

FIFTY YEARS A BIRD-BANDER -- WELL ALMOST

By William Pepper

On June 7, 1914 my father banded his first bird, a nestling Catbird, one of many nestlings to be banded in those early years. That first year he banded only 105 birds of 18 species. Until 1924 he banded only during the summer months, when home from work, or on vacation. This hobby was to continue until shortly before his death in 1948.

How soon after that first bird I began to help him there is no record, nor do I remember. I have a photograph of myself taken by my father about 1914 when I was all of nine years old, a little young for even a sub-permittee, holding a Herring Gull. It looks very dead and is almost as large as I am. I also remember helping to extricate Leach's Petrels from their nesting burrows on some small islands off Mount Desert Island, Maine. This was done between 1915 and 1917. I also recall being rewarded for locating nests at home in Pennsylvania.

There is no record of when I actually may have first banded a bird for him, since his records, and mine also, now that I think of it, do not show whether birds were banded by sons, daughters, or wives.

It was only after I married and left home in 1927 and received my own banding permit, that I have definite dates of my bandings.

Between us, except for 1923, we have banded at least a few birds each year since, despite several world wars and other interruptions. My father's total was 13,174 birds banded of 116 species. My own total is 34,473 of 143 species. Together we have banded 47,647 birds of 162 species. Most of these have been banded within a 20-mile circle of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but birds have been banded from Newfoundland to the Okefinokee Swamp in Georgia, where most birds were found inside a snake caught in a trap than were banded during the trip. The Okefinokee Swamp also happens to be our most western banding point.

Some of my father's methods of catching birds were rather interesting, from lassoing a Night Hawk, dozing on a low limb, with the aid of a long fly rod and fish line loop, to catching Terns, perched on bridge railings, with a long-handled landing net while someone drove him slowly past in his car. I recall a drawbridge lamp which was too close to an attempted catch, and ended up at the bottom of the channel -- ("Drive on, Bill").

An interesting fact, due possibly to its relation to the early days of United States banding, is that I can find no record of my father's having caught a bird banded by anyone else, except for one summer's stay at Northeast Harbor, Maine, when there were three banders trapping within sight of each other. However, his records of foreign recoveries may have been mislaid.

I only wish he could have been with us these past five years to enjoy the thrilling experience of netting at the annual Island Beach Operation Recovery, when a good single day's catch often exceeded many of his annual catches.

With eyesight failing so that I can't fat-class a bird, and hearing missing many a bird call, it's very unlikely that I'll still be banding in 1978, my official anniversary, so perhaps I'll celebrate mine this year, shaky as my claim may be.

20 East Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia 18, Pa.



COMMENTS ON TRAPS

By Mabel Gillespie

In the President's message, September-October issue of EBBA News, 1962, Merrill Wood tells of raising his Chardonneret traps off the ground for greater efficiency. This scheme I, also, have found effective. My property on Martha's Vineyard Island is partially surrounded by a rustic fence. I have nailed flat boards, somewhat larger in area than the base of a Chardonneret trap, horizontally to the tops of the posts, and then tied the traps to these platforms. I find that Blue Jays, Flickers, and particularly Gray Squirrels can upset the traps if they are not fastened, and a fall to the ground does them no good. In Glenolden one of these traps is tied to the top platform of an old step ladder.

The mention of Chardonneret traps sparked a thought that has been smoldering for some time. In the first place I was delighted to hear that someone else than myself still uses this old-time trap. A couple of years ago, when my last two Chardonnerets faded away like old soldiers, I was fortunate in finding a wood-worker who agreed to make some. I ordered five for myself and three for Grace Melensy. I had been so enthusiastic about Chardonnerets that she decided to try them.

Now here is the point to which I am circuitously leading. Grace was very much disappointed with the performance of her Chardonnerets. Yet I, a mere eighth of a mile distant from her Martha's Vineyard banding station, obtained excellent results with them. The subject of this brief discourse, then, is that what works for one bander doesn't necessarily suit another.