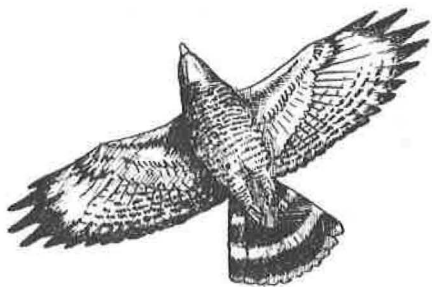


# *A Bird Bander's Diary*

*by Ralph K. Bell*



*Sept.-Oct.*

September 20, 1970.... This has been a memorable weekend at our former O.R. station on top of the Allegheny Front Mountains (10 miles SE of Davis, W.Va.). Not only were there lots of migrating warblers but the Broadwing Hawk flights were fabulous as over 5000 were observed going southward yesterday and today. (In October, word reached us that the most magnificent hawk flights of the century took place near Cape May, N.J., but unfortunately exact details are lacking. Ed.). Only once in 16 years have I ever seen greater numbers of hawks.

Hawk watching during fall migration is becoming more popular each year and this year I counted 57 watchers up on Bear Rocks at one time with others coming and going. The Bear Rocks observation post is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  mi. north of our banding area. The main warbler movement is usually over by 1000 hours each morning and often the banders go up to the outlook to watch for hawks at this time of year.

Ravens are also often seen round this time of year and yesterday 27 were doing their acrobatics just to the north of us. The previous record for numbers I recorded was 18 seen at one time, several years ago. I know of no other bird that seems to enjoy life as much as a raven. They are continually doing their aerial stunts and occasionally pester the hawks for added excitement while "talking" to each other with hoarse croaks.

The axiom that a day that is poor for warbler migration is often good for hawks sure holds true in this area. The best warbler flights occur on days when there is a strong westerly wind that keeps the migrants

below the lip of the rim until they reach the pass where our nets are located. Since the mountain ridge turns southeast at this place for a short distance, the passerine migrants come through the pass to keep on their desired southwest course. On calm, sunny days, these migrants do not need to follow the ridge below the rim and few birds are caught. When the morning sun warms up the valleys the thermals start to rise. Hawks love to ride these thermals(rising warm air currents) and these currents also save energy for the long migratory flights.

The hawk flights started earlier than usual this morning. It was a beautiful sunny morning with no wind at all. The valley below our netting area was filled with fog and the Broadwinged Hawks started coming up out of this fog around 0900 hours - long before the thermals could give them any help. The hawks seemed anxious to get going and since there were no thermals many came close to our nets. It was fabulous. There were dozens in view at one time - all beating their wings to compensate for the lack of updraft. Since some were so close, the air could be heard rushing through the flight feathers and the dark rufous barring on the underside of the adults gave an added touch to a scene which will never be forgotten by the banders and visitors present that morning.

The view from our netting area is particularly spectacular but after years of coming here we are so used to it that we often need to be reminded how beautiful it really is. A lady from Maryland, unknown to any of us, visited our station on 3 September when none of us were here. She left the following note in our banding cave:

9-3-70

Hello to whomever uses this place.

Not being noseey - just curious. We find this a most delightful spot sheltered from the wind, as we are now, and sitting in your chair of high authority overlooking the valleys below. As I was saying before, I am not that noseey but if you find time would you please let me know what the poles and strings above your den happen to be used for - legally or illegally.

Sincerely Yours,  
Gail Shafer

The lady probably found our banding site quite be accident as it can only be reached by a footpath and is not visible from the service road that is 150 yards away. The chair she mentions is an old wooden lawn chair, kept there year around for any weary visitor who wants to rest and relax.

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