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A Bird Banders Dream

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I suppose all people who are interested in bird banding started out first as bird watchers because they enjoyed the wildness and the beautiful colors of our feathered friends. Some of us went on to become semi-professional Ornithologists, others went on to be Professional Ornithologists. Usually those people interested in the study maintain their interest from teenage bird walks until they spend their last years watching the Goldfinches attack the thistle seed feeders at age 90.

Banders look forward to banding as many species as possible and as large numbers as possible. Studies of populations, migrations, nesting distributions, longevity and many other interesting problems grow out of the banding programs. Colony banding offers a chance to band many thousands of birds. With the hope that several recovery records will be forth coming in later years.

It is always a thrill to recapture your own birds in subsequent years, but a greater thrill when you recapture some other banders bird. In reality only a few such banding recoveries are made. Approximately 3% of banded birds are recovered out of the many thousands banded. Recaptures of another banders birds would average less than .03% of the banded birds.

Longevity records spark a great deal of interest. In order to get such records you must start banding when you are 18 years old, and keep on every year until you are 88 years old.

To make a longevity record legal you have to be lucky enough to have someone find one of your banded birds and have them report the band to the Bird Banding Lab. After the Bird Banding Lab reports the band back to you, you have to check with the finder by letter and find out the circumstances of the recovery of the bird and the band. Many disappointments come when you find out that the band had been found years before and not reported for that year. Once in a while a very unusual circumstance gives an interesting recovery.

In 1979 the banding office reported one of our birds recovered at Port Huron, Michigan. This bird was a Common Tern, banded on Lone Tree Island in Saginaw Bay in July 1934. This would be a 45 year recovery record. Following up with the finder of the band we found that an archeology dig was being undertaken near the Blue Water Bridge that crosses the St. Clair River. The band

was found at the depth of 12 inches under the surface. You could not claim that bird as a longevity record, because I suspect that the young bird in its first migration was weak and died along the shore of St. Clair River. This is probably the only recovery of a Band found in an Archeology dig.

Now comes the oldest confirmed recovery record up to this time from the Ludwig's Banding records. Band No. 0386-48013. Ring Billed Gull banded June 27, 1938 on Scare Crow Island east of Alpena, Michigan at the mouth of Thunder Bay, Lake Huron. This bird was reported to the Fish and Wildlife Dept. (so labeled in 1938) February 1938. Reported by Mark L. Trauernicht, 4058 S.E. Troy Avenue, St. Francis, Wisc. 53207. The bird was found in the Eldorado Swamp, Wisconsin. To be sure of the identification I wrote MR. Trauernicht and asked him the condition the bird was in when he found it. Here I quote his letter.

"Dear Mr. Ludwig,

In regards to your letter about the Ring Billed Gull. It came off a dead bird floating belly up in Eldorado Marsh area, north of our Horicon Wild area. It was pretty well decomposed already. I was jump shooting ducks back in the sloughs. I have been a water fowler for going on 37 years, and belonging to Ducks Unlimited, quite up to the banding of birds and movements. I pick up all bands I find, and send them in for I know someone must have a record of them somewhere. As near as I can remember it (the bird) had a black ring on the bill. I hope I have been a service to you in search of your knowledge of travel and whereabouts of this bird. Keep up the good work. If it weren't for people taking an interest in Wildlife I am sure there would be nothing left.

Thanks for your interest sir,

Mark L. Trauernicht"

End of Quote.

Obviously Mr. Trauernicht has been a bird lover for years. This Ring Billed Gull was recovered November, 1982, making this the oldest recovery record for the species ever recovered. The record is 44 years and 5 months.

Having been banding colony birds every year since 1929, we now are finding many recoveries that exceed 20 and 30 years. The Ludwig's, since 1927 have banded approximately 1% of all the birds banded through the United States Banding Program. As I say, band lots every year and after fifty years you may have an exciting record to report.