

1976

Report of the American Ornithologists' Union Ad Hoc Committee on Scientific and Educational Use of Wild Birds

North American Bird Bander

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Recommended Citation

North American Bird Bander (1976) "Report of the American Ornithologists' Union Ad Hoc Committee on Scientific and Educational Use of Wild Birds," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol1/iss1/9>

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Report of the American Ornithologists' Union Ad Hoc Committee on Scientific and Educational Use of Wild Birds

The Auk 92, Suppl. (3), July (1975)

Because of its importance to banders, it seems to me desirable to make an extended summary of this report for those EBBA members to whom it is not readily accessible. The committee making the report was requested by the A.O.U. President, D.S. Farner, to examine in depth the problems involved in the use of wild birds for educational and scientific purposes, especially with regard to public relations and to laws and regulations pertaining to such use.

In the foreword to the report Dr. Farner points out that although much remains to be learned, probably more is known today about birds than about any other class of animals, and this has made it possible for investigators to use birds for many significant contributions to such disciplines as evolution, population biology, ethology, ecology, and comparative physiology. Avian biology has thus provided an improved basis for scientific research and for effective conservation programs. It has also greatly increased public interest in birds. Along with that, however, it is becoming more difficult to use birds for these purposes because of increased public sensitivity to protection of wild animals, and because of greater legislative or administrative restrictions. The Committee was therefore charged with investigation and report on several specific points. They included an explanation of the need for collecting living or preserved specimens, a code of ethics for collectors, the need for the use of live birds, and a code of ethics for those who handle them, the standard for maintaining wild birds in captivity, the regulations about importing and exporting live birds, and liaison with regulating agencies so that scientists can be kept informed of changes in the rules.

After describing the need for study specimens of preserved birds, the Committee outlined the information that should appear on the label of a salvaged specimen — insofar as the details are known. In addition to the date, locality and collector's name, the type of habitat, sex, age, weight, reproductive condition, degree of fat deposits, colors that fade,

stomach contents, stage of molt, and presence of parasites all should be listed. The report then goes on with an interesting section on what information might be derived from the salvaged specimen at a later date.

With regard to collecting extralimital or vagrant species, the Committee favors the practice in the belief that the documentation of range extension through collected specimens is very important, and that the loss of individuals in the advanced stages of extension is not likely to affect the outcome. There are, of course, many other reasons for collecting, and there is a thorough treatment of these reasons. The section on the opposition to collecting birds treats today's ecological movement with consideration, and tries to document the cases where the extinction of several species have been hastened by collecting.

This leads into a very interesting section on bird population dynamics, and one on man-caused mortality in birds in order to put the effects of collecting in perspective. It is concluded that hunting pollution, habitat changes, pest control, collisions, electrocutions, and destruction by man's animals far outweigh the effects of responsible collecting on bird populations. Nor is the qualified scientific collector a just adversary of the bird watcher or environmentalist.

The section detailing the recommendations for procedures in collecting and capturing birds is quite thorough, and while largely dealing with collecting, it also discusses capturing for marking, and the maintenance of living birds in captivity. The specific recommendations of interest to banders involved the issuance of permits (much as they are now issued); the limitation on capturing rare or endangered species (much as they are now); the regulations concerning salvage of specimens, the rules for handling live birds, the selling and buying of specimens, foreign imports, and the disposition of specimens seized by law enforcement officials.

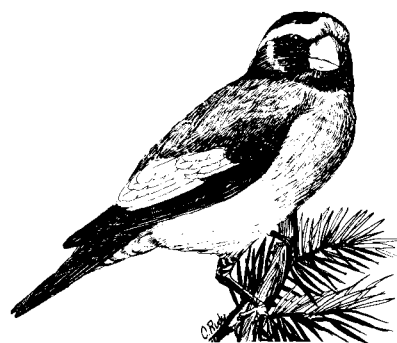
The report ends with a code of ethics for collectors and capturers of birds, and since it might be well for all banders to be familiar with this code, we report it here in detail.

1. The collecting or capturing permit should only be used for justifiable scientific or educational purposes. 2. Specimens should only be collected or captured from populations capable of sustaining any losses involved. 3. Only those specimens necessary to the project should be collected or captured, and those should be properly cared for. 4. The maximum possible information should be recorded for each specimen obtained. 5. Live birds should be maintained under humane and healthful conditions. 6. Collect only with the aim of making available all relevant data through publication, or by giving others access to the data. 7. Abide by all regulations. 8. Notify local authorities of plans to collect or capture birds in areas under their jurisdiction. 9. Identify yourself and your purposes to those who may witness your collecting or captures. 10. Be judicious and humane

in collecting or capturing, and respect the rights, interests, and feelings of others. 11. The privilege of collecting or capturing birds should be considered a trust in the pursuit of science, and not flaunted.

A valuable bibliography is appended to the report, and there is a second part describing Federal regulations in detail for the U.S. and Canada, as well as a partial list of state regulations (for six western states).

Contributed by Darwin L. Wood



IMPROBABLES

Kay B. Burke

Every bander must harbor a hope that his nets or traps will yield a rare bird, one not normally found in that particular area. When such a bird does wander into the nets or traps it has to be an exciting moment for the bander.

During nearly eight years of banding I have had three such experiences, and I'm ever hopeful that the fourth experience is just around the corner.

In 1968, while banding in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, area, I netted what I identified as a Dickcissel in winter plumage. After banding and releasing the bird I was informed by much more knowledgeable banders than I that I had made a mistake in my identification. They were certain that Dickcissels were not found in that area. I stood by my identification, even though they were not the least convinced. Upon returning home one afternoon the following spring, I noticed that a bird had actually lifted a closed trap gate and had gotten itself trapped. Upon closer inspection I saw that it was a banded Dickcissel in full spring plumage, and — you guessed it — it was the one I had banded the previous fall! I called my skeptical friends who hurried over to verify my identification.

My next "improbable" was netting and banding an immature Harris' Sparrow in the Tucson, Arizona

area during the 1972-1973 winter. This fellow stayed all winter and was unusual enough for both local and distant birders to make frequent trips to see it.

The latest "improbable" was a Beardless Flycatcher, netted on the Pahrnagat Wildlife Refuge, about 100 miles northeast of Las Vegas, Nevada, on 28 April 1973. This bird was well north of its normal range and I wonder if unusual weather conditions could have played a part in its straying from its usual environs. That spring had seen record-setting rainfalls for the southwest desert areas and winds of high velocity. The bird was netted shortly after sunrise, there was a slight southwest wind, and I assume it was travelling with a flock of warblers as the net contained numerous Yellow and Virginia's Warblers.

Sad to say, I didn't have a camera handy to record this bird but there was no doubt as to its identity. It even treated us to a song once it was released and sitting in the tree above us. Hope springs eternal, however, and I shall be looking for the same bird when we resume banding at the wildlife refuge. And you can be sure we will have a camera this time.

2738 W. Casas Dr., Tucson, Arizona 85704