



May-June  
**A Bird Bander's Diary**  
 by  
 Ralph K. Bell

June 1969 ... I'm sure most banders have started a project and before it was finished have found out something that was totally unexpected. This was the case with my Starling project.

For years, all Starlings were banded in an effort to find out about their travels, habits, life expectancy, etc. My family and friends would consider me a little "odd" because I would band and release Starlings to go on their unscrupulous ways. But band I did and as all banders know, the recovery rate for Starlings is high.

To partially satisfy my critics (and my own conscience) I did start to do something about the Starling problem here on March 18, 1966. That day I started to list all female Starlings that were captured in my box traps in the obituary column. However, all captured males were banded and released as before.

There are four box traps placed at strategic locations around our yard and male Starlings cannot seem to resist the temptation to inspect them once the breeding season starts. Since two of the traps are placed near the Purple Martin boxes there has been very little trouble with Starlings wanting to throw out Purple Martin eggs or compete for nesting sites in the houses. Starlings seem to prefer the deeper holes of the box traps and of course are immediately captured. Starlings are not dumb and usually take off screaming after being banded and seldom return - especially if they are held up by one toe for a few seconds before being released.

The first observation made after the decision to eliminate all captured female Starlings was that I seemed to be getting more females than ever before. At first glance this seemed strange and I even thought about writing EBBA member Dr. Harold Burt of Columbus, Ohio who has written a book titled "The Psychology of Birds".

The increase in female Starlings captured was so evident that this

year I decided to keep detailed records and maybe come up with an answer. The first female was captured on March 5, 1969 and by the time the base period ended on June 10, the female Starlings captured totalled 106. This was 18 more than the number of males captured and was a complete reversal of past history (at the time when both sexes were captured, banded and released).



Starling nest-box trap

Often, in past years, a banded male would defy me and stay around and sing - usually at box F-1 (Flicker box trap No. 1). The male would be too smart to enter the trap again but would constantly carry in nesting material and push it into the hole. The weight of the nesting material would soon trip the trap - making it useless for catching anything until I cleaned it out and reset it again. This would often happen three or four times a day. Formerly, I would usually have to eliminate this brave persistent singer to keep the trap operative, but this year I decided to let him sing to his heart's content. His filling of the box with nesting material was most annoying but I interfered only to the extent of removing it several times a day. The trap was closed while we attended the EBBA meeting but that did not stop him. He would somehow manage to raise the trap door enough to push in big wads of nesting material.

His enthusiasm began to wane about May 25 and by June first he decided to give it up as a lost cause. My records indicate that at least 79 female Starlings were captured in box-trap F-1 - most were probably lured there by the persistent singing of the male.

Many females with brood patches were captured the latter part of April. This suggests that predation of Starling nests may be quite common and that the pair bond between male and female may be terminated when the nest is destroyed. Either that or the males had been shot by Starling haters that wished to keep them away from their Purple Martin boxes. Anyway, it was an interesting experiment. One apparent benefit (to us) is the fact that there are very few immature Starlings around as this is being written (the end of June) and we have actually had some cherries for ourselves!

A table on the following page shows the number of Starlings banded since 1958.



Tally of Starlings captured and banded since 1958 (in box traps)

	Number caught in box traps up to June 10th	<u>Known</u> males captured and banded	<u>Known</u> females captured and banded
1958	75	55	15
1959	127	88	33
1960	57	40	15
1961	54	47	7
1962	91	79	12
1963	58	48	7
1964	98	87	11
1965	254	206	47
1966	126	107	7
1967	75	75	0
1968	107	107	0
1969	88	88	0

Seven females were captured in 1966 before I started my experiment on March 18. After that all females were eliminated. One non-breeding female was trapped as late as May 18, 1969.

Eye color is a reliable way to tell the sex of about 95 percent of the Starlings during the breeding season. However, bill color and length of feathers under the chin can be used as checks if necessary.

Box 229, Clarksville, Pa. 15322

FOOT POX - ISLAND BEACH OPERATION RECOVERY, 1968  
By Mabel Warburton

Island Beach banders working on Operation Recovery collected five specimens of tissue suspected of being foot-pox. Upon examination by Dr. Lars Karstad, at the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada, the samples sent were found to be pox lesions. Bird species having pox were: Yellow-shafted Flicker (Colaptes auratus) captured by Dorothy Bordner and not banded due to the condition of the tarsi; Swainson's Thrush (Hylocichla ustulata) banded by Bruce Adams; a hybrid Flicker banded by Bruce Adams; and two Black-throated Blue Warblers (Dendroica caerulescens) banded by Mabel Warburton. The Black-throated Blues were a new host record. In 1965 the Island Beach banders discovered four new hosts; in 1966 two more were added; in 1967 no samples were taken; and in 1968 one new record, or a total of seven new hosts.

300 West Trenton Ave., Morrisville, Pa. 19067

## EBBA ANNUAL BANDING REPORT

EBBA's first Annual Banding Report appears on the following pages, in the form of a table of species with numbers banded in each state and province, followed by highest individual total. Thanks to the excellent response from New England EBBA members, these states are included although they are not, strictly speaking, in EBBA territory.

Response to this first effort was most encouraging; some 218 banders returned report forms, and ten negative reports were also received. This project was initiated by Robert Pyle, chairman of our Publication Committee, who then proceeded to undertake the enormous job of compiling the reports and preparing 14 pages of tables...all this while also having to move his family from Hawaii back to Maryland!

The Annual Report will continue in the next issue with an alphabetical listing of reporting banders and their totals, and a commentary by Bob Pyle. The tables have been carefully checked, but anyone detecting an error is encouraged to bring it to the Editor's attention, for correction in the next issue.

## FOREIGN RECOVERY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

We have just received news of one of the recoveries listed in the last issue: Evening Grosbeak 69-114006 was banded as an adult female (local breeding bird) by Mrs. Wayne Chapman at Patten, Maine on June 14, 1965 and was trapped as ASY-F by Frank L. Lowden at Ferncliff Nature Reserve, Ohio, Pa., on January 14, 1969. New recovery reports follow:-

Blue Jay	763-40815	Evening Grosbeak	73-191386
Brown Thrasher	562-71482	"-	73-108953
Common Grackle	963-33419	"-	68-137941
Pine Siskin	119-82012	"-	72-177091
"-	108-83684	"-	70-195491
"-	112-67358	"-	74-128071
"-	120-07011		

