

THE "CALL-OUT"  
By C. Brooke Worth

Probably some American ornithologists know the procedure of the "call-out", but even among those, many may not be familiar with that British term. Although I have been knocking about former British Colonies for a number of years, I had not heard the expression until the other day, when Richard French asked me whether we followed this custom in the United States.

I had just brought Richard's attention to Frank Frazier's most recent plea in EBBA NEWS (May-June 1962, p. 127) for some banding notes from this solitary but indefatigable Trinidadian bander (although the adjective "solitary" does an injustice to Richard's equally indefatigable wife). We were sitting on the small verandah of my field house in Bush Bush Forest, at the center of Nariva Swamp, following a day of intensive bird-watching. Richard had brought along some nets, but opportunities for catching birds were slim, despite our list of about 64 observed species. Indeed as we sat there, we agreed that we could have saved miles of walking merely by remaining in camp, for many of the birds, however inaccessible they might be, appeared in succession within our limited panorama. For example, a dead palm stump about 30 feet high just beyond the verandah contains old woodpecker cavities that have served, under my direct observation, as dormitories or nest sites for four species of birds, equally divided between woodpeckers and woodcreepers.

Anyhow, Richard was eagerly reading and commenting on the article by John V. Dennis in the same issue of EBBA NEWS on "Banding Experiences in Guatemala and Costa Rica" while he worked on field notes. His passing use of the term, "call-out", had nothing directly to do with the occasion but immediately drew my attention. This, he said, consists of reading out the names of all the birds on the British check-list, at the end of the day when the observers on a particular census have assembled. As each bird's name is called, the observers individually state how many of that species they have seen. The person functioning as secretary or tabulator records each answer, and thus the total amount of kinds and the numbers of each species are attained.

As soon as he asked me the question, Richard looked slightly discomfited, for it struck him at once that a "call-out" in the United States would take uncomfortably long, what with our check-list of some 800 species. I assured him that we have manageable local, regional and even seasonal lists that could be used for this purpose. However it strikes me that we generally have overlooked this socially promising ornithological exercise in favor of mailing census lists to a designated and more impersonal center. Not that the "call-out" is unknown in the U.S., but it is certainly not a traditional end-point of our

days afield. To me it sounds admirable, especially if accompanied with material as well as social relaxants -- an oyster stew on a cold day at the shore, plus simpler organic chemicals to warm the stomach.

Richard French wants to contribute to EBBA NEWS, but he is very busy. He was impressed by Frank Frazier's published appeal, and by the present additional note I hope to push him over the edge. He has fascinating data on many species of North American origin, as well as less migratory tropical forms: Dickcissels, waders and terns in particular. But aside from such serious data, he has many a tale to tell about his personal banding experiences in mangrove swamps, a habitat with which most of us are familiar only through photographs.

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