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Use of Banding Data

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Use of banding data

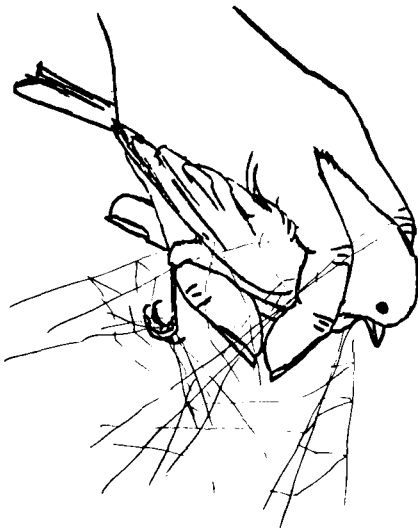
Stephen M. Russell

Each of us who bands gathers useful information which may never be utilized. We weigh and measure birds and may note something about the extent of molt, fat levels, and the development of a brood patch or cloacal protuberance. These data are not filed with the Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL). A number of birds are recaptured many times, and information from them could provide much insight on longevity and on seasonal changes. But retrap data also remain with the bander. When a bander becomes inactive, much valuable information may be lost.

Approximately 75 banders from across the country met on 21 March 1980 during the joint meeting of the Cooper and Wilson Ornithological Societies in Corpus Christi, Texas, to discuss ways of better utilizing information gathered during banding. The two hours allotted for the meeting were inadequate to enumerate all problems, much less resolve them. The first part of the meeting was devoted to reports on activities at large banding stations, and descriptions of cooperative banding studies.

George Jonkel, Chief of the BBL, expressed enthusiasm for plans to utilize banding data more effectively but was clear in expressing the limitations of the BBL's resources. The BBL has some return data in its files, but prospects for additional processing of return data are not good. Nor is it likely that the BBL can process new types of data (measurements, weights, etc.)

Several persons commented on projects at their respective banding stations. Kathleen Anderson described some of the projects at Manomet Bird Observatory. Banding (12,000-19,000 birds annually) has been one of the major activities in the 11 years of its existence; data are used in a variety of ways, but long-term baseline information on population changes is an important goal. Molt studies, shorebird distributions, and microwave effects on birds are some of the other research areas. We learned from Kenneth Parkes that the Powdermill Nature Preserve east of Pittsburgh now has stored data in the Carnegie Museum computer on over 200,000 birds handled! Later this spring they will be ready to begin analyses; one of the first will be concerned with migration studies. Powdermill is well along in the use of computer processing, and their efforts in analyses may well establish patterns for other large stations. David DeSante described banding studies at Point Reyes Bird Observatory. Including their Farallon Island studies, they have entries on nearly 200,000 birds (including retraps). Monitoring migrations and



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talked about subsequent actions. The main topic concerned the possibility of establishing a central repository for data not collected or not utilized by the BBL. We concluded that if one central place could be established with adequate computer facilities and staff, it could store and process banding data for many banders. Such a center could:

- 1) Store data not filed by the BBL
- 2) Make data available for cooperative projects
- 3) Perform basic data processing and statistical analyses for banders contributing their data.

There is a long way to go in setting up a central repository. It requires people with enthusiasm for the project and with some computer expertise (and it requires computer facilities). The project will require money — our estimate of \$20,000-\$30,000 would initiate the project and also process several thousand records. This probably would be an appropriate undertaking for some large bird observatory, and efforts are being made now to get this project underway. But no one has resolved the question of how to raise the funds in a matter of a few months. As is the case with many new projects, the initial funding is the bottleneck. Once underway, and with evidence of its usefulness expressed in numbers of studies supported and papers published, funding should be more available.

In summary, there is considerable interest among banders in doing more with the data taken from the birds handled than is now being done. There is added awareness that much valuable data are lost when banders become inactive. It is essential that banders use standardized methods in taking data and that they record it on appropriate forms. Cooperative projects are practical only when data from different banders are compatible. Efforts are being made to establish a central repository for banding data (that is not otherwise collected or utilized by the BBL). One of the repository's chief functions would be to provide basic computer services for banders who do not have access to computers. And when it come to developing momentum for initiating and conducting studies, team up with other banders and pool expertise!

Initial steps were taken at Corpus Christi to advance the usefulness of banding studies substantially. This is a time for sharing of ideas (on everything from banding analyses to raising money), enthusiasm, and expertise. ♦

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