

LAST CALL FOR PAPERS FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING

Members who desire to present papers at the Annual Meeting at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary on Saturday, April 16, should advise President Frank Frazier not later than March 15. Complete details of the program as well as instructions for getting to Hawk Mountain, accommodations, etc. will be given in the March-April EBBA NEWS which will reach you by April 1st.

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The newspaper photograph below illustrates the story on Page 14.

EASTON EXPRESS, THURSDAY, JULY 23, 1953

—Easton Express Photos
OWLETS, ASSORTED—Above, left to right, Merle Nicholas, Prof. Albert E. Conway, Lee Nicholas, and S. Linford Nicholas hold baby monkey-faced or barn owls hatched in the silo on the Nicholas Homestead, Easton R. D. 4.

BANDERS SHOULDN'T OVERLOOK POSSIBILITIES FOR FAVORABLE
NEWSPAPER PUBLICITY FOR THEIR BANDING ACTIVITIES

The picture on page 13 as well as the newspaper clippings reproduced on this and the following page are examples of the type of favorable publicity banders should try to get for their activities. Public support is urgently needed for the banding program as a whole, and, in addition, public awareness that dead birds may carry bands aids in returns and recovery records. Also, plugs for conservation can readily be introduced into the material. The accompanying articles were written by an exceptionally capable and sympathetic newspaperman, Mr. Ben Kizer, whose feature column, "Community Crossroads", appears daily in the Easton Express.

Barn Owls Appear Again, No More Pleasant, Though, Than They Were In 1950

By BEN KIZER
Easton Express Staff Writer

Last spring, S. Linford Nicholas, of Easton R. D. 4, noticed a strange, large bird entering and leaving a hole at the top of his 46-foot silo.

Might have been two different birds, he said yesterday as he stood in the silo's ladder well and stared up into the shadowy reaches beyond the top of the ladder.

Anyway, one day he was up there in the top of the ladder when whatever it was whooshed past his head. There he was, on a catwalk, with a drop of 46 feet under him, when the thing came by, and he said he found this disconcerting.

"That scared me like the dickens," he said, with considerable feeling. "That gave me a thrill."

In one corner of the silo top, he saw when he stopped teetering on the catwalk, were six eggs. Several weeks later, his son, Merle, reported that four of the eggs had hatched. This week, Mr. Nicholas' neighbor and cousin once removed, William Nicholas, reported the hatching to Prof. Albert E. Conway, of Lafayette College. Prof. and Mrs. Conway came right over.

"They got the notion," said Mr. Nicholas wonderingly, "they wanted to band 'em."

For the Conways, that notion was no novelty. At their former home

on Morgan's Hill, they banded a golden-crowned sparrow, and Mrs. Conway became the first woman to band a golden-crowned sparrow east of the Mississippi, a triumph tempered in Mr. Conway's mind only by the distressing fact that few Eastonians turned up to look at the sparrow with the yellow head.

In summer the Conways sometimes help the U. S. Government by using their own money to band birds in New England, and sometimes they go to the shore to band loons or teal or whatever one bands at the shore and on this occasion they climbed to the top of the Nicholas silo to band four hissing, defiant baby barn owls, or monkey-faced owls.

In August, 1950, barn owls turned up in a silo at the Henry Dorbacker farm, near Little York, to be identified by Lester Stoffel, librarian of Easton Public Library, who arrived at the scene with two giant bird books and the conviction that whatever the birds were, they had to be in his bird books, and they were, but Mr. Conway said these were the first barn owls he had banded in this area, and Mr. Nicholas said nothing like this had ever happened on his farm, and he had been there since 1902.

Hoot owls, yes. "But hoot owls," he said, "sit there and hoot, where these

don't hoot."

What they did do, in addition to hissing, was bill-snapping and squealing.

As the four baby barn owls came down the ladder well, in a cardboard carton at the end of a rope, they sounded like pigs in mortal terror and when they were dumped on the floor they got their claws tangled in one another's wings.

"Gotta get a little som'p'n and stir 'em," said Mr. Nicholas, moving away as if in search of something suitable for stirring scrambled owls, but Mrs. Conway moved in to separate them with her bare hands and when Mr. Conway and Merle came down the ladder they joined Mr. Nicholas and another son, Lee, in sitting bravely behind a wire netting while Mrs. Conway arranged the vicious little brutes for a picture.

Barn owls, said Mr. Conway, from behind his fence, had been known to nest in every month of the year. Different owls, he said, but he hesitated over the question of whether the same pair mated only once a year.

"I don't know as anyone knows," he said carefully, and he said the thing to do was to give barn owls a boost, because they were an aid to the farmer, eating rats and mice but not birds.

"Not even pigeons," he said fervently. "These owls would eat two or three dozen mice a day. A cat wouldn't eat five or six mice a day."

Then had there been a terrific drop in the mouse population since the owls moved in, Mr. Nicholas was asked, but he ducked that one.

"We have a bunch of good cats," he said politely, but he said the owls could stay as long as they chose, and visitors were welcome to look at them.

COMMUNITY CROSSROADS

By BEN KIZER

Albert Conway, of Lafayette College and Morgan's Hill, isn't the only bird bander around. Dr. Paul H. Fluck, of Lambertville, is another one.

Dr. Fluck is ornithologist for the Washington's Crossing park and on Sundays he and his associates of the park staff conduct a sort of school for bird banders. No tuition, no formal classes, but people who already know something about birds can watch banding and learn how to apply for a banding license and if you're interested in long hours and no pay this may be just what you've been looking for.

In his study of birds and national parks, Dr. Fluck has been in every state three times and made trips to Alaska, Mexico and Hawaii and the den in which we talked about birds was decorated with assorted stuffed fish and other mementoes of his travels and also with a rack full of magazines containing the articles he has sold since he started writing about four years ago.

Included was a copy of Liberty, containing his article titled "Beware of the Dog," a treatise which questioned the man's-best-friend theory and aroused dog lovers no end.

"Dogs," muttered Dr. Fluck. "Sixteen thousand children scarred every year in New Jersey. Dogs kill more children than any other animal."

Another article, in County Gentleman, was titled "Prince of Pests." This one was about cats and it had an illustration showing an evil-looking cat doing mean things to a pheasant and this one touched off a flood of letters from people interested in cats.

"Two," said Dr. Fluck, wonderingly, "agreed with me."

But, he admitted, 350 had other ideas and many of them wanted to do him violence.

Anyway, the goal at Washington's Crossing was the establishment of a nature center, a sort of

miniature Yellowstone, featuring flowers, animals and birds at the site of Washington's historic crossing, and he said a good Washington book to read was "The Unvanquished."

"Starts off," he said, "with Washington putting his pants on. And you talk about an army—he had less than 1,200 men, and they were sending him clerks who had never held a rifle before and men from Philadelphia wearing patent leather shoes. And there they were, roasting a rabbit over a campfire, and birds hopped around the campfire, and the birds that are there now are the descendants of those birds. We've changed, but they haven't."

I sat there staring at the unchanging birds hopping around the campfire and Dr. Fluck flipped open his book of banding records to show that catbirds return from the South on or about May 8, give or take a day or two, and he said if I wanted to see a catbird I would just have to wait until May 8, and he said a catbird would not only return to the same yard, but to the same bush in the yard.

"We blame everything on instinct," Dr. Fluck said scornfully, "when we don't know enough to blame it on anything else."

Starlings, he said. People were bitter about starlings, but starlings controlled the Japanese beetle. A

starling could eat two to three thousand beetles in a season, and the great horned owl ate rats.

"The most dangerous animal," he said, "is the rat. There's one rat for every person in the United States, and next year there will be more."

And the rats carried fleas and the fleas could carry plague.

"Germ warfare," he said, "is not so impossible as it sounds."

There were, he said, only a thousand bald eagles left, but no hunter was ever fined more than \$10 for shooting one, and there were only a few golden eagles and that was nonsense about eagles carrying away children.

"They only weigh," he said, "six pounds. But everybody wants to shoot a big bird. You could shoot a barn door, too. But it would certainly be asinine to keep it up."

Beyond that, he said, he cared for several birds which were unable to care for themselves, and his nurse, Miss Jeanne Pittman, brought in a moulting screech owl, a blind song sparrow, and two blue jays, named Saucy and Tinker.

Tinker caught tossed peanuts in his beak (or her beak—Dr. Fluck wasn't sure) and popped them back into Miss Pittman's mouth on command and Dr. Fluck said these jays liked to find delicacies of their own and offer to share them with human friends.

They were, he said, especially gleeful when they could offer a dried spider, and what effect this will have on prospective banders I don't know.

These birds, said Dr. Fluck, were sensitive, so if you wanted to avoid offending them you would have to pretend to like whatever they offered, but Miss Pittman said in the case of dried spider, she just didn't pretend.

Callous, I guess she was, and Dr. Fluck said as for dogs, he had a dog, and I said, he did, and he said yes.

"I have nothing against dogs," he said reasonably. "It's the people who own the dogs."

Well, nothing could be fairer than that, and that certainly ought to calm down the people who didn't like that dog article, but somehow I don't think it will.

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