

LETTER TO THE EDITORCLARIFYING THE RECORD

Sir:

I have been involved this winter in two discussions arising from publication of my notes in EBBA NEWS. There is nothing like controversy to arouse reader interest, and far more important for the new Banding Manual sheets, to get banders really to LOOK at their birds. So I take my lumps, and am glad to point out some of the problems that beset us in a discipline with no absolute standards.

1. On the Eyeline in Swamp Sparrows: this boils down to a difference in nomenclature. I quoted R.C. Leberman as defining the adult eyeline as "pearly white". In correspondence, and in their recent excellent article in the Jan-Feb 1974 INLAND BIRD BANDING NEWS (46:1), John and Heather Riggins disputed this. As Leberman had suggested there might be a coastal race that differed from his inland one, I wrote Dennis Puleston on Long Island, who handles several hundreds of the species each fall. He corroborated the Riggins' gray eyeline. I then checked back with Leberman and found that to him "pearly white" is a light gray (very light) and that he had taken his nomenclature from the color chart following page 4 in Palmer's HANDBOOK OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS. So the argument comes from a different interpretation of colors and words, not from the species. To any one handling Swamp Sparrows I recommend the Riggins' carefully researched article.

2. On American Goldfinch: The recent exchange of letters in EBBA NEWS by myself (36:3) and Mrs. Olyphant (36:4) boils down to 1) a matter of nomenclature, and 2) my suggestion that this species merits further study before the presence or absence of "spots at the base of the primaries" should be taken as definitive proof of age.

On 1): In Mrs. Olyphant's original research, printed in Bird-Banding, 1972 (43:173-181) she referred to "white spots at the base of the primaries". I translated this to mean the white outer web that can be seen, in differing gradations of color where the feathers emerge from the skin. In some cases this white extends beyond the primary coverts, but I took "base" to mean the technical base, and made my observations from this. In her recent Letter to the Editor, EBBA NEWS (36:4), Mrs. Olyphant redefines her "spots" as being the visible white of the web beyond the coverts.

2) When WBBA sent out an Age and Sex sheet on American Goldfinch, this past summer, based, so Dr. Collins wrote me when I asked him about it, on Mrs. Olyphant's research, I immediately found that in Massachusetts I was taking Returns from previous years that showed, not only white at the base of

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