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Western Regional News

WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION 74th Annual Meeting, Reno, NV 24-26 September 1999

The meeting started Friday following a North American Banding Council certification course for trainers. A field trip to Pyramid Lake and Numana Fish Hatchery, a MAPS site, was led by Jane Thompson and Ted Floyd. A barbeque and social followed the WBBA Board Meeting. A slide show on "Bats of Nevada" by Matt Rahn, UNR.

On Saturday an early field trip explored local areas with Ted Floyd and Jim Eidell as leaders. After this, mist nets were set up to catch birds at the Arboretum Grounds, Rancho San Rafael. Demonstrations on banding and ageing techniques by WBBA banders and the following demonstrations were presented:

Mending nets with a tatting shuttle revisited. Ruth Yoder, Motte Rimrock Reserve, Perris, CA. With the ever increasing price of mist nets, mending nets is now more feasible than ever before. How to mend mist nets with a tatting shuttle was demonstrated. The method is easy to use and the shuttles are harder to lose than needles.

How to handle hummingbirds caught during passerine banding. Ruth Russell, Tucson, AZ. Ruth explained how to remove the occasional hummingbird caught during other types of banding, including tending to hummers in shock and looking for bands.

Primary fade and wear on passerines and near-passerines. Barbara Carlson, University of California, Riverside, CA. Primary feather fade and wear was shown via slides (since these characteristics are difficult to show in fall birds). The importance of recognizing these two types of information while banding birds was discussed.

How to handle raptors caught during passerine banding. Buzz Hull, Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, San Francisco, CA. Buzz explained how to remove the occasional raptor caught during other types of banding, including what to expect, and how to handle the bird without injury to either bird or bander.

How to use BAND MANAGER: Demonstration and Discussion. Kathy Klimkiewicz, Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, MD. Using a laptop computer and projector, Kathy demonstrated the use of the BL's database program, BAND MANAGER, which also generates banding schedules.

After lunch at the Student Union, the following papers were presented:

THE PROGRAM OF THE NORTH AMERICAN BANDING COUNCIL (NABC). Dr. Steve Russell, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ. An up-to-date presentation on what the NABC has accomplished so far, where the NABC is headed, and how it will tentatively work in the future.

INTRODUCING THE NEVADA BREEDING BIRD ATLAS. Ted Floyd, Great Basin Bird Observatory, 443 Marsh Avenue, Reno, NV 89509. Breeding Bird Atlases (BBAs) are multi-year volunteer-based surveys of all the breeding bird species of an entire state or province. In the United States, BBAs began in the east, where there was a favorable combination of small states and large volunteer populations. In the western United States, however, BBAs are complicated by larger census areas, difficult access, and a smaller volunteer base. The problem is especially acute in Nevada.

The challenge in Nevada is to use coarse-scale census data to make fine-scale predictions about the distribution and abundance of breeding bird populations. This is accomplished by a randomized sampling design that is stratified within major habitat classifications. Census data can then be superimposed on a very fine-scale land-use data base that has been generated by the Biological Resources Research Center at the University of Nevada, Reno.

MEADOW RESTORATION PROMPTED BY BIRD BANDING RESULTS. James A. Steele, Director, Sierra Nevada Field Campus, 323 Thornton Hall, SFSU, San Francisco, CA 94132. The hydrology of the majority of meadows in the West continues to degrade from over 100 years of disturbance and may well be responsible for many of the declining trends observed in western bird populations. This paper presented the results of bird banding at Carman Valley from 1992 to 1999, as well as observations of the changing hydrology which prompted us to initiate a partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and other organizations to bring in grant money to restore the watershed. The causes and remedies to the degraded watershed was discussed. The restoration and historical data should also provide a reliable experiment to evaluate meadow system health and its effects on bird populations.

BREEDING BIRD DYNAMICS IN THE BONNEVILLE BASIN. J. W. Martin, US Army Dugway Proving Ground, STEDP-DEP, Dugway, UT 84022; and T. L. Pearl, M. C. Martin. I. Flanders, and A. L. Stevenson, Utah Div. of Wildlife Resources, Partners In Flight, 1594 West North Temple, Suite 222, Salt Lake City, UT

84114. From 1996-1999 breeding resident and Neotropical passerines have been monitored at U.S. Army Dugway Proving Ground (DPG), Tooele County, UT (398,542 ha), located 128 km west of Salt Lake City, in west-central Utah. DPG is considered a cold, northern desert shrub habitat with halomorphic soils, interspersed with insular islands of shrubsteppe dominated by sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*), saltbush (*Atriplex gardneri*), and Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) typical of the Great Basin. Habitat structure, density and diversity is impacted strongly by exotic annual weeds and associated increasing frequency and intensity of natural- and human-caused wildfires.

Following Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) protocols, three paired plots were established in highly disturbed military training areas and respective control sites. Each plot consisted of 9 point count and 10 mist-net stations. Additionally and concurrently, another 120 point count stations were established throughout DPG. Each bird captured was banded with USFWS aluminum and colored plastic bands. While auxiliary banding was not monitored immediately, these individually marked birds will be an important part of species-specific (territory and resource utilization) studies in the latter half of a ten-year cooperative agreement between DPG and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources under Partners in Flight.

Shrubsteppe-obligate species (Sage Thrasher, Sage Sparrow, Black-throated Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow) and juniper-obligate species (Ash-throated Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Juniper Titmouse, Bullock's and Scott's orioles) fluctuated widely between years—few resident or Neotropical species remained stable from year-to-year. Some species have extremely limited distributions in what appears to be suitable habitats (i.e., Western Scrub-Jay, Gray Vireo, Black-throated Gray Warbler). However, the overall trend indicates a decline in native species with replacement by grassland-adapted species (Horned Lark, Western Meadowlark) with increasing brood parasitism by the Brown-headed Cowbird. The major contributing factors for population trends are loss of vertical structure within shrub and juniper communities, and their

replacement by exotic annual weeds, principally cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), tumbling mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*), peppergrass (*Lepidium perfoliatum*), and Russian thistle (*Salsola iberica*).

These findings constitute important wildlife-habitat considerations for public land-administering agencies that continue to promote chaining of mature stands of juniper and/or pinyon pine (*Pinus edulis*), control burning, and other habitat manipulations. While avian density and diversity may remain constant between "pristine" and "disturbed" habitats, such management practices reduce habitat-obligate species, increase habitat fragmentation of historically monomorphic landscapes, and increase brood parasitism.

BIRDS OF BIG SUR: SOME EMERGING PATTERNS BASED ON NET CAPTURES. Chris Tenney (Research Associate) and Jim Booker (BSOL Director), Big Sur Ornithology Lab, HC 67 Box 99, Monterey, CA 93940. The bird-banding program at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL) was initiated in 1992 by the Ventana Wilderness Society, the organization that has piloted the return of the Bald Eagle and the California Condor to the Big Sur region. The banding lab and its 21 net sites are situated along the Big Sur River, about one mile (1.7 km) from the Pacific Ocean and 20 mi (33 km) south of Carmel, CA. Biologists at the lab have banded over 40,000 resident and migratory species representing about 150 species and forms. Five years of constant-effort banding are beginning to reveal some patterns in the seasonal and annual movements of birds. Winter residents like the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Fox Sparrow, and Hermit Thrush show strong annual site fidelity to winter territory. Capture rates in Jan-Feb are lowest, but just two months later, the arrival of north-bound transient warblers and flycatchers yields some of the highest, and most unpredictable, capture rates. Mid-summer is characterized by a downslope movement of post-breeders like Black-headed Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Warbling Vireo, and Hutton's Vireo to the resource-rich Big Sur River. This is contrary to the pattern in the California Sierra, where post-breeders move upslope to high-elevation meadows. Low capture rates due to the departure of summer residents in August is shortly followed by the Sep-Oct arrival of southbound fall transients, like the Yellow Warbler and Pacific-slope Flycatcher, and returning winter residents. Some permanent resident species, like

the Purple Finch and Bewick's Wren, appear to have distinct breeding and wintering populations.

USING MOLT LIMITS FOR AGEING BIRDS: RECOGNITION, INTERPRETATION, AND DOCUMENTATION. Dan Froehlich, MAPS Coordinator, The Institute for Bird Populations, PO Box 1346, Pt. Reyes Station, CA 94956. The 1997 ID Guide by Peter Pyle, the new North American standard for in-hand passerine and near-passerine identification, brought information on molt limits of North American landbirds into wide circulation among banders. The strong variability in molt patterns among individuals, populations and species is a direct result of the ecological constraints they face. Photographic representations are a great help in understanding the basic principles underlying age identifications based on molt limits. Identifying molt limits depends on understanding the fundamental differences between juvenile and definitive feathers: structure, length, shape, color and edging. Their identification also depends on understanding patterns of retention during typical first pre-basic molts. Interpreting them depends on understanding the inherent pitfalls: feather wear, prealternate molt patterns, pseudolimits, and variability in the timing of molt. Finally, documenting molt limits and molt patterns both photographically and using modified molt cards is important to help others recognize molt limits and update the accounts in the ID guide.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ATLAS OF MOLT LIMITS IN SIERRA NEVADA BIRDS. James A. Steele, Director, Sierra Nevada Field Campus, 323 Thornton Hall, SFSU, San Francisco, CA 94132. Banders have a unique opportunity to test and critique the value of molt limits and feather wear as ageing characteristics. Examination of recaptures of known age enables us to verify information on molt limits derived from museum specimens. A slide presentation of known SY and ASY birds captured in the Sierra Nevada was provided.

REPORT FROM THE BIRD BANDING LABORATORY. Kathy Klimkiewicz.

At the WBBA Business Meeting the following officers were elected: President - Bob Altman, 1st Vice-President - Jim Steele, 2nd Vice-President - Ken Burton, Secretary-Rhonda Millikin, Treasurer - Tricia Campbell, Director (2000) - Mario Mamone, Director (2001) - Ken Voget, Regional Representative - Anna Maria Benson.

After a buffet dinner, **Dr. Lew Oring**, UNR, spoke on "**Waterbird Conservation in the Great Basin: Costs and Benefits of Hypersaline Lakes**"

Sunday featured several field trips: Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, leader: Larry Neel. Pyramid Lake and Numana Fish Hatchery, leader, Jane Thompson, Banding at Little Valley, leaders: Jim Eidel and Alan Gubanich. Local Areas, leader: Ted Floyd.

The Western Bird Banding Association is very grateful to **Alan Gubanich**, his committee, and the co-sponsors, Lahontan Audubon Society and Great Basin Bird Observatory, for their work in organizing a very successful meeting, attended by more than 70 people.

**Join us for Western
Bird Banding Association's
Millennium and 75th Annual Meeting
in Fairbanks, Alaska.
Tentative dates: 8-10 September.**

**REPORT FROM KEN BURTON
WBBA'S REPRESENTATIVE TO
THE NORTH AMERICAN BANDING COUNCIL**

At the recent WBBA meeting, I replaced Barbara Carlson as WBBA's representative to the North American Banding Council (NABC). On behalf of WBBA, I thank Barbara for being our NABC rep the past two years and especially for her work in making WBBA's first NABC certification session such a success. Her shoes will be hard to fill. I will be assisted by Rita Colwell, who will be alternate representative. I served as alternate during Barbara's term and have been actively involved in NABC since its inception.

The NABC rep's job is to serve as liaison between WBBA membership and NABC by voicing members' concerns and ideas at NABC meetings and by reporting NABC developments back to our membership. I will continue to use *NABB* as a forum to share with you what the Council is doing. It also will be my responsibility to organize the NABC certification sessions at the next two WBBA meetings.

I know that some of you are unsure, apprehensive, and perhaps even suspicious of what NABC is attempting to accomplish. In short, we are working to improve the quality of banding and banders in North America by producing manuals for banders and trainers and by implementing voluntary certification procedures at several levels of competence and responsibility. No one will be required to obtain NABC certification before getting a permit and no one will lose his/her permit if he/she does not get certified. Our aim is to help trainees and their trainers know what skills and knowledge should be possessed by banding assistants, permittees, and trainers; to provide the information and facilitate the experience needed to get there; and to give banders a means of demonstrating that they've reached those levels. For more extensive information on NABC's goals, accomplishments, and composition, please visit NABC's web site at <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNETNABC/>.

Of the many organizations represented on the Council, the banding associations play a unique role in that we are the only ones whose *raison d'être* is banding. In fact, there is considerable overlap in our missions. NABC is developing at a pivotal time for the associations in terms of our role in the scientific community. NABC and the banding associations are in a perfect position for a mutualistic relationship wherein the associations can provide certification opportunities and link trainees with trainers and banders with projects; while NABC can provide additional focus and purpose to the associations.

The Council is still in a formative stage and it is by no means too late to make yourself heard. Your opinions and suggestions are not only welcome, they are needed. I am your official voice for the next two years; please utilize me! I invite you to contact me by phone (415-669-1847) or e-mail (kmburton@svn.net) if you have questions or anything you'd like me to convey to the Council. Those of you who just went through the certification, we especially want your input.

It is my wish and that of the entire Council that together we can improve the banding experience for those on both ends of the pliers as well as make the information obtained from banding more accurate, standardized, meaningful, useful, and accessible. I hope that you will support these endeavors and I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to be your representative.