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## A RECORD OF BIRDS BANDED AT AVERY ISLAND, LOUISIANA DURING THE YEARS 1937, 1938 AND 1939

By E. A. McILHENNY

### FOREWORD

IN BIRD BANDING, No. 3, July, 1937, there was published a complete list of the birds banded by me at Avery Island, Louisiana during the year 1936. The number banded that year being 17,981, enumerated as far as possible as to sex. Since then, I have received, from time to time, from others interested in bird banding and the sex ratio of birds, requests for information similar to that given for 1936. I now present a tabulation of the birds banded at my station for the years 1937, 1938, and 1939. A comparison of these records with that for 1936 gives some interesting data as to numbers banded and sex ratio. My banding traps for the smaller land birds are operated every day in the year, and my four traps for migratory wild fowl are operated from September 1st to February 1st; then closed until March 15th., at which time one trap is operated on Blue-winged Teal (*Querquedula discors*), as their return from the south can be expected about that time.

My reason for closing the wild fowl traps in mid-winter is, that the great majority of wild fowl using the territory adjacent to the traps have been banded by that time. These banded birds, knowing grain is available in the traps, crowd into them as soon as the feed is spread in the morning, making it necessary to handle many hundreds of banded birds in order to get a few that are not banded. This also seems to be true of the Red-wings (*Agelaius phoeniceus littoralis*) and Boat-tailed Grackles (*Cassidix mexicanus major*) taken in my small bird traps, as these traps take more banded birds during the summer than those not banded.

Small birds seem to have more shrewdness in getting out of the traps than wild fowl, for they, after feeding in the trap, will fly up and out the same opening they entered by. Ducks, on the contrary stay in the traps until liberated.

Coots (*Fulica americana americana*) are the wisest of all the birds I have banded. They stay in the water to the lee of the trap, and eat such food as is floated out by the wind or splashed out by the feeding ducks. Very few coots enter the traps at one time, and then only in small groups; these, after having fed, go out without hesitation through the apex of the entrance funnel, and their place is taken by another small group. This in and out of the trap by Coots in small parties is continuous until all are fed, or all the food in the trap is consumed.

Black Vultures (*Coragyps atratus atratus*) are the most interesting and individual of the birds that I band, and by far the easiest to get into the trap. I band Vultures only during late February and the first week of March in the spring, and late October to November 15th, in the autumn. The spring banding begins after the fur-trapping season ends in February, and closes when the Vultures begin nesting in March. The fall banding begins in late October, one month before the fur-trapping season begins in November, and ends on November 20th. During the trapping season for fur animals, Vultures feed on the carcasses of the animals killed for their skins, and scatter over a wide area of marsh and woodland to get this food. After the trapping season, they again take up their abode in the great Vulture roost in the forest on the east side of Avery Island. The large population of this roost can be appreciated when it is realized I use only one trap for these birds and it is set only two months each year, yet the total Vultures banded during the three years here listed total 8,046 Black Vultures, and I have recorded more than 3,000 retraps of individuals who have been banded for more than one year. Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura septentrionalis*), although common, do not go into the trap with the Black Vultures.

These birds seem to know days ahead of the time the vulture trap is to be set, and for a week or more before that time gather daily at the trap, perching on top and going inside, as if expecting food to be placed for them. If the trap was not kept open, hundreds of Vultures would go into it and starve, as no one visits the trap except when it is set. An abundance of interesting facts have been noted concerning this bird since I started banding them.

During the exceptionally cold January and February just passed, I developed a method of catching Woodcock (*Philohela minor*) at night, using a headlight and net. I found the method was also effective in capturing other ground roosting birds, and have succeeded in netting and banding many species I had not before banded.

Night banding is exciting as well as interesting, and in the future it will play a large part in my banding operations.

Systematic records and observations of banded birds develop three main facts: migration, span of life, and homing ability—facts that could not possibly be learned through any other source.

During the three years here recorded, I banded a total of 81,593 birds divided as follows:

Wild fowl and Game Birds.....	55,533
Non-game Birds.....	26,060

During this period I have recorded more than 7,000 returns and re-traps from birds making one or more migrations after being banded.

The recording of returns of a large number of individuals of a species that have been banded at one station over a period of years, gives an accurate picture of the migration and distribution of that species. A record that could not have been made except by the retaking of the banded birds. A graph of the retakes of birds banded at Avery Island, which is located about the south center of the Mississippi Valley flyway, shows birds banded at this point have been retaken throughout the northern part of North America from Newfoundland on the east to the coast of Bering Sea on the west. Very few naturalists have had the opportunity to follow the migration of our birds from their winter home in the south to the place far north where they are at home in the summer. The retaking of recorded banded birds enables us to readily grasp the whole picture of distribution and migration of many species, which have been banded in sufficient numbers at one station over a long period of time. It requires many years of careful records to build such a picture, but when built, it is permanent and accurate.

A comparison of the sex ratio of the birds banded is interesting and shows but little variation in percentage for the three years here given, when compared with the record for 1936. The sex ratio determined while banding trapped birds cannot be absolutely accurate, for too many errors occur because of the different migration of the sexes and the habit of some birds of flocking in winter according to sex; notably, Red-wings (*Agelaius phoeniceus littoralis*), Cow-birds (*Molothrus ater ater*) and grackles of the various species coming to Louisiana.

Banding does indicate when the records of one station are compared for a number of years, whether one sex is more abundant than the other.

In all the species of ducks I have banded in large numbers, excepting only the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*), males outnumber females about two to one. The over abundance of males is undoubtedly one of the governing factors in the decrease of the duck population.

As all of my traps are large stationary wire-covered enclosures, and as I use only one sort of food to attract the birds, and that—cracked rice—(except, of course, for Vultures), I do not get a very wide variety of birds in the traps, other than grain-eaters. Some few insectivorous birds blunder into the traps, but these are exceptions. I have, however, during the years here tabulated, banded 87 different species.

During the three years banding now recorded, a very large number of returns have been noted, some banded as much as ten years back. During several winters, I kept a record of the numbers of times the same bird was taken in the trap, and find many ducks are recorded as retakes very many times for the entire winter-banding season. These old-timers become very tame, and do not struggle when being handled. Some ducks have been retaken many times each year for four or more years.

A LIST OF BIRDS BANDED BY E. A. McILHENNY AT AVERY ISLAND, LOUISIANA DURING THE YEARS 1937, 1938, and 1939

SPECIES	1937	1938	1939	
Pied-billed Grebe	( <i>Podilymbus podiceps podiceps</i> )	15	9	4
Water-Turkey	( <i>Anhinga anhinga</i> )	0	1	6
Great Blue Heron	( <i>Ardea herodias herodias</i> )	1	0	0
American Egret	( <i>Casmerodius albus egretta</i> )	0	2	0
Snowy Egret	( <i>Egretta thula thula</i> )	112	302	29
Louisiana Heron	( <i>Hydranassa tricolor ruficollis</i> )	1	122	24
Little Blue Heron	( <i>Florida caerulea caerulea</i> ;	6	34	0
Yellow-crowned Night Heron	( <i>Nyctanassa violacea violacea</i> )	4	0	0
American Bittern	( <i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i> )	0	0	2
Glossy Ibis	( <i>Plegadis falcinellus falcinellus</i> )	16	0	0
Lesser Snow Goose	( <i>Chen hyperborea hyperborea</i> )	10	0	0
Blue Goose	( <i>Chen caerulescens</i> )	132	205	11
Fulvous TreeDuck (♂)	( <i>Dendrocygna bicolor helva</i> )	10	7	0
" (♀)	"	5	0	0
Mallard (♂)	( <i>Anas platyrhynchos, platyrhynchos</i> )	552	907	861
" (♀)	"	534	895	771
Common Northern Black Duck (♂)	( <i>Anas rubripes tristis</i> )	14	3	0
" (♀)	"	4	3	0
Mottled Duck (♂)	( <i>Anas fulvigula maculosa</i> )	118	74	13
" (♀)	"	63	33	14
Gadwall (♂)	( <i>Chaulelasmus streperus</i> )	0	3	19
" (♀)	"	1	3	13
Baldpate (♂)	( <i>Mareca americana</i> )	0	3	16
" (♀)	"	3	0	10
American Pintail (♂)	( <i>Dafila acuta tzitzihoo</i> )	3,855	4,916	5,207
" (♀)	"	2,052	2,186	2,178
Green-winged Teal (♂)	( <i>Nettion carolinense</i> )	75	181	299
" (♀)	"	29	63	172
Blue-winged Teal (♂)	( <i>Querquedula discors</i> )	1,887	1,450	1,380
" (♀)	"	1,069	639	534
Cinnamon Teal (♂)	( <i>" cyanoptera</i> )	12	3	2
" (♀)	"	1	0	0
Shoveller (♂)	( <i>Spatula clypeata</i> )	3	4	14
" (♀)	"	1	0	9
Wood Duck (♂)	( <i>Aix sponsa</i> )	202	149	81
" (♀)	"	145	97	43
Redhead (♂)	( <i>Nyroca americana</i> )	26	8	6
" (♀)	"	16	4	3
Ring-necked Duck (♂)	( <i>Nyroca collaris</i> )	1,302	1,284	2,899
" (♀)	"	486	388	835
Canvasback Duck (♂)	( <i>" valisineria</i> )	151	176	102
" (♀)	"	86	97	71
Greater Scaup Duck (♂)	( <i>" marila</i> )	4	9	5
" (♀)	"	3	8	5
Lesser Scaup Duck (♂)	( <i>" affinis</i> )	1,750	2,790	1,493
" (♀)	"	943	1,067	747
Buffle-head (♂)	( <i>Charitonetta albeola</i> )	3	0	1
" (♀)	"	2	0	0

A LIST OF BIRDS BANDED BY E. A. McILHENNY AT AVERY ISLAND, LOUISIANA  
DURING THE YEARS 1937, 1938, and 1939 (Concluded)

SPECIES	1937	1938	1939	
Ruddy Duck (♂)	( <i>Erismatura jamaicensis rubida</i> )	18	8	1
(♀)	( )	20	4	0
Hooded Merganser (♂)	( <i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i> )	4	0	0
(♀)	( )	1	0	1
American Merganser	( <i>Mergus merganser americanus</i> )	2	0	0
Black Vulture	( <i>Coragyps atratus atratus</i> )	2,388	2,456	3,220
Cooper's Hawk	( <i>Accipiter cooperi</i> )	0	3	0
Bald Eagle	( <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus leucocephalus</i> )	1	0	0
Eastern Sparrow Hawk	( <i>Falco sparverius sparverius</i> )	1	1	1
Eastern Pigeon Hawk	( <i>F. columbarius columbarius</i> )	0	0	1
Eastern Bob-white (♂)	( <i>Colinus virginianus virginianus</i> )	97	7	26
(♀)	( )	61	4	12
Sora	( <i>Porzana carolina</i> )	0	2	0
Purple Gallinule	( <i>Ionornis martinica</i> )	12	4	14
Florida Gallinule	( <i>Gallinula chloropus cackinnans</i> )	666	241	213
American Coot	( <i>Fulica americana americana</i> )	1,107	938	1,007
Black-neck Stilt	( <i>Himantopus mexicanus</i> )	0	0	3
Killdeer	( <i>Oxyechus vociferus vociferus</i> )	1	4	1
Eastern Mourning Dove	( <i>Zenaidura macroura carolinensis</i> )	35	3	10
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	( <i>Coccyzus americanus americanus</i> )	0	2	0
Barn Owl	( <i>Tyto alba pratincola</i> )	0	1	0
Southern Screech Owl	( <i>Otus asio asio</i> )	1	0	5
Great Horned Owl	( <i>Bubo virginianus virginianus</i> )	0	0	1
Chimney Swift	( <i>Chaetura pelagica</i> )	397	130	340
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	( <i>Archilochus colubris</i> )	0	1	1
Southern Flicker	( <i>Colaptes auratus auratus</i> )	12	2	1
Red-bellied Woodpecker (♂)	( <i>Centurus carolinus</i> )	3	7	6
(♀)	( )	1	5	5
Kingbird	( <i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i> )	0	3	1
Eastern Phoebe	( <i>Sayornis phoebe</i> )	0	0	2
Tree Swallow	( <i>Iridoprocne bicolor</i> )	243	65	30
Bank Swallow	( <i>Riparia riparia riparia</i> )	32	0	33
Rough-winged Swallow	( <i>Stelgidopteryx ruficollis serripennis</i> )	0	31	14
Barn Swallow	( <i> Hirundo erythrogaster</i> )	0	2	0
Purple Martin	( <i>Progne subis subis</i> )	5	0	0
Florida Blue Jay	( <i>Cyanocitta cristata florincola</i> )	64	89	86
Fish Crow	( <i>Corvus ossifragus</i> )	165	22	0
Carolina Wren	( <i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i> )	0	3	1
Eastern Mockingbird	( <i>Mimus polyglottos polyglottos</i> )	141	103	163
Brown Thrasher	( <i>Toxostoma rufum</i> )	10	44	39
Southern Robin	( <i>Turdus migratorius achrusterus</i> )	0	0	10
Loggerhead Shrike	( <i>Lanius ludovicianus ludovicianus</i> )	32	28	21
Starling	( <i>Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris</i> )	42	208	375
Myrtle Warbler	( <i>Dendroica coronata</i> )	2	3	5
Bobolink	( <i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i> )	0	0	4
Western Meadowlark	( <i>Sturnella neglecta</i> )	56	118	96
Yellow-headed Blackbird	( <i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i> )	5	1	0
Gulf Coast Red-wing (♂)	( <i>Agelaius phoeniceus littoralis</i> )	1,700	1,607	2,102
(♀)	( )	393	259	331
Rusty Blackbird (♂)	( <i>Euphagus carolinus</i> )	6	0	31
(♀)	( )	0	0	1
Brewer's Blackbird	( <i> " cyanocephalus</i> )	2	0	0
Boat-tailed Grackle (♂)	( <i>Cassidix mexicanus major</i> )	299	519	512
(♀)	( )	1,052	909	1,002
Great-tailed Grackle (♂)	( <i> " " mexicanus</i> )	0	0	4
(♀)	( )	0	0	0
Purple Grackle (♂)	( <i>Quiscalus quiscula quiscula</i> )	264	8	91
(♀)	( )	89	0	61
Florida Grackle (♂)	( <i> " quiscula aglaeus</i> )	10	9	0
(♀)	( )	3	6	0
Bronzed Grackle (♂)	( <i> " " aeneus</i> )	29	0	3
(♀)	( )	25	0	1
Eastern Cowbird (♂)	( <i>Molothrus ater ater</i> )	315	125	862
(♀)	( )	162	39	247
Louisiana Cardinal (♂)	( <i>Richmondia cardinalis magnirostris</i> )	76	67	77
(♀)	( )	31	36	85
Dickcissel	( <i>Spiza americana</i> )	0	0	2
Red-eyed Towhee	( <i>Pipilo e. erythrophthalmus</i> )	1	0	0
Eastern Savannah Sparrow	( <i>Passerculus sandwichensis savanna</i> )	241	59	165
Swamp Sparrow	( <i>Melospiza georgiana</i> )	0	3	45
Hybrid Canvasback and Redhead Drake	( )	1	0	0
Hybrid Cinnamon Teal and Shoveller Drake	( )	1	0	0
Pintail and Redhead (♂)	( )	0	0	1
(♀)	( )	0	0	1

26,029 26,314 29,250

Avery Island, Louisiana.