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## Letters

North American Bird Bander

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The comments by Edward T. Reed on the future of U.S. passerine banding (*EBBA News* 38:84-85) stimulated a response from a veteran bander, Karl E. Bartel, (*North American Bird Bander* 1:35) with further rebuttal from Mr. Reed (*North American Bird Bander* 1:178-179). At a meeting this exchange would bring a viable discussion. But, lacking that opportunity, I would hope there would be more comments in these pages by members.

Naturally, I am not in full agreement with either contestant. Mr. Bartel was right in saying that 42 years ago, when he started banding, the program was "tag and toss." We knew little about birds and their movements. In Australia until recent years, the situation was similar. In England, the banders buy their rings from the BTO and there are numerous banding projects; but the banders are not **required** to participate in any. When I set up a banding program in Asia, there was no background information on bird movements, so I said, "Band everything you can get your hands on!" In India, the program of the Bombay Natural History Society has been devoted to ducks and shorebirds, and as a result they are sadly lacking information on their passerines. Where does the U.S. stand in this picture?

First, what is the objective of bird banding? It is covered in one simple statement: To mark birds so that they can be recognized. That is the objective; everything else is spin-off.

And what is the position of the bird bander in this? He is the bird marker. That's all he is. That's all I expected of my field teams. I didn't expect the farmer or commercial bird catcher who was doing the banding to write scientific papers about it.

When attending local Audubon Society meetings, I occasionally hand out reprints to some of the members. The response to even a simple paper is one of awe. In the days when I was president of WBBA, we had monthly meetings at the home of Harold and Josephine Michener in Pasadena which were attended by bird banders close enough to reach there in a few hours driving. They discussed (the matter) and were constantly urged to write up the results of their banding, but few papers appeared. With the larger number of banders we have today, why has the situation remained the same? The answer is simple: the vast

majority are not scientists; they are not trained in research attitudes; they are laymen who catch the bird for the fun of it. To be asked to write scientific papers and to do scientific research are terrifying propositions.

As a scientist, then, what do I ask of the bander? I ask him to mark birds, and I ask him to keep careful records of the birds that he marks. That is all. Other than being furnished with bands, he is **paying** for the privilege and fun of banding. As additional cost, I can only ask that he keep good records. With these good records available, people such as me, Karl Bartel, Edward Reed, L. Richard Mewaldt, George Jonkel or the members of his staff, can write up those scientific papers. They are the ones who should decide what to do with the material at hand. They can design the research using these data.

It is the spin-off from this basic objective of marking birds that we are really arguing about. Mr. Average Bander is just going to mark birds. Mr. Exceptional Bander does the other things. He measures feathers, takes weights, describes color and molt, puts on color tags, makes nesting studies, checks cranial ossification, examines eyes, takes blood smears, collects ectoparasites, makes study skins, improves trapping techniques, gives demonstrations and educational talks, writes reports, etc., etc. And we scientists and biologists honor and respect him for doing these things, for it makes our work easier and more meaningful. We cannot and must not **demand** these things from the bander.

The careful bander provides the foundation for a whole branch of science. That we have more or fewer banders is an administrative matter to be determined by management and budgetary problems. Let the administrators decide how to augment or reduce the numbers of banders. They can regulate them out of existence; they can sponsor and court them. They can coddle or cudgel the bander, but without him there is no basis for the science. As an ornithologist interested in the population dynamics and bionomics of birds, my response is "Long live the banders; long may they ring!"

H. Elliott McClure  
Camarillo, CA

If I were asked whether my banding is of any value, I would, in all honesty, have to reply: No! Partially, this is because my involvement within EBBA just did not allow time for banding, but the blame does not all fall there. The primary reason for my "no" answer is that I did not develop my project in a scientific way. The thing is that you first define the problem (objective) and ask yourself how you can gather data, by what method and then you go ahead and do it. I started banding first, without knowing what my goal was. The end result was thousands of birds banded but for what objective? The reason I am being so candid about myself is that I am quite sure others are in the same boat (but are perhaps less eager to admit it). However, about two years ago, I recognized the fallacy of my projects and it was then that I started banding in a Boy Scout Camp in the Ramapo Mountains, Bergen Co., NJ. This is an ecologically unique area, comparable to an island or a piece of land completely separated from its surroundings. I am basically studying the effect of foresting (harvesting of mature trees) on bird populations. Because of the complexities of the area and to a certain degree the inaccessibility of parts of the total area, this is going to be a long term project. I recognize from the onset that this is mostly a breeding biology study and banding is just a means toward an end, as it should be. I have not been able to justify my banding between 1964-1974 but now I can. Of course I became more knowledgeable about bird identification, ageing and sexing but one needs not be a bander to accomplish this, although it helps.

Frederick S. Schaeffer  
Jamaica, NY

On 16 April, while banding near Bloomsburg State College, we trapped an AHY female Cardinal which we banded and placed temporarily in a holding box. When she was taken from the box approximately 15 minutes later, she had removed the band and was holding it in her bill. The band was reapplied to her leg and the bird released. I thought this was an interesting observation in light of the recent article by Mr. Copeland (NABB 1:177).

Bob Sagar  
Bloomsburg, PA



May I be permitted a rejoinder to two items in NABB Vol. 1(4)? First, as to band removal by Cardinals (p.177) my feather clipping of groups of Cardinals over the years has never revealed a case of band removal. I doubt if a recent vintage band (say last 10 years) could be removed by a Cardinal without serious damage to the leg. I have found it a major operation to remove even a well-worn band, involving filing a groove across the band. I have seen a number of scarred, but otherwise intact bands and a few old, crushed ones.

Second, as to the value of banding (p.178), it all depends on one's scale of values. Historically, banding was started to learn more about migration. This is possible when dealing with relatively large game birds.

When I started banding 30 years ago, it was evident that I would be banding small birds, that few of mine would be taken by others and by the same token, I would get very few birds banded by others. In other words, recoveries would be only the frosting on the cake. It was evident also that the maximum amount of information would be obtained by careful processing of the birds I handled and reprocessing under appropriate conditions when they were recaptured. Needless to say I did not work out the appropriate processes all at once but at least I acquired material that gave some indication of local population sizes and in some cases a measure of mortality. As time went on other possible problems appeared including age changes and indications of site tenacity, information on molt and even on items of feather structure. In other words, I have plenty to keep me busy regardless of whether I ever hear of any of my birds at a distance. However, it is obvious that this requires one to band constantly over a period of years in one locality. In the 20 years that I have lived in North Carolina I have banded well over 30,000 birds in my own yard. Returns amount to nearly 300 a year.

Charles H. Blake  
Hillsborough, North Carolina

## Letters

I have read with interest the articles on the future and objectives of banding over the past year. It seems to me that the issue of educational use of banding does indeed need considerably more attention. While I cannot pretend to enough erudition to completely understand Mr. Bray's article, the points made by Mr. Reed are only too true.

None of us want to give up our banding because we are not getting enough returns, however; so let's put it to better and more valid use. Only those involved in stations such as Island Beach where tremendous migrations are concentrated can truly band enough numbers of any one species to expect returns that are useful.

What of the backyard, nature center and school-yard bander like myself? What are we really teaching by banding a dozen or so birds daily for "Demonstration" purposes?

(1) It is amazing how many people do not know what to do with a band, particularly on a songbird, should they find one. In lectures throughout Northern Westchester County I have heard many stories of banded birds buried or otherwise disposed of for lack of knowledge (I always carry a dead banded bird among my specimens). Therefore the more people, especially children, we reach, the more returns we should get.

(2) The opportunity to meet a chickadee in person awakens a greater appreciation in the average person for the marvelous creature a bird really is. Again — the more awareness, the more protection.

(3) We must all understand that it is not just well-publicized endangered species that require our study, but the garden-variety birds and those of our sanctuaries also need study and management. The importance of *all* birds as environmental monitors cannot be over-stressed.

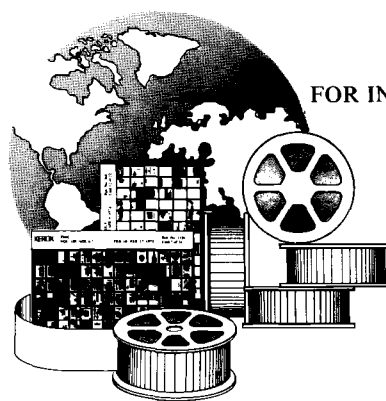
(4) As pointed out in Mr. Hadow's article on Downy Woodpeckers (NABB 1;4), contributions to ornithology can and are being made constantly by lay persons (Charlton Ogburn, in his book *The Adventure of Birds*, calls us "ornithophiles"). Therefore "turning on" kids to birds must be an absolute mission with all of us. Think too of the enrichment you will add to anyone's lifetime by increasing his awareness of birds. I know a number of banders in my area who are doing all of these things. We could count our numbers not in the birds banded,

but in the people enlightened. I can also think of many areas where our tax money is spent that I consider much less worthy!

Let's see EBBA get a good education committee going, and have some input from banders who are doing this good work.

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