

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).

1975a. Eastern Bird-Banding Assoc. News 38:131-132.

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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