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Eastern Regional News

Eastern Bird Banding Association

Founded 1923

President's Message

EBBA is an organization made up of many diverse people with a common interest. The common interest is obviously the study of birds through banding, but the diversity of our backgrounds and the approach we take toward research, is harder to pin-point.

Some of us are academicians, that is, they pursue ornithological research from a scientific point of view. They methodically lay out the problem, form a thesis, find out what methods they need to employ to prove their thesis and generally they publish the results. These people are, however, in the minority. Most of us are career-people in different fields, fields unrelated to scientific study, and thus we see bird-study in a different perspective. It is often this latter group that's trying harder and yet they don't seem to get anywhere. Sound familiar? Well, you're not alone.

In this diversity lies EBBA's plight. If all EBBA members were academicians, we would be able to fill NABB many times over. There is no doubt in my mind that 'the rest of us' need help in publishing for NABB, but what we should address ourselves to is not the writing of the paper (that comes last), but the collection of data. If you collect data haphazardly, you won't be able to publish, even if you tried.

As you are banding, don't you sometimes wonder why you are getting the species that you're banding, why one year the population is different from the year before? I could go on and on asking 'WHY' about many phenomena that occur to me as I am banding, but the main thing I'm trying to emphasize is that you won't be able to study anything, *unless* you ask 'WHY' frequently. Now you must select one of your 'WHY's' and find some way to study the matter. That's done by making a statement, an ASSUMPTION and then you try to prove the assumption (thesis) you've set as your goal. You do this methodically. That is, you keep accurate notes about all aspects of the study, and anything that might affect the outcome of your study. Regardless whether you prove your thesis or not (negative information is often just as important), you then have something you can publish. And you'd want to do so, because when you do something methodically and correctly, you know that no one can shoot

any holes in your efforts and what you have is something worthy of consideration.

I've known so many banders who year after year, band hundreds of birds. When questioned why they do this, the answer is always inconclusive. Reasons often heard are: "I want to see year to year fluctuations", or "Look at all the recoveries I could be getting." Let's face it, unless you band thousands of birds each year, the number of recoveries you'll get are minimal, and checking annual fluctuations is much more accurately done with binoculars! Do you know what percentage of birds are captured out of the migratory flock that's passing by your station, and if this percentage is constant? Of course you don't. Neither do I! So stop this foolishness of banding hundreds of birds per week. It proves *nothing*.

Having said this, and hopefully having motivated someone out there into wondering "What if Fred is right?" — I hope you'll take this moment as a crossroads. You have to make a decision! Start assimilating all the WHY's that you can think of, on paper. Then look at the species that normally come through in numbers, or that breed or winter in your area. Make a selection based on the criteria you've put together and start a new study trying to find that answer to some of these questions! Then, after a couple of months, look again at the thesis you've formed, and determine that you have not unduly strayed from your original investigation. Finally, when you're satisfied you've spent enough time investigating, either send a paper to our Editors for publication in NABB, OR, contact our Education Committee, if you feel you need help developing your study, OR, if development is no problem but presentation is, contact our Publication Committee. But whatever you do, if you have publishable material, DON'T sit on it for year after year — let your knowledge benefit someone else!

Let's GET INVOLVED . . . let's DO IT!

Fred S. Schaeffer
President