

1996

## News, Notes, Comments

North American Bird Bander

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## News, Notes, Comments

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1-800-327-BAND



The U.S. Geological Survey's Bird Banding Laboratory, the Canadian Wildlife Service's Bird Banding Office, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Migratory Bird Management, announce the availability of a toll-free telephone number for reporting bird bands. One may call 1-800-327-BAND from anywhere in Canada, the United States and most parts of the Caribbean to report a bird band. They established this number as a uniform, convenient way to increase band reporting rates. Preliminary results from a 1995 trial where equal samples of Mallards were banded with bands bearing the 1-800 number vs. bands bearing a conventional reporting address suggest that the 1-800 number prompts significantly more band reports from the public. In the final analysis the hope is that the band reporting rate will be more than doubled. Thus, the 1-800 number will produce more and better data, and make field banding operations more cost effective.

The BBL plans to expand use of the 1-800 number by listing it in the 1-800 directory and on their home pages, and by advising conservation agencies, Flyway Councils, banders, and others of the number. Feel free to help promulgate the number. The BBL has also made a limited number of 1-800 bands available to banders, with priority given to pre-hunting season Mallard banding in Canada and the northern US, and to goose banding in northern and central Canada. In 1997 they hope to go fully operational with 1-800 bands being available for all species of larger sized birds, game and nongame.

Your continuing support of the North American bird banding program is appreciated, and please, if you have bird bands to report, call **1-800-327-BAND**.

Please note: This number is **ONLY** for reporting bands, NOT for calling the BBL staff about other issues. It is also not for reporting pigeon bands. Pigeon bands can be reported to the Avian Service Center at 405-670-9400.



HOUSE FINCHES (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) have been color banded in and around Mankato and North Mankato, MN. We ask that observers at the local and national level be alert to possible sightings of these birds at any time. Each bird wears a metal U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service band plus three colored bands, so that there are two bands on each leg. The possible colored bands are as follows: red, orange, yellow, dark green, light green, dark blue, light blue, white. It is important that we know the exact combination of the metal and colored bands carried on each leg. Please send observations with as much information as possible (such as date, location of the sighting, and sex) to:

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Box 34, Mankato State University, Mankato, MN 56001  
e-mail: merrill\_frydendall@ms1.mankato.msus.edu  
fax: 507-389-2788

## Identifiable Forms

The changes in the AOU Checklist described in News, Notes and Comments in Volume 21, Number 1, of *North American Bird Bander*, illustrate the importance of adequate identification and documentation of each bird banded. While Banding Lab protocols require identification of forms or subspecies with AOU numbers (e.g. Baltimore and Bullock's orioles), some recent splits of one species into two involve forms without AOU numbers; e.g. the previous split of Brown Towhee into Canyon and California towhees. This is an easy split for banders since the ranges of the new species do not overlap and the species are visually distinct. Some future splits will probably be as challenging as the two in the genus *Empidonax* (Traill's into Alder and Willow flycatchers, and Western into Pacific-slope and Cordilleran). Distinguishing species in this genus was already difficult.

Fortunately not all forms and subspecies are as difficult to distinguish as "empids." For instance the three groups within the Solitary Vireo (Blue-headed, Plumbeous and Cassin's) can usually be recognized easily. As taxonomic status of many species and subspecies is examined more carefully, the data we banders generate can be very helpful. We need to identify birds to the lowest taxonomic level possible (subspecies or form wherever practical), record the data carefully and store them in retrievable form.

What tools do we have to help us? Some newer field guides, including the National Geographic's *Birds of North America*, illustrate identifiable forms within some species. Species accounts in the Bent *Life Histories of North American Birds* are often split by subspecies and individual monographs in the new *Birds of North America* series provide information on more than 200 species, with at least 60 more being added each year. Single copies are now available.

Aging, sexing and molt data are also a valuable resource, and the *Identification Guide to North American Passerines* is the most useful source of information. Other species are covered in Vol. 2 of the Banding Manual and WBBA worksheets.

Photography supplements written records when a bird is unusual in any way. Banders who capture species new to their area need to take pictures to adequately document the record.

What about that bird that you just can't identify? Get all the information you can, photograph from all angles, consult all sources of information. If it is still an enigma, follow the Banding Lab rules and don't band it. For a rare bird, the important thing will be your records, not your band on it.

*Robert Tweit*

## WANTED:

Volume 11, Number 1, of the *North American Bird Bander*, to fill the only gap in Western Bird Banding Association's archival file. If you can spare a copy, please send it to: Robert C. Tweit, 3116 N Willow Creek Dr., Tucson, AZ 85712.

