

BANDING NORTH AMERICAN MIGRANTS IN PANAMA

By Vernon M. Kleen

In the fall of 1967, I had the great privilege of working nearly three months with birds in western Panama along with two other men, Thomas Heatley from Central Michigan University and Peter Kirmse from Guelph University in Canada. We were working for Dr. Horace Loftin of Florida State University in the Canal Zone under a National Institute of Health Grant he had received.

Tom and I arrived in Panama on the night of Sept. 19, and spent our first day netting birds in the Canal Zone with Peter who had arrived earlier. We caught several migrant species such as Traill's Flycatcher, Kentucky Warbler, Northern Waterthrush and American Redstart as well as many of the local residents which seemed quite strange at first; wrens, tanagers, hummingbirds, etc., since I had just come from an Operation Recovery station in Maryland. The major goal of this project was quite similar to that of an Operation Recovery Station--band as many of the North American migrants as possible as well as some of the local population especially at the primary work-site in Chiriqui Province in western Panama.

On Sept. 21, we packed all our gear into the jeep and tied the 10-15 foot bamboo net-poles on top. By that afternoon we had departed from the Canal Zone and were on our way to Chiriqui. Enroute we noted several species of birds quite similar to those familiar back in the United States; Tropical Kingbird, Tropical Mockingbird, Groove-billed Ani, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Ruddy Ground Dove and Roadside Hawk. Late that night we arrived at a cabin near Cerro Punta owned by the Florida Audubon Society which was half way up the country's highest mountain, Volcan de Chiriqui (over 11,000'). We were greeted by Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Kalma (from Connecticut) who were residing there while he was working for his doctorate on one of the local sparrows. This cabin was our main headquarters for the banding operations.

The following morning, we were surprised by the beauty of our surroundings and the habitat for our work. The house was surrounded by coffee trees, there was a large, green front yard with several kinds of flowers and a small swift-flowing stream in back with a heavy woods and steep-rising cliff at the extreme rear - perfect mountain habitats and operating headquarters. Temperatures were in the 70's through the day and down to low 40's some nights.

We quickly erected about 10 nets through the coffee trees which seemed to attract Wilson's and Black-&-White Warblers. A few more nets were set up across the road near the river (that had Dippers and Spotted Sandpipers) where both species of Waterthrushes were caught. A third line of net-coverage of all habitats; it was hoped that a Quetzal would fall prey to this latter line of nets as one had done for the men working there the previous spring.

As the days progressed, so did the number of birds and bird-species caught. Migrants included: Mourning, MacGillivray's, Blackburnian, Canada, Tennessee, Wilson's, Black-&-White, Black-throated Green and Chestnut-sided Warblers, Louisiana and Northern Waterthrushes, Ovenbirds, Yellow-bellied, Traill's and Acadian Flycatchers, Eastern and Western Wood Pewees, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Veery, Swainson's Thrushes, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. Many local residents were also captured; wrens, tanagers, hummingbirds, more hummingbirds, flycatchers, finches, vireos, warblers, thrushes, robins, sparrows, etc., some with unusual names as: Slaty Flower-piercer, Paltry Tyrannulet, Violet Sabrewing, Rufous Mourner, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-thrush, Bright-rumped Attila, Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner and Rufous-browed Pepper-shrike to name a few.

Most of the netting during the first month was strictly confined to the cabin area since many migrants were still arriving. The early afternoon showers caused only temporary periods of ineffective netting but most of the birds were not active during this time of day anyway. The nets had to be furled before dusk each evening unless we wanted to spend the next day removing up to 25 bats from each one. The two or three nets purposely left unfurled (by one of the men who was working with bats) were useless for catching birds after only one night.

Late in October, I flew over the mountains to the Caribbean Coast and landed in a small village in the middle of a banana plantation near the Costa Rican border. From there I went by train down to Almirante in the Province of Bocas del Toro where I joined Tom and Peter who had arrived there a couple of weeks earlier. Almirante is noted for the exportation of Chiquita brand bananas by the United Fruit Company. The only way into Almirante is by train or ship although the Fruit Company maintains a small landing strip for personal use.

At Almirante, The Gorgas Memorial Laboratory of Panama had been studying avian diseases for several years possibly transmitted by migrant birds. They had hired men each fall to set up and operate mist nets while lab technicians did the actual work with the birds. They were primarily interested in five common migrants: Catbirds and four thrushes (Veery, Swainson's Thrush, Gray-cheeked Thrush and Wood Thrush). All the other birds that were caught had simply been released, so Dr. Loftin took advantage of the situation and made arrangements for these additional birds to be brought to us for processing before being released. By the time we walked the nearly two miles out to the field lab along the railroad tracks each morning, the first round of birds were waiting for us.

Nearly 100 nets were being operated daily, so the variety and number of birds caught at this coastal station differed tremendously from those back in the mountains, although a few species were duplicated: Empidonax flycatchers, some warblers and thrushes. The many new migrant species included: Common Snipe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, Prothono-

tary, Yellow and Hooded Warblers, Yellowthroat, Yellowbreasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, and Lincoln's Sparrow. Hundreds of catbirds and the four thrush species were caught. The local species included: Kingfishers, manakins, hummingbirds, more hummingbirds, grassquits, seedeaters (one unnamed subspecies), antbirds, flycatchers, etc., with odd names like: Band-tailed Barbthroat, Long-billed Gnatwren, Blue-crowned Woodnymph, Black-headed Saltator and Plain Xenops.

One of the outstanding sights while at Almirante was the hawk and vulture migration. I have never been to Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania, but I know that this migration along the Caribbean coast is just as spectacular if not more so. Actual counts of over 100,000 Turkey Vultures (Oct. 28, 1967) would soar by endlessly on the rising thermals and then change direction right over the city of Almirante. During a two week period (Oct. 24 - Nov. 7) the Black Vultures, Swainson's Hawks and Broad-winged Hawks would also drift past by the 1000's. Other hawks were noted, but not in such large numbers. It is encouraging to know that the Swainson's Hawks are still plentiful knowing how much they are persecuted in their summer range.

Visits to the island of Bocas del Toro were also interesting where large numbers of migrant shorebirds and herons were concentrated. The boat trips from the mainland to the island were also rewarding as Olivaceous Cormorants, Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Boobies were seen.

The immediate vicinity around Almirante is primarily wooded swamps with few and difficult trails. By following some of these trails, many additional species could be found that weren't caught in the nets, such as: parakeets and parrots, trogons, toucans, oropendolas, caciques, woodpeckers, orioles, tanagers and euphonias, and more hummingbirds. Howler monkeys could also be heard in the distance.

Before mid-November, we returned to the mountain camp near Cerro Punta where we stayed until early December. The routine was changed since few new birds were arriving anymore. During the last few days, we were able to make field trips around the area. We climbed Volcan de Chiriqui to above the timberline, visited remote lakes and wandered through the lowlands. We finally saw a Quetzal along one of the mountain trails (we never did catch one in a net or even see one in the yard).

On Dec. 6, we began our trip back to the Canal Zone. Yellow-headed Caracaras and Laughing Falcons were regular roadside visitors and one King Vulture presented itself conspicuously for us for several minutes. After we had gotten back, we were able to visit the Smithsonian Institution's Research Station on one of the islands in the middle of the Canal called Barro Colorado. Here wild monkeys and several new birds were observed at close range.

During the three month stay, I was surprised by the lack of mosquitoes wherever we went. Snakes were also few, so it seemed, since I personally saw none alive. We did see a few lizards and iguanids, but they were interesting to watch. I have only good recollections of the country and am looking forward to a return trip someday and wish to thank Dr. Loftin for the enjoyable time I had while I was there.

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A UNIQUE BREEDING RECORD: SAW-WHET OWL (PART 2)

By Frederick S. Schaeffer

This note is a postscript to my paper in the July-August 1968 EBBA News (Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 174-177) in which I related the story of the second known breeding record of the Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadica*) on Long Island, N.Y. since 1879. Adults and young were last seen in the area on June 15, 1968.

The present writing concerns the adult female Saw-whet Owl, a parent of the five young described in the earlier paper. This bird, banded with a size 4, lock-on band, No. 524-21171 on April 7, 1968, was recovered by a Mr. Timothy Lindsay in South Portland, Maine on January 12, 1969. Still alive, it was found wounded (BB-shot in left eye) sitting docilely on the ground. Mr. Lindsay brought the owl to Mr. Douglas L. Marston, Regional Biologist of the Maine Fish & Game Dept. nearby and it was Mr. Marston, a bander himself, who sent a form 3-1807 to the banding office. Earl Baysinger kindly sent me this form, because interesting comments in the remarks section of the form shed further light on this interesting recovery.

Mr. Marston writes as follows: "I picked up bird from Lindsay on morning of January 13, 1969 and it was taken to Dr. Ladd Hildebrand, Vet., for treatment of eye injury. Antibiotic applied to eye Jan. 13, 14, 15. BB shot fell from eye prior to treatment by Dr. Hildebrand. Bird died January 15, 1969 while in my possession. Post-mortem examination indicated mechanical injury to skull above right eye and this undoubtedly resulted in death".

Of course, needless to say, I was grieved that this bird had met a cruel death by a hunter, as I had hoped it would breed in the area again. On the other hand, however, we now have a record of a bird which went to winter, north of its breeding area. This is certainly interesting.

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