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Researchers Negligent in Use of Banding Data

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I earlier suggested (N. Am. Bird Bander 10:130, 1985) that banders at "Operation Recovery" stations and officials responsible for policies followed in publication of *North American Bird Bander* could perform an added service to science if operation of the stations were standardized to meet certain requirements and standardized summaries were published in *North American Bird Bander*. Unfortunately, this proposal places a faith in ornithological researchers that may be partly unjustified. It is my purpose now to consider some of the weaknesses and failings of current ornithological research in the United States.

To make available for use by researchers data collected at "Operation Recovery" stations meets no assurance that the data will be used in a responsible manner. A wealth of unused data now exists in the personal files of banders and in the files of the Bird Banding Laboratory, and this is one symptom of an unhealthy condition in ornithological research in the United States. In some cases when banding data were used conclusions were different than they would be with use of data from other areas or a more appropriate method of analysis. Also, questions go unanswered because of failure of researchers to make full use of available banding data and thus qualify themselves to offer suggestions to banders of things to be done to address additional problems with use of banding data. Researchers must take part of the blame for the fact that simply placing bands on birds has become the end goal of many banders.

The ideal situation is for the bander and researcher to be the same person for in being a bander a researcher has unique advantages recognizing problems that can be addressed with use of banding data. As for myself, I must admit to coming to be less of a bander as I became more of a researcher. I see my experience as a bander to be a preparation for research with use of banding data and my experience as a researcher a help in understanding why banders often do not continue on to become researchers. Banders cannot fail to be interested in the fate of birds they band and thus be incipient researchers, but their interests are too often stifled by influences coming from researchers.

One bander declined my offer to make him a joint author of a paper I had written using data he furnished, saying he could not join me in my disagreements with the experts although he agreed with my conclusions. Another

bander told me that she feels like crawling under a bed when a certain expert gets up to speak. With use of pomposity and gobbledygook, experts have succeeded in making ornithological research in the United States inappropriately forbidding instead of properly inspiring.

Ornithological research has become such a "me too" thing that an author daring to do original research can expect to have his or her offerings rejected. One editor pointedly told me that his journal would publish nothing failing to support ideas currently accepted by the group publishing the journal. The modern proliferation of publications on ornithological research is more a manifestation of the strength of the "me too" philosophy in ornithological research than an indication of progress in accumulation of new facts.

The standard procedure now used for refereeing manuscripts is an excellent tool for inhibiting progress, and it is often used by referees to protect their own ideas—and mistakes. Referees, supported by editors, commonly act in a pontifical manner in rejection of manuscripts reporting original research, leaving no opportunity for interchange of ideas. Actually, I can see no justification in offering for publication a manuscript containing only information and views already published. We do not need new research proving that birds can fly. I like to see research authentic enough that the next step builds on rather than testing its authenticity.

In a false use of science researchers sometimes undertake to displace common sense with use of statistical tests. One researcher whose paper I refereed was able to show with statistical tests that counts of blackbirds leaving roosting sites could be made with laboratory precision although a reference available to him but which he chose not to cite reported that counts by different observers of the same congregation varied from five to twenty million birds. Of course, the defense of researchers is that research is such a complex process that nobody but them can understand it.

I urge banders and readers of *North American Bird Bander* to resist the intimidating activities of researchers and to insist on publication of understandable articles using banding data. Ornithological research in the United States can be made an effective quest for new information, interest of banders in research can be newly invigorated, and reading of research papers can be brought to have a new attraction.

(Eastern)