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Sand Bluff Bird Observatory

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This MAPS banding station is a component of the Elhew Field Station under the auspices of the Wehle Land Conservation Center—a facility of the State Lands Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Station operation and maintenance are funded by the State Lands Division and the Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust. This is Elhew Field Station research contribution number EFS-002.

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Sand Bluff Bird Observatory 2012 report

Located in north-central Illinois about one mile from the Wisconsin state line, we find Sand Bluff in the Sugar River Valley situated on the 303-acre Colored Sands Forest Preserve in Winnebago County. The habitat here consists of sand prairie, oak savanna, river bottoms and oxbows. The station was founded by Master Bander Lee G. Johnson in 1967 and since then he has been joined by Master Bander Richard Hamilton.

Numerous volunteers have assisted in the operations and we now have 12 people with sub-permits and 30 who contribute numerous hours to the stations operations from repairs to data work. Over the years we have netted and banded over 275,000 birds. No one has ever been paid for their work.

The year 2012 proved to be an interesting one for captures. Spring banding was as mixed up as the weather could be. Warm weather came in early, trees leafed out, then a cold snap killed a lot of buds and it was not until the early part of May before leaves came back on the surrounding trees. The winter birds, such as the Dark-eyed Junco and American Tree Sparrow, were gone early and many of the Neotropical birds came through early; we just did not catch a large number of any species. Our
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total for the spring migration was a lowly 1,619 birds covering 87 species.

Our fall season started the first week of August and went until the end of November. We caught 4,093 birds representing 99 species in the mist nets, and an additional 225 raptors at the Hawk Trapping Station. We had an unusually high 118 Black-capped Chickadees, along with 176 Hermit Thrushes and 276 Swainson's Thrushes. Warblers came through in good numbers with 106 Tennessee, 116 Magnolias and 110 Yellow-rumped Myrtles. Seventy-five Northern Saw-whet Owls graced our nets with several foreign bands. We were really excited to band a Pileated Woodpecker. The rarest bird of the year was a Sage Thrasher caught on 29 Sep 2012. The raptor station broke a record with 211 Red-tailed Hawks—5 were caught in the spring and 206 in the fall—2 Peregrine Falcons, 1 Red-shouldered Hawk, 10 Cooper's Hawks and 1 Sharp-shinned Hawk. Three of the red-tails were foreign retraps—one ASY originally caught in Palmyra, WI, in 2011; an HY originally captured at O'Hare International Airport had wing tags as well as a leg band; and the third was an HY from Stevens Point, WI. For the year we totaled 5,937 birds representing 116 species. Some longevity records among the retraps were two Blue Jays—one was captured 11 years ago as an HY and the other, nine years ago as an AHY. Other longevity records were seven-year-old recaptures of a Baltimore Oriole, Chipping Sparrow, Hairy Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Field Sparrow.

We assisted graduate students from the University of Illinois on a doctoral project collecting black-legged ticks for a study on Lyme Disease. No results are back from that yet. In the past we sampled for Avian Flu and West Nile Virus but results were negative.

We welcome students of Ornithology to assist them in their studies of the avian world.

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