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# *The Passenger Pigeon*

## TO ENCOURAGE STUDY OF WISCONSIN BIRDS

Vol. II

August, 1940

No. 8

### WATERFOWL BANDING IN SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

By E. L. LOYSTER, Milwaukee

*Supervisor, State-Wide Museum Project*

For ten successive years I have watched the multitudes of waterfowl gather on our Wisconsin lakes with the arrival of the spring thaw. In 1934, after reading much published material on the subject, I decided to attempt some waterfowl banding. Many mistakes common to the beginner were made and the attempt was unsuccessful. I concluded that this sort of thing was accomplished only by experts after many years of experience. However, with my former mistakes in mind and having the necessary time and material, I decided to try again this spring (1940).



*E. L. Lyster and A. Nikora shown banding a male Baldpate captured in the Double "B" Trap shown in the background. This trap also known as traps "A" and "C" as separate traps built as one.*

Working in cooperation with the Milwaukee Public Museum and the State-wide Museum Project, we set up our trailer camp at Lake Maria. Operations were carried out at Lake Maria in Green Lake County, Fox Lake in Dodge County and neighboring ponds.

The first open water in the county appeared on a small pond on the farm of Walter Davison, two miles south of Markesan, Green Lake County. Duck food consisting of wild celery, sago pondweed, smartweed, arrowhead, sweet flag and watercress were present in ample quantities. The pond is about one hundred fifty yards in diameter. First arrivals were Lesser Scaup, Common Mallard, Pintail, and a few Redheads.

The traps were constructed of two inch mesh chicken wire pegged down around the bottom with forked stakes and supported by willow

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poles which were inserted into the mud and drawn together at a common center at the top of the trap. The two traps on Davison pond were known as trap A and trap C; both were single entrance Water Lilly Leaf traps. Trap A had a water entrance with a seventy-five foot woven wire lead. The lead was supported on metal fence posts. Trap C was a land entrance trap which was conceived after watching the birds walk completely around trap A. The land entrance trap was constructed for those birds that desired to enter from the land side. Cracked corn, oats and cob corn comprised the bait. After six weeks of banding in Trap A and Trap C combined, we recorded one Redhead, two Common Mallards, twenty-seven Baldpates, and twenty-two Blue-winged Teal; a total of fifty-two specimens.

The percentage of birds caught in each trap was about the same. In the case of the Blue-winged Teal and the Baldpate, there was a slightly larger number of males caught.

Trap B, a double land entrance trap, was placed on a gentle sloping piece of land on the West marsh of Fox Lake. A collecting cage in this case was placed on the water side. This was done because the trap had to be approached from the land side. In the construction of this trap, ten willow poles were arched to meet at the center and were covered with 2" mesh chicken wire. This marsh area is well known to many sportsmen as good water-fowl territory. Large numbers of marsh feeders congregate here both spring and fall. Of special note was the number of Baldpates present here. Net results of six weeks banding at this station were fifty-nine Blue-winged Teal, twenty-seven Baldpates, one Pintail, one Green-winged Teal and one American Coot; a total of eighty-nine ducks.

Trap D, constructed on the Southwest shore of Lake Maria, Green Lake County on the Schultz farm, was the largest trap used in the operations of this year. The maximum measurement of this trap was approximately 60 x 40 feet, and combined two land entrances and two water entrances. It would appear in vertical profile as a large clover-leaf with a collecting cage placed at the base or land side of the trap. Construction was somewhat retarded by the heavy ice on Lake Maria. Operations did not commence on Lake Maria until about April 20th. At this time there were several thousand Canada Geese and as many ducks feeding on open holes in the very heavy icepack. Two inch mesh chicken wire and metal fence posts were used in the construction.

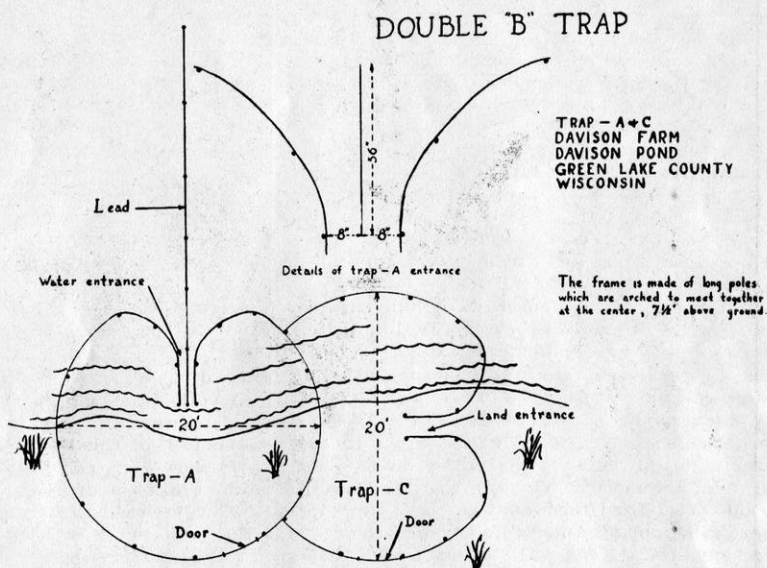
The results of five weeks banding at this station were nineteen Baldpates, and forty-nine Blue-winged Teal, a total of sixty-eight birds. Slightly more than half of the birds banded in this case were males; this applied to both Baldpates and Blue-winged Teal.

Trap E, a single land entrance Water Lilly Leaf trap, was placed on a small pond formed by the spring run-off on the Gram farm two miles south of Markesan, Wisconsin, Green Lake County. The pond was about one-half acre in area. A considerable amount of weed seed was present and it was this item of food that attracted the concentration of several hundred ducks. In two weeks of operation we managed to band seven Baldpates, four males and three females. The trap operations ceased when the water disappeared.

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Trap F was placed on the west shore of Lake Maria in an area of heavy concentration on a small muddy flat. This trap was comprised of a single circular pen constructed of willow poles and two inch wire mesh with a ten foot drop gate thirty-six inches high which operated from a long pull wire. The trap was in operation May 16th to May 21st, but had to be discarded because of interference by live-stock. No birds were taken in this trap.

The number of birds banded for the spring season were as follows: one Green-winged Teal, one Pintail, one American Coot, two Common Mallards, one Redhead, eighty-nine Baldpates and one hundred twenty-five Blue-winged Teal, or a total of two hundred twenty birds.



*This trap designed and built by E. L. Loyster and set up on a three acre pond near Markesan, Wisconsin, caught 1 Redhead, 2 Mallards, 27 Baldpates and 22 Blue-winged Teal in the spring of 1940. Both land and water entrances attracted an equal number of birds.*

Many of the birds were caught several times in the same trap and many were repeats from our traps in the near vicinity. All stations were within a six mile area so that no real migration record could be worked out. Birds taken in the Lake Maria area were later retaken at Fox Lake and vice versa.

The concentration of Baldpates in this area was notable and has never been observed before in my ten years of experience in this region.

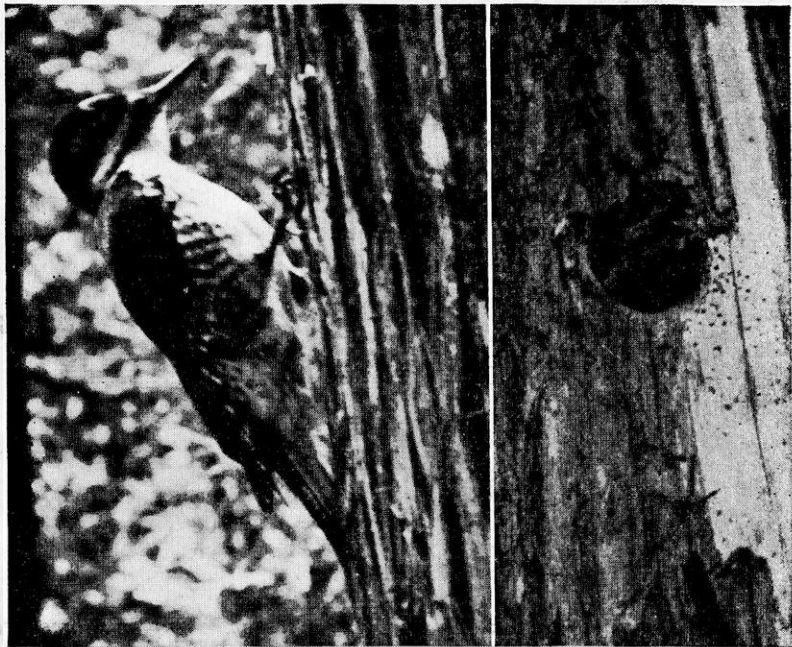
Another interesting observation was two Holboell's Grebes on Lake Maria on May 7th. These birds were evidently a pair and spent several days feeding on the lake. Several hundred Double-crested Cormorants arrived on May 8th and stayed several weeks migrating between the numerous lakes in this region. The Ruddy Duck was very common in small flocks on Lake Maria this year. A limited number of Shovelers were in evidence at all of our traps, but we were unable to band any of this species.

The writer closed the field camp and returned to Milwaukee on May 16th.



Mr. Walter Wilson, a federal forester at the Riley Creek, C. C. Camp, located the nesting cavity of a pair of Arctic Three-toed Woodpeckers in a dense cedar swamp near Springstead Creek, Price County, Wisconsin, about two weeks previous to June 6, 1940, when it was examined by the Milwaukee Public Museum staff after being reported to them.

The swamp in which the nest was found came within several hundred yards of a gravel road and followed Springstead Creek inland to the south where lumbering operations were in progress. This is pointed out to show the fact that the birds were not easily disturbed as many cedars had been cut about the nest tree.



Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker and nesting hole.

—Photo Courtesy of Milwaukee Public Museum.

The opening to the nesting cavity was about 12 feet above the ground level in a cedar tree and faced the northeast. This tree was about 8 inches in diameter at the hole and the entrance was a neatly cut hole about one and three-quarters inches in diameter. The cavity was 7 to 8 inches deep. The entrance, and in fact most of the tree, was quite exposed, since many cedars had been cut and a logging road passed within about 30 feet of the nest tree.

The female bird was found to be on the nest during the first inspection, while the male was found on the nest on other occasions. On June 12, the male, female and nest stub were collected together with two newly hatched young and two addled white eggs and the shells of the two hatched birds. Immediately before collecting this group the female was observed feeding the young at intervals of ten to fifteen minutes. After an hour of observation the male also returned to the nest with food.

Arctic Three-toed Woodpeckers are known to nest only rarely in northern Wisconsin with their usual nesting range farther north. Although no search has been made to find all nesting records, it might be well to mention that Capt. B. F. Goss and A. J. Schoenbeck found two

nests of this bird with young in Oconto County in 1893. Winter records of this species in the state are uncommon even in the north probably due to a lack of qualified observers, while records for southern Wisconsin are very rare.

## "WILD BIRD NEIGHBORS" BY ALVIN PETERSON

Reviewed by MURL DEUSING

*Milwaukee Public Museum*

Here is a book of plain everyday bird observation that even the casual bird lover will appreciate. It deals with common birds that we all know and see every year, the robin, bluebird, mourning dove, and many others. In simple lucid style Mr. Peterson relates his experiences with his bird neighbors—the successes and failures of the robins building near his home, how the red-headed woodpecker stores away acorns for the winter in his oak grove, and how he surprised a cowbird on a chipping sparrow's nest. Finest of all the chapters are those on the bobwhite with their grim story of daily struggle to elude a murderous hawk. The book is richly illustrated with over a hundred photographs by the author. This work is of special interest to bird lovers of Wisconsin since all the material in the book was gathered from the vicinities of Milwaukee and LaCrosse.

## BY THE WAYSIDE

Conservation Warden Eric Moir of Prairie du Chien reports that on a cold blizzard day of February, 1940, he observed several eagles perched on dead branches over the open water in the Mississippi River about 1,000 yards below the Lynxville Dam. Below these eagles in the open water were a group of mergansers. The eagles would periodically dive down at the mergansers attempting to catch them, and actually did catch one while he was watching. The eagles could not be identified because of the severe weather conditions, but this is another record case indicating the habit of eagles taking advantage of unusual weather conditions. It is also not impossible that they were stealing fish from the mergansers. Warden Moir states that about 200 of these fish ducks wintered at this location.

Barney Wanle, representative of the Conservation Department at Horicon, reported the finding of about a dozen late nestings of pheasants in the Horicon Marsh area in August. He had previously observed considerable nesting loss to both ducks and pheasants due to the unseasonable flooding of the marsh this summer and these late nests are therefore more common for that reason. High water was reported on the marsh the last of August with abundant vegetation and large numbers of ducks are expected to stop there this fall.

## NEWS NOTES

Mr. J. M. Speirs of Champaign, Illinois, is again taking a robin census this fall and would appreciate any day by day accounts of the numbers of robins seen in a set location as well as data as to when none were seen or no observation was made. Anyone who has kept such records and may wish to assist Mr. Speirs in his study should contact him, care of Vivarium at Wright and Healy streets of that city.

Five game biologists and one junior game biologist were recently selected by the Wisconsin Conservation Department to supervise the work on research investigations of the state's waterfowl, grouse, pheasant and deer problems. All of these men ranked high in the Bureau of Personnel examinations for these positions, and it is worthy of note that all of the men chosen were members of the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology.

Game biologists include Fred R. Zimmerman on waterfowl, Irven O. Buss on pheasants, William S. Feeney on deer and Wallace Grange on grouse. Ralph C. Hopkins is the junior game biologist who will also work on deer studies.

By N. R. BARGER, Editor

*(Kindly send field notes to N. R. Barger, 132 Lathrop St., Madison, Wisconsin, at the end of each month. Use the A. O. U. order.)*

During July a number of warblers were seen in the northern part of the state and one Canada Jay was reported. Notes sent in for the period consist largely of nesting activities, many of which were later this year than usual.

Many nests of the Pied-billed Grebe were examined by Richter in Oconto County, July 1, twelve of which contained eggs numbering from one to six. They were fresh to incubated about one week, however, the majority were fresh, indicating late nesting. No nests were found with more than six eggs. At Racine, E. Prins saw two nests of the same species, from July 6 to 20. They contained five and six eggs respectively.

#### **Hérons Common—Egrets Scarce**

The Great Blue Heron, thought by many to be shrinking in numbers, had a good year in many sections. Mr. and Mrs. Backus saw large numbers in Washburn County, July 2 to 7 and some in Vilas County, July 19 to 21. The same is true of Manitowoc, Grant and Jackson Counties, where Zimmerman saw them, July 2 to 19; and at Green Bay throughout the month (Strehlow). Deusing sends in the only record received of the American Egret. It was in a Great Blue Heron Colony, June 14, but disappeared thereafter, although he searched for it repeatedly in hope that it would nest. A nest of the Green Heron contained three eggs, July 20, at Racine (E. Prins). It was in a willow tree as is commonly the case. The Black-crowned Night Heron has been seldom reported this year, except by Strehlow who saw them throughout July at Green Bay. The Least Bittern was seen in Washburn and Vilas County, July 3 to 20 (Mr. and Mrs. Backus) and at Green Bay (Strehlow). Nests were as follows: July 6, one containing one egg and one newly hatched young. July 20, one nest had four eggs and one newly hatched chick; the second had two eggs and one newly hatched chick with two fluffy chicks; the third contained three eggs and two chicks. These were by E. Prins at Racine. One nest with five eggs was observed by Richter, July 1, for Oconto County, indicating here too that they usually lay five eggs.

#### **Pintail Nesting in Oconto County**

Black Ducks spending the summer were as follows: Three in Grant County, July 22, (Zimmerman); twenty in Vilas County, July 29, (Scott); several at Green Bay throughout the month, (Strehlow) and a small number of broods in Oconto County, July 3 (Richter). The latter observer records two female Pintail with broods, July 3, for Oconto County. More Wood Duck were in Grant County than one would suppose, July 22, when Zimmerman counted 25. One female of this species was brought to Richter, July 15, which had been found dead in the city of Oconto. Strehlow reports 4 Scaup and 2 American Mergansers for Green Bay, July 6.

A Bald Eagle was seen in Vilas County, July 28, (Scott) and two by Strehlow for Green Bay, July 7. Marsh Hawks which no doubt suffered from high water this year on their nesting grounds, had a good season in the area under observation by Deusing. Strehlow records the Pigeon Hawk for July 1, 2 and 19 at Green Bay. E. Prins tells of a nest of the Sparrow Hawk in a brick silo at the top, where the birds gained entrance through a metal cone. Two young had flown and one was still in the nest, July 6. Feeney observed to immature male Sparrow Hawks in Dane County, July 12.

Two Sharp-tailed Grouse were seen in Jackson County, July 19 (Zimmerman); several in Vilas County, July 30 (Scott); and Miss Morse reported them also in Vilas County, July 8 to 16. The Bobwhite which



is rare in Racine County was heard by E. Prins, July 6. Mrs. Rogers notes that they are abundant around Green Lake this year. The same is true of Ring-necked Pheasants in all parts of the state.

The second clutch of eggs of the Florida Gallinule (8) was complete July 11, at Racine (E. Prins). This nest was much more exposed than the first nest of the year. On July 8, a nest of the Coot with 8 eggs, incubation just begun, was found by Richter, in Oconto County. Another nest contained 7 eggs. High water destroyed these nests as well as those of the Pied-billed Grebes, July 9 and 10.

#### Piping Plover at Green Bay

Strehlow reports two Piping Plover at Green Bay, July 14, and one Wilson Snipe for the same date. G. Prins observed the latter, July 30, at Racine. Three Upland Plover were seen, July 4, west of Madison by Feeney; and Strehlow reports them throughout the month for Green Bay. Miss Heisel has a record at Pound (Oconto County), July 24. Kahmann notes two Solitary Sandpipers, July 17 at Hayward; Zimmerman, two in Jackson County, July 19, and one in Manitowoc County, July 2; and the Prins Brothers report two for Racine, July 7. Lesser Yellow-legs were seen at Racine (Mrs. Rood), July 28; at Hayward (Kahmann), July 15; and at Green Bay (Strehlow). Mrs. Rood also notes one Pectoral Sandpiper at Racine, July 28. Reports of Least Sandpipers were: 9, July 17, at Hayward (Kahmann); and 1, July 16, 4, July 27 (Strehlow). Young Wilson Phalaropes were about, July 1, at Oconto (Richter).

Strehlow saw 7 Bonaparte's Gulls, July 6 and one on the 21st at Green Bay. He also reports a Forester's Tern on the latter date. Caspian Terns on the 24 and 31, and about a thousand Common Terns on the 14. Richter also mentions the Caspian Tern with Common Terns at Oconto. Black Terns nested there in a scattered colony. On July 1, nests were in all stages of development. Average clutch was three and the nests were constructed over water on rushes and weeds collected.

A Mourning Dove's nest found by E. Prins, now in use, was four or five inches high, indicating that it may have been used several times and added to. A nest of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo contained eggs the last of July at Racine (Dr. Von Jarchow). Mrs. Rogers has noticed an increase in numbers of Cuckoos about Appleton this year.

#### Subnormal Wren Nesting Reported

Mr. and Mrs. Backus mention the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker for Douglas County, July 9 to 11 and in Ashland County, July 12 to 18. Miss Morse found it in Vilas County, July 8 to 16. Yellow-bellied Flycatchers caused some excitement at Appleton, July 19, when Mrs. Rogers identified a female that was captured. Interesting to southern observers is the Canada Jay, reported by Miss Morse for Vilas County, July 8 to 16. Inquiry on the part of E. Prins and E. Hanson concerning the nesting status of the House Wren this year has showed them far below their usual numbers. Still worse is the situation with the Prairie Marsh Wrens according to Richter. One marsh where he usually finds them contained none this year, but the rushes were thinnest ever. This condition he blames on the muskrat and carp, the latter perhaps the more. Miss Morse mentions the Short-billed Marsh Wren for Vilas County, July 8 to 16. Five Shrike nestlings were just leaving the nest, July 14, in Dane County (Feeney). He also noted other young at about the same date elsewhere. On July 18, Mr. and Mrs. Backus observed Black and White Warblers feeding young in Vilas County. Yellow Warblers had departed from the Milwaukee region by July 15 (Deusing), but Redstarts were still nesting. While in Vilas County, July 8 to 16, Miss Morse noted the Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, Pine, Connecticut, Mourning, Redstart, Chestnut-sided, and Oven-bird warblers. Mr. and Mrs. Backus reported the latter two from Vilas and Douglas Counties respectively during July. The Black-throated Green Warbler was seen at Green Bay by Strehlow in July.

Bobolinks were still feeding young, July 6 at Racine (E. Prins). He noted that the buff on the male had faded to white at that time. Mrs.



Rogers noted the young out of the nest, July 24, for Appleton. Feeney noticed a flock of Red-winged Blackbirds flying directly into a light breeze, July 3, in the direction he was driving. They were traveling at a ground speed of 30 miles per hour, or between 30 and 35 miles per hour air speed. Miss Morse observed the Orchard Oriole in Vernon County, July 5; and the Brewer's Blackbird in Vilas County, July 8 to 16. Deusing noticed the latter as well as Red-wings and Cowbirds flocking before the end of the month. Two Cowbirds that G. Prins raised by hand turned out to be male and female, as the molt in July brought out. They were quite tame and would perch on their shoulder or hand and playfully peck at things. Dickcissels were feeding young out of the nest, July 24 at Green Lake, (Mrs. Rogers). A Purple Finch was at Green Bay, July 24 (Strehlow); Goldfinches in great abundance in Ashland County, July 12 to 19 (Mr. and Mrs. Backus); and Leconte's Sparrows were observed in the Green Bay region during July, (Mrs. Hussong and others). White-throated Sparrows as follows: Douglas County, July 11, and Ashland County, July 14 (Mr. and Mrs. Backus); Vilas County, July 8, (Miss Morse); and at Green Bay, July, several times (Strehlow).

### NEWS NOTES

Back numbers of THE PASSENGER PIGEON are available for all issues except January, February, March and December of 1939 at a price of 10c each. Members who wish to have their files more complete should contact the editor in this regard.

Reprints of feature articles in THE PASSENGER PIGEON may be secured by the author through the editor at a price of \$2.00 per 100 copies and \$1.00 for each additional 100 for a three or four page article. The editor should be informed of any desire for reprints at the time the article is submitted for publication.

The following new members were recently reported or else previously overlooked in membership lists:

- Erickson, Homer, Pulaski
- Schwendener, Mrs. Carl W., 1722 N. 48th st., Milwaukee
- Johnson, Mrs. Ralph, Little Suamico
- Pelzer, Miss Viola, 417 W. Beacon st., New London
- Winchester, Florence, Route 4, Box 41, Oshkosh
- Murray, Robert, A., 101 Park st., Oshkosh
- Holterman, John, 519 Pine st., Green Bay
- Wetli, Elred, Route 6, Green Bay
- La Budde, Mrs. Edward, 1728 N. 59th St., Milwaukee
- Gerry, Dr. Eloise, U. S. Forest Products Laboratory, Madison
- Loyster, Earl L., 1720 E. Capitol Drive, Milwaukee
- Aliesch, Fred, Pepin
- Pribbanow, Miss Audrey, 2934 N. 24th Place, Milwaukee
- Oehlschlager, Miss Elizabeth A., "The Hummocks," Station C, Route 6, Milwaukee

Address changes are as follows: Miss Karine Kjolseth, 55 ½ Franklin avenue, Oshkosh; Ben T. Logan, Barnum; Sister Mary Martha, St. John Baptist School, Route 4, Green Bay; Walter Mueller, 1600 Massachusetts avenue, N. W., Washington, D. C.; Barger, Mr. and Mrs. N. R., 132 Lathrop st., Madison; Scott, W. E., care of Conservation Dept., State Office Bldg., Madison. The address of Mrs. M. T. Ray previously given as Milwaukee should have been listed as Menasha.

Owen Gromme reports that his three field parties working in northern Wisconsin this past summer secured many valuable records especially of nesting warblers. The Magnolia Warbler was found and at one location nesting Mourning Warblers were as common as the Maryland Yellow-throats.

S. Paul Jones of Waukesha is considering the possibility of publishing a booklet on the Birds of Waukesha County. Jones has studied this county for many years and has much excellent material.