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## An Observation of an Ahy Gray Catbird with a Gray Iris

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associate breeding populations with specific wintering sites. It should be well worth-while, therefore, to investigate further how our songbirds can cope with the rapid changes that are presently occurring all over their wintering range. During the past winters, such changes were accompanied in southern United States by unusually cold weather. Its impact should be reflected not only in banding totals of transient birds (see, for example, Clark 1978) but also in the abundance of breeding birds in various regions of the country. The documented sharp decline of the Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) and other songbirds in Europe has been attributed to conditions in their winter quarters (Berthold, 1973), and is a grim — and instructive — precedent.

### Acknowledgement

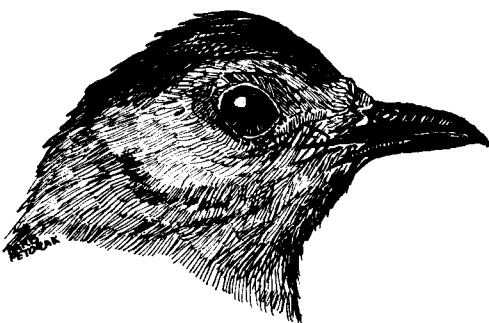
The author wishes to thank his wife, Ursel Homann, for her help in the banding operations.

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On 19 May 1979 while banding at the Port Huron State Game Area during the Michigan Bird Banders Association Spring Bandout, I caught a Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) with a pale gray iris. This is the first catbird I have seen in the spring with this color iris.

During the summer and early fall (through September) all the early HY catbirds I have banded have had this color iris. These individuals also have a yellow mouth; this catbird had a black mouth. The earliest recorded nesting of the Gray Catbird in southeast Michigan is 14 May; this nest had 3 eggs (Kelley, A.H. 1978. Birds of Southeast Michigan and Southwestern Ontario. Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.) Thus, I believe that this bird could not have been an HY individual.

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The most recent information on aging catbirds indicates that a brown iris can be used to determine SY catbirds through April. After April all catbirds should have a plum or deep red-colored iris (Bird-Banding Laboratory. 1977. North American Bird Banding Manual, Vol. 2. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and Sheppard, J.M. and M.K. Klimkiewicz. 1976. An update to Wood's Bird-Bander's Guide. *North American Bird Bander*, 1:26.). I can find no references that mention a gray iris in spring (AHY) catbirds. Since this eye color is characteristic of early HY catbirds, it seems probable that this bird should have been aged as an SY bird. I would suggest that all banders check the eye color in spring to see how often a gray iris occurs and attempt to determine if it is safe to age these individuals as SY birds. It is possible that the gray iris on this bird was an abnormality and thus cannot be used as a criterion to age catbirds. Further study should clarify the matter. ♦

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