

YOU NEEDN'T LEAVE YOUR BANDS BEHIND

By C. Brooke Worth

During August, 1957, I spent my annual vacation at Avalon, N.J. We had a cottage with a dock on the bay. The dock had a narrow ramp leading to a roughly square area that was over mud at low tide but over several feet of water at high tide.

Neighbors were observed to be feeding Laughing Gulls with garbage scraps or broken pieces of bread, the birds descending to lawns to scramble for food. This gave me the idea that I might convert part of the expanded portion of the dock into a gull trap.

Two-inch mesh chicken wire was used to fence in the sides of the left portion of the dock, an area roughly 6' x 12'. Across the top of this enclosure, at about 2½' level, I put cross strings at intervals of 9 inches at both ends, leaving an open space in the middle of about 6". (This was the final arrangement, arrived at after several tests of the birds' reactions.) The idea in general was an adaptation of various crow and pigeon traps that have been described in the literature.

Laughing Gulls, having a wide wing-span, are rather slow on take-off and need to glide forward some distance before becoming airborne. Hence it was no trick at all for me to lurk near the house, while the birds entered the trap, and then to approach at a normal walk as they unsuspectingly squabbled over the scraps of bread. By the time they became aware of my approach, they did not have time to attempt a vertical exit through the center opening of the trap but, instead, they tried to run through the chicken wire. All I had to do was to crawl inside on my hands and knees and gather up handfuls of gulls. These I dumped in a large trash can, from which they also could not arise because of their wingspread, and thus I escorted them to the cottage for individual banding.

Ultimately I trapped 31 gulls, one a repeat of my own, and another with a foreign band. The F. & W. Service inform me that the latter bird was banded some 5 miles away and some 2 months previously at Stone Harbor by Mr. Bennett Matlack (Band No. 515-87270). It was an immature in my hands and must have been banded as a fledgling. I banded only 2 adults.

It was interesting to observe that the gulls soon became trap wise. As time went on, they entered the trap in progressively smaller numbers, although they continued to feed on neighboring lawns. During my last 10 days in Avalon, I caught no gulls at all. Ring-billed and Herring Gulls several times almost entered the trap, but they didn't quite make it. Perhaps the dimensions of the enclosure were too small. However they were also less common, and it seemed that the abundance of Laughing Gulls was a factor in their entry into the trap. Numerous Laughing Gulls

might be nearby for some time, but only soar past the trap repeatedly. When one finally entered, a half dozen others would quickly follow it.

Song Sparrows and Redwings were strongly attracted by the bread bait. Sparrows could leave the trap between the strings or through the chicken wire, while Redwings could use the string exit easily and the wire one with a bit of squirming. Therefore I rigged the simplest of all traps, a drop-trap of hardware cloth propped up by a stick with a hand pull-string. When the gull catch fell off, I concentrated on the drop trap, catching 24 Sparrows and 27 Redwings, the latter a satisfaction to me in view of the F. & W. appeal to banders to trap more "blabbirds."

These remarks show that a bird-bander, removed from his banding station by virtue of going on vacation, need not leave his bands behind. With little expenditure of money or effort, he can by simple means expedite a banding venture that not only furthers the F. & W. program but also gives him a pleasant variation from his usual backyard activities.

BASIC BOOKS FOR BANDERS

By Frank P. Frazier

Every bander has his favorite reference books — for what it is worth, here is a list of mine. These are the guides I turn to in connection with banding activities. These are the books I like to have near me at all times.

1. The A.O.U. Check-List of North American Birds, published by the American Ornithological Union. 5th Edition, 1957. This new edition is superb (latest previous edition was issued in 1931.)
2. A Field Guide to the Birds, by Roger Tory Peterson, and
3. Audubon Bird Guide, by Richard H. Pough. Both are fine books for the simpler problems of identifying, sexing and aging birds.
4. A Manual for the Identification of the Birds of Minnesota and Neighboring States, by Thomas S. Roberts. Very helpful for the knottier problems, since its plumage descriptions are taken directly from Ridgway, Bent, Forbush and Dwight.
5. Annotated List of New Jersey Birds, by David Fables, Jr. Useful only to New Jersey banders -- others will find their own regional lists indispensable.
6. Bird-Ringing, by R. M. Lockley and Rosemary Russell. A fine British book on the techniques of trapping and banding, obtainable from John