

Bird Banding Station

The Allegheny Front Migratory Observatory (Bird Banding Station) is located at the overlook across the road from the Red Creek Campground. Established in 1958, the station is open from August to October depending on weather. It is the only cooperative banding station in West Virginia, although banders, who must be licensed, do band from their yards. Banders are volunteers, usually members of the Brooks Bird Club, who cooperate with staff from the Monongahela National Forest and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.

In the fall, songbirds are most likely to migrate after the passing of a cold front, and the migration usually is along a broad front. Many birds fly along the Allegheny Front in the fall and often are funneled through the dip in the ridge to keep on a southwest course.

Birds banded at the station are mainly songbirds, and about one-third of the species banded are warblers. Most birds that fly down the Allegheny Front during their migration do not nest in West Virginia but in Canada and farther north; they winter in the tropics, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

In order to secure the birds for banding, as many as 20 nylon nets are set up in "net lanes." After birds fly into the nets they are removed carefully to avoid injury. The birds then are placed in a canvas sack and taken to the banding station, which is a plywood shelter where the bands are kept. The birds are identified for species, sex, and age, and then banded. Some are weighed and checked for fat. Migrating birds usually put on fat just before migrating. The fat is used for fuel for what may be a 200-mile night flight. After this information is recorded, the birds are released. This type of data is used to determine status and distribution of bird populations.

The information is very important because birds serve as a kind of ecological indicator of the health of the earth which all species must share. Destruction and fragmentation of North American forests due to urban development and agriculture have caused a serious loss of habitat for many woodland birds, especially warblers. Destruction of the rain forest in South America has meant loss of habitat for some birds that winter in the tropics. Banding stations such as the one at Dolly Sods provide information to help monitor the number of birds and keep track of fluctuations in populations. It appears that numbers of woodland bird species are declining.

Approximately 15 bird species have been banded at the Allegheny Front station. Not all species are banded. Because of their small size, hummingbirds are not banded but notes on their occurrence are kept. Species most often banded include Tennessee warbler, black-poll warbler, Cape May warbler, black-throated blue warbler, black-throated green warbler, blackburnian warbler, bay-breasted warbler, ovenbird, dark-eyed junco, golden-crowned kinglet, and Swainson's thrush. Other birds that have been banded include merlin, sharp-shinned hawk, yellow-bellied sapsucker, and several flycatchers including yellow-bellied and least flycatcher. The station bands over 6,000 birds in an average year. (For complete lists of birds banded and dates, refer to the *Redstart* which has annual updates of bird banding activity.)

Ref Dolly Sods,, West Virginia Renewable Resources Unique Areas Series 813, West Virginia University Extension Service, N. J. Venable, 1996 third printing