



March-April
A Bird Banders's Diary
 By Ralph K Bell



Carol Hand's drawing of this issue's selection for the bird-of-the-month is very good -- especially since the Bluebird is a difficult subject. Carol not only excels as an artist, but really knows her birds, trees, flowers and ferns as well. She is currently teaching at East Liverpool, Ohio, and is to be married this June. We wish the best for the new bride and groom.

The Bluebird is my favorite bird. Why, I'm not sure, but probably because a pair immediately took possession of my first try at making bird houses. I remember it was a crude affair -- being about two feet high, and made from a wooden well casing. The entrance hole for the Bluebirds was through a slot that had been cut for the pump handle. The Bluebirds must have liked it as it was used by them for years.

March 2 Decided I had better be checking on the Bluebirds sleeping in the yard nest-box today. I had tucked a piece of plastic screen in the entrance hole last night (so as not to shut off ventilation) after they had gone to roost. This is about as late as they roost in a group here. Only five were in the box so one was already staying as guard at his selected nesting site somewhere in the vicinity. Three were males and, in proper light, that beautiful blue is beyond description. Two wore bands. One male (32-185163) had been banded as a nestling on August 18, 1963 in a nest-box less than 100 yards from the roosting box. The banded female was the mother of the banded male. She had been banded July 3, 1963 and caught later on (on two different occasions) with her young in water-drip traps when the whole family traveled together.

March 3 Saw the first Redwinged Blackbird (of the new year) flying east at 9:15 a.m. and another flying northeast at 9:29 a.m. To me, migration is the most interesting part of bird study, and the first arrivals of the blackbird family are easy to observe since they are so easily seen, do not fly at great heights, are daytime migrants, and usually give a call note as they fly along.

March 5 52 degrees a.m.; wind SW. Some migration early this morning but windy after 7:30 a.m.

7:00 a.m. - one Starling flying due north

7:05 a.m. - five Starlings flying northeast

7:15 a.m. - one Robin flying northeast

7:20 a.m. - seven Redwings flying northeast
 7:22 a.m. - one Starling flying due north
 7:29 a.m. - five Robins flying northeast (very high)
 8:25 a.m. - two Redwings flying northeast

March 6 26 degrees a.m.; clear all day; calm a.m., but light wind out of south p.m.

2:15 p.m. - 30+ Redwings flying due north
 2:30 p.m. - 100+ Starlings flying due north
 4:15 p.m. - 30+ Redwings flying due north
 5:17 p.m. - 17 Purple Grackles flying east
 6:27 p.m. - 37+ Redwings flying northwest (almost dark)

March 7 Several flocks of 100+ Redwings flying over today. A few Redwings flying northwest this evening, evidently coming from a wintering area entirely separate from the main flocks that come in from the southwest. I have noticed limited numbers of Redwings coming in from the southeast in other years too. One has to be careful that they aren't coming from a roost, but when the first flights come from the same direction, both morning and evening, they must be considered migrants.

March 9 Note that the migrants were singles in very small groups at first, larger groups on the second day, in the hundreds on the 7th, but today there were at least two blackbird flocks in the county of over 1000 birds each. The first evening migrating blackbirds have no central roosting places in this area. They fly until almost dark and stop to roost when they find suitable habitat -- preferably evergreens. Usually 3 or 4 of the early migrating flocks roost in our evergreens here in the yard. Probably more would, but I always check my nets about dark, and if they see me they usually continue on their migration path a few more miles.

March 15 Bander Mabel Edgerton and three of her friends from Barnesville, Ohio, were here today to see how the water-drip principle is applied in connection with the Seth Low all-purpose trap. In my opinion, not enough stress is given to the new banders as to extra birds that can be captured and banded if water is used as a lure. Water is "it" with Raymond Middleton's thrush trap. It works very well with the Seth Low all-purpose trap too. When water is used, almost every species of bird can be captured -- instead of grain eaters. I have even captured both kinds of Kinglets with the water-drip addition. I visited our president Merrill Wood to get ideas soon after receiving my permit over 10 years ago, and he used the water-drip principle in his Seth Low trap. Merrill believes he got the idea from Geoffrey Gill of Huntington, Long Island. Merrill's father, Dr. Harold B. Wood also used the water-drip in a big square trap in his back yard in Harrisburg, Pa. Merrill believes his catch is increased (by experiments) by 50% when water is used.

Just thinking How nice it would be if we could all honor our president by attending the annual meeting at Douglass College this June.

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