Commentary on the 1979 Annual Report

Charles T. Collins

In 1979 WBBA area banders banded 194,756 birds which is the highest total of the decade — an increase of 18.5% over the 1978 total and 20.4% over the 10-year average (Table 1). This total, the seventh highest ever, is only exceeded by those of the period from 1964—69 when Hawaii and the Pacific Islands contributed an average of over 260,000 birds banded per year, mostly attributable to the U.S. National Museum's Pacific Project. The total of 448 species banded in 1979 seems to be an all-time high for the WBBA area and 12.8% over the 10-year average. The number of species banded has increased considerably during the last five years. In addition, three hybrid or intergrade forms were banded in 1979 and eight species were banded for the first time in the WBBA area: 5 in the western states (Little Blue Heron, 2; Gargany, 3; Coppery-tailed Trogon, 5; Eastern Bluebird, 4; and Bluethroat, 7) and three in Hawaii (Harcourt's Storm Petrel, 2; Skylark, 3; and Indian House Myna, 5).

Banders and/or cooperatives with the highest numbers of species banded were: Point Reyes Bird Observatory, 149; Dr. L.R. Mewaldt, 106; Kathryn Burk and Edgar Jones, 83 species each. Banders and/or cooperatives with the highest numbers of individuals banded were: Colorado Division of Wildlife, 17,800; California Department of Fish and Game, 16,997; P.R.B.O., 9347; Klamath Basin NWR, 8257; and Douglas Benning (U.S.F.W.S., Denver), 6753. Eight non-agency banders totaled over 2,000 birds banded in 1979 and two (Edgar Jones and Fred Hosea) exceeded 3,000!

As also true in 1978 (Gilmore, 1979. *NABB* 4:94-95) gamebirds accounted for the largest percent of all birds banded (48%) of which waterfowl accounted for 46% and gallinaceous birds the remaining 2% (Table 2); three species contributed 84% of that total. Only 3% of all the birds banded were birds of prey, led by the American Kestrel, Red-tailed Hawk, and Barn Owl which jointly accounted for 41% of that total. Shorebirds, gulls, and alcids made up 12% of the year's total with the top three species accounting for 48% of the group total. It is interesting to note that for a change two of the three are sandpipers and not the expected gulls, perhaps reflecting the increased interest in coastal wetlands and their avifaunas by several state and federal agencies.

Passerines represented 29% of the total banded in 1979; House Finches, White-crowned Sparrows, and Dark-eyed Juncos made up 26% of this total. The remaining group of birds accounted for 11% of the annual total and prominent in this group were two shearwaters being studied in Hawaii and the Sage Grouse in Colorado. The 15 species listed in Table 2 account for 109,322 individuals or 56% of all the birds banded in WBBA's area in 1979. From this it is obvious that we are banding very few individuals of many other species. I would hope that careful consideration is being given to the amount of time and energy (and computer record-keeping time) being devoted to this and that these costs are balanced against the data obtained and the chances of returns and/or recoveries in the future. As also noted by Hay (1978. NABB 3:87-89) in a substantial number of species (57% in 1979) one bander or agency accounted for at least one-half of the total for that species. Hay also believed that this, "coupled with a decrease in birds and species reported per individual reflects a continuation of a trend toward directed banding studies." Further indication that this is true is the fact that the 55 banders or agencies which reported banding 5 or more individuals of only a single species averaged 227 birds and, of these, three reported banding more than a thousand individuals (range 5-2012)! In these figures we may also be seeing proof of the increased attention being given to nongame and endangered species by state and federal agencies and traditionally game-oriented wildlife management programs (Balph, 1980. NABB 5:39).

Another decade has slipped by since I prepared a similar commentary on the 1969 annual report. At that time I noted apparent long-term declines in the number of Brown Towhees and California Thrashers, among other species, and believed it might be an indication of increasing development pressures and destruction of our native habitats. Over the last five years (1975-1979) an average of 38.2 California Thrashers have been banded annually, which is nearly double the 1960-69 average (19.9/yr.) but still below the 1950-59 average of 54.4/yr. Brown Towhees over the last five years have averaged 247 individuals banded per year, which is 14% below the level for 1960-69 (282/yr. and 46% below the 1950-59 level (450/yr).

Although these figures are probably more directly

Table 1. Ten year summary, 1970 through 1979

	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	10-year average
Including all sources											
Number of reports	213	195	187	164	189	236	242	223	311	361	232
Reports of less than 100 birds	82	69	77	73	67	116	98	104	157	156	100
Species banded	360	381	366	377	393	412	410	444	416	448	400
Birds banded	184,681	185,946	167,358	137,408	139,103	119,547	149,964	149,335	164,224	194,756	159,232
Average species/bander	14.8	14.5	14.9	15.2	18.3	13.6	14.3	12.1	12.3	11.9	14.2
Average birds/bander	867	830	890	723	658	514	961	564	624	581	721
Excluding Hawaii-Pacific area											
Birds banded	184,284	184,794	166,648	137,112	138,923	119,339	149,316	147,739	155,782	186,031	156,997
Birds banded by area											
Alaska	2,443	3,130	1,774	6,216	2,164	4,185	9,451	19,621	21,597	15,311	8,589
Yukon, B.C., Alberta	8,133	11,136	7,718	7,307	4,069	9.086	22,334	17,409	16.641	28,401	13,223
Washington, Oregon	24,319	17,101	18,472	14,963	12,598	10,597	19,156	13,013	15,366	17,796	16,338
Idaho, Montana	15,788	14,920	14,652	10,019	11,403	5,999	13,244	16,235	16,113	16,049	13,442
California	71,690	71,241	62,108	46,428	41,110	43,243	39,363	35,162	40,741	57,708	50,879
Nevada, Utah	13,081	11,145	8,541	6,112	7,392	6,485	4,380	5,579	5,031	5,927	7,367
Wyoming, Colorado	33,295	40,246	40,399	35,973	36,643	32,232	33,630	29,815	32,781	34,906	34,992
Arizona, New Mexico*	15,535*	16,393*	10,672	10,051	11,421	7,614	8,406	8,569	6,951	9,604	10,521
Mexico*			2,312	43	239	106		737	561	329	545
Hawaii, Pacific Islands	397	1,152	710	296	180	208	648	1,596	8,441	9,725	2,235

*Combined in 1970, 1971

Table 2. 1979 banding breakdown by category and major species within each category.

Group	Waterfowl Ducks, geese & swans	Birds of Prey	Shorebirds, gulls & alcids	Passerines	Others
Total	89,320 (46%)[1]	5469 (3%)	23,202 (12%)	57,441 (29%)	19,324 (10%)
Major Species	Mallard 39,182 (44%)[2]	Am. Kestrel 794 (15%)	Western Gull 4422 (19%)	W-crn Sparrow (all races) 6710 (12%)	Manx (Newell's) Shearwater 2461 (13%)
	Pintail 24,271 (27%)	Red-t. Hawk 764 (14%)	W. Sandpiper 4245 (18%)	House Finch 4714 (8%)	Sage Grouse 1862 (10%)
	Canada Goose 11,889 (13%)	Barn Owl 652 (12%)	Dunlin 2755 (12%)	Dark-eyed Junco 3345 (6%)	Wedge-tailed Shearwater 1434 (7%)

[1]( ) — % of total birds for 1979 [2]( ) — % of birds in this category

influenced by shifts in bander activities and interests, it still seems worth looking for long-term trends in some of the data contained in these annual reports. It is gratifying to see that the birds of prey accounted for 3% of all birds banded in 1979 compared with only 0.3% of the annual total in 1969, a level which caused me some concern ten years ago! The amount of effort required to accomplish this seemingly modest increase has been truly impressive when it is compared with the relative ease of banding large numbers of some colonial seabirds and waterfowl.

The geographical summary for the last 10 years (Table 1) reflects several clear shifts in avian research emphasis. The annual banding totals for some states have remained relatively the same over this decade while others have clearly declined. Most noticeable have been the dramatic increases in the total for Alaska and Western Canada, no doubt due to the increased emphasis on inventorying the avifauna of some of these northern areas proposed for development and oil exploration. Equally dramatic has been the resurgence of banding activity in Hawaii and the Pacific Islands. Although still not approaching the fantastic levels of the late 1960's, the annual totals in recent years greatly exceed those of the early 1970's as a result of the increased levels of interest and funding for studies of the endangered species in these islands. What trends we will be seeing in ten more years from now is anyone's guess, but I would hope they will reflect continued efforts to understand and protect our native avifaunas and their habitats.

I am indebted to Dr. Martha H. Balph for carefully tabulating and summarizing this year's annual report thereby making my job so much easier.

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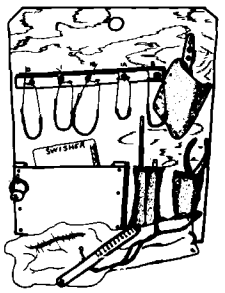

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1½	4.15	4.30	4.65				7.45	7.80	8.50
2½							8.50	8.85	9.65
Nylon Tethered-Top Nets									
1¼				8.85	9.25	10.10	11.75	12.30	13.40
1½				6.85	7.15	7.75	8.50	8.90	9.70
1¼x2.6 cm							11.75	12.30	13.40
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1¼				11.25	11.80	12.80	15.30	16.00	17.40
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Sust—Sustaining member
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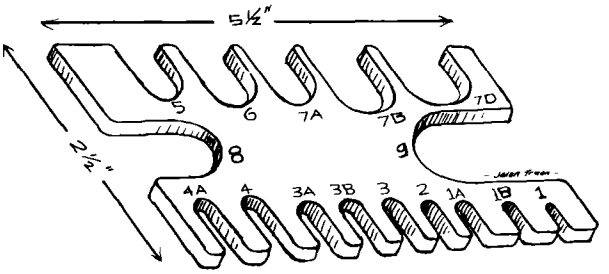

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