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## The Revolution from Observatory to Network...and "Where Have All the Data Gone?

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Founded in 1925

## *Western Regional News and Comments*

### **The revolution from Observatory to Network .. and “where have all the data gone?”**

Many of us involved with banding have been associated one way or another with a “Bird Observatory”. What I term “Bird Observatories” have several things in common; they typically include monitoring, education, and research (often all three). At almost all the Bird Observatories in the Americas, the underlying theme has always been ***Long-term Bird Monitoring Science***, with counts of various kinds, and banding usually at the core. In the Americas, Bird Observatories have been a positive force for 80 years, and I calculate they have generated a data universe of about 30 million landbird banding records. Congratulations!

What is distinctive about a Bird Observatory is “one stop shopping” for science-based information and expertise about birds. Among the several hundred Observatories in the Americas are a staggering panoply of governance models, financial states (from budgets of a few thousand a year to several millions!), personnel (up to a couple of hundred), and appellation (think of Bird Studies Canada, Manomet Center for Conservation Science, and Powdermill Avian Research Center).

In WBBA-land, we are justifiably proud of the role the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (currently “rebranded” as PRBO Conservation Science) has played in bird research and conservation over the past 45 years. Its direct descendents include many other entities in the Americas, including the Institute for Bird Populations, Klamath Bird Observatory, the several Costa Rica Bird Observatories, and many others.

When WBBA started PRBO in 1965, we followed a hallowed tradition, going back to the very first ‘modern’ Bird Observatory, founded in 1910 on the German island of Helgoland: to have a single station. At PRBO, the focus was on banding using volunteers who were motivated by the idea that they could make marked contributions to science! And in retrospect, equally important were evenings around the kitchen table where lifelong friendships formed amongst teachers, handymen, housewives, students, vagabonds, seekers-of-knowledge, and researchers alike with birds as the social and scientific nexus.

In the first decade of PRBO, there were some things we did not do, and probably should have. We had, for example, neither clocks nor seasons for nets: that is, we often ran nets around the year, all day and night, or skipped several days. In other words, our netting effort was anything but standardized. We also did not do any other surveys as a compliment to banding, as compared to today’s Observatories that often do “area searches” or “checklists” while banding. In that pre-computer era, we also could not enter the data, and thus our efforts at analysis were laborious, yet led inexorably to intimate knowledge of each bird.

Today, single-station Observatories, together with sophisticated data management and high speed internet, are enthusiastically joining into powerful data networks, following the model of the peerless Chan Robbins’ “Operation Recovery.” These

networks have many millions of accessible data records through herculean efforts such as MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) and LaMNA (Landbird Monitoring Network of the Americas).

While these data networks link Observatories and provide opportunities to examine patterns at scales greater than single locations, they would benefit greatly from inclusion of sizeable datasets that have not yet been entered. For example, I recently discovered through our data-archiving efforts at LaMNA, about 100,000 unentered landbird banding records from nets and traps at the Austin Ornithological Research Station near Wellfleet on Cape Cod between 1930 and 1957. Entering them

now is a lot cheaper than paying for a time machine to go back and sample the birds again!

Such "heritage" data sets are potential treasure troves of information, extending our knowledge back in time and providing a baseline analog for today's rapidly changing world. These data need to be sought out, entered, and archived for future generations and scientific endeavors into this newish century. If you know of any such hidden treasures, please let us know.

**C. John Ralph**, WBBA President  
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p.s. thanks to John Alexander, Thomas Gardali, Linda Long, Carol Ralph, and Walter Sakai for comments

WBBA ANNUAL REPORT OF BIRDS BANDED, 2010													
A summary of banding with USFWS/CWS bands reported from WBBA area for 2010													
compiled by:													
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Codes in the HIGH BANDER column refer to the list of individuals or institutional banders.													
Numbers in ( ) are individual totals													
Upon request we can supply a list of all banders for a species or the results with AOU# and/or species codes													
Species	Alpha Code	MX	HI	AK	YU BC	NWT AB	WA/OR ID	CA	NV UT	MT/WY CO	AZ NM	Total	High Banders
Emperor Goose	EMGO				81							81	U21(81)
Greater White-fronted Goose	GWFG				2072		1143					3215	U18(2014), C17(1143), U23(58)
Lesser Snow Goose (wh phase)	LSGO				2714							2714	A01(2714)
Lesser Snow Goose (bl phase)	BLGO				36							36	A01(36)
Pacific Black Brandt					27							27	U23(27)
Cackling Goose	CACG				741		24					765	Y01(385), U23(356), C17(24)
Canada Goose	CAGO					164	1	6	31	31		233	C13(164), S16(31), K03(21)
Trumpeter Swan	TRUS							4			60	64	M10=C12(30), F02(4)
Tundra Swan	TUSW				104							104	A02(104)
Whistling Swan	WHSW				383					5		388	U18(196), U23(187), S16(5)
Wood Duck	WODU							302	167		1	470	I01(297), S07(118), C06(40)
Gadwall	GADW							1	218	164	2	385	S04(164), K03(161), S02(57)
American Wigeon	AMWI				13		20		1			34	U15(15), K05(10), U12(3)
American Black Duck	ABDU										1	1	M04(1)
Mallard	MALL				6	1	2955	1889	1860	112	209	7069	R03(2549), I01(1838), K03(1588)
Blue-winged Teal	BWTE						9	5			298	312	M04(298), R03(9), I01(5)
Cinnamon Teal	CITE							6	67	47	1	121	K03(48), S16(47), S02(19)
Northern Shoveler	NSHO								8	31	19	58	S16(31), M04(19), K03(6)
Northern Pintail	NOPI			1	599		1517	28	7	4	8	2180	U15(1484), K05(468), Y01(131)
American Green-winged Teal	AGWT				1317	1	220	12	3		3	1556	K05(686), Y01(631), R03(219)
Canvasback	CANV				3					2		5	U12(3)
Redhead	REDH							8	41	107	1	158	S16(107), K03(41), I01(8)
Ring-necked Duck	RNDU						3	4	1			8	I01(4), D04(3), K03(1)
Greater Scaup	GRSC				1							1	A01(1)
Lesser Scaup	LESC				17		8				614	639	R04(614), U12(17), D04(8)
Steller's Eider	STEI				365							365	U18(365)
Spectacled Eider	SPEI				66							66	U23(58), U12(8)