

SPRING? AND THE REIGN (RAIN) OF THE MYRTLE

By Mrs. Murray Olyphant Jr.

Here in Minnesota, we like to believe that we have a great "theater of seasons". But as the acts unfold, we wonder about this play of the weather and ask ourselves, sometimes, is the play such a smash hit after all? After one has resided in this beautiful land of the lakes for a reasonable length of time, one quickly learns that during many years we have at least six months of winter. Such was the case at the end of the first week of May, 1968.

On Tuesday, May 7th, it was pouring cold rain all day, the temperatures were in the low 40's, and the wind was blowing a gale out of the northwest. It was one of those days that could only bring growls of disgust from any Minnesotan, but more possibly shrieks of frustration from a bird bander! All that I was conscious of the whole day as I was attempting to lessen my pile of ironing, was that our woods and lawn were exploding with birds, that we so eagerly wait to see again after the long winter has supposedly passed. Spring migration was really swinging and what was outside our house represented our first big wave of early warblers. What felt like the icy hand of winter most likely held them from continuing their journey further northward.

I can remember clearly, looking out our basement windows at 4 p.m. on that dreary afternoon; our back lawn was covered with Myrtle Warblers (*Dendroica coronata*), foraging for whatever they could find to eat, which I suspect was little. There was a constant stream of them flying to our various suet feeders. Our lawn had changed from dull green to blue-grey with yellow spots.

I wondered to myself that night what their fat class might be and whether they could withstand the raw winds and unseasonably cold temperatures. What would develop tomorrow? --- I soon found out.

At dawn on May 8th, with the temperatures in the high 30's, the rain had stopped, but the winds continued out of the northwest at about 20/25 mph. for most of the day, and the heavy grey clouds continued to roll across a turbulent-looking sky. There was no change in this weather pattern until 4 p.m. on May 9th. With this situation prevailing, I was concerned about these fragile little insectivores and constantly wondered during those two days how long how long they could survive. If only the wind would subside...

Because of the dense concentration of birds on May 8th, I decided that despite that wind I was going to try and band some of these migrants ...12 meter nets were out of the question; they would never work in such a "blast". Therefore, where would be the best place to use 6 meter nets, and how many? I decided to use only 2, and I would place them in a spot that

could be constantly watched. This would mean my net lane due north of the front door of the house (which faces north), and just to the west side of our front path. This spot to the front of the house borders a thick stand of many different kinds of deciduous shrubs and young trees and is easily seen from by banding table on the front porch. The distance from the porch to the net lane is about 45 feet.

I started to work at 8:30 a.m. by placing the two 6 meter nets end to end in a north-south direction, so essentially I had 40 feet of net in place. (I must comment here that the tethering of nets is a gift from the gods under these windy conditions. In fact it is most essential, I feel, for the safety of the birds' lives). Within minutes after the nets were set up, Myrtle Warblers started to fly into them, and somehow the nets held them. Everywhere I looked there were Myrtles, and I soon found out that during the daylight hours of May 8 and 9, I was not to find time to sit down on even an uncomfortable chair until late in the afternoon of May 9. I spent both days between two points--mya two 6 meter nets and my banding table. No sooner did I empty my nylon mesh holding bags of Myrtles, and process the birds, than there would be more to be removed from the nets. My question about fat class was answered easily. By far the majority of the birds banded on both of these days had a fat class zero.

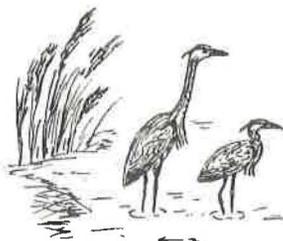
Besides the huge number of Myrtles, there were other species of warblers and other passerines that I also banded. The other most common species was the Palm Warbler (*Dendroica palmarum*). I cannot possibly estimate the number of birds that hit the nets and bounced off, but a safe guess would be at least 50%. All I dept hearing above the noise of the wind was the constant "check-check" of the Myrtle. The weather was too nasty for singing and I was too busy to look at anything beyond the immediate vicinity in which I was working.

Suddenly at 4 p.m. on May 9, I was conscious of a change. With "my nose to the ground", I was not paying much attention to the sky! But the sun came out and the clouds rapidly disappeared and what's more the wind subsided for the first time in over forty-eight hours. The migrating flocks disappeared as if a curtain on a stage had been lowered and the play was over. Within minutes there was not a bird to be seen or heard except for an occasional Black-capped Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*) or White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*), calling as they visited our feeders. My banding activities stopped as suddenly as they had begun thirty-two hours before.

With two small mesh, tethered 6 meter nets in operation during those two days, I had managed despite the wind to net and band 193 individual birds of 24 species, which included for me a new life species, a Pine Warbler (*Dendroica pinus*). But the Myrtle took the prize as I banded a total of 107 individuals, 46 AHY males, and 61 AHY females.

What happened on May 8 and 9, 1968, when I look back on it all now in October, I find hard to believe. This had been a truly high adventure in banding and I shall never forget it.

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NEW EVENING GROSBEAK LONGEVITY RECORD

By William E. Savell

This concerns, in our opinion, a new longevity record for the Evening Grosbeak and the story is as follows:

On November 30, 1968 at our Linwood, New Jersey banding station, we recovered an AHY Male Evening Grosbeak, bearing band 54-197708. The bird looked just like every other male grosbeak to us, and we submitted a report to the banding office the same day.

On April 1, 1969 we received our certificate of appreciation and were amazed to learn the bird had been banded on January 23, 1956 by Maurice Broun at Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania. Our great delight and the thought that this might prove to be a new longevity record for the species, prompted us to write Dr. Broun immediately. Shortly afterward we received a reply from him in which he said in part, "Thanks so much... Remarkable, that 14 year old grosbeak; indeed a record, I think. The banding office has not yet notified me..."

Feeling this was rightly a record about which Dr. Broun might wish to write, we withheld our comments from EBBA News. However, on July 17, 1969 we received a further communication from him, saying "The write-up on Evening Grosbeaks in latest Bent series has some longevity data but, so far as I can see, our bird could well be the oldest for wild birds. May I suggest that you prepare a note for EBBA..."

It is with great pleasure that we report and share this thrilling experience with a noted ornithologist.

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