

BIRD BANDING DEPARTMENT

Under the Direction of Wm. I. Lyon, Waukegan, Ill.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN NEW ENGLAND

BY S. PRENTISS BALDWIN

Bird banding is as catching as the flu, in New England. It is in the atmosphere, the mental atmosphere.

The history of New England is one of growth of intellectual atmosphere; the growth of science; and, with it, the study of the science of ornithology, until there are now more ornithologists per square mile, I almost said per acre, than in any other part of the country.

And as the scientific ornithologists lead in the study of birds, so they lead in educating the public to the importance of birds to agriculture, to the absolute necessity of protecting birds to preserve the food supply; and at the same time they arouse the interest of great numbers of persons, who become lovers of birds and who, if less scientific, are fully as enthusiastic in making friends and companions of our wild birds.

But we are not reviewing the history of the last hundred years, nor even that of the desultory bird banding in New England of the last fifteen years. We speak only of the rapid strides of bird banding as a method of study and protection of birds, since systematic trapping has been introduced.

Almost two years ago a business man of Boston wrote asking questions about trapping and banding birds; and during the spring of that year (1921) he followed instructions carefully and tried out trapping upon a country place in Cohasset, Mass.; and his eyes opened to the wonder and joy of this method of learning the birds.

Have you, reader, had this experience? Have you held a little, lively wild bird in your hands, petted him, and talked to him, and given him a numbered bracelet so as to identify him? And you discover that he is not much frightened? And that he comes back to your traps again and again? And brings his children when they come off the nest? Why, my old friend, Brown Thrasher No. 19247, has been coming back to me every year, for eight years.

This business man, Laurence B. Fletcher, and found something of great value, an absorbing, fascinating hobby; and with the health and energy so characteristic of him, he started out to encourage others to try this hobby

Mr. E. H. Forbush, the State Ornithologist, so well known for his life work in bird protection, Dr. Glover M. Allen, and Mr. Charles L. Whittle, well known scientific ornithologists, became actively interested; and in August, 1921, a group of fifty or more came together at the Boston Society of Natural History to hear the story of these methods.

Then followed a real canvass for converts to bird banding, with cordial hacking of the ornithologists about Boston, and through Mr.

Fletcher's energy; the sending of circulars to Bird Clubs and Audubon Societies and bird lovers throughout New England, and a kindly exposition of it in the newspapers during the autumn of 1921.

Finally a meeting was called for January, 1922, to organize the New England Bird Banding Association. This meeting was held at the Boston Society of Natural History and was attended by nearly three hundred bird enthusiasts, who came from far and wide points in New England, and some even from Canada.

It was a wonderful audience to talk to, for every one was in earnest, and came there to learn all about the fascinating new methods of study; there were traps on the platform to illustrate the methods of trapping; and a live Brown Thrasher to show how quiet and well behaved a bird can be when he knows he is in gentle, firm hands. Many persons stayed long after the formal program to ask questions; and few, if any, left the hall without having registered as enthusiastic members of the Association.

And this happened only a year after Mr. Fletcher first began to ask, by letter, "what is this bird banding?"

Another year has now passed, and I have just been to the Annual Meeting of this Association in Boston, and what a growth there has been!

Again the audience came from all over New England, now active bird banders, of some experience, and the Secretary reports that there are four hundred of them; and that another hundred or more are in process of becoming members and bird banders.

A few items from the Secretary's report will give some idea of this one year of growth: 2500 letters answered; circulars sent out over the United States and Canada to the number of 20,000; letters or circulars to all members of the American Ornithologists' Union; to Bird Clubs, to all individuals who have written and published anything on birds in the last five years; notices to Coast Guard Stations and Lighthouse keepers to watch for banded birds; and already many members have been contributing interesting notes of returned birds to the bulletins that are issued bi-monthly by Mr. Forbush, State Ornithologist of Massachusetts.

"But," I hear someone say, "not all these members will have the patience and persistence to produce scientific results." "No," I reply, "but every one of them will become an active bird protectionist; and some are already obtaining interesting results which will have a cumulative value with the passing of years."

One interesting feature of bird banding has developed in New England, in that it has proved a wonderful aid to the Audubon Societies in their work for the protection of birds; because the bird bander, of necessity in his field, protects birds from their enemies, and provides shelter and feed for them; that is part of the bird banding game.

It is significant that the first President of the New England Bird Banding Association was Mr. Forbush, who is not only State Ornithologist of Massachusetts, but is Field Agent of the Audubon Societies, and has for many years been a leader in bird protection in New England. And such men as Ernest Harold Baynes and Herbert K. Job, who devote

their lives to the preservation of our wild birds, are high in their praise of bird banding and what it can do for the birds.

Another interesting fact has developed in New England, as it has elsewhere; I refer to the cordial support of bird banding by the scientific ornithologists.

As to this, it is significant that many of the members of the Nuttall Ornithological Club have become active members of the New England Bird Banding Association, and, in fact, nine of the twelve officers of the Association are members of the Nuttall Club.

The Nuttall Ornithological Club, the oldest and most conservative organization of scientific ornithologists in this country, has even spread upon its minutes a formal indorsement of bird banding.

The amateur, coming into bird study through bird banding, and hearing so much of it, may obtain an exaggerated view of it, and think it is some marvelous new idea which is going to overturn the whole science of ornithology and perhaps invalidate the work of the past.

But the ornithologist sees bird banding as simply a tool, a new method, which in no sense displaces the methods of the past, but which enables him to add new kinds of facts to the knowledge of birds; and to build further upon the splendid foundations already built by the other methods of study.

To the amateur, however, these methods open extraordinary opportunity to make real progress and read discoveries in the science, since there is so much opportunity for each bird bander to work out new forms of traps, new kinds of baits, and new methods of observation of bird habits.

Sportsmen have found bird banding to produce most interesting and prompt results, since so many game birds are shot in the season and are reported from various points. Members of duck clubs are finding it more interesting to trap and band ducks and trace their migration routes, than to shoot them; but the two forms of sport may be carried on together without injury to either.

We should not close this account of the remarkable growth of the New England Bird Banding Association without some reference to a second great regional association which has been recently formed, the Inland Bird Banding Association, which will organize this work through the great central area of America, from the Appalachians to the Rockies, and Canada to the Gulf. Persons in this area should apply for information to The Inland Bird Banding Association, Wm. I. Lyon, Secretary, 124 Washington Street, Waukegan, Ill.

BIRD BANDERS AND THE BIRD CENSUS

Bird banding and the making of censuses of breeding birds are, or should be, closely allied, since persons who operate banding stations are in close touch with the birds breeding in their respective neighborhoods. For this reason the Biological Survey is asking its bird banding coöperators to assist further by using their knowledge in making bird censuses.

Censuses of breeding birds have yielded some very valuable and interesting data and are a much more important method of investigation

than most people realize. They furnish our only means for the solution of certain problems concerning the distribution of bird life and its fluctuations. Exact information is needed to show how much birds have increased as the result of protective measures in their behalf, and what species have been most affected or need further protection. Bird censuses will furnish such data. Many more counts should be made each year, in order to accumulate more material for study. Studies thus far made have been confined to the most general phases of the subject, since in any attempt to solve a problem lack of sufficient data has proved a handicap.

The general plan of this work is to count the birds breeding on some selected tract of 40 to 80 acres, which represents as nearly as possible the average conditions for the locality in regard to the proportion of woods, cultivation, etc. The repetition of the census year after year on the same area is of as much importance as the selection of a special kind of land on which to make it. Moreover, in order to obtain any comprehensive knowledge of the bird life of the country as a whole, a bird census must take into account all sorts and conditions of land.

It is not necessary to find a place where birds are abundant in order to make a bird census; any convenient place is good, but preferably one where conditions are not likely to change materially for several years. In the past there has been too great a tendency to make the counts only where birds were especially plentiful. While counts of the birds breeding on a small area are not to be despised, the chief objection to them is that such tracts usually represent places that are virtually sanctuaries, where birds have been encouraged by means of special planting and feeding to nest abundantly. Obviously, such places can hardly be considered as representative of the bird population of any large area or section of the surrounding country. They are, however, interesting as examples of the result of special protection.

In view of their special qualifications for this work, all bird banders should give further coöperation in the studies of the Biological Survey by making bird counts. Detailed instructions and blanks for reporting the counts, together with return envelopes requiring no postage, will be furnished upon request addressed to the Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

M. T. COOKE,
U. S. Biological Survey.

NOTICE TO BIRD BANDERS

We desire to publish from time to time general district reports of the progress of the Bird Banding work. In order to do this it will be necessary for each Bander in the Inland district to send to Wm. I. Lyon, Waukegan, Ill., a general report of the totals of the number of birds handled, banded, returns, repeats, trapped, or immature, with any unusual events. These should be sent in by the first of May, August, November and February, so there may be time to make general averages and comparisons. The next report wanted will be from the first of this year to May 1st. Help us make this department interesting.

A letter addressed to the nearby Bird Banders whose addresses we had at the Waukegan office brought a fair number of reports to begin our attempt to gather some general data that would show results of the Bird Banding work for last year. The reports from thirteen banders show that they placed 3106 bands on birds covering ninety-four species, and the number covering the total birds handled was over 8000.

M. J. Magee, Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., had unusual success with the Purple Finches, placing two hundred and fifty-four bands on this species which, with others, made his total of bands placed at three hundred and forty-four. Mr. Magee's success with the Purple Finches puts him way in the lead on this species; he also had an unusual experience with a male red-winged blackbird, which came to his feeding station on November 1, 1921, and stayed all through the winter until April 23, 1922. On November 24, 1922, a male red-winged blackbird came to his feeding station and seemed perfectly at home, so it was concluded that he was apparently the same one that was there last year, and was observed daily feeding at the station with the Evening Grosbeaks until Christmas day. The next day one of the male Grosbeaks came back to the station with his leg hanging by a thread. The Redwing was never seen again, and apparently some one had shot at the flock. It seems to be very unusual for a Red-wing to winter so far in the North, but Mr. Magee's tempting food supply must have been the cause.

Mrs. R. C. Flannigan, Norway, Mich. Norway is close to the Wisconsin line in the mining district of the Northern Peninsula of Michigan: to Mrs. Flannigan goes the honor of placing the first band on a Hummingbird, also Bohemian Waxwing, and she is in the lead in banding Chipping Sparrows, Phoebe's and Chimney Swifts, 65 bands placed.

Herbert L. Stoddard, Public Museum, Milwaukee, Wis., has a new title—Inland Bird Banding Association Treasurer. Before the new duties were thrust upon him he had made a trip to Bonaventura Island at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River and banded 215 Gannets and Murres, which is the record for those species.

Mr. Stoddard is making plans for banding and study of the Bank Swallow in his campaign for the coming season.

Rev. George Roberts, Lake Forest, Ill., was a member of the American Bird Banding Association, and has been doing a small amount of banding for a number of years. He had one of the first returns with a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Last year he banded the most Cowbirds out of the total of 95 bands placed by him.

W. S. McCrea, Chicago, Ill., placed 124 bands on 80 Herring Gulls and 44 Forster's Terns while on the small island in the northern part of Lake Michigan. A gentleman fishing at Traverse City in September noticed a gull apparently in trouble and went to its assistance and found that it was caught on a fish bait with one hook in the beak and another in the foot. These were removed and the bird flew away, seemingly all right. Two other returns came back, one from the coast of Georgia and the other from north central part of Texas, about one thousand miles apart in their winter homes.

Fred N. Hadley, Whiting, Ind., leads the list in banding Cuckoos last

year. This year he has changed to the Catbirds and Flickers; he also added a number of swamp birds to the total species, including 6 American Bittern and 6 Green Herons. Total number banded, 240.

Donald H. Boyd, Hobart, Ind., whose trapping station is just south of the southern end of Lake Michigan, and but a short distance from Whiting, placed fifty-one bands. Mr. Boyd works with Mr. Hadley of Whiting, in maintaining a Trapping Station in the Whiting Public Park, and as a matter of an experiment they took a number of White-throated Sparrows, trapped in Whiting, to Hobart, where they were released, in an effort to see if they would return to the same trapping station, but they were not successful. They both have been giving considerable attention to the study of individuality in birds.

Samuel E. Perkins III, Indianapolis, Ind., tied Mr. Stoddard, with 215 bands placed, and leads the list with 51 Robins, and is also high man for Mourning Doves, Brown Thrashers, Swallows, and Orioles. We know he must have been busy catching the two Killdeer chicks, as we had to run some to get two Piping Plover chicks that are on our list. Mr. Perkins' work covers twenty-nine species of birds, which means considerable time and effort.

Aldred S. Warthin, Jr., Ann Arbor, Mich., has carried on banding work during the winter months with a small trap cage at a feeding shelf on a second story window, which should be a strong argument against those who plead lack of space.

Another station was maintained about a half mile distant by Mr. J. VanTyne, and some interesting results were observed at both stations. A number of Chickadees, Downy Woodpeckers and White-breasted Nuthatches were banded. Five Chickadees banded by Mr. VanTyne have frequently been taken at Warthin's feeding shelf and three of his were taken at Mr. VanTyne's station; only one Downy crossed over, and no Nuthatches, showing Chickadees range farther in search of food. Total birds banded 51. We regret not having the VanTyne report for comparison.

F. W. Rapp, Vicksburg, Mich., leads the list on Purple Martins, with 35, and placed 58 bands.

Mr. Rapp got a Coot in some way and discovered that it had a poultry band around its neck. The band had number 30 stamped in the front and on the back was scratched the name Afton Reed. Who is Afton Reed? We want him for a Bird Bander.

Arthur D. Moore, South Haven, Mich., had a hard time getting bands, which delayed his real work for last year, but in spite of that he had an unusual record with a window box trap in catching a Wood Thrush, also a Carolina Wren, which was afterwards found dead and sent to Professor Barrows at Michigan University, who reported that it had been recorded about twelve times in that state. Thirty-three bands were placed.

Miss Kathleen M. Hempel, Elkador, Iowa, banded 221 birds, had 79 repeats and 21 returns. She is far in the lead in percentage of returns and in banding Woodpeckers, Nuthatches, and Chickadees. We hope she will explain methods for the benefit of other banders. She also leads in number of Blue Jays banded.

Waukegan, Ill. The station at Waukegan, Ill., has not missed a day, while they they were at home, in trapping at least one bird, in over two years. This steady persistent work is bound to bring results, and is well shown in the results of 1922, which shows a total of one thousand three hundred and eighty-four birds banded, and a total of over five thousand handled. In the total handled, besides those banded, were over twenty-four hundred repeats, seven hundred and fifty House Sparrows, and there were twenty-three returns, including some of those for the third time.

The main comment to be offered on the total record is on the Sparrow family. Twelve species were taken, as follows: Song Sparrow, 81; Chipping, 1; White-throated, 395; White-crowned, 33; Tree, 42; Field, 7; Lincoln, 35; Vesper, 1; Swamp, 4; Harris, 1; Savannah, 1, and Fox, 17; adding 750 House Sparrows destroyed, and 268 Juncos brings the total to 1,636. The Song Sparrows prove themselves to have the greatest possibilities for results in trapping. Out of 40 chances, 8 returned, and 1 for the third time.

The next surprise came from the Tree Sparrows. Last season we were successful in banding 46. This season, so far, we have had 8 returns, and according to last year's record we banded the last Tree Sparrow about April 15th, which would give us a month and a half more to get records of returns from last year's banding.

The White-throated Sparrows present another peculiar phase. All told we have banded 761, and up to date have not heard from a single one. This would bring up the question as to whether birds in through migration remember the feeding spots of last year, or whether they wish to avoid being retrapped.

The White-crowned Sparrows are present at our traps generally in a period from five to seven days.

Lincoln Sparrows were trapped in greater quantities than before, but with no returns.

During the fall migration Hermit Thrushes were around our yard in numbers for about ten days, giving us an opportunity to band 37.

The new woodpecker trap, which was made to trap the birds as they climb up the tree, was successful in taking 22 Brown Creepers, 1 Black and White Warbler, 2 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, and 2 Hairy Woodpeckers, which shows that we may expect more from this kind of a trap in the future.

Working along the shore of Lake Michigan, we were successful in running down 27 Spotted Sandpipers and 2 Piping Plover chicks. We found the method of driving the fledglings out of the small bushes more successful than hunting for nests.

Last year a Fox Sparrow stayed through the entire winter. This year an apparent immature male White-throated Sparrow came to the station in December and was taken every little while up to February, at the time this article was sent in for the press.

A few totals taken at random of the district show 189 Robins, 88 Catbirds, 57 House Wrens, 49 Purple Martins, 106 Grackles, 50 Red-Chipping Sparrows, 503 White-throated Sparrows, 194 Grackles, 50 Red-

winged Blackbirds, 97 Blue Jays, 39 Mourning Doves, 51 Brown Thrashers, 316 Juncos, and 208 Gannets. These totals show which are the leaders among the ninety-four species

February 20, 1923.

Note:

It seems that Mr. Thomas E. Musselman of Quincy, Ill., is now at the trapping station of Mr. S. Prentiss Baldwin in Thomasville, Ga., and will have charge of that station during February and March; Mr. Baldwin will also be there during March.

Mr. Musselman is a graduate of the University of Illinois (1910) and received the degree of Master of Arts in 1913, upon a thesis based upon a study of Bird Migration. Since then Mr. Musselman has been a frequent contributor upon bird topics to the State Audubon Society Magazine, and to Country Life, and to other magazines and papers. Besides writing on the subject, Mr. Musselman has given many lectures on bird topics, illustrating them with lantern slides from his own pictures.

That Mr. Musselman will make most interesting use of the six weeks at his trapping station is evident from his telegram, just received by Mr. Baldwin, and describing the first day at the Station. The telegram is as follows:

Received at Cleveland, O., Feb. 20, 1923.
From Thomasville, Ga.

S. Prentiss Baldwin,
Williamson Building, Cleveland, Ohio.

First morning fifty-seven birds fifteen with last year's bands. I captured five Quail, one Mockingbird, one Thrasher. Please send assortment of larger bands. I like Inwood, and the Clarks* have been wonderful to me. Glad to see you on the third.

(Signed) T. E. MUSSELMAN.

* Mr. A. B. Clark is manager of Inwood Plantation, which belongs to Mrs. J. C. Morse of Cleveland, this being the place where Mr. Baldwin has been trapping and banding since 1915.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

METHOD OF HANDLING BIRD BANDING RECORDS

As announced in Bird Banding Notes No. 4, it has been found necessary to make a change in the method of handling bird banding records in order to reduce the clerical labor in the Biological Survey. We plan therefore to return to the earlier method of using cards for reporting to the Bureau all newly banded birds.

Hereafter whenever bands are forwarded from the Bureau, a set of official, numbered cards will be sent also. The numbers on these cards will correspond to those on the bands, and in the case of particularly active permanent stations the name of the station and of the operator will also be filled in. For each new bird banded, it will then be neces-

sary for the operator to fill in only the name of the bird, its age and sex (if known), the date, and any pertinent remarks.

These cards should not be retained longer than one month after banding, but may be forwarded to the Biological Survey more frequently. Records of migratory game birds banded during the open season should be sent in promptly (daily if possible), as returns are frequently reported on them only a few hours or days after banding. If any repeats have been secured before the cards are forwarded, they should be entered in the "Record of Recovery" section, so that the record for each banded bird will be up to date when the card is sent to the Bureau.

Addressed envelopes and franks will be supplied as before, for use without payment of postage. When only five or six cards are sent at a time, they may be inclosed in a small envelope. The envelope will also hold ten or twelve cards if care is taken to tie a piece of string both ways around it. Larger consignments should be made into packets, both sides protected by stiff cardboard, and securely wrapped and tied. Franks should be used on such packages, and for safety, should be under the string.

It is expected that each operator will preserve a complete report of the activities of his station (including all records of "repeats") and forward a copy to the Biological Survey at least twice a year. These reports may well be of a seasonal nature and should be compiled during the slack periods that usually follow the spring and fall migrations. They should show, first, the complete history of each banded bird as observed at the station, and second, a brief account of the general conditions that have prevailed during the period in question. Schedules will be furnished by the Biological Survey for these reports, or each operator may use sheets of his own preference.

With this system in operation it is believed that the bird banding work will admit of unlimited expansion; and through the constant interest and energy of our coöperators, the Biological Survey feels confident that a great quantity of new and important data will be secured.