REPORT ON AGING AND SEXING CRITERIA FOR AMERICAN REDSTART

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For several years I have heard argument on the validity of the presently available aging and sexing criteria for the American Redstart (Setophaga ruticilla). I felt it necessary to solve this problem before I continued to report age and sex on redstarts to the Bird Banding Laboratory. First I read all the resources available to me on plumage and age/sex determination of this warbler, then I tested the reliability of my findings with study skins.

After reading several authorities, patterns of agreement emerged similar to the criteria many banders now use. The criteria and figures given below resulted from age/sex determination by plumage characteristics only; skull ossification was not obtainable with the study skins.

Black and orange birds

- ASY MALE or HX MALE

- Spring

Grayish birds with orange breast patches and yellow to orange underwings, usually contrasting (SY Males or SY MALE never with black on head and throat) or HY MALE

- Spring

Grayish birds with yellow patches and yellow underwings, little or no contrast

- ASY FEMALE or HY FEMALE

- Spring

- Fall

Using the above guide, basically that put forth by Robbins (1944) and Wood (1969), I tested my findings with study skins. ASY/HX Males checked out with 0% error. SY/WH Males showed a 19.1% error. ASY/HX Females had a 3.7% error. Obviously in the fall much more accurate results can be obtained for adult females by using skull ossification along with plumage. Identifying SY Males and ASY Females in the spring, when skull condition is not helpful, seemed a possible problem. Identifying SY Males by plumage as above produced a 14.4% error. (Table 1). An unofficial statement from the Banding Laboratory indicated that the percent of error for banding criteria should be 1% or less.

Other interesting plumage characteristics I found were:

Two birds were marked female on the museum label and had black body feathers and orange breast patches. On one the black was on the breast, throat, forehead and lores. On the second, black was on the breast, mid-back, and crown. This indicated that the presence of black feathers may not be totally reliable in separating SY Males from females. However, the sample of