

HOW THEY DO IT  
 Being Hints for New Banders  
 (and Reminders for Veterans)  
 from back issues of EBBA NEWS



CONCERNING FOREHEAD INJURIES by Mrs. Ernest E. Wanek (July-Aug 1953, p.7)  
 During our banding experience we have discovered that a number of birds had injured foreheads and, at times, also injured chins, when removed from the traps. The cause seemed to be that, in their attempt to escape, they forced their mandibles through the hardware cloth, and since the openings were half inch squares, received flesh wounds when more than their bills protruded.

We experimented with quarter inch hardware cloth, which in every instance so far has eliminated the flesh wounds, although at times the bill itself may be slightly scraped.

Some of our traps had openings which provided for the purpose of driving birds into gathering cages. This always seemed a difficult operation, so we constructed traps, one 27 x 24" and another 24 x 24", with openings for the removal of birds by hand. Practically any part of the trap can be made 'out of bounds' for a bird if darkened. It has been relatively easy to remove the birds in this fashion.

Another feature we find advisable is to provide a floor (of quarter inch hardware cloth) for our traps. This permits the location of the traps practically anywhere regardless of the nature of the topography, and when one considers that Ramsey, N.J., is in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains, it will be appreciated."

CONCERNING BLOODY NOSES Dr. Paul Fluck (as part of the above) wrote:  
 "Best treatment for sore noses is Parke-Davis OXYCEL which can be obtained in drug stores. Looks like cotton. Just stick a small piece on the bleeding area and hold with pressure for a few seconds. Let bird go with cotton attached. Bird watchers for miles around will go into fits raving over the 'White-nosed Whatzit' in the neighborhood. But who cares? Oxycel doesn't cost much and a bottle will last a long time."

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF SUNFLOWER SEED by John E. Dennis (November - December 1953, p.4) As a year round bait, sunflower seed is just about tops. Even when natural foods are plentiful in late summer and banding is at low ebb, sunflower seed will bring a ready response. The big drawback is the high cost. Many of us have overcome this by planting our own, but, as I have found through several years' experience, the growing, harvesting, and storing of sunflower seed present some knotty problems.



Few other plants are as easy to get started. Plant the seed twelve inches apart in rows spaced every two and a half feet. There are no exacting soil and fertilizer requirements, and the plants can stand considerable wetness or drought. They need plenty of sunlight and a moderately rich soil. The showy blossoms alone are a good reason for planting them. As the heads mature, the plants become top-heavy and, with a combination of rain and wind, are likely to fall over. One year, just before the heads were ripe, a storm all but ruined my crop. This year much the same thing happened, but I saved the day by propping up the fallen stalks with poles.

A mistake I have made in the past has been to allow the birds to take too large a share of seeds from the standing plants. One year they made away with two-thirds of an acre. It would have been of more benefit to them to have received this extra food during the lean winter months. This year I was away when one planting matured. When I returned, much to my disgust, I discovered that English Sparrows had virtually stripped every head. This sparrow competition is something new. Fortunately I had a later planting elsewhere which yielded a good harvest.

Once the heads are harvested we still have problems. They quickly attract rats and mice and will mildew and spoil if not properly dried. The best procedure, I find, is to place the heads on shelves in a dry room or shed open to the sunlight. There I leave them, after taking rodent control measures. I see no advantage at all in shucking out the seeds unless it is for convenience in storing. Birds seem to come more quickly to the unshucked heads, and the effort required to pick the seeds out keeps them around longer. I use the smallest heads for trap bait.

In their great popularity, sunflower seeds offer a problem as it seems impossible to supply enough of them. One difficulty is that many of the birds which take them have the food-storing habit. The White-breasted Nuthatches and the Tufted Titmice work tirelessly all day long storing away the seeds, and so do the Blue Jays to a lesser extent. I suspect that chickadees have this habit also. Whatever use they make of them, the seeds vanish so quickly that we have to dole out the heads rather sparingly.

Here in Virginia, sunflower seeds are a great favorite with the Downy Woodpeckers. This does not seem to be so true farther north. One fall they came to my planting daily. The seeds were carted away one at a time to poles or fence posts. I suspected the food-storing habit but discovered the birds were only seeking out suitable crevices in which to place the seeds so that they could then pound the husks off.

Most birds either pound the husk off or, like the finches, maneuver it between their mandibles until it splits apart. Mourning Doves swallow the seeds husk and all, and I have even seen Cowbirds do this. Smaller birds, such as Song Sparrows and Towhees, can readily split

the husks, but Pine Siskins seem to depend largely upon tidbits which the other birds leave behind. Towhees place the seeds edgewise in their mandibles so that it either splits open or goes shooting out with force.

Some banders have had considerable success in catching birds which came to sunflower plants to feed. By placing traps in the rows, baited either with water or with sunflower heads, they catch such birds as Goldfinches and, in northern latitudes, Crossbills. I have had no luck along this line. Whenever I have placed traps in sunflower plantings, I have failed to take the birds coming to the plants for seeds. For instance, I have yet to take a Goldfinch in an banding trap here in Virginia; this is in contrast to Massachusetts where I banded nearly three hundred one winter, all in seed-baited traps. But it is a different story when sunflower seeds are made available in wooded situations. Not only do all the woodland birds which have been coming to the fields for sunflower seeds make their appearance but so do the sparrows and other birds of more open situations.

While I do not recommend sunflower seed as a sole source of food at the feeding or banding station, I do suggest it as one of the best baits for year round use and one of the most economical when home grown.

BANDING AT CITY DUMPS by W. M. Davidson (July-August 1954, p. 9)  
Picking one's way through broken glass, heaps of tin cans and discarded furniture is not a popular pastime, but for a bird bander it is all in the days' work. I have had my eye on the dumps at Orlando and Oviedo, Florida, for some time before it struck me that these places might be fruitful for banding. The dump at Oviedo is partly encircled by heavy vegetation, while that at Orlando is amid open ground, with a marshy field adjacent, and it contains two ponds. Mist nets only were used.

At the Oviedo dump in eight visits in January, February and March 1954, I banded 93 birds representing 14 species; 5 species of sparrows and 3 species of warblers were among those banded. The dump at Orlando was visited 3 times in mid-February. Here 19 birds of 4 species were banded, including 8 Least Sandpipers feeding about one of the ponds.

BANDING NESTLINGS by Geoffrey Gill (September-October 1958, p. 75)  
When banding a nest full of young birds and the birds refuse to be returned to the nest, don't keep climbing up and down the tree in the hope that they will stay put. Take a carrot basket for birds such as robins, a smaller basket for smaller birds, and place the nest and the birds in the basket and tie the whole thing in place up the tree as near the original nest site as possible. The parent birds will continue to feed the young in the basket after the fuss subsides. By the time the young can clamber out of the basket they will be larger and better able to avoid ever present danger from cats and dogs.

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