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Eastern Regional News

Eastern Bird Banding Association

Founded 1923

President's Message

Life is full of changes. As you may have noticed, the coordination and publication of NABB is now being handled by Robert Pantle. This was a change agreed upon by EBBA, IBBA, and WBBA, and made with the hope of improving the appearance and ironing out the problems involved in publishing a jointly sponsored journal. While there may have been a delay in your receiving this issue due to the change-over, Bob has assured me that future issues will be sent out in a timely manner.

As both editor for the EBBA portion of NABB and as coordinator, Bob has informed me of a couple of his concerns which I would like to address. As is always the case, we should endeavor to write up the results of our banding investigations and send them in for publication. Articles for both the front section of NABB and for EBBA's regional section are needed. In addition, artists are needed to provide line drawings for use in NABB. Pictures or illustrations for

use in the journal must include the artist's permission for use and be of a type useful for reproduction. Bob can provide the details to those interested. Certainly there must be some of you with the talent and willingness to provide this service for NABB. Line drawings help provide that little extra that improves the appearance of our journal, so please let Bob know if you can help.

Changes may also be coming in the Banding Lab. As was mentioned in the last MTAB, a meeting with representatives of the banding organizations has been proposed for this winter to discuss these forthcoming changes. As of this writing, in early September, I have received no subsequent details concerning this meeting, but I will keep you informed of any further developments.

Enjoy the change of the seasons and may the coming holidays find you healthy and happy.

Judith Bell

The EASTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION's 67th Annual Meeting will be hosted 27-29 April 1990 in Rochester, New York by GENESSEE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY. Papers, workshops, and equipment displays will focus on banding techniques and study results. Persons wishing to participate in or assist with these activities are invited to inquire. Student research reporting is encouraged.

Among events already scheduled are presentations by staff of Braddock's Bay Raptor Research Association, and field trips to a lake shore hawk lookout, an operating raptor and songbird banding station, and to the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge to view waterfowl.

Plan to come and enjoy a busy spring weekend that's for the birds! Learn about the unique birding and banding that exists in the shadow of that imposing body of water called Lake Ontario. Registration details will be mailed in March.

For information or to participate in the program, contact Robert P. Yunick at 1527 Myron Street, Schenectady, New York, 518-377-0146, or at work: 518-370-4200.



Gracklepox - A Bander's Disease

In 1983, coinciding with the initiation of a full-time migration monitoring effort on Old Cut Boulevard at the base of Long Point, Norfolk County, Ontario, certain banders complained of an ailment which very quickly became known as "gracklepox." In the spring of 1987, Dr. Ronald R. Tasker reported on this condition in Long Point Bird Observatory's spring newsletter (Tasker 1987). At that time, Dr. Tasker was able to provide the long awaited diagnosis. Presently, I would like to review Dr. Tasker's discussion of gracklepox and provide an update for North American bird banders.

What is gracklepox? Gracklepox is a skin condition which is characterized by itching, burning, or just downright painful blisters, sores, and reddened skin, almost entirely confined to the backs of the hands and fingers making movement difficult and uncomfortable. Dr. Tasker put it well when he said, "If the name does not, the physical appearance of the victim's hands certainly does inspire a mixture of revulsion and pity." (picture above). Banders at LPBO were afflicted with gracklepox in the springs of 1983-1988 to lesser and greater degrees. Some banders were actually unable to continue handling birds; their hands were that swollen. Usually the condition evolved between approximately 5 April and 15 May.

Debate raged over the possible cause. Was it borne by birds, or was there another explanation? The connection between

the ailment and the clawing and biting of Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*), Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) and Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), species commonly banded in April, was strong in the minds of the banders and the term "gracklepox" was coined. Many times, poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) was brought forward as a possible cause. Full-time banding activities at Old Cut and the sudden emergence of the problem seemed to be linked and the Old Cut station is the only banding station where poison ivy occurs. This was dismissed, however, since the people who contracted the disease tended to be people who believed they were immune to poison ivy. Furthermore, gracklepox did not resemble typical poison ivy. The rash consisted of lesions at various stages of development and were apparently restricted to the backs of the hands and fingers. They did not spread to the palms, forearms, or other parts of the body.

The debate was finally resolved in May 1986, thanks to Dr. Gary Sibbald of the Division of Dermatology at Toronto General Hospital. Dr. Sibbald examined tissue from a bander with a particularly bad case of gracklepox and determined that it was, in fact, poison ivy, although not a typical manifestation. The gracklepox form affected people who were immune to direct contact with the plant, but who became vulnerable when the toxin was literally injected subcutaneously by the sharp claws of grackles, or similar species, or alternatively, rubbed into scratches caused by the birds.

In subsequent years, particularly 1988, we have been able to minimize the occurrence of gracklepox using the same methods one would employ to reduce the risk of regular poison ivy. Now, when handling large numbers of grackles and blackbirds, banders wash their hands with soap regularly, usually at intervals of one to two hours. The results have been very favorable.

At the most basic level we assume gracklepox is passed on to banders by grackles and red-wings who have actually walked on freshly sprouting poison ivy. Beyond that, we have come up with two ideas to explain the occurrence of gracklepox. One is that grackles and red-wings arriving at Long Point have departed from areas where poison ivy has already sprouted. This is quite likely, given the recovery locations for these species banded at Long Point, and it may explain, at least in part, the minor cases of gracklepox incurred by banders at the tip of Long Point where poison ivy does not occur. Presumably, these birds have worn some of the toxin off their feet between the time they were exposed and their arrival on the Point by simply walking and bathing. One could counter, reasonably enough, that these birds originated from the mainland and that the same wearing off of the toxin has taken place. This brings us to the second similar point, which is that grackles and red-wings simply pad about on fresh poison ivy stems at the Old Cut station and pass it

on to banders very shortly afterward. This is generally accepted. Quite likely, poison ivy toxin originates from both local and distant sources, with varying degrees of virulence.

Interestingly enough, gracklepox is not a problem in the fall. I assume this is due to the fact that the birds are not actually walking on the poison ivy. They may walk among the mature plants, but most probably do not light on the plants which are usually too frail to support them.

I have questioned other banders about gracklepox, but no one seems to have had any of the problems we have encountered at Long Point. At Point Reyes Bird Observatory, where poison oak (*Toxicodendron quercifolium*) is rampant, apparently no bander has contracted poison oak symptoms that could not be explained by simple contact with the plant (Geoff Geupel, pers. comm.). If there are banders out there to whom gracklepox sounds familiar, my recommendation to you is to wash your hands...often!

Literature Cited

Tasker, R.R. 1987. Gracklepox. *Long Point Bird Observatory Newsletter*: 19(1):9.

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(Editor's Note: Following is the first of several articles on computers, that will appear in EBBA's Regional section)

What Can A Computer Do for Me?

Computers are fascinating things. They do their tasks silently and with great speed. They rebuke you when you hit the wrong key and 99% of the time, they let you correct your mistake. There are thousands of commercial programs, some costing a mere \$3.00 or so, such as public domain or shareware programs, and then there are those that cost many hundreds of dollars. If you follow directions, for the most part they are easy to operate and it doesn't take a Ph.D. to operate them. Let's face it, elementary school children now routinely use them as part of their educational development.

Suppose you have a computer, let's say a computer that emulates the IBM-XT-type machine. What is said here applies to all types of computers; however, the more advanced computers react slightly different. But for the pur-

pose of this paper, let's say you have this machine and you have about 512 Kilobytes of memory, about the minimum required for most programs today, and that you have one floppy disk drive and a modest 30Mb hard drive. Assume that this machine has been prepared by your dealer and it is ready to go. We'll talk about the details of how this is done much later in this paper.

You flip the switch and the monitor reflects a quick memory check. All is well, and you see on your screen the prompt: "C:\>". (For the purpose of this paper, anything you will see on the computer screen will be in quotes, but the quotation marks are not part of the screen text.) Now what do you do?

There are various choices based on the directories already in place on your hard drive. Generally, if the operating system is in place, there might be a subdirectory named: "C:\DOS". The back slash indicates that DOS is a directory name that is at a lower level than the root (C:\), which always is the top-most directory. Suppose you purchased a program such as "Quicken," a checkbook program by Intuit Corporation. (It is a very popular program which generally sells for about \$40 and really excels in keeping your budget in shape.) You will want to create a subdirectory for it, because all program that have numerous files should be placed in a separate directory. This keeps the hard drive organized and eliminates the chance of running files with similar names but belong to other programs.

To create a directory, you want to be sure that you are in the root directory--where the prompt says "C:\>". If it says just "C:>", then we need to do some minor programming to fix that. Let's do that first.

In the root directory there is a file called AUTOEXEC.BAT. BAT stands for batch file. A batch file is a file or listing of commands that gets executed one at a time. This particular batch file has one special property, it is run every time you turn the machine on and also when you execute a system reset. In order to change something in this file, we need to use a text editor. The text editor is called EDLIN.COM. It is a very basic text editor without many of the fancy features found in other text editors, but it does the job. It is also a bit complicated, but once you get the hang of it, it's not difficult to work with.

At the "C:>", type: EDLIN AUTOEXEC.BAT (enter). (You must depress the enter key after every command.) The screen will now refresh and you will see the following:

End of Input File
*

It waits patiently for your next move. The asterisk is the program prompt. You should now depress the letter 'L' and

the program, AUTOEXEC.BAT will list out. It might say something like this:

```
1:PATH=C:\C:\DOS;  
2:DATE  
3:TIME
```

If your computer has a built-in clock, you do not need the entries in lines 2 and 3, but for the time being, we want to do two things: we want to create a path for Quicken (assume you are going to place this program in a subdirectory called QUICK), so you would type the number 1. This would move your cursor (indicated by an asterisk prompt) to the beginning of the number one line but below it, like this:

```
1:PATH=C:\C:\DOS;  
1:*
```

You should depress function key 3 (F3) (this replicates what is already there, and now your cursor is just beyond the semicolon after the word DOS) and you should type \QUICK; and (enter). Now the cursor goes back to the first indent point and when you do 'L' again, your screen looks like this:

```
1:PATH=C:\C:\DOS;\QUICK;  
2:DATE  
3:TIME
```

Now we need to add a like (ONLY if this line doesn't already exist), and we do this by typing 4I (the letter I either in upper or lower case) and (enter).

Now the prompt will be waiting for you at:

```
4:*
```

This is a new line. You would type "PROMPT \$p\$g" (without the quotes of course, and yes, those things before the small p and the small g are dollar signs!). The prompt will now display the following:

```
4:PROMPT $p$g  
5:*
```

But we don't want another line, so how do we get out of it? We use the function key 6 (F6) which adds an end-of-file marker on line 5 which looks like ^Z, usually referred to as a 'Control Z'. When you do this, you will land back at the left where an asterisk awaits your command.

If what you did looks good, we can save the file; but if it doesn't, that is if you got confused, then you should type the letter q, which means QUIT but do not save. And then you try the whole procedure again.

To save, on the other hand, you type the letter E, which in this case means EXIT and SAVE. Now you will not see the DOS

prompt with the back slashes in it because you haven't run the AUTOEXEC.BAT program yet. Remember, that occurs only at start up; but we can hasten that event along a bit by resetting the computer. This can be done from the keyboard by depressing three keys at the same time: CTRL, ALT, and DEL. If all goes well, you will see your correct prompt. Now we still have to create the directory and we do this by typing at C:\> the following: MD QUICK (enter). MD stands for MAKE DIRECTORY. To go to this directory now, you can type CD \QUICK (from any subdirectory, or if you are in the root directory, you may omit the back-slash). CD means CHANGE DIRECTORY. And if things go according to Hoyle, your system prompt will now read: C:\QUICK.

Most commercial programs have installation programs. The documentation that comes with the program will let you know whether it does or not. But you still have to know how to do it if the program doesn't have a set-up facility. When it doesn't, you generally will be told to transfer the files from the floppy disk to the hard drive. When you are in the directory you have set aside for the program, you insert the floppy disk in drive A, label side up with the oblong disk slot going in first. (Never touch the media as it is the oils on your finger that can upset things.) Close the latch (usually turns down depending on the type of drive) and type at the C:\QUICK> prompt the following: COPY A:.*

The asterisks in this instance are 'wildcards'. You're telling the computer to copy any file that is on the floppy in drive A. File names consist of either single words up to eight characters or what of up to eight characters, a period, and then another one to three characters. For example: Q.EXE is the program file for Quicken. Once you've made these transfers, you should follow the information that comes with the program. After awhile, as you get more experience with computers, you tend to try the program before reading the book. In other words, you only read the book when you get into trouble and things don't work as intended. That's a bad practice when dealing with the very large programs.

In this paper I have covered how to update your autoexec.bat file, particularly the path command, which is important (otherwise the computer can't find your files). I've told you how to start a program and how to load data from a floppy to your hard drive. This should get you started. In the next edition, I'll build on this foundation by talking more about files, types of files, how you interact with your printer, and how to format disks. (Please do not go exploring with the format command. It is real easy to wipe out a hard drive that way. If you must format a floppy disk, it's ALWAYS: Format A: or Format B: but NEVER C:!

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