



Eastern Regional News

Eastern Bird Banding Association

Founded 1923

President Valerie M. Freer
RFD 1, Box 21G
Ellenville, NY 12428

1st Vice President Hannah Suthers
4 View Point Drive
Hopewell, NJ 08525

Secretary Margaret Donald
11501 S. Glen Rd.
Potomac, MD 20854

2nd Vice President Walter Protzman
4 View Point Drive
Hopewell, NJ 08525

Treasurer Donald Mease
RD #1, Box 436A
Hellertown, PA 18055

3rd Vice President Frederick S. Schaeffer
84-55 Daniels St., Apt. 4f
Jamaica, NY 11435

Editor

Nadia M. Mutchler
RD 1, Box 212X, Monticello, NY 12701
Ph: 914-856-6444

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Terms expire 1982

Advertising Manager: Jolan Truan, 3314 W. Glenn Dr., Phoenix, AZ 85021

Atlantic Flyway Editor: Donald Clark, RFD Hicks Rd., Franklinville, NY 14737

Periodical Reviews: Noel Cutright

Illustrations Editor: Barbara Petorak, 923 W. Walnut St., Shamokin, PA 17872

Historian: Harriet Marsi

Back Issues: Mrs. Donald Mease, RD 1, Box 436A, Hellertown, PA 18055

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EBBA Annual Meeting Speaker

EBBA Annual Meeting speaker, John W. Terborgh of Princeton University, had a message on the Ecology and Conservation of Migratory Birds Wintering in the Tropics of such vital importance that it calls for summarizing here — and action on our part as banders.

New data on where in the Neotropics some 150 species of migratory birds go and what they do there were brought together in a Symposium held in 1977 at the Conservation and Research Center, National Zoological Park, Smithsonian Institution.

These data show that some two-thirds of the North American breeding bird species of forests and woodlands migrate to the Bahamas, Cuba, Hispaniola, Mexico, Central America, and northern South America. This means that these birds, including warblers, vireos, flycatchers, thrushes, and orioles are, for seven months of the year, compressed into a wintering area of half the size — or less — of the North American breeding area. Some species winter in limited areas, e.g. Kirtland's Warbler in the Bahamas, Chestnut-sided Warbler in the Caribbean side of Central America, and Philadelphia Vireo mainly on the Pacific side of southern Central America. Because of this tendency for species to concentrate on the wintering ground, the effect of habitat destruction in the tropics is amplified many times. The clearing of 1 hectare (2.47 acres) of forest in Mexico becomes equivalent to loss of perhaps 5 hectares of habitat in the northeastern U.S.

Consider that over half the natural vegetation of Central America and the Greater Antilles has already been cleared for cropland and pasture. If the present rate of deforestation continues (several percent of the remaining habitat per year), very little wintering habitat will remain by the end of the century. Loss of habitat of land birds is occurring more rapidly and systematically than that of water birds except in the Argentine pampas where many shorebirds winter. There, the potholes are being drained and the virgin prairie plowed, in a pattern similar to what we have witnessed in our own Great Plains. In the forested portions of the tropics, cleared land is used for agriculture for only a few years, then it is converted to pasture for grazing; the depleted soil cannot support the regeneration of a forest of original diversity and quality. The loss of primary forest habitat is more important for many migrant species than previously thought, and will result in major reductions of species populations.

What can we as banders do? During the questions and discussions after the talk, we came up with the following:

1. Go on the organized bird tours in the Neotropics. These tours are noticed by the respective governments, and such tourism may become sufficiently important that the countries will perceive the economic benefits and be motivated to create and enforce nature reserves.
2. Take breeding-bird censuses (e.g., the State Breeding Bird Atlas) so that we will have the long-term population records necessary for detecting dangerous trends.
3. Band warblers, vireos, flycatchers, etc. on their breeding grounds before fall migration, so we can learn more about their dispersal.
4. Read! A book is available from this international symposium: A. Keast and E.S. Morton, Editors. *Migrant Birds in the Neotropics: Ecology, Behavior, Distribution, and Conservation*. The Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 1980. In hard cover (\$27.50) and paperback (\$15.00).
5. Many of the countries involved do not even have field guides in their language available to university students and researchers! Bird and conservation organizations could help by sponsoring translations.

Hannah B. Suthers

Back issues of EBBA News, Index, and NABB

(east of the Mississippi)

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Ray Purvis Margerum

1911-1981

Ray was a bird bander for many years, first serving as a sub-permittee with his sister, Mabel Warburton, and in 1963 receiving his own master permit. He banded at his own home in Trenton, NJ, also at Stoney Brook in Princeton, and at Island Beach State Park.

Ray made beautiful wooden collecting cases for banders from Maine to Florida, and will be long remembered for this service to banders.