

MEMORANDUM

TO : All Banders

June 9, 1967  
MTAB # 7

FROM : Chief, Bird Banding Laboratory  
Migratory Bird Populations Station  
Laurel, Maryland 20810

SUBJECT: Transmittal of Revised "Age" Codes - to be used for birds  
banded after June 30, 1967

After you take your first hurried scan through the following pages, go ahead and compose your letter of resignation, enclose your banding permit for cancellation or draft your irate letter to the editor of your banding association -- then lay them aside for a day or so, come back and re-read this material. After you have gone through it a second time, thought about it for awhile and mentally "aged" a few birds, I think you will find it is not nearly as complex as it appears at first glance.

We have been aware for quite some time that the "age" codes used in banding data were both difficult for the bander to accurately use and not sufficiently precise to satisfy the needs of the data analyst. We were also aware that many banders have been using the present codes incorrectly (nearly half the incoming 1965 banding schedules were held or returned to the bander for clarification). Many of these queries pertained to inaccurate "age" codings.

With this in mind, the decision was made to expand and alter the system used to indicate the "age" of banded birds.

In formulating the attached revised "Year Class" codes, we were limited by or assumed:

1. that the present Bird Banding Laboratory "age" codes are inadequate for qualified banders to record all recognizable "year classes" of the birds they handle
2. that for many species techniques for determining these more refined data have been developed and these data would be of value to persons analyzing banding data
3. that the revised codes should be as compatible as possible with the millions of records already on file

4. that most banders can and will cope with the expanded, somewhat more complex "Year Class" codes
5. that due to:
  - a. the large number of species;
  - b. the variations in species, latitudes, breeding seasons, etc.;
  - c. the limitations imposed by dealing with encoded data (necessity of definite "either-or" type classifications);
  - d. the inadequately worked out "age" criteria for most species, etc.,

the most desirable classification must continue to be tied to a calendar year (January 1 through December 31) rather than a "bird year" or a 12-month year. This is essentially the same system we have been using and is compatible with the "age" code system being utilized by the newly centralized European banding scheme (EURING).

If more adequate "age" classifications are provided and if the bander can and will comprehend and adhere to them, then scientists analyzing banding data can segregate the year-classes and, based on their biological knowledge, make their own decisions as to whether the bird is physiologically "adult," "immature," "juvenile," etc.

Based on that assumption, we decided to completely divorce our "age" nomenclature from terms which have biological meaning which do not necessarily coincide with this classification system. For example, a biologically "immature" bird can be:

a tree sparrow less than a year old, or  
a Canada goose less than 2 years old, or  
a ring-billed gull less than 3 years old, or  
an albatross less than 4 years old, or  
a bald eagle older than that!

The same confusion exists with the use of terms such as "adult" and "sub-adult."

The addition of a completely new terminology will also provide banders an additional stimulus to review the definitions more closely than if we had continued using familiar terms with modified or unfamiliar definitions.

The use of the new terminology will enable Banding Laboratory personnel to identify and correct incoming schedules carrying obsolete "age" codes.

If you have made it this far, go ahead and read through the "Year Class" codes. If they are unclear or if you are uncertain as to the definitions, attempt to get together with some of your fellow banders and talk them over. If questions or ambiguities still appear to be present, please let us know as soon as possible. We will do the best we can to provide whatever additional information is needed.

In order to provide you a brief "check" of your interpretation of the new "Year Class" codes, we have applied the new classifications to those birds noted on the sample banding schedule you received on page 19 of MTAB 6. Please read through the code sheets accompanying this memo, then pull out MTAB 6 and mentally apply the codes to the birds noted thereon.

Our interpretation of the "Year Class" codes for these birds follows the attached "Year Class" code sheets.

These attached sheets do not become effective until July 1, 1967. At that time the "age" code sheets transmitted to you via MTAB 6 should be marked "obsolete" or destroyed.

During the "changeover period," it will be all right to report both the old "age" codes and the revised "Year Class" codes on the same schedule. For example: If, on June 30, you place Band No. 25 on a mourning dove with buffy primary coverts, you would enter "age" code "I" on your schedule. The next day (July 1), if you catch another dove with buffy coverts, you may enter "Year Class" code "HY" on the next line (Band No. 26) of the same schedule.

\*\*\* ATTENTION CANADA GOOSE BANDERS \*\*\*

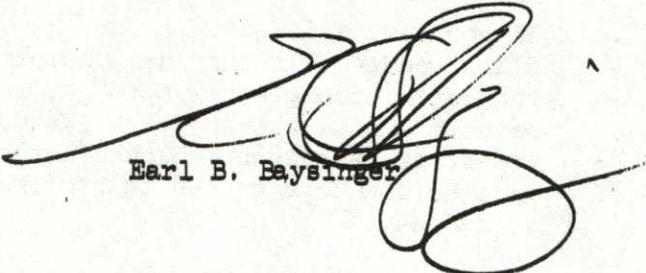
In MTAB 6 we requested that all schedules reporting Canada geese should be held until you received these revised codes. This request was made with the mistaken assumption that we would have these codes

June 9, 1967

ready for distribution shortly after your receipt of MTAB 6. Since we obviously "missed the boat," please forward all Canada goose schedules you have been holding.

Use the "age" codes in MTAB 6 for all geese banded prior to July 1, 1967.

Additional copies of these "Year Class" code sheets are available upon request.



Earl B. Baysinger

Attachments

June 9, 1967

## BANDING "YEAR CLASS" CODES

(To become effective for birds banded after June 30, 1967. The "age" codes provided via MTAB 6 should be used to report all birds banded during the period January 1, 1967, through June 30, 1967.)

Any "age" code system based on "bird years" (breeding season to breeding season) is very difficult to apply to banding data. This is due to the large number of species involved, the variety of geographical areas in which they are captured and/or banded, the tremendous variation in breeding seasons among species and areas, etc.

For this reason the Bird Banding Laboratory's "age" designations are based on calendar years instead of "bird years." This "calendar year" is defined as the period January 1 through December 31. It should not be interpreted as a "bird year" (breeding season to breeding season) or necessarily a 12-month period. For example, a bird hatched June 1, 1966, is in its second calendar year on January 1, 1967, although it is only about 7 months old.

A bird "graduates" each time it passes January 1. This is the same method used to age race horses (for what that's worth).

Under this system the "age" codes (hereafter called "Year Class" codes) entered on the records you forward to the Bird Banding Laboratory may or may not agree with the physiological "age" of the bird. By indicating correctly the bird's "year class," however, you will enable scientists working with these data to interpret correctly the "age" of your birds.

To use these codes accurately, it is necessary to ask yourself two questions:

1. During what Calendar Year did this bird hatch? This must be answered by your knowledge of the sequence of molts, skull ossification, soft-part coloration, breeding seasons, cloacal changes, or other physiological or morphological indicators of "age" in the species you are banding.
2. Within how many Calendar Years has this bird lived? This can be answered by taking your answer to Number 1 above and relating it to the date on which you band the bird.

June 9, 1967

These revised "Year Class" codes are primarily an expansion rather than a modification of the former code system and are as compatible as possible with data already on file.

For example:

<u>Old Code</u>	<u>equals</u>	<u>New Code</u>
Local or Nestling		Local
Immature		Hatching Year
Sub-adult		Second Year

If age determination techniques are available and if you are aware of and use them, these revised "Year Class" codes will enable you to record precisely the "year class" of a bird through its first 3 calendar years.

These codes will also enable you to indicate birds which are at least "X" years old but perhaps older (Codes "AHY," "ASY," or "ATY").

REMEMBER - EVERYTHING "GRADUATES" ON JANUARY 1.

AFTER JULY 1, 1967, AND UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, PLEASE DO NOT ENTER THE NUMERIC CODES ON YOUR BANDING SCHEDULES. The numeric codes are provided for your interpretation of coded data you receive from the Bird Banding Laboratory.

UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, ENTER ONLY THE "ALPHA" CODES FOR YEAR CLASS IN THE RECORDS YOU FORWARD TO THE BIRD BANDING LABORATORY.

<u>Numeric Code</u>	<u>Alpha Code</u>	<u>Alpha Designation</u>	<u>Definition</u>
0	U	Unknown	A bird which you were unable to place accurately in any of the following categories. Except for birds for which the data were not recorded or have been lost, ONLY BIRDS BANDED DURING THE PERIOD AFTER THE BREEDING SEASON AND BEFORE JANUARY 1 CAN BE CORRECTLY CODED "U."
4	L	Local	A young bird banded before it was capable of sustained flight.

<u>Numeric Code</u>	<u>Alpha Code</u>	<u>Alpha Designation</u>	<u>Definition</u>
2	HY	Hatching Year	A bird old enough to be capable of sustained flight and known to have hatched during the <u>same</u> calendar year in which it was banded.  Example: Banded 1967 -- Hatched 1967
1	AHY	After Hatching Year	A bird known to have hatched before the calendar year of banding; <u>year of hatch otherwise unknown</u> .  Example: Banded 1967 -- Hatched sometime before January 1, 1967. (Birds which would have been coded "U" on December 31 "graduate" to class "AHY" on January 1.)
5	SY	Second Year	A bird <u>known</u> to have hatched last year (it is now <u>in its second calendar year</u> of life).  Example: Banded 1967 -- Hatched 1966
6	ASY	After Second Year	A bird known to have hatched <u>before last year; year of hatch otherwise unknown</u> .  Example: Banded 1967 -- Hatched 1965 <u>or earlier</u> .
7	TY	Third Year	A bird <u>known</u> to have hatched the year before last (it is now in its third <u>calendar year</u> of life).  Example: Banded 1967 -- Hatched 1965
8	ATY	After Third Year	A bird known to have hatched before the year before last (it is now in at least its fourth calendar year of life).  Example: Banded 1967 -- Hatched 1964 <u>or earlier</u> .

In summary, FOR A BIRD HATCHED IN 1965, possible codes by year are set forth in the following table:

<u>Year of Banding</u>	<u>Possible Codes (most discrete listed first)</u>
1965	Local (L) or Hatching Year (HY) or Unknown (U)
1966	Second Year (SY) or After Hatching Year (AHY)
1967	Third Year (TY) or After Second Year (ASY) or After Hatching Year (AHY)
1968	After Third Year (ATY) or After Second Year (ASY) or After Hatching Year (AHY)

EXAMPLE OF THE USE OF "YEAR CLASS" CODES. The "age" codes for the birds noted on the sample schedule (page 19, MTAB 6) are "translated" into the new "Year Class" codes below:

<u>Birds Wearing Band No.</u>	<u>Would Be Coded</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
123-50009	SY	Blue Jays retain some "juvenal" plumage into at least their second calendar year. This bird has such feathers. It obviously didn't hatch in 1966 and would have replaced these feathers if it had hatched in 1964 or earlier. Therefore, it must have hatched in 1965 and is in its Second calendar Year of life (SY). (If the bander had not been aware of this age criterion, all he could have said was that the bird did not hatch in 1966 and would have coded it "AHY.")
10 & 11	ASY	These Jays had no "juvenal" plumage nor other "immature" characteristics. All we can say is that they did not hatch in either 1966 or 1965. Therefore, we know they hatched at least two calendar years ago, but the year of hatch is otherwise unknown.
12 thru 14	SY	
15 & 16	ASY	
17	SY	
18 thru 20	ASY	
21 thru 35	HY	Mourning Doves replace their buffy-tipped "juvenal" primary coverts during their first autumn (or, rarely, winter). These birds had such feathers and, therefore, must have hatched in 1966 (the Calendar Year in which they were banded).
36	AHY	Since this bird obviously did not hatch in 1966, all we can say is that it hatched before 1966.

<u>Birds Wearing Band No.</u>	<u>Would Be Coded</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
37 thru 49	ASY	Common Grackles retain some "juvenal" plumage well into their second year. These birds had no such feathers; therefore, they apparently did not hatch during either 1966 or 1965. They must have hatched in 1964 or earlier and, therefore, are coded "ASY."
50 thru 53	ASY	Woodcock retain "juvenal" flight feathers into their second autumn. These birds had no such feathers; therefore, they apparently did not hatch in either 1966 or 1965. They must have hatched in 1964 or earlier and, therefore, are "ASY."
54 thru 72	L	
73	AHY	
74 thru 79	L	
80	AHY	
81 thru 92	L	
98 thru 00	HY	

Remember that the codes you enter on your schedules indicate the "age" of the bird at the time of release.