Banding Operations - Tinker Harbour
Labrador, Newfoundland
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This is a brief report on the waterfowl banding at Tinker Harbour, Labrador, 1951.

DESCRIPTION OF AREA

Tinker Harbour is located 25 miles south east of Rigolet. The area directly concerned with our banding operations extended from Mason's Island - 7 miles northwest along the shoreline, or roughly that area between Snook's Arm (Little Tinker) and Killick Point (S.E. limit of Turner Bight).

The coastline from Turner Bight to Tub Harbour, a distance of 35 miles is rather low lying, with many deep coves separated by rocky Headlands. At low tide many of these coves become boulder strewn mud and sandflats. These sandflats are utilized by all species of waterfowl as feeding areas, especially when capelin shrimp spawn are abundant. The banding area at Tinker Harbour is fairly well protected by a barrier shoal and 3 islands which serve to break the force of all except northwest winds. This protection is especially important in September when strong winds occur daily.

BANDING SEASON 1951

The banding season extended from Aug. 6 - Sept. 27. During that period a total of 781 ducks were banded plus 35 birds of other than Anatidae. A breakdown of birds banded is given in Table 1 and 11.

Table 1 - WATERFOWL

SPECIES	I♂	A♂	I♀	A♀	TOTAL
Black Duck	133	95	139	83	450
Black Duck Returns		4		11	15
Mallard		1		1	2
Mallard Black		1			1
Pintail	46		53	9	108
Green-winged Teal	93		104	2	199
Returns				2	2
Blue-winged Teal	1				1
Red-breasted Merganser	1			1	2
American Eider	1				1
Total:	275	101	296	109	781

TABLE II
OTHER SPECIES

SPECIES	N	A	TOTAL
Semipalmated Sandpiper		11	11
Pectoral Sandpiper		12	12
Greater Yellow-legs		3	3
Semipalmated Plover		3	3
Ruddy Turnstone		4	4
White-crowned Sparrow	1	8	9
Fox Sparrow		1	1
Savannah Sparrow	1		1
Northern Shrike	1		1
Total	3	32	35

I would estimate that at any given time during the banding period (Aug. - Sept.) that a population of at least 3000 birds utilized the Tinker Harbour Area. The rate of turnover is not known but the impression given by repeat data would indicate rapid changes in the population. At least 25,000 waterfowl (mainly Black Ducks) passed through Tinker Harbour during this season.

It is possible to estimate with some degree of accuracy the size of the catch for the next day by observing (a) size and numbers of flocks flying to feed on the exposed flats in the evening, and (b) tide and wind conditions.

1951 was a successful banding year and a great deal of credit is due to the work of Sidney Blake & Family, Northwest River, Labrador. (See Personnel Section)

CAMP SITES AND ANCHORAGES

Undoubtedly many banding sites exist in this area, other than the one at present utilized. No matter how excellent their banding possibilities may be, they are useless without a convenient, safe anchorage. One of the major drawbacks which previously hampered operations at Tinker Harbour was the lack of such a harbour. This was rectified when Blake discovered an anchorage on the south east shore of Mason's Island. The excellence of this location was well

nstrated by a 60 m.p.h. gale which struck the area Sept. 9. As a precaution against sudden storms making return to the island impossible, a second tent was erected on the mainland near the old campsite, food and clothing were stored in the tent, sufficient for a 3 day stay.

FUTURE OF THE BANDING STATION

The value of our Tinker Harbour station cannot be stressed too strongly. The number of birds banded to date has not been great but the full potential of the area has not been utilized.

The greatest value of this station is the public relations aspect. It serves as concrete evidence to the people of the Lake Melville - Hamilton Inlet area that the Federal Government takes seriously the posted hunting regulations. Withdrawal at this time would be interpreted as laxity.

Admittedly this is an expensive station to operate, and that a reduced appropriation will not permit the Service to continue, but I feel that whenever funds again become available, the Tinker Harbour Station should be re-opened.

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS - 1951

The banding period may be divided roughly into 2 parts calm, warm August and stormy September. The latter part of September was not too favourable for banding as heavy swell and increased predation disrupted one or more traps per day.

The overall season was the most favourable in the history of the station in the opinion of Sid. Blake.

PREDATION

The history of the Tinker Harbour Banding Station is filled by reports of extensive and at times serious losses by predation, especially by foxes.

We were fortunate that 1951 was not a bad predation year. A total of 781 birds were banded and 16 lost by predation (one of these birds was killed by an unknown predator ½ mile from the nearest trap). In addition 400 repeats were recorded, thus total birds in the traps were approximately 1300. Therefore less than 1% loss was incurred.

The most serious predator was the Rough-legged Hawk, which destroyed 6 banded and 5 unbanded birds. A total of 6 young birds were destroyed during the season, evidently representing the total juvenile population in the area.

Great Horned Owl - A large adult was killed August 19 when it was discovered in trap #17. In addition at least four other birds were heard "Hooting" in the area.

Goshawk, Duck Hawk, Pigeon Hawk and several Accipiters were noted at frequent intervals in the banding area.

Foxes were not a serious predator this season and no kill can be directly attributed to this source. In contrast to the 1950 season when foxes were reported abundant, only 1 was seen this year and very little additional sign.

American Lynx - one was killed in trap #16, Sept. 20. The animal was given every chance to escape but evidently could not (see trap modifications). A second Lynx was seen the same day but was allowed to go unmolested as trapping operations were being concluded.

Mink and Weasel accounted for 3 birds, which is negligible. Weasel kills can be recognized by very fine teeth marks which appear on the throat. This may be contrasted to crushed base of the skull in Mink kills.

SELECTION OF BAIT

Three types of bait were used this year at Tinker Harbour. Considerable spoilage (mould and seed generation) occured in the bags of grain which were deposited throughout the trapping area.

It was found that corn was the grain most susceptible to mould, followed closely by scratchfeed which contains some corn.

The rate of deterioration can be slowed by turning, and shaking daily, the exposed bags. This procedure at least stops most seed generation.

Corn is an especially good bait when traps are erected in clean sand. It is heavy and not easily washed away by tides. Furthermore its bright colour seems attractive to ducks.

Scratchfeed is the best all round bait because of its varied contents.

Barley is the poorest grain because of its lightness which caused frequent "washed out" traps. However in places where stable water levels exist this grain can be used to an advantage, especially after the ducks have commenced utilizing the bait and trap area.

ADDITIONAL TRAP LOCATIONS

A total of 18 traps were erected this year. I would make the following suggestions for future trap locations.

A - Trap #5 be moved from its present site (Fig. 1A) to the gravel point pond. This site is little utilized during August but waterfowl behaviour in September changes radically. Often a good August trap is a poor one in September.

B - A two door trap to be placed on the lee side of the gravel point. The doors to face S.S.E. and N.W. This arrangement would assure that at least one effective entrance would be available under most wind conditions.

C - An additional trap to be located on the Snook Arm shore of the lower cove (see Fig. 1). The position is approximately halfway between the cove and the open sea and in the lee of a small island.

D - There is a small sandy cove on the south shore of the outer islands ¼ mile S.S.E. of Mason's Island. This trap would be entirely experimental.

E. - The present trap #6 to be enlarged and a second entrance created facing the body of the island.

F - A two door trap to be erected on the narrow strip of land between the pond and sea shore. The entrance to open on (a) sea (b) pond.

MODIFICATIONS IN TRAP CONSTRUCTION

The 4' 1" mesh poultry wire supplied this season was excellent. It permitted the construction of a 4' trap and reduced the amount of lacing required by the 3' wire.

Doorways can be constructed simply by making a narrow entrance 2" wide at the base, tapering gradually to 1" at the top. This entrance should be at least 18" high in order to permit birds to feed even at times of high tides. The sides of the entrance must be spring-like in action; opening to permit entry of the bird, then closing after the bird has passed through.

Wherever the larger mammalian predators are a serious factor, a poultry wire flooring may prove adequate to prevent further depredations. This floor should be placed in the bottom of the trap, pegged down and covered with 2 - 3" of soil. This proved adequate to retain a lynx in trap #16 for three days.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Sidney Blake should be again hired to provide a boat and assistance.

(2) The Tinker Harbour Banding Station should be re-opened as soon as possible.

(3) An outboard motor to be supplied by the service.

(4) At least 20 traps be erected.

(5) When the station is re-opened, a small one-room permanent building should be erected; large enough for a single bunk and table.

(6) Since the banding operations extend into the legal Hunting Season it would be advisable to post the Tinker Harbour area. Signs should be placed in all trading posts Cartwright - Indian Island, Smokey's Tickle, Rigolet, Park's Harbour, and Northwest River.

(7) Portable traps of heavy gauge fox wire should be made up by the Service and at least one trap be sent to each banding station. This would allow the bander to take advantage of shifting feeding areas.

(8) The boatman should be allowed to do limited shooting beyond the trapping area. The regulations in effect in 1951 deprived the party of a possible supply of fresh meat. Shooting should of course be permitted during the legal hunting season.