

REQUIEM FOR A BANDING AREA

By Mabel Warburton

On January 28, 1955 I received my bird-banding license and opened my station at my home near Morrisville, Penna. I named my place The Woodhaven Bird-Banding Station. At that time we were situated approximately one quarter mile from the town line, on a moderately travelled road and our own grounds consisted of 1 1/3 acres, about one third woodland, one third lawn with shade trees, and the rest garden, house and outbuildings. To our right was an old farm, about 6 acres, which was now overgrown with brush and small saplings. To our back lay about 8 acres of deep woods with tall oaks, beeches and assorted hardwood trees. The land was swampy with two ponds. Attempts at drainage had been made and a series of ditches ran through the woods and across our place. Made long ago, nature had softened their banks with vegetation and they were pretty streams in early spring. Mallards, wood duck, green heron and solitary sandpipers were seen here, and the mallard stayed to nest.

To our left were a few dwellings, set far back from the road with sweeping lawns and tall trees. Our immediate neighbor was a solitary woman; no dogs; no cats. Across the road was a house surrounded by approximately 8 acres of grown-over farmland, lawn and trees. Mine was an ideal banding and netting area.

At first I used small traps, and not in any great number; but gradually increased until I had the yard fairly well sprinkled with Set Low or all-purpose traps; woodpecker tree-traps; one-cell and three-cell trip-steps; several 6 traps and two large walk-in house traps. My first year of banding was necessarily slow as the number of small traps rarely yielded more than one or two birds per round. Total banded the first year was 506 of 31 species.

In 1958 I received a netting permit and also got permission from the landowner to use the adjoining land for banding purposes, so now nets were strung (I was allowed only 3!) in the wood near one pond and traps were set there. I banded in no set pattern. It was not unusual for me to set traps in the morning and run to and fro all day long; but on other occasions traps were shut off and nets furlled while I ran errands or attended long-delayed housework.

Totals grew larger. The number banded in 1958 reached 3,927. It was also in 1958 that Island Beach called, and from then on, all my Fall migration days were spent at the Operation Recovery program there.

Although my Woodhaven banding totals fell, the bird population did not. Red-eyed vireos sang in our trees, Kentucky warblers bred in the back yard, the chat called from the over-grown field next door and pheasants strutted to the housetraps. And then the blow fell.

The land on one side and back was sold to a development company and the construction of a large sprawling apartment house was begun. Almost simultaneously the neighbors across the road became discouraged with increasing traffic and creeping commercialism and sold out to a gasoline company. Three tall oak trees, a magnificent magnolia, two or three stately pines, the tulip trees, and dozens of others were relentlessly knocked down, and along with most of the house, were bulldozed into the ground. A honky-tonk gas station, complete with flying banners, now occupied land where once a farm house stood.

On our side of the road, devastation continued. Trees were levelled by saw and ax, huge amounts of landfill were brought in, building up the apartment area so high that our ground was periodically flooded with ground water. The drainage ditches were temporarily cut off, and in May of 1966 my entire back yard was under two or more feet of water. May, the best banding month of spring.

I noted in my banding book: "April 1966; this year the back woods are nearly gone, also the land to the right is cleared and bulldozers, heavy machinery and men are working daily. Birds are scarce as they have lost cover." That April my banding totals fell from 350 the previous April, when 35 species were banded to 54 birds of only 13 species. The next month, May, when water covered the yard, only 267 birds of 35 species were banded as compared with May 1965, when 666 birds were banded, and 56 species represented.

March 1967 looked grim. I wrote: "Am now almost surrounded by the apartment, running down the east side and all across the back of my land. This destroyed the deep woods, the two ponds,

and all the fields. The house across the road is all gone and they are busy building the gas station there. Traffic on the front road is terrific with never a lull. Birds here are practically nil."

April and May of 1967 totalled only 102 birds compared with 706 of that period in 1965. In May of 1967 I again noted: "The men are working on opening the ditch and grading the land for the apartment. There is now a road running to the building and they are constructing a swimming pool only a few feet from where my two tree-traps hung, and where my best net land was! There is noise, dirt, activity all day long. Birds are scarce. Only my patch of woods and that of one neighbor is intact. Everything else is gone."

During our years at Woodhaven we sighted 116 species of birds, and of these 108 species were banded. Total banded from 1955 through 1968 was 13,404.

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KIPTOPEKE BANDING STATION 1973

PHOTOS BY FRED SCHAEFFER

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At the invitation of Walt and Doris Smith of Hampton, Va., I spent a wonderful week at Kiptopeke Banding Station. The station is located at the southern end of the "Delmarva" Peninsula, near Route 704 West on the

Bay side. Now that you know where it is, I hope you'll pay them a visit in the Fall of 1974!

The station is manned for a week at a time and during the week of September 24th, Walter P. Smith was the "BIC". For the uninitiated, that means "Bander-in-Charge" and that's the person vested with the awesome powers so vividly described by Walt himself in "Kiptopeke: October 6-15, 1972" (Ebba News, 36(1): 40-50).

On this page at the top is a Merlin, a "first" for the station! On the opposite page, we find three rows of photos. At the top, left, two Tanagers: females both, a Scarlet and a Summer Tanager. On the right, the BIC hard at work. Middle Row: The BIC with Mary Scott. Note that he's sitting in a director's chair, plainly marked BIC. On the right, "Mike's Castle", the hub of activity (usually) where all banding is done.

Bottom Row: Left: Dorothy Mitchell holding the prized Merlin. To the right of her is Elizabeth Bell, Ruth Brown (holding Sharpie), Charlotte Lombardi and Hugh Bell. Right: Smiling at us is a beautiful Sharp-shinned Hawk!

Accommodations were close at hand. The Peacock Motel on Rt. 13, served as headquarters motel, and around 5:30 P.M. each afternoon, it was time for the "Attitude Adjustment Period", also known as the "Happy Hour." This rite was always followed by a 15 minute drive to Cheriton for a superb dinner at Paul's. If any of you happen to be on the road near there, do stop in at Paul's for Crab Imperial or their other famous seafood dishes! I must have gained 15 pounds, but I'm not at all sorry about it.

A possible foreign retrap came our way. If #1280-63808 on a Yellowthroat is yours, please get in touch with Walt Smith!

--84-55 Daniels Street (#1k), Jamaica, New York 11435