

1988

Commentary on the 1987 Annual Report

North American Bird Bander

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Recommended Citation

North American Bird Bander (1988) "Commentary on the 1987 Annual Report," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 13 : Iss. 3 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol13/iss3/12>

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Commentary on the 1987 Annual Report

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A total of 423 reports were received for 1987, including 31 subpermittees and 117 persons who reported no banding with USFWS/CWS bands in the WBBA area. The number of active reports, 306, was slightly higher than the previous 5-year mean (1982-1986) which was 295.6. In fact, only 4 of the previous 20 years (1978, 1979, 1981 and 1982) produced more than 306 active reports. Thus, the number of active banders (or at least the number who report to WBBA) seems to be at least holding its own in western North America.

The total number of birds banded in the WBBA area in 1987 was 169,856, 21% above the previous 5-year mean, and the largest number banded since 1979. In fact, only 6 of the previous 20 years (1966-1971 and 1979) saw more birds banded than 1987. Table 1 shows a generally increasing number of birds have been banded each year since the extremely low years of 1982 and 1983. These years, incidentally, coincided with a major El Niño - Southern Oscillation (ENSO) that disrupted weather patterns worldwide. The total number of continental full species banded in 1987 was 414, the largest number ever. It is evident therefore that the efforts of active banders also appear to be increasing in western North America. This is indeed welcome news in comparison to 1983, the last year for

which this commentary was written, when banding activities (or success) was at virtually an all-time low.

The number of birds banded per active bander in 1987 (555) was also at the highest level since 1980, considerably higher than the suppressed levels of the early 1980's and approaching the generally high levels of the 1970's. The mean number of species banded per active bander (12) remains consistent with the past few years.

Geographically, increases in 1987 over 1986 in the total number of birds banded were noted in 7 of the 10 regions (Table 1). The 1987 totals were also higher than the previous 5-year means, remarkably so for western Canada (70% higher) (*Ed. note: The compiler received an updated list of Canadian banders for 1987!*) and Hawaii and the Pacific Islands (55% higher), and substantially so for Nevada and Utah (+35%), Idaho and Montana (+23%), California (+16%), and Washington and Oregon (+14%). Two regions, Wyoming and Colorado, and Arizona and New Mexico differed little from their previous 5-year means, but two other regions declined noticeably - Alaska (-17%) and Mexico (-97%). These latter declines may be due to a decrease in directed banding in these areas. (*Ed. note: Present Mexican regulations discourage reporting of banding in Mexico.*)

Table 1

Birds Banded by Area

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	5-yr mean 82-86	1987	10-yr Average
Number active reports	311	361	282	314	361	238	276	299	304	296	306	305
Reports <100 birds	157	156	119	146	159	98	131	164	123	135	123	138
Species banded*	388	408	393	383	383	374	399	399	390	389	414	393
Birds banded	164224	194756	157787	153585	122147	120963	147805	159838	153654	140881	169856	154462
Avg species/bander	12	12	12	11	11	14	13	14	13	13	12	12
Average birds/bander	624	581	560	489	338	508	536	535	505	484	555	523
BIRDS BANDED BY AREA												
Alaska	21594	15311	7580	8781	6286	6529	4216	8205	5698	6187	5065	8927
Western Canada	16641	28401	34557	29384	17729	10284	23563	18083	24990	18930	32251	23588
Washington, Oregon	15366	17796	17366	18441	13709	15595	19416	21978	21015	18343	22147	18283
Idaho, Montana	16113	16049	13330	11642	9945	8080	9795	12214	11407	10288	12607	12118
California	40741	57708	38216	32782	38978	36176	40597	47600	46446	41959	48914	42816
Nevada, Utah	5031	5927	4444	7426	7365	4496	4946	8479	8361	6729	9100	6558
Colorado, Wyoming	32781	34906	25278	19242	7379	16096	16179	15972	11049	13335	13787	19267
Arizona, New Mexico	6951	9604	16910	17548	16028	16625	22898	16299	15073	17385	16737	15467
Mexico	561	329	106	223	219	932	815	5505	869	1668	50	961
Hawaii, Pacific Isls.	8441	9725	6083	8116	4509	6150	5380	5503	8746	6058	9198	7185

*The species summary is for continental birds, full species only.

Colorado, Wyoming and Birds Banded totals for 1987 include a late report of 123 birds not in the species list.

Table 2

Number of Birds Banded (% of total) for Groups of Species

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1982-6 5-yr mean	1987
Waterfowl (Anseriformes)	31245 (25.6)	32516 (26.9)	41785 (28.3)	36482 (22.8)	40151 (26.1)	36436 (25.9)	52577 (31.0)
Birds of Prey (Falconiformes & Strigiformes)	5129 (4.2)	5243 (4.3)	6050 (4.1)	7478 (4.7)	6488 (4.3)	6078 (4.3)	7366 (4.4)
Shorebirds, Gulls & Alcids (Charadriiformes)	9994 (8.2)	8247 (6.8)	10588 (7.2)	17270 (10.8)	7262 (4.7)	10672 (7.6)	13104 (7.7)
Pigeons & Doves (Columbiformes)	7470 (6.1)	9494 (7.9)	15365 (10.4)	5332 (3.3)	2936 (1.9)	8119 (5.8)	3009 (1.8)
Passerines (Passeriformes)	57238 (46.9)	54440 (45.0)	62922 (42.6)	79548 (49.8)	79092 (51.5)	66648 (47.4)	79906 (47.0)
All Other Birds	11071 (9.1)	10996 (9.1)	11095 (7.5)	13728 (8.6)	17725 (11.5)	12923 (9.1)	13731 (8.0)
TOTAL	122147	120936	147805	159838	153654	140876	169856
Wood-warblers (% of passerines)	5868 (10.3)	4776 (8.8)	5697 (9.1)	6074 (7.6)	6746 (8.5)	5827 (8.7)	5105 (6.4)
Hummingbirds (% of all other birds)	1275 (11.5)	717 (6.5)	1199 (10.8)	1579 (12.0)	1656 (9.8)	1285 (10.2)	3047 (22.2)

An analysis of the past 6 years of banding as a function of the general types of birds banded provides additional information (Table 2). Waterfowl averaged about 26% of the total number of birds banded during the previous 5 years but jumped to 31% of the total in 1987 when 52,577 were banded, the highest number since at least 1981. Was this increase due to the presence of more waterfowl, or to greater activity in marking seriously declining populations of waterfowl? I'd guess the latter. A total of 7,366 raptors were banded in 1987, only 112 birds short of the 1985 all-time high. They totaled 4.4% of all birds banded about the same as the average for the past 5 years, and a noticeable increase from the 2.8% value in 1979 and 0.3% value in 1969 (Collins, NABB 5:88-89, 1980). Raptor banding continues to provide extremely important scientific information as well as considerable interest among the lay public.

Banding of Charadriiformes in 1987 were clearly above the previous 5 year mean in absolute numbers, and slightly up in % of total birds banded. In sharp contrast, however, pigeons and doves were way down in 1987, as they also were in 1986. Has state and federal money perhaps been diverted from upland game birds to waterfowl? Or has there been a real decrease in Columbiformes in the western United States?

Passerines were banded in 1987 in numbers well above the previous 5 year mean, but in numbers very comparable to 1985 and 1986. Several authors in NABB have recently spoken of a decline in passerines in North America, particularly in wood-warblers (Jones, NABB 11:74-75, 1986; Stewart, NABB 12:58-60, 1987). Such a decline does not appear to be widespread in passerines

over western North America as a whole, if the data in Table 2 mean anything. However, when one looks just at the wood-warblers, the picture changes somewhat. The proportion of banded passerines that were wood-warblers has shown a rather consistent decline over the past 6 years from a high of 10.3% in 1982 to a low of only 6.5% in 1987. Could this be an artifact of an increase in directed studies of various passerines other than wood-warblers (which are relatively rarely banded in directed studies)? Does it signify that wood-warblers were relatively more common than other passerines during the ENSO years because of better winter survivorship facilitated by migrating to the tropics? And that populations of other temperate zone wintering passerines now have returned to more normal levels? Or does it mean that wood-warblers are actually declining, due either to loss of wintering or breeding habitat caused by deforestation? Mist-netting studies can supply the information to answer these critical questions, but only if they are *rigorously standardized*. Bird banders in North America have the opportunity to make extremely important contributions to conservation and the well-being of our planet, as well as to science, if they can make a commitment to undertake long-term standardized studies. The challenge is great, but so are the rewards.

Finally, "all other birds" increased slightly in 1987 over the previous 5-year mean. This increase was entirely due to hummingbirds which were banded in unprecedented numbers in 1987, a total of 3,047 individuals. They thus constituted 22.2% of "all other birds", as opposed to an average of only 10.2% for the previous 5 years. This remarkable surge in hummingbird banding should serve as a strong message to the BBL to continue to make quality hummingbird bands available to banders.

It cannot be stressed enough that the value of the information presented in the Annual Report depends entirely upon the cooperation of all banders and agencies in submitting complete and accurate data. Let's all do our part! In closing, I thank Joan Tweit for her excellent work in preparing this year's Annual Report.

This is PRBO contribution number 398.