

VICTORIAN BANDING CONFERENCE.

In Melbourne, on November 29 and 30, 1963, the Victorian Branch of the Australian Bird Banding Scheme held its third banding conference. The programme consisted of two evenings of lectures and discussion, with a day in the field, devoted to mist-netting. Unfortunately, due to illness, the regional organiser, Mr. Frank Stewart, was unable to take the chair. Mr. Roy Wheeler, acting regional organiser, presided in his stead. The Director of the Fisheries and Wildlife Department, Mr. A. Dunbavin Butcher, again opened the conference.

In his opening address, Mr. Butcher spoke of two very real dangers to our wildlife - the destruction of habitat and the indiscriminate use of insecticides. Little had been done to combat the latter problem, but with the former, major advances were being made towards the establishment of Wildlife Reserves. Now, after many years, it was accepted that land might be legitimately used for wildlife conservation. However, it was essential to have a sound case before proposing new reserves. Amateur bodies could play an important part here, by furnishing information, not readily available elsewhere, on the wildlife of an area. He thanked the Victorian Ornithological Research Group for the part they had already played in this field.

Addressing his remarks particularly to banding, Mr. Butcher pointed to the unique privileges of bird banders, in that they could interfere with wildlife. However this privilege carried with it a responsibility to ensure that abuses did not creep in. It was necessary for banders and mist-netters to be highly skilled and qualified in their knowledge and handling of birds.

The first of the comprehensive series of lectures was presented by Mr. Jack Hood, Naracoorte, S.A. His subject was banding, traps and trap-making. Mr. Hood acknowledged the great advantages of mist-nets, but he believed that, on your home-ground, traps were more effective. With the aid of slides, Mr. Hood showed an amazing assortment of traps, including funnel traps, clap-nets, crow traps, spring traps, run-through rat traps and many more, with a wide variety of modifications he had made to suit local birds and local conditions. He showed how he had attached holding compartments, so as to increase the catch, how he had fitted perches within the traps as an additional means of ensuring that passerines did not escape and many other pieces of information drawn from his wide knowledge and experience.

Mr. John Edge, of Allansford, Victoria, spoke on his experiences as a bat bander. He told how at times 5,000-8,000

Bentwinged Bats had been noted in the caves in his district. The great quantity of moth wings on the floor of one particular cave pointed to the economic importance of the bats. There was a great fluctuation in the numbers of the bats and there was also much variation in the proportion of males and females at different times.

With the help of Mr. Shirreff, Mr. Edge had banded 5,000 bats in his district. He did not feel it advisable to band these bats in winter time due to their partial hibernation. He praised the new mono-metal bat bands, which he felt were much less damaging to the bats.

Miss Helen Aston spoke on British Banding Stations and how British methods might be adapted to a proposed banding station at Cape Woolamai on Philip Island. There are twelve bird observatories in England, Scotland and Wales; six of these are located on small off-shore islands, noted for their large breeding populations of sea-birds, the others are situated on coastal spits and promontories.

It is hoped that an observatory at Cape Woolamai might include among its banding activities not only the large-scale ringing of mutton-birds and ibis, but also the erection of Heligoland traps for the catching of robins, silvereyes and other passerines associated with Bass Strait migration.

The following day, members visited an area at Donvale where it had been hoped to erect "a mile of mist nets" along a bush track. Not surprisingly, the distance covered by the continuous line of nets fell rather short of the target. The tally also was rather below expectations, however the interchange of ideas and opportunity to observe others in action, was most helpful.

On the Saturday evening Mr. Warren Hitchcock spoke on the first ten years of the A.B.B.S. showing the growth of the banding organisation, and highlighting some of the features and achievements. In 1953, 8,000 birds had been banded of which 85 had been recovered. In 1963, 75,000 birds banded had produced 8,000 recoveries. In the ten years 312,000 birds banded, had yielded 30,000 recoveries.

The Silver Gull still led the number of birds banded, with the Short-tailed Shearwater second and the Silvereye third. The Grey Teal had produced the most recoveries. Banding had confirmed hitherto unproved theories (e.g. mutton-bird migration); it had also brought surprises. For instance, it showed the Little Egret to be a great wanderer with recoveries from New Zealand, New Guinea and New Britain. The knowledge derived from banding could be, and had been, of great import-

ance as an aid to conservation (e.g. Mallee Fowl and duck). In recent years the most spectacular development had been the introduction of mist nets. In 1962/63 34,000 birds had been banded through this medium.

Mr. Hitchcock praised the Bird Banders Association both for the high standard of the Journal and the liaison the Association formed between the A.B.B.S. and banders, and between banders themselves. In conclusion he stressed the importance of the amateur in the bird banding scheme, the importance of public relations and the need to maintain high standards.

Mr. John McKean gave a very detailed account of the banding and bird study carried out by himself and others at Lord Howe Island. A full account of this work appears in Vol.1 No.5 of the Bird Bander. From three visits 14,661 birds have been banded, of which 8,833 have been Fleshly-footed Shearwaters. Mr. Gerry Setford showed slides of the Island and some of the birds.

Mr. Trevor Pescott of Geelong introduced the subject of colour banding. The advantage of individual colour banding lay in the fact that it was unnecessary to retrap. It was particularly useful where special species studies were being undertaken. Another use lay in the employment of one particular colour in an area as a means of marking birds of that locality (e.g. Red band on Flame Robins at You Yangs). The colour could also be varied from year to year. The best birds to colour band were terrestrial species.

Mr. Pescott stressed the need to avoid over-lapping of colour banding schemes and to use colours of strong contrast. He appealed to members to make use of the Victorian colour band bank and to carry colour band projects through, because once a particular series of colours had been used on a species, these could not be used for many years.

Mr. Alan Reid and Mr. Bill Davis spoke on their survey of bird life at Somers. The survey was being carried out in three ways, by banding, by fortnightly circuits of the area and by the keeping of day to day records by Mr. Reid during his nature study lectures and excursions with the children at the Somers Camp. Species and numbers of all species are marked on charts; graphs showing population fluctuations are also kept.

The final topic was mist-netting. Mr. David Noonan spoke on the questionnaire which had recently been sent to all Victorian mist-netters. This circular had two main objectives- firstly to seek the knowledge and experience of established

mist-netters, so that this could be utilised by those desirous of taking up mist-netting and secondly to find out what standards should be observed on such problems as length of time nets should be left unattended, netting during the breeding season and so on. Owing to shortage of time a thorough summary and discussion of the subject was not possible.

In closing the conference, Mr. Wheeler thanked the speakers, all those who had helped to make the gathering such a success, country members for the efforts they had made to be present, and in particular the Fisheries and Wildlife Department for again making their library available for the conference. Finally he invited members to attend the R.A.O.U. outing at Yellingbo on the morrow.

David Noonan,
Roy Wheeler.

BANDING EASTERN SPINEBILLS

S.G.Lane, Lane Cove, N.S.W.

Until I commenced banding with mist nets, I was completely unaware of the extent of the population of Eastern Spinebills (Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris) even in the area of my home.

During a particular day, one or two of these birds could be seen or heard feeding in the garden or, with their characteristic swift flight, moving between feeding plants. From casual observation it was assumed that these birds constituted a small resident population, the same birds returning regularly throughout the day to the same place.

After more than four years banding in one area at North Ryde (Sydney), N.S.W., it is prudent to examine the results, as these may assist others commencing similar methodical activities.

The Spinebill is not easily attracted to traps and I have never caught one in this fashion. It is, however, a bird easily caught by mist nets correctly sited in suitable places.

The banding area at North Ryde is approximately 300 yards long by 50 yards wide. It consists of a mixture of coastal heath and open forest, part sandstone and part shale vegetation bordered by a large row of exotic Coral Trees (*Erythrina* sp.).