

SOME ASPECTS OF BANDING

By S. G. LANE

How often do we hear remarks that a species is resident in a particular location, yet it is obviously a migrant in another. Such remarks are usually based on visual observations—birds of the species being seen throughout the year in a certain location. Observations of this nature do not necessarily prove that the species concerned is "resident" in that area.

Writing of the Eastern Silvereye, *Zosterops lateralis*, A. J. North (1909) indicated a variety of plumages in winter flocks near Sydney, and drew the conclusion that these were simply transition stages between summer and winter plumage. It is now known that there is little plumage change in individual Silvereyes except that normally expected from moult, wear and time/season of the year, but no obvious and/or extensive seasonal change. The one important fact that was apparently overlooked by North was that the composition of the population was changing. This mistake was easily made as seasonal plumage changes occur in many species and the means to mark and determine individuals was not at that time readily available.

It is now known from banding that some Silvereyes from Tasmania winter in New South Wales, individuals reaching as far north as the Queensland border and probably into south-eastern Queensland. The longest recovery so far concerns a bird banded at Hastings Point near Murwillumbah on July 3, 1965, and recovered at Don, near Devonport, Tasmania, on May 14, 1966, 995 miles south south west of the banding location (see *Australian Bird Bander* 4: 82).

Some of the Tasmanian forms have been retrapped regularly in wintering areas near Sydney or "en route" to or from more northern areas. On the other hand, a large number of Silvereyes remain in Tasmania throughout the winter, a fact which led some ornithologists to doubt Dr Keast's theory (1958) of the winter migration.

It seems that many Silvereyes never leave Tasmania, while others make regular winter migrations involving journeys of hundreds of miles.

Welcome Swallows, *Hirundo neoxena*, are to be found in the Sydney district throughout the year but are the ones that breed here, in fact, the same birds that are found here in the winter months? My own limited banding records for this species indicate (negatively) that individuals change over, possibly birds breeding in more southern latitudes wintering here while those that bred here are wintering further north.

On the other hand in another Sydney suburb, Dr A. M. Gwynn has had swallows resident throughout the year. Perhaps this is another case where some birds remain in their natal area while others of the same species migrate.

One morning while mist netting in a small swamp, I caught and banded 41 Reed-Warblers, *Acrocephalus australis*, in just over two hours. Six nets were used in an area extending about 50 yards wide and 100 yards in length. Visual and audible observations indicated that there could have been from four to six pairs of these birds in the area. The number caught was far in excess of these figures and it is most unlikely that every bird in the area was netted. (Lane 1966 a.)

The recent comment (1966) by L. L. Burgess regarding Scarlet Honeyeaters "sharing this large bush with a pair of Eastern Spinebills" reminds me of my own earlier conclusions that a few pairs of spinebills resident in the area regularly visited my garden. An analysis of my banding records (1966 b.) indicated that the population of this species seen in one location is constantly changing except, of course, when nesting is in progress.

Many similar instances come to mind. I remember having seen and been told by other observers of the one white phase Giant Petrel, *Macronectes giganteus*, that was to be seen regularly during winter concentrations of these birds off Malabar near Sydney. Subsequently, while banding albatrosses in this area "this" bird was caught and banded three times! One of the three birds was ringed on June 20, 1959, another on July 4, 1959, and the third on August 28, 1959. When handling these birds, individual differences were noted that would not be apparent when viewed at a distance through binoculars. The plumage of the first bird was noted as having "very little black flecking"; the second "a few black feathers"; and the third "a number of black flecks". Since 1959, a number of other white phase birds have also been banded in the same locality.

In much the same way, the population change of Wandering Albatrosses, *Diomedea exulans*, in the same area is very noticeable, even during a morning's banding. A cursory analysis of banding records reveals that very few Wanderers are retrapped a second time in the one season. In 1963 at Malabar (Lane 1963), 200 Wandering Albatrosses were banded and 31 retrapped during six outings. Of those retrapped, only three had been banded during the same season, one of these at Bellambi (about 30 miles south of Malabar) six days earlier.

I wonder how many banders have remarked, when removing a particular bird from a net, "I have never previously seen or heard this species in this locality." This has been my experience on numerous occasions, although I have had quite an extensive experience observing birds and considered at one time that few

species of birds would be overlooked when numerous visits and some considerable time was spent in one area.

An instance of this nature occurred in January, 1966, when I netted two Plum-headed Finches, *Aidemosyne modesta*, near Richmond, N.S.W. (Lane 1966 b) (awaiting publication). Four weeks later a further two were netted in the same place; both were juveniles. Despite numerous banding visits to this area both prior to and since that time and despite observations by many ornithologists, this species has not otherwise been recorded from that district.

D. W. Lamm and S. J. Wilson (1966) mentioned similar instances in their Brindibella Range Survey.

At Leura, N.S.W., Mrs. R. E. Vellenga (1966) was of the opinion that probably up to 50 Satin Bower-birds, *Ptilorhynchus violaceus*, visited her garden and she was surprised when I suggested that she would almost certainly need twelve dozen colour combinations, if not more, in order to commence her colour banding study on these birds. In three and a half months she had banded 160 Satin Bower-birds in her garden.

These and many similar banding and observation experiences have shown that despite the undisputed status of many observers, species may be easily overlooked by observation alone and that unless individuals can be positively identified by marking, colour banding, banding and subsequent retrapping, very incorrect conclusions may be reached.

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Letter-winged Kites in the Northern Territory.—On the night of 1st/2nd October, 1967, we camped at Brunette Bore on the Barkly Tableland. At 0520 hours I noticed a bird fly overhead, which in the half light I suspected to be a Letter-winged Kite, *Elanus scriptus*, a minute later a second bird arrived and perched on the top-most vane of the windmill, and identity was then certain. The other two members of our party were alerted, and within the next hour

we were treated to the spectacle of 16 of the birds about us, perched in a low bush on the dam wall and on the upper vanes of the windmill, or in casual flight, at times being disturbed by the faintings of a Black Falcon, *Falco subniger*. They appeared quite oblivious of our presence. By 0800 hours all the birds had drifted away to some distant vegetation to the south-west, doubtless to roost there for the rest of the daylight hours. The congregating of the birds in this manner impressed us as a communal gathering after the night's hunting, and in this connection I should mention the irruption of rats, probably *Rattus rattus*, then in progress throughout the Barkly Tableland. By night they were observed at the bores in considerable numbers, with burrows everywhere.—A. BLACKBURN, 10 Score Road, Gisborne, N.Z.

Breeding plumage of the Red-necked Stint.—Although the Red-necked Stint, *Erolia ruficollis*, is the most numerous of the migratory waders to visit Australia, it has seldom been recorded in full breeding dress. It is probably for this reason that the standard Australian field guides do not include a description of this plumage.

This note is prompted by the appearance of a Red-necked Stint in full breeding dress at Lauderdale on September 2, 1967. It was also seen at the same place by D. R. Milledge and myself on September 10. Stints in Australia are usually rather drab birds and we were surprised by the brightness of this individual, with the throat and fore-neck a bright cinnamon—almost orange-red. The sides of the head and neck were also cinnamon-red and the upper parts and wings had the feathers edged with the same colour, giving the bird a brown appearance.

In winter plumage this stint appears pale-grey above and white below with, in some birds, indistinct grey markings on the throat. The feathers of the back, wing-coverts and tertials are grey with a black mesial streak. During the months of March, April, August and September many birds are in body moult and the presence of cinnamon edgings to the feathers of the upper parts makes many birds appear brown. Birds that over-winter in Australia almost invariably retain the grey winter dress and flocks containing both brown and grey birds are common before the departure and after the arrival of the breeding birds. At this time there is also much variation in the throat markings. The Lauderdale bird is, however, the first I have seen in full breeding plumage.—D. G. THOMAS, 9 Lallaby Road, Moonah, Tasmania.