

**HERRING GULLS AND LEACH'S PETRELS**

BY FRANCIS H. ALLEN

DR. CHARLES W. TOWNSEND and I did a little banding at Matineus, Maine, in August of this year, and though the number of birds banded was not large the experience was interesting to us and an account of it may possibly be of some interest to other banders. Besides a few young Spotted Sandpipers, charming little downy creatures that it required some agility to catch, a single fledgling Savannah Sparrow, and an adult Barn Swallow, the banded birds were sixty-one young Herring Gulls and fourteen Leach's Petrels, two of which were adults and twelve downy young.

Most of the Herring Gulls banded were on Ten Pound Island, a small rocky island lying between Matineus and Ragged Island (Crichaven) and about a mile from the harbor of Matineus. The island, which is said to have been named from the discovery upon it of a ten-pound cannon-ball, is covered, where the ledge does not protude, with a luxuriant growth of grasses and weeds, among which yarrow is the most conspicuous flower, though a few beautiful patches of harebell are more attractive to the visitor in August. There are also an abundance of raspberry bushes and a few scattering dead and dying spruces. This Ten Pound colony is now much the largest colony of Herring Gulls in the immediate neighborhood of Matineus, though the birds nest in smaller numbers on No Man's Land, which was at one time the most southerly breeding-ground of the species, and on several other smaller islands near by. Here on Ten Pound, as in other similar locations, the Gulls nest in convenient places among the rocks and also hidden very effectually in the weeds and raspberry bushes. It was here among the weeds and bushes that we found most of the young Gulls hiding. Some of them were fully fledged at the time of our visit, August 5th, while others were somewhat downy, a few having the speckled downy heads of the very young birds, though otherwise well on into the first plumage. Some of the birds were sufficiently well fledged to fly off and alight in the water after we had released them.

We found the young Gulls by walking through the rank vegetation, parting the way before us with our feet or a stick. In such places, when we came upon a bird, it was always lying still and was easily picked up. Often the bird would lie quiet in our hands, but often, again, we had to hold it with one hand about the neck to keep it from biting or striking with open bill.

We banded a number without holding them at all, simply laying the bird down while we put on the band. Often one would lie still after we were through until we gave it a shove, when it would scuttle off at a fairly rapid rate. (See Plate I.)

Plate I



BEFORE BANDING



AFTER BANDING

Dr. Townsend thought that the quiet birds were those that were lifted with especial care so that they were kept in the same position and the "freezing" instinct was not superseded by the instinct to escape. I was not aware myself, however, of handling the birds differently. One would have thought that the sensation of being grasped and lifted would break the spell of the freezing instinct, however carefully the birds were handled; but the passage from the dominance of this instinct to complete possession by the defense and escape instincts is probably an abrupt one with no border-land between absolute passivity and great activity, and the access of the new instincts (they appear to come simultaneously) doubtless occurs under varying degrees of provocation in different individuals. In

some, really rough treatment might be necessary to break down the freezing instinct, while with others the mere sensation of being captured might be sufficient.

While we remained in the neighborhood many of the old birds were constantly flying about overhead screaming, but they never swooped down in attack, as Terns do when their young are disturbed. This behavior is, of course, characteristic of the Herring Gull and, I suppose, of other Gulls. Is it perhaps due to the less active habits of the Gulls and the fact that they do not habitually plunge for their food as do the Terns? And also perhaps to the fact that their bills are less fitted for attack?

We banded sixty young Gulls on this occasion, stopping only when our bands gave out— but, I must confess, rather relieved when we came to the end of them, for it is strenuous work. Another day, August 9th, having discovered another X band, we banded our sixty-first on No Man's Land. On the latter island, which was long the principal breeding place of the Herring Gulls about Matineus, the spruces which cover its southern end are now all dead, doubtless killed by the Gulls.

On August 11th, we took a power-boat to Seal Island, about seven miles east of Matineus, where Leach's Petrels breed in considerable numbers. Here, in a level, turfy spot, their burrows are found on every side. It was very amusing to run one's bare arm into a burrow up to the elbow or beyond and feel at last a weak nipping of one's finger-tips, then to take the bill between the fingers and gently draw out the bird, a little creature covered with the softest of long sooty-gray down, which peaceably submitted to the adjustment of a *La* band about its leg. Twice our haul was an adult bird, which after receiving its band flew swiftly off in an irregular, wavering flight and disappeared. These old birds were incubating, and in each case we found an egg in the burrow from which we had removed the parent. Each young bird, after the banding, was placed in the entrance of its burrow with its head pointed in, whereupon it disappeared promptly, having apparently not the slightest desire to remain longer in the glaring light of day to which it had been so prematurely introduced.

Seal Island is well worth visiting for other purposes than bird-banding, for it has some of the most beautiful cliffs to be found on the Maine coast, smooth granite, quite vertical or even overhanging, and fifty or seventy-five feet high above the sea, and I don't know how deep below the surface. It has also a very striking chasm, cleft, or "guzzle," as it is called, and a

"Devil's Den," through which one threads one's way for about a hundred feet from daylight at the water's edge to daylight at the other end. But all this is another story from bird-banding and one that does not belong in this Bulletin. It does, however, add to the interest of our avocation to follow it into wild and beautiful places.

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## HELPING THE BIOLOGIST

BY CHARLES L. WHITTLE

BIRD-BANDERS have reason to feel gratified over the service they are rendering biological science in assisting to sustain one of the fundamental postulates upon which the present view as to the origin of geographical races or subspecies rests.

It is obvious that the various recognizable races of many species could not have come into being were it true that the nesting-places of such races were determined merely by chance. The present theory requires that the races shall return each year to the approximate area of their respective breeding-grounds of the previous season, otherwise they would intermingle and interbreed, with the result that variations of color, size, etc. would be obliterated, the races disappearing and only the species surviving. While the theory requires that this be so, it has remained for the bander to gather evidence which cannot be gainsaid, not only in support of the theory in general, but showing, in case of several species at least, how powerfully instinct draws migratory birds, not only back to the area constituting the nesting-range of the species or race, but to the immediate vicinity of their birth and often to the identical spot. It is this latter habit which in effect brings about a sort of semi-isolation of families or groups of birds, even within the territory occupied by a species or race, which gives rise to conditions favoring the survival of peculiarities of color, form, or song locally arising. I have already described a locally occurring song of the Purple Finch about Peterboro, N. H., and its persistence for several years.<sup>1</sup> Recent data favoring the view held at that time as to the persistence of the same Purple Finches or their descendants in this Peterboro area year after year are given in this issue of the Bulletin by Mrs. Whittle, pp. 63-65.

<sup>1</sup>The Auk, Vol. XI, pp. 233 and 234, 1923.