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## Banders' Forum

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# Banders' Forum

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## A Bander's Nightlight

For many years, banders have used battery-powered headlamps to provide adequate lighting during dawn, dusk, and dark of night to assist with net tending, skull aging, record keeping, and other banding-related activities. Headlamps offer the advantage over a hand-held flashlight or fuel-burning lantern of keeping both hands free for banding activities and allowing the light source to be aimed where needed. Headlamps suffer, however, from requiring the carrying of a bulky, heavy, six-volt battery and the necessity of dealing with terminal clips or connectors.

A new, miniaturized, clip-on light is now available that will be welcomed by some banders as a replacement for the headlamp. It is sold as Panasonic Flexible Light, Model BF-332EBP. I found mine in the L. L. Bean catalogue as catalogue number 6247PP at the modest price of \$7 delivered. It consists of a  $3\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times 2$  in. battery pack, containing three AA cells, that weighs 123 g. with the batteries (a six-volt battery alone weighs over 600 g.). The pack has an alligator clip for attachment to one's clothing. A 5-in. flexible, gooseneck bulb holder allows the light to be aimed where needed. Since then, I found in a camera store another model made by Tamrac. It uses two AA cells in series and is not quite as compact as the Panasonic. It costs \$4.95.

Nighttime owl and shorebird banders may need a headlamp or flashlight to assist them in walking difficult terrain and may not find this clip-on light useful for that purpose. However, songbird banders who need extra illumination at dawn and dusk will find this light very useful due to its compactness, light weight, and intensity at distances up to several feet.

Robert P. Yunick  
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## Response to Comments on Review of Bluebird Book

A short reply to Reber Layton's comments (NABB 12:109, 1987) on my review of the bluebird book co-authored by him and the Dews (NABB 12:22, 1987) is in order. While Mr. Layton points out various pages on which topics I found lacking are supposedly covered, his concept of adequate coverage is very much more superficial than mine. For example, neither I nor the many people I have talked to consider the mere depiction of a House Sparrow trap with a few lines of description of the trap on p. 155 as covering the dangers such traps pose to other birds; nor the very slight mention of "squirrels" among other predators on p. 157 as covering the topic of Flying Squirrels as predators of bluebirds. I did make a mistake, however; I overlooked one aspect of those letters the Dews wrote about their trail over a run of two miles or more, and that is: there is more written about the Audubon meetings, a garage sale, various species of birds (over 15 to be exact), the Caribbean, hurricane Elena, overnight trips to Memphis, Jackson, and New Orleans and "their yard bluebirds" than their *actual* bluebird trail. My reference to . . . "little new appearing in the book" . . . referred to the considerable portion that had appeared previously in *Sialia*. While any book on bluebirds would inevitably include several references to papers in that journal, the relative proportion of papers from *Sialia* compared with the few papers from other journals on bluebirds still tells me that a prime intention of the book was to promote the North American Bluebird Society - especially in view of the fact that this book has a total of 222 pages and the North American Bluebird Society and/or *Sialia* is mentioned no less than 38 times. The general superficial nature of the book would seriously prevent me from recommending it to naturalists and the reading public in general. Its total lack of detail on banding makes it of even less interest to banders. In his frantic attempt to discredit me, Mr. Layton failed miserably to make a mental note of one of the most important components, and in not doing so he totally lost sight of the fact that the review was done by a *bander*, for *banders*, for publication in a *banding* journal.

Mrs. Roger W. Foy

Editor's note: This response closes discussion on the book in question. M.K.M

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# Bander's Forum

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## Warbler Population Declines

**William M. Gilbert**  
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I share the concern of many ornithologists regarding recently reported declines in the numbers of migrant North American passerines, particularly wood warblers. A major implication of these reports has been that the cutting of tropical rain forests, the winter habitat of many of the species, is a major cause. Most information on the subject has been anecdotal, however, and to date I have seen no careful study evaluating a possible decline (although such a study, based upon Breeding Bird Survey data, apparently is in progress; Sam Droege, personal communication). It is because of the importance of this matter, and the need for its reliable evaluation, that I feel compelled to comment on Paul Stewart's article "Decline in Numbers of Wood Warblers in Spring and Autumn Migrations through Ohio," *No. Amer. Bird Bander* 12:58-60.

I have serious reservations as to whether Stewart's study supports a conclusion of a general decrease in wood warbler populations. My reservations lie in the broad-based nature of the reported netting declines. Each of the 18 species showed declines in capture frequency between 1974 and 1985. If these decreases reflect a general reduction in warbler population numbers because of destruction of winter habitat, then it follows that the winter habitats of each of the 18 species should have been damaged to some extent. But while significant habitat damage may recently have occurred within regions of tropical rain forest, this should not hold true for habitats outside of the tropics. For example, the winter ranges of the Yellow-rumped, Palm, and orange-crowned Warblers lie mainly in the southern United States and Mexico. The birds' winter habitats in these regions probably have not been altered enough, if at all, during the past decade so as to account for the steep population declines of these species implied by Stewart's study.

There also are other possible objections to the study. Dave DeSante (personal communication) has suggested that differences between the earlier samples of the 1970's and later samples of the 1980's, might have resulted from extreme, but normal, fluctuations

in annual numbers of individual birds during the two time periods. It also seems possible that some of the warbler species listed in Stewart's study, although wintering in the tropics, might not require virgin rain forest habitat, and thus these would not be seriously affected by possible tropical deforestation.

Concentrating on my original point, however, I have developed a list of North American warbler species which probably would be unaffected by tropical deforestation, based solely on their winter range. This list may be useful to banders who wish to analyze their long-term records for possible evidence of detrimental effects from such deforestation. I would suggest that if records show that one or more of the following species has declined in a fashion similar to that of tropical wintering species, then the general decrease probably was not the result of tropical deforestation. I have indicated the 14 listed species as being eastern (E), western (W), eastern and western (E,W), or restricted (R). The last group comprises species restricted to the southwest U.S. or the Rocky Mountains. They probably would not be encountered by the general bander.

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WARBLER		
E,W	Orange-crowned	<i>Vermivora celati</i>
R	Virginia's	<i>V. virginiae</i>
R	Colima	<i>V. crissalis</i>
R	Lucy's	<i>V. luciae</i>
R	Olive	<i>Peucedramus taeniatus</i>
E,W	Yellow-rumped	<i>Dendroica coronata</i>
W	Black-throated Gray	<i>D. nigrescens</i>
W	Townsend's	<i>D. townsendi</i>
R	Grace's	<i>D. graciae</i>
E	Pine	<i>D. vigosii</i>
E	Palm	<i>D. palmarum</i>
E,W	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
R	Red-faced	<i>Cardellina rubrifrons</i>
R	Painted Redstart	<i>Setophaga picta</i>

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## Warbler Population Declines: A Reply

**Paul A. Stewart**  
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Gilbert raises two main objections to my paper in (12:58-60): (1) winter habitats of each of the 18 species must have been damaged to some extent and (2) population differences between the two time periods, 1974-79 and 1980-85, might have resulted from normal fluctuations in populations of the different species without indicating population declines.

I disagree with Gilbert's claim that similarity in population decline of a species wintering outside of tropical forests compared with those inside can be taken to indicate that general decline in numbers was not caused by tropical deforestation. I claim that what happens to species inside and outside of tropical forests must be assumed to be totally independent. Because a species is not exposed to the decimating factors encountered in tropical forests does not indicate lack of exposure outside to an equally hazardous environment.

If the goal of my study had been to determine the probable role of tropical deforestation in population decline it would, of course, have been proper for me to treat species using tropical forests as a distinct sample. Lacking that goal, I think that a general statement suggesting that tropical deforestation might be a factor in decline of numbers of wood warblers migrating through Ohio was fully justified. In my consideration of decline in numbers of wood warblers migrating through Ohio, I could justifiably have been accused with being out of touch with reality if I had failed to mention tropical deforestation as a possible decimating factor. Anyway the only species on both my list and Gilbert's list are Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, and Palm warblers (*Vermivora celata*, *Dendroica coronata*, and *D. palmarum*, respectively). Thus, my data come near to representing a tropical forest situation.

I am deeply concerned about Gilbert's statement saying that winter habitats in the southern United States and Mexico "have not been altered enough, if at all, during the last decade so as to account for the steep declines of these species implied by Stewart's study." It is much more precise to determine the

condition of a bird's environment by checking on the bird's responses to that environment than to draw conclusions from eyeballing the environment. Even old timers used this principle by testing whether a well was safe for their entry by first introducing a caged canary. Furthermore, Gilbert shows a strange quirk in logic by assuming that the habitat outside of tropical forests has not changed in the last decade enough to cause the indicated decline, then moves on to accept and use the demonstrated decline to argue that decline inside and outside of tropical forests was the same, thus indicating that decline in tropical forests was not caused by deforestation.

As was indicated in the paper criticized by Gilbert, I think that the time periods used, 1974-79 and 1980-1985, were long enough to eclipse annual fluctuations as much as was feasibly possible. I further think that the time periods were long enough to indicate against the probability of periodic fluctuations being a controlling factor in the decline shown. The fact that all 18 species showed at least some decline in numbers gives support to my belief that the indicated decline was general.

Anyway, my major burden in preparing the paper criticized by Gilbert was to press for action on the cause broached in my letter published in *North American Bird Bander* (10:130) suggesting publication in this journal of data suitable for following population trends of birds mist netted at "Operation Recovery" stations. What I am most concerned about is the fact that bird banders are allowing days and years to pass without establishing a data base to show what is happening when so little adjustment is required to address the need. I would be glad to be shown in error if action could be motivated by the error to demonstrate my error. Meanwhile, Howard and Marcella Meahl are making an enormous contribution to ornithology by collecting data suitable for use in following population trends of birds captured in their mist nets.

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## The Privileges and Obligations of Color Banding

**Charles T. Collins**  
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**O**n 1 June 1984 I observed a color banded adult male Evening Grosbeak at a feeder in Estes Park, Colorado. My initial expectation was that the unique combination of color bands on this birds (USF&WS band on the right leg, black, blue, violet color bands on the left leg) could easily be correlated with an exact band number and, consequently, we might have a record of a bird banded at one location, possibly the wintering ground, and visually "recaptured" on its breeding ground. Although such records are not unique, they are not superabundant either. This record was submitted to the Bird Banding Laboratory in October 1985 which in turn contacted the original bander. However, I received no further conformation from the bander and, consequently, I doubt that this observation has resulted in an addition to the band recovery file. Unfortunately, I do not think this is a unique occurrence.

In his essay on "the history, and functions of bird banding [and] bird banders" Jerome Jackson (*No. Amer. Bird Bander*, 8:166-169; 1983) made the point that banding is not a game but a scientific endeavor, which requires "scientific methods, attitudes, and goals." He also states that "in accepting a banding license, every bander ... is accepting a scientific responsibility." His main theme regarding responsibility and professionalism dealt with the obtaining and publishing of scientific information through banding. I would like to extend this theme a bit further to include the responsibility to communicate with and answer queries from others regarding banding operations in a professional manner.

One area clearly needing improved professionalism and scientific responsibility is in the responsiveness of banders to sightings of their color marked birds. We are reminded (W.B. Quay, *No. Amer. Bird Bander*, 10:62; 1985) that auxiliary marking requires special authorization. my point is that within this authorization also comes the obligation to respond to others, banders and the general public alike, who report sightings of your color marked birds. In all too many cases this is just not being done! Notices from banders using auxiliary color markers regularly

appear in *Ornithological Newsletter*, *North American Bird Bander*, and other publications. Their goal is to have field observers report sightings of these marked birds. All information is to be the U.S. Bird Banding Laboratory or the Canadian Banding Office for transmittal to the responsible investigator, even if the bander is known beforehand. The bander then receives a form letter from the Bird Banding Laboratory requesting that he/she respond to the party making the observation. This is also pointed out in the *North American Bird Banding manual* (Vol. 1, page 2-11) which states that "banders are responsible for contacting these people who report marked bird(s) and providing them with information about the bird(s) and their project." Although a simple duplicated form letter with some blank spaces for adding in details would suffice, it is at this point that the process fails. There is no further checking by the Bird Banding Laboratory to see if in fact any response was made. If my experience is typical, it is more often not done than done. My students and I have reported a total of nearly 50 sightings of color marked birds in the last 3 years and have received fewer than 5 responses from the banders of these birds. In one case I received no answer to my personal letter sent directly to the bander asking for details about which colors were being used (on Heermann's Gulls) so that we could more systematically look for them. In another case, the duty of responding had been given to a student assistant who at first informed us that the band combination we had read on an adult Western Gull was in fact currently on a hatching year bird.

Because of my long interest in bird banding and my personal use of auxiliary color markers (bands), I tend to avidly look for color marked birds in appropriate field situations. I thoroughly resent the impoliteness of my fellow banders when they do not respond in even the simplest way to my report of their bird. More

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## Privileges and Obligations... (cont.)


importantly, I realize that a lack of response will quickly curb any inclination of other observers, particularly non-banders, to report color banded birds. This will impact all investigators alike, and particularly those who are actively seeking sightings from the general public. Thus, the ingratitude of some may decrease the report rate for all, and therein lies the real rub. Here is where I see the obligation and professionalism part of our auxiliary marking authorization. Many banders very much want to hear about observations of their color marked birds! Their whole research program may in fact depend upon such sightings.

Some banders by their silence may decrease the reporting rate of color banded birds and thus reduce the possibility of other banders hearing about a potentially valuable field sighting. These people are not acting in a professional manner.

Admittedly, some of the observations turned in are either erroneous (I have misread my share of gull bands when using binoculars.) or do not adequately describe the colors or the arrangement of the bands. Even allowing for a percentage of the sightings falling into this category, a great number are correctly described and from these there is alarmingly little feedback. Positive feedback can in fact greatly enhance the reporting rate. When I first came to

California in 1968 patagial marked gulls were being seen wintering in our area. Reported sightings of these birds brought a quick and informative response which only served to stimulate additional observations. The flip side of this would be the type of response I got from my report of the Evening Grosbeak!

What can be done about this? Clearly a revised procedure is needed, one in which there is a method for checking on bander responses. Also, penalties for non-cooperation (permit suspension?) should be established and enforced. It may become necessary for the Bird Banding Laboratory to provide only the actual observation and not the date and location until the bander responds with the appropriate information on the time and place of the original banding and the goals of the study. This increases the total reporting process by several otherwise unnecessary steps. However it may be unavoidable and would at least provide a method for insuring a response reaches the field observer. Without some checking on the process, and enforcement of the regulations when necessary, the system will go on as at present. Accordingly, many observers still will become discouraged by lack of feedback and potentially valuable scientific information will continue to be lost. There are obligations that go along with the privilege of using auxiliary markers. This privilege can and should be revoked if the obligations are not met.



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