

SOME RETURNS FROM BIRD BANDING

BY MRS. MARIE DALES

No one but a bird bander can know how eagerly I awaited the coming of spring, and the returning birds, some of them banded by me the previous year. How many would come back to the old familiar haunts? Would my Catbird with a squeaky voice, return to take up his singing post in the little tree near my breakfast window, and sing his heart out to the same mate of the year before? Return he did, in the meantime his voice had become normal. I was not able to determine whether he had the same mate, for he did not come back to nest in the same place, consequently I lost trace of the pair.

The number of returns was somewhat of a disappointment. Out of 170 birds, or 17 species, only 12 individuals representing three species returned to my traps. They were six Robins, five Brown Thrashers, and four Catbirds. These 12 individuals repeated 46 times during the season.

My first return, a female Robin was the first Robin I banded the previous spring, a truly interesting coincidence. The next return Robin were a bright and shiny band; here, I thought is a bird that has been banded on his way north. Imagine my surprise when I found that he was one of the first birds I had banded. How he had managed to keep his band so fresh and clean, I do not know. It leads one to believe that some birds are especially tidy in their habits. Repeatedly I saw four other species, that I am quite certain were birds of my banding. There were two other returns, one a male Robin which met death as he flew into a wire clothes line in a neighboring yard, the other a Brown Thrasher, caught in a rat trap under a porch at the home of Mr. Kirk, on Gilman Terrace. A wire netting surrounding an old tennis court at 110 Twenty-fourth street, I am reasonably sure was responsible for the death of two other birds of my banding, a Catbird and a Yellow Warbler.

Each spring there is a period of warfare between the Bluebirds and the Purple Martins, which finally subsides as each become engrossed with family affairs. When the Bluebirds retired to the woods with their first brood, the martins became imbued with a "when-the-cat's-away-the-mice-will-play" spirit, and did such unusual things, they alighted on the sparrow trap, and on the pedestal food table, they waddled around the court, looking much like a small boy wearing father's long coat. Twice I chanced to be looking as one entered the Bluebird box; in each instance I was fortunate in catching the bird before he got away. Each bird was presented with a shiny band. These two were the only martins I was able to band, for all of a sudden they reverted back to their former mode of living; not again did I see one alight on any low object as they did during the short period of reveling. Try as I would, I could not trap another martin by any method.

Throughout April great numbers of Cedar Waxwings came and went. I tried every kind of bait that I had ever heard of, but I was not successful in trapping a single bird. One morning six sat in a row on the fence, and looked so longingly at the water in the pool, but they dared not brave the trap. One pair has nested in this locality for the past three years. I have not been so fortunate as to find the nest. In August of each year I have seen a young Cedar-bird in my yard. Last August I was fortunate enough to see one go under the trap. I was so excited I could scarcely pull the string. I know now what is meant

when a hunter says he had buck fever. This was the only Cedar Waxwing I was fortunate enough to band.

Last year I was quite sure that my happiness would not be complete until I had banded a Meadowlark. One old fellow strutted about the place all summer, never once deigning to go near the traps. Imagine my delight one warm day last spring when he walked under the trap and I pulled the string. I was not so delighted a moment later when he gripped my thumb in a vise-like clutch that drew blood, besides his unpleasant and wicked grip I discovered that he was covered with vermin. I banded and released him with dispatch, I assure you. Later in the season I got his wife and two babies. They were better behaved. Often, during the summer I saw the male walk around the pool, never once daring to venture under the trap. I regretted his reluctance for if ever a bird needed a bath it was he. In a trap on the fence I kept nesting material, cotton, string, and colored yarns. This has proved to be the best kind of bait for Orioles and Kingbirds. By this method I was fortunate in trapping the two female Orioles, Baltimore and Orchard. A pair of Arkansas Kingbirds nested in an elm just across Kennedy Drive. They helped themselves quite freely to the nesting material. One day I thought I had him, but he proved too quick for me, after that he very cleverly saw to it that I did not have another opportunity to pull the string on him; he reached in from the outside and got the material he wanted. I failed in my attempt to trap and band these birds.

Later a male of the other Kingbird came into the B trap, when I discovered him he was flying around under the top of the cage, imagining himself a prisoner, he did not have the sense to drop down and go out the way he came in. He was very angry about his humiliating experience. While being banded he displayed his orange crest. An immature Kingbird came into the same trap a little later. These were the only birds of this species to receive bands.

Usually I keep a crust of bread floating in the pool. One day I chanced to see a female Grackle going in for some of the moistened bread. I pulled the string, trapped, banded and released her. Half an hour later the male came. He picked up a dry crust near the sparrow trap, took it over to the pool and dipped it up and down to moisten it. He too received a band.

In the fall of 1924 I banded twenty-eight Harris's Sparrows. On May 12 the following spring only two of this species presented themselves at my trapping station, neither one of them being banded.

Only twice have I seen a real sick looking bird. The first one was a male Cowbird, with ill kept and ragged plumage; after a bath he flew to a nearby tree, where he rested for a long time. The other was a Chipping Sparrow, three toes of the left foot, the outer toes of the right foot all missing. The tip of the lower mandible was gone, and the upper mandible broken off almost back to the nostril. Its plumage was ill kept. There came under my observation an immature Bluebird with a deformed foot. The claws on the outer toes of the right foot, and the first joint of the middle toe were missing. The remainder of the toe was doubled back on the ball of the foot. One day three immature Catbirds came into the trap at the same time, all of one brood, apparently. All had slightly longer and decidedly hooked upper mandibles. Two of them repeated the following day.

I have noted Robins with no white in their tails some showing the faintest trace, a few others with the white graduated on five feathers on each side of the

tail. One Robin had a perfect fan-shaped tail with the ordinary white marking on the two outer tail feathers. In a few specimens the white eye-ring was absent, in others it was very pronounced. One brood of young Thrashers were of a decidedly darker shade of brown in plumage.

The past year with its high winds, hail, and heavy rainfall, proved most disastrous to nests and young birds, and to adults as well. The Mourning Doves suffered particularly, their nests being so flimsy. One pair finally took possession of an abandoned Robin shelter, which in this particular case did not better conditions any, for the terrific hail storm late in September so frightened the young birds that they hopped out of the nest. I found one of the young birds that same night, brought it into the house where I kept it till the next morning, when I banded and released it. That same morning my neighbor found the other bird, all but dead, a victim of the raging elements. Later in the day I found the mother Bluebird, dead, both wings broken by the hail.

My experience in bird banding has raised this question: Do the adult birds go south in advance of the young? In 1924 I banded all birds on the right leg, in 1925 on the left leg. Toward the latter part of July and August, it struck that I very seldom saw a bird banded on the right leg, either in vicinity of my traps, on my walks in the park close by, or afield. I believe the theory has been advanced, that they go into seclusion during the molting period. Why, then, did I not see them in the secluded places? On the morning of August 27, as I idly watched the congregating martins I became conscious of the fact that there were so few full plumaged males among them. In a flock of one hundred there were but seven. Did the majority of the males go south earlier?

What returns from 383 birds banded in 1925, will the coming spring bring in its wake?

STOUX CITY, IOWA.

NECROLOGY

LEROY TITUS WEEKS was born February 1, 1854, at Mount Vernon, Iowa. With his parents, he removed by covered wagon to Osborne, Kansas, in 1872, in which neighborhood his life was spent until he returned to attend Cornell College, Mount Vernon, from which he received the degree of B. A. in 1883. He was ordained to the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church and spent two years as a home missionary in the Salmon River Mountains in Idaho. He was married to Ida Anna Alborn at Smith Center, Kansas, in 1894. After her death, in 1913, he married Ada Pauline Kuhn, of Evanston, Illinois, who survives him.

As an author, Dr. Weeks published two volumes of poems and a Handbook of the Sonnet. At the time of his death he was contemplating the editing of another book on the Sonnet, an anthology of bird poems, and a handbook of Grammar.

Dr. Weeks may be accorded a prominent place in Iowa in two fields of activity; that of the poet and that of the ornithologist. It is the purpose of this sketch to treat of him in the latter field. He was not only a bird lover, but a bird student. He was indefatigable in his efforts to get out in the field and get his knowledge of birds first hand. The migration season found him in the field a great deal of the time, and despite his years, he would tire many a younger