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## A funny thing happened on the way to the Banding Office

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Many things have had an effect upon my life, but perhaps the most devastating would be my encounter and involvement with birds.

My wife has nearly disowned me and has several times threatened divorce, declaring there are feathers coming out my ears, that I track seeds and dirt throughout the house and if one more dirty bird messes up her windows that's it. "Birds, birds, birds — that's all you ever think of," is a typical remark.

I don't see why she should think that. After all, I've only banded a little over 1,000 Evening Grosbeaks this last month. Of course, my fingers are just stubs, and healing stubs at that. She says I even sound like a grosbeak when I snore. (I just hope I don't bite like they do.)

One minor problem that upset her usually-even disposition was the day the phone rang and an eager voice said, "I have a Screech Owl; would you like it?" Shortly, two boys brought me a dirty black gray-phase Screech Owl. "He fell down our chimney," they said. It was obvious.

With that we took the owl down to the basement where a bath was in order. We removed the soot from his (or her?) eyes and while I was cleaning up, off flew the owl. Around the basement it went, up the stairs and into the living room. I held my breath expecting an explosion, but my wife was out and I was able to rescue the bird from where it had perched on her new drapes! I thought I had licked that crisis. Then, the next Friday night as I worked with some other banders on getting our records ready to go to the banding office, I heard the explosion, "What is that on the ceiling?" She was blaming my kids. Now I may be devious, but I'm not one to let my children take the blame; besides, they were denying any knowledge of the marks on the ceiling. For, straight across our white ceiling were perfect wing marks of an owl. "Beautiful," I said. The next words were directed at me. "Get a bucket, a wash cloth, soap, and water and get busy," but here my ingenuity came into play. "It's a conversation piece," I said hopefully. "Where else could you find real live owl prints on a ceiling?" my friends said. Come and visit me and see for yourself. They're still there.

Driving to lunch one noon with one of my fellow workers, I stopped to check my traps that an assistant was running for me. There I found two containers full of grosbeaks, which I put in the car. Driving down a hill, the containers tipped and some 20 to 30 grosbeaks were flying inside the car with my buddy ducking and yelling, "Hit the brakes — hit the brakes — take to the woods." Cars were honking and people waving at us. One car with a long-haired, weird-hatted driver gave me the sign as he passed. It took most of my lunch hour to get the birds under control, and all the rest of the week to calm down my companion.

While giving a banding demonstration, using a grosbeak, naturally, and talking to a fifth grade class on how animals breath (I get a little banding and bird study in with my science lessons), the bird left his calling card in my hand, much to the delight of the students. As I was explaining about how the plumbing works with birds, he reached down and nailed me good on the end of my finger with his beak. I let out a yelp which was drowned out with childish laughter and promptly released the bird — out of the window, luckily. The students then wrote this verse which they made into a song:

*A grosbeak is a yellow bird  
He breathes while in the sky  
He has two lungs a-going  
Just like you and I  
He squawks and carries on  
And grabs you with his bill  
If the back end doesn't get you  
Then the front end surely will.*

One day as I walked into my office there was a cartoon depicting me<sup>1</sup>(poor resemblance) holding a goose that I had banded. The caption said, "I've found another, take back your ring." Another time, a picture of a Starling with the words, "Hurry, Ken, slip us some umbrellas and our coats, they're bombing the heck out of us with water and soap." Great group of folks I work with!

I have a teenage son who plays rock music. One night he had his group practicing in our basement. Now it seems that one of the boys, the drummer, had to visit the basement toilet. What he didn't know was that I was keeping an injured gull in the

shower with the curtain closed. I'd go down and feed it, turn the water on and clean up the mess. (My wife, being selfish, wouldn't let it walk around the house leaving its "calling cards.") Anyway, the boy was just getting comfortable when our gull stuck its head out through the curtains to see if it was feeding and cleaning time. With that, we all heard a sonic boom. "Ye gods — a pelican, a pelican — I'm being attacked by a pelican." The drummer came streaking through the house, clutching his jeans!

Putting up bird houses can be hazardous or hilarious, depending on the point of view. From my point, it was hard to accept the problem that followed. As I reached to hook up the bird house, one foot on the stepladder and one on the windowsill, something moved and I ended up in a juniper bush, on my back unable to move. "Help!" I croaked. "Look, look, a Bald Eagle has landed," one of my daughters said, as she ran to get her mother. "You and the birds again," was all she said.

Yes, birds have created some problems, some fun and lots of interest around the neighborhood. I don't know what I'd do without them.

<sup>1</sup>Cartoon credit: Harry Mandell, Art Supervisor, Board of Education of Allegany County (Md.)

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## An apparent longevity record for the Black Noddy

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On 13 December 1972, while assisting Dr. Harvey I. Fisher with his research on Laysan Albatross (*Diomedea immutabilis*) longevity, I captured an incubating Black Noddy (*Anous tenuirostris*) from its nest on Sand Island, Midway Atoll, Hawaiian Leeward Islands. This bird (662-05366) had been banded on Sand Island on 15 February 1964 by Eugene Kridler. The interval between banding and my capture is eight years, ten months. Since Mr. Kridler listed its age as at least one year old when banded, this individual was no less than nine years, ten months old when recaptured. No attempts were made to sex the bird, either by Mr. Kridler at the time of banding or by myself.

Apparently this is a longevity record for this

species; correspondence with Mr. Kridler and Roger B. Clapp could reveal no older records. However, this age is nowhere near the maximum attainable. Brown and Robertson, Jr. (*Bird-Banding*, 46:250-251, 1975) list two Brown Noddies (*Anous stolidus*) over twenty years of age, one twenty-five years old. Thus, Brown Noddies — and most certainly Black Noddies — share with other terns the ability to live long lives.

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