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## GENERAL NOTES

**A Supposed Bird Banding Record in the Great Basin in 1846.**—Some time ago I came across an alleged banding record in the literature which if valid would not only be one of the first instances of banding known but also an extreme longevity record. This item of ornithological interest was first noted in J. Cecil Alter's History of Utah (p. 473, vol. 3) having been taken from The Millennial Star (June 25, 1894, Vol. 56: 416), which is a magazine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The story had in turn been taken from Territorial papers but with no indication as to the particular one or the date.

The account is as follows: "A wild goose has been captured west of the Utah line. Attached to the bird's leg was a very thin piece of brass, an inch long and half as wide. On this is punched with a pointed instrument, 'Fremont Party, September, 1846, B.B.J.' It is presumed that the initials are those of Colonel B. B. Jackson, who was a member of Fremont's exploring expedition when it passed through that region nearly fifty years ago. The venerable colonel is living somewhere in Sonoma County, California, and has been informed of the capture.

If he remembers having turned a tagged goose loose in 1846 the bird will be presented to the California Pioneer Society."

When I brought this to the attention of E. Alexander Bergstrom, Editor of *Bird-Banding*, he commented that a 48-year recovery record would be phenomenal since the oldest bird known through banding up to that time had reached only about 27 years and that it was doubtful that any Canada Goose (the most likely species) had been recovered with more than a 15-year span. Indeed the oldest record in captivity for the Canada Goose was 32 years. He thought it would be particularly remarkable to achieve this longevity record with a makeshift band, considering the definite loss of modern bands through wear in long-lived species. Since the record rested solely on the newspaper account, which did not rule out the possibility or probability of a hoax, he suggested that an investigation be made to establish whether this was a bona fide early banding record or a skillful hoax. Accordingly I launched upon some historical detective work with the following interesting results.

Since I could find no mention of a Colonel Jackson or of any bird banding in Fremont's reports, I first made inquiry of the Society of California Pioneers with headquarters in San Francisco. Mrs. Helen S. Giffen, Secretary, wrote that a scrutiny of their gift list prior to 1906 revealed no mention of a goose or a band from a goose having been presented by anyone. If such an item had been in the collection it would have been destroyed along with the rest of the Society's collection at the time of the 1906 earthquake and fire. Mrs. Giffen was unable to locate a Colonel B. B. Jackson in their Sonoma County records. However, in a volume marked Bodie (in Mono County, California), she found the following handwritten notation about him, evidently made in 1879. "Age, Sept. 27, 1879, 64 years; Born Pennsylvania; Departed Peoria, Ill., March 6, 1845; Arrived Oregon City, Sept. 15, 1845; Route, Plains." Thus it would appear that Jackson travelled west before the third Fremont expedition and arrived in California a year prior to the supposed banding date of the goose. The Fremont party did not start from Bent's Fort until August 16, 1845. They spent two weeks in September in the vicinity of Great Salt Lake in September 1845 before continuing westward across the Great Basin to California. Colonel Jackson may have had some connection later with the Fremont Party in California when Fremont exchanged the role of explorer for that of a soldier and became involved in the Bear Flag Revolt. In September of 1846, Fremont was slowly working his way north from Los Angeles to Monterey, recruiting among American residents of the area.

The search next involved locating the original newspaper account for possible further particulars. A page by page search of the most likely prospect was made, the result being that it was soon found in the *Deseret Evening News* for Thursday, May 24, 1894, p. 8. This account was essentially the same as the previously quoted version except that the introductory sentence reads: "James H. Sturgeon captured a wild goose at his place one day last week, and he thinks that he has a grand prize." In the last sentence the date of the bird having been banded and released is given as 1849 rather than 1846. Most significant was the source indicated at the end of the passage, namely, "Homer (Nev.) Index."

Next I wrote to the Nevada State Historical Society. Mrs. Clara S. Beatty, Director, replied that she had not been able to find anything about the banded goose in the Reno papers of the 1894 period and that neither the band nor the goose had been given to the Nevada Historical Society Museum. However, some references she found in the Reno Evening Gazette of the 1891 era suggested that the Homer Index was the paper published at Lundy, Nevada, a town in the western part of the state near Bodie, California. Mention was made in one excerpt that she sent me of Sturgeon's hay wagon having arrived at Lundy. In other passages there was mention of a Jim Townsend with the suggestion that he edited the Homer Index.

Thus two leads pointed to the Bodie, California area, so I next wrote the California State Library at Sacramento. Allan R. Ottley, California Section Librarian, replied that no reference in their records had been found to any banding of a wild goose by B. B. Jackson. He furnished a lot of information about James William Emery Townsend. The latter was indeed a resident of Lundy and edited the Homer Mining Index. This weekly paper was evidently his last venture for he died in 1895 or '96.

Perhaps the most revealing information was the account appearing in Samuel

P. Davis' History of Nevada, 1913, Vol. 1, p. 476, as follows: "*Jim Townsend*.—This unique specimen was by all odds the most original writer and versatile liar that this coast, or any other coast, ever produced. He began his journalistic career in Mono County with the *Mono Index* and wound it up in Carson City, where so many newspapers lie buried. He kept the coast laughing for years with quaint sayings that he set up as from the case they came into his mind. They never saw manuscript. He simply set the type when he felt like expressing an idea and worried himself almost to death because he could not set the type as fast as he could think.

"To read his paper you would think it was published in a city of ten thousand inhabitants. He had a Mayor and City Council, whose proceedings he reported once a week, although they never existed, and enlivened his columns with killings, lawsuits, murder trials and railroad accidents and a thousand and one incidents of daily life in a humming growing town, every last one of which he coined out of his own active brain.

"One of the most exciting things with which he kept churning up his readers was a shooting scrape and scandal and divorce proceedings arising from a scandal in which the Mayor's wife and a member of the city council figured. It dragged along through his columns for nearly six months. It was very interesting to read and implicitly believed—except by persons who knew that there was no mayor and no council at that time in the town where Jim's paper was published.

"He was called 'Lying Jim Townsend' to the day of his death and could he have had his way it would have been graven on his tombstone."

Townsend was the original of Bret Harte's Truthful James. The fabulous humor of Townsend is dwelt upon in a longer account of him in "Bret Harte and Truthful James" by Robert L. Fulton in the *Overland Monthly*, 87: 89-98, August, 1915.

After learning about Jim Townsend who undoubtedly wrote the goose story, it seems certain that the banding was a hoax as Editor Bergstrom suspected. Either the whole thing was entirely a figment of Townsend's fertile imagination or was a practical joke on Sturgeon in which Jackson participated unwittingly or otherwise. Or perhaps the reverse was true. In any event this supposed early banding and longevity record is discredited.—William H. Behle, Biology Division, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

**Interesting Starling Returns.**—I have been trapping and banding Starlings for two or three decades at Garden City, New York, but it is so seldom one is retrapped that there have been very few returns, although there is usually a larger or smaller percentage of banded individuals (by observation) about the station. My trap was in operation, although not every day, throughout the twelve months beginning September 1953, and new birds of various species taken and banded. These included 2 Starlings in September, 19 in October, 21 in November, 2 in December (total 44); none in January, 1954, 6 in February, 10 in March, 6 in April, 4 in May, 2 in June (total 28), none in July or August.

It was surprising and entirely unprecedented when three return individuals were trapped on May 22, 1954, and a fourth on May 23. At this date they should have been on or near their nesting grounds, and it is interesting that all four were banded in November; corroborating a previously held opinion that many of our Starlings return to home territory in fall, though they may not remain there through the winter (1937, *Bird-Banding*, VIII, pp. 76-77).

Of the four, 2 (including that of May 23) were banded on November 14, 1953; one on November 4, 1953; one on November 9, 1952. These four were the only Starling returns trapped during the twelve months in question. It suggested itself that they belonged to a wandering unit group, such as seem to make up our resident Blue Jay population (Kimball and Nichols, 1945, *Bird-Banding*, XVI, pp. 130-134).

Another point of interest is eye color. Male Starlings have a dark eye, dark brown I suppose, but rarely sufficiently pale to be noticeably brown offhand. But in a minority, presumably females (Kessel, *Bird-Banding*, 22: 16, Jan. 1951), it has a noticeable pale or paler rim. The eye of the Nov. 9, 1952, bird (512-17824), and of the two of Nov. 14, 1953 (502-48421 and 22), had a pale rim; that of the one of Nov. 4, 1953 (512-17895) did not. And it was the same when the four were taken as returns in May, 1954.—J. T. Nichols.