

A. W. Martin - Early Saskatchewan Bander

by J. B. Gollop, Canadian Wildlife Service, Saskatoon

In a paper given at the North American Wildlife Conference, in March, 1956, the first use of dogs to assist in duck-banding was attributed to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel working in the 1940's (J. B. Gollop. The use of retrievers in banding flightless young mallards. Trans. 21st N.A. Wild. Conf. 1956:239-248). It now appears that a Saskatchewan man, A. W. Martin, had pioneered with this technique at least 20 years earlier.

In a letter to me from Port Arthur, Ontario, dated December 20, 1956, Mr. Martin wrote in part: "About thirty years ago I did some duck banding in Saskatchewan at Waterhen Lake east of Prince Albert, and in the southern part of the province. While I used various methods in catching the birds I had the best success with Mallards by using my hunting-trained Chesapeake. When I came to a good-looking slough I would put the dog in the open water. The old birds would do a lot of squawking and flying around and the young birds would head for shore to hide in the long grass and I could chart their progress and location by the movement of the grass. As you know, a Chesapeake is a heavy, strong dog and if he does not pinion both wings properly a young bird is

apt to flop around and injure himself. Instead of letting the dog catch the birds I used a long cane pole with a heavy ringed landing net on one end which I dropped over the grass and pinned the birds down. This plan of course worked best at mornings and evenings when there was little wind and in prairie districts where vegetation was sparse. My old dog, 'Beaver,' has long gone and I have given up duck shooting but I like to think of old times and learn what the boys are doing."

Records in the Canadian Wildlife Service Banding Office show that Mr. Martin banded 443 ducks between July 8 and 27, 1921. Nine were banded at Waterhen Lake, 91 on the Little Arm River near Findlater, and 348 at Findlater. The birds banded were 125 Pintails, 119 American Widgeon, 58 Blue-winged Teal, 55 Shovelers, 50 Mallards, 25 Scaup, 11 Canvasbacks (and 2 Coots).

Mr. Martin's efforts took place before government control of organized banding began working effectively in Canada. Mr. Martin used his own tags, apparently putting some on the legs and others on the wings. Nothing is known of the inscription he used, but he did get a few returns, even from the United States.

Field Identification of the Greater Scaup

by the late Wendell Taber

In studying "The Birds of the Saskatchewan River" I began to realize that Saskatchewan observers face somewhat the same problem that we face in Massachusetts—but in reverse. I am therefore sending some comments which may be of value in helping you to distinguish between the Greater Scaup and Lesser Scaup in the field.

The rule of thumb here is that the Greater Scaup is a salt-water bird and the Lesser Scaup is a fresh-water one. I rule out the much-quoted difference in the shape of the head of two species. (The head of the Greater is rounder, that of the Lesser more peaked). C. F. Batchelder's statement, "the difficulty often lies not in

testing the observed facts but in dealing with the observer's mind" is too true. The head shape is useful only in making me investigate further. The one field mark that I accept is that of watching a male under perfect sunlight. If, after watching the bird move about for perhaps five minutes, turning its head this way and that, until I am satisfied that I have received reflection of color from every conceivable angle, I have NOT received a momentary flash of green, I accept the identification, as being a Lesser Scaup. The Greater Scaup often looks purplish at first, but sooner or later the sun hits exactly right and there is a flash of green. All this may be at a distance of 25 yards.