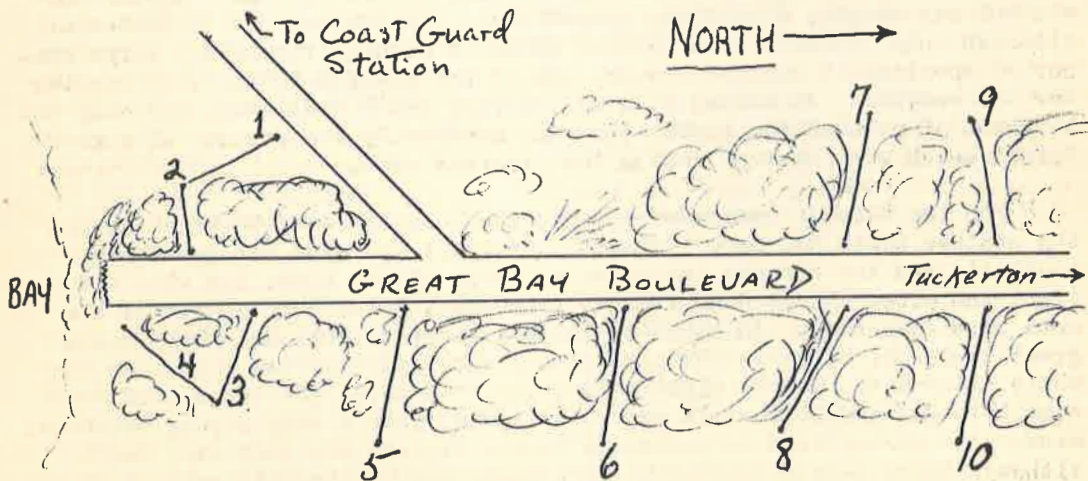


MIST-NETTING AT TUCKERTON: 1959

By Frank P. Frazier, Jr.

This fall, Michael Logue and I spent several weekends netting at Tuckerton, N. J. in connection with Operation Recovery. The nets were placed toward the end of the Great Bay Boulevard, which has been described in two recent articles in EBBA NEWS. The last several hundred yards of the road, where the netting was done, runs north and south, and the end of it juts out into the Great Bay, about two miles north of Atlantic City; the southern tip of Beach Haven is about the same distance to the north.

The road runs from the town of Tuckerton for several miles through salt marsh, and is bordered on each side by a line of very dense bushes, averaging about six to eight feet in height and ten to twenty, sometimes more, in width. Nets were placed in narrow breaks, most of which we had to cut for the purpose, in the lines of bushes, perpendicular to them. The illustration below shows placement of the nets, which are numbered for reference. After a nocturnal flight, these bushes are full of birds, many more per cubic yard of bush, so to speak, than I have seen at most other migration concentration points, even after very heavy flights. Although in the early morning the nets were often filled with birds during their normal movements, most of the time we found it very helpful to beat the bushes with extra net-poles: we walked slowly down the road, actually just agitating the bushes rather than beating them, the object being to get the birds to move through the bushes ahead of us but not fly out and in again. The secret of this operation is slow and gentle bushbeating, just enough to keep the birds moving, and on the whole it was very successful. However, many birds would fly out, or up, then back into the shrubbery, often avoiding a net.



The banding was done on the following dates: August 1-2, and 7 (only three hours - rained out); September 19-20; October 10-12, and 17-18. The August dates were, of course, prior to the main migration season but are included on the strength of a couple of early migrant warblers taken then, and of several song sparrows which were banded then and retaken later. The September weekend was, unfortunately, a very slow one: only 57 birds were banded. October, however, was extremely productive, and these two weekends will receive the most attention in this article. Numbers of birds banded are as follows:

August 1-2:	61	October 10-12:	330
August 7:	27	October 17-18:	360
Sept. 19-20:	57	TOTAL:	835

The seven species banded in the largest numbers, i.e. over 20, were:

Myrtle Warbler:	310	Sharptailed Sparrow:	29
Song Sparrow:	109	Redwing Blackbird:	25
White-throated Sparrow:	53	Palm Warbler:	20
Slate-colored Junco:	43	TOTAL:	589

During the first weekend of August, most of the birds banded were, of course, residents, and Song Sparrows and Redwings were dominant. However, a Black and White Warbler, a Magnolia Warbler, and two Northern Waterthrushes were taken. The three hours of netting, before rain forced us to fold the nets and leave, on August 7th, produced 15 Sharp-tailed Sparrows and seven Seaside Sparrows: residents, no doubt, but it is interesting that these were caught on this day, but never in similar numbers before or since. Perhaps the foul weather induced them to stay in the bushes rather than spend the day feeding in the marshes. Again, one migrant was caught: a Northern Waterthrush. On the weekend in September, although only 57 birds were banded, we had a disproportionately large number of species: 16 species one day and 17 the next; a total of 28 species for the weekend. We banded 11 Song Sparrows and 9 Redstarts, and only one to three of most of the rest! This was apparently the residue of a good flight which went through during the previous week.

The two October weekends provided ideal conditions: in both cases, the weather would not have indicated a flight: the wind was generally southerly and the air was fairly warm. Most of the time, the wind was light and often almost nonexistent: this was a great help as far as the nets were concerned. In spite of these weather conditions, there was a great number of birds in the bushes, and more would arrive, often in the early afternoon. On the night of October 11 a very pronounced cold front came through, and October 12 was clear, cold, with a very strong northwest wind: this strong wind is reflected in the figures for that day, for although there were plenty of birds around, and hitting the nets, few were

caught and only 40 birds were banded during the morning, until we left shortly after noon. Banding data for these two weekends are summarized in the table below. Nets were left up constantly during the day.

Date:	October -	10	11	12	Total	17	18	Total	Grand Total
No. of Birds Banded:	97	193	40	330	159	201	360	690	
Total Species:	20	32	12	42	19	20	28	47	
Net-Hours:	45	60	18	123	69	57	126	249	
Birds per Net-Hour:	2.15	3.22	2.22	2.68	2.3	3.53	2.94	2.77	

Bandings of the seven commonest species as mentioned on the preceding page are as follows, for these two weekends in October, bearing in mind that most of the Redwings were banded as residents in August.

	Oct. 10-12	Oct. 17-18	Total
Myrtle Warbler	141	169	310
Song Sparrow	25	61	86
White-throated Sparrow	21	32	63
Slate-colored Junco	29	13	42
Sharp-tailed Sparrow	2	10	12
Redwing Blackbird	3	-	3
Palm Warbler	19	1	20

Among the interesting or rare birds caught were two winter wrens on October 17; a third was seen but not caught. Two Orange-crowned Warblers were banded: one on October 11 and one on October 18; also two Connecticut Warblers on October 11 and one Rusty Blackbird on October 17. Last year, three Grasshopper Sparrows were banded here on Columbus Day weekend: this year we had one, on October 11, which was the best day for sparrows: eleven species of sparrows were caught, also including Vesper, Lincoln's, and White-crowned; the Seaside Sparrow was the only sparrow banded this year but not taken on October 11. In addition to these, we saw but did not catch a Lark Sparrow on October 11, and a Red-headed Woodpecker on October 18.

Song Sparrows provided several returns and repeats: six Song Sparrows banded in the fall of 1958 at Tuckerton were taken this fall: two on August 1st, three on September 19-20, and one on October 17. One of these birds was originally banded here on September 9, 1958 as an immature, and was taken September 20, 1959 and again on October 18. In addition to these returns, at least a dozen of the Song Sparrows banded this August were captured again, often several times, during September and October.

It is unfortunate that only weekends could be spent on banding here, as there are excellent opportunities for study, with so much material to work with. As it is, the only definite conclusion apparent is that Tuckerton is unexcelled as a migration concentration point for bird-banding purposes, especially because it is possible, unlike most if not all other coastal banding locations, to "herd" the birds toward the nets. When there were many birds in the small area at the end of the road, we found that we were kept quite busy with five nets: we used locations numbered #6 through #10 on the diagram above; the other spots were used in August and September when we operated as many as ten nets. On the two weekends in October, we used five nets almost exclusively, except for two more put up on October 12, when it was too windy to catch many birds, and one more part of October 17 (at location no. 5 on the diagram). As a result, the birds-per-net-hour figures are, for these weekends, far above those for any other Operation Recovery station that I have heard of. For example, the highest birds-per-net-hour average at Island Beach was .9 (nine-tenths) on September 25, 1959 - 414 birds in 462 net-hours; a total of 45 nets used.

There are, however, a few disadvantages at Tuckerton which make it less attractive for a major banding operation than it first seems. Wind is a very great problem, as there is very little to shelter the nets from it - and it is windy at Tuckerton more often than not. We tried split-shot as suggested by Gail Cannon in the July-August EBBA NEWS: this helped, but we used it as an emergency measure and it was not as satisfactory as it would have been if used properly. Split-shot ought to be put on nets which are set exactly as desired on a calm day, rather than in a wind. Repeats can also become a problem: due to the restricted banding area, banded birds will be caught again and again, and we soon adopted the practice of driving each cage-full of birds a mile or two down the road to release them. For an extended stay, this area is primitive at best - there are no food or lodging facilities within many miles of the banding area - we got by, camping out among the mosquitoes, but are not prepared to recommend this to others! Finally, the Great Bay Boulevard is a popular road for hunters and fishermen who come to park at the end, and for people on weekend outings who have the maddening habit of driving to the end of the road with no more purpose than to turn around and return. It is a painfully public area for banding.

Upper Montclair, New Jersey

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

All Banders, we believe, beginners or veterans, have problems of one sort or another for which they need answers. To meet this need, EBBA NEWS is arranging a new department, Questions & Answers, to appear in each future issue. So send in your questions about any phase of banding -- satisfying answers are guaranteed!

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