

A BIRD BANDER'S DIARY

By Ralph K. Bell

Generally speaking, Bluebirds are not one of the species that readily come to bird feeders. I have had them eat yellow cake sometimes during very cold winter weather but not on a regular basis. They seem to prefer small fruits and berries when insects cannot be found.

During Hurricane Agnes (June, 1972), my wife, Betty, noticed the hungry Bluebirds eating dog food that had been left in the dog pan. Betty likes to feed anything (including me), so she started putting out raisins for the Bluebirds. The pair that stayed here in our yard most of the time liked the raisins and even took some to feed their young. Every morning they seemed to wait for their daily rations.

Al Goga, a friend of ours whom we met after he captured one of my banded Bluebirds, visited us from his home which is about 35 miles away and told us an interesting story. Al loves Bluebirds and has fed them meal worms for years. He said they would even come into his kitchen through an open window to get them. He noticed one carried a band, and, by using meal worms as bait, he managed to catch it in a fish net and get the band number in order to find out where it had been banded.

For about two winters now, Betty has been feeding birds on our front porch under the edge of a Chinese Juniper. Betty would make a "crumbly" mix of peanut butter, corn meal, grits, crushed graham crackers, wheat germ, oat meal, rice krispies and a small amount of bacon fat. Many of our wintering birds really loved this mix, and when spring came we noticed some of the new arrivals found this a special treat. The regulars such as the Junco, Cardinal, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, and Downy Woodpecker were joined in the spring by the White-crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Catbird, Robin and Brown Thrasher. However, the most amazing birds to come were two Bluebirds that had a nest in a box about 50 yards away. Betty would go out each morning and call, "Here Blue Blue". Almost immediately the female would come out of her nest-box and fly to the porch with the male following.

Encouraged by all of this interest on the part of the Bluebirds, Betty decided to try feeding them meal worms. Al Goga was right-"Bluebirds really do love meal worms", and after their eggs hatched, they would feed the meal worms to their young. They would take 50 to 100 of them a day if offered. But the feeding habits of each parent was quite different. The male would usually eat one or two worms and then struggle to hold 3 to 5 in his bill at a time and carry them to a tree before going to the box. Mama Bluebird seldom ate any worms and seemed satisfied to take one or two worms at a time and often flew directly to the box.

The Chipping Sparrows learned to come to the call as well as the Bluebirds, and this can present a problem unless one lives near a bait company (meal worms are a favorite of fishermen). Meal worms thrive where there is stored grain, and since we have a poultry farm, the worms are here but the supply is limited. Betty is currently trying to increase the supply by keeping some in a plastic box containing poultry mash to see if they will propagate. The whole thing is an interesting experience!

-- RD 1, Box 229, Clarksville, Pa. 15322

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sir:

My wife and I are licensed to band migratory upland game birds (Woodcock, Jacksnipe and Doves). The volume is not high although in 1973 we banded 97 Woodcock and 5 Jacksnipe. We were putting on No. 3 bands with any sort of pliers. This past winter I got 2 specially designed banding pliers from your list of suppliers. The difference is startling both as to time and quality of the job done.

Undoubtedly there are others who use "just any" pliers who would be startled to see how much better a pair of "banding" pliers works.

-- G. Norman Slade, Dellwood, White Bear Lake, Mn. 55110

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sir:

Of particular interest to us is one of our feathered friends that has almost become one of the family.

Black-capped Chickadee A.O.U.-735.0 was first banded by us on March 18, 1967, returned to our trap on March 29, 1970 and imagine our delight and pleasure when Chickadee bearing band No. 113-40062 returned to our trap on March first 1974 for the third time.

We are located at Pleasantville, Pennsylvania (413-0793) in the foothills of the Alleghenies, Permit Number 08892 and although the majority of our banding is Evening Grosbeaks there is always some interesting activity from the smaller birds and March seems to be the peak of the spring migration for several species.

-- S. Carlyle and Juanita B. Sheldon, Pleasantville, Pa. 16341

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(Ed.)