



## Atlantic Flyway Review

A REVIEW OF OPERATION RECOVERY AND RELATED SUBJECTS

Edited by Frederick S. Schaeffer



One week left - and Atlantic Flyway Review still unwritten for this issue. (But it still was received ahead of the deadline. -Ed.) I never quite realized how much work Operation Recovery really is, until now. Despite an extremely poor September at Tobay Banding Station, my O.R. station, things are really picking up... and so is the paperwork to be done. Nevertheless, I am going to try to cover all items in this issue which had been planned, and which are so necessary in order to assure smooth sailing through the first four issues of next year which will feature your station reports.

When you receive this issue, the final government-sponsored Operation Recovery will be over. Despite many differing opinions, we should be grateful that O.R. was founded in 1954 because it opened up the way for organized, thorough and diversified study. Although the brand-new publication by Merrill Wood, entitled "A Bander's Guide to Determination of Age and Sex of Selected Species" is largely based on non-O.R. publications the bibliography shows that a great amount of data used in this very fine book can be directly attributed to Operation Recovery. I just received my copy last week and have not yet used it in the field, but comparing it to my own notes, and notes from others in various fields, it looks like an excellent piece of work. A publication such as this was sorely needed, to cover many private and other notes, all of which overlap in data and none of which were very accurate.

Now that the government-sponsored O.R. is no more, Atlantic Flyway Review is the only source for complete Operation Recovery station data, so it is of utmost importance that ALL O.R. stations in the Atlantic Flyway submit the requested reports. Many participants have complained that the final statistical report did not come out until the following July in the past, but for this, there was a very good reason. From Earl Baysinger I hear that a great many banders fail to submit their banding schedules when they should, so I would imagine that Chandler Robbins had similar headaches with the O.R. data, hence the delay in publishing reports.

Therefore, if all O.R. station leaders submit their data to me when it is requested, there is no reason in the world why we cannot publish the statistical data in an early issue of Atlantic Flyway Review. The key to the whole problem is the individual station leader him/herself!

On June 25, 1969 I sent a memo to all station leaders requesting background information: (a) ecology of the station area; (b) whether you use

h. Short list of principal banders.

i. Short description of area, only if changed since it was last reported (this is a must for new stations) - e.g. principal features of terrain, principal vegetation and its density. If nets are set up in other than the standard way, indicate this here (for instance, "used 2½" mesh nets for hawks on 15-foot poles").

j. List of rarities and details.

k. List of birds collected (if you have a collecting permit) due to extreme rarity - otherwise not included in banding summary.

I beg all stations which make final summaries, to send me a copy. As you know, in 1970 summaries will not be required to be sent to Chan Robbins. Even though I will know your totals from your Dec. 25 postcard, it would help if I had the whole list. Since many of you make up complete summaries anyway, we would appreciate a Xerox copy. If you have no final summary to give, how about just a list of some of the interesting totals? If EBBA takes over Operation Recovery, there will still be paperwork, but not so much as there was in the past. It will probably consist of a daily (final) summary, repeat and return data sheets, and your usual two reports to Atlantic Flyway Review. These will be tied in with the whole program and a special study program data sheet which we are designing now.

Although we, the O.R. Committee members, have some interesting studies in store, under investigation as to their validity and practicality for O.R. work when and if EBBA begins sponsoring it; if you feel you have a study which you would like to see many O.R. stations do, by all means let us know. Please drop me a line on it. It should be a study which does not create too much extra work and which is of benefit to all stations.

A matter very dear to heart... Banders have repeatedly wondered why the processing of recoveries takes such a long time. Why must it take three months to obtain a "report to the bander" card from a modern computer?

In early spring I discussed this subject with Earl Baysinger, and through this discussion and subsequent correspondence have come to the conclusion that there is not very much in new ideas that can be found, to solve this painful (to banders) problem. I presented several suggestions but each, for some good reason or another, would have proven impractical to the banding organizations and costly to the Bird Banding Laboratory, which has enough budgetary problems as is it.

Throughout this period of discussion I came to the conclusion that the problem is more elementary than I had suspected. It should be noted that I, as editor of this column and as an independent bander, am in an impartial position but nevertheless feel that some of the reasons given

for these delays in processing of recoveries can definitely be attributed to laxity of the banders themselves.

To document this more fully, let me take the case of a hypothetical recovery and attempt to follow the data through the Banding Laboratory into the mailbox of the bander. The dates given here, incidentally, are authentic.

Sept. 30, 1969 - Finder sends report (or Form 3-1807) to Lab.  
 Oct. 3, 1969 - Finder's report received at Lab.  
 Oct. 17, 1969 - Finder's report is read and coded.  
 Oct. 31, 1969 - Recovery coordinates have been determined.  
 Nov. 3, 1969 - Report is "batched with others" and sent to EDP section.  
 Nov. 17, 1969 - EDP section has keyed the work sheet and included this band number along with four to six thousand others for the computer run.  
 Nov. 20, 1969 - Computer "scans" its memory to match up the finder's data with the bander's data.

If the bander's schedule had been sent in, AND there were no complications on it (did not have to be sent back) then, at this point, everything is fine. However, if at this point the data the bander should have reported is not in file, the computer will reject the finder's data. About 18-20% of every run is rejected (bear in mind that about two million bands are issued each year). If the computer rejects this data, the clerks then must check and see: (a) were the reported numbers misread; (b) were the bands used prior to 1967 - these are not in the computer and must be pulled out of the files manually; (c) did we overlook the schedule; (d) did the bander send the schedule and if so was it returned to him due to questionable data - about 20-30% are. This procedure (points a through d) takes about two weeks.

After the Banding Lab staff satisfy themselves that no schedule has been received, yet another clerk has to determine to whom the band was issued, prepare and mail one of the pink 3-860a cards (see MTAB 6). She also must file the finder's letter so she can find it when (or if) the bander returns the card. The waiting period for most banders to return them is two to three weeks.

Many banders do not ever return these pink cards, but return a schedule instead. If this happens, the lab has to recheck the entire procedure as if the finder's report was just then received. About 30% of banders require a "second reminder" on those pink cards, so the Lab staff has to wait another two to three weeks to proceed.

Up to this point, in this hypothetical case we come to these two conclusions: if the schedule IS on magnetic tape, processing takes about

six weeks; if it is NOT on file, the procedure, including one or two reminders to the bander, takes over three months.

Once the pink card has been received, the girls have to transpose the bander's data onto worksheets, enter the data into the pipeline to be key-punched, to be included in the next computer run, after which the card to the bander and certificate to the finder are on their way. There is a computer run every three to four weeks, as this is a very costly procedure.

I once read that a computer run for a business firm costs \$460.00 per hour. If this is what it costs the Banding Lab also, you may realize that it is a mighty expensive proposition.

In addition to the foregoing, the Banding Lab staff often discovers:-

(a) The data on the banding schedule and the data sent back on the pink card do not agree. They must then launch into another correspondence session with the bander to determine what is accurate.

(b) When it turns out that the data on the pink card was in error, they must then remove the erroneous data from the computer machine files. They also must correct all their records and send a new "report to the finder" to provide him with the correct data. All this takes a great deal of time.

In addition to this, the Lab takes time to prepare for the long overdue (not surprisingly) banding manuals, code revisions, file edits, processing requests for data from the files, etc.

All the data given above is factual. The dates and times are not exaggerated. Please remember, for every error one of us makes, all the other banders suffer. All these seemingly nebulous errors create an amazing amount of work for the Banding Lab and an almost insurmountable backlog. It is thus not surprising that it often takes months to process a recovery. The Banding Lab can only be efficient...when we are!

#### Atlantic Flyway Recovery Report

Please note the excellent papers in the last issue of EBBA News (Vol. 32, No. 5) by Raymond Middleton, pp. 224-229; by William E. Savell, p. 220; and by Ralph W. Condee, pp. 231-2. All these papers include interesting recovery and longevity reports on various species.

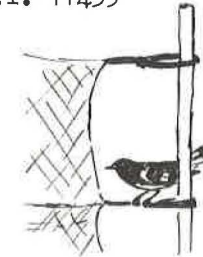
7. (Rc) Brown-headed Cowbird, 495; AHY-M 691-56660. Mrs. Valerie Freer.  
04-05-67 - Ellenville, Ulster County, New York.  
01-30-69 - Scotland Neck, Halifax County, North Carolina.

8. (Rc) Black-capped Chickadee, 735; HY-U 115-72335. Mrs. Valerie Freer.  
09-23-68 - Ellenville, Ulster County, New York.  
11-04-68 - Monaca, Beaver County, Penna.
9. (Rc) Starling, 493; HY-F 622-27682. Mrs. Valerie Freer.  
08-11-67 - Ellenville, Ulster County, New York.  
03-26-69 - Scotland Neck, Halifax County, North Carolina.

Next Issue: Operation Recovery reports. See above list of stations for your due date. Don't forget the postcard (Station Statistical Summary, described above, p. 254) due by December 25!

Next deadline: December 25, 1969.

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#### TWO MORE YEARS OF BANDING PURPLE FINCHES AT WESTPORT POINT, MASS. By Malcolm Oakes

Since my 1967 report on ten years of banding Purple Finches the pace of my activities at Westport Point during the summer months has slackened considerably. This has been due both to spending less time banding and to the fact that the number of finches appearing at our feeders has fallen off very decidedly, especially during 1969. This summer not only have Purple Finches been scarcer but the numbers of most other species of local birds, with the possible exception of Robins, has also been much lower than in previous years.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Period</u>     | <u>No. of Days<br/>Banding</u> | <u>New Birds<br/>Banded</u> | <u>No. of<br/>Returns</u> |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1968        | May 2 - Sept. 23  | 53                             | 316                         | 117                       |
| 1969        | May 10 - Sept. 14 | 44                             | 170                         | 108                       |

The number of returns was also the lowest in several years, although many old-timers continued coming back for the fourth, fifth or sixth time since 1962. A new longevity record for me of ten years was established by male finch No. 61-70977 originally banded in 1959, in brown plumage at

that time. This bird first appeared in male plumage in 1963 and has returned to Westport Point on the following dates:-

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| July 4, 1960 (brown plumage) | April 16, 1966                                    |
| June 8, 1963 (male plumage)  | June 24, 1967                                     |
| May 8, 1964                  | June 22, 1969 (plumage in<br>excellent condition) |
| July 10, 1965                |   |

Another point of interest, in my opinion, is the number of individual birds that have returned one or more times over the years as shown in the table that follows:-

| Year   | <u>No. of birds Banded</u> | <u>No. returned during 1968</u> | <u>No. returned during 1969</u> | <u>No. of individual birds returned since year of original banding</u> |
|--------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 1958   | 42                         | -                               | -                               | 6  |
| 1959   | 190                        | -                               | 1                               | 45   |
| 1960   | 178                        | -                               | -                               | 52   |
| 1961   | 110                        | -                               | -                               | 35   |
| 1962   | 336                        | 8                               | 4                               | 115  |
| 1963   | 645                        | 10                              | 8                               | 159  |
| 1964   | 409                        | 13                              | 11                              | 147  |
| 1965   | 672                        | 20                              | 8                               | 126  |
| 1966   | 294                        | 27                              | 15                              | 70   |
| 1967   | 267                        | 39                              | 26                              | 48   |
| 1968   | <u>316</u>                 | <u>-</u>                        | <u>34</u>                       | <u>34</u>  |
| Totals | 3459                       | 117                             | 108                             | 837  |

These figures show that out of a total of 3459 Purple Finches banded since 1958, 837 individual birds, or an average of 24% have returned to Westport Point during one or more years since they were first banded.

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