

1976

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Edward T. Reed

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### Recommended Citation

Reed, Edward T. (1976) "Is Your Banding of Any Value?," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 1 : Iss. 4 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol1/iss4/10>

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# Is your banding of any value?

Edward T. Reed

For the first time since I joined EBBA I have encountered a controversial issue that did not involve either a sexing or aging technique. I now know for certain that at least one other EBBA member is interested enough in the basic questions and problems related to banding to express his opinions. I am referring to an article by Karl E. Bartel which appeared in the *North American Bird Bander*, Vol. 1(1):35. Mr. Bartel was responding to an article I wrote (*EBBA News* 38:84-85) in which I suggested that most banders of passerine species were playing a wasteful numbers game without any justifiable objective, all at the expense of the American taxpayer.

The majority of Mr. Bartel's comments I believe representative of many banders and as such support my original contention. I do, however, recognize and agree with some valuable points he made and will discuss the significance of these points later. Returning to the basic question, let us consider the major goal of Mr. Bartel's banding activities. He is interested in determining the migration patterns of songbirds, a goal which I believe is representative of how most banders would reply if asked why they were banding. Granted, in some cases this is a worthwhile objective. The best example which comes to mind is the banding of waterfowl. In order to regulate the hunting pressure on these sporting species it is necessary to relate the breeding success in specific regions to the migratory pathways of these birds. However, we are not concerned with waterfowl and in most cases there are far more valuable means by which banding can contribute to our knowledge of songbirds.

Going hand-in-hand with the fact that most banders feel they are concerned primarily with migration activities is the fact that most banders are unwilling to admit to the futility of what they are trying to do. For example, Mr. Bartel claims that a recovery rate of 75 percent is needed. I agree. In most mark-recapture studies a recapture rate of at least 75 percent is usually required if a meaningful level of statistical significance is to be

attributed to the resulting population estimate. However, in almost all cases the population in question is well-defined, under intensive study, and is sedentary in nature. To even suggest a recovery rate of 75 percent when dealing with a migratory group of birds whose numbers range to the millions and whose distribution flows between two major continents is utterly ridiculous. Mr. Bartel's recovery rate for the Dark-eyed Juncos he has banded is 0.09 percent, and to increase it to 75 percent would require increasing the recovery effort by a factor of 833. Not just doubling or tripling his ability to recapture banded birds but becoming 833 times more efficient at recapturing birds is ridiculous and totally unrealistic. Not even in the case of waterfowl which are annually banded by the thousands and then intensively hunted do we enjoy the luxury of a recovery rate anywhere approaching 75 percent.

It is time that banders get a better grip on reality, understand the limitations of what they claim they are trying to do and then channel their efforts into areas which have greater value and also fall within the realm of practicality. We can band juncos by the millions, but even at a greater recovery rate what do we have when we are done? Was it worth the expenditure of taxpayer's dollars to process such a tremendous volume of data when other, more valuable, research goals could have been realized?

I feel that I have made my views clear, as has Mr. Bartel. What about the remainder of the EBBA membership? Do you feel that your banding activities are worthwhile? The *North American Bird Bander* is the place to respond. I am interested in knowing how many EBBA members agree with me and are willing to initiate steps to correct or improve the situation.

In concluding, let me return, as I promised earlier, to some points made by Mr. Bartel with which I agree and feel deserve more elaboration. I am referring to the value of local advertising and the use of banding demonstrations at sports shows and

fairs. Both of these ideas are excellent and deserve more effort on the part of EBBA members. An increased recovery rate is desirable regardless of the project objective and the use of local newspapers and shows can help achieve such a goal.

In order to increase the involvement of banders in such activities we must first consider the problem of local communication among banders. Do you know all of the banders in your area? Is there any organization among EBBA members which is indeed capable of handling a demonstration or educational program? What is clearly called for is a movement, initiated and guided by the leadership of EBBA, to organize banders on the

local level. Not only will this enable the execution of the type of activities suggested by Mr. Bartel but it would also facilitate the coordination of area-wide research of the nature I suggested in my original article.

EBBA members have the ability to greatly increase the value and usefulness of their banding efforts. The basic question is whether or not they want to change. Is the EBBA leadership innovative and dynamic enough to make better use of the organizational machinery available through EBBA? I hope so.

107 Archer Road, Syracuse, N.Y. 13204

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## Project Babe

In the fall of 1971 a raptor program was initiated at Woodland Park Zoological Gardens in Seattle, Washington, called "Project Babe" after an imprinted Golden Eagle.

The primary goal of the program at that time was to gain information regarding the breeding of birds of prey in captivity and, if successful, to help re-establish the wild population by releasing surplus birds back into their natural habitat. It was felt that this program would not only provide a worthwhile research project for the Zoo's staff and volunteers, but would also aid in fulfilling part of the Zoo's conservation responsibilities. The first breeding season was very successful in that two Prairie Falcons and two Harris' Hawks were hatched and fledged. A great deal of data on the reproductive behavior of these birds was also collected.

It soon became apparent that a second part needed to be added to the program. Since the Zoo was the logical place for treatment and rehabilitation of sick and injured birds, a surplus of Bald and Golden Eagles had accumulated on the Zoo grounds. Some of these birds were permanently crippled, so efforts were made to enter them into educational or breeding projects while others proved to be releasable. The releasable birds were a problem in the respect that Zoo personnel did not have the time to spend to monitor the birds following release, and the more desirable sites were somewhat distant from the Zoo grounds.

There were a number of delays, the most important being the failure to receive the radio-telemetry gear for several months, but eventually

an eagle release site was established on the upper Skagit River and San Juan Island, both of which are located in western Washington. Personnel for the project were solicited and screened through the Zoo Research and Volunteer Program, several of whom were selected from the University of Washington and Central College. Eventually, through this program, eight Bald and two Golden Eagles have been satisfactorily released back into their natural habitat.

Although there have been a number of raptor rehabilitation programs started throughout the country, little material has been published indicating the results of these projects. The primary reason for this lack of data is that most of the birds have been released after rehabilitation, and success has been assumed without long-term monitoring or observation. When so much time and expense have been invested in the bird, it is essential that adequate time be spent by observers to determine whether release was successful, preferably using radio-telemetry equipment. Telemetry gear, which includes a 3-channel receiver and transmitters, is necessary in order to locate and assess the hunting ability of the eagles after their release.

Funds for Project Babe are still needed. Donations are tax deductible and would be greatly appreciated. Please make donations payable to "Project Babe," c/o Seattle Zoological Society, 5500 Phinney Avenue North, Seattle, WA 98103.

James W. Foster, DVM  
Scientific Director