



Sept.-Oct.

# A Bird Bander's Diary

by  
Ralph K. Bell

Sept. 9 .... Left home at 3 a.m. this morning for our OR Station on the top of the Allegheny Front Mountains approx. 10 miles ESE of Davis, West Virginia. Arrived at our headquarters (the Red Creek Campgrounds) at 6:15 a.m. - just at the break of day, and in plenty of time for the morning flight of migrants. I did not need to put up any nets as John Morgan, Cora Williams and her husband William, had been there for some time. Dr. George Hall had started things by putting up the first nets on 30 August, but had to leave a week later for his W. Va. University duties.

Sept. 10 .... I arose before dawn (I sleep in our station wagon) and noted that John Morgan's light was already on in his tent. Conditions seemed perfect for a good flight. By 7:30 a.m. DST warblers were coming through in large numbers. Cora Williams furled her 5 nets at the campgrounds and came out to the rim to help. We furled 7 of our 13 nets at the rim as a precaution against casualties in the heavy wind. Each day has its predominant species, and this was Blackburnian Warbler day. They seemed to be everywhere, and there were plenty of adult males among them.

We had put up a high net yesterday as an experiment. It was placed directly over one of our best nets (No. 4 south) and in front of some Red Spruce. It caught warblers alright, but whether the effort involved and the cost of the net made it worthwhile is debatable. Also the enmeshed birds are "sitting ducks" for hawks. One hawk came in after a warbler while we were taking out birds directly below. Due to the hawks, and bats during the night before (and probably owls too), this net had 11 major holes in it in less than 24 hours. It was also noted that by keeping this high net furled just above the other net, many warblers (that would normally fly above the lower net) would duck under the furled net and get caught.

Sept. 19 .... A large flight of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks today and the new net locations are paying off. Three new net lanes were cleared this year. One (for a 5-meter net) is excellent for warblers, and the other 2 are very good for Grosbeaks and Tanagers. 64 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were banded this year compared to only 5 last year.

This weekend had been selected for the first Mountain State Hawk-Watchers and Bird-Banders Junket with headquarters at nearby Blackwater Falls State Park. As a result we had perhaps 50 visitors today and naturally many birds became alerted and avoided the nets entirely. However, I feel that the educational value far exceeded anything that could be gained by banding perhaps another 100 birds. Anyone that wanted to remove a bird from the nets was encouraged to do so. One lady from Ohio exclaimed! "You mean I can take a bird out myself? No one has ever allowed me to do that before." Several people were showed the Seth Low, the Dater and the "hock-wing-head-wing-foot" methods, and I can truthfully say I did not hear of even one bird casualty. One 12 year old boy from Charleston even removed a Sharp-shinned Hawk all by himself, and I feel he will be a friend of nature the rest of his life. People that get to participate do not develop a hostile feeling.

Sept. 26 .... 34 degrees. Clear with light west wind. A truly beautiful day. A good Wood Thrush flight at break of light, followed by a good movement of Swainson's and Grey-cheek Thrushes. Some warblers were coming over, but most were too high for the nets. As we had plenty of banders and volunteer help today, I climbed to a vantage point perhaps 400 yards from the main netting area to admire the flight. Rafts of Blue Jays were now coming over, as were Cedar Waxwings and Flickers. The dwarf trees in the rocky area below me were alive with Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Swainson's Thrushes and warblers (Anne Shreve told me later she estimated well over 100 Black-throated Greens in the bushes near no. 4 net south). Not far away a Swainson's Thrush was eating the berries of the Mountain Ash (for which this area is famous). It was wonderful to be above and away from the rush of the banding activity. The vastness of the area, the hugh rock fields, the lack of human habitation and the scenery in general gets "to you" on a day like this. A good description would be to repeat Tanya Hall's quote "it fills the mind and delights the soul."

Oct. 17 .... The wonderful banding trips to Red Creek are over for this year and perhaps this is a good time to make a little summary. While the Atlantic Coast stations are away ahead of us when it comes to banding most species of warblers, there is evidence to suggest that the mountain flyway is used to a greater degree by at least 3 species - the Tennessee Warbler (239 banded 1965), Black-throated Green Warbler (217 banded) and the Blackburnian Warbler (247 banded). Chan Robbins made the comment that none of the coastal stations catch the Blackburnian by more than singles.

A total of 3492 birds of 79 species were banded in 4638 net hours. The best days were as follows:

Sept. 10, 1965	243 banded in 116 net hours	Blackburnians	43
Sept. 11	210 " 94 " "	Tennessees	32
Sept. 14	220 " 157 " "	Tennessees	42
Sept. 16	249 " 148 " "	Swainson's Th.	28

Looking northeast from the banding area. Many birds come around this mountain before coming up the ravine and into the nets.



A Lull in Banding Activity

This picture shows our "cave" that is our banding headquarters, especially in band weather.

Mrs. George Ballentine removing a bird from the net. This net is very good for catching Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Tanagers.



Arthur Dunnell at exposed nets near the rim. These nets are very good with moderate westerly winds, but with light winds the migrants fly over the nets. Very strong winds keep most of the birds from getting up over the rim. Mountain ranges can be dimly seen to the east.



Talking things over on a beautiful sunny morning at Red Creek. The Hall's dog Digsy on rock by nets. Mrs. George Ballentine (by nets); Dr. George Hall (cap and glasses, standing); Charles Conrad - Executive Director, Brooks Bird Club (white cap, seated); Art Dunnell (standing, back to camera); John Morgan (seated on rock, hat); and Ralph K. Bell (seated, watch on wrist). Photos by George Ballentine.

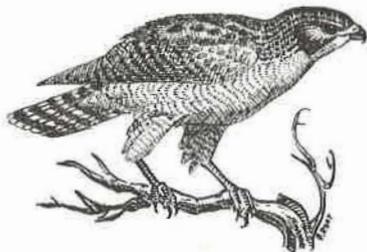
Sept. 18, 1965	265	banded in	248	net hours	Blackpoll	61
Sept. 26	207	"	206	" "	Swainson's Th.	45
Oct. 9	135	"	81	" "	Blackpoll	81

Due to the large numbers of Blackpolls banded here (436) (and very little banding was done in October), I am wondering if past theories about the main flights of Blackpolls migrating directly across the western North Atlantic could be erroneous. Perhaps by their migrating patterns (and timing) they are apt to be blown out over the Atlantic Ocean. At least some of the Blackpoll Warblers noted at Red Creek were coming in high (200 feet) from out over the valley and flying straight west as if to correct their course. Bermuda is almost exactly straight south from Red Creek.

George Hall and I wish to thank everyone that helped make this fall at Red Creek such a success. A lot of the credit should go to John Morgan (who stayed from 1-28 Sept.), Cora Williams (who stayed 2 weeks), Connie Katholi, Maxine Kiff, Anne Shreve, and Tom Olsen. Other EBBA members that were present and gave assistance were Elting Arnold, Mr. & Mrs. George Ballentine, Art Dunnell and Betty Vossler.

Postscripts: John Morgan, who was sitting on a rock near the nets, had a Ruby-throated Hummingbird fly up to him, poise, and then stick its bill into his red coat .... to keep from losing track of time, Cora Williams kept crossing out each day on her calendar.

R. D. 1, Box 142, Clarksville, Pennsylvania



Answers to QUIZZ on page 283 -- 1, Book of Job. 2, George Lyttelton. 3, Richard le Gallienne. 4, Edith Wharton. 5, Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke. 6, Robert Southwell. 7, Henry King, Bishop of Chichester. 8, Alexander Pope. 9, Andrew Marvel. 10, William Shakespeare.