

## OPERATION RECOVERY AT BLOCK ISLAND, 1959

By James Baird

Ever since the inception of the Operation Recovery program in 1955, it has been hoped that a station could be established at Block Island. The reports of Miss Elizabeth Dickens, Mr. Roland C. Clement and other members of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island provided details of an amazing volume of fall migrants, and indicated that a station in this particularly strategic position would yield interesting and valuable results. Some insight into the netting potential of Block Island was gained by the experience of the past three years when the author, assisted by members of the Rhode Island Audubon Society, was able to band over 300 birds each year over the Columbus Day holiday weekend.

This year we are happy to report that a banding station was in daily operation for the period September 10 through October 12 (except for two days, September 17 and October 5). Mr. Gilbert Cant operated the station from September 10 to September 16 (maximum of four nets) and banded 85 birds of 38 species. Mr. and Mrs. Stanley S. Dickerson arrived on the 18th and departed on October 4; they operated 15 to 25 nets depending on the weather and assistance. They were assisted during one weekend by Frank Frazier, Jr. and Michael Logue, and at other times by Merrill Slate and Severyn S. Dana. During this period there were 1085 birds banded of 71 species. James Baird was station leader during the period October 6 through October 12 and was assisted by Richard Ferren, Merrill Slate, Ralph O. Udall, Joseph J. Mahoney, Jr., and Miss Joan Leven. During this period, using a maximum of seven nets, there were 714 birds banded of 45 species. Thus during this 31 day period there were 1884 birds banded of 80 species in a total of 4520 net hours.

From the observations of the fall migration in the past few years it had already been decided that the area with the greatest potential for netting migrants would be in the shrubby growth at the northern tip of the island. This decision was based on two facts: 1. Most day-flying nocturnal migrants fly northward through the island, and upon arrival at the northern tip either leave the island in a north or northwest direction or turn and settle in the bushes at varying distances south of the northern tip, and 2. Block Island is pear-shaped, with the northern end the narrowest part of the island -- this, coupled with the stream of northward-moving birds produces a higher transient density than elsewhere on the island. Although nets were not operated on other parts of the island, the birds per net hour ratio would indicate that our assumptions were essentially correct.

The netting station area, which remained the same despite station leader changes for various periods, was located in the thickets, gardens and lawns of the properties belonging to Mrs. Russell Dolan, Jr.

and Mr. and Mrs. Whitman. Their properties lie on the southeast corner of Chagum Pond, on the east side of the road and about a quarter-mile from the northeastern end of the island. Many of the nets were set in the mowed paths that crisscross the extensive thickets of bayberry, wild rose, blackberry, poison ivy, and sumac. The remainder were set in the gardens and lawns of the Dolan and Whitman residences. There was no attempt to determine the directions of flight of the birds captured or the catch-total of individual nets but more than 60% of the birds captured were weighed, measured and the fat class estimated. The only times that all birds were not fully processed were on heavy flights when only a certain few selected species were fully processed during the busiest periods.

The weather was generally disappointing; the too few cold fronts were all too quickly succeeded by long periods of warm southwest winds. However, cold fronts did force their way southward and were marked with immediate increases in the numbers of netted birds: 103 birds on Sept. 20th; 122 on Sept. 25th and 26th, each; 358 on October 11th. This latter flight was one of such magnitude that it had to be seen to be believed: it was a day when the only limitation to the number of birds that could have been banded was the number of nets that could be operated safely. In addition to the birds that were being captured at low level, there were literally thousands flying overhead at varying altitudes -- interestingly enough, the majority of these were birds that were not being taken in the nets, e.g. Robin, Rusty Blackbird, Purple Finch, Cedar Waxwing, Water Pipit, Flicker, etc.

The ten most numerous species banded might be of interest for purposes of comparison, and were: Slate-colored Junco, 200; Myrtle Warbler, 209; Song Sparrow, 172; Savannah Sparrow, 150; Palm Warbler, 120; White-throated Sparrow, 93; Brown Creeper, 91; Blackpoll Warbler, 66; Redstart, 56; and Catbird, 56. Other interesting individuals banded included Sora Rail, Saw-whet Owl, Mockingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, Philadelphia Vireo, and Dickcissel.

Studies of visible migration were undertaken by members of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island during the weekend of October 10-12. Observers were placed at strategic places about the island and counts of birds and direction of movement was recorded at each spot. The results of this particularly interesting cooperative venture will be written up by Mr. Roland C. Clement and the author. Other less systematic observations were made at intervals during the period by Mr. Severyn S. Dana, members of the Hartford Bird Club, Merrill Slate, and other members of the Rhode Island Audubon Society that were unable to join the special studies group.

Newport, Rhode Island

★ ★ ★