
Bander's Forum

COMMENT:

I read with interest Mr. Schaeffer's letter in the Jul.-Sept. Bander's Forum (NABB, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 83). While I sympathize with his frustration with the BBL I do not agree with his primary point in the letter. I believe it is a mistake to think that any one of us outside the banding lab has a clear picture of BBL's problems; consequently I think it a *major* mistake for us to complain that our efforts to "help" have not been appreciated. Banders have more than enough problems of their own (e.g., making good use of their own banding data). The mission of the BBL is very different from that of the individual banders and, consequently, their needs are quite different. Clearly, one of their major needs is for each and every bander to submit carefully checked and properly filled out written (or typed) schedules. It does not appear to me that submitting machine-readable schedules is wanted (except from, perhaps, very large permanent stations). If I were running the BBL, I would probably not want them either.

Mr. Schaeffer seems to assume that the BBL should be providing advice and software for microcomputer users. Why? The BBL staff are biologists, not programmers. They have a computer to help with their work but their responsibilities are with the data not the machines. Considering the level of support provided by the Federal Government, it is amazing that the BBL functions as well as it does; adding the function of providing software to banders seems to me to be unrealistic.

What then is realistic? Computers can be extremely useful tools for banders. Properly programmed, they can drastically reduce errors in data handling and can significantly streamline a banding operation. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, they can provide a means to analyze a bander's own data. Clearly, they could be used to produce machine-readable schedules. However, they can just as easily produce printed schedules (and in any case the BBL would require both). I think we should carefully ask ourselves what we as banders need (machine-readable schedules do *not* qualify), and what the BBL needs from us (such schedules apparently also do not qualify) and address our programming skills to solving those needs. I hasten to point out that this is precisely what most of the efforts to date have done (as demonstrated at the joint EBBA-NEBBA meeting this year). I urge Mr. Schaeffer to join ranks.

Mr. Schaeffer's suggestion of forming a committee to coordinate and assist the various programming efforts is good. Perhaps one or more of the banding organizations will be interested. This committee could maintain communication with the BBL so that the needs of both the BBL and individual banders are better served. Meanwhile, we as individual banders should actively continue in our efforts to make the most productive use of our data.

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(Editor's Note: Upon receipt of a comment to a previously published article, EBBA's editorial policy will be to offer the original author an opportunity to reply.)

REPLY:

I disagree with Dr. Wood that it is a major mistake for us to complain that efforts to "help" (the Banding Laboratory) have not been appreciated. If the "help" was not needed or not desired, they would have said so, but they did not. Since they did not, I feel it is reasonable to expect a "thank you". While that "thank you" has now been received (through sharing of a computer program), I must point out that with any organization or individual, saying "thank you" is a courtesy that one comes to expect in the normal flow of communication from one party to another.

If, as Dr. Wood puts it, "it does not appear to me that submitting machine-readable schedules is wanted", then why does the Banding Laboratory give banders the opportunity to do so? That was not the issue in my original Article. I already *had* the authorization from the Banding Laboratory to so submit my schedules.

There are some points in Dr. Wood's reply that are realistic. I agree with him the Banding Laboratory should not be placed in a position of providing advice and software for microcomputer users as they are biologists rather than programmers. Perhaps I overlooked that distinction.

Dr. Wood urges me "to join ranks". Join ranks with whom? I've kept up a large correspondence over the years with people who are programmers and I've been programming (not necessarily with birds in mind) since the heyday of the microcomputer in 1976-77, so perhaps it would be more appropriate that some others joined ranks with me.

Fortunately, D. Alan Davenport (Chief Programmer at Patuxent) at the request of George Jonkel, very graciously allowed me to have a copy (on disk) of his "Banding Schedule Generator" program written for MS-DOS application. I would rather like to believe that they made that fine gesture to show their appreciation for years of assistance I've provided the Lab.

Fred S. Schaeffer

The Bander's Forum

We read with interest the article "Sex reversal in banded Cardinal" in Volume 11 of the North American Bird Bander. Although the observation is well worth noting, we find the conclusion that her observations "prevents a clear cut case of sex reversal" to be misleading, and potentially erroneous.

What the author noted was a *plumage change*, apparently from dull to bright. She suggests that this could be the result of some perturbation that created a hormone imbalance. We agree. Indeed, Johns (1964, Condor 66:449-455) demonstrated that testosterone injections produce bright plumages in both male and female phalaropes.

But *plumage change* does not necessarily indicate *sex reversal*. That latter term indicates a change of the sex of the organism. No evidence is presented in the article to indicate that the bird was functioning as a female (i.e. producing eggs) and then switched to become a functional male (i.e. producing sperm).

Like the author, we are not aware of any reference to natural sex change in "wild free birds." We are not convinced that her article documents the first case. Given the complexities of hormonal control of morphology, we are not particularly surprised to read a report dealing with plumage change.

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As an aviculture intern at the International Crane Foundation last year, I completed a research project which included a literature search on the topics of avian sex determination and gonadal differentiation and chick sex ratio manipulation. Although it was by no means exhaustive, my library work revealed some very interesting scientific findings. Thus, I was very interested in Mrs. Baumgartner's data.

It is important to remember that, useful as it is in the field, plumage is a derivative method of sexing birds—only inspection of gonads can be considered completely accurate. Thus, it is quite possible that the author observed some form in which gonadal secretions of estrogen became inhibited or a male cardinal which underwent a delay in maturation. Either scenario might explain these plumage observations.

I never ran across an example of true sex reversal in birds in my research, although it has certainly been attempted in a variety of ways. I define this as either a fertile individual not in the sex of its chromosomal designation or an individual documented to be fertile in first one sex and then the other. Thus, observations such as the author's can be very important if accompanied by chromosomal and gonadal sexing—difficult, I realize, in the field. However, without chromosomal and gonadal data, the author's observations cannot be presumed to indicate actual sex reversal, but only represent documentation of an unexplained plumage development.

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