

\* \* \* \* WHO IS BANDING THE MOST OF WHAT? \* \* \* \*

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 \* Elinor McEntee, of Ridgewood, N.J., banded 560 red-  
 \* polls this spring. . . Ralph Bell, of Clarksville, Pa.,  
 \* banded 534 robins in 1955. . . Gordon Hight, of Atlanta,  
 \* Ga., rings thousands of chimney swifts each year. . .  
 \* Eleanor Dater, of Ramsey, N.J., banded extraordinary  
 \* numbers of warblers this spring. . . President Paul Fluck  
 \* gets unusual numbers of red-eyed vireos, rose-breasted  
 \* grosbeaks and other species at Washington Crossing, Pa.  
 \* There must be many other worthwhile contributions by  
 \* other banders large and small. \*

\* It would be valuable for all banders to know who is  
 \* banding the most of what. In that way intra-banding  
 \* correspondence could spring up to the good of all con-  
 \* cerned. To make this type of feature possible, it will  
 \* be necessary to have each bander send to EBBA NEWS his  
 \* last year totals. So send them along (a copy of the  
 \* list you sent the Bird-Banding Office will be fine.) We  
 \* plan to list the leading banders of each species in  
 \* forthcoming issues. \*

\* \* \* \* \* MIST NETTING - SOME NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS \* \* \* \*

(In two parts - Part I)

By John V. Dennis

With mist netting becoming more and more popular today among the banders, there is a very definite need for a paper or papers on their uses and limitations. This present paper makes no pretense at answering all the questions but offers a few suggestions to the bander on the use of nets and brings up a few of the problems that the bander will meet. It is hoped that the Banding Office will soon have an instruction leaflet out on netting. Meanwhile, many banders are learning the intricacies of mist netting the hard way - by trial and error. This is particularly true of the bander who has had no opportunity to spend some time with an experienced netter.

A great deal of disappointment and frustration can be avoided if

a few rules are observed and if a bander's netting is limited to certain objectives. In the main, mist nets are not substitutes for traps. They should be used in situations where bait trapping is impracticable or unproductive. Those birds that are easily captured by the use of traps should continue to be trapped in that manner, while the nets are used more specifically to capture those birds that do not readily enter wire traps like the flycatchers, vireos, and warblers. In view of this it can be seen that mist netting should not be undertaken as a year-round backyard affair. As a matter of fact, many banders feel that during the winter fewer birds will be captured by nets than would be taken during the same period by the use of wire traps. This is true since the birds learn to avoid the nets if captured repeatedly. When nets are used in the backyard many of the birds that would normally come to the feeder or baited traps will stop coming.

There are several inherent difficulties in netting that are not encountered or that are minimized in trapping. Netting requires considerably more diplomacy than is required with traps. A series of nets stretched about the landscape are conspicuous. And birds caught in the net look dead or helpless. This often has a very definite emotional effect on the uninitiated who may then resort to one or all of the following actions: give the bander a verbal blasting, attempt to take the bird out of the net or tear the nets down. It is absolutely necessary that the netting site be conspicuously posted with the official banding poster (3-1155) and it is also a great help to have each net tagged with a small baggage stamp stating:

Bird Banding Project, in cooperation with  
the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.  
Interference is unlawful.

signed ----

Another difficulty encountered is that if the bird is left too long in the net - it will die, most often from exhaustion. However, if the net is in the bright sun and it is already a hot day then the bird will die even more quickly from the heat. And conversely, if a cold day - the bird will die from the cold. Even if the bird does not die there are certain debilitating effects and injuries that occur to the bird left too long in the net. These include: exhaustion, loss of feathers, and cutting of the skin by net strands - these generally occur at the base of the wing, the neck, and the thighs. However, despite the above remarks and contrary to the belief of the occasional

observer, the process of being caught in the net does not harm the bird in the least. Only inexperienced handling and prolonged confinement cause hardship.

Nearly all of these difficulties may be overcome if the cardinal rule of the netter is observed and that is that the nets must be attended constantly. Net casualties are proportionate to the number of times during a given period that the nets are visited. No bander should undertake mist netting unless he intends to be right with the nets or near them every minute. This is partly to the benefit of the bander since, as a rule, the longer a bird is in the net, the harder it is to take out. But constant vigilance is also necessary for the bird's safety since cats, dogs, foxes or almost any predator may put in an appearance.

The following are suggestions on the operation and maintenance of nets:

1. The net operator is strongly advised to wear a buttonless shirt, coat, or a sweater. It is more than annoying to be in the act of removing a bird only to stop and unhook a button that has caught up in the netting.
2. In the area where a net is to be set up a net lane is first cleared and then the ground beneath the net is cleared of twigs, leaves and other possible snags. Axe, clippers and a rake are standard equipment.
3. Nets should be carefully folded and placed in containers when not in use. Some banders prefer to roll the nets onto a cardboard mailing tube while others use a cloth or paper bag.
4. Nets should be secured to the poles by a fairly heavy elastic band, this reduces stretching of the net lines if the net is blown by the wind. The eight foot steel fence post, while a little heavy, serves very well. And for elastics a No. 84 elastic band is suitable (it is about three and one half inches long and a half an inch wide).
5. The trammel lines (the cords from which the net is suspended) should not be spaced too far apart. For the standard four shelf net a space of about 15 inches is about right. One difficulty with nearly all nets that are available today is trammel stretch. This can be rectified by the following procedure: when the new net is first strung up, either measure the distance from pole to pole or leave the poles in a permanent location, always using the same net in the same location. Then when after some usage the trammels stretch - set up the net, and tighten each trammel by untying one end and shortening the cord length until the line is tight again. This assures the operator that the net

is about the same length as when first purchased. If the trammels are not shortened and the poles are simply moved further apart then the efficiency of the net is impaired in that there is no horizontal give to the net.

It is of the utmost importance that the new netter has a clear mental picture about how the net works. It will greatly simplify the setting up of the net and the removal of the birds - not to mention the increased catch if the nets are properly set up. Once the bander understands the functioning of the nets, he will realize that it is absolutely necessary that the birds are taken out of the net on the same side that they entered. In fact, it is impossible to do otherwise but a great deal of time can be wasted if an attempt is made to do so. If in doubt and great difficulty is experienced in removing the bird, chances are that the wrong side is being worked. Look first for a portion of the bird that is not covered by netting and work from there. Untangle feet and legs first, and then while holding these firmly, work one wing free and then the other, and the remaining netting can be pulled over the head just like taking off a sock. Occasionally it is necessary to cut a strand or two in removing a bird but if proper attention is given the nets and with careful handling of the bird in removal, this will be infrequent.

-- (to be concluded in the next issue)

#### IN DEFENCE OF BLUE JAYS

Mrs. Grace Dietze, Nutley, N.J., writes: "Blue jays may have bad reputations, but there are two here that have saved more than a few bird lives, I'm sure. At the first hint of a cat, they fly to our dining room or kitchen window (depending on which room they see me in) calling for help, because they have me pegged as a good cat chaser. Also, on several occasions I have seen blue jays fly into a feeding flock of white-throats or other birds, when some danger appeared unseen by the flock, scattering them to safety.

"Let the seed on the feeder get low, and they fly from my kitchen window to the feeder and back again, with scolding cries. Yet when I fill the feeder, they do not always feed immediately but sometimes fly off, content that I am still on the job. I never fail to be amazed how they feed happily in the flat trap except when I am in the kitchen, where the pull string is."