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Bander's Forum

As another severe winter starts to fade away, our thoughts turn to eternal spring and its hopes for new life and growth. As a bander, it turns to thoughts of migrations and the frustrating fact that we still know so little about the movements of individual birds of many species or the mechanics behind their timing and routes.

Every now and then someone asks "Why do I as an individual, band birds?" What can I possibly add to our knowledge of bird biology that the professionals, academics, graduate students, etc. don't already know? I guess the answer to this question is the real reason I band and the reason we must all fight hard to perpetuate the support of the amateur banding program by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

There are not enough professional or academic personnel involved in non-game banding studies to provide the kind of data base necessary to determine individual migration routes and movements of each species across the continent. That is why the Fish and Wildlife Service originally supported the whole concept of non-game banding programs by amateurs across the continent.

It bothers me greatly when I feel that I as well as other banders do not get the support and encouragement from the banding office which we need to do a better job of conducting our banding operations. What support do we really get? A revised manual every 5-10 years with more rules and regulations that have to be followed or we have the threat of our license revoked. An annual report card of all the mistakes which we make on our banding returns which accumulates in our permanent file showing the incompetent job we are doing. The added hassle we get for trying to work with endangered species which really need our help.

For two years now Inland has not even had a representative from the Banding Lab at our annual meeting. For years we have tried unsuccessfully to get the banding lab to have a column in NABB providing us all with hints and ideas for how each of us can improve our banding operation. I feel the banding lab has a tremendous responsibility to help develop more banders not fewer, and to provide the support (in the field) for all of us to do a better job and not just criticize the job we are doing.

People do things because they enjoy them and feel they are worthwhile. The success of any program is based on these feelings. The amateur banding program in North America is one of those programs. Yet we, you and I, who are involved in the guts of the program do not get the support of the people responsible for running the show. Why not?

When a new development such as a highway, strip mine, bridge, oil refinery, power plant or whatever is coming into an area, how many banders are requested to do a banding study in the area? I, in 25 years of banding, have never been asked to do such a study. In fact, just the opposite has occurred. When opposed to a development I have to overcome other professionals and academics who challenge my knowledge and ability.

I have never seen a letter or policy statement from the Fish and Wildlife Service stating that a whole network of trained volunteers (amateur banders) across the continent are available and would be excellent resource people for EIS statements.

It seems to me the Department of Transportation, the Department of Energy and the Department of Agriculture should be aware of the availability of these people for their projects. Instead, we find consulting firms are hired for two or three days to make observations by persons who don't even know birds to prepare basically worthless EIS statements. I have never yet read an EIS statement which included but a tip of the iceberg of the total effects the proposed development would have on the bird life using the area.

We, as banders, must use our own time, pay for our own traps, nets, transportation and other expenses and yet never get a recommendation from the Banding Lab that we would be available and would be good resource people for these EIS studies by other departments. At times it seems like they are embarrassed by those of us out in the field (in the front line) doing the work.

I guess I get concerned when I hear so many banders (not just 1 or 2) comment that they have lost their enthusiasm for banding and cannot recommend anyone to start banding. Unless the Banding Lab changes its attitude towards the amateur banding program its future is written on the wall, and it isn't good. The Fish and Wildlife Service and State conservation agencies are looking for public monies to support their programs. Perhaps they should learn that if they would support the public (the truly interested public — the amateur bander) perhaps it would reflect back to them ten fold.

I have not yet given up hope. Spring is here. Let's all try to plant some good seeds this year so we can reap a good harvest. My comments above are my seed for this new column in NABB. Send your thoughts to me and I'll print them for other people to read.

Terrence N. Ingram