

WHERE TO MIST NET NEXT FALL

By John V. Dennis

(In two parts - Part II)

Rhode Island, westward on the coast, for its size has undoubtedly contributed a greater share to Operation Recovery than has any other state. This reflects the activity of James Baird, the director of the Norman Bird Sanctuary at Middletown, R. I. It was Mr. Baird who initiated Operation Recovery in 1955. Besides conducting highly successful banding operations in the Newport area, he has made periodic fall netting trips to Block Island. The results of these trips indicate that Block Island is one of the hottest netting spots along the entire coast. Douglas L. Kraus at Kingston, R. I. is another O. R. participant. Information on Rhode Island can be obtained by writing to Mr. Baird at Norman Bird Sanctuary, Third Beach Road, Middletown.

Connecticut has a goodly number of banders but activity seems to be confined almost entirely to inland localities. One wonders why some of the Connecticut banders do not try their own coastline along Long Island Sound. It must be admitted, however, that coastal property is heavily tied up in real estate and hence there are probably few openings for prospective mist netters. A similar problem can be anticipated on Long Island across the Sound but perhaps not quite to the same degree. Exceptionally good results were obtained this past fall by Leroy Wilcox at Tiana Beach. This is a narrow coastal strip between the ocean and Shinnecock Bay. Among Mr. Wilcox's trophies were the second Sage Thrasher ever reported and the first banded east of the Mississippi, and a Northern Waterthrush of his recovered at Caracas, Venezuela. Plenty of stay-at-home banders will surely become more interested in Long Island's coastal thickets now that Mr. Wilcox has shown the way. He can be reached by writing to Oceanic Duck Farm, Speonk, L. I.

Getting to the New Jersey coast, certainly Island Beach needs no introduction to EBBA readers. All records were broken when Island Beach banders under Mr. and Mrs. Stanley S. Dickerson banded 5,745 birds of 97 species during a three week period in September of 1958. So staggering are these figures that we may assume that Island Beach banders did nothing but band. On the contrary, few other stations carried on more work in weights, measurements, and visual observation -- this in spite of heavy banding pressure. So built up is the Jersey coast that Island Beach must appear to birds as the only green oasis for many miles. This may well be a factor in the heavy concentrations there. New Jersey, of course, has another outstanding migration spot in Cape May. Our President, Seth Low and party have banded around Cape May Point for a number of seasons now. Indeed some of Mr. Low's work at Cape May with nets anteceded Operation Recovery. Those interested in opportunities in New Jersey should write to either Mrs. Stanley S. Dickerson, 222 DeVoe Avenue, Spotswood, N. J., or to Seth H. Low, Rt. 2, Gaithersburg, Md.

On down the coast, Delaware offers some potentially favorable mist netting sites, but so far no one has taken advantage of them. Maryland with a relatively short coastal strip on the ocean is one of the states best covered by Operation Recovery. The thickets north of Ocean City, one of the original O. R. stations, are heavily banded by Chandler S. Robbins and party. South of Ocean City mist netting has been carried out sporadically at Assateague Island. An extensive coastline along Chesapeake Bay provides additional opportunities in Maryland. Mr. W. M. Davidson bands quite successfully every season at Claiborne. Other banders have tried Chesapeake sites from time to time. For information on coastal Maryland, letters can be addressed either to Mr. Robbins at Patuxent Research Refuge, Laurel, Maryland, or to Mr. Davidson, 1504 Bodell Street, Orlando, Florida.

Moving south into Virginia, Frederic R. Scott is the only bander to set up mist netting along the coast each fall. He is active at the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge which is on the ocean just south of the Maryland line. Mrs. Dickerson of Island Beach fame gave Cape Charles just south of Kiptopeake a brief try in 1957 but was unsuccessful in banding large numbers because of the weather. Cape Charles, of course, is well known for its tremendous fall concentrations, and both in this respect and its topography at the mouth of a large bay, it resembles Cape May. It is a little known fact that Cape Charles was the site of one of the first modern studies of coastal migration. From September 22 to November 11, 1936, the late William J. Rusling, acting for the National Audubon Society, was at Cape Charles daily and there he tabulated numbers seen each day and noted such things as direction of flight, influence of the weather and topography. It is of interest that the highest species total obtained by Rusling was for the Robin -- 32,277 observed during the period. 159 species were observed in all. Special interest was reserved for the hawk flights. Rusling's unpublished manuscript is in the hands of the National Audubon Society. It is a pity that this fine piece of work hasn't been followed up by others who might have come to Cape Charles instead of other spots along the coast.

The part of Cape Charles where the greatest concentrations occur lies within a military reservation. Special permission must be obtained for entry. Inquiries about the Virginia coast can be directed to Mr. Scott, Experiment Incorporated, Richmond 2, Va.

From Cape Charles south the coastline is one big question mark so far as mist netting opportunities are concerned. Here and there sporadic attempts have been made -- generally with poor results. The difficulty lies in the fact that the coastal region is so unexplored by banders that no one knows where the good spots are or even if they exist. Dr. Charles H. Blake, Mrs. M. B. Peacock, and Harry T. Davis have visited the outer coastal beaches between Currituck and Pamlico Sounds and the Ocean. Their verdict is that this area is totally unproductive so far as land

migrants are concerned. Blake and others have surmised that the main stream of migration moves somewhat inland in North Carolina, perhaps slightly to the west of Pamlico Sound. In any event North Carolina is wide open to anyone who wants to give it a try. There are indications that a few banders at least will be converging upon North Carolina this coming fall.

As for South Carolina and Georgia even less is known. Checking coastal thickets north of Pawley's Island, South Carolina, I was impressed by the suitability of the terrain and vegetation for mist netting operations. In many areas there are open lanes of sterile sand that support no vegetation. In between are woody plants such as bayberry and red cedar. It would be hard to conceive of a more favorable mist netting location. But are there enough birds to make it worthwhile?

The "Sea Islands" off Georgia are, if anything, even more alluring. However, some are heavily forested, which may not make them suitable for mist netting operations.

From the few remarks I heard about the east coast of Florida opportunities there are not too hopeful. But again more positive knowledge is needed. I have banded in winter and spring in what appears to be a good migration spot in south Florida. South of Miami and east of Homestead there is a vast agricultural area where, except in a few places, there is no natural vegetation. Such clumps of exotic and native vegetation as do occur are heavily frequented by birds. One of the very best such spots is known as South Allapattah Gardens; its location can be obtained by consulting the Miami office of the National Audubon Society at 13 McAllister Arcade. Audubon tours make a point of stopping here because of the excellent probability of finding rarities. I recall once seeing a Black-throated Gray Warbler in a tree at this locality and seconds later seeing a Vermilion Flycatcher in the same tree! Someone should give this area a try in October.

Except for some exploratory mist netting in Dauphin Island and vicinity along the Alabama coast by Mr. Thomas A. Imhof, 307, 38 St., Fairfield, Ala., practically nothing has been done in the Gulf Coastal regions. Here again unlimited opportunities exist for pioneering work.

In this discussion it is presumed that the bander is seeking a site on or very close to the coast. Experience from Operation Recovery indicates that coastal and insular situations off the coast produce the highest concentration of migrants. Nevertheless for the sake of comparison inland situations should be manned as well. Is the coastal migration of a different composition from that inland? Is there, as is suspected, a higher percentage of immatures at coastal and insular situations?

Under present rules an OR station must be within 50 miles of the coast. But a station operating 100 or even 500 miles inland can make a tremendous contribution if it adheres to the same rules and routine of a coastal station and operates over a reasonably good stretch of the fall migration.

For this reason banders shouldn't be too discouraged if they are unable to make the coast. But for those banders who can get to the coast, opportunity is indeed unlimited.

17 Liberty Street, Nantucket, Mass.

MIST NETTING AT TUCKERTON, N. J.

By Frank P. Frazier, Jr.

On October 10, 11 and 12, 1958, Joe Jehl and I banded with nets at Tuckerton, N. J., along the Great Bay Boulevard, a road running from the town of Tuckerton out to the shore, its outer half surrounded by extensive salt marshes. This section of the road is bordered by an almost unbroken line of bayberry and other bushes, averaging about six to eight feet high and six to ten feet wide. These lines of bushes are used as a flight lane by large numbers of migrating birds which come in at night, perhaps from Beach Haven, as they work their way inland, feeding on the way.

We set between three and ten nets, at various times, across these lines of bushes toward the outer end, using natural breaks or cutting away enough room for the net. We then walked down the road, beating the bushes, and herded the birds along into the nets. Unfortunately, there was a strong wind blowing during most of the weekend, which greatly reduced the catching efficiency of the nets, and far more birds hit and bounced out than were caught. However, we banded 119 birds of 23 species, of which 49 were Myrtle Warblers. Sparrows were well represented, with nine species: 15 Song, 14 White-throats, and one to four each of Savannah, Grasshopper, Sharptail, Junco, Field, White-crown and Swamp. Three Grasshopper Sparrows were banded, which seems to be an interesting record. One Sharptail was taken which was later proved to be the James Bay subspecies (*Amospiza caudacuta altera*).

Providing that the hunting club which owns this property does not trim the bushes too drastically, this location seems worthy of more extensive banding in connection with Operation Recovery. It is an ideal netting situation, with the added benefit of the possibility of beating the bushes to herd birds into the nets, which is not practicable at most other netting locations. The area can profitably take up to fifty or more nets, given sufficient banders to handle them, and on days with little wind great numbers of birds would be netted.

Upper Montclair, N. J.
