



A Bird Bander's Diary

Sept.-Oct.

Sept. 28, 1967 ... It was raining when I left home at 3:42 am. for Red Creek Campground in West Virginia (our O.R. banding station on top of the Allegheny Front Mountains). Arrived there at 6:55 am. and it was raining very hard. Since netting birds in heavy rain should never be attempted, all nets were tightly furled. Cora and Bill Williams, of Indiana, Pa., had been resident banders for 17 days and this was the morning they had planned to leave. They invited me in to have breakfast with them in their trailer and we talked of their experiences there in this wild, remote place only 125 Crow miles from Washington, D.C. This year it was especially colorful with an abundance of brightly colored clusters of mountain ash and deciduous holly berries. This area is also noted for its wildlife and snowshoe rabbits were especially plentiful this year.

The Williams' had seen many people come and go. Some came to band, others to watch the banders operate and learn more about birds. Still others came to observe and count the many hawks that use this ridge to migrate southward by riding the thermals that rise out of the valley to the east on nice days. Cora Williams said her greatest thrill was seeing the adult Bald Eagle at about 9:30 am. on September 14. It was first observed gaining altitude as it circled higher and higher above "Raven Point" to the north of our nets, then leveled out and headed straight south. I was repairing a net at the time and watched it go past our net lanes and out of sight. The true thrill and feeling of seeing one of these magnificent migrating birds cannot be expressed in words ... one has to experience it personally.

Many of the visitors to the mountaintop came to pick blueberries - probably the best crop in years. I know I have never seen so many. One man told John Morgan that he had picked 300 gallons. I talked with two elderly ladies that had driven almost 50 miles to pick the blueberries. In a few hours they had picked seven gallons. Evidently the chance to enjoy nature away from civilization was the primary reason for coming as they planned to sell the berries "back home" for only \$1.25 a gallon.

Banders present at one time or another, besides Cora Williams. were

Connie Katholi (Charleston, W.Va.), Maxine Kiff (Ona, W.Va.), Betty Vossler (Wheeling, W.Va.), Elting Arnold (Chevy Chase, Md.), Walter Fye (Knox, Pa.), Dr. George A. Hall (Morgantown, W. Va.), John Morgan (Charleroi, Pa.), Tom Olsen (Greensburg, Pa.). Tom and Virginia Olsen left their trailer there for two weeks and this extra comfort was utilized and appreciated by several of the banders. Chuck Conrad, executive director of the Brooks Bird Club, added a personal touch by contributing a drinking cup (made up at his own plant) with the inscription "Red Creek Water Commission". The many visitors to the famous spring at the campground now get a chuckle when they see that cup.

Oct. 20, 1967 ... Evidently a great Bluebird migration is in progress as many could be heard and seen flying over until well after sunup. This species seems to be making quite a comeback and I feel much more optimistic than I did a few years ago. Several unbanded Bluebirds were caught in my Seth Low water-drip traps earlier this fall and two were captured and banded this afternoon in Trap W (along the multiflora rose hedge).

Oct. 22, 1967 ... While visiting with my wife's relatives in Williamsport, Pa., I drove over for a short visit with the Walter Biggers family. Walter is currently filling an order for 8-cell traps. Also, the Biggers' have been quite busy getting ready for winter. Their honey crop had already been brought in (they sell a delicious honey) and their porch was loaded with apples and they made sure we took some home. They live in a truly beautiful mountainous area and the fall colors were at their best. Visiting fellow banders is an unforgettable experience that we should all participate in more often.

Oct. 23, 1967 ... At 3 pm. as I approached the water-drip trap, I noticed a gray bird with white in the wings and tail and presumed it to be a Mockingbird - at least two of this species are constantly seen along the hedge. While chasing it into the gathering compartment, I noticed the remains of a bird on the ground beside the trap. I took a closer look and noticed I had captured my first Loggerhead Shrike. The Shrike had evidently entered the trap for the bird, which proved to be an immature White-crowned Sparrow. While I felt badly about the loss of the White-crown, the capture of a new species is always a thrill, even to an old bander. This is my first fall record, although there have been several spring observations.

I checked with Todd's "Birds of Western Pennsylvania" and note that the late J.W. Jacobs (Purple Martin box manufacturer) found a shrike nest in the county in the spring of 1884 but none have been recorded since. I went to see Dr. Samuel Dickey at Waynesburg to ask what he knew about the Loggerhead Shrike in Greene County. Dr. Dickey, a noted oologist during the 1910-1920 period, has travelled extensively and has a wonderful knowledge of birds, and is still quite active. Sam told me he has never seen a shrike nest in the area but did notice adult birds at two different locations during the summer about five years ago. One place was along the

road where our Breeding Bird Survey is taken. I plan on checking this area thoroughly before the Survey next June.



In the evening - about three hours after the capture of the shrike - I was again checking the traps along the rose hedge. About 150 yards north of the drip trap there is an excellent location for trapping ground-feeding birds. Two foreign banded White-crowned Sparrows have been retrapped here. So far, only a grain trap has been used, but I hope someday to replace it with a water-drip trap to increase the take.

This evening, three White-crowned Sparrows were in the trap and one was an adult Gambel's. In the hand this subspecies of the White-crown is very easy to distinguish from the ordinary White-crowns, as the white eye-line starts from the base of the bill instead of from the eye. A picture was taken and the difference can easily be noted when compared with Raymond Bubb's photo of the White-crown in the preceding issue of EBBA News - Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 230. (See also Birds of North America by Robbins et al., p. 321. -Ed.)

While only a subspecies, it was new to me and two new birds in one day is really something! EBBA member Merit Skags of Cleveland, Ohio had just written that he had captured a Gambel's White-crown on October 7 and that I would catch one here in Greene County some day. His prediction came true just two weeks later.

Box 142, Clarksville, Pa. 15322



SAW-WHET OWL - REQUEST FOR MEASUREMENTS

Jan Reese is conducting a study of Saw-Whet Owls which we hope will eventually result in a paper for EBBA News. To complete his study, he needs wing and tail measurements (with emphasis on tail measurements).

Readers who have banded - and measured - Saw-Whet Owls are requested to send wing chord and tail (central tail feathers: from tip up to the point where quills enter the skin) measurements, with date and place of banding, to Jan Reese, Box 298, St. Michaels, Md. 21663.