

1937

Bird Banding at Parsons College

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Parsons College

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BIRD BANDING AT PARSONS COLLEGE

WESLEY H. BARTLETT

Although a number of operators have had charge of the station, headquarters has always been located at Parsons College. In January, 1931, the station was opened on the Parsons College campus, but the misdirected interest of students soon necessitated a change, and a small wooded tract, known as "Old Settler's Park," just northeast of the city limits was chosen. Here, during the greater part of each winter and spring, the traps have been set and operated. Summer months have seen other and more convenient locations utilized. A sub-station has been operated for three years during the Chimney Swift migration on chimneys in town.

During the past banding year at Parsons a total of twenty-four species has been banded. Probably those of most interest are the Migrant Shrike, Grinnell's Water Thrush, Wood Thrush, and Lincoln Sparrow. The Slate-colored Junco leads with a total of 254 individuals banded. The Chimney Swift plays a close second with 251 individuals, while the Bob-whites numbered fifty-five individuals banded. Most of the other species banded numbered less than twenty-five. A total of 730 individuals has been banded during this banding year up to April 1st. Banded birds meeting death during this year have numbered eight. Returns numbered sixteen, all of which were banded here previously.

The past winter was extremely hard on banding activities, which almost ceased. Had this period not been lost the banding might have brought some interesting winter results. At present thirteen traps of five types are in operation.

Since the opening of the station 5188 individuals of sixty-four species have been banded. From the chimney-top sub-station 2488 Chimney Swifts have been banded. The Slate-colored Junco is second in line, with 954 individuals banded, and the White-throated Sparrow is third with 445. Interesting species, besides those mentioned before, are: American Coot, Grasshopper Sparrow, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Red-tailed Hawk, Double-crested Cormorant, Myrtle Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Philadelphia Vireo, Winter Wren, Cedar Waxwing, and Ovenbird.¹

¹ See "Comparative Chart of Bird Banding Activities of Parsons College, Fairfield, Ia." attached to this paper.

Table I—A Comparative Chart of Bird Banding Activities of Parsons College, Fairfield, Ia., Jan., 1931, to Apr., 1937 (A year's record is kept from June to June)

	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	Total
	-31	-32	-33	-34	-35	-36	-37	
Junco, Slate-colored	56	67	104	157	160	156	254	954
Sparrow, White Throat	19	2	51	32	98	227	16	445
Blue Jay	13	5	12	13	75	74	24	216
Sparrow, Tree	13	5		3	3		4	28
Sparrow, Song	12	1	2	13	42	12	13	95
Cardinal	9	8	2	2	14	6	27	68
Chickadee, Black-capped	6	6	1	5		2	3	23
Sparrow, Fox	5	2	12	13	34	28	9	103
Thrasher, Brown	4	1	38	17	24	21	28	133
Woodpecker, Downy	4			10	1	1		16
Owl, Great Horned	2							2
Nuthatch, White-breasted	2	3	4	4	3	3	7	26
Titmouse, Tufted	2	6	3	3	6	9	6	35
Meadowlark, Eastern	1							1
Woodpecker, Red Bellied	1			1	2			4
Woodpecker, Hairy	1			1				2
Coot, American	1			1	2	1		5
Towhee, Red-eyed		2	9		1	1	1	14
Cowbird		1	10		14	1		26
Flicker, Northern		1			2	4		7
Swift, Chimney			1001	1231	4	1	251	2488
Catbird			9	9	6	2	3	29
Sparrow, Lincoln			5	4	2	5	2	18
Yellowthroat, Maryland			4					4
Grackle, Bronzed			3	5	6	26	10	50
Sparrow, Harris			3	4	6	2	5	20
Thrush, Wood			2				1	3
Owl, Screech			2		1			3
Sparrow, Grasshopper			2	15				17
Sparrow, Chipping			2	3		1		6
Kinglet, Golden-crowned			2			1		3
Phoebe			1					1
Wren, House			1	30	7	2	5	45
Ovenbird			1		1	1		3
Cuckoo, Yellow-billed			1					1
Bluebird			1	10	5	1		17
Robin			1	7	4	10		22
Sparrow, White-crowned			1	1	1	3		6
Dove, Mourning			1	9	4			14
Crow			1					1
Owl, Barred			1					1
Bob-white				18	59	13	55	145
Blackbird, Red-wing				15		1		16
Swallow, Barn				14	8			22
Shrike, Migrant				3			1	4
Oriole, Baltimore				3				3
Hawk, Red-tailed				2				2
Thrush, Hermit				1	1			2
Sparrow, Field				1				1
Starling				1				1
Woodpecker, Red-headed				1		2		3
Grossbeak, Rose-breasted					2	8		10
Hawk, Sparrow					3	3		6
Warbler, Magnolia					1			1
Killdeer					1			1

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BIRD BANDING

185

	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	Total
	-31	-32	-33	-34	-35	-36	-37	
Cormorant, Double-crested					1			1
Sandpiper, Spotted					5			5
Warbler, Myrtle					2			2
Waxwing, Cedar						1		1
Vireo, Philadelphia						1		1
Wren, Winter						1		1
Kinglet, Ruby-crowned							3	3
Water-thrush, Grinnells							1	1
Goldfinch							1	1
Year's Totals	151	110	1293	1662	611	631	730	5188

The baits we use are commercial chickfeeds, cracked corn, suet, and water. The type of trap known as the "Government Sparrow Trap" has proved the most satisfactory of all the traps we have tried. A false-bottom and a funnel-entrance tray type has also given good results. A drop trap, baited with water and grain, is operated from a laboratory window and is proving satisfactory for robins.

The drudgery of a banding station has its rewards in the unexpected thrills which break the monotony of the catches. Usually the thrill consists of a return from a previous year, but if it is an extra-special thrill, one may have a "Foreign" return, as the birds banded at some other banding station are called. Then too, there is the thrill of receiving a postcard announcing that one of "your" birds has been trapped or killed elsewhere. Individual returns also are often very interesting. One cardinal returned at least once a year during five consecutive years. A junco which was banded in 1931 wearing normal plumage, was recaptured in 1932 and was at this time mottled with large spots of white. In 1934 it was again recaptured, still mottled, but in 1935 the plumage of the bird was again normal. It was also noticed that this bird was much larger than the average junco. Smaller thrills come sometimes from the numerous repeats. Some birds seem to develop what has been called the "trap habit," and repeat often. Individuals have been captured, released, and recaptured in another trap farther down the trap line within fifteen minutes after the first capture. Then there are the migrating birds which remain about the station for a lengthy visit. One song sparrow repeated forty-seven times in forty-nine consecutive days.

Foreign returns here have been entirely limited to chimney swifts. We have captured eight chimney swifts that have been banded elsewhere — seven of them by Musselman of Quincy, Illinois. A number of swifts which we banded have been recaptured elsewhere — two in Minnesota, one in Tennessee, and one in

Louisiana. A junco was captured at Martin, North Dakota two weeks after it was banded here. Two red-tailed hawks were banded as fledglings from a nest in a tall tree on Decoration Day, 1934. Exactly six months later one of them was shot at Cuero, Texas.

In operating the station we have attempted to maintain safety for the birds. This necessitates much work in attempting to keep the region in the vicinity of the traps free from dogs, cats, and small mammals which might kill birds, and to prevent hunting and trespassing by man, if possible. Snakes sometimes kill a few birds for food. Some of the birds which might be listed as occasionally detrimental to the trapped birds are shrikes, crows, English sparrows, starlings and some birds of prey. We must remember, however, that all these birds do not always destroy, and are also doing much good. We must take great care and thought before we kill such individuals, and must also remember that the species as a whole probably is not detrimental.

One phase of the zoological work carried on at Parsons has thrown a little light on the fate of some of the banded birds. For about three years owl pellets have been collected in the vicinity of the station and elsewhere, for the purpose of studying the food habits of owls in this region. From a group of barred owl pellets the band of a junco was recovered. The following year pellets yielded up the bands of three blue jays and five bob-whites. Thus it might appear that an owl in the area of a banding station is a menace to the birds, but this is not actually the case. The bob-whites were taken during a blizzard period when there was a particularly heavy concentration of bob-whites in the Park. Fifty-four individual bob-whites were caught within a week in the few acres of woodland where they had taken refuge from the surrounding fields. The study of the food habits of the owls in the territory has shown that they are considerably more beneficial than harmful. As an example, permit me to cite the case of one long-eared owl which resided in the cemetery near the banding station from December, 1933, to March, 1934. During that time all pellets from this owl were collected and the contained bones identified. The results, when totaled, showed that during the approximately three-month-long period, this one owl had eaten 355 destructive field mice and shrews, and had taken, in the same period, only three birds — and one of these was an English sparrow.

Some interesting high spots of the years of banding are: the coot that mistook the Library lawn for a body of water, was cap-

tured, banded, deloused, measured and weighed before being released; the cormorant which flew into an automobile headlight and after having been banded was released to be shot at Dallas City, Illinois, a month later; a seemingly healthy and thriving downy woodpecker with only one leg; another downy which laid an egg in the woodpecker trap; a golden-crowned kinglet so tangled in beggar's lice that it was picked up, unable to fly; a brown thrasher captured and banded three weeks after the "last" migrating thrasher had been seen; and the house wren that was rescued from a cat and found to be a return from the previous year.

PARSONS COLLEGE,
FAIRFIELD, IOWA.