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FIRST NESTING PLACE IS "HOME"  
TO MIGRANT BIRDS, SAYS LINCOLN

Makers of new "homes" for migratory waterfowl should give careful consideration to the birds' own idea of where home is, counsels Frederick C. Lincoln, naturalist of the U. S. Biological Survey.

Homing instinct, says Mr. Lincoln, apparently does not operate intensively in an individual migratory bird until after it has first nested. The location of this critical first nest, he further points out, seems to be more or less a matter of chance, but it will be within the natural breeding range of the species.

These facts, Mr. Lincoln explains, indicate that a species of migratory waterfowl cannot easily be established as a breeding bird on areas outside its natural range. Pinioned or wing-clipped waterfowl may be bred successfully on favorable areas outside their ranges, but this does not mean that their young will return to these areas after the fall migrations to wintering grounds. With other birds of their kind they are more likely to return to breeding areas within the natural range and there establish the nesting places to which their homing instincts will guide them in succeeding years.

Mr. Lincoln observes that many persons seem to believe that it is necessary only to introduce a few pairs of birds of any particular species into an area that is environmentally suitable and—Presto! the species is established. This belief he attributes to the success that has attended the transplanting of a few species of upland game and song birds, but he calls attention to the fact that almost

without exception these successful experiments have been with non-migratory species.

Citing an example of the failure of transplanting experiments with migratory birds, Lincoln points out that several thousand Egyptian quail were imported and liberated in the Northeastern States from 1870 to 1880. The experiment failed. Some of these birds raised broods the first season, but there is no evidence that any of them returned after their fall migrations. Mr. Lincoln conjectures that the birds may have perished at sea while attempting to migrate back to their natural winter quarters in Africa.

The improbability of young birds returning to the nesting sites of their parents is indicated also by information the Biological Survey has obtained from bird banding. Mr. Lincoln calls attention to two outstanding examples. In one case, a mallard duck nesting near Antioch, Nebraska, hatched more than 100 ducklings between 1927 and 1933. These ducklings were banded. Yet there is no evidence (from bands or otherwise) that a single one of the young ever returned to nest even in the State where it was hatched. Individuals of these broods have been recovered south to Arizona, Texas, and Louisiana, and north to Alberta. Mr. Lincoln's other example is based on records of the house wren obtained at a station in Ohio. Hundreds of adults and fledglings of this species have been banded there, and though each season more than 42 percent of the adult birds taken have been old timers, only 2.6 percent of the banded young have been retaken there in following years.

To the question: What becomes of the young?, Mr. Lincoln replies that apparently the only tenable answer is that they spread indiscriminately throughout the natural range of the species and only by chance return to the area where they hatched.

It seems probable, he observes, that this is the operation of a natural law to prevent much of the inbreeding that might result were the offspring to return with their parents to the home site of the previous year.