WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP IN BIRD-BANDING?

By JOSEPH J. HICKEY

ALL ornithologists have taken much satisfaction in the enormous impetus which banding has given to the study of native bird-life. The use of the banders' technique, still a recent event in natural history, has already fallen into periods. The early, promiscuous marking of fledglings first gave way to an emphasis on the ringing of adults. Traps became a fashionable topic for debate and all but an end in themselves. Sanity finally triumphed, and the celluloid band resulted. A vast, scarcely dreamed of field of investigation was at once opened. We have a generation of ornithological exploration ahead of us. The trap is now wedded to the binocular, while both remain subservient to the will and intelligence of the investigator. Field ornithology has mushroomed out into studies of territorialism, persistence of the family group, bird-song, the bird mind, etc. The pursuit of these lines of research will always be limited by the restricted number of banding stations, the inevitable saturation point in banding efficiency, and the amount of man-power available.

It appears logical that banders are now ready to avail themselves of the services of their fellow, non-banding ornithologists in large-scale studies of bird-life. One group has but to use colored celluloid bands, the other to follow them up with the necessary field observations. This concentration of endeavor by two hitherto independent bodies represents the next development in field ornithology. It excludes a study of passerine species at once, and it is entirely predicated on the undeniable fact that a small number of species, like the gulls, are available for banding in large numbers, are later conspicuous over wide stretches of countryside, and are possessed of the habits necessary to permit easy, close scrutiny of colored bands.

Sooner or later the unique advantages of the Herring Gull as a subject for a study of this type will be utilized. The simple formula of one colored band and one Biological Survey ring can be carried out in four colors. The combinations used need only apply to colonies or general areas, and they should be quickly made available to all bird clubs in the East. The project needs experienced gull-banders in both the Inland and the Northeastern Bird-Banding Associations. It necessitates frequent and careful censuses of gull-concentration areas later on by local bird clubs. It requires the backing of both *Bird-Banding* and *Bird-Lore*. But the potentialities of obtaining sight-recoveries and returns by an army of observers scattered wherever gulls may stand—on beaches, rocks, or piers,—captures the imagination and arouses one's enthusiasm. Moult, migration, wintering areas, return to natal areas stand out as the

obvious major divisions of the data which may be obtained by large-scale studies of this type. The invigorating influence by which amateur ornithology may be thus affected is more intangible, but nevertheless almost as desirable.

A PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT OF PLANS FOR A COÖPERATIVE FIELD STUDY OF THE HERRING GULL

By JOSEPH J. HICKEY and ROBERT P. ALLEN

No clearer index to the alert interest of *Bird-Banding* in co-operative field ornithology can be found than in the immediate response of the Editor to the preceding article. As a direct result of the Editor's vigorous efforts, leading banders in the Northeastern Bird-Banding Association have whole-heartedly agreed to band several thousand Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) with celluloid bands during the next three months. Mr. F. C. Lincoln of the Bureau of Biological Survey has promised to support the program with sufficient bands. In addition, a large number of migration watchers have enthusiastically offered to carry out the study in their field work, by making sight-recoveries. Such a unanimity of effort concentrated upon a single species will unquestionably produce many interesting results.

Responsibility for the banding work in New England has been assumed by a committee comprising Messrs. R. J. Eaton and Benjamin Shreve, with Professor A. O. Gross acting as chairman. Dr. H. F. Lewis, Chief Migration Officer for the Dominion of Canada, will band a colony on the north side of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and with his assistance plans are being made to band several other Canadian colonies. It is expected that one or more colonies in the Great Lakes region will also be included.

The work will, of course, be centered upon fledglings. Birds will be given three bands: the regular aluminum one and two celluloid ones. The latter will be of only two colors, red and green. In meeting such birds in the field, observers will check the *exact* position of all three bands and note at the same time whether the bands are upon the right or left legs or both. This marking scheme will enable one to determine the colony as well as the year in which the bird was banded. All the fledglings at each colony will thus receive the same celluloid-aluminum band combination. In New Brunswick, where Professor Gross will make a determined attempt to trap adult birds, adults will receive a combination different from the fledglings. Thus the *individual* identity of the Herring Gulls will be sacrificed to a simple formula which will provide the essential data needed and exact records on longevity will remain possible.