

MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55105

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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Subject: BIRD-BANDING at ORDWAY. (3)

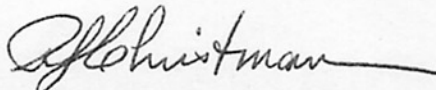
In our tenure at Ordway we have been asked frequently about bird-banding. The average questioner is not immediately satisfied by the explanation of the process of capturing a wild creature and releasing it unharmed after marking it for future identification. Why, they say would anyone want to capture something without eating it or preparing it in some way for profit or for a conversation piece? Above all, they ask, Why let it go? That's just like throwing something away after you've worked for it.

Bird-banding is not an old occupation, dating back probably to Jean J. Audubon, who marked some Phoebes by tying silver wire around their legs; these same birds - of at least some of them - returned to his neighborhood the following year. This was about 1835 or so. This does not strike most people as "much of a deal"; anybody knows that birds migrate southward in the fall and return in the spring. This phenomenon, now accepted as common knowledge although still imperfectly understood, was not established much more than two centuries ago and even such an intellect as Aristotle completely missed it, recording his opinion that Swallows bury themselves in the mud for their winter disappearances! There is a need for a continuing study of this and other phenomena which apply to wild creatures.

In previous bulletins (Nos. 5, 7) we have mentioned bird-banding and its techniques but some of this bears repeating here. Banding is accomplished by placing an aluminum band around the tarsus ("leg") of the bird; the band is numbered uniquely so as to distinguish the subject from any other bird any place in the entire world. The bands are in the form of a circular ribbon of aluminum ranging in diameter from 2.1 mm (to fit a Chickadee) to 5.6 mm for a Mourning Dove. Next time you see a dead bird examine it to see if it carries a band on its leg (look at both legs although we habitually place the band on the right leg). The band can be removed by parting and uncurling it into its flattened shape which can then be taped to a sheet of paper and mailed. Anyone who reads this can be of assistance by keeping a lookout for banded birds and reporting same either to the Fish & Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240 or by calling Ordway at 455-6204.

In our studies here we trap and band specimens for study after which they are released. It requires a lot of personal attention to handle the birds so that they will not be injured or excessively affected by the experience of being entrapped.

The peak periods for bird-trapping are the months of October and April-May, when the two seasonal migrations occur. Some very interesting things show up in these trappings; e.g. we had never positively identified the Traill's Flycatcher at Ordway until we caught two in a mist net about four years ago; also an Acadian Flycatcher was taken in Aug., 1975, one of the most northerly captures reported for this species. The greater portion of birds seem to be captured during the late afternoon hours during September, about one-third of them after 4 pm.



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