I found it was caught in one of the yard nets on July 18, 1968.

July 5 My sheep dog, Casey, put a racoon up a tree this evening. It was evidently coming up through the yard to make another raid on our martins. I like racoons. We had one for a pet once and they are a very interesting and intelligent animal. But I had decided some time ago that this one would have to be eliminated if we were to keep our martin colony. It was really a big racoon, long and lean, with a reach of 33 inches from the hind feet to the front paws. This answers the question as to how it managed to get past the 27 inch wide aluminum collar guard I had put around the poles.

July 30 I believe the last of our Martins left the box today. This year's crop of young was almost a complete failure with only 7 young being raised in the old 30-room box that normally produces around 100 young. No young at all left the big 38-room box as the racoon had destroyed every nest. One can only hope that next year will be quite different.

--R.D. #1, Clarksville, Pa. 15322

MOURNING DOVE WITH ABNORMALLY WORN BEAK AND TOE NAILS

By Kenneth W. Prescott

On 13 May 1968 I banded a Mourning Dove (Zenaidura carolinensis) at my Pennington, N.J., Banding Station, #883-63250, AHY-M. It appeared "normal" in all respects when banded and on 14 July of that year when it returned. I did not again capture the bird until 27 December 1970 when I was astonished to see that it had practically no beak at all. Both the upper and lower mandibles were worn smoothly all the way back to the still intact nostril openings. The stubs of the mandibles were rounded, not fractured, and there was no appearance of sores or other possible infections. All toe nails were gone from the left foot with only a suggestion of horny tissue remaining. Three of the four nails on the right foot were so worn that only slight nail stubs remained. The bird was molting on the abdominal tracts, neck but not head, back, upper tail coverts, and secondaries. The dove, which showed no traces of subcutaneous fat and weighed 120.1 grams, appeared healthy. When released, it flew strongly, ascending rapidly to a branch in a deciduous tree where it was immediately joined by another Mourning Dove.

-- 15 Timberlane Drive, Pennington, N.J. 08534



AGE RECORD OF RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

By Charles H. Blake

Juvenile female - banded: 20 August 1966 - Hillsborough, N. C.
return: 24 June 1971 - Hillsborough, N. C.

Although 262 Ruby throats were banded at Hillsborough before the present bird, an unknown, but certainly large, fraction of these were transmigrants which were unlikely to be retaken. Hence, no useful estimate of average longevity can be derived from this recapture.

--Box 613, Hillsborough, N. C. 27278

