

1978

News, Notes, Comments

North American Bird Bander

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Recommended Citation

North American Bird Bander (1978) "News, Notes, Comments," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol3/iss1/8>

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News, Notes, Comments

Some notes on Painted Buntings

Samuel R. and Isabel H. Tipton

We now have been banding Painted Buntings (*Passarina ciris*) with aluminum and colored bands at Long Beach, North Carolina for five summers (1973-1977). Here are some of the observations we have made.

The birds we band are close to the northern limits of their breeding range. We do not see the aggressive behavior in the male that is reported by South Carolina observers. In fact, our birds, male and female, are shy and the nests are well hidden. The multi-colored males begin to arrive around the 17th of April, and the latest observation of either sex at our station has been the third week in September. One individual that we banded as a green SY male in May 1973 was the first one back (multicolored) in 1974, 1975, 1976, and 1977. We rarely see a colored bird after the middle of August, the exciting exception having occurred on 21 September 1977, when we had two birds that had not been seen since they were banded on 21 July and 23 July as green SY males to come back as shining multicolored males—their molts complete except for waxy sheaths on primaries 8 and 9. This observation supports Erma Fisk's contention that the green males become multi-colored at the complete (post-nuptial) molt of the second year. (Fisk, 1974).

We have banded 32 proven males (13 multi-colored and 19 green with cloacal protuberances, of which 8 returned multi-colored the following summer); 11 proven females (by brood patch) and 36 green birds of unproven sex (27 HY, 1 SY, and 8 AHY). Thirteen males, four females, and one of unknown sex returned the following year, five males and one female returned the second year, two males the third year, and one the fourth year following the year of banding. This year, 1977, with eight HY birds, was the most successful breeding year so far, as determined by our netting records. We have seen one proven green male singing territorially but we did not observe nest or young.

The wing chords for our birds averaged slightly lower than those Fisk reported (1974). Our values in millimeters \pm one standard deviation for all

males was 67.5 ± 1.9 (range, 63-73); for multi-colored males 68.5 ± 1.5 (range, 65-73); for green males 66.0 ± 1.0 (range, 63-67). In eight males banded when green and returning multi-colored the wing chord increased 2.4 ± 1.5 (range, 1-6). The value for 11 proven females was 64.0 ± 1.7 (range, 61-67). The wing length tends to increase with age in both males and females.

Wing Chord Criteria used by us for sexing green Painted Buntings:

Skull incompletely ossified in late summer and fall, may show small 'windows' through first spring

Wing chord 66 mm or more... HY/SY-M

Wing chord 62 mm or less ... HY/SY-F

Wing chord 63-65 mm HY/SY-U

Skull completely ossified

Wing chord 64 mm or less ... AHY-F

Literature citation

Fisk, Erma J. 1974. Wintering populations of Painted Buntings in southern Florida. *Bird-Banding* 45:353-359.

113 W. 23rd Street Long Beach, Southport, NC 28461

Color-marked Turkey Vultures and Black Vultures

White vinyl wing markers have been placed on Black and Turkey Vultures near Blacksburg, Virginia, in a study of their movements.

Persons who observe such marked vultures are asked to note the species, wing marker, and date and location of the sighting. Send this information to the Bird Banding Laboratory with a copy to Irvine D. Prather, Dept. of Biology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA 24061.

Tree Sparrow recovery and return

A Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*) No. 1360-75876 was banded on 1 February 1975 by Dr. Maurice Broun, at New Ringold, PA. On 23 December 1975 I trapped this bird at Lake Bluff near Wolcott, NY. On 9 February 1977 this Tree Sparrow was recaptured by Dr. Broun at the original place of banding.

John H. Buckalew

Ed. Note: Wolcott is 200 miles NW of New Ringold.

Nest site tenacity of a Scarlet Tanager

On 15 May 1977 I captured an AHY F Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga Olivacea*) with a large brood patch, at a banding station in the Ramapo Mountains of New Jersey. The bird was taken to a location 0.2 mi. from the site of capture for banding and recording.

After banding, the bird accidentally escaped (we usually return birds to the trapping site for release). I noted that it flew up and over the cabin in the general direction of the trapping site. Fifteen minutes later the bird was found again in the same net of the original capture.

The tanager was very docile and did not bite as forcefully as the other tanagers captured.

Two Wood Thrushes and a Hermit Thrush with brood patches were observed in the same area, but the tanager appeared not to notice them. It was somewhat surprising to find these species in so close a proximity to one another.

Frederick S. Schaeffer

Editors' note

In the last issue of NABB (Vol. 2, No. 4, pg. 164), please note that the excerpt from *Bird Banding* was reprinted with the kind permission of the Editor of that journal.

American martins

A comprehensive bibliography of the North and South American martins (*Progne spp.*) is currently in preparation. It will include all papers dealing solely or partly with martins, except local annotated checklists. Authors wishing to have material included should send an abstract or reprint to Charles R. Brown, Box 1309, Austin College, Sherman, Texas 75090.

Cowbirds

Request for information on cowbird nestlings —

I am studying geographical variation in the gape coloration of nestling Brown-headed and Bronzed Cowbirds. In some localities the rictal flanges and tomia are yellow, in other areas they are white. A preliminary report on this study will appear early in 1978 in *The Auk*. Since more information is needed. I would greatly appreciate receiving the following types of data from any location: coloration of the rictal flanges, tomia, mouth interior and eye-lids of cowbird and host nestlings (if the latter are present), host species, precise locality data, and date.

The information on coloration is best if based on observations of live nestlings; however colored photographs are also valuable. My studies would benefit if I had the opportunity to personally inspect colored photos but this is not a necessity.

Most nestlings will probably have rictal flanges and tomia that can be described as clearly yellow or clearly white, but if you wish to report data with greater accuracy, and especially if the color seems intermediate, the nestling cowbird can be compared against a color standard. Page 250 and 251 in *Birds of North America* by Robbins et al. show the heads of warblers and present numerous shades of yellow. These shades of yellow (or others appearing in Robbins) can be matched with those of live nestlings. — Stephen I. Rothstein, Department of Biological Sciences, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA. 93106.

The human side of bird banding

This letter was written by a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines to H. Elliott McClure (now of Camarillo, CA). Dr. McClure was in charge of the Migratory Animal Pathological Survey in Southeast Asia at the time. The bird mentioned was a Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) banded the previous September as it crossed Taiwan on its way from China to Luzon.

30 September 1967
Sagada, Philippines

Dear Sir:

Your bird, number 45324, showed up in Sagada and haplessly (for it) flew into a net set up for exactly that purpose: catching birds.

Sagada is located approximately 200 miles North of Manila (approximately 17° Lat., 121° Longitude) and sits at an elevation of 5,000 feet. The bird, however, was caught on a mountain peak, a short walk from Sagada (mostly straight up), and perhaps another 1,000 feet in elevation higher than Sagada.

Because of its elevation, Sagada (and the rest of the Mountain Province) has a quasi temperate climate. And the Pine tree dominates its climax community. Quite different from the rest of the Philippines.

From what I can gather, the people of Sagada, as well as the rest of Mountain Province (Igorots), have been going up on the mountain peaks to net birds for as long as anyone can remember. The fellow who I go bird-netting with inherited his net from his grandfather, who wove the net many years ago using the bark of a special tree. In times past, birds caught were an important source of meat to the community; now, however, I believe it is mostly done for sport, although the birds netted are eaten as number 44324 will probably be. (45324 is now alive, but it can not fly due to its collision with the net and the subsequent struggle that ensued, between man and bird. We will attempt to nurse it back to health and get it off the ground again — although it is quite doubtful that we will be successful. If the bird does fly again, we will send it back to Hong Kong; if it doesn't, we will eat it.)

Perhaps you will find the methods used by the Igorots to net birds interesting. The net, about 10 feet wide, tapering down from about 10 feet at the top to about 3 feet at the bottom, is stretched on and attached to two bamboo poles which are about 14 feet in height. The net is made of twisted bark

"string" about ½ of an inch apart. This set-up, on the peak of a mountain, is stood up and held in the shape of a "V", the point to the ground. The net is held by a person, who, his hand placed 4 feet up the poles, either squats or sits, waiting for a bird to fly into the net. To attract the birds, to fly to and hopefully into the net, a Petromax (a pressurized kerosene lamp) is placed on the ground, a few feet to the right and behind the man holding the net.

The net, so it is believed, must be facing West. The environmental conditions must also be correct: netting of birds is only done at night; it must be a cloudy night, with the clouds low enough to sweep over the peaks where the netting is done. It is best if the clouds are blowing from East to West, thus sweeping from behind, over, and away from the direction the net is facing. There are usually birds in the East wind; although there are, so they say, birdless, East wind clouds. Sometimes, but rarely, there are birds found in clouds going in other directions, but there must be clouds present. If there are no clouds, there will be no birds. I went up last night to try my luck; freezing on the mountain top, I waited for clouds from 8pm until 4am (these are the usual times for netting), but during this time no clouds blew by; I caught no birds.

The birds that the people catch must mostly be migratory ones, because they just net during a part of the year: from the middle of September to the last of December. 45324 was caught the 27th of September.

We, here, suppose that you are studying the migration of these birds, but in a way this seems a little illogical (to me, anyway), because who would ever catch these birds in the course of their flight? Of course, you were right in this case, but it seems like Igorots catching these birds to eat would be the exception — most peoples would not bother (the birds are so small!), and if one doesn't catch them he certainly couldn't read your address on the band. Or are you studying the total time elapsed that the birds take to get back to Hong Kong after leaving?

We would be very interested in and appreciate any information that you can give us about number 45324 and its kind. And any help we could give you, we will gladly do so.

Sincerely,
P.D.
Peace Corps