

REMINISCENCES OF BIRD BANDING AT DAVIDSON, SASKATCHEWAN

by **Albert C. Lloyd**, Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh

After 45 years it is difficult to go back in memory and bring to life the early history of bird-banding at Davidson. My father, Reuben Lloyd, was one of the early settlers of the Davidson District, arriving there in 1904 or 1905 from Illinois. As a boy he had been raised on a farm and had become interested in wild life, mainly the study of birds. Sometime about 1914, he was offered a male White-tailed Deer that had been captured swimming from one of the islands to the mainland in Last Mountain Lake. This was the start of what later was known as The Lloyd Private Game Reserve, which he maintained throughout his lifetime. The Reserve was located a half-mile north of the town of Davidson and consisted of about five acres surrounded by a nine-foot-high page-wire fence. He constructed a low earthen dam across a shallow ravine forming a pond some half-mile long and maybe 200 feet wide at the widest point. This was also included in the reserve and filled each year by the run-off from the melting snow. The pond was a great attraction for migrating and resident birds. In the enclosed part of the Reserve he maintained a small herd of deer and from time to time several Prong-horned

Antelope were kept. Each spring several fawn deer would be born. In 1916 or 1918 the first antelope was born in captivity for which the Dominion Government had any record. The pair of twins were later killed by a hailstorm that passed through the area. I remember there is a published record put out by the Dominion Government along with a picture of my father taken with the twins. Also in this enclosure my father kept Canada Geese, White-fronted Geese and later Blue and Snow Geese, and from time to time, Whistling Swan and numerous species of ducks including Mallards crossed with domesticated English Call Ducks. Many of the ducks were migratory and no attempt was made to keep them through the cold and bitter winter. It was in such surroundings that I spent my early life and received training from my father.

How dull the winter months were back in the twenties and early thirties! Our wintering birds included the Sharp-tailed Grouse, Prairie Chicken, an occasional Snowy Owl and later the Hungarian Partridge. To this list could be added the House Sparrow and the so-called Rock Dove. I cannot help but marvel at the number of wintering birds given by the *Blue Jay*



Reuben Lloyd and duck trap at Davidson sanctuary, 1932.

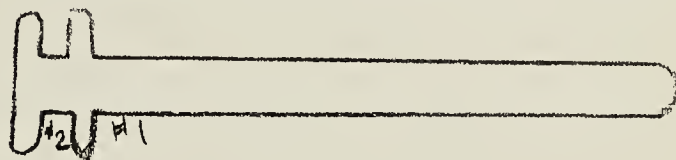
Christmas Count compared with the years when I was a boy. We always looked forward to the last week in February when we could usually see our first Horned Lark of the new year. It would be at least a month or so before the Tree Sparrow would report. With the early spring thaws, the forepart of April would bring the vanguard of the vast number of migrating birds with the peak reaching about the third week of May with the Warblers. I wonder if the Lapland Longspur still migrates across the fields in the large numbers that they did then? I have seen flocks of thousands following on the heels of one another.

During the winter of 1925 - 1926 we had a small invasion of redpolls. This is the only record I have of their appearance at Davidson. From December 30, 1925 to March 20, 1926, we were able to trap and band a total of 87.

Sometime in the early spring of 1923 my father told me that the Canadian Government and the Government of the United States had agreed to conduct a bird-banding program and that he had made application for a banding permit. In due time the permit and a supply of bands arrived.

The small bands that were first used were much like those in use today. However, bands for larger birds were made of a long strip of metal about three inches long with a number stamped on and "Nat. Biol. Sur. Wash. D.C." On each side near the left end were two sets of lugs—two on each side. You formed the metal

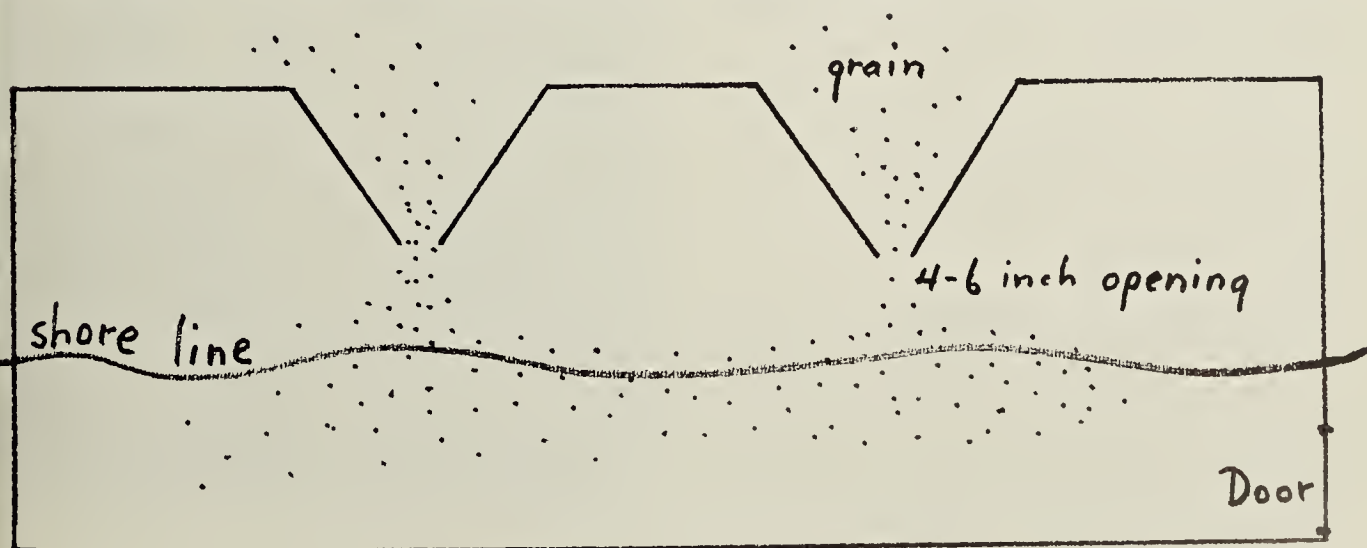
around the leg of the bird to be banded and crimped the set of lugs #1 over the band. Then you bent the metal back over these lugs and crimped the second set of lugs. Any excess metal was trimmed off and the bird released.



I wonder how many bands were put on too tightly or too loosely, and injured the bird's leg.

The Double-crested Cormorants were banded as nestlings on a small island at the north end of Last Mountain Lake. However, we caught most of our ducks by driving them out of the water into a pen before they could fly. We built a number of duck traps; the last one was a pen 10 feet long, six feet wide, and four or five feet high. The wooden framework of 2 x 2's had chicken wire stretched over it. Into one side we extended two open-mouthed V's some three feet. This we set on the edge of a shallow pond bank so that the V's were in the water. We baited both the shore inside the trap and the V's leading into the trap with grain. The ducks entered the trap, became excited, and simply swam past the funnel openings. We would then enter the trap through a door in the end, band the ducks, and release them.

Our first small bird traps were simple drop traps made from a framework three feet square and about six inches high, covered with window



screen. This was held up by a stick to which a long string was tied. For bait we used weed seed that could be found around any straw stack. When several birds were feeding under the trap, we pulled the string and the stick would be pulled out and the trap dropped over the bird. In one corner of the trap we had a small door that could be opened and a small cage placed so that the bird could be driven into it and be caught.

We soon learned of a better way to use the same trap. Drive a 2 x 2 or other wooden stake into the ground leaving about one inch of stick above ground. To this a mouse trap was nailed. Then from this trigger to each back corner of the drop trap we fastened a thread just tight enough so the trap could be set. The prop was then placed on the very edge of the trap so when sprung, the jaw of the mouse trap would knock the stick

from under the trap and drop over the bird. This worked very well and we caught many ground-feeding birds this way.

Of course there were other ways we captured adult birds. Sometimes we would catch flickers in their nesting holes in fence posts or telephone poles. Swallows we caught in grain storage bins, grackles in nesting boxes. Once I caught a pair of nesting shrikes by putting a noose on the end of a pole and dropping it over their heads. We also used a lady's hair net by tying two short and one long string to it so that they all joined together. The centre of the net was then fitted into the cup of a nesting bird. A light tug on the long string and you had the bird inside the net. We didn't use this very often since we were afraid of destroying the nest or that the bird might desert the nest.

SASKATCHEWAN BIRD BANDERS*

REUBEN AND A. C. LLOYD OF DAVIDSON

by **C. Stuart Houston**, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon

Reuben Lloyd began banding birds at Davidson on May 5, 1923. For the first ten years he was assisted by his son Bert, now a Supervisor with the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. No birds were banded in 1930, 1933 and 1936 and only two were banded in 1937.

His log book, kindly loaned by his son Albert C. Lloyd, records 3177 individuals of 73 species. At first, bands evidently were not issued in numerical order on wires or strings as they are today, for in the early years Mr. Lloyd applied them in random order—e.g. using number 73, then 62, then 66.

Some evidently escaped entry in the record book, as banding and recovery data are available on Fish and Wildlife Service printouts or were pub-

lished in the *Canadian Field-Naturalist*, for 14 individuals not recorded in the banding log book. Ten of the 14 were banded in the first year 1923



Reuben Lloyd

* No. 12 in a series of biographies of Saskatchewan bird banders.