

A BANDING "BONUS"

By Robert C. Dewire

Most banders can think of times when they were banding that a totally unexpected event took place that would be long remembered. Such an event happened to me during the past fall which may stir up similar memories of some banders and give still others something to look forward to.

This is the third year that I have been mist netting. I operate a station on the 50-acre Wadsworth Wildlife Sanctuary owned by the Mid-Fairfield County Youth Museum in Westport, Connecticut. In the fall I actively band from August through October with mist nets set up in shrubby areas surrounding a red maple swamp.

On the morning of August 22nd, I arose before sunrise to open up the six 30mm nets I had set up. At about 6:15 I returned with a gathering cage to remove any birds that were captured. I had three nets strung together with the last net at a slight angle from the others so that it was not visible when I approached. I had removed two birds from the first net, there were none in the second, and as the third net came into view I could see what was obviously a very large bird flapping his wings and pulling on the net. When I got there, I found I had caught a broad-winged hawk in my 30mm net!

The bird was an immature and was free except for his feet which both had netting wrapped around them. He hung upside down by his feet but at my approach flapped his wings and rose up in line with his feet, but the netting held him firm and he hung back down again glaring at me. I think you can imagine the excitement I felt as I realized what I had, especially since mourning doves were the largest birds I had ever caught previously.

The problem which now was evident was how would I get him out of the net without having his beak or talons sinking into my skin in the process. I had no gloves, and even though I was only a few minutes walk from my house I feared the bird would work his way out before I returned.

It took only seconds to decide to take the chance and get the bird out. I reached down with both hands and grabbed the legs. The bird made no attempt to reach for me with his beak and as I held the two legs together with one hand I worked the netting off with the other. When I got to the point where the final netting on the feet would release when I lifted the bird up, I took my free hand and very slowly moved it behind the bird sliding my first two fingers on either side of the back of the neck. Surprisingly the bird made no attempt to struggle. I lifted him up, the netting fell free and I had this spectacular

bird in my hands.

I carried him back to the house and another problem arose. I had no cage big enough to hold him and with both hands occupied how was I going to band him? Worse yet, I couldn't even open the door of the house to get inside to get to my bands!

All this time my wife, Mary Jean, lay peacefully sleeping not realizing what she was in for. She is an excellent birder and a great help with my banding operation, but prefers to begin doing these things at a more respectable hour than 6:30 A.M.

Nevertheless, I knocked on the bedroom window telling her that she wouldn't believe what I had. One look out the window and she was fully awake. While I held the hawk she banded it and then put gloves on so I could transfer the bird to her to photograph it. After taking several pictures my wife released the bird which flapped several times and then sailed across the field and into the bordering woodland. It was a spectacular way to start the morning and by day's end I had added a second bird to my "banding life list" - a prairie warbler.

It is the occurrence of this unexpected such as this that is the "bonus" that banders get for the long hours and hard work they put in, and an experience I felt would be fun to share with EBBA readers.

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LAWRENCE'S WARBLER VARIANT BANDED

By Harriet Marsi

In the 13 years I have been banding in the general area of my present net lanes, I have known that Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers nested in the vicinity. Every year I record the first day I hear their call in the spring and every year I have a general idea where they are nesting although I have never found the nest. Over the 13 years, I have banded 18 Golden-wings 8 Blue-winged Warblers and 2 Brewster's Warblers. I have often observed Brewster's Warblers. All these years, however, I have never seen or netted the other hybrid - the Lawrence's Warbler.

On August 19, 1972, however, I netted what I called my first Lawrence's Warbler. It had the black facial markings of the golden-winged warbler and the yellow upper breast of the blue-winged. It was not, however, a textbook model of a Lawrence's warbler nor did it fit the descriptions given in Merrill Wood: Bird-Bander's Guide to Determination of Age and Sex of Selected species, for any of the Lawrence's variations.