

took to be ASY males. I could not differentiate by the color of wingbars. The preponderance of these were white. Some were buffy, as many or more what I termed "dirty white". Birds I presumed to be older males had the primary coverts number 2-4 buffy tipped, the rest white.

I divided my presumed males into three classes, which the two students working with me on Sundays were also able to identify.

SUPPOSITION 1 HY-SY Male: Birds with gray rumps washed with brown; upper tail covert centers and flank streaks intermediate in width; brown faces; wing length 70+. There is an overlap here with birds I considered female, so a certain number were listed Unknown.

SUPPOSITION 2 AHY Male: Birds that are bluish-gray, with bluish-gray rumps, broad black centers to the upper tail coverts, fairly broad and distinct breast and flank streaking, wings 70-74 mm., some black in the face.

SUPPOSITION 3 ASY Male: Birds crisply colored in blue, gray, black and white. Brown on the mantle only; upper tail covert centers very broad, flank streaks black and broad, streaking on the breast strong, yellow patch at shoulder deep in color; white about eye in strong contrast to black of facial pattern.

Characteristics I did not find useful:

Wing bars; see above

Size and intensity of yellow at shoulder. This appears to be an individual characteristic which can be almost lacking in some females, even a three or four year old one. Usually strong in older males.

The dark shaft marks in the under tail coverts. My hope three years ago was that these might indicate an immature bird, but I have been unable to correlate their presence or absence with either age or sex.

Step up, Ladies and Gentlemen from Long Point to Manomet, from Powdermill to Kiptokeke; Dottie Mendinhall, Gladys Cole, Island Beach and points north. How do my suppositions fit with the birds you get? Are the upper tail coverts worn when fall birds reach you? Do you get many blue foreheads? In all males, or only the

very strongly colored ones? What proportion of older birds do you get? What color are your mouths? Mine are pink or yellow, even on ASY birds. I find incompletely ossified birds until mid-December and have had a few even later in that month. I had one complete screwball in molt on Jan. 13, with zero ossification.

I often have little to work on here in the winter but Myrtles. I'd be glad to test out any of your speculations.

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### THE MANUAL FOR AGEING AND SEXING

When do species nest in your area? This may affect eye color, mouth, bill and leg color. It will affect the timing of the postjuvinal and postbreeding molts and so whether you record a bird as HY, SY, or AHY. The literature is rich in information on nest building, clutches, behavior at the nest, but it is astonishingly meager in dates. If you band where there are local breeding birds you have a marvelous opportunity as the young and the adults are caught, particularly if they return within a few days, or a few weeks. How long is the postjuvinal molt? Is it partial or complete? What parts molt first? How long does the molt continue? What color changes does it bring? The same questions apply to the postbreeding molt. You would be amazed at how little information there is on these.

What about eye color? It is easy to accept passively what we read in books - i.e. adult woodpeckers have red eyes, mockingbirds have clear yellow eyes, towhees' eyes are red, or white, catbirds' eyes are brown (until January 1, when they become AHY black) But are they? Adult woodpeckers are returning to traps with brown eyes; five years of retaken mockingbirds have taught me that this species can safely be aged only with the juvenile gray (see the spring 1973 issue of Bird Banding), that the various gradations of green and yellow and orange are individual characteristics which have nothing to do with age. One respected bander says immature Cedar Waxwings have brown eyes, adults have red. Another claims the reverse.

If the alula edge can distinguish the Black-throated Blue immature from the adult, can this characteristic be used for other warblers? The edging of the alula of a Carolina Wren can differ in width. Is there a reason, or is this an individual variation? Is this a character that can be used? My ovenbirds return in spring some with a hint of wingbars, some without. Are these latter SY birds whose feathers have worn, or are they ASY birds? I never noticed this before, I'll have to wait for fall to find out (maybe).

Can adult male American Goldfinch be aged by the white spots on the vanes of the outer primaries? One letter says Yes, another says No. How much of the data on Blue Jays applies to how many of the many races? What about those spots on the tails of Evening Grosbeak, or the line of demarcation in the breast feathers of a Myrtle Warbler? Yes! No!

You see what a wonderful lot of detail a bander is lucky enough to be able to find out. With patience, a notebook, the luck of returns.

Do Painted Buntings breed in their green, immature plumage? I passionately need to know this. No one can tell me.

Can "male" Baltimore Orioles lay eggs? (Yes)

Can both of a pair of breeding White-breasted Nuthatches have black heads? (Yes)

Why does a fall Redstart, so easily judged female, come back a glorious, full-plumaged male? Is this easy sexing information we have all been using for years, on countless Redstarts, inaccurate? (Much of it).

Wing lengths are a problem. Feathers are frayed. You measure the left wing, I the right. The bird can be relaxed, or tense. But over a period of time a pattern may emerge. Can it be trusted? I have here a note on Tree Sparrows; Male wing 78+, Female 72-; surely a wide spread, but the BBL has not yet accepted it. Why? Well, look - (I don't know if this is their reasoning):

A TV towerkill in Florida produced Ovenbird wing measurements from a sample of 127 as M 71.2-80.1  
F 69.0-76.5      A similar kill in Wisconsin,  
sample size 225 produced M 77+  
F 73-

In Massachusetts Baird, Anderson, Howard, Nisbet with a sample size of 401 Myrtle Warbler kills figured a safe determination would be M 80+, F 68-.

Godfrey, in Birds of Canada gives M 80+, F 75- (no sample size given) How do your measurements run? Do they agree with  
Lincoln Sparrows M 65-69      or with M 61.2-65.3  
F 59-63      F 54.6-63?

You see some of the problems banders can help to solve?

What do you do with your net kills? A natural history museum will welcome them, quickly frozen and with the necessary data of date, place, wing, weight, soft part colors - the same data you take for yourself. If you enclose a self-addressed, stamped postcard they will advise you as to age and sex and you can check their dissected proof against your plumage notes. If a bird is brought you suspected as a pesticide kill, do not wrap it in plastic, but in foil. Look it over carefully, and see that it, too, reaches a museum. If you are sincere in your desire to learn, most museum personnel are glad to let you study their specimens. Just remember that like us they may not always have known enough to make the proper classifications.

It used to be that we could catch a bird, identify, weigh and measure it and then sit back waiting happily for a notice that it had been retrieved in Texas or Brazil (or down the block). This was often hard work, but a lot of fun. We had good discussions. Now that our job is to deal with plumage changes, with the ageing and sexing of living creatures, each individual, about whom so little is known, the work is twice as hard. But it is twice as rewarding, the fun is twice as great, the discussions livelier. As long as the BBL will put up with my mistakes, and my typing, I hope to keep at the labor of updating our information for you all. It won't come from heaven, though. It have to come from you. My address is below.

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(These changes will be incorporated in November 1973, edition of Bander's Aids. Editor).