

Animals', birds' ages important

FALL is the season of greatest animal abundance. Both adults and young of the year make up the population. The young that survived infancy are eating, growing and preparing for winter.

But the winter season can be very hard on adults and particularly the inexperienced young.

Adults and young of many animals look very much the same at this time of year. Often the differences are subtle and hard to detect by the untrained eye. But through the years, biologists have painstakingly studied several animals in order to determine their age.



nature
Timothy Nowicki

THIS INFORMATION is very useful because it can tell biologists how successful reproduction was that year, or what age make-up of that population is. If you see old animals, it means the population may soon die out because they are not reproducing.

But how do you age an animal? You certainly cannot ask them. Aging of different animals is done in

several different ways, depending on the kind of animal.

Birds caught during fall can be aged as juveniles (young of the year) or as adults. Tall feathers of juvenile ducks may have a small remnant of down attached to the tip, or the tip may be notched. Adults have a complete feather tapering to a point.

Outermost wing feathers of ruffed grouse differ between adults and juveniles. Tapered, pointed tips of the outer two wing feathers are characteristic of juvenile birds, while rounded tips are found on adult birds.

IT IS DIFFICULT to determine the age of an adult bird unless it is marked or identified somehow.

One method of identification is to place an aluminum band on the leg of a bird. That band has a number on it and a note asking the person who found it to return it to the Bird Banding Laboratory.

By comparing the lapse of time between the initial banding and its recovery, one can determine the age of that individual. Several bird banders in southeastern Michigan have collected information about the age of many birds they have banded.

One blue jay was recovered 14 years and one month after it was banded. Two common grackles were found after 11 years and 8 months.

The writer is a staff naturalist at Independence Oaks, an Oakland County park.

Senate panel OKs libel guard

(AP) — Legislation to repair a hole punched in Michigan's libel-law protection by a 1986 Supreme Court ruling is on its way to the state Senate following unanimous committee approval.

Under the bill, Michigan reporters and news outlets would regain stronger legal protection they lost under the ruling. The bill would restore a legal standard struck down in the decision and make it harder for plaintiffs to collect damages for erroneous stories.

The bill was approved 5-0 Thursday by the Senate Judiciary Committee chaired by Rudy Nichols, R-

Waterford. It has passed the House, but would have to return there for consideration of minor Senate changes.

COMMITTEE action came after several news officials and attorneys warned the Supreme Court ruling had damaged the media's ability to report the news.

"The effects are more pronounced with smaller newspapers," said Hershel Fink, attorney for the Detroit Free Press and other news agencies.

"The public will be deprived of a lot of information because the publishers will see it as safer," he said.

"The interest that's at stake is not a media interest," said John Romano, attorney for the Michigan Association of Broadcasters. "It's a public interest. This is legislation that supports a public interest."

"We're not reporting stories in total or dropping names because we don't feel we have sufficient protection," said David P. Hohendorf, associate publisher of the Spinal Column, a group of Oakland County weekly papers.

He said he has witnessed "a chilling effect" on reporting the news.

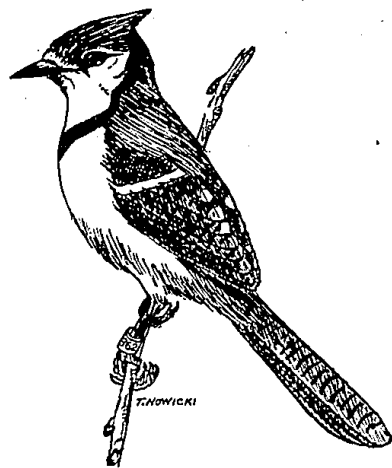
OPPOSED WAS the Michigan Tri-

al Lawyers Association, a plaintiffs' group.

"The malice standard is almost insurmountable," said Jane Bailey, legislative counsel to the organization.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. William Bryant, R-Grosse Pointe Farms, would require the proof of malice — knowledge that a statement was false or reckless disregard for whether it is false — to collect damages for libel on an issue of public interest.

Since the 1986 Supreme Court decision, the standard has been one of negligence.



One method of telling an adult bird's age is to fasten an aluminum band on the leg.

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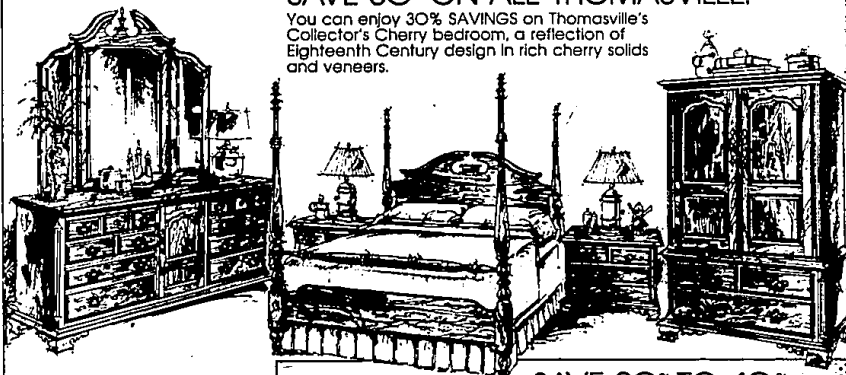
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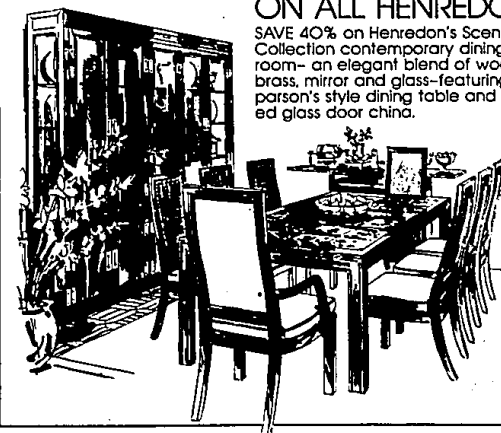
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