

AN ENGLISH BANDER IN GEORGIA

By P.G. Murton

(Ed. Note: Phil Murton, a Squadron Leader of the Royal Air Force, is familiar to many EBBA members personally or through "Operation Recovery in Reverse" which he co-authored with Elise Dickerson in the Sept.-Oct. 1966 issue of EBBA News. He prefaced a letter to the Editor, "I haven't the time at the moment to write an article for EBBA News, but..." - but the most interesting article which follows is the balance of his letter.)

I moved here, from St. Louis, in mid-January of this year, and, having just done my end-of-month scheduling I can quote a few facts and figures. In my yard alone, since mid-January, I've netted and trapped over 1700 birds - 600+ Chipping Sparrows and 200+ Purple Finches (that was up to spring when, of course, they left this area - Georgia - for their breeding ground) are included in this total.

To date, during my tour of duty in the USA which started in October 1965, I have banded 290 birds short of 10,000 (I should get these in the next few months before my tour is over and I return to England). For the first time, the month of July gave me a banded total of over 1,000 birds (1,021 to be exact). The figures I have amassed for this year are really accounted for by my good fortune in being able to work with an ornithologist (not a bander) in the town of Fitzgerald, south of here, who carries out aerial, foot and boat surveys of heron and egret "rookeries".

Through him, and with his invaluable assistance, I have been able to band over 1,600 egrets, herons and Anhingas. Our exact figures follow:

Green Heron	13
Cattle Egret	1271
Little Blue Heron	314
Common Egret	9
Anhinga	<u>22</u>
Total	1629

We have found, in all, six rookeries but have "worked" only three - so our 1600-odd birds have all come from ten visits to three of the colonies. Of the other three, one had nests 50 feet up in cypresses and were just not "getatable" - pity, as there were quite a few Great Blues there. One was very active, but the nests were over 8 feet of water and were about 8 feet above the water - again, not really "getatable" - and the third colony, which was a fair size with all the nests in the egg stage, was abandoned for some unknown reason, on our second visit which we made in the hopes of doing a spot of banding. We still plan one last visit, probably during the coming weekend, to all three colonies to band the last few remaining young and that will be the end of a very successful season.

As far as I can find out from local and Georgia birders, and Larry Hood at the Fish & Wildlife Service, no one has banded young in the Georgia swamp colonies to date and, unless a bander moves in to the state for next year, this will have been a "once off" effort - pity as there is so much to be learned if someone could carry on the work.

It's been great fun, though hot mucky work at times, and Milton Holkins, my contact and helper, and I have spent hours up to our waists in the swamps where the colonies are located - hazards have included a burning sun, torrential rain, hornets' nests (I've never seen two people become immersed in swamp water so quickly!) and millions of waterlogged sunken logs below the surface of the murky water - oh yes, and one man with sixteen bites on one leg from fire ants! Strangely enough we have never been bitten or bothered by water snakes and the few alligators we have seen have swum swiftly away!

During the course of our activities we have seen White and Wood Ibis (including the young of the latter) and stumbled across a roose of about 140 Black Vultures. We have also seen the nests of Gallinules, eggs and newly hatched young and, in one swamp, discovered the nest of a Prothonotary Warbler in some Spanish moss under a couple of Egret nests - eggs in the nest the first time and two young (banded) the second time.

Finally, another statistic for you - last weekend Milton Hopkins had a Blue Grosbeak's nest pinpointed for me and I was able to band the young - my 150th species since I came to the States.

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THE CO-EDITOR ...and Editor of EBBA News for 11 years, from 1956 to 1967, Frank Frazier. This photograph taken at the 1968 Annual Meeting in Wheeling, was sent by Chip (Mrs. Charles) Neel, who expressed mild outrage at his being so often behind and seldom in front of the camera. She writes, "Since he takes so many photos of others for EBBA News and never gets one of himself, I thought it would be nice to get him in for a change!"