

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 backing 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



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