

SOME RECORDS OF BANDED WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS

By JULIAN L. DUSI

The White-throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis*, is one of our common winter residents. We enjoy its plaintive song and independent attitude; so we are quite happy to hear the first arrivals of early fall and sadly acknowledge that they have all gone in the late spring. Since these little birds inhabit our backyards, it is interesting and easy to include them in our birdbanding programs, so that we may learn more about them. This paper is a report of the results from banding White-throated Sparrows at a banding station at Auburn, Alabama, from December, 1950, to the present season (Fall, 1954 to Spring, 1955).

White-throated Sparrows are primarily ground-feeding birds. This makes them an easily trapped species. The writer used several types of ground traps: clover leaf and Potter-type traps of four and single-cell designs. A large four-celled Potter-type trap proved the most satisfactory of those used. The cells were 15 inches in each dimension with doors five inches square. This trap was easily accessible to the birds and they did not hesitate to enter it, as they did the other traps with smaller doors and chambers. The traps were baited with cracked grain, bread, oatmeal, or nut kernels. In addition to the traps a mist net was used, but it did not prove as efficient as the traps.

No trapping schedule was adhered to. The traps were set when they could be tended and left unset at other times.

When the birds were caught they were banded with a Fish and Wildlife Service numbered band and also a colored band, with a specific color used for each banding season. In that way they could be specifically identified when caught again and could be visually identified as birds from this station, banded during a given season, when they were observed on the area. Each fall when the migrants arrived, few bands would be evident among them all. By late spring, practically all of the birds visiting the banding station would be banded, thus the effort applied to catching unbanded birds could be regulated so that a nearly complete catch resulted.

The results of this banding program are quite interesting. The banding of the birds at this one station only, in Auburn, showed that the birds did not range far from the station. Every time birds were observed at any distance from the station, they were checked for color bands. Birds with color bands were never seen any farther away than on the lots adjacent to the station. Outside of this area many unbanded birds could be seen, while on the station area practically all of the birds would be marked.

During the four past seasons for banding White-throated Sparrows, 73 birds were banded. Of these seven or 9.6 per cent have returned to the station one or more times during subsequent banding seasons and were retaken. The band numbers of the returning birds, the dates they were banded, and the return dates are listed in that order following:

20-136303—banded Dec. 17, 1950; returned April 6, 1953, Nov. 11, 1953, and Mar. 13, 1955.

20-136310—banded Jan. 26, 1951; returned Dec. 6, 1953, and Mar. 5, 1955.

20-136315—banded Jan. 27, 1951; returned Jan. 30, 1955.

20-136324—banded Feb. 1, 1951; returned Jan. 2, 1952.

20-136353—banded April 5, 1953; returned Nov. 30, 1953.

20-136359—banded April 29, 1953; returned Oct. 29, 1953, and Feb. 9, 1955.

20-136369—banded Nov. 6, 1953; returned Jan. 30, 1955.

From these records a number of interesting facts and inferences about the birds can be concluded. Birds, numbers 20-136303, 20-136310 and 20-136315, were banded during the 1950-51 season and were most recently retrapped in 1955. If they were hatched the breeding season before they were banded, they would be at least four and a half years old when last trapped. That is rather old for a small migratory bird! It would also mean that these birds had made at least six migrations southward and four trips northward. If they nested in the northern edge of the United States, that would be a total migration distance of at least 7,000 miles. On the six migrations southward it would mean that they had managed each time to locate the small area of land on which the banding station is located. That was very precise navigation.

Numbers 20-136324 and 20-136353 did not return to the trap during the 1954-55 season. This may indicate several things: that they simply were not trapped this season; that they went to some other area; or that they became a part of the high mortality rate, which is probably the reason so few birds ever return to a banding station.

Bird number 20-136359, banded on April 5, 1953, has returned each year since. Number 20-136369, banded Nov. 6, 1953, returned the following season, the current one.

Banded birds were often caught more than once each season; some of them became frequent visitors. The variable trapping program prevented them from being nuisances because the traps did not provide a constant source of food for them.

One interesting aspect of the banding program conducted was, that no birds banded by another bird bander have ever been taken at the writer's station at Auburn. Since it has been the only banding station in Auburn and probably the only one in at least a 30-mile radius, there was little chance of catching birds banded elsewhere.

Aside from the data obtained, this banding program afforded the writer a much better acquaintance with the behavior, plumages and morphology of the White-throated Sparrow and provided much enjoyable recreation.

Department of Zoology-Entomology
Alabama Polytechnic Institute
Auburn, Alabama

WHITE PELICAN RECORDS FROM WHEELER RESERVOIR

By THOMAS Z. ATKESON

White pelicans nest in northwestern United States and western Canada. They migrate diagonally across the continent and winter in Florida and along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Larger than their brown cousins, these white, black-winged-tipped birds have an overall length of nearly six feet and a wing spread of nine feet. In migration they make irregular stops in the Tennessee Valley of Northern Alabama. This is no recent development since Howell in his "Birds of Alabama" cites records from Leighton and Guntersville. However, the impoundment of the T.V.A. reservoirs and the establishment of the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge have undoubtedly caused these big fellows to stop more often.

Examination of the records show that the birds were recorded on Wheeler reservoir in 1941, 1943, 1944, 1946, 1948, 1950, 1951, and 1953. Numbers have varied from single individuals to flocks of at least 21 birds. Occurrences have been most frequent in the fall and early winter, with the earliest recorded on October 10 and the latest on January 9. Spring records have begun on May 9 and continued through June 1.

The pelicans have shown a definite preference for wide, open expanses of shallow backwater. Sight records have come most frequently from around the mouths of Round Island Creek and Beulah Bay, an open stretch of shallow water dotted with small, mud-flat islands, now part of the Swan Creek Public Hunting Area. On Wheeler Refuge records have been confined to the western end, usually from Garth Slough and from the Flint Creek embayment. The unique appearance of these birds has made collecting

unnecessary. They have been seen by all Wheeler Refuge personnel, past and present, by TVA employees, State Conservation officers, by the wildlife artist, David C. Hulse, Game Management Agent Leo Martin, and by numerous local people. While all these records are for Wheeler Reservoir, the birds probably occur on Wilson and Guntersville reservoirs as well, although no records are available.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge
Decatur, Alabama

GROUND DOVE RECORDS FROM THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

By THOMAS Z. ATKESON

The little Ground Dove, *Columbigallina passerina passerina*, diminutive relative of the Mourning Dove, is a typical bird of the coastal plains of the deep south. In Alabama, these small doves are usually limited to the lower third of the State, from the Black Belt southward, but sometimes they get an itching foot, or wing, and a case of wanderlust.

In the Tennessee River Valley, where the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintains the big Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, near Decatur, refuge employees keep a constant check on avian visitors. They have found the sparrow-sized Ground Dove a fairly frequent one. For example, they are recorded for 1942, 1947, 1950, 1951, 1953, and 1954. There were two records for 1950, two for 1954, and a single record for each of the other years. The accuracy of these records should not be questioned. They were made by L. S. Givens, former Wheeler Refuge manager and now assistant supervisor of refuges, refuge employees H. H. Grammer and E. A. Byford, and by wildlife artist David C. Hulse. In the course of the southwide Mourning Dove study, Hulse trapped and banded one of the little doves in 1950. He found another dead near Priceville in 1954. A study skin of the latter is now in the refuge collection.

There is only a single spring record, a bird seen on May 5, 1953. All other records are for fall and early winter. There is one in September, three in October, two in December, and one in January. The earliest was September 23 and the latest January 17. A single record was from Madison County; all others were from Morgan County. While these birds often form small flocks, all Tennessee Valley records were of single individuals or pairs.