

THINGS THAT CAN HAPPEN
or
TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF A NEW BANDER
By Mrs. Elizabeth F. Romaine

On July 21, 1957, my federal banding permit arrived, and shortly thereafter I banded my first bird, a Purple Finch. My fever soared rapidly, of course, and neither aspirin nor phenobarbital has helped to lower it or calm my nerves. With apologies to Herodotus, neither snow nor rain nor heat (let's leave out the gloom of night) has stayed this bander from the swift completion of her self-appointed rounds. (Here my husband asks me to add "nor meals nor telephone calls nor visitors nor husbands." He knows!)

Seriously, it has become more absorbing each day, and the rewards have been literally and potentially so great that I am prompted to report a few of them. Probably everybody knows about the headaches, but I must mention those too.

One day in September a sick Ring-necked Pheasant was brought to me. A man training his dog had picked it up, and the poor bird had just about had it. I have been cooperating in a minor way in a local encephalitis project, an undertaking sponsored jointly by the U. S. Public Health Department and the State Department of Public Health. I took the bird to Dr. Richard O. Hayes at the field headquarters, and he was able to get a good blood sample, and then a sample of the brain. It later developed, when the report came back from the laboratory in Boston, that this bird not only showed encephalitis antibodies in the blood, one of the three of these birds which did, but in addition, showed virus in the brain. Here Dr. Hayes really had something, and while this was not really a result of my banding, it was because it was known I was banding, and also involved in this project, that the bird was brought to me.

Then on December 3, 1957, I banded a Black-capped Chickadee, and just as I was finishing the job, I noticed that it had a large (for a Chickadee) growth just above the vent. Something told me to hold the little fellow - I had recently been to a meeting of the North-Eastern Bird Banding Association, and Dr. Elizabeth Boyd had given a talk on parasites on birds. Another call to Dr. Hayes. Did he know what I should do with it? He would find out. He did. He sent the bird to Dr. Boyd, and she has since reported to us that she was extremely interested in this specimen. The cyst turned out to have been harboring two of a certain kind of fluke of which there were only two previous records for Eastern U.S. - the Purple Finch and English Sparrow. Also, and here Dr. Boyd quoted from an article in the AUK by Farner and Morgan in 1944, the only recent reference she knows of for this parasite, the fluke "is confined almost exclusively to young birds ... all dated records are for

late spring and summer, May to September." She also said that the fluke was originally described from the Great Tit, Parus major, but that no other member of the Paridae had been found infected with it. "It is most interesting that this fluke occurred in a bird in December and on a Chickadee." And in eastern Massachusetts.

I have had my troubles, too. Squirrels, for one thing. One day I was talking to an experienced bander, and telling him my trials and tribulations, and he observed that we now had a new wrinkle - a soft-hearted husband. "It is usually the wives we have trouble with." This problem has plagued me for months. By using all the tactics I could summon, I had finally got that soft-hearted husband to agree that I could "do something" with the squirrels, just so long as he was not around when I did it. Now that was rather like saying to hang your clothes on a hickory limb, but don't go near the water. Because, as our business is here in our home, naturally my husband is at home most of the time attending to business! However, one day not long ago he went off early in the morning, and I was all set to "do something" with the little rascals, four of which have been hanging around, tripping every automatic trap, and, almost as often, trapping themselves, so that I have had to rush out and release them before they could tear up the traps. This day, my golden opportunity, not one single squirrel appeared, and I had one of the best banding days of my short banding life!

Another experience may be of interest, although it is of a different nature. On December 8, 1957, a friend called me in great excitement to tell me there was what they thought was a Green-winged Towhee coming to their grain. I suggested perhaps she meant a Green-tailed Towhee, and she stood corrected. I had seen one of these birds just once, in 1953, in Haverhill, Mass. Would they let me try to trap and band it? Reluctantly, yes. I gathered some gear and went. It was indeed a Green-tailed Towhee. A most accomodating bird, it went into a hand-release trap almost at once, and with the master of the house and a small daughter breathing down my neck, and a severe case of buck-fever, I banded it. Later I called James Baird at the Norman Sanctuary in Middletown, R.I. to tell him about this unusual experience, and a few days later he had a chance to come up here, and we went to see the bird. It appeared quite promptly, and Jim turned to me and said, "Well, it is a Green-tailed Towhee." (I know he had not quite believed me, and he knows I am writing this.) I merely answered that that was what I had told him it was. What a game!

Then trouble loomed. We noticed that the bird was picking at its band, and hitching that leg as it hopped around feeding. Imagine my feelings! What to do? Fortunately my trap was still there, as we had had three or four rainy days and I had not bothered to bring it home, so I slipped out and rigged it, and almost immediately the bird came back and went into it. Careful examination by a much more experienced

eye than mine showed no injury to the leg - it was merely that the band was much too big! I had used a size #2, as listed on the mimeo sheets sent out by the banding office. Of course, neither Jim nor I had any bands with us, but he took the offending one off, and we released the bird, and that was that. I felt rather deflated, although at the same time I knew that one bird more or less did not make any real difference. But a Green-tailed Towhee here! Jim Baird, however, probably has the unique distinction of being the only person to have un-banded one!

At the time I applied it, I thought the band seemed large, but with my lack of experience, and the rather strained circumstances under which I was working, (the friends were cooperative, but not over-enthusiastic) I was not in a very good position to use my own judgment, if I had had any, which I really had not.

Since then, much to my own personal gratification, I have re-banded the bird with a size #1B, and have the report from my friends that he is seen each day, paying no attention to the band, but happily scratching and kicking and jumping backward in his day-long feeding. Praises be!

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OPERATION RECOVERY AT ISLAND BEACH, NEW JERSEY

By Stanley S. Dickerson

Operation Recovery is a cooperative banding study of the fall migration along the Atlantic coast. The original purpose was the banding of birds during prescribed periods "with the ultimate hope that immediate recoveries by other stations farther down the coast might reveal information about the distance a bird flies in a single migratory hop, and the time that a bird takes to migrate a certain distance; and concurrently, whether birds, when they reach the coast continue to migrate on down the coast or whether they head back inland."* It was soon realized that the possibility of such recoveries was slight, but that much other useful information would be obtained during the program: (1) "the weather conditions that are coincident with migratory flights of birds, (2) any evidence of diurnal migration, (3) the species composition of the various flights,"* and (4) weights and measurements of certain defined species.*

The project began in the fall of 1955 as a ten-year operation and has been continued each year since. Four stations were in operation in 1955 and resulted in the banding of about 1500 birds. In 1956, approximately 5200 birds of 113 species were banded at 15 stations ranging from Nova Scotia to Maryland.* From incomplete returns, it appears that in 1957 at least 10,000 birds were banded at 12 stations located from Nova Scotia to Caffey's Inlet, North Carolina.

*Release of Bird Banding Office, July 1957 "Operation Recovery"