



Sept.-Oct.

A Bird Bander's Diary

by
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Sept. 18, 1969 ... It was 3:45 am. when I left home for our Operation Recovery station on top of the Allegheny Mountains and ten miles southeast of Davis, West Virginia. There was a heavy overcast and it was threatening rain. A few thrush calls were heard overhead but nothing unusual. Twenty-seven road miles later, I was past Uniontown, Pa. and at the base of the western edge of the Allegheny Mountains, and stopped

the car to check for thrush calls. It was raining lightly and the clouds seemed to be almost down to the ground. The lights from the city and the very low clouds and mist produced a diffused glow and out of all this came hundreds of thrush calls.

Other stops were made also, both on the mountain tops and in the valleys, but thrush calls were almost totally absent until Oakland, Md. was reached where the clouds were again all aglow from the lights of the town. Overhead, thrush calls were noted in very large numbers. All this brought back memories of big thrush flights at daybreak at our Red Creek O.R. banding station. Evidently the glow produced by large numbers of lights and low cloud cover stimulated the thrushes to give their calls the same as does the first light of day.

The weather report on the car radio said the weather was clear at Watertown, N.Y. approximately 350 air miles to the northeast. This helps to explain the large thrush flight. Without weather maps on hand, I can only assume that the weather front had gone through the Adirondack Mt. area over 24 hours previously and under such conditions a big thrush flight could be expected at this time of year. The front had not cleared out (as would normally be expected) and it is conditions like this that help cause high migrating bird casualties at TV towers, buildings, bridges, etc.

Sept. 26 ... Today it happened - our first recovery of a foreign-banded bird at our Red Creek O.R. station. It was after 9 am. and we were having a fair flight of warblers and the Bluejays were passing by in large numbers - flocks of 20 to 50 every few minutes. Jack Linehan and I were busy banding in the "cave" when some Jays started screaming - usually an

indication that they have spotted something. Jack said "there goes a Sharpie after his breakfast" and added the comment that maybe we will catch him in Rim net #1 and I rushed up to take a look. This net location is only large enough for a 5-meter net and is on top of a rock that juts out over the abrupt face of the mountain at this point. The head-high bushes in the background help make this one of our very best net locations. It catches everything from Hummingbirds to Bluejays on calm and windy days alike.

As I approached it the Sharp-shinned Hawk was just climbing up out of a deep fold. In its hurry to get away from me, the hawk made an abrupt turn and flew back into the net. I rushed in and grabbed the net to prevent another escape.

The first thing noticed was a band and that was cause for excitement (Jack said he had never seen me so excited). We had been hoping for this moment for 12 long years. Somehow, I had expected that our capture of a foreign-banded bird would be a Junco or maybe a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. We read the band number carefully with the hawk still in the net and noted the red iris (making it an adult), the square tail, and Jack paid special attention to the smooth tarsus - the adult Cooper's Hawk usually has distinct scales in front of the tarsus. The Sharpie escaped as we were taking pictures of it in the net and therefore didn't get any measurements, but the large size would indicate it had to be a female. This proved to be right as Earl Baysinger was kind enough to answer a special request for information on this hawk so that it could be included in this report.

The Sharp-shinned Hawk had been banded as a HY female on September 12, 1968 at Point Pelee National Park, Ontario (seven female Sharpies had been banded there that day). My biggest regret was that others that had contributed so much to the success of this project couldn't have been in on our first foreign recovery. Anne and Harvey Shreve were here that morning but had just left to go to the camping area for breakfast. Connie and William Katholi had gone home to Charleston the day before. Cora and Bill Williams had also gone home after spending two weeks here in their trailer as resident banders. George Hall wasn't due to arrive until evening and several of our banders had had a very disappointing time the weekend before when it rained very hard and we were in the clouds the whole time. These included Maxine and Ben Kiff, Betty Vossler and the Bill Noonan's who had driven all the way from Reidsville, North Carolina. One of our reliable banders, John Morgan, has moved on to new horizons as he and his new bride Camille are now living in Old Town, Maine.

Since Fred Schaeffer is doing such a wonderful job of summarizing the results of the Operation Recovery stations, I hesitate to say anything about what we have found out in the 12 years we have been banding here, but there are a few things I would like to emphasize.

One is the fact that we have never caught a Chipping Sparrow. Since this is a very common breeding bird in many areas to the north of us, this could be a very important observation in the migration puzzle. In fact, several members of the sparrow family are caught only occasionally - these include Vesper, Field and Song Sparrows, all of which nest on the mountain top in limited numbers and the capture of an occasional one should be expected. The almost total absence of migrating Towhees, Catbirds and Brown Thrashers is also food for thought. George Hall and I have talked about this many times and I have reached the conclusion that there are only two possible reasons as to why we do not capture many of the above-mentioned species.

One is that they migrate south or southeast over the mountains instead of southwestward which should bring at least some of them up through our banding area. The other reason (and a more probable one) is that these species migrate at a lower altitude than the 4,000-foot ridge where we band and therefore migrate down the valleys.

Personal observations indicate that Chipping and Field Sparrows are often abundant in the valley to the east of our banding station in late September and early October. Also, very little is known as to how extensive the Blackpoll Warbler migration really is through the mountain areas. We see lots of Blackpolls, but where do they go from here? A pooling of thoughts and observations often helps greatly in finding answers. Perhaps some answers could be found if more O.R. stations could be operated each fall at different elevations along the Allegheny Mountain chain. There are still many problems to be solved.

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