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## Visiting Other Banding Stations: An Interesting and Enjoyable Experience

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## Visiting Other Banding Stations: An Interesting and Enjoyable Experience

I had an unique opportunity this year to visit some banding stations on the West Coast to see how they did things as compared to what we do at Hafford Glen and AFMO. The trip was the highlight of the year for me although this notice of a recovery was also a bright spot: A Great Blue Heron that Sue and I banded at Harford Glen in July 2000 was recovered by Eliseo Luis Parazoa Caballus along the Cuyaguaje River in Cuba August 2005. But, let me tell you about the visit.

Discovering that I had two days on a weekend between classes on the West Coast, I decided it would be more sensible to do something while there instead of flying home and back. Fair warning to banders around the country: I teach courses in boiler safety, operation and maintenance, and in air conditioning and refrigeration and may decide to visit your station when I am in your area.

Originally, I had planned to visit C. John Ralph of the Redwood Sciences Laboratory in Arcata and had my visit settled until just before the weekend when it was apparent that it would rain all weekend in northern California. I did not have much success with connecting with people I had known at IBP and Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) because they had moved on. I decided to try a visit there anyway if I had time.

Dr. Ralph suggested I contact Gina Barton of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBBO) when it was apparent that Redwood would be washed out. She responded with a pleasant e-mail and directions to their banding station.

So, early in the morning of 15 Oct I rounded the last turn on a dirt road to find the PRBO and discovered that they know how to do it in comfort. The banding station was housed at the end of a structure that included offices and other facilities that we only dream of at Hafford Glen or AFMO.

I introduced myself to the two interns operating the station and got a tour of the net lanes, helping them open as we wandered through dense forested hills

and then down a slope with a beautiful view. Every banding station should have a view of the ocean.

The station has several double-height nets and some other tricks for permanent net installations. I also got to see some variations in design of net handling tools and set-up techniques. In a couple of cases they simply held the pole and unclipped their guys to open the nets, then clipped the guy back to the pole. One of their forest nets was set perpendicular to the slope of the hill, and I watched one of the interns walk out on a platform to raise the net at the downhill end.

It was comforting to see many techniques were shared, but variations existed. They also used clothespins to mark bags, but they hung the bags on marked pins on the wall and had a policy to return females with brood patches and local birds to their net lanes.

Perhaps it was my presence, but more than likely it was the heavy marine layer that made it a slow day at PRBO. The catch of only two birds still made my day because one of them was a flicker with its red shafts, much different from our yellow-shafted. I really appreciated the exchange of information and apologize to the two interns for forgetting their names.

On Sunday, I pulled up to the gate and successfully tried the combination Gina gave me to enter the Coyote Creek Riparian Station of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. While not as posh as the station at Point Reyes, they still enjoyed cover in the form of a trailer with electric power.

The staff that day consisted of Gina Barton, the director, Vicki Silvas-Young, Arleen Feng, Gerry Ellis, and Allen Royer, and it took all of them to keep things running smoothly. That is especially true when they had to deal with a visitor from the East Coast. After introductions I managed, somehow, to keep up with Gina on a trek to open the nets. They had three sets of nets spread out over the river valley, one set for Wednesday, one for Saturday, and the Sunday ones we opened. Like Point Reyes, they had double-height nets and I was shown a number of variations in their construction.

Nets spread across a large field were standard but set with the bottom trammel at the same height as the grass.

SFBBO's operation consisted of three tables set up for banding and any volunteer could use any table. The birds were handled quickly as additional tables, or 'kits' as they called them, were brought into service when necessary. When someone returned from the field with a large number of birds everyone helped to process and release them.

They had many birds during my visit and I was overjoyed to have the opportunity to see their version of a Fox Sparrow, the Audubon's Warbler (that I was lucky enough to call a Yellow-rumped so I did not accidentally identify it as a Myrtle) and the Chestnut-backed Chickadee, among others.

One thing suddenly struck me as I was recording data for Vicki after a very successful net run. I said "Wait a minute! You didn't skull that bird that quickly and its head isn't wet." I guess she did not understand my confusion at first but she eventually showed me how they skulled the birds. Vicki tried to train me in the method but I did not have enough time to get it down. I am hoping one of the station members will submit an article to *NABB* explaining the process because, as far as I could tell, it was actually easier on the bird and the bander than the method in which I had been trained. I checked the NABC manual but it was not described there.

Both visits were enjoyable and I learned a lot. So much of it was details and other methods of handling data which I can not explain readily. I now know that it is beneficial to visit other stations when I have the opportunity and recommend other banders do the same.

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### **First Winter Band Recovery of Cave Swallow from Mexico**

For many years the Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*) was one of the few species breeding north of Mexico for which the winter range was unknown (American Ornithologists' Union 1983). By the

early 1990s, a few individuals started wintering in the United States, primarily in Texas and in northern Mexico (American Ornithologists' Union 1998). But a few years before that, a long-term banding project at Carlsbad Caverns National Park, NM, gave an early clue to the historic wintering range of the species.

The Cave Swallow banding project started in 1980 at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. There were several goals of this project, including developing a better understanding of the population dynamics of a species with a limited United States distribution. A second goal was to band enough birds to get a recovery on what was then an unknown wintering range. Since 1980, more than 17,500 Cave Swallows have been banded in southern New Mexico and west Texas, with almost 17,000 just at the entrance of a single cave, Carlsbad Cavern.

On 8 Jul 1988, volunteers met at the entrance to Carlsbad Cavern on what was the 188<sup>th</sup> banding trip to that site. Over a course of four hours, a total of 112 birds were handled (59 retraps and 53 new birds), one of which was banded with the number 2011-45585. This individual was an adult with a brood patch and was surely nesting at Carlsbad Cavern, where hundreds nest each year. All measurements taken (left wing, right wing, tail and weight) were within the normal range for this species at that time of the year.

Frequently individuals are captured several times over a few years, and those initially banded during the period 15 May-31 Jul are thought to be nesting at the banding site. While there are other caves in the Guadalupe Mountains where the species nests, at that time none were very close. Since banding operations take place in the late evening when birds spend more time close to the nesting site, any bird captured at that time was thought to be part of a nesting pair. Like many individuals, this bird was never recaptured at Carlsbad Cavern or at any of the other cave sites which we monitored irregularly. This individual may have continued to nest annually at Carlsbad Cavern but remained undetected for the years between the banding and recovery date. It was eventually recovered, however.

This ended up being the first recovery from Mexico and, as a result, the first recovery that gave us