

The Thrush Migration Through W.Va.

Some information gained on Dolly Sods and some questions needing answers.

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As many readers of **The Redstart** know, the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory is located in one of the most rugged and remote areas of West Virginia. It is situated on Dolly Sods, a mountain ridge in Grant County, whose elevation is nearly 4000 feet. The banding station is located on the very edge of the ridge facing east. This station has just completed its 27th year of continuous operation. Established by Dr. George Hall and Ralph Bell, it has been manned, in large part, by bird banders and netters from the Brooks Bird Club. The banding period extends from approximately August 15th through October 7th spanning about a seven week period, which covers the bulk of the southern migration of passerines. Extensive and accurate records have been accumulated, especially for warblers, which constitute over 70% of the total birds banded.

Sunrises on Dolly Sods are some of the most spectacular ever witnessed. On a clear morning, you can count as many as seven ridges between you and the rising sun. When you look down, the valley-hugging fog creates lakes so realistic you might look for sailboats. Long before sunrise, however, the AFMO banding operations are underway. Three or four people are scrambling over the rocks to open the 17 long mist nets that make up the station. It's 5:30 A.M. and these "early birds" have to use flashlights to see what they are doing. Fingers get frosted, because at this elevation in September, snow is not unusual. So it's reasonable to ask, "Why not wait until dawn until you can see a little better?" The answer is "Thrushes."

It's a well-known fact that many Passerines are night migrators...high flyers you can see passing across a full moon. But of all these night flyers, thrushes seem to settle earlier. You can hear them in the trees and shrubs below as you open the nets.

A 15 to 20 minute wait around the banding station follows. With coffee in hand, the conversation usually turns to the weather because this is the controlling factor in bird flights. Then, as the sky lightens, the net tenders go out on their first run...the "Thrush run." On a good first pass, they will bring in 15 to 20 thrushes. This will continue until sunrise, at which time the warbler captures will increase and the Thrush bandings decrease. Ultimately, as the morning moves on, only an occasional thrush will be banded while warblers roll in by the hundreds. This sequence is well known to anyone who has spent time on Dolly Sods. It is confirmed by down-to-the-minute banding records maintained by the AFMO.

I think most scientific inquiry is produced by the simple question, "Why?" So my