

A BIRD BANDER'S DIARY
By Ralph K. Bell



May 19, 1972.....The more I observe nature and look at its workings from all angles, the more aware I become that all creatures have their share of problems. Just keeping a-live is a major concern of most living things and birds are no exception. At one time I felt that hole nesting species had an advantage since they were safe from storms and many obvious predators, but I've now changed my mind about this. Things have a way of balancing out and our Sparrow Hawks have lately had their share of trouble.

The Sparrow Hawk box was first put up in 1957 and for 13 years it had been used successfully by this very interesting hawk. During this period a total of 51 young were safely fledged. In 1970, trouble developed and only one egg hatched and this nestling was a helpless cripple - probably caused by either pesticides or herbicides [EBBA NEWS, 33(5)]

Sparrow Hawks again took to the box in the spring of 1971 and five eggs were in the box on May 9th, but the eggs (or young) disappeared before May 31st. A second nesting attempt was made as four eggs were noted in the box on July 9th. Another check was made on July 28 and three young had just hatched and the 4th egg was pipped. Two apparently normal young were banded on August 8th (there was no evidence of what happened to the others). These two banded young were believed to have left the box successfully.

During the winter of 1971-72, a female Sparrow Hawk spent the winter here on our farm and was seen on the nearby electric wires almost every day. I was never certain where it roosted each night but believe it was near the top of one of our 30-foot Austrian Pines. The Sparrow Hawk likes to retire early in the evening and never seems to be in a hurry to get going early in the morning like a lot of birds, but I wonder if this isn't typical of most hawks. Some winters, especially on cold stormy nights, I have noticed this species spending the night on the ledge under the roof of one of our poultry buildings. A local butcher once found one in his

slaughter house where it had sought shelter from an intense winter storm.

There were two Sparrow Hawks here for the first time this spring on February 24th and I presume these are two that eventually nested in the box. The box was checked on April 12th and the female was sitting on two eggs. I had reached in and noted she did not carry a band so gently lifted her out of the box and carried her down to the house to be banded. I hurried as much as possible as it appeared she might lay the third egg any minute. When released she flew directly back to the box. Seven days later there were five eggs present.

Today, while climbing to the box again to see if the eggs had hatched, I noticed some body and wing feathers of a female Sparrow Hawk on a horizontal branch about 5 feet below the box and then noted that the eggs (or young) were gone. Tell-tale claw marks and Raccoon hair identified the night prowling predator. At the base of the tree I found the right leg and foot of the mother hawk -still carrying the band that had been placed on her leg just five weeks before. After biting into the band (the teeth marks were there), the Raccoon had discarded the whole leg as something unfit to eat.

May 24....The male Sparrow Hawk is still here protecting his home territory. It is sad indeed to see him sitting for long periods on the top of an electric pole not far away from the nest box. There can be no reprisal as is often the first order of business with the human race. Everything must be accepted as it is at the moment. Occasionally he will fly about giving the killy-killy-killy mating call that is so frequently used in the early spring. Perhaps a second nesting attempt will be made if a passing unmated female hears his calls.

There is no doubt in my mind that Sparrow Hawks will come back to the same box year after year. But mortality from one cause or another is always a factor and new mates must be found. Since I do not make any real attempt to catch our hawks each year, I have no idea as to age limits. The pair that were here in 1966 (both were banded) were still here in 1968 as the female was captured in the nest-box on May 19, 1968. The male of that pair was last captured on April 19, 1970 (in one of my yard nets).

The original nest-box contained an entrance hole of

approximately four inches in diameter. This is larger than necessary and made the capture of the female Sparrow Hawk easy for the Raccoon. An additional board with a three inch diameter entrance hole has now been tacked over the entrance. Whether the male will accept this new addition to his home is questionable ... only time will tell.

--R.D. 1, Box 229, Clarksville, Pa. 15322

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Slight changes in Atlantic Flyway Review for 1973.

Scheduling AFR reports in our February issue has presented several unsurmountable problems, mainly for participants who have numerous banding schedules and state reports to submit. Provided no region hands in a late report, as was the case this year, the following schedule should work much better. This schedule supersedes the previous schedule printed and distributed in 1971.

Region I: Massachusetts, Maine and Rhode Island. Reports will appear in our MAY issue. Coordinator: Mr. Richard L. Ferren, Berkshire Community College, Pittsfield, Mass. 01201

Region II: New York State, excl. Greater N.Y., Long Island & extreme western N.Y. (i.e. Buffalo area); Coordinator: Dr. R. P. Yunick, 1527 Myron St., Schenectady, N.Y. 12309. These reports will also appear in our MAY issue.

Region III: Greater New York, Long Island & Connecticut. To appear in our AUGUST issue; coordinator: Mr. Robert Dewire, Mid-Fairfield County Youth Museum, Box 165, Westport, Conn. 06880

Region IV: New Jersey; coordinator: Mr. Bruce Adams, RFD 1, Cranbury Road, Cranbury, N.J. 08512. To appear also in our AUGUST issue.

Region V: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia & Dist. of Columbia. To appear in our NOVEMBER issue. Coordinator: Mr. Chandler S. Robbins, 7900 Brooklyn Bridge Drive, Laurel, Md. 20810.

Region VI: All stations not incl. in above regions, particularly: Western N.Y. Pennsylvania (Friendsville please report to Region II), Florida. Also to appear in NOVEMBER. Coordinator: Don Clark, 178 W. Girard Blvd. Kenmore N.Y. 14217.