

A Summary of Blackbird Banding in Tasmania

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As an adjunct to other banding activities, 170 Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) were banded at Riverside, Tasmania between 1960 and 1963. Twenty-three of these birds have been recovered by members of the public. This paper summarizes data derived from these banding activities and subsequent recoveries.

Status and Banding Activities

Blackbirds are conspicuous members of the avifauna of suburban Launceston during the summer half-year, but they are much less noticed during the winter. This is well illustrated by the seasonal distribution of bandings of blackbirds over three years.

When Banded	Number Banded
Late April to mid July	Nil
Late July to early November	11
Mid November to late April	159

Most of the few adults captured between late July and early November were retrapped several times during the same period. Thus seven of the eleven birds banded during this period were retrapped a total of 27 times between the banding date and the end of December in the year of banding. These adult birds almost certainly represent breeding pairs which had territories in adjacent or nearby yards, or in the golf course adjoining. Most blackbirds fledge during November, and young and adults were freely trapped in the yard during November and December, with lesser numbers taken in January. Blackbirds were never caught in the yard between 26 January and 30 July, although traps and nets were regularly used during this period.

In early November juvenile European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) are persistent beggars of food and were often seen bustling after adult blackbirds which were gathering earthworms on the lawn. The blackbird gathers several worms before returning to its nest, and it will lay aside some while it gathers another. Juvenile starlings attempted many times to snatch these worms but to my knowledge were never successful. Their persistence is sometimes rewarded; on 14 November 1960, after continued pursuit and begging, a juvenile starling was fed a worm by an adult blackbird which immediately departed with the remainder of the worms it had gathered.

Only two occupied nests were found, but no specific search for them was ever made. One nest was built at a height of about three feet in a Youngberry bush. It contained four nestlings and one egg on 4 November 1961, and five nestlings on the following day. These chicks fledged on 18 November and two fledglings were banded that day when they entered our yard. One fledgling was shot on 19 November and the second on 20 November by the owner of the property in which the nest was built. At this time of year many blackbirds are shot or trapped in home gardens, and this rapid execution of blackbird fledglings seems to be relatively common in the area.

A second nest, built at a height of about five feet in a pine tree contained three large young which fledged (probably prematurely) when I approached the nest on 2 November 1960. To my chagrin, a used and abandoned nest was found in the autumn of 1962 when I demolished a wood pile in the yard. This nest was built under the wood pile and was within two inches of the ground. Although the yard was under daily observation for relatively long periods because of banding activities, I did not suspect that blackbirds were nesting there.

Of the 170 birds banded, 106 were trapped in the backyard at 45 Freeland Crescent, Riverside and almost all were caught during activities associated with banding of starlings. Most were caught in mist nets, as the rapid flight of the blackbirds over the solid paling fences made them particularly liable to capture by this method. Surprisingly a number of blackbirds (about 60, including retraps) were caught in funnel entrance traps, which they entered to eat bread scraps set as bait for starlings.

During the autumn of 1962 and 1963, fairly intensive mist netting for silvereyes was undertaken on a vacant allotment about 300 yards

from my home, and starlings were also netted on another part of the allotment during the early summer of 1962. This allotment contained many blackberry bushes growing along a creek, and blackbirds appeared to live in these bushes throughout the year. A total of 64 blackbirds was netted and banded on this allotment.

Blackbirds and starlings breed at about the same time in Launceston, and the pattern of capture of the two species throughout the year was very similar.

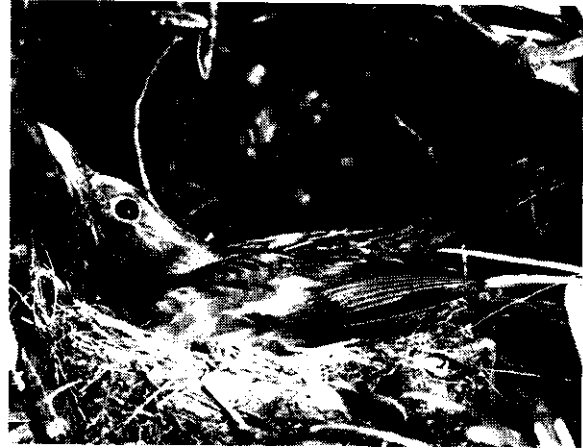
Recoveries

To date, 23 recoveries have been notified from the 170 birds banded. This recovery rate of over 13 per cent of banded birds is unusually high for a passerine species. Details are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Recoveries of Blackbirds

Band Number	Banding Age	Sex	Date	Date Recovered	Place and Method of Recovery
21654	A	F	30. 9.61	1.12.61	Trap.
21698	A	F	6.11.61	28.12.61	Shot.
21703	A	M	8.11.61	e.12.63	Shot.
21706	A	M	9.11.61	14.11.61	Shot.
21766	J		17.11.61	17.11.61	Trap.
21778	J		18.11.61	19.11.61	Shot.
21779	J		18.11.61	20.11.61	Shot.
21789	J		20.11.61	24. 3.62	Shot, eating grapes. Mowbray Heights, 2 miles NE.
21803	A	M	21.11.61	e1.12.62	Trap.
21811	J		27.11.61	1.12.61	Trap.
21812	J		28.11.61	1.12.61	Trap.
21813	A	M	28.11.61	20.12.62	Trap.
21827	J		7.12.61	7.12.61	Shot.
21841	A	M	20.12.61	8. 7.62	"Very decomposed".
21872	A	M	8. 4.62	e10. 2.64	Cat.
27558			10.11.62	28.11.64	Cat. Prospect, 5½ miles SE.
27785	J		5.12.62	e.12.63	Shot.
27788	J		6.12.62	30. 8.63	Flew into window: dead.
27799	J		11.12.62	31.12.63	"Dead".
39405	J		14.12.62	14.12.62	Cat: 3 hours after banding.
47032	A	M	2. 1.63	29.12.66	"In dazed state, later recovered and flew away"
47067	J		16. 2.63	26. 4.63	"Slightly injured from encounter with cat"
47072	J		27. 2.63	17. 7.63	"Dead".

Unless the suburb is stated, all recoveries were from Riverside or from the adjacent suburb of Trevallyn within two miles of banding. The only bird showing even moderate movement was 060-27558 which was killed 5½ miles from the place of banding. Another (060-21789) was shot



• Female Blackbird on nest.

Photo: T. W. Pescott at Mowbray Heights, almost directly across the Tamar River from the place of banding. The river here is about one third of a mile wide, but even this relatively simple water crossing could have been avoided if the bird had happened to move upstream about 2½ miles to the parklands on the edge of the City of Launceston, and then moved downstream on the southern bank of the river.

Cause of Death

Of the 21 birds recovered dead, one third (seven birds) were shot and a further third (seven birds) were trapped in rat or rabbit traps in home orchards. Thirteen of these fourteen birds shot or trapped were killed in November or December, which corresponds to the time of ripening of various berries and soft fruits. Three birds were killed, and a fourth injured, by cats. One bird died when it flew into a window, and three birds were found dead. These reported methods of death are very similar to those reported for starlings banded during the same period (Liddy 1968).

The longest time interval between banding and death was a few days less than four years (060-47032). Four other blackbirds are known to have survived for two years, and an additional four for one year after banding. Over one third (eight of 21) of all birds recovered dead were within five days of banding, and of these three juveniles were killed on the day of banding.

Reference

Liddy, John (1968). 'An Analysis of Recoveries of Starlings Banded at Riverside, Tasmania.' *Aust. Bird Bander*, 6:27-34.

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