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Commentary on the 1982 Annual Report

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Commentary on the 1982 Annual Report

W. Ray Salt

That someone so long removed from the banding scene should comment on the 1982 bird banding report of the WBBA is presumptuous. This I pointed out to Dr. McNicholl when he made the request. But Martin is both persistent and persuasive; he refused to accept my protests of ignorance and inadequacy, so the following is offered as the view of a long-time non-member and non-bander. Today as I write I wish that I had been adamant in refusal. Yet I do hold opinions on the subject of bird banding, some of which seemed to creep into "From the President," (NABB 7:71, 1982), and what better opportunity to present them than herein!

The Annual Report for 1982 is presented in two parts which are admirably suited to a variety of forms of analysis. My admiration and compliments go to the compiler, Philip M. Walters. I shall not deny the reader the pleasure of scanning the report in order to note, almost at a glance, who banded the most birds and the most species, which species were banded in greatest numbers and which the least, how his or her own efforts compared with those of others, and so on (see accompanying table). Nor shall I deny the statistician the excitement of extracting the nuggets of his own specific interests from such a rich body of ore. But one point likely to be overlooked by all but a few old-timers with good memories struck me forcefully. That was a considerable increase in proportion of "professional/academic" or "agency" banders compared with "amateur/backyard" or "non-agency" banders. So I did a little analysis of my own.

Although the Report does not lend itself to a clear distinction between the two, I found that 157, or 43%, of active banders and 25, or 57%, of sub-permittees appeared to be supported by some agency such as a government wildlife service or an educational institution. If these figures err, I believe it is on the conservative side. Thus about half of the banders in 1982 operated under sponsorship presumably for financial gain or professional advancement. Figures from the 1930s are not now available to me but my recollection is that in those days the volunteer backyard or garden-variety bander was heavily predominant.

Just when the trend towards "agency" banding started to show ascendancy I do not know, but I would hazard a guess that "project" banding fostered it. Certainly the requirement of a stated project in order to receive a permit saw the end of the banding careers of many "backyard" banders including myself. I am, therefore,

delighted to see that Edgar T. Jones and Kathryn B. Burk still enjoy great success in their "backyard" operations. Eddie's meticulously kept records were generously made available to me for use in publications on Alberta birds, and I found time to extract for publication only a small portion of the valuable information contained therein. Similarly, the records of Kathryn Burk and dozens of other dedicated banders must be equally rich source material which, I'm sure, would be willingly opened to examination by serious researchers. We need many more of this kind of bander.

Over the years, with the increase of "agency" banders, there has been a tendency towards identifying them as professionals and "non-agency" banders as amateurs. Such a distinction is odious since it carries with it the implication that the latter are less knowledgeable than the former. In my experience the average backyard bander is no amateur; he has breadth and depth in local taxonomic knowledge which many "agency" banders might envy. If the words amateur and professional are to creep into the parlance of bird-banding, it can only be on the same basis as in sports where the professional receives tangible rewards for his work while the amateur does not.

It is probably obvious by now that, like others mentioned in your President's message (*loc. cit.*), I hold a brief for the "non-agency" or "backyard" bander. But I would be among the first to acknowledge that agency-supported projects have produced a mass of published information which might otherwise not have been obtained. I saw the difficulties and discouragement that Dr. William Rowan, my former mentor, colleague, and friend, had to face while pursuing his initial experiments on the effects of photoperiodism on birds, and cannot help wondering if his productive life would have been extended if agency assistance had been as readily available then as it is today. He accepted advice and help from layman and expert alike. He would have accepted agency assistance gladly but was absolutely intolerant of bureaucratic control.

My great fear today is that growth of a mechanistic bureaucracy could fail to recognize that "agency" and "non-agency" banding are not mutually exclusive. The decline and ultimate elimination of "backyard" banding would be a disaster, and societies such as the WBBA would do well to ensure that the "non-agency" bander does not become an endangered species!

833 Fargo Place, Victoria, BC V9C 2L9.

The 1982 banding effort

Martin K. McNicholl

Professor Emeritus W. Ray Salt has provided the above commentary in comparison with his active banding period in the 1930s and 1940s, partly to promote discussion. While not all readers will share Professor Salt's views that a proliferation of agency banding may endanger non-agency banding, the trends he outlines of an increasing proportion of agency banders does have implications to our ongoing discussion of the relative benefits of general banding in comparison with more directed efforts, and may be relevant to the general decline in banding effort in WBBA territory pointed out by Dan Taylor and Stephen Ervin in the past two commentaries. Ray Salt's own banding experience was at both the "backyard" level, when he banded large numbers of birds in rural Alberta while he was a school teacher, and at the university level, where his study on the cloacal protuberance of the Vesper Sparrow and other passerines led to one of the mostly widely-used sex-determination tools of banders today.

For whatever reasons, banding in WBBA territory was again down in 1982. As shown in Table 1, compiled by Eleanor Radke, the mean number of species per bander of 10.5 and mean number of birds per bander of 338 were both the lowest figures in the last decade. Similarly, the species total of 383 is the lowest since 1974 and second lowest in a decade, and the total birds banded of 122,147 is higher in the decade only than the 119,547 of 1975. These declines do not result from poor reporting; in fact, the 361 reports ties with 1979 for highest in the decade. The increase in reporting from 314 in 1981 was,

in part, thanks to Canadian Wildlife Service's action of mailing report forms to all Canadian banders in WBBA territory, regardless of membership in the society. In spite of the increase in Canadian reporting, Canadian totals were substantially down, to 17,729 from 1981's 29,384. Similar declines were shown in every WBBA reporting area except in California, with especially marked declines from Wyoming/Colorado (19,242 in 1981; 7,379 in 1982) and Hawaii/Pacific Islands (8,116 in 1981; 4,509 in 1982). Reasons for these declines are unclear, but probably reflect a combination of a greater proportion of directed studies and the marked decline in funding for such studies in most (if not all) jurisdictions in WBBA territory.

Twenty-five species were banded in totals over 1,000, 4 fewer than last year, with the Mallard's 16,227 the highest. The total species of which 3 or fewer were banded was up 10 to 65 (plus redpoll sp.), including such very common WBBA territory species as Ruffed Grouse, Common Nighthawk, and Eastern Kingbird. Stephen Ervin pointed out that the 1981 total of 53,853 waterfowl banded was a significant drop; 1982's total of 31,201 is substantially lower. Twenty-nine waterfowl species and one hybrid were banded, including an astonishing 236 hybrid Blue-winged/Cinnamon Teal! Besides Mallard, waterfowl with over 1000 banded were Canada Goose (7973), Northern Pintail (1663), and Blue-winged Teal (1251), — the geese up from 1981, but both ducks markedly down. The 916 American Kestrels again attained the highest total of the 4,212 diurnal raptors of 21 spe-

Table 1. Ten-year summary, 1973 through 1982

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Including all sources										
Number of reports—active	164	189	236	242	223	311	361	282	314	361
Reports of less than 100 birds	73	67	116	98	104	157	156	119	146	59
Species banded ¹	377	393	412	410	444	416	448	407	403	383 ¹
Birds banded	137,408	139,103	119,547	149,964	149,335	164,224	194,756	157,787	153,585	122,147
Average species/bander	15.2	18.3	13.6	14.3	12.1	12.3	11.9	11.7	11.2	10.5
Average birds/bander	723	658	514	961	564	624	581	560	489	338
Birds banded by area										
Alaska	6,216	2,164	4,185	9,451	19,621	21,594	15,311	7,580	8,781	6,286
Yukon, B.C., Alberta	7,307	4,069	9,086	22,334	17,409	16,641	28,401	34,557	29,384	17,729
Washington, Oregon	14,963	12,598	10,597	19,156	13,013	15,366	17,796	17,366	18,441	13,709
Idaho, Montana	10,019	11,403	5,999	13,244	16,235	16,113	16,049	13,330	11,642	9,945
California	46,428	41,110	43,243	39,363	35,162	40,741	57,708	38,216	32,782	38,978
Nevada, Utah	6,112	7,392	6,485	4,380	5,579	5,031	5,927	4,444	7,426	7,365
Wyoming, Colorado	35,973	36,643	32,232	33,630	29,815	32,781	34,906	25,278	19,242	7,379
Arizona, New Mexico	10,051	11,421	7,614	8,406	8,569	6,951	9,604	16,910	17,548	16,028
Mexico	43	239	106	—	737	561	329	106	223	219
Hawaii, Pacific Islands	296	180	208	648	1,596	8,441	9,725	6,083	8,116	4,509

¹ To maintain consistency with previous reports, the species summary is for continental birds only.

cies, followed by Peregrine with 469 (up from 1981) and Red-tailed Hawk at 409. The Common Barn-Owl at 498 was down from 1981, but led by far the 15 species of owls totalling 540 birds (combined). Charadriiformes were down again to 9,009 birds, of which 1,137 were shorebirds, 4 jaegers, 5,820 larids, 47 skimmers and 2,001 alcids. Snowy Plover led shorebirds, with 316 banded; Western Gulls led larids with 2,242; and Cassin's Auklet at 1,375 topped the alcids. Of species banded in both years, 3 shorebirds increased in 1982, while 19 were below 1981 totals. All larids banded in both years were down, with especially striking declines in Glaucous-winged Gull from 1,325 to 7 and in Ring-billed Gull from 1,241 to 4. In contrast, the 515 Black Terns constituted a welcome number for a bird not banded at all in 1981.

Five alcids were down, 3 up. The White-winged and Mourning were again the most-banded doves, with a slight increase in banding of the White-winged and decrease in the Mourning. Cuckoos, caprimulgids, and swifts were all banded in low numbers only. As usual, hummingbird totals reflect specific studies even more clearly than most groups, with most species made up from the efforts of primarily a single observer. Three banders, F. Baldrige, W.A. Calder, and L. Carpenter, were responsible for highest species totals in all hummingbirds. Rufous Hummingbirds at 880 were up substantially from 1981, with Carpenter's 463 itself approaching the 1981 total of 527. The 93 Calliope were a

very welcome improvement over the one banded in 1981. No woodpeckers were banded in very large numbers, with the Red-shafted race of the Northern Flicker scoring highest at 67, slightly up from last year. The "fringillid" *per.se* and emberizids, accounted for the highest number of passerine species with over 1,000 individuals banded, with House Finch up at 4,986, the Oregon race of the Dark-eyed Junco up at 3,228, Gambel's race of the White-crowned Sparrow down at 2,596, Pine Siskin up at 2,067, Common Redpoll up at 1,627, Song Sparrow up at 1,188, Chipping Sparrow down at 1,087, and Evening Grosbeak down at 1,011. Other passerines of 1,000 or more banded birds included 2,973 Mountain Bluebird (substantially up), 1,949 Audubon's race of Yellow-rumped Warbler (up), 1,662 Red-winged Blackbird (substantially down), 1,562 American Robin (substantially up), 1,459 Tree Swallows (substantially down), and 1,205 House Sparrows (up).

Banding effort, as shown by overall and species totals do not by themselves indicate banding contribution. In 1937, Professor Salt suggested in *News From The Bird Banders*, WBBA's journal at that time, that inclusion of recoveries in relation to totals of each species, might help to indicate the full value of banding studies. We hope that the station reports soon to appear in these pages partially fulfill this function.

320 Markham Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6G 2K9.

Elgin B. (Oxy) Hurlbert, 1904-1982

Captain Elgin Blaine (Oxy) Hurlbert, USN Retired, bird bander of Pacific Grove, California, died 29 August 1982. Oxy, as we all knew him, was born 24 September 1904 in Campbell, California. He attended Occidental College (henceforth "Oxy"), San Jose State University, University of California at Berkeley, Navy Line School at Newport, RI, and the Monterey Naval Post Graduate School. He married Winifred (Wini) Rugh in 1927. He is survived by Wini, their son Jerry and daughter Jean, eight grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. Oxy survived the sinking of the Yorktown during the Battle of Midway in June 1942 and then served in the Atlantic on anti-submarine and convoy escort duty through 1946. Among duty assignments in the 40s and 50s he served with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, two and one-half years in Japan, and finally with the Twelfth Naval District in San Francisco until retirement in 1960.

In retirement Oxy became active in many organizations with natural history and environmental objectives. He was a Life Member of the Western Bird Banding Association and served as President of its

Northern Division, Member of the American Ornithologists' Union, Cooper Ornithological Society, National Audubon Society, American Birding Association, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History Association, and many others.

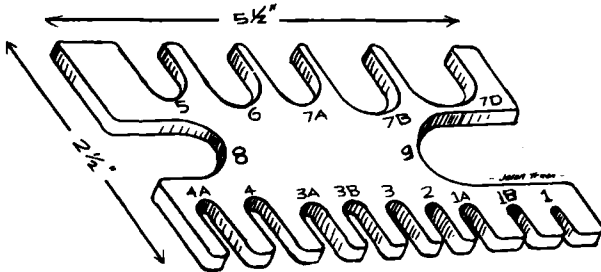
An unabashed back-yard bander, Oxy took full advantage of their small well-planted patio-garden between their guest house and cozy home on Mermaid Avenue, overlooking Monterey Bay with its pelicans, shearwaters, gulls, and sea otters. Among his specialties were Pine Siskins (1309) and three races of White-crowned Sparrows (789). He intercepted several Monterey Peninsula vagrants including Dickcissel, Lucy's and Prairie Warblers, and Ovenbird. Captain Hurlbert utilized his considerable knowledge of ornithology, bird banding, natural history, and environmental matters to testify in public hearings as well as in lectures and demonstrations for adult and youth groups. Wini has deposited his banding records, including many weights and measurements, banding equipment, and some journals and other publications with San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory.

L. Richard Mewaldt

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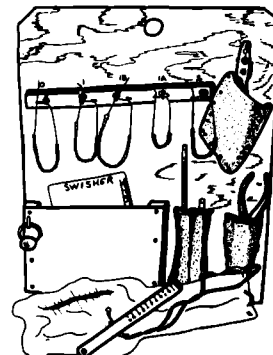
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