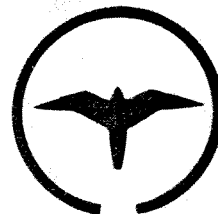


ONTARIO BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION



AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 1980 NEWSLETTER

SABOTAGE OF POTTER TRAPS - HAROLD RICHARDS

Banders who make considerable use of potter traps usually encounter three exasperating vandals: squirrels, raccoons, and Rock Doves. For best results the traps must be kept constantly baited, even when not in operation. Inevitably, the pests will damage traps, drive interesting birds away, and consume great quantities of expensive bait.

To frustrate the squirrels you may put the trap on a platform at the top of a metal pole five or six feet high. Squirrels jump incredible distances which makes it necessary to place the trap well away from trees, fences, or other launching pads. Greasing the metal pole is only a very temporary deterrent to their climbing. It requires a conical squirrel-guard made from a circular piece of sheet metal two feet in diameter.

It is not so easy to keep the raccoon down. He can climb over even two squirrel-guards placed one above the other. I've watched him reach out and grab the edge of the guard with his hand-like front paws. His hind quarters follow and he gets a grip with the hind paws. Then his front paws reach the pole above the cone, and he is up in position to knock the potter trap down. However, he can be foiled by an oversize squirrel-guard. Use a sheet metal circle thirty inches in diameter. Cut out a sector whose arc is about fourteen inches. Use rivets to form a wide cone. Be sure that the collar that holds it on the pole is very sturdy.

But what can be done about the flocks of pigeons? I have tried using a somewhat larger platform with a plastic roof, and a removable end through which a potter trap can be inserted. Slender vertical bars surround the platform. Try the small aluminum tubes obtainable when an old TV aerial is being wrecked. I first tried placing the bars four inches apart and the pigeons entered without missing a wing-beat. Experimentally, the space between bars was gradually decreased. It was found that a Rock Dove rarely got in when the distance between bars was two and three-eighths inches. Mourning Doves, Grackles, Blue Jays, and smaller birds still enter quite readily. However, the persistent pigeons have a habit of clinging to the edge and rapidly beating their wings to maintain position while reaching in to grab a bite. The fanning wings blow considerable quantities of sunflower seed to the ground.

This article is published in hopes that some reader has better solutions that he or she will share with us. Please write to the editor. Squirrels and pigeons can be caught in traps. But then what? Is it legal to destroy them? Few wives are enthusiastic about making squirrel or pigeon stew. Is it even effective? I have heard of a citizen who disposed of fifty squirrels in one season and still had three or four in his back yard at any given time. Is transporting them a solution? I have often suspected that other banders are transporting squirrels to my neighbourhood. How far would a pigeon return if transported? How much would you have to dislike anybody to justify giving him your squirrels or Rock Doves?

AGGRESSIVENESS IN TREE SWALLOWS - DAVID BREWER

Anybody who has banded very many nestling Tree Swallows well knows that the adults become very aggressive in defence of their nest. This usually manifests itself in violent 45° dives at the banded bird's head, the bird uttering a dry rattling clitter as it sweeps by a couple of inches above your hairline. Such aggression in defence of the nest is common in birds, being found in everything from humming birds to cassowaries. (Given the choice, I'd prefer the humming-bird). Clearly it makes sense from an evolutionary point of view for an organism to attempt to safeguard its offspring, and hence of course its own genes, from predators at a certain amount of personal risk. However, several times in recent years I have noted behaviour in Tree Swallows which cannot be explained in this simple way.

On several occasions I have been mobbed by more than two swallows at one box; in one instance, by four adult birds. This might be explicable if the extra two birds came from a nearby nest, but in this case this was not so. On June 17, 1980, I was attacked by three adult Tree Swallows while banding a young in a box attached to my TV tower, but to my knowledge there are no nesting Tree Swallows within six hundred yards of my pair. Such "altruistic" behaviour does make sense if the "helpers" are siblings of the actual parents - the helpers are to some extent safeguarding their own gene-pool. As the British Biologist Haldane once said, "I would give my life for two brothers or eight cousins". There are numerous examples in the bird world of such apparent altruism being in fact selfish, when studies reveal that the helpers are actually related to the helped - the classical work on the Arizona Jay being a splendid example, when it was found that the numerous birds feeding the young in one nest were all blood relations of the nestlings.

I would suggest that this explanation is not terrible in the case of the Tree Swallow. Firstly, there is not the slightest evidence that siblings are involved. Secondly, on at least two occasions I have noted cases of Tree Swallows defending the nests of other species. On June 7, 1980, while inspecting a nest-box which held House Wrens, I was violently mobbed by a pair of Tree Swallows - the actual proprietors meanwhile confined themselves to grovelling around in the undergrowth nearby making disapproving churning noises. The nearest nesting Tree Swallows so far as I know were some four hundred yards away, and curiously when I inspected their box I was unmolested. Two years ago, I had under observation a nest-box near Guelph which contained Tree Swallow eggs. On returning a week later I found that it had been expropriated by a pair of Bluebirds (at which I was rather pleased). The swallows, however, held distinctly different opinions and had become very aggressive. As I got out of my car and climbed the gate into the field where the box was, the swallows came flying straight for me. I walked the two hundred yards to the box with a pair of irate Tree Swallows buzzing around my ears like hornets. Why had the loss of their nest-site caused the swallows to become so much more aggressive than usual?

Is there, in fact, any reasonable explanation of why Tree Swallows should take risks to defend any nest other than their own?

BIRD TOUR OF SURINAM (DUTCH GUIANA)

David Brewer is co-leading a tour of Surinam in northern South America, March 11 - March 24, 1981. He anticipates that the tour will see about three hundred species of birds, ninety percent of which will be novel to Canadians. Anybody interested please contact David at R.R. #1, Puslinch, (519) 824-4342.

BLUEBIRD NEST BOXES

Do you operate a Bluebird trail? If so, read page 28 of the July/Sept., 1980, issue of Nature Canada. Experts are suggesting that on your Bluebird nest boxes you try an open mesh top instead of a closed roof. Such exposure of the nest to the elements is said to discourage sparrows but does not keep out Bluebirds.

AGEING BLUE JAYS

On August 23, 1977, one of our members trapped and banded Blue Jay 1063-53837. It had a pink mouth and hence was HY. It was retrapped in May 1978, and May 1979. When re-trapped for a third time, July 8, 1980, its tongue and the back part of the roof of the mouth were still pink.

AN OLD RING-BILL?

On the 23rd of June, 1956, the late Alf Bunker put band 525-06504 on a Ring-billed Gull, (L,U), on the Bluff at Presqu'ile Point.

In the summer of 1979, a park camper brought the band to Mr. Bill Pratt, a naturalist on the staff of Presqu'ile Provincial Park. No further details were recorded. Perhaps this incident illustrates that we should carefully record what, when, and where.

RED-LETTER DAY - PETER LOCKHART

May 19, 1980, certainly was a red-letter for me. I arrived at my swamp in Hope Township at about 8:00 A.M. and went about unfurling my nets as I have done on many previous occasions. But there was a difference this time. As I was straightening up the last net, which was situated in a grove of silver maples with about 10cms of standing water, I heard a noise behind me. I turned around to see a yellowish warbler fly into the net about 3 metres away. I quickly finished straightening the net and then extricated the bird. Immediately I recognized it as a Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria Citrea*) but as I held the bird in my hand doubt started to overcome me "It can't be - not in my little swamp", but it was. I banded the bird (AHY M 1540-03522) and had to borrow my neighbours camera to take some pictures. In checking with the Canadian Wildlife Service in Ottawa later I ascertained that only 13 birds of this species had been banded previously in Ontario since 1956 - the last one in 1976.

I was really on a high at this point and accidentally let two birds go as I was taking them out of the nets. But the day was to continue on this high note. Later in the morning I retrapped in the same net at the same two common Yellowthroats which I had banded previously (1510-10126 which I had banded at this location as an ASY M on May 27, 1979) and (1480-80158 banded as a HY M on Sept. 27, 1978). I said to myself after reflecting a while "Now that's incredible". I also retrapped a Veery which is nesting here (21-144435 also banded on May 27, 1979, as an AHY F). WHAY A DAY!!

GREAT LAKES BEACHED BIRD SURVEY

If you like to walk beaches at any time of the year, you are invited to join the Great Lakes Beached Bird Survey (GLBBS). Begun in 1977, the survey monitors bird mortality on the Great Lakes using information collected by volunteers on monthly beach walks. GLBBS is compiling long-term records on natural bird mortality and its seasonal and geographic patterns, to help us assess the significance of bird die-offs and learn more about the effects of pollutants on birds. It also documents the occurrence of uncommon species like jaegers and eiders.

Participants walk a one or two mile stretch of beach of their own choice and count, identify, and record on the forms provided, all dead or dying birds encountered. Last year 50 volunteers took part, covering 1.2% of the Great Lakes shoreline and finding 1416 beached birds of at least 102 species.

Eight banded birds - 5 Herring Gulls, 2 Ring-billed Gulls and 1 Canada Goose have been found on beached bird surveys, and some specimens such as a Northern Fulmar and a Black-legged Kittiwake have been given to museum collections. Beach-walkers also make spot counts of live waterbirds on their surveys, providing interesting information on the distribution of waterbirds. Numbers of live waterbirds are related to beached bird numbers and to ice conditions in winter. The survey presently has funding from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to examine the effects of winter navigation on bird populations. We would like to get more survey coverage of areas where ice conditions are affected by either shipping or thermal discharges. At places such as harbours where the beaching of birds is not possible, live waterbird counts may be done separately. Results of GLBBS are published in an annual report sent to all beach walkers, and available from LPBO (address below) at \$1.00 each.

In Ontario, we now have good coverage at Toronto, Pickering, and Sarnia (still have no one at Kingston and Thunder Bay), but we would like more participants on each of our four Great Lakes and the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers. If you are interested in taking part, write to: Anne Lambert, Great Lakes Beached Bird Survey, c/o Long Point Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario, NOE 1M0.

NOTES FROM HAROLD RICHARDS

EDEMATOUS BROOD PATCH

Banders who have been dealing with Bank Swallows have read the following in North American Bird Banding, Vol. 2, Part 6: "...Male develops a brood patch, but it is not edematous as in female."

Ordinary dictionaries don't help, but an ornithologist at the R.O.M. tells us that the term means "watery, puffy."

SLIMY BIRD BATHS

No doubt your bird bath becomes green and slimy in the hot summer weather. When scrubbing it, try a cupful of Javex. It is very effective.