

## THREE SEASONS OF OPERATION RECOVERY AT MONHONON'S COVE, MAINE

By G. Hapgood Parks

Monhonon's Cove is located at  $44^{\circ}28'28''$  N,  $67^{\circ}51'47''$  W, which places it on the rugged Maine coast about 20 air miles from Bar Harbor and in a direction slightly east of northeast of that resort. More locally, it lies three houseless miles south of Wyman village in the town of Milbridge in Washington county and at the end of a so-called road which is used only infrequently, if at all, by local lobstermen, weir fishermen, and clam diggers. Curiosity sometimes impels "summer folks" along this road, but few ever persist until they reach its termination on the west shore of the Cove. By punt, or skiff, one may cross the Cove to its eastern shore where a wooded point juts southward into the Atlantic between Monhonon's and Bear Coves. Close to the tip of this point our log cabin is situated.

The three acres nearest to the cabin are ours. Here we conduct our netting and banding in cooperation with the Operation Recovery program. The trees on our three acres remained untouched when the pulpwood was harvested from the more northerly part of the point and from the half-hundred or more acres on the mainland north of the coves almost a decade ago. Our trees are almost exclusively spruces and fir balsams with a few tamaracks and a white birch or two. Most of the trees tower straight up to heights of from 50 to 80 feet or more. With the exception of two narrow hardhack swales which cut across the point, there is little or no undergrowth. Throughout the wooded area one can pick up rockweed, boulders, and driftwood where they have been deposited by waves which have washed across the entire point during severe storms.

Groups of uncut 20 to 40-foot spruces and firs are dispersed throughout the cut-over area and the seedling evergreens are rapidly replacing the rotted piles of slash. Much of this scrub area is covered with growths of blueberry, raspberry, highland (and swamp) cranberry, huckleberry, bunchberry, bayberry and crowberry. There are, also, numerous pin cherry and mountain ash trees.

1957 - It was in this environment that we set our very first nets during the late summer of 1957. The sparseness of the earth layer upon and among the underlying and outcropping ledges made the installation of netpoles a distinct problem. As a result, we allowed ourselves to be driven into the woods where properly spaced tree trunks could be employed as supports for our five ground-level nets. These five nets, set end to end, reached almost entirely across our point in an east-west direction from close to high water mark on both shores, parallel with and between the two swales. Two other nets were similarly installed, except that, using pulleys, they were raised about 18 feet above the ground and closer to the overhead canopy. Another net was erected parallel to the shoreline (in a north-south direction) close to our cabin and near a patch of bayberry bushes, over ground carpeted with crowberries.



We lacked the rubber bands which are so essential for attaching the supply since we were able to use the dead spruce saplings which were located net loops to the supporting poles - or trees. Fortunately my associate ally abundant. Two additional nets served to adjust the length of the new-bander is also a hooker of rugs. After having cut crosswise a castoff tly located line to the greater width of the point at this place. One of from an automobile tire, I borrowed the machine which she uses to slit hour tree nets was also moved to a potentially more productive location near woolen remnants into narrow strips for hooking. The cut edge of the tubthe new net-line in the scrub. The net near the cabin was retained. was inserted into the slitter in place of the customary piece of woolen cloth. A few turns of the crank produced (four at a time) the nicest possible rubber bands for the purpose at hand.

Active netting began August 8 and continued daily, weather permitting, through September 8. A total of 2449 net-hours was accumulated. 394 birds of 37 species were banded, and 75 of these birds repeated a total of 128 times. Season's end found Swainson's Thrushes, with 135 banded, at the top of our numerical list. Myrtle Warblers, with 52, placed second, and White-throated Sparrows, with 42, third. No particular rarities were netted. An adult male Black-throated Blue Warbler was our most interesting capture. In all, 17 species of warblers were taken and, since this was the first occasion upon which we had handled any number of these warblers, much time was consumed in identifying them and photographing them.

Definite migratory movement became apparent as early as August 14. The season's big wave hit us on September 2 with Swainson's Thrushes, Cedar Waxwings, and White-throated Sparrows predominating.

Three problems seemed particularly difficult during our baptismal netting experience. (1) Regardless of wind direction little protection was afforded the nets by the relatively flat terrain of our point, nor were there any significant amount of undergrowth or low limbs to serve as a windbreak. (2) It soon became frustratingly apparent that most of the migrants were moving through, or above, the tree canopy which carried the great majority of birds far over our nets. (3) Red squirrels were especially obnoxious. Two of these varmints, within the span of little more than five minutes, one day mutilated into uselessness the bottom tiers of three of our nets. The act was performed literally before our very eyes and it bore the earmarks of nothing short of sheer deviltry. Upon another occasion a red squirrel killed an unbanded Swainson's Thrush in one of our nets. A family of red foxes and a young buck deer also gave us some very uneasy moments, but they caused no serious damage.

1958 - In an attempt to profit by our first season's experiences we revised the net-line for our 1958 activities. Leaving the east-most of our ground-level nets in its satisfactory location near the southern edge of the swale, we moved the remaining four nets to a similar east-west line in the scrub just north of the edge of our uncut area. It was necessary here to install net poles. This process involved the erection of a tripod support for each of the poles since they could not be driven sufficiently into the hard ground. Said poles and supports were in ample

Inspired by the improved potentialities of our new net-line we entered enthusiastically upon our second season of netting. We were not long in discovering, however, that we had built ourselves up for a disappointing letdown. Throughout the entire August 12 to September 25 netting period we found ourselves contending with almost impossible weather conditions. Winds were unrelenting. Few days failed to bring at least a shower or drenching fog.

We succeeded, however, in accumulating 2593 net-hours during which 253 birds of 36 species were banded. 53 of these birds repeated 93 times. One return was captured, a White-throated Sparrow which was apparently nesting locally. Our most prominent species were the same as in 1957, but the new order of prevalence saw the Myrtle Warblers leading (59 banded), followed by the White-throated Sparrows (35), and the Swainson's Thrushes (24). 13 Species of warblers were banded. Our only capture which could be considered a rarity in any sense of the word was a female Black-throated Blue Warbler.

Our only wild animal difficulty took the form of a yearling doe which browsed around the nets and employed the net lane as a convenient pathway. She remained in the vicinity all season and became embarrassingly tame. Frequently she was seen so close to the nets as actually to brush against them, but the anxiety we felt proved to be groundless. Although she gambled and capered about the nets she damaged never so much as a single strand.

At no time was there any semblance of a migratory wave. Apparently the weather conditions were so inclement as to deter the normal complement of migrants from travelling along our exposed point, for far fewer than the usual number of birds were observed.

1959 - Our 1958 net-line was retained intact for the 1959 season, and, with improved weather conditions prevailing, our results were gratifying. From June 18 to July 31 we conducted a carefully controlled attempt to capture and identify some of the local nesting population. Not more than two or three nets were set at any one time and these were closely tended.

During this preliminary period two new north-south nets were installed near our cabin when it was noted that a Tree Swallow family in a nesting-box close by was attracting frequent visitors. 42 of these visiting swallows were netted as well as a returning male. In all, 99 birds were taken.



When August brought the flocks of migrating "peeps" to our locality an attempt was made to net a sampling of them. The swift tidal currents which accompany the 9 to 11 foot rise and fall of the water on the sharply sloping ledges which characterize our shore proved to be serious obstacles, so we were obliged to be satisfied with a single shorebird net set north-south across an open gully where storms drive high tide waves across the point and transform the tip, where our cabin stands, into a tiny island. This net took 26 sandpipers (Least, Semipalmated and Spotted) and two Semipalmated Plover from the thousands which gathered on the bare ledges and on the buoyant rockweed during periods of ebbing tides.

Formal Operation Recovery netting was carried on from August 1 to September 27. During this period we accumulated a total of 4257 net-hours. 839 individuals of 57 species were banded, of which 171 birds repeated a total of 309 times. Nine additional returns from the two previous netting seasons were also recaptured. The season's returns included eight Myrtle Warblers, three White-throated Sparrows, three Song Sparrows, and one each of the following species: Slate-colored Junco, Tree Swallow, Parula Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-capped Chickadee, and Hermit Thrush.

Twenty species of warblers were banded. This list includes two Yellow-breasted Chats, as well as one immature Blackburnian Warbler and a Mourning Warbler. Our six kinds of flycatchers included one each of the Crested, Olive-sided and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers. Our three kinds of vireos included one Philadelphia and a Solitary to augment the commoner Red-eyes. Our greatest surprise came when an unbelievably soft bunch of brown feathers, when we retrieved it from the meshes of a net one morning became an adult Saw-whet Owl.

But the 1959 season belonged particularly to the Chickadees. It was fortunate for us, perhaps, that only 111 individuals from the uncounted swarms of Black-caps which filled the tree canopy during most of September came into contact with our nets. The hours seemed endless which we were compelled to expend unsnarling the cute little bandits and the acres of mesh those grasping ice-tong toes could hold seemed immeasurable. The seven Brown-caps which we caught were far less prone to snarl the nets than were their Black-capped cousins.

So the Black-capped Chickadees topped our 1959 O. R. list (111). White-throated Sparrows (99) took second place and Myrtle Warblers (89), third. Swainson's Thrushes (34) were relatively less abundant than during the two previous seasons, slipping to seventh place behind Slate-colored Juncos (62), Tree Swallows (42), and Robins (37).

New animal trouble plagued us. Two netted birds had been found alive but suffering from open, bleeding neck wounds, before the cause was discovered. Then one afternoon, a repeating Whitethroat flew from my hand to the bottom bough of a small fir. As he reached the branch a hitherto unseen

weasel pounced upon him. Although the attack occurred not more than ten feet from where I stood the bird was dying when I reached him. Subsequently a Junco and another Whitethroat were found in bottom tiers with similar neck wounds. Both survived, but a second Junco was found dead. The weasel eluded my attempt to affect an unbalance of Nature's plan.

Recoveries - One avowed purpose of O. R. is to map the flight of our birds. Beyond the 21 returns already cited we have three recovery records of birds banded at Monhonon's Cove. (1) Adult female Belted Kingfisher banded August 17, 1957, was found dead on the steps of the high school at Grand Harbor, Grand Manan, New Brunswick, Canada, on May 6, 1959. A communication indicates that there is a question as to whether this bird flew against the large glass area in the door or whether it had been shot and left on the steps to be added to the collection of mounted birds at the school. (2) Immature Robin banded September 6, 1958, was killed by Mrs. Philip Sawyer's cat at Milbridge, Maine on June 2, 1959. The Sawyer home is about seven miles north of our station, so this record seems to be essentially another return. (3) Immature Robin banded September 20, 1958, was shot at Bridgeton, North Carolina, on December 17, 1958 and reported by Esau Moore of that place.

In closing, reference should be made to our very low bird count per net-hour of operation. In fact, more than six net-hours were expended for each bird captured during three seasons. This situation is understandable when we recall that a very high percentage of the migrants travel in the tree canopy, or above it, and are therefore much too high to be reached even by our tree nets. In the cut-off area, too, there are so many closely scattered groups of tall spruces as to function almost like an extended canopy. Here the birds flit from group to group and come within range of the nets only by chance or when they drop to the ground or to the bushes and shrubs in search of food.

99 Warrenton Ave., Hartford 5, Conn.

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#### MIST NETS

For mist nets (any quantity), order from Mrs. John Y. Dater, 259 Grove St., Ramsey, N. J. Statement that purchaser has a permit to use nets must accompany order. Price to Sustaining Members: \$2.00; to others: \$2.50. Mrs. Dater also has some five meter nets (16 feet) at \$1.25. Postage must accompany orders of less than \$5.00.