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Western Regional News

Western Bird Banding Association

Founded 1925

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Bird banding is a research tool, albeit for many of us a very pleasant one, with intimate contact with live birds that we have enjoyed watching for years. Today, with increasing concern for Neotropical migrants and the many species being listed as endangered or threatened, the need for accurate data of value has increased along with the concern for the well-being of many bird species. We, as banders, have an obligation to treat birds as ethically as possible. This includes collecting the data in a systematic fashion from the banding we conduct, whether as a solo project or a part of a regional or national project, and making it publicly available. It also means banding only as many birds as needed to answer the questions we have asked within a project.

Although we have progressed in bird banding, with increased knowledge on identification, ageing, and sexing of birds, developed regional and nationwide programs such as monitoring avian productivity and survival, and bird migration, we have discovered that there is little continuity in methods used between banders. Individuals are teaching themselves banding techniques, or learning from their master permittees; and while they are not wrong, the difficulties come in trying to compare data from one region or group of banders to another. It only follows that we need some kind of national or continent-wide approach to banding training. The following will provide you with some information about the new training program that is just beginning to be developed.

In March, a bander training forum was conducted in Mill Valley, California, organized through the Institute for Bird Populations by Ken Burton. Participants included John Tautin, head of the NBS Bird Banding Lab.; Lucie Metras, head of the Canadian Wildlife Service Banding Office; the presidents from the three banding associations; banders from the U.S. and Canada who are involved in training banders currently; and a representative from the National Audubon Society.

The overall focus of the forum was two-fold: (1) to have better trained banders, and (2) to have *more* better trained banders to assist in ongoing research and regional and national monitoring programs. Two full days were spent discussing and outlining the topics within the following areas: summary of training programs in other countries (We are behind most in our level of training required for permits.); ethics in banding; training subject matter; methods and types of training; evaluation criteria and mechanism for trainers and trainees; model/structure (NABC - see below) chosen to carry out this plan; levels of certification, responsibility, and authorizations; and partnerships.

A new organization, the North American Banding Council (NABC), which will carry on the work started in this forum, will consist of members from the three banding associations, four ornithological associations, and some members at large. As with any new council and program, funding needs are paramount and hopefully will come from a variety of sources including the banding associations.

Among the first tasks performed by NABC will be to develop the banding training materials necessary for both trainers and trainees and set up the certification program. Although the forum produced an excellent outline, and perhaps the majority of the documentation needed for some objectives, training manuals, guidelines, and evaluation systems still need to be worked out in detail. In the future, an individual who has taken the training, received the certification, and has a valid project will find it easier to get a banding permit. In addition, training will be available for individuals who wish to volunteer to work on larger projects that are already in existence or being organized at the current time. This provides ways for individuals to contribute information for solving conservation issues that are so critical at this time.

More information will be forthcoming on this new program at annual meetings of all three banding associations. Although the three banding associations—Eastern, Inland, and Western—function at the regional level, support for this new council will provide an additional tie between the associations besides the publication of *NABB*. Having a chance to work closely and have discussions with other banders from across the continent at the forum has broadened my perspective on banding as a whole and has been one of the pluses of serving as your president. You can experience the same effect by attending your local association's meetings and participating in group discussions.

Barbara A. Carlson

