

BIRD BANDING ON NANTUCKET: HIGHLIGHTS OF 1981

by Edith Andrews, Nantucket

The Nantucket Banding Station began operation in 1955, when the use of Japanese mist nets was first authorized for banding in this country. The station's original project, known as Operation Recovery, was established by John V. Dennis. Through the years various other banders have conducted operations at the station during the height of fall migration. The station's project is now part of a project known as the Atlantic Flyway Review, which, as the name implies, covers the Atlantic Flyway from Nova Scotia to Florida. The project aims are to monitor numbers and distribution of migrants; to record arrival and departure dates; to make correlations with weather patterns; and to obtain data on weights, measurements, age, sex and plumage.

The Nantucket Banding Station is located in a small pine grove known as the Mothball Pines (after the name, "Mothballs," of a cottage there), near Hummock Pond and the barrier beach on the southwest shore of Nantucket Island. This location acts as a landfall for migrating land birds. The pines are Japanese Black Pines (*Pinus thunbergii*), an introduced species which resists wind and salt spray. Through the years the pines have grown and spread eastward.

Birds are captured in fine nylon Japanese mist nets stretched between poles in regular net lanes. Captured birds are removed from the nets, placed in holding cages and carried to the banding table for processing. Processing includes placing a numbered aluminum band on the leg, measuring the wing chord, checking the body for fat deposits, examining the skull to determine age, weighing the bird, and, finally, releasing it. Birds which are recaptured after banding are weighed again to determine changes in weight.

In the fall of 1981, the Nantucket Banding Station increased its activity with the assistance of Earthwatch volunteers, who helped especially in removing birds from the nets, in weighing birds, and in recording data. Nets were set in three different locations: in the woods, along the edge of the woods where bayberry and pokeweed grow, and along the shore of the pond near a growth of cattails. Four nets were set in each habitat. Data was kept on the productivity of each location as well as on the number of nets used and the hours of operation. Nets were opened at sunrise and furled at sunset except during times of bad weather, such as rain or strong wind.

In 38 days of operation, a total of 1812 new (unbanded) birds of 75 species were banded, and 330 were recaptured on days subsequent to banding. Totals for some species were without precedent: 171 Red-breasted Nuthatches (the former high

being 85 in 1975), 50 Black-throated Blue Warblers, and 20 Yellow-breasted Chats. Other species in abundance were Yellow-rumped Warblers (354), American Redstarts (101), Common Yellowthroats (97), and Blackpoll Warblers (89).

Another all-time high was the day's total of 272 new birds banded on 26 September. This day was preceded by two days of strong northwesterly winds. On 24 September, it had been impossible to open the nets; on 25 September, the nets had been open for 101 net-hours with 33 new birds banded. The "Big Day" (26 September) dawned overcast and calm, with winds becoming light easterly, where they remained for the rest of the day. All 12 nets were open for 12 hours, or a total of 144 net-hours. Birds were netted steadily throughout the day until 4 p.m., when numbers began to slack off. By the next day, the wind had shifted to the southwest, and only 30 new birds were banded in 66 net-hours.

Some of the most interesting species banded in 1981 were Sharp-shinned Hawk (1 male and 1 female), Merlin (1; 2 others escaped), Connecticut Warbler (1), Mourning Warbler (4), Yellow-billed Cuckoo (2), and Belted Kingfisher (1). Many other interesting species were observed in the vicinity of station, though not banded. Raptors reported included Peregrine Falcons swooping overhead, Ospreys, and even a Golden Eagle. Two Caspian Terns flew down the pond. Shorebirds, including Baird's and White-rumped sandpipers, swarmed over the barrier beach. A Yellow-throated Warbler was seen well by many in the vicinity of one of the nets, and a Prothonotary Warbler landed on the antenna of a car parked near the banding table.

In December, a band was found in an owl pellet collected in the Nantucket State Forest. This band had been placed on the leg of a Yellow-rumped Warbler on 6 October 1981 at Mothball Pines.

The Nantucket Banding Station now looks forward to the 1982 fall migration. Volunteer assistance with the banding project is sought for the period 28 August to 9 October. For further details, write to Bird Nantucket, Box 1182, Nantucket, MA 02554.

EDITH ANDREWS has banded birds on Nantucket for many years. As a student, she authored the Birds of Nantucket with Ludlow Griscom (Griscom and Folger, M.A.S., 1948) and has collaborated with Kenneth Blackshaw on the booklet titled, Birding Nantucket. During the fall migration of 1981, Edith directed an Earthwatch program at her banding station in the Mothball Pines.