

2001

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Recommended Citation

Niel, John J. and Keenly, Heather (2001) "Bird Bands and Auxiliary Markers in the Marketplace," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 26 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol26/iss2/3>

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Bird Bands and Auxiliary Markers in the Marketplace

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ABSTRACT

We monitored the sales of federal and non-federal bands and auxiliary markers during a one-month period in 2001 on eBay, the largest online auction site. Two hundred eighty-six individual auctions brought cumulative final bids totaling \$14,137.84. 282 federal bands were sold. Additionally, 361 non-federal bands were sold as well as 78 neck collars, wing tags and other auxiliary markers. Jack Miner bands were treated as a separate category and 26 were sold at a mean price of \$190.27. No correlation could be found concerning final sale price and whether a band had been reported previously or not. Still, the impact of bands as commodities remains unknown on the quantity and accuracy of reported recaptures.

INTRODUCTION

Federal bird bands and other auxiliary markers may be possessed, bought, and sold legally if legally acquired. Bands and federal auxiliary markers are considered to be federal property before they are placed on birds, but after they are recovered they may be considered the personal property of the finder. These items are sought by hunters, bird enthusiasts, and serious collectors alike as trophies, souvenirs, conversation pieces, and mementos. The purpose of this study was to quantify the amount of these items sold and the monetary value they command. In addition, any patterns or trends that may indicate improper possession of bands or reporting of banded birds were noted.

METHODS

We monitored the final sale price of bird markers offered on the eBay online auction site (www.ebay.com) from 11 Apr through 10 May

2001. We selected eBay because it is the largest online auction site available. We selected late spring as a time because the number of items available for purchase on eBay peaks in the winter and tapers off to a low in the summer. We feel our timing allows for a true monthly average amount of items sold. We found items by searching key words in the titles of all items offered for sale with auctions ending within the dates selected. After some preliminary research, we used the following searches: goose band, goose bands, duck band, duck bands, bird band, bird bands, swan band, swan bands, Jack Miner, and goose collar. There is no way to determine the number of bands or markers that did not include those key words in the auction title and, therefore, were not included in the study. Information recorded for each successful auction was: number and type of markers, final bid price, and the seller's comments as to whether bands were reported or not. We defined a successful auction as one that received a minimum bid or met the seller's imposed reserve price.

RESULTS

During one thirty-day period we found 286 successful auctions totaling \$14,137.84 in final bid prices. If our assumption is correct that the timing of our study represents an average month of sales, a full year of monitoring bird bands and markers might produce 3,400 auctions with sales totaling over \$169,000.

Federal Bands: In all, 282 federal bands were sold in the month-long study. 212 size 8 bands were sold. Of those, 162 were sold in lots that contained exclusively size 8 bands at an average sale price of \$20.42 per band. In addition, 61 size 7 bands were sold. Of those, 42 were sold in lots that contained exclusively size 7 bands. The average sale price for those bands was \$23.79. Four size 6 bands

were sold at an average price of \$24.00. Three size 5 bands were sold. Two were sold in a mixed lot of bands and auxiliary markers. The other was sold alone for a price of \$46.00. One size 4 band was sold in a lot with other bands. One size 9 lock-on band was sold. It was reported to be from a Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) and commanded \$63.75 as a final price.

Jack Miner Bands: Jack Miner bands are highly sought after by collectors due to their relative scarcity, the ease of identifying the year the band was used, and the unique Bible verses inscribed on them. These bands all originate from a banding operation in Ontario. Twenty-six Jack Miner bands sold for a total of \$4,947.11 or an average of \$190.27. Bands ranged in price from \$51.00 to \$800.00

Non-Federal Bands: Three hundred thirteen bands were sold that appeared to be designed for use on a bird; 100 of these bands were unused from a private game farm. The remaining bands were from duck clubs, provincial and state agencies, and others.

Novelty Bands: Forty-eight bands were identified as mementos from fund raisers or of uncertain origin. Included in this category was a 14K gold band designed to be worn as a ring.

Auxiliary Markers: The following items also sold during the time period of our study:

- 55 Neck Collars
- 13 Plastic Tarsus "collars"
- 2 radio transmitters
- 6 toe tags
- 2 wing tags

Report Status of Federal Bands: Auctions containing one or more federal bands (n=127) were read to determine the advertised report-status of those bands. Seventy-three percent (n=93) of the auctions made no mention of whether the bands had been reported or not. Eleven percent (n=14) declared that the bands had been reported, with almost half of those providing the Certificate of Appreciation to the new owner. Eight percent (n=10) of the auctions stated that the bands were unreported and an additional 6% (n=8)

of the auctions stated that the report status was unknown. Finally, two auctions (<2%) advertised unused federal bands. One of those auctions sold a pair of bands that the seller stated came from "an old bander's estate."

No correlation could be found between the report status of federal bands and their final auction price. When specific band sizes and styles (the way the writing appears on the band) were taken into account, sample sizes were too small for any meaningful results. Other variables that may influence final bid prices that could not be controlled for include: band condition, the actual individuals bidding on that particular band, postage fees a high bidder must also remit, the quality of the auction advertisement, the reputation or rating of the seller, and any private communication among the seller and the potential bidders. In the last case, an interested party could simply e-mail the seller and ask additional questions regarding the status of the band, especially in the auctions that made no mention of report status.

CONCLUSION

There seems to be a clear demand for bird markers of all varieties. Although we could not find any correlation between report status of bands and final bid price, further study may show one. Certainly, several sellers highlighted the fact that the new buyer could receive a Certificate of Appreciation in the buyer's name. With bands literally being sold from every corner of North America to every other, the potential for misinformation whether intended or not, increases.

