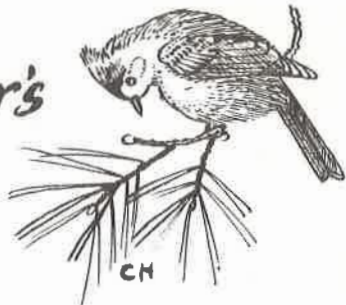




A Bird Bander's Diary



By Ralph K. Bell

When I received a note from Mary Schmid stating that the Publications Committee wanted me to write a "bander's diary" column for EBBA NEWS, my first reaction was to refuse completely. However, after sleeping on the idea for a few nights, I decided to give it a try. Also, how could I refuse after all those flowery words that Mary used!

Since banding only occupies part of my time (my wife will question that statement), my diary will consist of many subjects, instead of just birds and banding, unless too many complaints are heard. I remember Walter Bigger writing me once that banders were a very dedicated group of people, and that it was hard to get them to talk about any other subject.

Perhaps the first thing I should do is give a description of our area. We live in the southwest corner of Pennsylvania, approximately 50 miles south of Pittsburgh, on a 124 acre farm. The area in general is "hill country," and due to so many valleys, there are lots of streams. Years ago there were many covered bridges over these streams (formerly called kissing bridges by some since they protected buggy-riding lovers from prying eyes), and there are still 15 of them in our county. Bander Trudy Smith was here on a visit this past summer to take pictures of the Carmichaels covered bridge.

The main industries in this corner of the state are stock raising (sheep, beef, and dairy) and coal mining. Our own money crops are eggs, Christmas trees, and the wool and lambs from a flock of 50 sheep.

Why do I live on a farm because I prefer the wide open spaces. Life is too short to spend 2-4 hours a day driving to and from work in congested city traffic. We live in the Carolinian life-zone, and the elevation (above sea level) of our farm varies from 850 feet along Ten-mile Creek to 1120 feet on the ridge above the house. A $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of Multiflora Rose hedge borders the west side of our farm and is an excellent place to trap birds - especially sparrows. Last fall, on September 25, while checking my banding traps along this hedge, I noticed a strange bird

in one of my water-drip traps. In this trap were perhaps 10 other birds, mostly Chipping and Field Sparrows. But one bird seemed quite excited and gave a chip something like an Indigo Bunting only much louder and more coarse. Although I had never seen one, the English Sparrow size, yellowish on the breast, chestnut on the bend of the wing, and a black stripe down each side of the throat, made me immediately decide it must be a Dickcissel. As it was a new bird for me, I took it to the house and consulted Peterson to be sure.

November 2 Pete, our Red-tailed Hawk came for food this afternoon during a snowstorm. As the hunting season starts next Monday, I decided to catch him and put him in the pen where he stayed last winter. Since it is illegal to keep Red-tails captive in this state, our local game warden had taken Pete from some boys over a year ago and brought him to us. We agreed to try and train him to go on his own. Pete was given his freedom this past summer, but came back periodically for food. The longest time he ever stayed away was 11 days, but we could usually tell where he was as the local Crows had a round with him every morning. As fall approached and the migrant Crows came in, Pete had a rougher time of it, as perhaps 100 Crows would assemble at a time. Pete is fearless of man, and we are especially afraid he will get shot when the leaves are off the trees, but we want to release him by the first of February as Red-tails select a mate about that time in this area. In fact, they often start their nest before the end of February. Usually their nests are in a large oak tree (often white oak) and on the northward facing slope of a hill, but not always. The nest tree is usually in a large woods, but I once knew of a nest in a lone tree in a pasture field.

November 11 Received EBBA NEWS today, and one can easily see why the membership has grown so fast in recent years. I had to chuckle over the picture of Carol Bullard, with revolver and dead snake. I believe it should win the prize as the most unusual picture to appear in EBBA NEWS for some time.

December 6 Gerald Turner, the only mailman I have ever known (except when I was away in college) made his last trip today. He had completed 40 years of service, and to add a "touch" to his last trip Gerald drove a 1924 "Model T" Ford. The "Model T" made the rounds without a "hitch," but a modern car followed just in case of trouble. To farm families years ago, the mailman was the link with the outside world, and was looked upon as a friend indeed. My first memories of Gerald are of seeing him trudging through the deep snow to bring our mail. Roads were not immediately cleared in those days, and our mailman took short cuts across the fields and delivered mail to at least some patrons each day.

December 20 Christmas tree customers are really coming in earnest now. Our best sellers are Scotch, Austrian, and White Pine trees. I try and keep some of each kind cut and brought down to the house, but the

customers keep coming so fast, many have to drive up in the fields to pick one still standing. Some like to do this anyway and may spend several hours (on warm days) trying to pick the perfect tree. The ground was frozen this year, which was helpful. Last year there was too much snow and the year before too much mud. Happy New Year ... banders all.

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WING-TAIL MEASUREMENTS OF BLACK-CAPPED AND CAROLINA CHICKADEES

(From a paper by Stephen W. Simon first published in Maryland Birdlife for March, 1959) - (Reprinted from EBBA Workshop Manual, Vol. 2, 1963)

The following table shows the Wing-Tail measurements of Black-Capped and Carolina Chickadees banded at Monkton, Md., between 1954 and 1959. The measurements were to the nearest 0.5 mm. For convenience, in the table the 0.5 measurements were raised to the next 1.0 mm. (The 6 Carolinas and 9 Black-caps measured at Laurel by Robbins during the winter of 1957-58 fall in the same pattern as the Monkton birds.)

	<u>Tail</u>																	
mm.	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65
56		1		1														
57				2														
58	1			2			1											
59			1	2	3													
60			2	1	1	1	2			2								
61				1		2	3	2	1			1	1					
<u>Wing</u> 62					4	5	3	4	1			4	5	1				
63							6	3	1			1	3	1	2			
64						1			4	1			1	1		1	1	
65												1		1		3	1	1
66														1			1	
67																3		1
68																1		