

A BIRD BANDING CLASS IN TOWSON, MARYLAND

By Janet E. Ganter

In the spring of 1972 the new Program Chairman of the Maryland Ornithological Society pondered the problem of what should be included in the activities for the coming year. In talking with various members about suggestions or ideas, one request was often repeated; that some arrangement be made to help people desiring to learn about banding in greater depth, or to learn to become banders.

It was pretty general knowledge that many respected banders were unable or just plain unwilling to take on the responsibility of a single student, let alone a group! But eager hearts and willing hands are not easily suppressed. A supply of competent licensed banders, as well as experienced helpers and record keepers are essential in a state like Maryland. Although small in size, its Ornithological Society with chapters in every county owns two sanctuaries and maintains two more in different biotic areas of the state. Banding programs are carried on at the sanctuaries, but for lack of good helpers have often faltered sadly.

The Fall of 1972 found the bander in charge of Fall Migration at Irish Grove (the newest and largest Sanctuary of 1400 acres of tidal marsh on the Chesapeake), clearing the nets and letting hundreds of birds go unbanded; she just did not have help.

There was no doubt that a need existed. How to deal with it was the problem. Luckily Mrs. Gladys Cole, a Baltimore bander with many years of experience, but a hard gal to catch up with listened and offered to help. When the MOS Program went to press in July, it contained the following announcement: Wednesdays throughout the year as weather permits - banding classes.

The announcement attracted many people who had been birding for years; they wanted to get a more intimate view of birds. Several teachers came eager for a chance to see and learn in the few hours of daylight left after school closed. Several new banders came to learn and to share with the others the knowledge they could offer.

At the very generous invitation of Mrs. Cole, it was agreed that classes could be held at her home near Towson. It was a perfect location with 1 and 1/10th acres of trees and shrubs, planted just for the birds, ample open space and water available too. Saw-whets had been banded there in 1963, and the garage had been a nursery for over a hundred young Barn Swallows the summer of 1972. For 15 years the birds had been coming, and

(inspite of shopping centers creeping in on two sides) the birds showed up for the new Banding Class and willing students of all ages, began to learn.

Some classes were busy ones, with plenty of chance to get experience removing birds from mist nets. Some students kept records, while others did research to identify a new bird. Still others measured and checked the birds for fat. On other days, with fewer birds, time was spent becoming acquainted with the anatomy and physiology of the bird. Several times bad weather forced the group indoors, where the banding discussion went on and on. For the first time many people learned about and made use of the extensive library of *EBBA News*, *Bird-Banding*, *Wilson Bulletin*, and a vast assortment of related books and magazines. Occasionally neighbors or members of a local Garden Club came and the students then became the teachers on those days.

The classes were never dismissed until record keeping chores were done. A brief summary of each day's banding activity, as well as a list of birds seen and heard was included. When a string of bands was finished the students helped prepare the schedules for the banding laboratory. It was fun, but it was work!

As November moved in with shorter days, colder weather, and fewer birds, the banding students needed a break. There was still plenty of learning to be done and skills to be practiced, but now was a time to relax, read banding publications and look forward to Spring Migration, a short time away. They knew from reading past records that Spring could bring any number of surprises. May 18, 1972 had been a record breaker, with 63 birds banded of 13 species.

Perhaps other banders will be inspired by this attempt and will be willing to try a similar class. A word of caution: always bring lunch, and be honest; tell them they'll never learn it all in one day-or one year- or even in a lifetime.

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: We published this note with mixed feelings; each time similar stories are printed, we suddenly find such classes taught by inexperienced banders. Classes on banding techniques should be left to those of us who are known to be experienced in these matters. Mrs. Gladys Cole is such a person, as well as Mrs. Betty Knorr of New Shrewsbury, N.J., who sent us the following account, backed up by newspaper clippings): (dtd December 11, 72)

Dear Fred,

Recently got to thinking about EBBA NEWS from a different angle. Since my actual banding has been very limited the past