

THE SILVEREYE PROJECT.

A. M. Gwynn

In the Third Annual Report of the Australian Bird Banding Scheme (July 1956 to June 1957) it is noted that sixteen Eastern Silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*) had been banded during the year, bringing the grand total to thirtyone! A further 81 were banded in 1957-58. But we have come a long way since then. When a group of Sydney bird banders in July 1958, picked on the Silvereye as a suitable subject for a large scale co-operative banding project they picked better than they knew. The immediate reason for the choice, was of course, the fact that many of the birds in the winter flocks seen around Sydney appeared to be of the Tasmanian form. Most Australian ornithologists now accept this as an established fact, though 'till last month there was only one interstate recovery to prove the point (Bill Lane's lucky 010-06887).

However, this is only the gilt on the ginger bread. One of the important advantages of the Silvereye as a subject is that it is one of the easiest of small birds to catch; it is also extremely abundant. This means that most banders can soon run up a quite respectable total of banded birds, and if they trap consistently in the one spot, they can expect a regular return of retrapped birds to sustain their interest.

When I began banding Silvereyes in 1960, it was with visions of dramatic interstate recoveries. However, I soon found out that the steady interest in banding Silvereyes is in the study of the local population. It is true of almost any study one takes up, that the more one goes into it, the more there is to be found out. Silvereyes are no exception.

The winter flocks are made up of birds of a great variety of plumages, which seem to become more complex the more one studies them. How many different races can be recognised?

We may assume that individuals which we retrap in March and again in September are locally bred birds; these nearly all have more or less bright yellow throats and light brown or fawn flanks. Many of us are also familiar with the typical "Tasmanicus" with black in front of the eyes, pale grey throat and bright chestnut flanks. But what of the drab, grey-green birds with little colour on the throat, and grey-brown flanks? or the "Tasmanoid" birds with yellow throats?

Bill Lane has shown that some of the migrants are remarkably constant in their movements, year after year: yet at the end of my third winter's trapping I can say that,

though I have caught quite a number of birds of the Tasmanian type, some of which were retrapped repeatedly for some weeks after banding, the only bird of this type which I have caught with a band put on in a previous season was 16054, banded two years earlier by Bill Lane at North Ryde, five miles away.

The migration picture too is very complex. Evidence has been obtained both that Tasmanian birds come to Sydney, and that some birds from the Central New South Wales coast go to Queensland, but these are only the first pieces in a very complicated jigsaw puzzle of movement.

The Silvereye project is now entering a very interesting phase. Thanks to the steady work of a large number of banders, some just trapping steadily in their own back yard, others conducting mist-net campaigns on an ambitious scale, we have now built up a quite substantial population of banded birds. A grand total of just on seven thousand Silvereyes have been banded in the Sydney area up to August 31st of this year alone, and a large proportion of these are probably still at large.

It is clear that to date we have been banding considerably faster than sufficient to make up the losses due to natural mortality. The result is that the banded population has now reached a size that is beginning to pay increasing dividends in terms of recoveries "away from point of banding".

As Bill Belton has shown at Tianjara, it is possible to go out in the bush, completely away from where any other banders have worked - and retrap a bird banded a couple of hundred miles away. This is still an isolated example, but the chance of doing this is much greater than it was two years ago, and retraps between stations in the immediate vicinity of Sydney are becoming increasingly the order of the day. Another factor of vital importance is that Tasmanian banders are at last getting busy. Until recently the absence of any worthwhile numbers of Silvereyes banded in Tasmania has been a serious gap in the project, so that the news that John Liddy had chalked up a total of 427 birds banded at Launceston in February and March of this year, and the evidence of good banding work by R. H. Green and G. K. Meldrum (see page 12) are indeed welcome.

Warren Hitchcock has kindly provided the totals of Silvereyes banded in Tasmania during the last three banding years. The figures are:

1-7-59	to	30-6-60	99
1-7-60	to	30-6-61	324
1-7-61	to	30-6-62	810

There is therefore now a real prospect of a two-way traffic in banding recoveries between Tasmania and the mainland.

As yet I have said nothing about the extensive banding carried out in Victoria because I am less well-informed about what is going on there, but the sterling efforts of Miss Gracie Bowker at Port Fairy, who is the second Silvereye bander to reach four figures, have already resulted in two very interesting recoveries (see page 12). There is reason to believe that there is a real prospect yet of Silvereye recoveries between Victoria and New South Wales (or A.C.T.).

Another important gap in the Silvereye project is that to date very few nestlings have been banded. This is regrettable for two reasons, first because of the desirability of getting some reliable longevity data, and secondly because nestling recoveries away from point of banding are incontrovertible evidence of point of origin. So it is to be hoped that some experts at finding Silvereye nests will come forward and give us a few tips.

BANDING OF LITTLE WATTLE BIRD (*Anthochaera chrysoptera*) AT WEENEY BAY.

H. Battam, Cronulla, N.S.W.

Weeney Bay is a small bay inlet on the eastern side of Botany Bay, N.S.W. The banding locality is on its eastern shore, access being gained from Captain Cook Drive, the Cronulla-Kurnell Road.

The vegetation in the immediate vicinity is a mixture of Lantana, Casuarina and *Banksia integrifolia*, the last species being of major importance, as it is abundant in the area and would be the main source of food for the Little Wattle Bird, being in flower the year round; it provides both nectar and insects. It is also a favourite nesting tree.

These factors would account for the high concentration of this species in the area. It is always plentiful and whilst it appears to be sedentary, there is also the possibility that migration and/or nomadic movement take place, the latter being the more likely.

The birds come to a water hole to drink and bathe. This is approximately 12 feet in diameter, and the water in it is maintained more by high tides filtering through the surrounding sandy soil than by rain water. The hole has never been dry over the last four years. The birds move to this hole in all weather conditions, the movement being more pronounced in warmer weather.