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Lake Erie Bass Islands Avian Research Program

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Lake Erie Bass Islands Avian Research Program

In the early 2000s, the Lake Erie Islands Historical Society began sponsoring Elderhostel programs on South Bass Island. One dealt with fishing and the other with wine making and natural history of the islands. The popularity of evening natural history programs and optional morning bird walks soon led to a birding Elderhostel.

In 2003, I was asked by Lisa Brohl, one of the leaders of the Elderhostel, to present a one-day program on bird banding and give a demonstration. The demonstration was conducted on a 20-acre property owned by Mark and Barb Barnhill on the eastern-most part of the island. The program was a success and I was asked back each year after.

In the summer of 2006, I retired from teaching. Lisa called and asked if I would work the week-long Elderhostel. I agreed and banding increased. In 2008, the Elderhostel program increased to two sessions. Lisa is also the chair of the Lake Erie Islands Chapter of the Black Swamp Land Conservancy. She began using the data we were collecting to help secure funds to buy land on the islands. In 2009, she convinced me to start banding on Middle Bass Island.

In 2010, one of my sub-permittees, James Marshall working at Stone Lab, began a summer banding project on all of the Lake Erie Islands. So, again this year, we now have some bird banding data for South Bass Island, Middle Bass Island, and North Bass Island plus my long-term data from Kelleys Island. Banding data which have been collected over the last nine years have been used to purchase properties on South Bass Island (Scheeff East Point Preserve) and on Middle Bass Island (Middle Bass Island East Point Preserve) within the past year. The Put-in-Bay Township Park District as new owners will use the banding data to help manage the properties for migratory and nesting birds in the future. It is hoped that the banding projects can be increased in years to come.

During the 2011 banding season, banding occurred on 29 days, when 787 individual birds of 66 species were banded on South Bass, Middle Bass, and North Bass Islands. All of the banding done on North Bass Island was conducted by James Marshall as part of his study of avian use of the vineyards there.

In addition, 52 banded birds were recaptured. Of these, 62% were banded in past years. One individual was first banded in 2008, nine birds were banded in 2009, 22 birds in 2010, and 20 earlier in 2011. Perhaps the most outstanding record for this year was a Northern Cardinal captured on 2 May 2011 and which exhibited gynandromorphy, a condition in which the individual has both sets of sex chromosomes and exhibits both male and female plumages.

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