

FIRST YEAR
By Bob McCullough

The day my permit arrived I drove out on Long Island and got the last of Geoffrey Gill's traps, and some kindly advice from Mrs. Gill. We started for our place in north-west New Jersey on top of the Kittatinny Mountains, loaded with hardware cloth and enthusiasm. Among my first catches were a Chickadee and a Collie dog.

Mrs. Dater furnished me with back copies of EBBA NEWS and I pored through them for all the things I needed to know. They were so helpful that I had my hand up in the Cape May meeting at the Auditorium when it appeared for a moment that there would be no comment after the editor's report. Someone did make some kindly remarks, so I remained quiet, as I did not have much to say for myself in the company of my experienced associates. On Friday night my wife was coming down with a virus, we only spoke to two people, Mrs. Gillespie and Miss Meleney, both had been banding birds for about forty years. Saturday morning we had to return home, after a brief stop at the Auditorium meeting.

We have had the advantage of all the years of other people's experience, which gave us a head start. However, like other new banders we have had our own special problems, and our own special excitements and adventures.

One early morning I awakened fully when I found a rattlesnake coiled up alongside a single cell trap that I was about to reach for because it had a Chickadee in it. I shot the rattlesnake and coiled it back up the way it was for a picture, all of which did not seem to bother the Chickadee other than his usual interest in getting out. The picture I sent to Mrs. Mary Schmid, who had been most helpful to me, as an example of what happens to people who do not attend their classes at the Annual Meeting.

Another night there was a lot of commotion in the All Purpose Trap. Three little Raccoons were in it, the mother was on top of it and another was trying to get in. They finally all piled out through the gathering compartment which gave way.

At first I wondered if traps and bands would make me have less birds around my place. Mrs. Dickerson, in the course of some correspondence over a gathering box, assured me that I would find I had a lot more birds than I thought I had. Such proved to be the case. We thought there was one pair of Indigo Buntings around and we banded 23. What we thought was one pair of Crested Flycatchers became 17. While I was still counting one Chickadee was in the trap 27 times during the year.



RATTLESNAKE and CHICKADEE

With help from Mrs. Dater we secured a netting permit. Our list of species grew to 49 and our total grew to more than 600 birds. We remain in awe of the figures we find in EBBA NEWS!

While giving a nature talk for school children I talked about bird banding, naturally. Two boys had caught five birds in a home made trap, one of them was banded, and "what should they have done?" I had to tell them that it was unlawful to trap wild birds without a permit, but had to admit that someone would have been very pleased to know about the bird. The teacher said she had cared for a hurt bird for a few weeks, and it died. The bird had a band on it, but not knowing what to do about it she did nothing. In both cases they did not know what kind of bird it was. It occurred to me that many birds are probably never reported because the small bands cannot carry thorough instruction, and most people would not think to do something about a band of this kind that might come into their hands. I hope that the right person finds my banded birds, as I await the day to hear from one of them. Thirty-four of our first 150 birds have returned. We are making a study of the bird life in general of our mountain-top area, making notes on bird personalities, and special notes on Chickadees.

The first year has proven that I have lots to learn. I had the feeling at the Annual Meeting that there was a vast store of knowledge among the people there, and I felt privileged to share in it and contribute anything I can. The first year also proved that I had underestimated my wife's helpfulness, as usual! We both look forward to next year's meeting and we hope to attend more fully.