

## ISLAND BEACH OPERATION RECOVERY 1963

By Dorothy L. Bordner

IBOR was in continuous operation from August 2, when Bert Murray began netting, until October 27, there being only four days during this period when no birds were banded. Co-directors were Elise Dickerson, Mabel Warburton, and Bert Murray. In 1962 and 1963 IBOR had its headquarters in the abandoned coast guard station--sharing it with the lifeguards until mid September. In 1963 something new was added--electricity and running water (one faucet in the "kitchen"). Civilization! No more struggling with gasoline lanterns or flashlights to process those birds that insisted on waiting until dark to get in the nets. It was wonderful!

Almost 50 banders and assistants made the 1963 banding total, 31,676 birds of 157 species, the best yet--or the worst depending from which side of the records you look! Totals for two species topped the 5000 mark and five more species topped 1000. These were 6138 Slate-colored Juncos, 5033 White-throated Sparrows, 1453 Myrtle Warblers, 1430 Brown Creepers, 1249 American Redstarts, 1089 Song Sparrows, and 1011 Catbirds. Species topping 500 included 784 Yellowthroats, 725 Red-breasted Nuthatches, 716 Blackpoll Warblers, 643 Baltimore Orioles, 600 Downy Woodpeckers, 599 Flickers, 595 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and 569 Semipalmated Sandpipers.

The great increase in numbers banded in the last three years has been the result of more concentrated October banding. A contributing factor in 1963 was the fact that most of the flights came on weekends when more banders and helpers were present. However, the statistics are but a minor part of the story of IBOR.

For the benefit of those recent EBBA members who are not familiar with Island Beach State Park, I give a condensed version of an earlier description by Stanley S. Dickerson. Island Beach State Park is a narrow strip of coastland, 10 miles in length, extending from Seaside Park in Ocean County to Barnegat Inlet. The peninsula is, for the most part, less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile wide, bordered on the east by the Atlantic Ocean and on the west by Barnegat Bay. Except for the sand dunes at the ocean edge, it is quite level. A paved road bisects the strip from the northerly end to within one mile of the Inlet. The portion east of the road is principally beach and sand dunes with some cover near the road and is being developed for recreation. The west side of the road is almost entirely covered, the principal growth being Bayberry, Catbrier, Wild Cherry, Red Cedar, Holly, Poison Ivy, and Hudsonia with lesser amounts of Blueberry, Sumac, and Virginia Creeper. This cover is 4 to 12 feet in height except in a few places where it reaches a height of 20 feet. The bay-side is generally sandy but there are swampy areas and, in some instances, large salt marshes as the bay is approached. The area west of the road has been reserved for study by naturalists. Operation Recovery has been carried on here each year since 1956.

Net lanes were on the west (bay) side of the road and ran perpendicular to the road, in some instances all the way from the road to the bay. Except during the October flights all birds were brought to headquarters for banding and "processing." Bert Murray did almost all of the processing. After the arrival of several other banders in late August Bert gave up banding to weigh, measure, fat class, etc., the birds brought in by the rest of the banders. As you can imagine headquarters became a rather frantic place at times during small flights. Have you ever been under the same roof with five or six screaming flickers? It is a wonder our ears survived! During the October flights banding was done in the net lanes and Bert made the rounds to pick up the species he was especially interested in processing or to process them right in the lane.

The October finch flights were almost unbelievable! In fact, I didn't believe all I had heard about them until I saw one. If you can imagine birds hitting the nets (within a foot of you) on either side as you are removing one bird, and coming so fast that two people can hardly keep one net clear, you will have some idea of a flight. Since the birds hit at dawn and the numbers taper off late in the day, care had to be taken not to leave too many nets up over night, which meant furling nets at the last net check after dark every night. Since flights came with NW winds, we always listened intently to the weather reports and checked every weathervane on the way to the net lanes in the morning. One morning when we got started a few minutes later than usual, Mother said the car went a little faster after it passed each vane pointing NW and it really jumped when we passed the first net lane full of birds. That day the birds got there ahead of us, and we had a busy time of it for a couple of hours. On October 17, during such a flight the two of us banded 609 birds, including 393 juncos.

The Brown Creeper flights, although not as big as the finch flights, were just as interesting. While taking one creeper from the net it was not at all uncommon to have another one climb up our clothes. They also had a habit of climbing the net poles one by one and then flying away without being caught!

The daily routine of a bander at IBOR began with the alarm at 5:00 or 5:30 and out to the net lane by dawn. Net checks were made at least once every hour during the day with the last net check by flashlight after dark, then dinner and the tally of the day's banding before falling into bed. Slow days were occupied with opening bands, checking records, bird watching from the tower at headquarters, sweeping out the piles of sand which accumulated from banders' boots on the floor of our building, and discussing birds and equipment with other banders. The few rainy days were spent catching up on things at the motel (such as sleep) and were really welcome except when they came six at a time.

The shore at the end of several net lanes proved to be good for shorebirds so nets were placed in the water of the bay and operated when

business was slack in the other nets. The main problem here was that the shorebirds were very good at avoiding the nets until dark and it could have been an all night banding job. For shorebirding hip boots and a headlamp are recommended. I had neither and took my first Black-bellied Plover out of the net clutching a flashlight under my arm and standing in mud and water up to my knees.

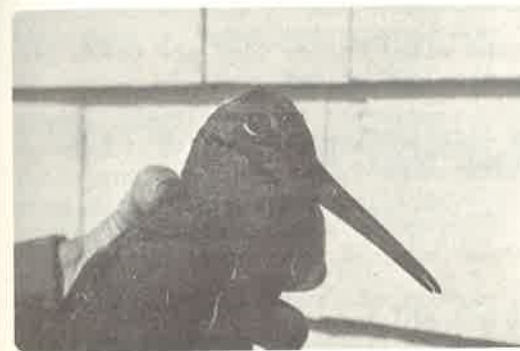
Mosquitoes were not the problem that I expected from the tales of earlier expeditions. The repellents worked very well for me. Far worse than mosquitoes were the hordes of small biting flies that invaded the bay shore and headquarters for about a week in late September. They thought the repellents were so much seasoning for the meat!

Every bander who has worked at IBOR has his own memories of the high spots. Each new species banded brings its own thrill. Black-bellied Plover; Sora; Clapper Rail; Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Blue-winged, Golden-winged, and Orange-crowned Warblers; Seaside, Grasshopper, and Henslow's Sparrows were a few of ours. Perhaps our biggest thrill came when we saw and later banded our first Saw-whet Owls.

Of course, there are always "the ones that got away." During the last week of October I chased a beautiful male Hooded Warbler halfway down my net lane without getting him, and only one was caught in 1963. An interesting, but frustrating, way of spending slow periods was net watching. Myrtle Warblers played around the nets for hours without making a false move and even sat on the top trammel. Redstarts fluttered along the nets like butterflies. Kinglets and Winter Wrens often squirmed through the net, as did some of the Swamp Sparrows. Swamp Sparrows were jitterbugs--moving from the time they hit the net--and could get into the worst possible tangles. One Kingfisher flew into the net at top speed and went right through it without even slowing down. Masters of the art of avoiding nets were the shorebirds and their techniques were varied--some flew over, some under, some around far out over the water, and a few landed and ran beneath the net. Some even seemed to skid to a halt in mid-air when they saw the net.

Any large operation has problems and IBOR is no exception. With at least 21 banders, each using his own bands, the task of checking the number of each previously banded bird on the band series list became time consuming and almost impossible. Yet this is one of the more important phases of the operation. Only by careful recording and checking of banded birds caught can we gain information on length of stay and movements in the park and also pick up those rare foreigners and not quite so rare returns. Luckily, relatively few repeats were caught during flights. Unauthorized people in the banding lanes were another problem. However, the park personnel did an excellent job of patrolling the road, and this problem was kept to a minimum.

What of the future? Much information is being amassed, but many more projects could be undertaken regarding individual species, weather, behavior



IBOR Headquarters

At left - clockwise: Stanley Dickerson, Elise Dickerson, Wide Awake, Sleepy, Bert Murray, Charl Warburton - center, Sonja & John Miller. Above - Dorothy Bordner (absorbed) and some of her photographs of birds netted and banded. Photographs at left by Elise Dickerson, except owls by Dorothy Bordner.

in and around the nets, etc. To carry out such projects there is a need for qualified banders to act as helpers in the lanes and for scientifically trained persons to weigh, measure, and fat class the birds.

I strongly second Jim Hallett's recommendations on page 235 of the Nov.-Dec. 1963 EBBA News. There is no better place than an OR station to test your powers of identification and observe different types of equipment in action. However, remember that IBOR is not the only Operation Recovery station. Other stations have a high potential and need banders who can give a week or more to the operation. Investigation may reveal such a station in your area.

One final caution--don't come to IBOR or any other station if you don't want to catch OR fever. Although this was only my second year at IBOR, and my first banding year, you can easily see that I have an acute case.

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ISLAND BEACH OPERATION RECOVERY 1964  
By Elise M. Dickerson

Plans have already begun for IBOR 1964. In an attempt to solve some of the problems the following rules have been established:

1. No banders for less than a full week.
2. No week-enders (too many bands to cope with) unless they are there for at least a week at some time during the IBOR season.
3. No bander may use his own bands the first year--but must come as a helper to learn the rules, regulations, forms, etc.
4. Before August 1st each bander must send Elise Dickerson his list of bands to be used.
5. Before August 1st anyone wishing to participate must send the dates he plans to be there.

All persons working at IBOR will be expected to make their own arrangements for living quarters. There are no camping facilities in Island Beach State Park. There are several motels in Seaside Park where accommodations can be found.

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