

BULLETIN
OF THE
NORTHEASTERN BIRD-BANDING ASSOCIATION

THE AGE OF BANDED BIRDS

BY J. T. NICHOLS

SOME years ago when bird-banding in America was in its infancy, one of the obvious problems to which it seemed to the writer to offer a solution, was the normal span of life of the individual bird. With the various other interesting problems on which this method of study is throwing light, that of age has more or less lapsed from immediate attention. Nevertheless it has not lost its philosophical importance, and it must be one of those which continually comes to mind with the individual operator, in the consideration of records obtained.

Considering the stress of their environment, the most rational postulate as to course of life in wild animals or birds, is a high death rate prior to gaining full adult strength and vigor, then comparative safety until the decline with age begins, then almost immediate elimination. This view (likely held by earlier writers also) was very clearly stated by E. T. Seton some years ago. It would imply a fairly definite normal age limit at or slightly beyond the point where physical decline sets in, if that point is rather definite, which seems likely. Accumulating data on longevity from banded birds would approach this limit, but rarely exceed it. The same species in captivity might show a normal age limit much less clearly, it being a reasonable hypothesis that such unnatural surroundings would impose greatest restraints and be most detrimental to health in what should be the full vigor of middle life, while rather tending to decrease the death rate in youth and in age.

A certain amount of data on longevity accumulated from American banded birds has been published incidentally, but in a scattered and rather inaccessible form. When sufficient records are to hand to justify a more or less final statement in the matter, we trust that we shall hear from the Biological Survey concerning it. Meanwhile it is worth the necessary

space to assemble for our convenience such information as is immediately to hand. The following list, as a starter, has been taken from Lincoln, 1924, Dept. Bull. No. 1268, with additions and emendations from earlier numbers of this (Northeastern B. B. Assn.) bulletin, the two bulletins of the Eastern B. B. Assn., and one or two other sources. The writer hopes that others will be interested to build on this slight beginning, from the already considerable (and sadly scattered) literature of American bird-banding,¹ and from their own records.

A word of explanation as to the list. Ages are approximate minima as indicated by first and last records from the individual bird. When the first record is in late winter or spring, it is assumed that the bird dates at least from the preceding summer. In as much as full data is not listed, an initial letter will serve as an index to the source of each record (where it may be looked for) as follows:

B.—“Bird-Lore,” Season reports: 1925, p. 11; 1926, p. 270.

C.—M. S. Crosby, unpublished records.

E.—Bull. Eastern B. B. Assn., No. 2, p. 15.

L.—Lincoln, 1924; Returns from Banded Birds, U. S. Dept. Agr., Dept. Bull. No. 1268.

N.¹—Bull. Northeastern B. B. Assn., I, p. 31.

N.²—Bull. Northeastern B. B. Assn., II, p. 49, 63, 87.

N.³—Bull. Northeastern B. B. Assn., III, p. 9, 20, 28.

TENTATIVE LIST OF BANDED BIRDS AND AGES

L.	Herring Gull 25386.	July 19, 1915.	Aug., 1920.	5 years
N. ³	Common Tern 1258.	July 3, 1913.	Aug., 1917.	4 “
L.	Mallard 36845.	April 8, 1918.	Nov. 19, 1921.	4 “
L.	Black Duck 36903.	Aug. 31, 1918.	Mar. 31, 1921.	3 “
L.	Green-winged Teal 43110.	Feb. 12, 1917.	April 28, 1920.	4 “
L.	Pintail 36222.	Feb. 2, 1917.	Oct. 28, 1922.	6 “
L.	White-faced Glossy Ibis 3539.	July 3, 1916.	Oct. 22, 1922.	6 “
L.	Snowy Egret 3615.	July 3, 1916.	Jan. 20, 1923.	7 “
L.	Black-crowned Night Heron 24536.	June 10, 1915.	June 4, 1921.	6 “
L.	Ferruginous Rough- leg 37998.	July 2, 1916.	Sept. 29, 1919.	3 “
L.	Red-bellied Wood- pecker 31778.	Mar. 7, 1916.	Feb. 16, 1920.	5 “
L.	Chimney Swift 38461. (adult)	June 6, 1916.	July 3, 1923.	8 “

¹A study of the pages of *The Auk*, *The Condor*, and the *Wilson Bulletin* should yield significant additions.

L. Blue Jay 31775.	Mar. 1, 1916.	Mar. 26, 1921.	6 years
B. Am. Crow 23021.	June 22, 1917. (adult)	Oct. 21, 1924.	8 "
L. Purple Grackle 34538.	April 10, 1917.	June, 1920.	4 "
N. ² Purple Finch.	1923.	1926.	3 "
L. White-Throated Sparrow 38160.	Mar. 5, 1916.	Mar. 27, 1921.	6 "
N. ² Tree Sparrow 6912.	Jan. 29, 1922.	Jan. 3, 1926.	5 "
N. ³ Tree Sparrow	Feb. 24, 1923.	Jan. 2, 1927.	5 "
L. Chipping Sparrow 38839.	Mar. 26, 1917.	Mar. 24, 1921.	5 "
L. Chipping Sparrow 38643.	Sept. 12, 1916.	Sept. 25, 1920.	4 "
L. Slate-colored Junco 45754.	Jan. 4, 1919.	Dec. 18, 1922.	4 "
N. ³ Shufeldt's Junco 34830.	Dec. 20, 1922.	Oct. 31, 1926.	4 "
E. Song Sparrow 47143.	April (1st yr.).	July (4th yr.).	4 "
N. ¹ Song Sparrow 11057.	Aug. 5, 1921.	Mar. 15, 1925.	4 "
N. ² Chewink.	1923.	1926.	3 "
L. Cardinal 41898.	Mar. 12, 1917.	Mar. 28, 1921.	5 "
L. Rose-breasted Grosbeak 49510.	May 25, 1919.	May 4, 1923.	5 "
B. Brewster's Warbler 48866.	June 10, 1922. (adult)	June 6, 1926.2	5 "
L. Myrtle Warbler 27290.	Feb. 28, 1917.	Mar. 1, 1921.	5 "
L. Catbird 53471.	May 15, 1920.	May 25, 1923.	4 "
L. Brown Thrasher 19247.	Feb. 27, 1915.	Mar. 28, 1922.	8 "
L. House Wren 45303.	June 17, 1919.	June 6, 1922.	3 "
C. White-breasted Nuthatch 48820.	Nov. 1, 1922.	Mar. 6, 1927.	5 "
C. Chickadee 27143.	Jan. 22, 1920.	Feb. 7, 1926.	7 "
L. Hermit Thrush 16246.	Feb. 13, 1917.	Feb. 23, 1920.	4 "
L. Robin 33519.	July 8, 1917.	May 14, 1922.	5 "

(approx.)

To summarize landbirds exclusive of Hawks.—We have 8 years for Chimney Swift, American Crow, Brown Thrasher; 7 years for Chickadee; 6 years for Blue Jay, White-Throated Sparrow; 5 years for Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tree Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Brewster's Warbler,² Myrtle Warbler, White-breasted Nuthatch, Robin; 4 years for Purple Grackle, Slate-colored Junco, Shufeldt's Junco, Song Sparrow, Catbird, Hermit Thrush; 3 years for Purple Finch, Chewink, House Wren.

Many of the figures given above must be still far below the

²While this paper is in press, T. D. Carter and R. H. Howland report May 30, 1927, Brewster's Warbler, 48866, and a female Hooded Warbler banded as adult July 4, 1923, placing these birds in the 6 years and 5 years classes respectively. A 9 year old Canada Goose is recorded in Bird-Lore (1927, p. 183).

normal age of the species concerned. Lincoln (1925, *Auk*, p. 364, 365) cites European White Stock of 11 years and Great Gray Heron of 9 years, and we have seen no comparable age data of such large American birds.* On the other hand, figures for the common passerine species (those which have been considerably banded) may be approaching the actual normal. Although he does no systematic banding, the writer banded in December 1923, and January 1, 1924, 14 House Sparrows, 2 or 3 of which, proving to be permanent resident individuals for the immediate vicinity of the banding station, were noticed casually to May 1925 or later. In the early months of the present year (1927) attempts to find even one of these birds have been unavailing, and it seems that one purpose of banding them, to obtain data on age of the House Sparrow, has been frustrated by too high a preconceived idea of that age. Four year Song Sparrows (another prolific species) are rarer in the records than one would expect if this were not near the normal maximum age, and very likely the House Wren is short lived.

RETURNS OF A CRESTED FLYCATCHER

BY MABEL GILLESPIE

ALTHOUGH banding is the infallible method of identifying individual birds, it sometimes happens that certain peculiarities of song or habit may also serve as identification marks for an occasional unbanded bird. This was the case with a male Crested Flycatcher that is now with us for the fifth year, a bird which was not banded until the third year of his appearance.

In May 1923, a pair of Crested Flycatchers chose for a nesting site a hollow fence-post which we had fastened to the side of the house for a winter feeding shelter. It was about five feet above the ground and five feet from a window in another housewall making right angles with the supporting wall. A sash curtain of sheer voile made it possible for an observer to watch the comings and goings of the pair without attracting their attention. After the fledglings were hatched, observations were made several mornings from dawn until breakfast time. Many days a camera was focused on the shelter with a thread leading from the shutter into the window.