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Whither North American Bird Bander: Additional Ideas

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News, Notes, Comments

Omission: *NABB* Oct. Dec 2015 Vol.40 No.4 & Jan.- Mar. Vol. 41 No.1 - page 19, Lesser Goldfinch: New Logevity Record article, the author's name was left off. The author's name and address should have been noted as follows:

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The *NABB* editorial board apologizes for this omission.

WHITHER NORTH AMERICAN BIRD BANDER: ADDITIONAL IDEAS

In the April-June 2015 issue of *North American Bird Bander* (*NABB*) (Vol. 40(2):69-70) C. J. Ralph summarized some of the 'facts of life' facing publications in the field of ornithology and *NABB* in particular. His suggestions are cogent and should be reviewed carefully and, wherever possible, implemented. Although I can not quite match his record of being a bander for 60 years (only 54 in my case), I was very much involved with the sometimes acrimonious 'Great Journal Joining' which is to say, the merger of the three regional banding association newsletters to form *NABB*. Accordingly, I am concerned that now, after 40 productive years, steps be taken to insure the continuation of *NABB*'s role in the dissemination of useful information to the field of ornithology in North America and perhaps beyond.

I fully concur with Ralph's suggestion that raising *NABB*'s profile and gaining a better "impact factor" value will attract additional authors, readership, and association memberships. In the past, a journal's impact factor was never a consideration for me as to where I submitted a manuscript. However, today it is a new age and a journal's impact factor is a valid consideration for authors, particularly new ones, when making submissions. In his article, Ralph also pointed out that *NABB* is "an excellent 'go to' journal for banding-related science and methods." I agree: emphasis on methods! I have two suggestions as to how *NABB*'s present role can be built up a bit more in our quest for an improved impact factor score and hopefully a brighter future for *NABB*.

In the past there has also been a partial gap between the

more academic researchers looking to back up more theoretical constructs with hard field data and those active banders summarizing data they have collected on topics such as age-sex determination, migration and survival rates to name a few. The few times we have had a joint scientific meeting between a banding association and a research organization, such as the Cooper Ornithological Society, there was very valuable exchange of information between those wishing to learn how to capture and band birds for their research and those who already have the expertise to do so but could use some mentoring in the ways of data summarization and analysis.

To some extent, the methods section of published papers should be explicit enough for another researcher to replicate the study. With today's costs of publication, editors are unlikely to allow an extensively enlarged methods section in a submitted manuscript. All too often generalized statements such as "birds were captured with mist nets" or "birds were marked for later recognition with colored plastic bands" are all that can be included. No details are likely to be given about how and where the nets were set, or what went into the choice of the type of color bands or other marking devices that were used. More importantly, no information is apt to be included, or which techniques were not utilized and why. Other workers should not have to go through this trial-and-error 'rediscovery of the wheel' process. What works for one species and not for another should be spelled out. Here is a role for *NABB*. Authors, particularly early in their careers, could elaborate on the development of their field techniques, explaining what worked and also what did not. This summary could then be cited in the abbreviated methods section of their more data-oriented manuscript or manuscripts (presumably in one of those "High Impact Factor" journals). I advocated this approach many years ago and two papers of exactly this sort were submitted and published in *NABB*. One dealt with catching elusive Roadrunners (Vehrencamp and Halpenny 1981) and one with secretive Clapper Rails (Zemba and Massey 1983). I am sure there are others. I think this is an approach which is both useful to ornithologists conducting field studies of birds or, particularly, those contemplating starting such. It goes without saying that *NABB* is a ready-made outlet for this type of manuscript to supplement its current coverage.

Perhaps in the process it would also raise the rate of subsequent citation of papers appearing in *NABB* and consequently improving its impact factor. We need to publicize this approach and *NABB*'s availability.

My second suggestion for the banding associations might be to undertake joint projects among banders already capturing a focal species and publish the results in *NABB*. A prototype for such a study might be the 1974-1975 White-crowned Sparrow Cooperative Project, coordinated by L. R. Mewaldt and J. R. King, to which a large number of western banders contributed data. This resulted in several publications (see Literature Cited) including two that were published in *NABB*! Someone might want to revisit this idea as well and set up new cooperative projects among banders and publishing the results in *NABB*.

My thanks go to C. J. Ralph for starting this discussion, the results of which can only benefit *NABB*.

LITERATURE CITED

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*Editor's note: Dr. Collins is Professor Emeritus of Biology and has long studied swifts and terns. A long-time bird bander, Dr. Collins served as president of WBBA in 1977 and 1978.

Jul. - Sep. 2016

BANDING NOTES - "Lumpers and Splitters"

One of the things I occasionally complain about (mostly facetiously) is how occasionally, and seemingly randomly, a species is split into two or more species or two species are lumped into one species. Hence the name of this banding note.

Winter Wrens were split into Pacific Wren and Winter Wren. The two are next to impossible to separate even in the hand (<http://www.sibleyguides.com/2010/08/distinguishing-pacific-and-winter-wrens/>). Plain Titmouse was separated into Oak Titmouse and Juniper Titmouse. The two are pretty hard to separate, but at least, each tends to reside in separate habitats (see names of the two birds) and the vocalizations are different. Oh but now in the Modoc Plateau of northeastern California the two are found together and sound the same. In these two cases, some feel that the split was premature.

An example of a potential split that has been around for a number of years is the Fox Sparrow. There has been rumors of making this species into four species, much to the delight of "life listers". Check the species account in Pyle, and you will see it is hard but not impossible to separate them. Sibley's *Guide to Birds* does a very good job of distinguishing the four. But confusion arises as Pyle and Sibley do not use the same names.

A relevant split for us here in California is our Western Scrub-Jay, which is now California Scrub-Jay and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay. Fortunately for us, the California Scrub-Jay is found west of the Sierra Nevada and the Cascades north through Oregon and Washington. Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay is found east of the Sierra Nevada (Owen's Valley east into NV, UT, CO, NM, and AZ). For further enlightenment on these jays, see *Birding Magazine* Vol. 48(2).

So we now have the "butter butts". An incomplete history is as follows: They were "originally" Yellow-rumped Warblers. In the nineteenth century, it was considered two species, split into Myrtle Warbler and Audubon's Warbler (field guide from the 1930s). It was not too difficult to separate the Myrtle primarily in the East and the Audubon's primarily in the West. By the 1960s, the lumpers put the two species back as one (field guide from the 1960s). Someone discovered a