

WHAT BANDING MEANS TO ME

By Eleanor E. Dater, Ramsey, N.J.

To me bird-banding is a laboratory science. I like it. With each bird I handle there is always the possibility of learning something new. That new thing is unpredictable. It may keep me busy for a couple of hours or days tracking down an unanswered question on plumage, eye color, an abnormal growth, type of seed that may fall from the mouth of the bird, parasites, or just the identity of a female or immature bird. The reactions of some birds while being banded are most amazing and interesting. They may occupy my thoughts for many hours while working on some routine task.

Some weak birds die of fright either in the hand or in the trap. Those birds are always dated and stored in the deep freeze for further study. If I have no use for them in my studies, they are sent to the American Museum of Natural Sciences in New York where they are added to the skin collections that in many cases are very old and worn. Some skins that I have had to use were dated in the 1880's. These new skins may be a very great help to some student making a special study.

Once in a while a bird that I capture is a record for the area. That is gratifying. Then there are the friends who are learning birds who will come to see a new bird every time I give them a ring. In this manner I have taught some one who is eager to learn how to identify a difficult bird.

During the spring and fall migrations I have two teenagers who are only too happy to "net sit" for me when I have to be away for a few hours. I have trained these very nimble fingered people to extricate the birds from the nets with never a casualty or injury. The birds are always retained until I return when I allow the sitter to complete the banding and identification. Those youngsters have learned a great deal in what they consider an independent way.

Banders have been accused of making a game out of the operation. No doubt there are some such, but certainly not enough to condemn the whole program.

There are times when I ask myself why, other than personal pleasure, am I doing this? What is all this banding doing either for science or birds? The answer of one eminent ornithologist was "You may never know, but undoubtedly some one some day will use the data you have collected in research he or she is doing." So I continue to band and enjoy it.
