

GENERAL NOTES

A Plea for Coöperative Ornithology.—During the past three years I have banded 257 fledgling Tree Swallows (*Iridoprocne bicolor*) at Princeton, Massachusetts. Of this number, 148 were banded in 1934 and hence cannot be taken as returns until 1935. Of the 109 banded in 1932 and 1933 only 6, or 5.5 per cent, have been taken as returns at the original colony or in the town of Princeton.

If bird-banders in New England and especially in Massachusetts would make an effort to trap adult Tree Swallows, some valuable information might be obtained on the dispersal of these Princeton fledglings.

Tree Swallows would make an excellent species on which bird-banders might concentrate, to obtain information on the dispersal of fledglings, because of the ease with which both the male and female can be trapped in a nest-box.—L. B. CHAPMAN, Newton Highlands, Massachusetts.

A New Method of Banding Sea Ducks.—During my studies of the birds in the St. Mary Islands Sanctuary on the North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, in the summer of 1934, eighteen American Eider ducklings (*Somateria mollissima dresseri*) were banded. These youngsters were picked up on the nesting islands and banded when a few hours old. The banding was done by placing a small No. 2 band around the hind toe, passing it through the lobe of that toe. A small slit was made in the lobe with a pen-knife through which the band could be easily passed. The operation appeared to be painless. Bleeding, when it occurred, was almost imperceptible. The No. 2 band was found to be large enough to accommodate the toe of the adult and not appreciably to hinder the movements of the baby duck in the water.

I believe that this method of banding the downy young of birds with lobed toes is new and that it is worthy of further experimentation. Certainly it is almost impossible to secure any appreciable number of adult Eiders for banding without interfering seriously with their nesting activities. It is only for a short time during the nesting-season that they are found in any concentration which would offer opportunity for trapping. As yet, I believe, less than a dozen adult birds have been banded, owing to the difficulty of securing them without disturbing the nest. Of course the newly hatched ducklings cannot be banded by placing the large bands used on adults on the small tarsi, and after they leave the island where they hatch (usually the first or the second day) it has been found impossible to capture them again.

It seems possible that ultimately another advantage may come through banding newly hatched young. If we can sometime determine the ratio of returns from the adults banded and use this in computing the status of the species, it might be possible to compute the ratio of returns from the newly hatched young which were banded and thus secure data which would be of considerable importance. In the case of the American Eider in the region which I have visited, the Great Black-backed Gull is a very serious enemy. What percentage of the great loss of young ducks should be charged to this predator is a disputable matter. If control methods are instituted on the Gull in behalf of the Eider any marked increase in the crop of ducks produced could be measured, to some extent, through extensive banding of ducklings.—R. A. JOHNSON, State Normal School, Oneonta, New York.

A Singing Female Song Sparrow.—During the spring of 1934 I had at my home in Worcester, Massachusetts, a singing female Song Sparrow, C189638.

When the bird first arrived early in April, it sang a great deal, and I followed it about for several days, for it was hard to believe that a Song Sparrow could be the author of that peculiar song.

I captured and banded the bird on April 10th, placing a black band on the left leg. Wing and tail measurements of 63.50 and 65.25 mm., respectively, and weight of 20.40 grams indicated that this bird was a female. I later checked up and found that the peculiar song and black band belonged to the same bird. The only other

Song Sparrow in my garden at the time was a male B176573, a return-2, which arrived about March 20th, with which I believe the singing female was mated.

The early morning seemed to be the preferred time for singing, for although in April the female's song was heard at all hours of the day, later in the season it was heard only before 8 A.M. She sang at increasing intervals until about June 17th. As I was away from home from June 17th to September 3d, I have no later records.

The song was high-pitched, neither weak nor harsh, but a loud, clear series of whistled notes of varying length (usually of seven notes) seemingly all on the same key. It resembled more the song of the White-throated Sparrow than that of any other bird. The first note was longest, then came three short notes, followed by three notes, each nearly as long as the first, thus: *we-e-e, we, we, we, wee, wee, wee*. There seemed to be four beats to the first note, one beat for each of the following three notes and three beats for each of the last three notes. The time of delivering each note and the space of time between songs were similar to those of the male.

One main song of the male sounds (to my ears) thus: *zip, zip, zip, sir we-e-e, sir, sir we, sir, witz, witz*, with many variations. The females' song included only the fifth note of this male's song and the key seemed to be D of the last, highest octave on the piano. The female Song Sparrow is invariably seen close to the ground, but this female always sang from an elevation of from fifteen to twenty feet, choosing usually a branch of a poplar or the top of a peach tree near by.

Mrs. M. M. Nice in "Zur Naturgeschichte des Singammers," *Jour. f. Ornithologie*, 51, pp. 552-595, 1933; 52, pp. 1-96, 1934, disagrees with E. M. Nicholson in his book on how birds live (52, p. 51-52), who makes a distinction between the "true song" that is a "territorial song" and "invariably uttered at the top of the voice" and the "sub-song" which is "low and inward." He states that "with the possible exception of robins (*Erithacus rubecula*), where the hens keep a separate territory of their own in winter, all records of singing females appear to refer to sub-song, and not true song." Mrs. Nice feels that the female's song is a true song resembling the territory song of the male with all the music omitted, and although it may be a matter of self-assertion, in most cases it appears to be a kind of vestigial phenomenon, eliciting no response from any other Song Sparrow. I heartily agree with Mrs. Nice in this matter, for the song of my female was loud and was delivered in much the same way as the male's song. I could find no reason for her having a territorial song, as the male sang normally and no other Song Sparrows were seen in the vicinity. There seems to be no accounting for her unusual behavior.

Mrs. Nice says that Saunders suggests that singing females may be unusual individuals, that possess some trace of masculine characteristics. She states that one of her singing females had had a peculiar history of wandering from one mate to another in February and later seemed rather uninterested in her nesting, and that another singing female appeared unusually aggressive. It is a regrettable fact that I was unable to obtain any nesting data on my singing female.—Mrs. KENNETH B. WETHERBEE.

Notes on the 1934 Tree Swallow Breeding-Season.—This season with the Tree Swallow (*Iridoprocne bicolor*) has given interesting notes on the relations existant between breeding pairs, and the correlative relations to late-migrating brown, first-year-breeding females. Coincidentally, it has shown a conclusive explanation for the changing of mates and disappearances of breeding birds which occur. It has shown, too, a constancy in the incubation period; and gives probable new data on unusual nestings. The 1934 activities, in particular, with observations on a return male, give an explanation, in part, of the 1933 tragedies recorded by me in, *Bird-Banding*, 1934, p. 134.

Of five nesting return birds three were trapped: F60913 (♂) nested at Boxes 5 and 1 with his first two mates, and at Box 1 with his third, brown, mate. His mate of 1933, H49344, figuring in the 1933 tragedies, in 1934 nested in Box 10, one hundred and ten yards from Box 5, where she nested formerly. A female that nested at Substation C in 1932, F60921, this season selected station Box 13, a mile from the former site. Two females, one at Box 3 and the first seasonal mate to F60913 at Box 1, were not trapped, and their return status is unknown.