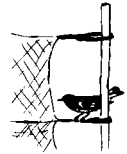


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# Why do you band birds?

Walter P. Smith



I probably shouldn't, but I do  
Get sadly turned-off by the few  
Who ask in sweetly cloying words,  
"Now, what do you do FOR the birds?"

My stock answer to the above lines is that, as a bander, I don't do things FOR the birds—I do things WITH them. I wonder how many times I have been asked why I band birds. I also wonder how many answers might I have given over the years. It is certainly something that I have thought about many times since I received my banding license, and even before—to such an extent that I thought it might be interesting to record my thoughts on paper, as objectively as is possible.

I say objectively, since I must recognize the fact that I band, primarily, because I love it. After all, it is a hobby and, as such, if it didn't bring me pleasure, I wouldn't do it. Oh, sure, I feel very comfortable with the thought that perhaps some of my data may be used to further science. But I'm not all that altruistic as to say that is the real reason I do it.

Rather, I strongly suspect that the first time I held a bird gently in my hand and examined it—in wonder and awe, and at some length, from mandibles to rectices—I was hooked in a manner that only a bander can fully understand. And any bander has felt as I feel when I place a little warbler on its back in the palm of my hand, and it lies there, mesmerized, unable or unwilling to believe that it is free to take wing—until at a flick of my hand it is gone in a flash of color.

And that is just a part of the "why." After fifteen years of banding, it is easy to look back to when I started, how little I really knew then, and to bask in that glow of realization of expanding knowledge over the years. I have always said that I believe the single most fascinating thing about our banding station at Kiptopeke is that, of the roughly 100 species we band every fall, perhaps half of them are species we didn't even know migrated through coastal Virginia—until we put up nets and started catching them. And that is after 25 years of bird-watching in the field.

One of the best examples of this is the four Empidonax flycatchers. Only the Acadian breeds in our area and can be identified by its call. Yet we

found all four in our nets, identifiable by a series of measurements that can be taken only when the bird is in the hand. And surprisingly, the Traill's, Yellow-bellied and Least all outnumber the Acadian at Kiptopeke. Another example would be the unbelievable numbers of Veeries and Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrushes; these are species which, when we were birding in the fall around home, we figured we were just lucky to see one of each; yet at Kiptopeke we have had over a thousand some years. And again, species such as Brewster's Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Philadelphia Vireo and Clay-colored Sparrow, I never see in my fall birding or, if I did, would be most difficult to identify in the field—yet in the hand at Kiptopeke, they are comparatively simple to key out. And last, but not least, such vagrant species as Black-headed Grosbeak, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Western Kingbird—species I would not have expected to see east of the Mississippi—showed up at Kiptopeke.

And just so you won't assume I think all the birds are at Kiptopeke, let me put in a plug for back-yard banding. I never thought, when I banded Song Sparrow No. 75-76324 on 23 November 1968 as an AHY-U bird, that he would show up regularly every single year since that time, through 27 March 1977; that means it is at least 10 years old! And I was amazed to discover that the race of Song Sparrow in my back yard was a distinctly smaller race than those we get at Kiptopeke. I had always classed Cardinals as permanent residents, but my banding records were to prove to me that my back yard contained three populations of Cardinals: a wintering one, a breeding one, and a permanent one. And then there's the thrill of hearing about birds I've banded; they have been picked up from Canada to the West Indies and many places in between—and as far west as Louisiana.

These are but some of the things I have learned from my banding. Besides, as a new retiree, in the last six weeks of this past winter, I have netted and trapped over 1800 birds in my back yard. Considering banding and record-keeping, I have consumed a pretty considerable amount of time in this pursuit. Now, if I hadn't been banding, I just might have had to spend that time painting the house! ♦

3009 Chesapeake Ave., Hampton, VA 22361

## Techniques for tern and gull banding

**Fred Hosea**

In working with large colonies of Caspian Terns and Western Gulls, I have found some techniques that may assist other banders in reducing trauma to the colony and to individual birds.

With Caspian Terns there is a strong tendency for birds over a few days old to run away from their nest site. In large colonies adults will often attack and kill these "runners". I have found almost complete success by placing "runners" on their backs. They calm down quickly just as other birds do and, when they right themselves, nearly all will stay put. We banded this spring in a colony of 3500-4000 chicks. Using the method described we saw no chicks killed by adults and very rarely a runner.

With terns, timing of banding is critical. Best results are obtained by banding about the 2nd to 3rd day of the main colony hatch.

A similar problem occurs with Western Gulls. They will mostly be hidden close to the nest, or possibly will still be on the nest. If picked up, they will probably run when replaced. Good success is obtained by simply lifting one side of the bird and clamping the band on the exposed leg; this works better than anything else. The "on the back" treatment does not seem as effective on gulls.

Regional Manager, Dept. of Game, State of Washington, P.O. Box 44, Aberdeen, WA 98520.

## A note of interest

We have taken over a nesting/banding project with the American Kestrel (*Falco spawerius*) started by Tom Mutchler in 1970. We recaptured an AHY F (#1263-04405) on the nest. According to Mr. Mutchler's records this bird was taken as an AHY F on nest—with young— on 6 May 1971 in the same nesting box.

Elaine Mease  
Hellertown, PA 18055

## Verdins

Dr. George T. Austin from the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas recently published in the *Wilson Bulletin* on the demography of the Verdin (*Auriparus flaviceps*). The study made use of data obtained through the North American Nest Record Card Program sponsored by Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Clutch size in the species decreased from east to west and north to south; breeding season length decreased from south to north. Nesting success was greatest during the first two months of the breeding season and varied with locality and year. Further details may be found in the *Wilson Bulletin* 89(4):572-582.

## Bander's resource material

**Improving habitat for birds and other wildlife—**available for the asking.

The U.S. Soil Conservation Service, USDA, has just completed publishing the fourth of a series of brochures on conservation plantings. Of vital interest to the birder/bander is: "Invite Birds to Your Home . . ."

Conservation Planting for the Northeast #PA 940  
Conservation Planting for the Southeast #PA 1093  
Conservation Planting for the Midwest & West #PA 982  
Conservation Planting for the Northwest #PA 1094"

Brochures #940 and #982 are printed on both sides in black/white and color and fold out into an attractive 17" x 21" wall chart, ideal for instructional purposes. Actual color photos of plants are used to show preferred foods; art work in color with black/white illustrations and photos are used to show how to effectively plan an improvement effort.

FREE: Single copies can be obtained through your County Agricultural Extension Office.

Christopher Rose

## How to rescue a raptor

So you've been called to pick up a presumably injured raptor. How do you pick up the injured bird? Each circumstance will govern the method of pick-up.

A downed bird on a busy thoroughfare must be removed quickly. Often in this type of circumstance the bird is stunned. Retrieval is therefore simple. Approach the bird from the rear, if possible. Confine the wings to the body, one hand on either side of the bird. After removing the bird to a safer area, it can be examined for type of injury.

If the bird is in no danger from traffic, you can take time to ascertain the nature of the bird's injury. If there is no leg injury, the "distract and grab" method can be used. When rescuing alone, I usually hold one hand above my head, then crouch low enough to "grab" the legs together above the talons. The bird will usually keep its eyes on the movement of the high hand. As soon as the capture is made, restrain the wings close to the body. The two-man rescue is obviously simpler; one approaches from the front and distracts, while the second approaches from the rear and "grabs."

If there is a possibility of leg injury, the safest method is the "cover completely" method. A towel, blanket, jacket or any handy light-weight item (large enough to cover the bird) can be used. Simply toss it over the bird—be sure to cover the head—and quickly restrain the bird within. You usually end up with a blanket full of talons, but this is fine: you then know the whereabouts of the talons. The cover should be gathered together, bringing the wings carefully against the body. The cover can be used to transport the bird temporarily, if the bird will not become over-heated by lack of air circulation, but I do not recommend this.

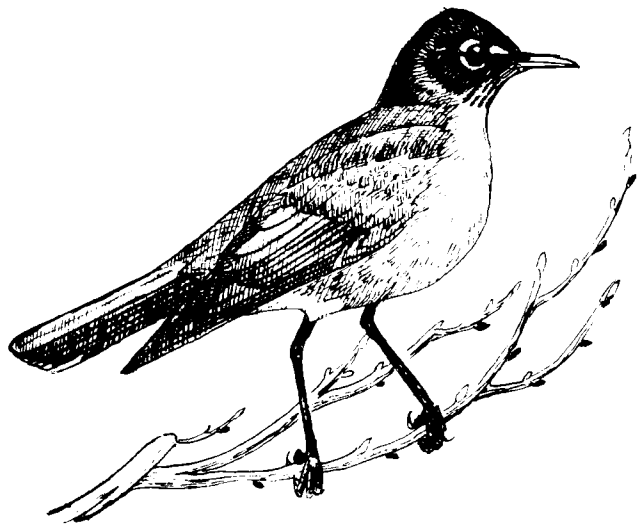
How should you transport the injured bird? The best method is to tape the primary and secondary feathers of each wing together, and also tape the legs together. This taping prevents the bird from further injuring itself or its feathers. **Do not use adhesive tape—Use a paper tape** such as a non-allergenic medical tape available at drug stores.

Adhesive tape will damage feathers. A hood is also a great aid. If you are alone, placing the bird on its back will usually sedate it, and it will be somewhat mesmerized.

I do not recommend the use of a net on a pole as a method of rescue.

Tom Mutchler

*Ed. note: Tom Mutchler was one of the pioneer surgical repair persons at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Kempton, PA. Through his work many raptors were returned to the wild that would now be zoo or museum specimens.*



## Robins

Rev. Charles R. Long, a Research Associate with the Department of Ornithology of the Ontario Museum wishes cooperators who can take part in a three-year survey of Robins (*Turdus migratorius*) across North America. Further information may be obtained by writing him at 71 Meadowlily Road, London, Ontario N5W 1B7.

## MTAB excerpts

For those unfamiliar with the MTAB, it is a Memorandum (To All Banders) sent periodically by the Banding Laboratory to the master banders. Sometimes the information does not reach the sub-permittees and, for this reason, we will be excerpting certain parts of the Memorandum.

1. Status code 697 should **NOT** be used because of misuse and misinterpretation of the code. Please see the Bird Banding Manual, Vol. 1, Part 5 for list of additional status codes; 656, 660, and 685 should cover most cases of rehabilitation. Be sure to explain what was done to the bird in the Remarks section of the schedule. We plan to revise the status codes in the future and will provide a more complete series of codes to handle rehabilitated birds.

2. The following suggestions should help banders improve banding schedules:

a. For identical data enter continuity lines **with a ruler.**

b. Use the Remarks section **liberally** for unusual species, age/sex clarification, and/or status explanations.

c. Be sure that state and region codes are three-digit entries.

d. Enter dates as six-digit codes (i.e., 06-06-78).

e. Do **not** mix alpha and numeric codes for age and sex (i.e. AHY-U **or** 1-0, **not** AHY-0).

f. **Type** schedules or **print clearly with black ink.**

g. Do **not** mark out or write over entries; neat erasures or "white-outs" are acceptable.

h. Enter inclusive band numbers in the appropriate space on the form.

i. All birds must have both an age and a sex code entered on the schedule **even if the code is U.**

j. Do **not** punch holes in banding schedules sent to the Banding Lab.

k. Birds banded between 1 January and the beginning of their nesting period cannot be coded as age Unknown on the banding schedule. By definition, these birds must be coded AHY (or SY, ASY, TY, or ATY when more precise ageing is possible). See pp 5—22 of the *Bird Banding Manual* for definition of age codes.

l. Study the sample schedule on pp 4-16 and 4-17 and re-read Part 4 of the *Bird Banding Manual*, Vol. 1.

3. Orders for bands and supplies **must** come from the master permittees, not from the sub-permittees.

4. **Do not band:** resident game birds (Sp #288.1 through 311.0), parakeets, rock doves, vultures, or unidentified migratory birds such as *Empidonax* flycatchers, warblers, gulls, and ducks.

5. Document banding of unusual species with a full description, measurements, and a photograph if possible. If there is **any identification doubt, do not band the bird.**

6. We have had numerous requests for information on ageing and sexing redpolls. **Do not use** the WBBA Worksheet by Collins and West **or** the key by Brooks (*Bird-Banding* 44(1)21). All redpolls should be aged and sexed as follows:

1A. Most breast feathers completely colored red or bright pink giving a solid red or pink effect...

ASY M (Jan—Jul)

AHY M (Aug—Dec)

1B. Breast light-pinkish, mottled pinkish-white or pinkish buff, or without pink... SEE 2.

2A. January through July...AHY U

Sex by brood patch or cloacal protuberance during breeding season.

2B. August through December...SEE 3

3A. Skull incompletely pneumatized...HY U

3B. Skull completely pneumatized...AHY U

*Note: MTAB 37 concerns itself with auxiliary marking of birds. Everyone involved in auxiliary marking should read it completely.*