COOPERATIVE BANDING IN FINLAND

By Timo Tallgren

After having followed for several years the course of banding in Finland, where each bander works alone, three of my friends, Seppo Karhu, Hannu Miettinen, Reijo Purasmaa, and I decided to form a four-bander team. Because we live near each other in Helsinki and had earlier banded in the same places, it occurred to us that a group of four banders should be able to work more effectively than four solitary ones. We pooled all our banding facilities such as mistnets, traps and bands. We could, in addition, use two motorboats and three cars and the team was very mobile. It was possible for us to go soon always according to where there were many birds. It should be pointed out that we did not band in the birdstations (established bird observatories).

Directly at first it became clear that the team should have in its work marked objectives and a timetable of some kind for summertime when the banding is most effective. This is because there is a very common phenomenon among the banders that one strives only for great numbers in banding. Because enormous amounts of small birds are caught, the individual banders should also measure, weigh and identify the age and sex of birds. Normally only the stations do this work. The teamwork in our case was very successful. For the summer, we posed for ourselves certain questions to work on, as follows: "When is the beginning of the fall migration of the warblers (Sylvia communis, S. curruca, S. borin, Phylloscopus trochilus, Acrocephalus schoenobaenus, A. scirpaceus) and of the Scarlet Grosbeak (Carpodacus erythrinus)?" These species come late in spring and the fall migration begins early in midsummer. Because their fall migration is little known, the results we are waiting for could be valuable. In our program was also the question, how the conditions of weather have effect upon the migration of the Wagtails (Motacilla alba & flava). As usuall, the mass banding of gulls, terns and eiders was in the program too. We also weighed and measured several hundreds of birds.

The banding began very slowly and in small numbers, but the reason for that was that we are just amateurs. My friends study at the university and I work in Finnish television. Thus there was not much time to band. The total from Jan. 1 to May 15, 1968 was only 830 birds of 49 species. But after this the summervacations began and the team started its work. The nesting time of the birds on the islands (see EBBA News 31:1, Jan.-Feb. 1968, page 15) is May-June and our activity was directed to these. The result was, among others, 3294 Black-headed and 1826 Herring Gulls, and 477 Common Eiders. Our banding total by June 23 was 7802 of 102 species. The great numbers of gulls were banded during certain days: during four hours June 5 we banded 1400 Black-headed Gulls in the colony of Tiirakari (3200 pairs) and a few days later 1060 Herring Gulls in the outer archipelago. One should mention that the gulls were banded with color rings too, in connection with a study being conducted by a Finnish

Top: Common Eiders in flight.
Center: Two netted Wrynecks (Jynx torquilla) at Laajalahti.
Bottom left: Kristian Rothoff with female Merganser at nest-box; right: Young ducks.
(All photos by the author.)

scientist. After the gull banding was finished we started to band waders, waterfowl and Starlings in the very thriving and reedy Finnabay, about 17 kilometers west of Helsinki. This bay attracts enormous numbers of birds, especially during the fall migration. There are waders, mostly Ruffs, Wood Sandpipers and Jack Snipes, many hundreds every day; there are waterfowl swarming, both young and moulting adults, and every evening some 15,000 Starlings come to this area to roost. This place is clearly the El Dorado of the banders. Here, starting July 10, we banded 2584 birds during 25 days.

On July 29 we began banding simultaneously also in Laajalahti near Helsinki. This area is a wide shore of bay with thickets and bushes. During migration, warblers are present here in great numbers. We caught 2062 birds in 13 days with 34 nets. This is a very large number bearing in mind its being early midsummer. The nets were catching day and night. One had to examine the nets very late in the evening with a flashlight and early in the morning a little before sunrise when there were in the nets only a couple of liters of water. The purpose of this Laajalahti operation was only to clarify the beginning of fall migration of some warblers.

The trapping was continued in Finnabay and the daily amounts began to increase as the migration was strengthened. In August the daily numbers were regularly over 200. Especially at the peak of migration the Yellow Wagtail was especially abundant and although trapping with nets was done on the open sandbanks around reeds and the winds made netting

The author at his nets.

difficult, over 300 Wagtails were caught in the best day with 25 nets. When we finished banding at Finnabay on September 10, our cumulative total was surprisingly great, 20,770 birds of 143 species, which was a new record in Finland. There were many rarities, for instance: 12 Spotted Crakes (Porzana porzana), 3 Water Rails (Rallus aquaticus), 2 Moorhens (Gallinula chloropus), 23 Nightingales (Luscinia luscinia) and many others. The greatest rarity was a very little warbler, the Yellow-browed Warbler (Phylloscopus inornatus) whose nearest breeding areas are east of the Ural Mountains. No doubt it had come to Finland with strong east winds at the end of August. This species has been found only about ten times in Finland.

Our team made also a couple of different banding operations. At first we made contact with the Helsinki trawlers in May. These catch salmon with trawl in the Gulf of Finland. During the spring migrations the loons stay close to the trawlers and often swallow a hook or get entangled in the line. We printed a pamphlet in which the purpose, etc. of banding was explained, and also a little story of the migration of loons in Finland. These were distributed among the trawlermen and in addition each boat got a big sack for holding loons. The results were encouraging - 39 Black-throated and three Red-throated Loons were banded in two weeks in May.

The second operation was the banding of birds of prey. In May, Hannu made a long trip to the center of Finland, having made previous inquiries about nesting places of hawks. Later at the end of June Reijo visited the known nests and banded the young. The results follow:

Buzzard	Buteo buteo	2
Rough-legged Buzzard	Buteo lagopus	1
Sparrow Hawk	Accipiter nisus	6
Goshawk	Accipiter gentilis	12
Honey Buzzard	Pernis apivorus	2
Hen Harrier	Circus cyaneus	5
Osprey	Pandion haliaetus	16
Hobby	Falco subbuteo	1
Merlin	Falco columbarius	6
Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	6
Total		57

These operations are proof, that it is easy for a team to organize different programs and realize them successfully, apart from the usual banding.

With regard to cooperative banding ("teambanding" in the original manuscript, as a direct translation of the Finnish expression. -Ed.)...is it well adapted? The answer is quite absolutely affirmative. There are so many advantages for which one should strive still more to this way of

working. If we consider the economical point, one can immediately see that the team work is noticeably more useful than solitary banding. The team does not need relatively so many mistnets, wader- and waterfowl traps as the same number of individual banders. Because there is more money to use, one can keep the traps and nets in better condition. Particularly the nets, whose time of use is relatively short. Every netter knows, no doubt, that worn-out nets are more likely to cause casualties. Thus we can diminish losses. In the team the expenses are divided among the members and are easier to manage for that reason. A solitary bander is over-extended if he traps with 20 nets continuously for two or three weeks. The effectiveness of banding is hampered by the factor of fatigue in spite of that, that a bander is no doubt "the most energetic being of the society". The team can divide the turns of banding between its members and thus it is possible to continue for longer times without a pause. This proved to be very effective at least in our team. There was a good solidarity, a certain "We-spirit", which surely for its part had effect on our eagerness for banding.

There is a very important point, that banders of a same place are able, by forming a team, to band more birds and nevertheless to disturb the nesting birds less. In Finland at least there is a common occurence, caused by lack of unified effort, that banders visit certain nests of birds of prey and colonies of seabirds at short intervals. The young have an inclination to run to the sea when banders come, one after the other, up to the nesting rock. Often it may be a heavy sea and many of them are drowned. Cooperative banding serves to reduce greatly this hazard.

Cooperative banding also has a most beneficial side-effect: a team is likely to take a more critical attitude in the determination of species, and of age and sex and so forth, than a solitary bander. As a result of this psychological factor, results are likely to be more reliable because the control is more accurate.

Finally I might say that even if our banding numbers were very large, it does not mean that we have used all our time for banding. On the contrary, we somehow managed also to pass many sunny summer days in June and July at the swimming beaches and in the archipelago.

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