

## BIRD BANDING NOTES

Conducted by Wm. I. Lyon

### BIRD BANDING NOTES FROM THE RECENT NATIONAL MEETINGS

The A. O. U. meeting at Pittsburgh. The forty-second annual meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union was held at Pittsburgh, Pa., from November 11-13, 1924, inclusive. The session on Wednesday forenoon was devoted to bird banding. Dr. Joseph Grinnell, of California, presented a paper on "Bird Netting as a Method in Ornithology", illustrated. "Some Results of Bird Banding", illustrated, was the subject of a paper by Wm. I. Lyon, of Illinois. Frederick C. Lincoln, of Washington, D. C., gave a report on "Results of Bird Banding in Europe", illustrated. A paper entitled "A Report of the Tanager Hill Bird Banding Station", prepared by Mrs. Frank W. Commons, of Minnesota, was presented by Dr. Thomas S. Roberts. Laurence B. Fletcher, of Massachusetts, reported on the "Activities of the Northeastern Bird Banding Association", illustrated.

During the week the Eastern Bird Banding Association held a banquet at the Faculty Club, and in spite of a severe rain storm which caused some members to become lost, the occasion proved to be a pleasant one. Rudyerd W. Boulton served as toastmaster. The speakers were, President A. A. Allen, Dr. T. S. Palmer, Frederick C. Lincoln, Hoyes Lloyd, and W. E. Saunders. The meeting closed with the exhibition of a series of lantern slides by Dr. Ralph E. DeLury, of Canada. An impromptu meeting was afterward held in the Zoology Building, where Dr. Fish exhibited two reels of Panama pictures.

The W. O. C. meeting at Nashville. The Inland Bird Banding Association held its annual meeting in conjunction with the Wilson Ornithological Club, at Nashville, Tennessee, on November 28-30, 1924. This was the first general meeting of an ornithological nature to be held south of the Ohio River, and its wonderful success is a great tribute to President A. F. Ganier and the Tennessee Ornithological Society. The memory of this meeting will remain forever with those who were able to attend. More than a dozen states were represented in the registry of attendance. A number of new recruits were added to the host of bird banders during the sessions. There seemed to be a general feeling that one of the results of this meeting would be a stimulation of interest in bird study in the southern states.

No one session was set aside especially for the papers on bird banding, but they were well distributed through all of the sessions. Mr. Frederick C. Lincoln, of Washington, discussed "The Purpose of Bird Banding and Some Results", illustrated. Mr. Herbert L. Stoddard, of Georgia, explained some very unique methods in a paper on "Banding the Shore Birds of Lake Michigan", illustrated. "Bird Banding Experiences in Indiana", was the subject chosen by Samuel L. Perkins III, of Indiana. Prof. James E. Stack, of the Michigan Agricultural College, discussed the matter of "Bird Banding in Colleges." "Various Methods Used in Bird Banding", illustrated, was discussed by William I. Lyon, of Illinois. The Secretary read a paper by Mrs. Frank W. Commons, of Minnesota, on "An Intimate Method of Studying Birds." Mr. A. F. Ganier, of Tennessee, reported on "Bird Banding in the Nashville District", illustrated. Two reels of motion pictures of birds of unusual merit were presented, as follows: "Sea Birds on



Wm. I. Lyon releasing at Nashville a Harris Sparrow trapped and banded in Illinois.

Bonaventure Island, Quebec", by Herbert L. Stoddard, of Georgia. "Bird Studies in Motion Pictures", by Dr. Thomas S. Roberts, of Minnesota, presented by Mr. Lyon. One or two other papers on banding were not presented because of lack of time, and it is hoped that these may be printed in the future.

The Inland Bird Banding Association held its annual business meeting on the morning of November 29, Saturday. Everyone present sincerely regretted the absence of the President, Mr. S. Prentiss Baldwin, of Ohio, whose attendance was prevented by sickness. Councillor Samuel E. Perkins III, was made chairman *pro tempore*. Then the minutes were read and adopted, the reports of the Secretary and of the Treasurer were read and adopted. Upon report of the nominating committee, F. C. Lincoln, chairman, the following officers were duly elected for the ensuing year.

President—William I. Lyon, Waukegan, Illinois.

Vice-President—Dr. Leon J. Cole, Washington, D. C.

Vice-President—Percival Brooks Coffin, Chicago, Illinois.

Secretary—Samuel E. Perkins III, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Treasurer—Herbert L. Stoddard, Bechtou, Georgia.

Field Secretary—T. E. Musselman, Quincy, Illinois.

Councillors—S. Prentiss Baldwin, Cleveland, Ohio; M. J. Magee, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan; Mrs. H. C. Miller, Racine, Wisconsin; O. M. Schantz, Chicago, Illinois; Prof. J. W. Stack, East Lansing, Michigan; Albert F. Ganier, Nashville, Tennessee; Frank W. Commons, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Dr. H. B. Ward, Urbana, Illinois; Prof. T. C. Stephens, Sioux City, Iowa; R. A. Gilliam, Dallas, Texas.

When the Saturday evening session was over, about nine o'clock, the guests were all quickly transported to the beautiful mansion of Mrs. James C. Bradford, where a delightful reception was given to the visitors. Early on the following morning a fleet of automobiles were waiting to take those who wished to go on the official field trip. Over twenty cars were counted in line at one time, and there must have been more than seventy-five people in the party. Stops were made in the various city parks and along the Tennessee River. It was quite an experience for those who came from the prairie states to get a glimpse of the great standing beech timber in Shelby Park. At noon the entire party assembled at the country home of Mr. and Mrs. Edward A. Lindsey, some twenty miles from Nashville, and known as "Ridgetop". Here a real southern "breakfast" was served with genuine southern hospitality. An afternoon stroll through the woods

on this mountain top brought us to the hour when we must hurry for the various trains upon which we were to scatter to our respective homes. And thus was brought to a close one of the most enjoyable conventions of bird lovers within our experience.

[The following story by Mrs. Commons is a wonderful tribute to bird banding. Her work has converted a carefully guarded bird sanctuary into one of the most important bird banding stations in the country.—W. I. L.]

### REPORT OF THE Tanager Hill BIRD-BANDING STATION 1923-1924

By Marie A. Commons

It was somewhat under protest that we became banders of birds. Our interest in ornithology had a sentimental rather than a scientific basis and birds had ever been to us symbols of freedom; consequently it was with reluctance that we undertook an enterprise that might seem to add one more hazard to their precarious lives or burden them with fetters that might impede their liberty.

But it was at the A. O. U. Convention in Chicago in 1922, after listening in rapt attention to Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Lyon that we experienced a change of heart, and returned home more keenly alive to the wonderful possibilities of our own few acres of land.

This property, which we call Tanager Hill, is situated seventeen miles from Minneapolis, on Lake Minnetonka in the State of Minnesota. There are thirty-three acres, to be exact, with 700 feet of level shoreline where gulls and terns circle in graceful flight, kingfishers dive from the dock stakes, shore birds pick their way daintily along the sand and blueherons stand motionless as if painted on a screen. From the highway, which skirts the shore, the land dips to a willow-encircled marsh, vocal from spring to fall with redwing blackbirds, and the favorite haunt of bitterns, rails, greenherons and the many marsh-loving sparrows, vireos and warblers. Beyond the marsh is the hay meadow with its song sparrows, bobolinks and meadowlarks, and from there the land rises gradually to the vegetable garden and berry patches, always disputed territory with catbirds, robins, orioles, grosbeaks and pheasants. An abrupt incline brings us to the alfalfa field where the killdeers and vesper sparrows nest, and still climbing we reach the broad lawn and the house on the crest of the hill amid the sugar maples, elms and lindens. The roadway, leading to the rear of the house, leaves the highway at the lake shore and winds up the hill, past orchard and vineyard, bordered with berry-bearing shrubs, dear to the birds at all seasons, but especially to migrants in the fall. Back of the house wild nature prevails—a dozen steps from the door and we are in a native forest with its tangle of second growth and under-brush, mostly wild berry bushes, elder, prickly ash and dogwood. On the right the land drops off precipitously into a fern carpeted ravine, beloved of the thrushes and ovenbirds, and on the left declines in wooded slopes and hollows to the tree pasture, on the eastern boundary of which lies Round Lake. This fair-sized body of water, much in favor with migrating water fowl, is fed by a stream that meanders into it through a marsh of quill reeds and wild rice, the home of yellow-headed blackbirds, marsh wrens and various shore birds.

There are not many small areas of land, perhaps, that comprise such an unusual variety of nesting sites and feeding places, and it is not surprising that after the Chicago meeting, we should feel stirring within us a sense of obligation

—a duty, in fact, for in our part of the country there was no banding station of sufficient activity to further the efficient work being done south and east of us.

We returned to Tanager Hill the following Spring, 1923, too late to really profit by the migration for, by the time we had secured our licenses, it was the last of April.

We began our enterprise on April 28, with only two traps; a government sparrow trap and a small drop trap 2 feet 6 by 3 feet, made according to plan described in Mr. Lincoln's Circular No. 18, and on that day banded two birds. The first was a white-breasted nuthatch, taken in the drop trap. Being the first, we have since felt a special interest in his movements. Having acquired his band No. 57316, he immediately disappeared and we did not see him again until October 13, repeating on the 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 28, 29, and November 1, 3, 8, 17, and finally on the 22nd, when the traps were closed for the season. We naturally expected him to be the first bird to welcome us this spring, but it was May 4 before he returned, merely for the day it seems, as he did not appear again until September 16. After that he repeated September 30, October 9, 17, 21, 22, 29, and November 2.

We very soon discovered that two traps were inadequate to our needs and on June 19 built a house trap, after Mr. Lincoln's plan (Fig. 6) in Circular 18, and a large drop trap, 4 feet by 5 feet. As our work increased and our enthusiasm with it, we added to our equipment, from time to time, until during the fall migration, we had in use two drop traps, one house trap and eleven government sparrow traps. These traps we have continued to use during 1924, with the addition of two more sparrow traps, two warbler traps and one woodpecker trap purchased from Mr. Lyon, of Waukegan.

For bait we use wild seeds screened from wheat, to which is added a rich mixture of hemp, millet, canary, and sunflower seed, with sometimes bread crumbs and suet; and during the season, we make the traps attractive with strawberries, cherries, plums, apples cut in small pieces and under the drop traps hang bunches of grapes and sprays of bright berries. We also provide drinking places near the traps.

During the year 1923 we banded 978 birds; of that number 507 were migrants.

Of the fall migrants the juncos and white-throats were by far the most abundant. Two hundred and ninety-eight juncos were banded between September 21 and November 18. Ninety-four repeated, one of them sixteen times. One hundred and thirty-two white-throats were banded between September 20 and October 23. Fifty-two repeated, one of them seventeen times. The remaining migrants were Lincoln, Tree, Harris, and Fox Sparrows.

Twenty-seven species were represented among the 471 residents banded, including 119 fledglings from thirty-two nests. We removed from the traps 631 repeats, giving us a total of 1609 birds handled in 1923.

We were fortunate in having but few casualties. One junco was killed in the trap by a Red Squirrel, and one by a Northern Shrike, that entered the trap undoubtedly for that purpose, and he now wears band No. 239527 as a proof of his guilt.

Among the many curious and interesting happenings of the year I might mention that of a Song Sparrow which was banded so late in the evening that he was brought into the house for identification. It was totally dark when he was released, and seemingly dazed by the sudden transition from light to darkness, he dropped to the ground as if injured. We threw a flash light on the ground and he hopped into the circle of light. Slowly we walked backward the sparrow following, keeping within the lighted area to the end of the terrace and back, a distance of nearly two hundred feet; now and then he stopped to peck at the grass as if looking for something to eat and finally hopped off into the shrubbery.

Throughout our season's work we were anticipating the coming year with its added interest of returning birds. Would our own nesting birds come back, would the migrants take the same route going north in the spring? As to migrants we were doomed to disappointment, not one returned, but of the 471 residents banded forty-one came back; of these sixteen were catbirds, 13.5 per cent of 119 banded; fourteen were song sparrows, 10.75 per cent of 131 banded; four redwings, 22 per cent of eighteen banded. The remaining seven were two Chipping Sparrows, two Robins, two nuthatches and one chickadee. All of these returns were adults when banded. We did so hope that some of our banded fledglings would return, if only to reassure us that the bands, placed with so much solicitude on their fragile little legs, had not checked their development.

Our return to Tanager Hill in 1924 was well in advance of the migration, but a heavy storm lasting for two days covered the ground with eighteen inches of snow, whirling it into drifts from four to seven feet deep. Although the few Robins, Bluebirds and Phoebes that had ventured north were too hungry to be shy, and came boldly to the house to be fed, we did not set our traps until April 2. During both April and May there were many cold, wet days and the traps needed constant attention, for the birds entered them without hesitation and repeated constantly, evidently appreciating an abundant supply of food near at hand. They were, for the most part, sorry looking creatures, wet and bedraggled and difficult to handle.

The spring migration totaled 320 birds, representing fifteen species, a little over double the number of species that appeared in the fall, and the junco still held first place. We banded 166, with the white-throat a poor second—only sixty-five.

By May 30 the juncos and white-throats were gone, the migration well over and our interest was centered in nesting birds and fledglings.

Of 986 resident birds banded, representing fifty-four species, 261 were fledglings from ninety nests. The repeats up to the beginning of the fall migration, numbered 1404, thirteen being young birds banded in the nest, lively youngsters none the worse for their aluminum adornment.

It is interesting to note the increase and decrease from month to month. In April we banded 275, in May 305, the two months when the residents were arriving and the migrants passing through. In June the number dropped to 171. These were birds that had settled down to their domestic duties, really too busy to investigate traps, wandering into them by chance, or in bad weather for a quick lunch. In July, when the young had left the nest and were roaming about with their parents clamoring for food, we nearly doubled the previous month's record, banding 342. In August it fell again and we banded only 189. By this

time our own birds were all banded and were scattering; the majority of these coming into the traps were birds probably wandering in from other localities. In September the lowest mark was reached with only sixty-one; many immature birds and old birds in various stages of moult. The first migrants did not appear until the fifteenth of the month, one or two now and then, but no flocks until October 1st.

Record for 1924 from April 2nd to November 14th.

Total number of birds banded—1825.

Total number of species represented—59.

Total number of repeats—2018.

Total number of birds handled—3843.

Record for the two years from April 28th, 1923 to November 1st 1924 (excluding winter period, when traps were closed.)

Total number of birds banded—2803.

Total number of species represented—65.

Total number of repeats—2649.

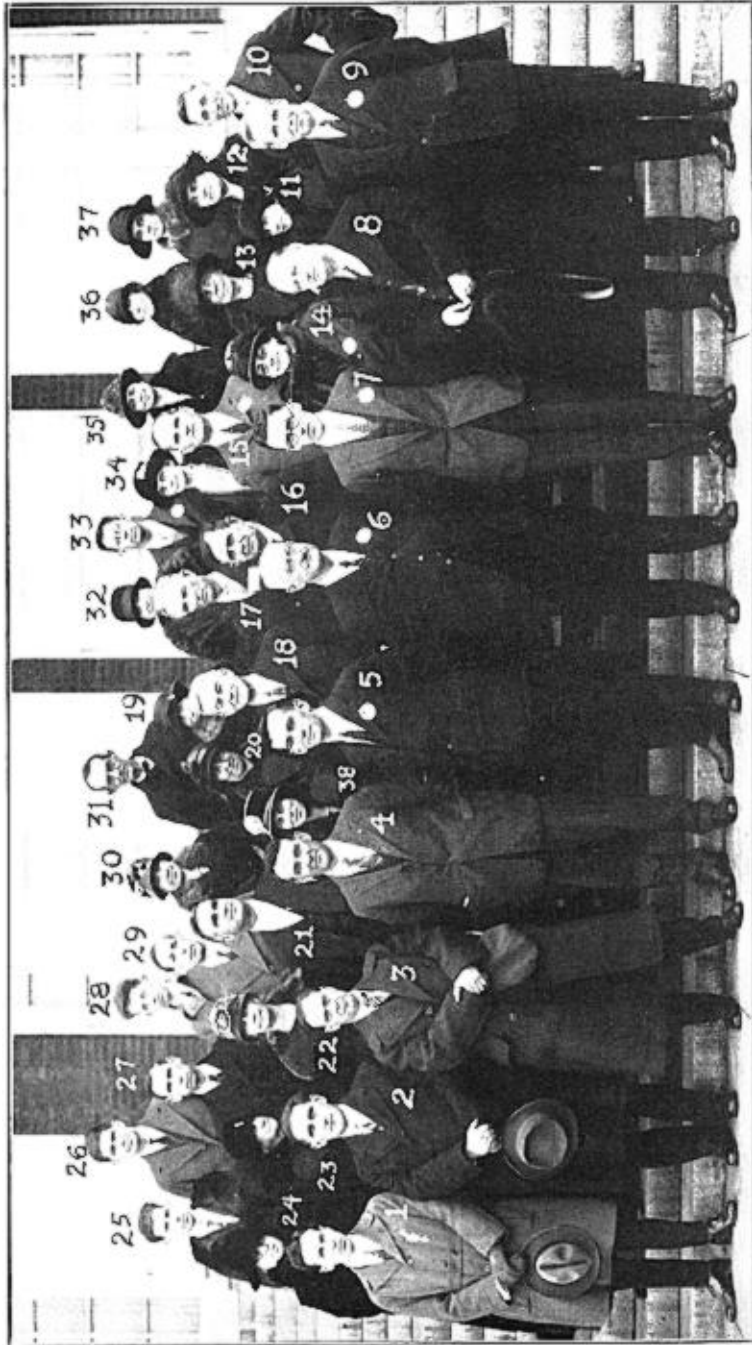
Total number of birds handled—5452.

We may never know of what value our work has been to science, but we are joyfully aware of its value to ourselves. We did not realize how little we knew about bird life until we held these elusive creatures in our hands. Not only have we immeasurably increased our knowledge of their physical characters, but we are becoming acquainted with the distinctive peculiarity of each species, for we have learned that they differ in disposition as do people of different nationalities; it is even true that different birds of the same species have their individual temperament. We came to know the characteristic flit of a certain Chipping Sparrow that repeated seventy-nine times last summer and very often called his number before looking at the band. We have grown to feel great respect for the mental processes of the nuthatch, to fear the saucy spitefulness of the chickadee, to love the gentle confiding nature of the Chipping Sparrow and laugh at the big cry babies—the Robins.

One could go on indefinitely recalling amusing and interesting exhibitions of bird behavior and it is this phase of the work that increases in fascination from day to day and keeps the bird bander eager from one season to the next.

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Professor Wm. Rowan, of the University of Alberta, writes in the January *Auk* of a possible danger to birds which are trapped for banding purposes. Birds which he trapped for experimental purposes were kept for some time after capture. These birds suffered a mortality of about 20 per cent. Post-mortem examinations indicated that death was due to subcutaneous inflammation in the region of the lores. The conclusion is that the birds injured themselves on the sharp cut-wire ends projecting into the traps, while they instinctively endeavored to escape. The writer further argues that 19.1 per cent of the "returns" listed in Bulletin No. 1269 of the U. S. Department of Agriculture may have been due to the death of the birds from a similar cause, viz., imperfection in trap construction. All bird banders should therefore carefully inspect their traps and make certain that no cut-wire ends project in any way that might permit injury to the birds.



The Nashville Meeting of the W. O. C. and I. B. B. A.