

NET HOURS: THE MYTH OF THEIR IMPORTANCE

By John and Mary Schmid

Mabel Warburton stated her point of view on the above subject in the July-August 1967 issue of EBBA News. We would like to add our comments.

After assisting in the Island Beach Operation Recovery for several years, in 1963 we started our own Operation Recovery at Mariedor Sanctuary located along Wading River and its tributary, Merrygold Creek, in New Jersey. High pine woods, marshes and a large cedar swamp are the habitat. We believe that, located as we are 30 miles south of Island Beach, 14 miles north of William Savell's station and 50 miles north of Cape May, our station is a good link between other stations, with a chance to make studies such a link can offer.

At our station we have banded:

1963	825 individuals	58 species	(1072 net hours)
1964	1075 "	59 "	(2180 " ")
1965	1693 "	68 "	(1754 " ")
1966	519 "	56 "	(584 " ")

In 1963 and 1964 nets were left up many more hours during the day until a pattern was established and we knew what to expect. In 1965 and 1966 most banding was done, as Mabel Warburton quoted us, from sun-up to 10:30 or 11:00 am., with occasional netting in the late afternoon hours. What do the above net-hour figures tell us of any value? Unless we are interested in the number or fraction of birds banded per net hour, nothing that we can think of!

1963	0.76 bird per net hour
1964	0.49 bird per net hour
1965	0.96 bird per net hour
1966	0.88 bird per net hour

Again, compare these figures with those given by Mabel Warburton and what have we learned? Nothing!

So we say, net hours remind us of the hours we've waited for birds that were not flying. They remind us that, had we known, we would have closed our nets as soon as we were sure. (When in one hour there are no birds in 20 nets, it's time to agree that birds aren't flying!) So now, we open our nets from dawn to 10:30 or 11:00 am. This is actually determined by the traffic, not the net hours. We also do not band in rain, high winds or extreme heat or cold that may endanger the birds. Granted, by closing our nets at 10:30 we may miss an unusual stray. Except for the personal pleasure of seeing and handling a rare bird, what would many

more net hours to catch one stray bird prove? Only that another bird was blown, or strayed, off its normal migration route.

We think bird banding is much hard work and more fun, but we believe with all the information banders should record (measurements, weights, aging, sexing, etc.) surely anything not of definite value should be eliminated.

And we say net hours are not even for the birds!

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MORE ON NET HOURS

By George A. Hall

(Mr. Hall is the editor of The Wilson Bulletin. -Ed.)

I would like to add a hearty AMEN to the remarks made by Mabel Warburton in her commentary, "Net-Hours: The Myth of their Importance" (1967, EBBA News, 30:158-160). Mrs. Warburton has put into print the same conclusions that I reached several years ago while trying to analyze my own Operation Recovery data. In summarizing and illustrating these conclusions most effectively and most interestingly, Mrs. Warburton has done us all a great service. I would, however, like to add some comments of my own.

Since we are discussing the fraction: number of birds banded/net hours, I think we should perhaps start with a short arithmetic lesson. The numerator of this fraction (number of birds banded) is the only part that we are really interested in and we hope to compare this numerator with those from other fractions at our own or other stations. To make a fair comparison, however, we must convert the simple number of birds banded to a fraction by dividing by some denominator. In any fraction the denominator is every bit as important as the numerator and in the situation at hand it is the denominator that gives us all the trouble.

If our denominators are not comparable then our fractions will not be comparable. To give a homely example, suppose that my O.R. partner Ralph Bell is selling his eggs at 50 cents a dozen, and a competitor is selling them at 75 cents a dozen. Since everybody understands what is meant by a dozen, and since both Ralph and his competitor mean the same thing by the word "dozen" we can confidently say that Ralph's eggs are the cheaper. But suppose that the competitor defines a dozen as 20 eggs? Then who is selling the cheaper eggs? We can no longer make an easy comparison since the denominator (dozen) is no longer the same in the two cases. Mrs. Warburton has demonstrated several reasons why her denominator (net hours) may not be representing the same thing as my denominator, and hence why she and I cannot get a valid comparison of our data if we compare the fractions, of birds/net hours.