

2018

## A Visit to the Warner Park Bird Banding Station in Tennessee

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### Recommended Citation

Sakai, Wlater H. (2018) "A Visit to the Warner Park Bird Banding Station in Tennessee," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 43 : Iss. 4 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol43/iss4/7>

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grounds tend to not be limiting for generalist species, as they are able to move between wintering habitats, including those of lower quality (Blackburn and Cresswell 2016) but can be much more critical for specialists. Savannah Sparrows are grassland specialists during their breeding season and some show habitat specificity on their wintering grounds as well (Korosy et al. 2013). Site fidelity on wintering grounds is only advantageous if the habitat quality is both high and predictable from year to year. The banding station is located in the middle of 110 acres of land that is in the late stages of restoration to a warm season native grassland that began in 2006. Restoration efforts are ongoing, but these captures represent a small, but positive, sign of successful restoration efforts. If this observation is indeed indicative of winter site fidelity in a grassland specialist as we suspect, the continued threat to grassland habitats may have more far reaching negative consequences than previously thought.

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### A VISIT TO THE WARNER PARK BIRD BANDING STATION IN TENNESSEE

Twenty years ago, I took a sabbatical leave to sharpen my skills as a bird bander. In the process, I visited numerous banding stations across California and Oregon. I learned every station does things a little different, even the MAPS stations that are suppose to follow an identical protocol. The second thing I

learned is that there is something new to learn at each visit to a new station.

To that end, I happened to note that there was a banding station in TN, where my son lives and whom I visit annually. The station was some two hour drive from my son's home, but I figured I am a bird bander. I can get up early enough to make it to Warner Park outside of Nashville.

I made contact with Sandy Bivens, who is the Master Bander to see if I could visit and observe. She enthusiastically welcomed me to visit the station. I am sure she must have "Googled" me and must have seen my name in *NABB*. I, in turn, "Googled" Warner Park, read its bird posting, and checked eBird. There is an extensive bird banding program at Warner Park, as it operates spring and fall migration banding programs, a MAPS station, Eastern Bluebird and Purple Martin projects, Breeding Bird Surveys, a hummingbird project, among others.

Upon my arrival, I met Sandy, Kathy Shaw, John Kell, Leah LaRocco, among others. I found that I was a bird banding celebrity, and folks were eager to meet me. The station had just gotten a copy of the Tabular Pyle (see Sakai and Ralph 2002, *NABB* 27:77-90), a reworking of the species account in Pyle's book to more easily age and sex birds. The banders noted I was the lead author, hence my sudden rise in status.

We soon had to leave the warm building to start banding. It was quite a chilly morning, as the temperature hovered around 8°C all morning. Worrying about the cold and exercising caution, the crew, including Vera Roberts, Heather Gallagher, Diana McLusky, and Susan Bradfield, started by setting up a half dozen Potter traps around the buildings. Banding was conducted on two picnic tables under a large tarp. I guess the area gets more rain than my station in southern California, where it does not rain. The crew began regularly checking the traps.

The morning started with Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, House Finch, and then more of the same. I was taught that every bird is a good bird, even the ubiquitous House Finch, but these were birds I had seen and heard at my son's place. Sandy decided to open a few mist nets. Although the temperature remained cold, the birds seemed to be fine. A Swainson's Thrush. Better. Sandy put me to work skulling some birds of questionable age, reasoning that I could do it quickly

and safely . . . without the bird getting that "brain freeze" we used to get as kids eating ice cream too fast.

I watched the bird banding process. The station had an assortment of bird bags, probably made by the volunteers. There was a tag on each bag noting its weight. The birds were weighed in their bags. The recorder then did a simple subtraction. I realized I should do this to the bags I use to weigh my kestrels! Interestingly, at Warner Park, birds are banded on the left leg. To facilitate that, birds are held upside down, which they call a "reverse grip," from the more traditional bander's grip, making the left leg more accessible to right handed banders.

Birds in bags were held in cardboard boxes that maybe held half gallon liquor bottles. Birds were held in separate compartments. This is better than clothes pinning them to a rope strung across two posts, considering the cold.

As noon and closing approached, I was thinking that birds mentioned above were all that I would see. Things suddenly perked up as we got a flood of birds in the mist net. There were Magnolia, Tennessee, Yellow-rumped, and Bay-breasted warblers, as well as more of the birds mentioned earlier. Of course, we had to get a Tennessee Warbler while in Tennessee. Yellow-rumped Warblers are common in California. Oddly enough, my first Magnolia Warbler was in Costa Rica, so I guess it is new to my U.S. list. And last, the Bay-breasted Warbler was a true life bird for me. We closed nets soon after.

While we were banding, there was a regular stream of visitors, ranging from moms pushing strollers, to a scout group, a college professor, a few hard-core birders with one looking for a Lincoln's Sparrow, a number of regulars that the banders knew by name, and others. As long as the bird looked perky, a volunteer showed the birds to the visitors, told a little about the bird and banding, before letting it go. There must have been some 50 visitors braving the cold morning.

In between birds, I began to show some of the volunteers how the Tabular Pyle worked. After closing shop, Sandy invited me to visit the station the next time I was in TN, and enlisted me to give some workshops on the Tabular Pyle. To that end, Laura Cook, who is scheduled to take over as "BIRD" coordinator from Sandy, has been emailing me regularly. **Walter H. Sakai** Thousand Oaks, CA