

Journal July 14-1941

THE PINE SISKIN, A DECTIVE STORY

by
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Bird banding has become an exciting and educational hobby of many people throughout the United States, and some times it clasps hands and interests of enthusiasts from one ocean to the other. Once in a while it furnishes an enigma to be settled.

One morning the telephone rang and the voice of Harold Gilbert, never failing Audubon member, said that he had an interesting little story for us. Some weeks ago a lone pine siskin, that shy little finch of the high fir branches, dropped suddenly down to a feeding tray in the yard of Mr. and Mrs. F. H. Swift on the Heights, neighbors of the Gilberts. It was an unusual occurrence for the siskin to mingle with the familiar families at the feeding tray, the robins, wrens, sparrows, towhees, and others. He was given a very quiet welcome for fear of scaring him-- or her-- away and losing the chance of unfolding his movements.

But deception, it seems, was not on the bird's mind. He came regularly for food and took his place as one of the group, showing no fear of his human watchers. This went on for some time, and then one morning he brought in his three children to partake of the free lunch counter. They must have been reared in the branches of the tall trees surrounding the yard, or nearby, and no one had guessed it.

And here comes the tid-bit of the story. On the slender leg of the parent bird was a band, a rather larger one than is usually allotted to the finch family. The Swifts obtained the banding number, but did not take the band off. However, they forwarded the number to the Fish and Wildlife office at Washington, D. C., to find out something of the bird's private life. The answer came back that this siskin was banded by Mr. R. J. Wright of Randolph, Massachusetts. A government envelope was enclosed with the request that the aluminum band be forwarded to the main office as it suggested an unusually long flight record for this bird. The cross-country distance from Randolph, Massachusetts, to Portland, Oregon, is about 3000 miles, and there is no telling by what round-about routes the bird arrived here, thus lengthening his journey.

In the meantime, the siskin and his family disappeared and with him the

band, the missing link in the train of events. As in any detective story, the plot thickens, and guesses and surmises are engrossing the interest of an enlarging group of bird lovers in town. The bird's entrance into the local group at the Swifts' yard, his dropping of siskin shyness, and his as sudden departure with his children and the main evidence in his case, are a little unreal, not to say uncanny. Might he have been a pet bird ~~subsequently~~ that was brought here in a cage, to accidentally escape into our impenetrable woods and rear his young? Thus having been hampered by human devices and perhaps caught by the season of mating and nesting, had he not fulfilled his bird destiny and taken wing again to eventually return to Randolph, Massachusetts, his home town so many miles away? Who knows?

One bird expert says, "Spinus pinus is a triumph of obscurity. His heavy, streaky pattern worked out in dusky olive on a brown base above and whitish below prepares the bird for self-effacement in any environment; while the sulphur-colored water mark of the outspread wings barely redeems its owner from sheer oblivion. This remark applies, however, only to plumage. In behavior the siskin is anything but a forgettable bird-person."

The range of the pine siskin seems to be North America at large, breeding in higher latitudes and in coniferous forests of the West to the southern boundary of the United States; also sparingly in northeastern United States and in the mountains of North Carolina, irregularly south in winter to the Gulf of Mexico.

Whatever the time of the year, siskins roam about in rollicking bands of from twenty to several hundred, moving in communal flight. When one is caught alone, he darts about in the graceful undulatory flight a good deal like the goldfinch. In the breeding season he may be found in evergreen timber throughout his range, and in winter may be seen in almost any part of the United States and Mexico.

Nesting time is from March to September. Congenial groups may agree to retire together, and a single tree or clump may contain a half dozen nests. The nest is invariably built in an evergreen tree, a favorite being the Douglas spruce. It is believed there is but one brood in a season.

BLACK TAR CAUSES DEATH TO SWALLOW

Dire calamity to birds, especially to ducks, geese, and other water birds, becoming entangled and helpless in patches of oil on the surface of the sea or rivers is not infrequent, but the case of a small feathered victim like the swallow being caught in a pool of tar on the highway is very unusual.

A couple of days ago, Mrs. Eugene Bowman who lives on the Oatfield Road, phoned to ask information about removing thick black tar from the feathers of a swallow--presumably a barn swallow. A young son coming home from school had noticed the little fellow struggling in the road and going closer, saw that he was all gummed up with fresh tar and held fast. Distressed at the sight, he managed to extricate the bird and brought him home to see what could be done for him.

We suggested a gasoline bath as the only thing to cut the ooze and admonished that it would have to be used with great care and gentleness. Even so, we expressed our doubts as to its success, as the handling of such a small bird and the amount of rubbing necessary would likely be as fatal as the tar. Mrs. Bowman made the effort, but the white-breasted bird succumbed to the process and the fumes. This has been the usual result of trying to save even larger birds caught in the same dilemma.

DEER KILLED BY AUTOS

When William L. and Irene Finley were motoring through the Cascade Mountains in southern Oregon, they saw a doe hobbling along dragging a right hind leg. It was early morning. The deer must have been struck by an auto during the night. Although scared and wild, she seemed to spend most of her time lying down. She was followed by two fawns that meandered around hunting food .

In the State of Michigan 150 deer were killed in one month by autos. In the last bulletin of the Michigan Department of Conservation, is a statement that 150 of these animals had been buried by three conservation officers during the month. And nobody knows how many got away to die in the woods.

In one accident that occurred near Grayling in the southern part of the state, a collision resulted in the death of the driver as well as the deer. For this reason all motorists should be instructed to be watchful along highways where animals are abundant. While it is illegal to kill our game birds such as grouse, quail, and pheasants during the spring and summer, untold numbers of young and old are killed along the highways of Oregon. As far as we know, records of these accidents have not been kept in Oregon.