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“That” Future of Passerine Banding

Karl E. Bartel¹

The Future of Passerine Banding, by Edward T. Reed, *EBBA News* 38:84-5, gave me a point to write about.

Forty-two years ago when I received my banding permit, banders were told to band as many birds as they could (per Biological Service, now Bird Banding Laboratory, *Ed.*). This I'm still doing. Mr. Reed states that this is not an acceptable objective for banding. It was in the thirties, so why not now?! We need to band hundreds of even one species to get even one recovery.

Here is where the rub comes in. In the thirties there were many articles in newspapers advising people to look for banded birds and where to send the band numbers. Today this is all but stopped. We banders will never know what, where and how birds do, if people are not continually advised to look for and send in the band numbers.

Every year there is a new generation of people that need to be advised about banding. In the thirties, forties and fifties I used to write articles in local newspapers about once a month advising where to send bird bands when found. Now for the last 15 years I have not written an article. Do you know what that has done? It has cut my local recoveries about 90%. In the old days I would get newspaper recoveries for about 25 birds in a year. Today I get only two or three.

If you think for one moment that with the birds now banded we have the answer where they go, you're dead wrong. Human population is forever changing their migration habits. Migration and where the birds go is my goal. There are gaps I need to fill. Let's take the Slate-colored (Dark-eyed) Junco for instance.

In 42 years I have banded 11,843 Juncos — with only 11 recoveries. Why only eleven recoveries?? Not enough banding information, that's why!

Thousands of people have found bands on birds, but they don't know what to do with the information. *I know!* I had a banding display in a sports show once, and three people had found banded birds. They said they kept them a few years and then tossed them out. “Ouch, my aching back!” That's why I have to band lots of Juncos to get a few recoveries.

To be sure, the recoveries I get are interesting, but lack data between banding and recovery station. I band in Blue Island, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, on the southern tip of Lake Michigan. One of my Juncos was trapped by a bander at Blaney, MI. Now which side of the lake did the Junco use — Wisconsin or Indiana? What is needed is more banders in order to find out. Other Juncos have gone to Benton, Ky. What I want to know is — did they bee-line to Kentucky, or did they zig-zag their way getting there. I probably will never know until there are more banders.

There are two things I would like to see, that probably won't happen. One is at least 500 bird banders in every state. The other is releases sent out by the Bird Banding Laboratory to every newspaper in the United States in the form of a banding recovery flyer, about three times a year. This is the only way to get a lot of recoveries, and at the same time the banders will not have to band as many birds.

Mr. Reed states we banders need an objective. Quite true, but we banders will never obtain our objective “normal” if we don't get at least 75% recoveries of our banded birds.

A good example why we need more banders: On October 5, 1937, the late William I. Lyon, of Waukegan, Ill., banded and released a White-throated Sparrow at 6:30 P.M.; on October 6, 1937, I captured this bird in Blue Island, at 7:30 A.M. This bird flew 60 miles in 13 hours. If we had banders spread every 50 miles throughout the state of Illinois, and this bird were captured by most of them, this would make banding history!

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