

2016

Banding Notes- Lumpers and Splitters

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Recommended Citation

Sakai, Walter H. (2016) "Banding Notes- Lumpers and Splitters," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 41 : Iss. 3 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol41/iss3/6>

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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

- King, J.R. and L.R. Mewaldt. 1981. Variation of body weight in Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows in winter and spring: latitudinal and photoperiodic correlates. *Auk* 98:752-764. [15 members of WBBA contributed data to this study!]
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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

“zone of hybridization” from Alberta to British Columbia. (Remember the definition of a species is that it can not breed with a member of another species.)

So here we are in 2016, and the splitters have again separated this species, armed with DNA evidence. Actually, they are suggesting a split into three and possibly four species <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/goodbye-yellow-rump-will-we-see-a-return-to-myrtle-and-audubons-warblers/>.

Now, science is slow and methodical, so this will not be done instantaneously. The paper was written and published this year “suggesting” the split. Other researchers will confirm this split. The American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU now the AOS = American Ornithological Society) Checklist Committee will review the body of evidence and render a judgement. This could come quickly or take several years. Then, from our perspective as bird banders, the

Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL and our “boss”) will make a change. The BBL is usually a fair number of years behind in making changes; e.g. California and Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jays are still lumped as Western Scrub-Jay.

Fortunately for us, the BBL separated Myrtle Warbler (MYWA) and Audubon Warbler (AUWA) early in the last century, and retained that separation, in spite of the lumping done the latter half of the last century. In fact, more recently, the BBL added Unidentified Yellow-rumped Warbler (UYWA), acknowledging the hybrids.

A more complete list of impending lumps and splits can be found in the American Birding Association’s Oct 2016 *Birder’s Guide* magazine.

Thanks to C. John Ralph for useful comments.

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Recent Literature

Compiled by C. John Ralph

(If you would like to help review articles of interest to banders, please contact cjr2@humboldt.edu, and feel free to mention if you have a particular journal or geographic area of interest).

Contributors to this issue:

ATC = Allen T. Chartier; CJR = C. John Ralph

IDENTIFICATION, MOLTS, PLUMAGE, WEIGHTS, AND MEASUREMENTS

Determination of Sex Using Morphometrics in the Northern Waterthrush (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) and Swainson’s Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*). K. M. Covino. 2015. *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology* 127(4):706-711.

With genetically sexed birds, she found that wing chord values can be used to determine sex with 95% confidence. This information would allow field researchers to determine sex of 58% of Northern Waterthrushes and 33% of Swainson’s Thrushes with 95% confidence of correct assignment. If age is taken into account, the proportion of individuals for which sex can be determined increases to 62% and 38%, respectively. **CJR**

NORTH AMERICAN BANDING RESULTS

Wintering locations of Ontario-banded Great Egrets: New Jersey to the Caribbean. D.V.C. Weseloh, D. Moore, and T. Knezevic. 2014. *Ontario Birds* 32(1): 2-11.

In 2001-2012, a total of 1900 young flightless Great Egrets (*Ardea alba*) were banded at four nesting locations in Ontario. Alpha-numeric red plastic leg bands were placed on 1,280 of them between 2001 and 2010, colored alpha-numeric laminated PVC wing tags were placed on 711 egrets from 2010-2012, and nine had no auxiliary markers. Encounters were filtered to exclude months and locations unlikely to pertain to wintering individuals. The 34 resulting winter encounters were from eight U.S. states [NC, SC, FL, NJ, TN, AL, GA, VA] and four Caribbean islands [Cuba, Virgin Islands, Jamaica, and Dominican Republic], with the center of distribution being North and South Carolina. **ATC**

Influence of bottom-up trophic dynamics on Northern Saw-whet Owl irruptions revealed by small-scale banding data in Central Ontario. 2015. S. Henry, E. Nol, and W. Wehtje. *Ontario Birds* 33(3):122-133.