

SPARROW MIGRATION AT SHIRLEY, MASSACHUSETTS,
DURING THE FALL OF 1936

By E. M. DAVIS and W. M. DAVIS

It seems desirable, in connection with the phenomenal scarcity of migrating passerine birds reported in the northeastern section of the United States, to place on record the results of our banding operations at Shirley, Massachusetts, during September and October, 1936 and to compare them with the results of a similar fall campaign during 1935.

In the January, 1936 number of *Bird-Banding*, pp. 48 and 49, the results of efforts to trap sparrows during the fall migration of 1935 were recorded. This year we set a trap line over the same route, beginning on September 21st and taking in all but two of the traps on October 10th. These two were left until the 16th. The migration was not over on the 10th, but pressure of other work made it necessary to curtail the banding.

Warned by the deprivations of chipmunks in 1935, we had four two-cell Potter-type traps ready at the start, and by moving these from station to station as the chipmunks moved in, we caught over twenty of them and had no serious trouble afterwards. No cats appeared this year, but some hounds found the sparrow traps, probably with chipmunks in them, a good many times, and the traps were in a serious condition after each encounter.

The bait was fine chick-feed with either Hungarian or golden millet. Sunflower seed was used in some places, but, except as a bait for Jays and chipmunks, it seemed to have little value. A small amount of ordinary cracked corn was in the mixture, not because we expected it to be eaten but as a possible attraction so that the birds would find the smaller grain.

The total catch of new birds was 804, and up to October 10th, when most of the traps were taken in, the total was 765.

The following tabulation gives in detail the results of the 1935 and 1936 campaigns:

	1935	1936
White-throated Sparrow (<i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>).....	318	276
Eastern Song Sparrow (<i>Melospiza m. melodia</i>).....	123	139
Swamp Sparrow (<i>Melospiza georgiana</i>).....	2	12
Lincoln's Sparrow (<i>Melospiza l. lincolni</i>).....	9	20
Field Sparrow (<i>Spizella p. pusilla</i>).....	20	73
Eastern Chipping Sparrow (<i>Spizella p. passerina</i>).....	9	167
Eastern Vesper Sparrow (<i>Pooecetes g. gramineus</i>).....	4	6
White-crowned Sparrow (<i>Zonotrichia l. leucophrys</i>).....	17	10
Eastern Savannah Sparrow (<i>Passerculus sandwichensis savanna</i>)	27	25
Indigo Bunting (<i>Passerina cyanea</i>).....	0	1
Red-eyed Towhee (<i>Pipilo e. erythrophthalmus</i>).....	12	68
Eastern Purple Finch (<i>Carpodacus p. purpureus</i>).....	0	1

Slate-colored Junco (<i>Junco h. hyemalis</i>)	14	0
Brown Thrasher (<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>)	1	1
Catbird (<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>)	3	0
Blue Jay (<i>Cyanocitta c. cristata</i>)	5	3
Eastern Hermit Thrush (<i>Hylocichla guttata faxoni</i>)	0	2
Black-poll Warbler (<i>Dendroica striata</i>)	1	0
Total	565	804

In addition we captured four Field, two Chipping, and one Song Sparrow returns. These were probably resident birds which had not been trapped during the summer. It should be mentioned that one Song Sparrow and one White-throat that were banded in the 1935 migration were taken in South Carolina during the following winter.

We were much busier with other work this year than in 1935, and it was therefore impossible to keep complete repeat records. Merely banding over a trap-line two miles in length with over thirty traps in operation on the route is almost a day's work in itself, and the last afternoon trip usually ended in a rush to finish before it became too dark.

The birds began to arrive in numbers on September 30th when fifty-six were banded. The peak was reached on October 2d and 3d with seventy-six and seventy-five new birds respectively, and it was not until the 8th of October that there were less than fifty new birds taken daily. It was on the 8th, however, that we found thirteen birds in a trap at one time, which is our record. These were mostly repeat White-throats. The trap was about three and one-half feet long by one and one-half feet wide with seven small funnel entrances. We used several modified Mason traps (the original is described in the last issue of *Bird-Banding Notes*). These did not seem to yield any better results than traps with small funnel entrances except in catching Chipping Sparrows.

As far as we have noticed, no close grouping of species occurred, excepting in the case of Field and Chipping Sparrows. It was not unusual to catch from five to ten of either species in a trap with none of the other species.

The Song Sparrows were in fairly constant numbers, but reached a peak on October 2d with sixteen new birds. The main body of White-throats arrived on October 2d and new birds were in about equal numbers through the 7th, after which there were fewer.

The trap locations were almost identical with 1935 with one exception. An old gravel pit on our farm has a floor about 250 x 100 feet in area and over this is a scattering growth of Broome grass, *Andropogon scoparius* var. *frequens*. One day, September 30th, we noticed the Chipping Sparrows eating the seeds, and immediately set a Mason trap baited with golden millet, and the sparrows responded by hopping right in. The pit turned out to be a bander's

gold mine, and before we quit we caught Vesper, Song, Savannah, Field, and White-crowned there, in addition to the Chippies.

The migration this year appeared no greater than last year. The increased total of almost 250 over 1935 can probably be accounted for by the discovery of the gravel pit, the use of Mason traps for Chipping Sparrows and the reasonably prompt elimination of chipmunks.

SONG SPARROWS F121239 AND 34-148621 MATES FOR TWO CONSECUTIVE NESTING SEASONS

By LEWIS O. SHELLEY

SONG SPARROWS (*Melospiza m. melodia*) were returning during the latter part of March, 1936. Among those trapped was the pair mated throughout the 1935 breeding season, and recorded in *Bird-Banding*, October, 1935, pp. 137-138. The male was caught in a flat trap on March 27th at 6.50 A.M., a return-3. The female, a return-1, was trapped on March 31st in an automatic trip-door trap at 6.30 A.M. She happened to be taken near the location later selected for her first season's nesting site. From nearly the first of their coming the two birds were distinguished from others of the species present by their actions, and therefore no particular attempt to trap them as repeats was made. They commenced coming to the yard on daily feeding trips, seeking doughnut at the piazza, and the elm feeding unit in the yard, continuing to do so throughout April and well into May.

The accompanying map shows the nest distribution during two nesting seasons. Open circles denote 1935 nests, with solid circles showing the 1936 nesting sites. The nesting territory is directly back of the house, with one (1935) exception. The male's two singing trees and a third singing perch, on the peak of the shed roof, are designated as singing units because of their noticeable commonest use, and are shown on the map as triangular marks. When the urge to sing overtook the male, it was noted repeatedly that he would mount to the nearest place he happened to be at the time. But when within seventy-five to one hundred feet of the occupied nesting site, he would fly to the nearest regular singing perch, which was most often one of the two sapling elm trees on the southern side of the brook. The shed roof was used as a singing perch, it seemed, chiefly because it happened to be the nearest one.

The first 1936 nest, as is commonly the case, was placed on the ground, this time in a tussock of coarse pasture grass, facing the side road and surrounded on the other three sides by a growth of black alder. On May 29th the young were heard calling and, from the parents' actions it was assumed that one or two young had