

GENERAL NOTES

A Woodland Banding Station in Winter.—In a piece of mixed woods, on a knoll crowned with hemlocks in a thin deciduous growth, my traps are placed by a shack which serves as a blind. For several reasons, when used as automatics they have been a failure: my birds almost never push up the swinging doors or press through the flexible-wire entrance, and it has been difficult also to keep the woodpecker traps working smoothly. The situation does not admit of incidental attention to them on my part, and that fact is, of course, a disadvantage. There have been certain unfortunate accidents: two Tree Sparrows had their skulls pierced by some bird unknown, and a Chickadee and a Tree Sparrow perished in storms, the former in a squirrel trap that it sprang, and the latter on account of the accidental closing of the door for escape. "Baiting" by a captive has not proved successful.

Two "pull-string traps," two "sparrow traps," two "woodpecker" traps and a wire-entrance trap are disposed rather close together among boulders that crop out at the spot; all but the last are worked by strings, at such times as I can be there. A sapling hung across forms a low twelve-foot perch that is useful to the birds and presents them clear and close to the onlooker. Experiments with piles of feed show that Tree Sparrows best like "canary seed," are indifferent to hemp, and avoid rape seed. Both "chick-feed" and "intermediate feed" are satisfactory to them, and also to Juncos and Fox Sparrows, a few of which have discovered this spot on migration. Chickadees frequently take the grain, and White-breasted Nuthatches occasionally. Of course the Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creepers, and Golden-crowned Kinglets confine themselves to suet, likewise the principal food of the Chickadees and the White-breasted Nuthatches. Sunflower seed is eaten but doesn't seem particularly useful here, and is rubbishy in the traps, and furthermore seems very attractive to squirrels, which are nuisances at best. Squirrels will also take the suet from the woodpecker traps by reaching down from above.

Here birds were fed several winters before being trapped for banding, and a well-developed mixed flock could be expected once every hour or less on what were apparently regular circuits of the wood: Downies, Chickadees, and Creepers were steady companions; sometimes a Hairy or two and a White-breasted Nuthatch or two came with them; more rarely one or two Red-breasted Nuthatches and Golden-crowned Kinglets. A single Blue Jay has been surprised at the feed, but hardly ever, and does not come when a person is in the shack. During banding operations the last two winters, the movements of these birds have been much less uniform, whether fortuitously or on account of a flock of Tree Sparrows that adopted the place as a winter station and gave a more general air of hospitality and companionship to satisfy gregarious instincts.

The past winter (1928-29), forty-five afternoons in attendance there, resulted in the banding of relatively few birds, and I have seen with some envy the results of better placed stations; the exact numbers are 3 Hairy Woodpeckers, 8 Downy Woodpeckers, 28 Tree Sparrows, 2 Juncos, 4 Brown Creepers, 4 Chickadees; there were 6 Tree Sparrow returns and 63 repeats of all the species. The six returns were from 25 Tree Sparrows banded in the winter of 1927-28. I have been wondering if these woodland birds do not continue more wary than birds which come to feed in more open places and at human habitations, for they gather familiarly about persons at such feeding places not a mile away. Almost all my birds have been shy about the traps;—although feeding up to the very entrance and going around and around them, they usually entered in a hesitating way. More-

over, they seem more disconcerted by the operation of the traps than at other banding stations I know of. Scattering seed outside might better be avoided—but at that birds will scatter a good bit, and squirrels, too.

There is nothing much that is novel to say about the manners of these birds. Hairy Woodpeckers are the wariest of all, and rarely expose themselves to the close gaze of persons in the shack; when I had suet on all sides, this species never came on the side where the door is situated. Once, however, in a fierce blizzard one went to sleep directly in front of me, with its head turned back under the feathers, first in the snow on the ground, then two feet up in a hemlock, then four feet up it on the sheltered side. The bird was a perfectly round ball except for the tail extended down. I left it so, after a half-hour, darkness falling. Downy Woodpeckers often rest motionless for considerable intervals on an upright bough. The other species I never see at rest there, except Tree Sparrows at times. Tree Sparrows have ways of their own; their manners are of two marked kinds; on the one hand, one will appear quietly, settle down to feed greedily, almost without stirring from a spot, like a mere lump, and then recuperate sluggishly on a branch overhead; on the other hand, some come in a gay flock, showering down from the hemlocks with much tsipping and a chorus of mellow dissyllabic notes, then hop and dart about, lively and pert, snapping tail and wings, crest up, carriage erect; when these leave, they go off with a whir and disappear for an hour or so. It is odd that only three or four times in the winter did I see as many as a dozen come together, though it would seem that the flock consisted of well over thirty; it must form and re-form day after day, perhaps for the purpose—conscious or otherwise—of better taking advantage of all such feeding grounds as are known to them, or of prospecting for new ones. My repeats did not prove that the composition of the lesser groups was fixed. An interesting return was Tree Sparrow B22151; it was banded February 18, 1928, and reappeared in December with one foot gone and the stump of the tarsus carried out at an angle. Its movements were natural, except in hopping; then particular exertion was plainly visible. It lost its tail in the fall of a pull-string on January 13th; this was about half grown on January 31st and fully grown on February 19th. This bird was in the traps four times between January 15th and March 29th, and on many other days was observed feeding. One other was in the traps nine times between January 30th and March 28th, but observation toward the end of March gives some color to the idea that the composition of the flock was changing. After April 2d no more at all were taken.

So far as I have noticed the conduct of these different species in the traps, in the gathering cage, and in the hand, it has differed much with individuals. Hairy Woodpeckers are in general wildest and really put up a fight; they fortunately try to nip instead of to drive the beak into one's hand. Chickadees bite, but are usually quiet in the hand, almost hypnotized; in the gathering cage, one will call "chickadee." Tree Sparrows, usually silent, sometimes give a sharp metallic monosyllable from the time the trap falls over them until the band is placed on; they are lively in trying to escape, fairly quiet when actually in the hand. Nuthatches have proved most slippery customers.

Though this account of the undistinguished banding station to which I resort for lack of a better is not particularly encouraging, I can recommend such a one for the great fascination it does have on occasion, for there are certain days of wintry beauty, either with a roaring blizzard that drives an impenetrable screen of snowflakes horizontally through the forest to shut us from the world, or with a brilliant, calm cold that rests on the new-fallen snow. Such are the days when the birds will be ravenous and will be sure

to swarm about us most attractively unperturbed, while, invisible to them, we gaze out from the dim interior, by the roaring fire.—F. B. WHITE, Concord, New Hampshire.

A Return-4 Rose-breasted Grosbeak.—On June 13, 1924, at my station in Peterboro, New Hampshire, I banded male Rose-breasted Grosbeak No. 117449. At the time of banding, this bird was in mature plumage, with primaries black, and hence was at least two years old. He was a return-1 May 24, 1925; a return-2 June 18, 1926; a return-3 May 15, 1927; and a return-4 on June 23, 1929. He was not taken in 1928. This record proves the bird to be now at least seven years old. It is regrettable that the bird could not have been taken first as a young-of-the-year, so that a study might have been made of its complete plumage changes. Jonathan Dwight refers to the extraordinary individual variation in the plumage of the male of this species. The variation in a number of individuals, if studied in the light of a knowledge of the bird's age, might be found to be based on a law of sequence. Banders who are fortunate enough to take this species in juvenal plumage, with a good succession of returns, have an unusual opportunity to note plumage changes in great detail—an opportunity not possessed by ornithologists studying collections.—HELEN G. WHITTLE, Peterboro, N. H., June 27, 1929.

Banding Notes from Dover, Massachusetts.—During the winter of 1923-4, I banded a number of birds at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur B. Emmons 2d, in Dover, Mass. At that time I was living in a rather thickly settled neighborhood near Boston, where birds were not numerous, but as I had formerly lived in Dover I knew that Mrs. Emmons had been successful for a number of years in feeding and attracting birds, so I thought that her home would be a good place to establish a banding station. The house is situated on a knoll in the woods (largely white pines and oaks), but with open fields not far away, and the locality appears to be a favorable one for many species of birds. A few months after I started banding operations at Dover, Mrs. Emmons secured a permit and from that time on only her bands were used.

On a recent visit to Dover after an absence of some two or three years, I was much pleased to find that a few of my birds still came to the Emmons station and that many birds banded in subsequent years were still in more or less regular attendance. Birds of several species were numerous around the house and I had what was to me the novel experience of sitting at the dining table and watching a Ruffed Grouse feeding on the porch, only a few feet away. Mrs. Emmons said that there were at least four of these birds which came regularly to feed on the porch, where grain was scattered on the floor, and that last winter there were five, but that one was killed by flying against the plate-glass window of the dining-room! The winter before there were eight birds. It was a satisfaction to hear of this, in view of the present scarcity of Ruffed Grouse in many parts of New England.

I saw a Phoebe's nest which had a rather interesting history. The birds started to build on the front porch, but before the nest was finished they started another at the other corner of the porch. Then when this nest was only partly completed they carried the material from both nests around to the kitchen porch, where they finally set up housekeeping in the nest which I saw.

I found that Mrs. Emmons had records of 476 birds banded (including 50 banded by me), as follows: Hairy Woodpecker 13, Downy Wood-