



Books For Banders

"SOMETHING OLD AND SOMETHING NEW"

Edited By Mabel Gillespie



Recently, Dr. Charles T. Collins of the department of biology at California State College in Long Beach suggested that attention be called to Dr. C. Brooke Worth's recent book: "A Naturalist in Trinidad". Such suggestions are very welcome, and it is particularly helpful if the suggestor sends a review or survey of the book he recommends. This procedure was suggested to Dr. Collins, but he felt it would not be proper for him to do so since he has also been a naturalist in Trinidad and figures in the text. (Both are EBBA members; Dr. Worth was, if we remember correctly, one of EBBA's founders. -Ed.)

In fact there seem to have been an unusual assortment of naturalists in Trinidad. They included Dr. Donald Griffin, whose book "Bird Migration" was considered in this section early in the year; and even the late Dr. C. William Beebe who established on Trinidad the field station of the New York Zoological Society called Simla. I was reminded of the time so many years ago when Brooke Worth, then a student at Swarthmore College, took me to hear a lecture by Dr. Beebe, while my husband took over the job of baby sitter.

Dr. Worth claims that in deciding on a vocation his "problem was to find some way to be paid for going on a global bird walk". He hoped that a degree in medicine might lead to work in public health in far places, where birds would flit openly on week ends and even engage the corner of an eye during the week... I took about 25 years before I was able to set the alarm for 3 am. in Trinidad, grab a hasty breakfast, snatch up my binoculars and bird bands, and set up the Japanese mist nets at daybreak with the satisfaction that I was being paid for my joys." Of course the scientific justification for this activity was the collecting of blood samples to be tested for viruses or antibodies.

He had already dealt with mosquitoes and small mammals in India and Africa. Now he was working for the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory - TRVL - "founded, staffed and supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and the governments of Great Britain and the several British West Indian Islands." The laboratory was concerned particularly with arthropod-borne viruses, known as arboviruses. The most famous arbovirus is the one causing yellow fever. During work on yellow fever other arboviruses were encountered; at present more than a hundred and fifty have been named. A number of these viruses have been shown to cause serious and widespread illness or disability both in human beings and in livestock.

The author claims that "any field naturalist who confines himself to the assigned aspects of an arbovirology program is not only a fool but

also a detriment to the lab. That is because of serendipity; I have neglected to remark that the natural history of not a single arbovirus is fully known. Consequently many of the things I observed and enjoyed as side lines in Trinidad could have been important to someone else."

Hurray for serendipity!

Dr. Worth's book has received rave reviews by John Kieran, Allan D. Cruikshank, and Joseph J. Hickey. At first I doubted it could be that good. But it is. I read far into the night, unable to curtail these delightful vicarious adventures. I was meeting the most delightful people and the most fascinating creatures. And I was revelling in Brooke's unique type of humor and clever use of the English language.

The chief concern of the laboratory was with eastern equine encephalitis, and blood samples were taken from the netted birds. Netting was carried on in fixed areas so that there would be the best possibility of repeats. "If we could now bleed birds at three-month intervals, and read tests at the lab that said 'negative, negative, positive', it would be possible to look up dates of capture and pronounce" 'This is a Silver-beaked Tanager, adult female, from Vega de Oropuche, which experienced an EEE infection between July and October, 1964'...Who knows what connection there may be between a sick child or horse in Venezuela and another in Florida?"

Don't miss the chapter on lists and list makers. Brooke admits he is "an inveterate list maker, otherwise I would not talk so bitterly about it... But though the average birder may sell himself to the devil personally, he does no harm to his subjects. Indeed he is usually an ardent conservationist."

"There is one day in every year when I approach a list in innocent purity. That is New Year's Day, when I go out with a fresh notebook as clean as the new babe... The reason I claim this as a pure action is that now I looked at every bird, to give each species a place on the new roster. Over and over I discovered forgotten pleasures in even the commonest finches and tanagers. I would make a New Year's resolution to forget about life lists and really take up ornithology. This mood lasted about as long as such resolutions usually do. By January tenth or fifteenth I would have recorded most of the ordinary birds and the old craving was back... There is no help and no hope."

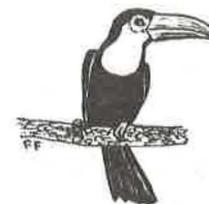
Let no bander make the mistake of thinking that a chapter with the title "Spiders and Bugs" contains nothing of interest to him. The discussion of webs and orbs (no, not all spider devices for catching prey are webs) is fascinating as well as enlightening. Furthermore, the chapter illustrates beautifully the teamwork of the scientists - entomologists, epidemiologists, parasitologists, and what have you. Whatever one might

observe outside his narrow field was sure to be of importance to another of the group. The chapter on bats is incredible. There was an employee at a textile factory who seemed to be able to smell snakes. He kept boa constrictors because he just liked to have them around. After a while he would let them go and then round up some more. This odd passion helped one of the researchers who wanted to collect ticks and mites from reptiles, and it helped the author who needed varied serum specimens for certain purposes. There are chapters on swifts and hummingbirds, and banders will delight in the description of constructing the framework for a treetop mist net.

An outstanding feature of the entire book is Dr. Worth's ability and insistence to see the biota as a whole. Birds may be his chief love, but he doesn't enjoy them divorced from their natural habitat. The terrain achieves reality for the reader through the author's descriptions.

The delightful narrative is further enhanced by black and white illustrations by Don R. Eckelberry. The book is published by J.B. Lippincott Company and retails for \$7.95.

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SCARLET TANAGER INFORMATION WANTED

Dr. Kenneth W. Prescott writes: "I am attempting to summarize migratory data on the Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) as supplied by the Bird Banding Laboratory... I would deeply appreciate additional information (and permission to use) which banders might be able to supply, regarding: Recoveries; Returns; Repeats; Individual Age; and other relevant data." Send information to Dr. Prescott at: New Jersey State Museum, Cultural Center, Trenton, N.J. 08625.