

ONTARIO BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Our most recent Treasurer's report from Fran Hubert indicates a balance of over \$2100.00 although the most recent journal issue expenses have yet to be deducted. Nevertheless, we are in good financial condition and will be better when about \$500.00 arrives at the end of the year as our portion of the Baillie Birdathon fundraising for 1988. The membership dues increase of the past year moved us from a weak financial position last year to healthy this year.

Thanks are due to Dave Shepherd for an excellent job editing the journal. We are sorry to hear that he will be retiring from this position at the end of the year but have formed a search committee to find a good replacement. The latest journal issue was, by the way, completed with a great deal of help from the Long Point Bird Observatory. We are really appreciative of the assistance they have regularly provided and will be sending them a donation of \$100.00 for this year.

Barb Charlton has joined the Board of Directors as a Director-at-Large and we welcome her to the Executive. I'd also like to belatedly thank Dave Lambie for his past four years' service as Newsletter Editor.

You probably noticed in the last Newsletter that the Annual General Meeting date is late in 1989: April 15. We decided to move the date back to avoid winter weather problems that have occasionally made getting to the meeting a challenge. We hope to see everyone there.

BIRD EXCHANGE ACROSS THE BORDER by Robert G. McKinney

On September 13, 1984 I banded an Eastern Wood-Pewee in my yard in a suburb just to the east of Rochester, New York. Five

days later the bird was caught, examined, and released unharmed at Long Point Bird Observatory on the north shore of Lake Erie. In subsequent correspondence with the Observatory I learned that they had never had a foreign retrap from about 150 miles due east like this one. At the time I thought how great it would be if I could catch one of the Observatory's birds in return. This has happened.

This past May 2, 1988, at a banding station in the Finger Lakes hill country south of Naples, New York I caught a female Rufous-sided Towhee with a band on both legs. On the right leg was a standard size 1A band with a number (921-33332); on the left leg was a special band the same size with the legend to return the band to the Banding Office. This previous February at the winter meeting of OBBA I learned that Long Point Bird Observatory was doing such double banding so I suspected that they had banded the bird. I have recently learned that they had on April 25, 1985, three years earlier. George Wallace, the Observatory's Migration Program Manager, informed me that they had also recaptured the bird two days later weighing two grams more.

Since originally catching the bird I have recaptured it twice more during the nesting season, both times with a distinct brood patch indicating that the bird probably nested locally. I of course wonder where it originated and if it may have been involved in an east-west migration like the Pewee.

LONGEVITY RECORDS FOR BIRDS BANDED IN ONTARIO

No one responded to my request for records of birds that might be the oldest of the species banded in Ontario. However, I searched out a few band encounters from published sources and am presenting a first, albeit incomplete, list in this issue of the Newsletter. Many of the records below are (or were) North American records as reported in:

Clapp, R.B; M. K. Klimkiewicz & J. H. Kennard. 1982. Longevity records of North American birds: Gaviidae through Alcidae. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 53(2): 81-124.

Clapp, R. B; M. K. Klimkiewicz & A. G. Fitcher. 1983. Longevity records of North American birds: Columbidae through Paridae. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 54(2): 123-137.

Klimkiewicz, M. K; Clapp, R.B. & A. G. Fitcher. 1983. Longevity records of North American birds: Remizidae through Parulidae. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 54(3): 287-294.

Please feel free to add to this list or correct it by sending me your records. I'll update the list late next year.

The information for each bird is organized as follows: species and band number appear at left, next are age and sex at time of banding, then two dates: banding date and recovery date. Underneath appear the bander's name, banding location and the recovery location. To the far right are the minimum ages in years and months.

Common Loon 34-669536 2 Sep 1935-25 Apr 1943 7-10
U U W.I. Lyon, Manizoulin Island
Beach Haven, NJ

American Bittern 40-644401 28 Apr 1940-__ Oct 1947 8-04
A U W.V. Crich, Toronto
Bolton, ON

Great Blue Heron 40-734305 21 Jun 1947-11 Sep 1970 23-03
J U H.H.Krug, Stokes Bay, Howdenville
Near Oliphant, ON

Northern Harrier 695-01043 30 Sep 1972-19 Jan 1979 6-06
HY M , Hawk Cliff
Nolichucky River, TN

Sharp-shinned Hawk 1123-72213 13 Oct 1972-7 Apr 1981 9-10
AHY F W.A. Lamb, Point Pel e
Trussville, AL

Cooper's Hawk 614-00720 8 Oct 1974-6 Oct 1986 12-04
HY M Bob Hubert, Hawk Cliff
Hawk Cliff

Northern Goshawk 617-21725 6 Nov 1973-13 Mar 1983 9-09
AHY F Howard McCarthy, Hawk Cliff
Whitefish Point, MI

Red-tailed Hawk 877-05423 4 Mar 1972-29 Oct 1985 15-04
AHY U Sheila Fowler, St. Thomas
Forestville, QU

American Kestrel 833-14376 4 Jan 1975-1 Mar 1984 9-08
AHY F Don Fowler, Branchton
St. George, ON

Merlin 1293-38094 21 Sep 1980-27 Apr 1986 5-10
HY M Sheila Fowler, Hawk Cliff
International Falls, MN

Semipalmated Sandpiper 52-37685 18 Aug 1957-25 Jul 1969 12-01
U U R. Brown, Presqu'ile Prov. Park
Presqu'ile Prov. Park

Ring-billed Gull 525-00717 24 Jun 1956-28 Jul 1981 25-01
L U W.N. Campbell, Presque Point
Presqu'ile Prov. Park

Black-billed Cuckoo 552-98476 10 Jun 1965-14 Jun 1969 5-00
AHY U LPBO, Long Point
Woodbridge, CN

Eastern Screech-Owl 505-55649 20 Nov 1955-15 Dec 1969 13-06
U U M. Field, Elgin County
St. Thomas, ON

Long-eared Owl 526-24634 5 Feb 1954-10 Jun 1962 9-00
A U L.G. Lambert, Toronto
Virginiatown, ON

Eastern Kingbird 1231-03092 16 Jul 1980-19 Aug 1986 7-03
AHY F LPBO, Long Point

Tree Swallow 75-48658 17 Jun 1970-15 Jun 1980 11-00
SY F LPBO, Long Point
Long Point

American Crow 20 Jun 1954-16 Jan 1983 29-08
HY U Forest Dilling, Bowmanville
North of Toronto, ON

Solitary Vireo 102-00711 15 May 1962-01 Nov 1968 7-05
U U LPBO, Long Point
Santa Eulala, Guatemala

Philadelphia Vireo 62-75810 28 Aug 1962-13 Apr 1970 8-10
A U F. Smith, Rice Lake
Barbarena, Guatemala

Yellow Warbler 108-63662 14 May 1966-04 May 1974 8-11
A M G. Garbutt, Sthuke's Marsh
Sthuke's Marsh

Red-winged Blackbird 722-24262 9 May 1980-30 Apr 1986 7-11
ASY M LPBO, Long Point

Common Grackle 1323-95097 25 Jun 1978-30 Apr 1986 8-11
AHY M LPBO, Long Point

NESTBOX MANAGEMENT WHERE HOUSE SPARROWS ARE A PROBLEM by Bill Read

House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) can be a serious competitor on Eastern Bluebird nest box trails. On a recent survey of trails in Ontario in 1987, House Sparrows, House Wrens, and blowflies were ranked by trail operators as the number one presumed cause of nest failure. (1)

When bluebird trails are unsuccessful, the blame may usually be traced to either improper location of the nesting boxes or failure to prevent House Sparrows from taking them over. (2)

In both 1986 and 1987 I found a male Eastern Bluebird killed in a nestbox by a male House Sparrow. Each year also, I find several Tree Swallows killed along my trail in a similar manner. In both cases, the bluebird's head was completely devoid of feathers. The male House Sparrow pecks the bluebird on the head, knocking all feathers off and causing severe injury. Young Eastern Bluebirds are killed in the same manner: Bruce Duncan has seen this in two nestboxes near Cayuga.

Eastern Bluebirds are extremely aggressive in defending their nesting territory. The problem seems to occur when a bluebird and House Sparrow end up in a nest box together. Either a male House Sparrow enters the box when a bluebird is gathering food for its young or the bluebird is roosting in a nest box within the House Sparrow's territory.

I have witnessed Eastern Bluebirds aggressively defending and chasing Common Flickers, Red-headed Woodpeckers, European Starlings, House Sparrows, and Tree Swallows. On one occasion, I watched a male Eastern Bluebird grapple with a starling in mid-air; they tumbled to the ground, and the bluebird flew up to chase the starling away from its territory. Starlings are never a problem as long as nest-boxes have entry holes 3.81 cm or 1½ inches in diameter, too small for the starling's body size.

Eastern Bluebirds returning in early spring are extremely vulnerable to House Sparrow attack. They arrive in a weakened condition after a long migration, may have a very slim supply of food here, and then try to defend a nest box or roost in a box where House Sparrows are common. A resident House Sparrow may have already claimed the box for his own and upon returning to roost finds the male Eastern Bluebird. Bluebirds outside a nestbox are more agile than House Sparrows. In a confined area, however, they are no match for House Sparrows with their thicker weaver finch bills.

In 1986, a male bluebird was killed in a nestbox with the nest only partly built by the female. Since the female builds the nest with encouragement from the male, who usually does not enter during nest building, I surmised that the male had entered the box after the House Sparrow. This supports the view that Eastern Bluebirds are aggressive and will fight to the death defending a nest box or young against House Sparrows.

Putting up bluebird or Tree Swallow nest boxes in urban areas or rural areas where there are large populations of House Sparrows only encourages Eastern Bluebirds to nest where their chances of being successful are greatly reduced.

I recommend the following:

1. Place nest boxes at least 400 metres (¼ mile) from barns or houses where there are large populations of House Sparrows. If House Sparrows continually occupy the nest boxes after removal of their nests or young, the only solution may be to move the boxes to another area. It is important to remember that only the nests of House Sparrows and European Starlings can be removed from nest boxes. All other cavity nesters, House Wrens and Tree Swallows included, are protected by law.

Keep in mind that the male House Sparrow has a greater attachment to his nest box than the female. Even if the female, nest, and young are removed the male will not give up possession of the nest box (personal observation). (3)

2. It is possible to completely remove House Sparrows from a limited area using commercial sparrow traps. Eastern Bluebirds have then nested successfully in some areas where they have not

been seen for over 100 years. (4) Keeping House Sparrow populations controlled is a labour-intensive activity and must be maintained on a regular basis especially if a small Eastern Bluebird population has been established in the controlled area.

The best time to trap House Sparrows is in late winter when large numbers congregate around barns and other buildings. It is best to bait the area with some kind of seed mixture.

Since male House Sparrows incubate, it is possible to sneak up to the box and remove them, especially on cold, wet days when they are more reluctant to leave the eggs. If you miss catching them on the first try they become extremely wary on your next visit.

If House Sparrows are allowed to nest successfully in boxes the young will in turn seek out boxes in which to nest. This will result in an increase in occupied boxes by House Sparrows and actually pose a greater threat to bluebirds than if the boxes were not put up in the first place: the opposite of what was intended. So-called Eastern Bluebird trails that allow House Sparrows to nest or are not monitored on a regular basis can actually do more harm than good to the bluebird, especially if the trail is located in an area where House Sparrows are common.

Footnotes:

- (1). Read, W.F. 1987. Short Communications. Ontario Bird Banding 19: 34-5.
- (2). Zeleny, L. 1976. The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival. Available from North American Bluebird Society (Address at end of article).
- (3). Grussing, D. 1988. Controlling the male House Sparrow. Sialia 10:21-2.
- (4). Sialia slide show from North American Bluebird Society.

Special House Sparrow traps and the article on how to control House Sparrows by Don Grussing are available from N.A.B.S., Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD; 20906-0295.

HOUSE FINCH PROJECT: REQUEST FOR DATA

Although OBBA's House Finch project has been inactive for a year, House Finches have not. They continue to spread across the province while some areas are now almost "saturated" with them.

To examine this range expansion, I'd like to request that Ontario banders take a look at their House Finch banding records (colour-banded or not) and send me a listing of all recoveries, retraps, and returns to the same banding location for the 1980s. Send me:

Band number - age and sex - date and location of banding - date and location of encounter.

I'd like to map the information and present it either in the journal or newsletter. There will not at present be any colour-banding, but we hope you'll try to catch as many House Finches as possible and report all encounters. Mail them to me: Bruce Duncan, 10 Chateau Court, Hamilton, ON, L9C 5P2.