

Commentary on the 1983 Annual Report

Martha H. Balph
Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, UMC 52,
Utah State University,
Logan, UT 84322

Banding activity in the WBBA area showed a decline in most categories in 1983. The total number of birds banded was 120,963, the second-lowest figure for the decade and 18% below the 10-year average (Table 1). The number of continental species banded was 394 ("species" including 374 currently recognized species in addition to subspecies or subspecies groups, hybrids or intergrades, and unidentified species). This total was up slightly from 1982 but still lower than the 10-year average. Hawaiian bandings contributed an additional 24 species. The number of active reports was lower than usual (down 34% from 1982 and 14% below the 10-year average), which probably accounts for at least part of the observed reduction in numbers of individuals and species banded.

The mean number of birds per bander in 1983 was 508, substantially higher than in 1982 but below average for the decade. The mean number of species per bander of 13.9 was 7% higher than the 10-year average and up 32% from 1982, reversing the steady decline noted in this category over the past several years. The marked increase in number of species per bander could signify a turnaround of the recent trend toward directed banding studies. However, the proportion of banders reporting 5 or more individuals banded of a single species (perhaps a better estimator of directed studies) declined only slightly, from 16% in 1982 to 14% in 1983. Furthermore, for most species one bander accounted for at least one-half of the birds banded (65% of all species and 59% of species in which more than 3 individuals were banded); this represents an increase since 1979 (see Collins, NABB 5:88, 1980). Future developments here probably would bear watching closely.

Table 1. Ten-year summary, 1974 through 1983

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Including all sources							
Number of reports—active	189	236	242	223	311	361	282
Reports of less than 100 birds	67	116	98	104	157	156	119
Species banded ¹	393	412	410	444	416	448	407
Birds banded	139,103	119,547	149,964	149,335	164,224	194,756	157,787
Average species/bander	18.3	13.6	14.3	12.1	12.3	11.9	11.7
Average birds/bander	658	514	961	564	624	581	560
Birds banded by area							
Alaska	2,164	4,185	9,451	19,621	21,594	15,311	7,580
Yukon, B.C., Alberta	4,069	9,086	22,334	17,409	16,641	28,401	34,557
Washington, Oregon	12,598	10,597	19,156	13,013	15,366	17,796	17,366
Idaho, Montana	11,403	5,999	13,244	16,235	16,113	16,049	13,330
California	41,110	43,243	39,363	35,162	40,741	57,708	38,216
Nevada, Utah	7,392	6,485	4,380	5,579	5,031	5,927	4,444
Wyoming, Colorado	36,643	32,232	33,630	29,815	32,781	34,906	25,278
Arizona, New Mexico	11,421	7,614	8,406	8,569	6,951	9,604	16,910
Mexico	239	106	—	737	561	329	106
Hawaii, Pacific Islands	180	208	648	1,596	8,441	9,725	6,083

¹To maintain consistency with previous reports, the species summary is for continental birds only.

	1981	1982	1983	10-Year Average
Including all sources				
Number of reports—active	314	361	238	276
Reports of less than 100 birds	146	59	98	112
Species banded ¹	403	383	394 ¹	411
Birds banded	153,585	122,147	120,963	147,141
Average species/bander	11.2	10.5	13.9	13.0
Average birds/bander	489	338	508	580
Birds banded by area				
Alaska	8,781	6,286	6,529	10,150
Yukon, B.C., Alberta	29,384	17,729	10,284	18,989
Washington, Oregon	18,441	13,709	15,595	15,364
Idaho, Montana	11,642	9,945	8,080	12,204
California	32,782	38,978	36,176	40,345
Nevada, Utah	7,426	7,365	4,496	5,852
Wyoming, Colorado	19,242	7,379	16,096	26,800
Arizona, New Mexico	17,548	16,028	16,625	11,968
Mexico	223	219	932	345
Hawaii, Pacific Islands	8,116	4,509	6,150	4,566

¹To maintain consistency with previous reports, the species summary is for continental birds only.

Regional totals for 1983 revealed increases in the number of birds banded in some areas and decreases in others. The area showing the largest relative increase was Mexico (170% above the 10-year average). In addition, all of 3 species banded for the first time in WBBA territory in 1983 were from Mexico and included 2 Nutting's Flycatchers, 4 Black-capped Gnatcatchers, and 2 Rufous-capped Warblers. Other regions showing substantial increases in numbers of birds banded were Arizona/New Mexico (39% above the 10-year average) and Hawaii/Pacific Islands (35%). Area exhibiting the greatest proportional decreases were Yukon/B.C./Alberta (46% below the 10-year average), Wyoming/Colorado (40%), Alaska (36%), and Idaho/Montana (34%). These results suggest a possible shift of geographic emphasis in banding activity from north to south.

Banders with the highest species totals for 1983 were Point Reyes Bird Observatory (147), San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (107), Modoc NWR (86), Stephen M. Russell (85), and Kathryn B. Burk (83). Four agencies and 11 individual banders reported species totals greater than 50. PRBO also led in total number of birds banded (8,853), followed by Arizona Game and Fish Department (7,178) and Colorado Division of Wildlife (7,060). Individuals banding the largest numbers of birds were Philip M. Walters (2,695), H. Elliott McClure (2,570), and Erhard Pletz (2,473). Twelve agencies and 20 individual banders reported numerical totals greater than 1,000.

Birds banded in 1983 represented 19 orders and 59 families (including 6 families banded in Hawaii/Pacific Islands only). Groups banded in the greatest numbers were passerines (45% of all birds banded) and waterfowl (27%), followed by pigeons and doves, shorebirds and allies, and birds of prey (Table 2); together these accounted for 91% of all bandings. Passerines, in addition to being the most commonly banded order, accounted for 42% of the families and 56% of all species banded in 1983. Most of the passerines banded (67%) were emberizids (24,508 individuals) or fringillids (12,187).

The number of species with over 1,000 birds banded was 20, down from 25–29 in 1980, 1981, and 1982. Mallards continued to lead with 22,086 banded. Mourning Doves ranked second with 8,001 banded, a substantial increase over 1982. Other species banded in numbers greater than 1,000 were: Laysan Albatross (2,470), Double-crested Cormorant (1,616), 2 species of waterfowl (Canada Goose, 3,772 and Northern Pintail, 1,307), California Gull (2,842), and 13 passerines including Tree Swallow (2,457, a record high for this species), Mountain Bluebird (1,557), 6 emberizids (Yellow-rumped Warbler complex, 2,055; Song Sparrow, 1,060; White-crowned Sparrow complex, 4,926; Dark-eyed Junco complex, 2,916; Red-winged Blackbird, 1,476; and Brown-headed Cowbird, 1,175), 4 fringillids (House Finch, 4,637; Common Redpoll, a record high at 2,489; Pine Siskin, 1,746; and Evening Grosbeak, 1,146), and House Sparrow (1,390). Together, these 20 species accounted for 59% of the 1983 banding total. Record highs were achieved for 41 species; particularly gratifying among these were 18 Whopping Cranes and 980 Least Terns, as well as 6 species of hawks and owls. At the other end of the spectrum were 73 species banded in very small numbers (1–3 individuals), compared to 55 in 1981 and 65 in 1982.

A closing comment and reminder: An apparent decline in the frequency of reporting in 1983 seems reason for concern. The WBBA annual report and commentary require full and accurate banding information to be meaningful. For example, in 1983 was there a real decrease in numbers of birds banded relative to previous years, or was the decline due to reduced bander response? All banders in the WBBA area are urged to submit prompt reports of banding activities in the years to come.

I am indebted to Van A. Truan for compiling this year's annual report.

Table 2. 1983 banding breakdown by category and major species within each category

Group	Waterfowl (Anseriformes)	Birds of Prey (Falconiformes, Strigiformes)	Shorebirds, Gulls & Alcids (Charadriiformes)	Pigeons & Doves (Columbiformes)	Passerines (Passeriformes)	Other
Total	32,516 (27%) ¹	5,243 (4%)	8,247 (7%)	9,494 (8%)	54,440 (45%)	10,996 (9%)
Major species	Mallard 22,086 (68%) ²	Com. Barn-Owl 838 (16%)	Calif. Gull 2,842 (34%)	Mourning Dove 8,001 (84%)	W.-crn. Sparrow ³ 4,926 (9%)	Laysan Albatross 2,469 (22%)
	Canada Goose 3,772 (12%)	Am. Kestrel 636 (12%)	Least Tern 980 (12%)	W.-winged Dove 784 (8%)	House Finch 4,632 (8%)	Dbl.-cr. Cormorant 1,616 (15%)
	N. Pintail 1,307 (4%)	Shp.-shin. Hawk 610 (12%)	Black Noddy 926 (11%)	Inca Dove 336 (4%)	Dk.-eyed Junco ³ 2,916 (5%)	Wdg.-t. Shearwater 916 (8%)

¹(%)—% of total birds for 1983
²(%)—% of birds in this category
³All races