
Bander's Forum

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To the Editor: As all bird banders in the United States know, they get their bands without cost from the Bird Banding Laboratory of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. This agency of the federal government is also responsible for keeping records on use of the bands. The support of the bird banding program by the United States government even extends to the Internal Revenue Service, which allows income tax deductions to banders for certain expenses in their banding activities. The justification for the government thus supporting bird banding activities lies chiefly in the fact that the banding program yields information on birds, a public resource.

Bird banders can experience the satisfying feeling that they are contributing to a program operating toward the increase of human knowledge on birds, but in reaping the special benefits provided by the government, banders must remember that they also have special responsibilities. While banders have a right to enjoy their activities, they must be careful to be certain they are not banding birds only for this enjoyment. The main goal among bird watchers generally is to list the largest possible number of species, and banders can easily fall into a similar pattern where the chief or only goal is to band the maximum possible number of birds. With the activities of banders subsidized by the government, banders do not have the same rights on this point as bird watchers.

What started as the "Operation Recovery" program has become a particularly conspicuous program in which the goal of collecting useful data may sometimes be compromised by the goal of banding the largest possible number of birds. Certainly the original goal of the "Operation Recovery" program to recover many birds banded farther north on their southward migration has not been achieved. I have used in my research data collected in the "Operation Recovery" program, and I have found some things that I think could be done to enhance the value of the data collected.

With only minor changes in the operation plan of the "Operation Recovery" program as followed at most or all stations, needed data would be yielded useful in following population trends of the birds involved. The chief difficulty I encountered trying to use data from the "Operation Recovery" program for following population trends

of birds was the fact that numbers of captures could not be related to efforts involved making captures. To address this problem, nets should be continuously operated in all of the same locations or records kept of nets in which birds were captured. If nets are continuously and similarly operated throughout the migration season of a species, the assumption can be made that comparable samples are being obtained in different years and that resulting data show population trends for the species. Comparison of data from different stations can be used to determine whether population trends are local or range wide.

Continuous operation of nets in the same locations can be expected to yield comparable data from year to year, with no need for records of which nets yielded the captures. However, if records are kept of the nets from which each bird is taken, nets can be opened or closed in adjusting to problems daily encountered at the station. Also, and more importantly, recording the nets yielding captures makes it possible to treat captures from each net as a separate sample, providing advantages to researchers wishing to use statistical tests in analysis of the data. Comparison of captures from the same nets through the years might also show changes in captures which could be attributed to changes in habitat.

In the change that I visualize for the "Operation Recovery" program, there is a potential role for *North American Bird Bander*. The annual reports of the past published in *North American Bird Bander* have had little value beyond giving banders an opportunity to compare notes on numbers of birds banded. With little modification in the program followed gathering the data, added value can be given to the data accumulated. Reports should be standardized to incorporate certain requirements.

To achieve standardization of reports, rules for operation of the banding stations and for preparation of annual reports should be formulated. By publishing standardized reports containing data useful in research, *North American Bird Bander* can perform a new and important service to ornithological science. At the same time the desire of banders to see reports of their results in print will be satisfied. A major challenge is awaiting action by officials responsible for the policy followed in preparation of *North American Bird Bander*.