

WHEN COMPANY COMES
By Robert McCullough

There was a day in August that I hoped the birds would do a little performing for us. We wanted them to show off for a house full of company from the city and my mother who was visiting us from out west. Birds were scarce all week but we had caught two Pileated Woodpeckers and a few miscellaneous birds, wishing they had waited until Saturday.

People began arriving at our New Jersey mountain top place, and just as everyone was there a big male Pileated Woodpecker went slamming into a net in the woods near the house. My wife performed very expertly under the admiring or horrified stares of our visitors. We banded the bird and released him. He flew to the nearest Chestnut Oak and circled and inspected it as if it were the only one he had ever seen, the same as his smaller relatives often do, and for the entertainment of our spectators.

The next net had a hummingbird in it, which we didn't attempt to band but was admired by all. His tiny peeps were quite a contrast to the woodpecker, who scarcely stopped his very noisy din the whole time we had him.

Naturally, one of the women would have to remark "That it must upset the birds terribly, emotionally, if not physically to be caught that way." The next bird that showed up was a male Towhee, that from his band number showed we had been catching him for four years, or ever since we started banding. My wife explained that he didn't seem emotionally disturbed or physically harmed from his experience.

When we went around the house to our other area, the Chickadees, which hadn't been around much, decided to put on a show for the visitors. They were all over the place, all banded, and all up to something. They obliged by going into a trap or net, so they could be taken out and have their band looked at and be admired by the company or introduce them to a Chickadee nip. I think they further contributed to dispel the "Emotionally disturbed from their banding experience" idea from our friend's mind.

Things quieted down for a while. We were all comfortably settled in the house and ready to have dinner. The calm was shattered by another Pileated Woodpecker in the net, a female this time. When banded she went through the same nearest tree inspection act. Before we could settle down again we banded a Red Eye Vireo, a Veery and an ovenbird.

As the day wore on we caught four Redstarts, which we never had before, a number of young Towhees decided it was time to get caught,

and we had three different warblers, including a return Black and White Warbler.

The next day, company departed, except for Mother, we only caught one bird, and saw few others. So, we agreed that the birds did show off for us.

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"He came to show off" -- Bob McCullough's Pileated Woodpecker