

A FAREWELL MESSAGE
By Philip G. Murton

After 3½ years in the United States we are on our way back to England. It is always good to go home, but on this occasion, we leave with mixed feelings, as our tour of duty has been a wonderful experience and something that is not "easy to fly away from". Through the medium of this brief note we want to express our thanks to all the charming people we have met in ornithological circles - for the great kindnesses we have experienced, and for the friendships we have made.

Space is too short to mention all the people whose company we have enjoyed, but our grateful thanks must go to Stanley and Elise Dickerson for their generosity and hospitality in the pleasant and relaxed atmosphere of their Somerville and Block Island homes, and for Elise's invaluable help when I first applied for my banding permit. Bill and Margaret Pepper have made their home our home, have visited us in St. Louis and Warner Robins (Georgia), and have taught us a tremendous amount about North American birds. We shall never forget the fun and excitement we had with them at Island Beach. Ted and Mary Pettit gave us the run of their Somerville yard, and threw open their delightful farm in the Catskills to us on several unforgettable occasions.

A special word of thanks is due to Earl Baysinger for granting a master banding permit - and to his staff for guiding a foreigner along the right lines with regard to banding in general and schedules in particular. I am also grateful to Larry Hood, Chan Robbins and Brooke Meanley for their help in various ways over the past three years.

Despite the fact that bird banding was constantly interrupted by "calls to duty" from the Royal Air Force, we have had a great many unforgettable experiences.

In the spring of 1966 I had an exhilarating ten days on Block Island with the Dickersons (recorded in the article "Operation Recovery in Reverse") - met and banded with Frank and Kit Frazier and saw, for the first time, hundreds of migrants in their spring breeding plumage - discovered a Marsh Hawk's nest and eggs - and cheered Stanley on as he did his recorded hundred yards sprint to retrieve a frustrated Sparrow Hawk from the net.

In August of that year we made our first visit to Island Beach with Elise - and caught our first White-eyed Vireo in her net lane.

In the falls of 1966 and 1967 we again netted at Island Beach - sharing a lane, nets and birds with Margaret and Bill Pepper. Here we met Mabel Warburton, Bob Yunick, and Dorothy and Blanche Bordner and many of the other keen participants who help to make I.B.O.R. the resounding success it is. Both years we saw and handled many new species from our own

and other net lanes. The most memorable of these were the Yellow-throated Warbler which Mabel caught, Bob Yunick's Sharp-shinned Hawk, Bill Pepper's Brewster's Warbler and our Clay-colored Sparrow. On each visit to I.B.O.R. we had almost perfect weather - and recall with nostalgia watching the beautiful sunsets over Barnegat Bay, whilst the full moon rose over the Atlantic Ocean in the east.

In the early part of 1967 we moved from Philadelphia to St. Louis, and were fortunate enough to find a suburban house with a yard which attracted a large number of birds. Here I banded 277 European Tree Sparrows, and a brood of young Flickers which had conveniently been reared in an old willow stump by the clothes post! We were introduced to a charming retired couple, Burrell and Ruby Pickering, who own a private wildlife refuge in the Ozark country. Here we had many pleasant days, netting and banding a variety of species. We recall most vividly one day when 13 Red-bellied Woodpeckers almost fell into the net whilst raiding ripening peaches - and another day when the Summer Tanagers were so busy gorging on raspberries that to be netted and banded was only a minor inconvenience to their activities! Here also, we helped to reestablish and increase the population of Bluebirds making and putting up suitable nest boxes in the early spring. These were enthusiastically inhabited for two or three broods.

Our last year was spent in Georgia and, again, we found a house with a perfect yard which was a miniature bird sanctuary - and a bander's paradise. We saw no less than 71 species of birds in the yard (including a Pileated and six other species of Woodpeckers) and caught and banded all but nine of these. In December 1968, an apparent "invasion" of Evening Grosbeaks and Purple Finches started, followed by a lesser invasion of Chipping Sparrows and American Goldfinches. We banded 931 Evening Grosbeaks and we have the scars to prove it! We banded over 2,000 Purple Finches in the year we occupied the house, as well as 823 Chipping Sparrows and 183 American Goldfinches - and spent many tedious hours removing over-eager repeats from the nets.

In the Georgia swamps, with the invaluable help of Milton Hopkins, Jr. (a well known local ornithologist) we located from the air a number of "rookeries" containing nests of Anhinga, Little Blue and Green Herons and Cattle and Common Egrets. In 40 hours of wading up to our waists in slime and duckweed, we tagged just under 1,500 young birds. Other highlights of these expeditions into the swamps included the discovery of young Wood Ibis, Prothonotary Warblers (duly banded) and a roost of about 150 Black Vultures.

There are countless other highlights which we shall recall with pleasure in the coming years. We have so very many happy memories.

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