

# Inland Regional News

## Inland Bird Banding Association

Founded 1922

### Nature Notes from Nebraska

Banding has not been as productive in Nebraska this winter as in past years. The weather has just been too nice! This may sound strange to those of you outside the state, but it's true. Oftentimes Nebraska's weather is equated with Alaska's, and I'll grant you that is also sometimes true. But with the exception of a three-week period in December, temperatures have been well above normal. How does this affect bird banding? Like everywhere else, we expect them to come pouring into feeding stations so we can get up those nets. But the birds are not stressed for food, so they only feed for very short periods and then they head for the fields to supplement their diets with natural food. Or maybe they just get tired of a steady diet of black oil sunflower seeds.

There are no "winter or northern invaders" such as Purple Finches, Evening Grosbeaks or redpolls to band. Only a few Pine Siskins and Red-breasted Nuthatches have made it to the eastern half of the state. The presence of these two species is perhaps due to the Pine Ridge fires last summer. Most banders have banded several of the nuthatches; but Mabel Ott, a Lincoln bander at the Chet Ager Nature Center, has probably had more luck than most of us. She banded five in one day. That may not sound like many to banders in other parts of the country, but here it's a lot!

An article in the Des Moines Register says more Pine Siskins than usual are over-wintering there. I just hope when they head back north, and hopefully west, they will stop over at Fontanelle Forest or Neale Woods Nature Center and give me a chance to send them on their way with little silver bracelets!

Ruth C. Green  
506 West 31st Avenue  
Bellevue, Nebraska 68005

### Cassin's Sparrow Banded in Dundy County, Nebraska

The Cassin's Sparrow (*Aimophila cassinii*) is considered by Johnsgard (1980) to be a very rare and irregular spring and fall migrant and summer resident in southwestern Nebraska. Bray et al. (1986) lists this species as accidental in Nebraska, citing only a handful of documented records.

In early June 1989, a group of birders found several areas containing Cassin's Sparrows in the extreme southwestern corner of Nebraska (Silcock 1989). The largest concentrated area of Cassin's Sparrows (approximately ten birds making flutter song flights) was found on 11 June by Ed M. Brogie five miles west of Benkelman in a sage/yucca habitat on the south side of Highway 34.

Ellen Brogie and I visited this area on 21 June and easily located several singing male Cassin's Sparrows. To aid in identification, we had in our possession a tape of this species' flutter song flight vocalizations. The calls given by the Dundy Co. birds were identical to those on tape: a short whistled note, followed by a trill, another short whistled note, and then ending with a final short higher note.

We observed one particular bird which seemed to be very territorial to an area adjacent to the south of Highway 34 and to the west of a private road. Upon playing the tape, this bird responded by making a flutter song flight directly towards us. It then perched on a barbed wire fence and gave five or six short rapid "chip" notes before performing another flutter song flight. During these flights, the sparrow achieved a maximum height of approximately 15 feet and the longest horizontal distance covered was about 30 yards. We observed the bird for over an hour under optimal light conditions, sometimes at a distance of less than 15 feet. Several photographs were taken and the area was searched unsuccessfully for positive evidence of nesting.

We returned to the area early the next morning, erected a mist net, and within 15 minutes had a Cassin's Sparrow in the hand. The bird was banded (#980-96043), photographed,

and released. The bird was classified as an adult, based on its worn plumage, partially molted tail, and unstreaked breast; and as a male, because it "hit the net" during a flutter song flight (Bent 1968).

The following characteristics were noted:

The bird had a slightly flattened head with a whitish-gray central crown streak, which was bordered with brown. A whitish-gray supercilium above the dark eye was apparent, as was a thin brownish eyeline that ran horizontally from behind the eye to a point perpendicular to the bird's nape. The bill appeared large in relation to head size and was bicolored; the upper mandible above the nostrils was dark, with the remainder flesh colored.

The unmarked breast and throat of the bird were of a uniform whitish-gray coloration. The lesser wing coverts were a chestnut brown and edged with gray. The medial wing coverts were also brown, heavily edged with white, and with black markings running through the midsection, along the feather spine. The secondaries were a lighter brown than that of the coverts and were slightly edged with white, although the posterior parts of the medial feathers of this group were blackish in coloration.

The flanks were slightly streaked and the legs were a pinkish-flesh color. The back of the bird was a mottled gray and brown, with the rump appearing quite barred. The tail was long, rounded, and tipped with white. The two medial tail feathers were lighter brown in comparison to the rest of the tail and were distinctly barred. The captured bird was missing one outer tail feather; the remaining one had a conspicuous whitish edge and tip.

Photographs are in possession of the author and others have been sent to the Nebraska Records Committee.

#### Literature Cited

- Bent, A.C. 1968. Life histories of North American cardinals, buntings, towhees, finches, sparrows and their allies ed. O.L. Austin. *U.S. Natl. Museum Bulletin* 237:427-444.
- Bray, Tanya E., Barbara K. Padelford, and Ross Silcock. 1986. *The birds of Nebraska: A critically evaluated list*. Published by the authors. Bellevue, Nebraska.
- Johnsgard, P.A. 1980. Revised list of the birds of Nebraska and adjacent plain states. *Occ. Papers Nebr. Ornithol. Union*, No. 6.
- Silcock, W.R. 1989. Cassin's Sparrow in Dundy and Chase Counties, Nebraska. *Nebr. Bird Rev.* 57:67.

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Creighton, NE 68729

## Should Piping Plovers Be Banded?

Observations of banded Piping Plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) suffering leg injuries during 1987 through 1989 have prompted the question of whether this species should be banded. All injured birds were banded on the metatarsus with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) bands. These individuals were also color-banded or flagged on their legs as well.

Since 1985, 329 Piping Plovers (83 adults, 246 chicks) have been banded on the central Platte River in Nebraska. Five injured birds have subsequently been observed or captured from this population. These six injuries represent 13% (N=46) of the banded plovers resighted/recaptured since 1986 in this area. Additional reports of banded Piping Plovers with leg injuries have surfaced from the Atlantic Coast, Lake of the Woods, and the lower Platte River.

We suspect the injury results from sand particles becoming lodged between the band/flag and the leg, leading to permanent disfigurement and, in some cases, eventual dismemberment of the limb. Because of their endangered/threatened status, we recommend that a moratorium be placed on all Piping Plover banding activities until this issue is resolved.

Please submit any previously unreported observations of injured Piping Plovers you have to John Sidle at the address below.

Gary R. Lingle  
Platte River Whooping Crane Trust  
2550 N. Diers Avenue  
Grand Island, NE 68803

John G. Sidle (USF&WS)  
203 W. 2nd  
Grand Island, NE 68801



### Volunteers Needed

A study on the nesting ecology of colonial and solitary nesting in Burrowing Owls in western Nebraska is being conducted. Ninety-two nests were located and monitored during the 1989 field season in Scotts Bluff, Banner, Morrill and Box Butte counties.

Two volunteer field research assistants are needed for this study. The positions are available from early/mid May through July/August. Responsibilities include: locating and monitoring nesting sites, working with predator models to

investigate possible advantages to colonial nesting, timing of foraging trips, recording prey items delivered to the nest, and monitoring predation rates on artificial nests. Students wishing to develop their own independent research project for college credit are encouraged to do so.

No experience is necessary, however, applicants should be enthusiastic and willing to work long and odd hours. Housing plus a small stipend will be provided. Please send a letter of interest, resume, names of two references and dates of availability to:

Martha Desmond  
Dept. of Forestry, Fisheries and Wildlife  
202 National Resources Hall  
University of Nebraska  
Lincoln, NE 68583-0819  
(402) 472-6826



### Wintering Sparrows in Lincoln

Thomas Labeledz, Lincoln, Nebraska, has been conducting a small, preliminary research project on site fidelity in wintering sparrows. Labeledz has been banding Harris' and American Tree Sparrows, and Dark-eyed Juncos near Lincoln for the past three years. He will present the results of this project to the paper session on ornithology sponsored by the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union at the 1990 annual meeting of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences.

Labeledz has expanded his project to an area in Hall County, NE, in 1989-90 and depending on success of banding at the new area, he may continue the project.

Anyone working on this type of research is urged to contact:

Thomas Labeledz  
University of Nebraska State Museum  
W-436 Nebraska Hall  
Lincoln, NE 68588-0514



### Junco Studies

Judy Janiak recaptured a Slate-colored Junco on 15 October, 1989 that had been banded on 5 April 1989 in the same place, her yard in Fridley. The bird had been sexed male by wing chord, with a red-brown iris. An interesting change noted was the third inner rectrix increasing from 2% white at the original banding to 40% white at the recapture. In his book, Merrill Wood suggested that this increase of white

occurred as juncos aged. However, his conclusion was based on very little information.

Jane Olyphant has a set of nine recaptures that span at least one breeding season. A few birds captured as adults show no change in the amount of white in the third inner tail feather; those captured as HY show an increase.

A standardized means of recording this characteristic is to take the three outer feathers on the right side of the bird and record the amount of white in tenths; i.e., 1.0, .7, .3.

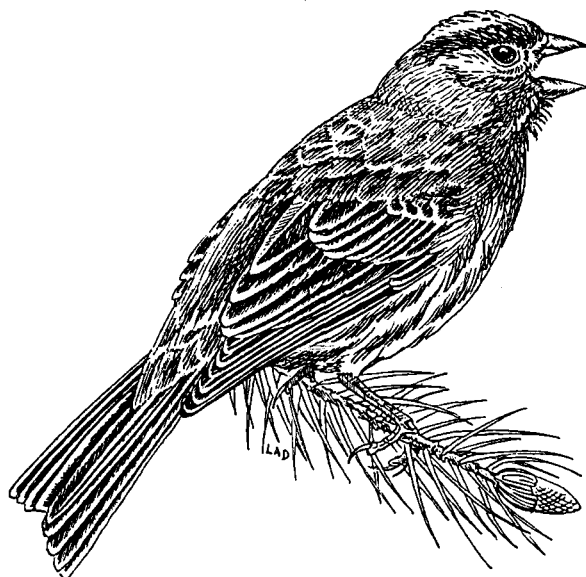
The color of the bird's eye should be noted, whether red, gray, or changing. Wing chord should be measured as well. Don Beimborn will be glad to receive any record of returns with tail data.

Don Beimborn  
3516 21st West  
Minneapolis, MN 55416



### House Finches in Faribault, MN

Forest Strnad reports banding a total of ten adult and five nestling House Finches in Faribault. The first one was banded on 13 December 1988. Females with brood patches were banded on 25 and 27 June 1989. One bird nested in a potted Tuberous Begonia on his deck. Forest thinks there were four nests in Faribault the summer of 1989.



House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) AHY ♂

L.A. DeCourcey © 1990

## 1989 Banding Results

Howard and Marcella Meahl

Ashtabula, Ohio

The Meahls banded a total of 8,116 individual birds of 96 species in 1989. The ten most commonly banded species were:

1. House Finch	2,769
2. Yellow-rumped Warbler	1,072
3. Slate-colored Junco	726
4. American Goldfinch	406
5. Song Sparrow	360
6. Golden-crowned Kinglet	212
7. White-throated Sparrow	203
8. Purple Finch	170
9. Ruby-crowned Kinglet	124
10. Gray Catbird	123

Included in the species count were six species of flycatchers, six vireos, seven thrushes, ten sparrows, and 28 warblers. The 1989 returns, counted after an absence of over 90 days, totalled 402 of 31 species. The oldest returns were:

2 Blue Jays	1976
1 Blue Jay	1979
1 Mourning Dove	1979
1 Gray Catbird	1981
3 Blue Jays	1982
2 House Finches	1982
1 Hairy Woodpecker	1983
1 Blue Jay	1983
1 Northern Cardinal	1983
1 Black-capped Chickadee	1983
2 House Finches	1984
2 American Tree Sparrows	1984
2 Northern Cardinals	1984
2 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks	1984
1 Blue-winged Warbler	1984
2 Gray Catbirds	1984
3 Black-capped Chickadee	1984

David Stage

Laurel, Nebraska

In 1989 I captured and banded 348 birds on my parents' farm in Cedar County in northeast Nebraska. I was able to capture and band 27 species including four species for the first time. These were: Killdeer, Swamp Sparrow, Field Sparrow, and Yellow Warbler. This brings the total number of species banded at this location since April of 1985 to 72.

The five most commonly banded species were:

Barn Swallow	105
American Tree Sparrow	46
Harris' Sparrow	35
Blue Jay	34
Lincoln's Sparrow	32

I also constructed and mounted five additional kestrel houses on utility poles this year. Last year (1988), three of the five boxes had kestrels successfully nest in them. In 1989, three of the ten nest boxes had kestrels, one had five young screech owls, two had European Starlings and one produced four baby squirrels.

### Inland Bird Banding Association

#### Annual Meeting

October 12 -14, 1990

Columbia, Missouri

The University of Missouri (Division of Biological Sciences and School of Natural Resources), Missouri Department of Conservation, and Columbia Audubon Society invite you to attend the annual IBBA meeting at the Best Western Columbia Inn in Columbia, Missouri. A variety of activities are planned to take advantage of October in mid-Missouri.

PAPERS --- EXHIBITS

FIELD TRIPS

Watch for further details

in the next issue of NABB.