

OPERATION RAINFALL  
By Russell J. Rutter

Every bander who has been at it for a few years has had the experience of getting caught in the rain with birds in the net. I think the thought of any good bander at such a time is the welfare of the birds, and my own practice is to get them out as quickly as possible and into a cage of a bird bag and then into some place where there is heat, so they may dry out with a minimum of handling.

On September 25, 1961 I had three nets up and was doing very well with them. It was one of those calm, dull days, ideal for nets, but always threatening to rain. Fortunately, it was quite mild. On my 11 O'clock check there were no birds in the first net, none in the second, but six in the third, including two Orange-crowned Warblers. I was using small cotton bags in which to place the birds as I removed them from the nets, and I had just taken out the two Orange-crowned Warblers and was moving to the next bird when the heavens opened, with no preliminary sprinkling, with one of those steady, straight-down, fine, soaking rains. I laid the warblers under a bush, which afforded practically no shelter, and removed the other four birds without too much trouble. Then I pushed the net up out of harm's way and, with my bags of birds, went back to net no. 2, which I also pushed up, and went on to No. 1.

To say that I was pleased to find that it now contained two Ruby-throated Kinglets and a Red-eyed Vireo would be a slight exaggeration. However, I deposited my bags in the driest place I could find, and went to work. Even soaking wet, the Kinglets, as usual, came out easily, and having learned from experience that in spite of their size these little mites are among the most indestructible of small birds, I banded them then and there. They went off like tiny rockets, with their usual lively chirps, although in my hand they had been only wisps of wet feathers.

It was still raining as hard as ever, and I was a quarter of a mile from the car. I pushed up the net, gathered up my bags, put my head down, and didn't stop until I opened the car door and laid the bird bags on the floor - only to find that the bag containing the precious Orange-crowned Warblers was missing! There was only one answer, so I headed back, and there they were, bouncing around in their now soaking wet bag in the middle of the old railway, almost back to the first net. I drove back to the cabin, where the oil heater was fortunately burning, distributed the birds in various cages not far from the heater, and in half an hour they were all as good as ever.

I took the two Orange-crowned Warblers, after banding them, out behind the cabin, placed the cage so the door faced the trees along the shore of our small lake, and raised the door. One of them flew directly up into the trees, but the second took off straight across the lake! It

was obviously headed for the other side, about 400 yards away, and I watched it as it gained elevation for about half the distance, then slanted down toward the far shoreline. I lost it there in the shadows, but felt sure it had made land, and I picked up the cage and was just turning away when I saw the reflection of the bird in the calm water, and then I saw it, coming back again. It was now losing elevation rapidly, and was only a few feet above the water when it reached shore and dropped in the grass only a few yards from where it had taken off. It lay there with wings half open, completely exhausted, and I watched it for about a minute, and then moved forward to pick it up. However, it pulled itself together at that moment, flew up into a low tree, shook itself, and went off to look for its companion.

All of us know that a bird released after banding, especially if it has been knocked about a bit, may do erratic things, and the careful bander always watches his birds to see that they make a normal getaway, but I thought this was an exceptionally interesting case, not so much because the bird flew out over the water, but that it turned back from an unknown shore and came back to almost the same spot it had just left.

(The above is from a letter to Mr. & Mrs. Stanley Dickerson from Mr. Rutter, an EBBA member and Park Naturalist of the Algonquin Park in Ontario and Curator of the Park's Museum. -Ed.)

Huntsville, Ontario, Canada

9-YEAR PURPLE  
FINCH RECOVERY

Howard Drinkwater, of Whitehouse, N. J., writes: "On Feb. 3, 1953, the first year I banded any number of Purple Finches, (254 that winter) I placed band no. 51-25728 on one that I judged to be a bird of the preceding year, sex undetermined. Today (Jan. 2, 1962), just short of nine years later, the bird - it was a male - returned. Now that of itself was, I thought, remarkable and worth a special note, but what really placed the bird in a very special category was the fact that both legs wore bands; both mine of Feb. 3, 1953, and one put in place just 20 days after the original banding. How I managed to do that, I'll never know. I suppose other banders have done the same but I wonder how many have their birds thus brought to their attention?"

"Both bands were in perfect condition and I released the bird with both intact. If it did so well thus far why disturb his aged equilibrium! I think I'll use this bird as an example when I'm called upon to allay the fears of those kindly bird-lovers who insist that banding small birds must do them harm and shorten their lives."

NEXT DEADLINE  
IS MARCH 6th

Because we wish to get the March-April issue of EBBA NEWS out well in advance of the Annual Meeting, the deadline for copy for this issue will be March 6th.