

BIRD BANDING IN TRINIDAD

By C. Brooke Worth

Since July, 1963, I have been tempted to send a note to "Who is Banding the Most of What," but my conscience insisted that this would be unfair. Who in EBBA could compete with items such as the Smooth-billed Ani, Pygmy Kingfisher, Rufous-tailed Jacamar or Ochreous-bellied Woodcreeper, to mention only a few of the exotic species I have been banding?

All this is part of our program, at the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory, to study birds in relation to eastern equine encephalitis. The banding aspect has two points of interest. One is simply to gain an idea of the density and movements of tropical bird populations. The other is to detect recent virus activity in individual birds by obtaining successive blood samples at times of repeated trapping. If the blood specimen is negative on one occasion but positive later, one can conclude that the bird experienced an infection during the interval between bleedings. This in turn is evidence that virus transmission, presumably by mosquitoes, had been going on recently, and that a current threat to the health of human beings and horses might exist.

The Fish and Wildlife Service have kindly granted me permission to use their bands. We are working on another scheme to make similar studies in Jamaica, again with F & W bands. This makes it all the more interesting, since some North American migrants (chiefly the Northern Waterthrush in Trinidad) are included, and their recovery in the United States or Canada would be most exciting.

Bird netting in open areas such as cocoa plantations or scrubby pastures is fairly rewarding, but in the rain forest it is slow indeed. One looks longingly up into the canopy where birds seem to be more abundant. So why not rig up some nets that can be raised and lowered on pulleys? That is exactly what we are doing. The first net is already operating and has caught a few birds about 40 feet above ground level. A second net will be suspended from 70-foot towers. The only thing I dread is catching treetop parrots, for they can bite like pruning shears, and in any case they would probably remove their bands with a single snip.

It is too bad that hummingbirds can not be banded. In an attempt to study their movements, I have been clipping one primary, beginning with the outermost one on the right and then continuing on the left wing. Naturally the feathers will be lost by molting, but for a while this practice enables one to recognize individual birds. Up to the present time I have marked about 40 hummers of five species and have had two repeats. One hummer was a list-lister!

The work is only in the first stages and will undoubtedly yield much interesting information as it progresses. Without question it will provide additional tidbits for future issues of EBBA NEWS. However, I promise not to send them to "Who is Banding the Most of What."