



A MONTH AT RED CREEK O.R. STATION, SEPT. 1966

By Cora D. Williams

On September 4, 1966, my husband and I trailered down to Red Creek Campground, 10 miles southeast of Davis, West Virginia. We found John Morgan there, who helped erect my nets and get me started on my four week stay as "resident bander" for the Operation Recovery station on the Rim. I'd call it the nicest rock pile this side of the Rockies. John left next morning at 10 a.m. for work and school.

Thus began my daily routine of 5:30 a.m. to after dark on the project started years ago by Charles Handley and Ralph Bell. I began immediately getting my mountain goat agility in shape. The net lanes were across rock avalanches, on rocky slopes, and a few were in a level glade but to get there one crossed rocks that tilted and once your balance was gone "you'd had it". Fortunately I came through with but one slight bump.

The wind on many days was so strong that a gathering cage could unbalance one and I carried paper bags of all sizes and found them very adequate for certain could be isolated until banded. As for gathering cages, the rubber-topped ones proved easier in which to place the birds and in removing them for banding. Incidentally, you kept well back from the edge of the Rim on windy days.

My "rock hound" husband refused to try to navigate the net lanes after dark or even venture onto the trail to the Rim at night so, alone, I enjoyed the enchanting sunset to the west and watched night approach from the valley to the east. After I felt reasonably sure all the birds were abed for the night I checked the nets by flashlight and returned to the camp to do the daily records. The bear I saw cross the road south of camp obeyed me when I said "Stay away from my section of the Rim".

The early morning walk to the Rim was in a hushed quiet, broken only by the "peeps" of thrush and yellowthroats in the ilex, mountain ash, blueberry and red spruce along the trail. On a 30 degree chilly dawn the grass was "crispy-crackly" under my boots. Gloves were a necessity and on all occasions were helpful in removing birds from the nets - the nylon

nets did not cling to the cotton gloves. Ice was frozen on water pails several mornings and my heart went out to the campers in tents and station wagons. I admired their ruggedness.

One 35 degree dawn I stood beside Ralph in the campground and listened to a large flight of thrushes. We also heard a Whippoorwill. Was it the one I caught in my net a week later? My first Whippoorwill to band!

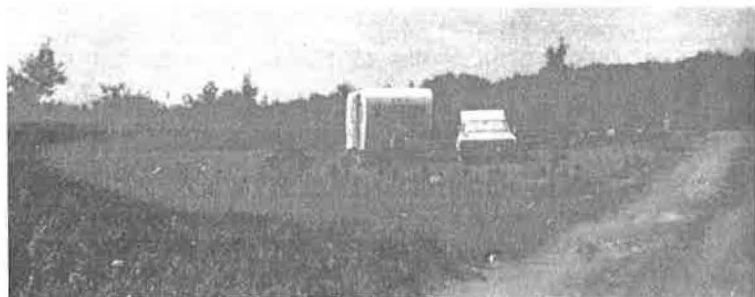
Our record sheets were very complete for data and I checked the temperature at 6 a.m., estimated wind speed and direction before picking up my equipment - a tackle-box banding kit (very adequate for pliers, bands, wing gauges, pens, pencils, etc.) and my beach bag of reference books. Writings by Chandler Robbins and others of EBBA were invaluable in aiding me to identify "oddballs". Thank you one and all of EBBA!

Red Creek Campground		Date	No. Nets	No. Net Hours		
10 SE Davis, W. Va.		Time	Temp.	Weather	Wind	Speed
390-0791		Midnight				
Break of day		6 a.m.				
First Warbler		Noon				
Sun first seen		6 p.m.				

#	Band Number	Species	AOU	Age	Sex	Hit net	Wing	Fat	Wt.	Net

Sample of record sheet heading used at Red Creek O.R. Station this fall. Since warbler flights often start about 20 minutes after sunrise, extra data is being kept to see if can help figure out why and how consistent this lapse of time really is.

Seeing or hearing the first warbler of the day wasn't too difficult but that "break of day" business really bothered me. Was it after the beautiful morning star dimmed in the east and the pale moon faded out or when I could read the face of my watch? By that time in the morning the eastern sky was so beautiful it didn't seem very important whether you could or could not see to read. As for when the "sun first seen", some days you never saw it. Those were the days when a huge cloud sat on the mountain and fog drifted hither and yon and visibility was measured in feet. It was on one of these days as I was prowling about camp and its vicinity botanizing, that a car stopped beside me and an elderly man said "Am I glad to see you!". They had made a wrong turn and were driving north instead of toward Davis. His wife thought the roads were so dangerous and wanted to get down off the mountain to level land. They had read the article in an eastern newspaper about the blueberry plains, sphagnum moss, one-sided spruce, cranberry bogs, and beaver dams and had driven over from Maryland's eastern shore to see them. They had no idea the area was so remote, the roads so steep, or the fog so dense.



Our home for 28 days at the Campground



"The Cave", where all banding was done on windy and bad days



A net lane at the Rim

When the fog cleared and the wind blew from the northwest the birds came up out of the valley from the east and over the Rim by hundreds. Many, many more than were caught in the nets went over high in the sky. The flights were usually over by 9 or 9:30 a.m. Some mornings the nets were all furled but three. Once the five-meter net had 13 birds in it. Our species list for the best day numbered 31, and 385 birds banded in 112 net hours.

On windy and showery days I banded in the cave, an out-crop of rock below which the men had made a floor of rocks and with the shelf-like formation at the back usable for banding kits and clip-boards, three banders could be sheltered to a certain degree. On showery days I had to make a lean-to of newspapers for the water dripped through the crevices. A chipmunk came to visit on several quiet days. A weasel was sighted twice along a south net, and bats made life along the nets at dusk interesting.

On clear days which were slow for banding, I sat in the sun and watched the Ravens play over the valley. An occasional hawk drifted by and several Turkey Vultures floated lazily in over the mountain top. Sometimes I "squeaked" and "kissed" the little animals out of their hiding places near the nets.

One day as Ralph and I were banding at the cave we were startled by a loud "Moo" above us. We went up the rock steps and met head-on a steer, as unhappy as we - he was between the Rim and our net lane. He finally went under a net which suffered about a foot tear in the lower shelf. The owners checked their cattle every week and salted them. Two women walked six miles one day hunting their cattle - one of them was 68 years old!

Some folks came to gather blueberries and cranberries; some came to see the banding on the Rim. Many came for water at the spring. The spring almost stopped flowing the first week but after the rains came there was water everywhere. It gurgled beneath the net lanes and lay in clear pools on the campground after a heavy shower. Brooks Bird Club came for its annual hawk count. Later in the month folks drove the ridge road to see the glorious autumn coloring. Anne Shreve, Connie Katholi and Norris Gluck came for four days of banding. Ralph came for long weekends to band and cut new net lanes. Dr. and Mrs. Hall came weekends to band. It was never lonesome. Some things I learned, and from whom, follow:

How to erect nets on a windy exposure - John Morgan
 Goldfinches are not easy to age and sex - Jack Linehan
 The tertiaries of an Ovenbird - George Hall
 The many stripes on a Blackpoll Warbler - Connie Katholi and Anne Shreve
 Quiet efficiency - Clark Miller
 How to skull a bird - Ralph Bell

Swiftly my four weeks of "helping on O.R." passed and at 9:30 a.m. on September 30, 1966, I was waving goodbye to Ralph who was industriously banding at the cave, surrounded by gathering cages filled with interesting but impatient subjects. The nets were all furled but three as it was one of our big flight days.

For September our species total was 68, and individuals banded 2205.

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Bill Williams, Anne Shreve, and Connie Katholi



The Rim area - net pole at left

(All photos by the author)