

THE WASHINGTON CROSSING NATURE EDUCATION CENTER
AND BIRD BANDING STATION - 1961

Excerpts from the Annual Report of the Director, Dr. Paul H. Fluck

1961 was a year of progress and action. It was the year when the Washington Crossing Park Bird Banding Station became officially what it has been since 1951, a Nature Education Center. In its ten years of public service, the Nature Education Center has been host to more than 300,000 adults and children from 50 states and more than 40 countries.

It has been said, and correctly, that there is no other kind of conservation except conservation education. What one generation zealously guards, the next generation can heartlessly destroy if education -- conservation education -- has not taught a lesson of conservation values. From what this writer has observed on the lawn of the Nature Education Center at Washington Crossing, the next generation is willing and enthusiastic to learn if given an opportunity.

Spurred on by ever-increasing interest in birds and nature, the Bird Banding programs and bird feeding programs which began as volunteer projects in 1952 are now attracting more than 50,000 visitors annually. School programs which began with half a dozen classes attending in 1953 and 1954 have now reached the point where tentative plans are being made to bring each of the 40,000 school children in the County elementary schools to the Center for an hour of outdoor nature education every year.

During 1961 the Director gave 136 lectures to a total audience of more than 20,000 people at the Nature Education Center. In nice weather crowds were limited only by parking and seating space. Often the parking area was filled long before program time and hundreds stood on the lawn behind filled benches. Many visitors come great distances and some stay overnight at nearby motels so that they and their families can attend both Saturday and Sunday programs.

Efforts were made in 1961 to estimate the number of visitors who came at times when programs were not scheduled. At least 40,000 and possibly half as many more came at such times. Although a full-time naturalist is not on hand to receive them, the Director and volunteer personnel, as well as park policemen spend many hours talking to these visitors.

During the year the Director talked to more than 6,000 children who attended 43 special children's programs which are held out-of-doors from April to November. So many children began arriving in March this year, it became necessary to begin the programs a week early. Throughout the year hundreds of scouts, camp groups, and church and school classes attended the children's programs. A number of crippled children attend the programs regularly.

Children's programs have been broadened to include animals, stars, trees and flowers, and even reptiles as well as birds. Indian lore, natural recordings of wild voices, and simplified instruction in photography provide children with a never-ending variety of new and out-door interests. The Director has been very much gratified when very small children have called out the names of unusual warblers and other hard to identify species.

7550 birds of 87 species were banded during 1961. 628 birds banded in former years returned to be retrapped. Among these were two Grackles banded in 1952, two Catbirds banded in 1953, and two Red-eyed Vireos banded in May 1958 which returned to nest in the Park during the summer of 1961. Goldfinches were very abundant. 2,000 were banded between November 1 and May 1.

Ophthalmoscopic examinations of the eyes of native birds, undertaken in 1960, continued throughout 1961. Lack of a much-needed retinal camera was a serious set-back. While it is hard to explain the need for such a costly piece of equipment (estimated at more than \$1,000) many lesions seen in avian retinas have never been seen before by ophthalmologists. Cataracts were seen in the eyes of 16 species, including Turkey Vultures, Blue Jays, Brown Thrasher, Wood Thrushes and Cardinals. These retina studies are done exactly as with humans; birds cooperate well and are not harmed in any way. A technique for staining the corneas of Wood Thrushes with Fluorescein was developed. This will facilitate the study of the external eyes of living birds.

Utilizing birds brought to the Bird Hospital, techniques perfected in 1960 were employed. Birds with leg and wing fractures were splinted with Scotch Tape, and released to care for themselves. When the fractures are healed, the birds remove their own dressings. A number of birds with fractures were known to fly again.

With the establishment of the Nature Center as a non-profit corporation, at last, after ten years, the Center has a future.



THE WORKSHOP MANUAL Copies of the Workshop Manual are still available. It contains invaluable information for banders -- veterans as well as those who have just received their licenses. If you do not have a copy -- send one dollar and your name and address to Miss Mary-Rebecca Cregar, 223 Matsonford Road, Radnor, Pa.