

BANDER'S CORNER

James V. Peavy, Jr.

One of the great rewards of being a bird bander is the opportunity to be out of doors in wild and sometimes lonely places for an entire day. When you have bird nets up, you are forced to remain nearby, and as a result, you can become very familiar with an area. These conditions lend to experiences that do not always relate to birds, but which are interesting and enjoyable encounters with other forms of wildlife. Following are a few experiences I have had while banding.

Spring, 1973 - Ted Weems and I had been banding for eight days on the Gulf Coast. One of our favorite places is St. Andrew's Bay, near the abandoned town of Navy Cove. Nearby we found a pond with a brood of baby alligators, watched over by a very protective mother. One day a Pied-billed Grebe stopped on the pond to rest and feed. Soon the mother alligator was stalking the grebe. She swam slowly toward the bird, showing nothing but her eyes and nostrils, until only ten yards of water separated the two. Without a ripple, the alligator sank out of sight. Both Ted and I expected to see the grebe disappear in a sudden splash of snapping jaws, but that grebe must have seen alligators before. As soon as the gator was submerged, the grebe also sank; for a few long seconds, the pond was calm, ruffled only by a slight breeze. Soon the alligator reappeared, and so did the grebe; they had changed places! This same performance occurred again and again during the day. The next morning the grebe was gone - eaten? I'll bet not.

Fall, 1973 - Ted and I were again at St. Andrew's Bay. As usual we were camping out, sleeping in my V-W van; suddenly there were footsteps outside. Not just one or two, but an army marching by, and I ask, "Ted, do you hear that?..." Silly question...even Weems couldn't sleep through that racket. So we investigate - nothing. As soon as we turn on the light, open the door and look around, all is quiet; as soon as we settle down again, the army is on the move. Finally we sat outside, quietly waiting. Soon our visitor was identified - an armadillo, and only one at that.

For banders there is a special thrill in getting to band a new species; the opportunity to hold, examine, measure and record data on a new bird is one of the high points in a bander's day. For most birders, some species are especially interesting and exciting; for example, waterfowl, warblers and birds of prey. You can imagine what a thrill it must have been for Margaret Miller this fall when she caught and banded a Sharp-shinned Hawk, a new species for her and one of the really exciting birds to handle.

When a bird wearing a band is recovered, the person who banded the bird receives a computer card with number-coded information. These numbers are translated with the aid of the bird banding manual, and sometimes an interesting story unfolds. One such card arrived this fall, and it stated 44-22-04-01-300-01-4, among other things. These numbers told me that this bird, a male Brown-headed Cowbird, was captured by a state employee working on the Cowbird Control Program in the very heart of the Kirtland's Warbler breeding range. This Cowbird was banded in the Birmingham Zoo on January 26, 1974, and was trapped near Luzerne, Michigan, on June 1 of the same year. For those not familiar with the Kirtland's Warbler story, a little background information follows.

The Kirtland's Warbler is one of the rarest songbirds in the United States. It has a very restricted breeding range and a highly specialized nesting

habitat requirement, nesting only in young jack-pines in a few counties of North Central Michigan. For some reason the Brown-headed Cowbird, which is a brood-parasite, seeks out the Kirtland's nest in which to lay its eggs. The developing Cowbird usually gets so much of the available food that the warbler young do not survive. Although Cowbirds lay eggs in the nests of other species, the Kirtland's nests are among the most heavily parasitized. The species is already in trouble due to low numbers, so every nest is important to its ultimate survival. Local authorities began a control program several years ago in which large numbers of Cowbirds are trapped and killed. This program is apparently working, because fewer Kirtland's nests seem to be parasitized since the program began. We become involved with this species, because the very Cowbirds which visit our fields and feeders all winter may be one of the parties involved in a life-and-death struggle for the survival of an entire species.

5205 Beacon Drive  
Birmingham 35210

BIRMINGHAM TOWER CASUALTIES

Fall, 1974

Richard J. Remy, Jr.

Fall collections were made of bird casualties at WAPI and WBRG television towers in Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama. The location and structure of the towers are described in Alabama Birdlife 16:4 (34) and 17:2 (46).

During the collection period which began on September 9 and ended on November 10, daily trips were made to the towers between sunrise and 8:30 a.m. During this period, 29 individuals of 14 species were collected. The following table shows the number of specimens collected at each tower and the dates of collection.

It may be of interest to note that the majority of the casualties were recovered after overcast, rainy nights with northeasterly winds.

To my knowledge, the only systematic tower kill surveys in Birmingham were performed by Michael Lee Bierly in 1967 and 1968. It is my intention to reinstate regular, systematic surveys of tower casualties during the fall and spring migration periods for the purpose of collecting data for records of migration movements, academic study of specimens and other related endeavors.

The specimens will be donated to approved museums and universities for use as study skins.

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602 South 38th Street  
Birmingham 35222