

A BIRD-BANDING REPORT FROM HUTCHESON MEMORIAL FOREST:
A SUMMARY OF THREE SEASONS

By Charles F. Leck

Hutcheson Memorial Forest, formerly known as "Mettler's Woods", is a 65-acre mature oak woods, with dogwood understory. It is famous as being almost in virgin condition, with some trees dated to 1627. As a research property of Rutgers University it has been intensively studied, and bird projects began here with the work of our EBBA president, Dr. Jeff Swinebroad. His bird-banding program at Hutcheson Forest included 13 seasons, 1956-68, with tens-of-thousands of net hours. Banding has continued by Dr. John Kricher (1969-70) and my own work (1971-73). In the recent years we have now obtained a number of interesting age-record returns, made possible by the great foundation work of Swinebroad. He made the forest a model area for complete, uninterrupted, banding studies.

Our returns from the three recent seasons reflects a total of approximately 4,500 net-hours, with much work by research assistants (Mr. John Kenny and Mr. William Shields). We were only concerned with summer residents, the breeding bird community. The age-record information can be summarized by age classes (Table 1).

Table 1

Age distribution of recaptured birds.

- 8 years - Oven birds (J.S.)
- 7 years - Catbird (J.S.), Brown-headed Cowbird (J.S.)
- 6 years - Brown Thrasher (J.S.), Wood Thrush (J.S.)
Rufous-sided Towhee (J.S.), Song Sparrow (J.S.)
- 5 years - Scarlet Tanager (J.S.), Rose-breasted Grosbeak (J.S.)
Song Sparrow (J.S.)
- 4 years - Wood Thrush (three - J.S., one J.K.)
- 3 years - Downy Woodpecker (J.K.), Tufted Titmouse (J.S.), Song Sparrow (J.K.)
- 2 years - Black-capped Chickadee (J.K.), Tufted Titmouse (*), Cardinal (*)
- 1 year - Brown Thrasher (*), Wood Thrush (three *), Blue-winged Warbler (*),
Song Sparrow (*).

The original bander of each bird cited above is indicated as: Dr. Swinebroad or his assistants (J.S.), Dr. Kricher (J.K.), and the author or his assistants (*). The five-to-eight year old birds (all Swinebroad's) contain several outstanding records. The eight-year old Ovenbird (see Bird-Banding, 43: 214) and six-year old Wood Thrush exceed the longevity citations of EBBA 1973 tabulation (EBBA News, 36: 26-29). The five-year Scarlet Tanager (male) was recaptured with a canopy mist-net, 40 ft. above the ground; it too may be an age-record. We look forward to future recaptures, and are hopeful of eventual "age structure" or population pyramids for the more common species. For example we banded 85 Wood Thrushes in the last three years, and should soon describe the number of individuals in each age-class. Only long term studies can provide this information (as has been evident from the valuable work by banders of the Powdermill Nature Reserve).

Only two recoveries were obtained at the Forest:

House Wren 123-69031 Imm. sex unknown

Banded at the Stony Brook Banding Station, Hopewell, N.J. 08/20/70

Recovered at Hutcheson Forest 06/14/71

Common Grackle 742-69125 Adult female

Banded near Dunellen, New Jersey by W. Pepper 04/14/71

Recovered at Hutcheson Forest 07/12/72

Details of all recaptured birds mentioned in this report are available from the author.

The recent banding work was one part of an intensive breeding bird survey of the forest (we also used grid- and transect-censuses). The overall research on the summer bird community was supported by the Rutgers Research Council and the Hutcheson Forest Research Fund.

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SPECIAL THRILLS OF BANDING

Every bander has had the thrills of capturing some unusual birds. In the early part of the summer of 1973, I had several such thrills. Upon arriving at my vacation cottage at Lake Lure, N. C. (near Chimney Rock), I put out six potter traps and three mist nets. My arising at dawn the next morning was awarding by seeing a Pileated Woodpecker hit a 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ " mist net and bounce out. Later I caught a male Summer Tanager in a potter trap and a female in a mist net nearby, within minutes of each other, apparently mates. On the same morning and in the same net, I caught a Brown Thrasher, a Wood Thrush, and a Swainson's Thrush. My greatest thrill came at dusk. To make sure that no birds were left in the nets and traps overnight, I have always checked traps and nets after dark. When I turned my flashlight toward the last net furthest from the house, one of my long awaited desires came true; there was a large brown bird on the ground in the bottom tier. I guessed what it was before actual identification: a Screech Owl! I had just ordered a small supply of No. 5 bands, fortunately. Then the thought struck me; how am I going to get him (or her) out. I did not bring gloves and those claws and beak had me worried. I was scared to leave it lest it get out or a dog or cat would kill it on the ground. I took a chance and grabbed it around the neck; it did not move. My flashlight had no doubt blinded it. I lifted it and found that it was not caught in the net; so could have easily freed itself had I delayed in getting it out. I put band No. 685-06374 on it and determined from incubation patch that it was a female. I put it on a platform to fly away, but it did not move. I feared that it was dead--perhaps from fright. Out of about 5,000 birds I have had three drop dead in my hands. After about twenty minutes, however, it left; but not before giving me one of my greatest bird thrills.

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