

A Bird-Bander in South America.

S.J.Wilson has forwarded to us the following extracts from a letter from Bill Belton dated August 26, 1964. We think that these will interest a lot of our readers, not only those who knew Bill in Canberra. His present duties take him all over South and Central America.

"My birding is necessarily sporadic, but it is widespread and surprisingly productive of new species for my life-list, although there are many frustrations involved. I have to confine my watching to the time I can sneak in between daylight and the usual 7.30 A.M. when we start our activities on our trips. It is heartbreaking to see birds flitting around all during the day as we pass through some remote area and not be able to take time to look at them. It is likewise even more frustrating to see things in some detail and not be able to find any material which would help to identify them. I sneaked a few looks while in the eastern lowlands of Bolivia a few months ago, but have not identified a single one of the birds that I got notes on. I also went hunting that day and brought home three different kinds of Tinamou, which are wonderful birds to eat. Two of them were unknown to me, so I put one of each of the unplucked birds into the freezer. When the day came that we were going to eat them, I got them out and told Edurne (housekeeper) that I wanted to let them defrost so that I could skin them. She took my Spanish word for "to skin" to mean that I was going to pluck them, so as soon as they defrosted and before I got home for lunch, she did a thorough job of plucking for me. And that fixed that!

"Nevertheless, I have been having a lot of fun and have come up with a lot of miscellaneous new birds in places as remote as Guatemala, Curacao, Venezuela, and Uruguay. I have done birding elsewhere as well, but most of it has been right here in the Canal Zone. My list for the Zone itself is well over 200 now, although not all of these are absolutely new to me and there are a good many North American migrants included in the list.

"I have found a mudflat which is only a few minutes away from where we live, which from now until next March will be pretty heavily covered with migrant shorebirds of many types at every low tide. At high tide a good many of these birds bank up on a small sandy shore on one side, which is a good place for looking. We expect to do some netting there in the near future. So far I have seen a few birds there on which there are only sight records in Panama, and I have now twice seen a gull which has not previously been recorded in the area.

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"I have done a good deal of banding, but in the season from April through August when there are practically no migrant species here, there is very little incentive other than for the new birds which show up out of the jungle in the nets and which might otherwise not be seen at all. That, of course, is a good deal of incentive in itself. But there is a lot more fun in other parts of the year when in addition to the local birds, we get a lot of North American ones, and there seems a reasonable chance that we will get some returns from our own birds. The season is just about to begin, and I am getting my equipment geared up to go again.

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"Holes in the nets are often caused by bats here. Our netting technique is necessarily different here than it was in Australia because of bats. We find that if we have the nets spread out too soon even after light breaks, we get a lot of bats in them. The same thing happens if we leave them up too late toward sunset. Bats are marvelous at chewing and they almost always make a hole, and when they do, they make a good one. There are more than 100 species of bats in Panama, so there are plenty to work with. As a matter of fact, some fellows, who are interested in both bats and birds, have gotten together and operate on a 24-hour basis, catching bats after dark and birds in the daylight. However, that is really hard on the nets. Since a certain percentage of the bats here are rabid, my way of taking care of them is with a couple of rocks with the bat in between.

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"Next week I will leave for Ecuador where I will probably spend most of five days. I hope to do some good watching there. There is a brand-new book out on the birds of Colombia, which is about the best thing that has happened to this part of the world in a long time, since it covers about 1500 species and includes a large percentage of the birds in surrounding countries. Interestingly, it was written by a fellow who has never been in Colombia: he is strictly a museum ornithologist."

Bird-Banding in South East Asia.

Dr. H. Elliott McClure, Ornithologist with the Migratory Animal Pathological Survey, U.S. Forces, Tokyo, Japan, in a letter to the President of our Association, writes:

"We are setting up a ringing programme in Southeastern Asia and hope to have seven teams in seven countries."