

Woodpecker (cont.)

Pileated	26(3):90
Red-bellied	26(1):35(Ph); 26(2):60
Red-headed	26(1)14-15
Workshop	26(2):40-42; 26(3):91-92; 26(4):138,140,146-151
Workshop Committee	see Committee
WORTH, C. Brooke	26(4):165 "The Continuing Armistice between Ornithology and Medical Research"

Wren

Carolina	26(1):14-15
House	26(1):14-15
Marsh, Long-billed	26(1):23
Winter	26(1):14-15
Yellowlegs	26(4):158
Greater	26(1):22
Lesser	26(3):103



MILLET FOOD PATCH ATTRACTS BOBOLINKS

By Joseph J. Mahoney, Jr.

Last spring an experimental two acre wildlife food patch of corn and millet was planted at the Norman Bird Sanctuary in Middletown, Rhode Island on the southeast tip of Aquidneck Island. The purpose of the planting was threefold.

First, it was planted to arrest erosion and rebuild topsoil which had been depleted through unwise farming practices on a rather steep hill. Secondly, it was intended to serve as an example of good farming practices as a strip crop, contour plowed field. Thirdly, as indicated above, it was meant to provide food for migratory and resident birds. Happily, the area has been successful in all three respects. It is the third mentioned purpose with which this article is concerned.

On August 27, a large flock of migrating Bobolinks was seen in the food patch. Two Japanese must nets were set in one of the millet rows and by the end of the day (16 net hours) 31 of the "rice birds" had been captured, banded, and released. Examination of a few birds collected as reference skins showed that the collected birds, at least, had fed almost entirely on millet.

Because the flocks moved around a great deal, new arrivals and departing flocks were not often noticed. Thus, we have no accurate count of the Bobolinks that visited our food patch. However, we estimate that roughly 2,000 of these dark striped yellow-olive blackbirds passed through between August 27 and September 11. At the time of this writing (September 17) small flocks are still with us, but high winds and frequent rain have made netting impossible.

Some males were found to have a few black feathers on the chin and throat, and these birds were always among the larger Bobolinks netted. For the most part, however, all ages and sexes would be inseparable to the novice. Skull ossification (checked through the skin of captive birds) and differences in shade between the greater and primary wing coverts were used to age the birds. Over 20% of the birds netted and aged proved to be immature.

Netting continued during August with daily success varying between 22 and 48 birds. Net hours varied also but usually amounted to 16 to 21 hours per day. After the first of September, the daily catch rose steadily until, on the 7th, 147 were netted, banded, measured, and released in 33 net hours. However, after that peak, the number of birds netted dropped sharply even though the number of net hours was increased. An example was September 9, when only 55 Bobolinks were taken in 50 net hours. On September 11, only 9 of our once numerous visitors were banded. A very small percentage of recaptures indicates that individual birds were not staying long with us. Of the 549 Bobolinks banded by Robert Woodruff, Lionel Peabody, Richard Feren, and the writer, only 5 were recaptured.

According to James Baird, former Sanctuary director, almost all the Bobolinks banded by Sanctuary personnel in the past ten years had been captured in a nearby marsh, where these and other blackbirds roost. The roosting birds and high-flying migrants accounted for most of the Bobolinks seen on Aquidneck Island before this August.

Other birds netted in the millet field during this period were: 5 Catbirds, 14 Redwinged Blackbirds, 3 Indigo Buntings, 4 Dickcissels, 99 Goldfinches, 11 Savannah Sparrows, and 25 Song Sparrows. More unlikely visitors netted in our millet strips were 3 Hummingbirds, a Black and White Warbler, and a Connecticut Warbler.

Now that the peak of the Bobolink migration has passed, our netting efforts are shifting more to the Sanctuary's woodlands, but we look forward to even more promising netting activity when the Bobolink flocks return next August.

Sigma Pi, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, R.I.