Western Regional News

Western Bird Banding Association

Founded 1925

President's Message

It is becoming increasingly apparent that Earth's biosphere, and its bird populations, are facing a growing number of environmental threats of ever increasing severity. Many of these are truly global in nature: accelerating habitat loss from the deforestation and fragmentation of tropical and temperate forest ecosystems, the desertification of scrub and savanna ecosystems, and the filling and degradation of estuarine, wetland and riparian ecosystems; global warming due to atmospheric accumulation of greenhouse gasses; loss of atmospheric ozone due to chlorofluorocarbon pollution of the atmosphere; and toxic pollution of marine and terrestrial ecosystems from acid rain, industrial wastes, agricultural runoff, and low level radiation .

In fact, the human species seems to have embarked upon a global ecological experiment, the ramifications of which may challenge the greatest extinction rates and fastest rates of range change ever recorded in the fossil record. And the global scientific community has not yet even put into place the means for recording the data from this experiment. Clearly the need for a continuing and compprehensive program of biomonitoring, on a global scale, is justified.

Birds, because of their high body temperature, rapid metabolism and high ecological position on most food webs, may be excellent indicators of environmental change. Moreover, land birds, because of their abundance and diversity in most terrestrial ecosystems, diurnal nature, discrete reproductive seasonality, and intermediate longevity, may be ideal indicators of change in terrestrial ecosystems, ecosystems in which it is often difficult to demonstrate adverse effects of habitat change and pollution. Furthermore, the beauty of land bird plumage and song make them favorite subjects of human attention. Truly, the "canary in the mine" analogy can accurately be applied to the biomonitoring of land birds.

Indeed, a number of large-scale, long-term biomonitoring programs for land birds are already in place on this continent. They include the Breeding Bird Survey, the Breeding Bird Censuses and Winter Bird-Population Studies, and Christmas Bird Counts. All of these efforts provide annual estimates for population trends for land birds, but all suffer from the same shortcoming: they fail to separate the effects of productivity from the effects of survivorship. Without these critical data, it is impossible to test hypotheses to account for observed population changes.

Here is where the efforts of banders like us can aid enormously. By banding and recapturing the individual birds that we encounter, we can accumulate data on the age-specific survivorship of our birds. Furthermore, by accurately ageing each individual captured, we can accumulate data on the ratio of young to adults, thus, information on the productivity of our birds. The key to both of these determinations is standardization. By standardizing the number and location of our nets, and our total efforts, including the effort and timing per day and per season, we banders can provide enormously valuable data on productivity and survivorship. In fact, only we banders can easily provide this information. Furthermore, by networking with other banders, we can provide meaningful information on changes in productivity and survivorship over larger geographical areas.

As has often been the case, the British have pioneered such cooperative banding programs. Since 1981, the British Trust for Ornithology has operated a Constant Effort Sites ringing operation during the breeding season to monitor productivity and survivorship of birds. Other constant effort banding projects are currently being established in Finland, France, the Netherlands and Denmark, and are being considered for New Zealand, Spain and Israel.

Now, at long last, a constant effort sites program is being established in North America. This is the Monitoring Avian Productivity (MAP) project coordinated by the Institute for Bird Populations. Up to 23 stations were in operation during the summer of 1989, the pilot year for this project. Hopefully, the scope and coverage of this project will increase greatly over the next few years.

Here then is an opportunity for banders to make an important and crucial contribution to avian biomonitoring. All that is needed is an array of six or more mist-nets, operated in a standardized manner on at least one day in each of about ten 10-day periods from May to August. For more information please write the Institute for Bird Populations, P.O. Box 554, Inverness CA 94937.

David F. DeSante

1989 WBBA Research Award

The recipient is David R. C. Prescott of the University of Calgary. His project is: Differential migration in the Evening Grosbeak: a test of hypotheses.

Donations Needed to Support WBBA Research Grants

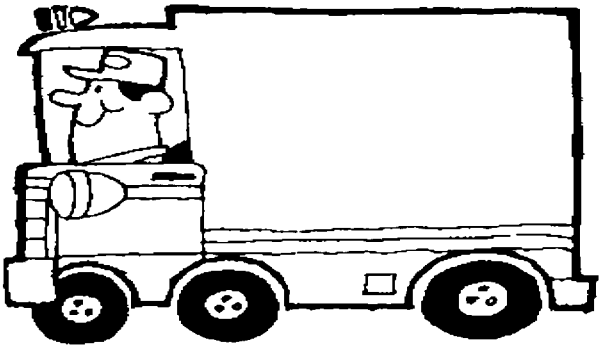
Western Bird Banding Association annually provides a grant of $250 to support avian research that incorporates bird banding. In the last three years, WBBA funds have supported projects on differential migration in the Evening Grosbeak, selective advantage of communal night roosts for the European Starling and territory selection by the Hermit Thrush. Most recipients are young investigators embarking on ornithological careers who find these awards important to their success. Many well-designed, potentially valuable research proposals are received and considered each year and WBBA would like to make more than one award annually.

Please donate generously to help support improved bird-banding research by young ornithologists by sending your check, payable to WBBA, and marked "Research Grant" to the treasurer:

Harold Wasserman
1158 Beechwood Street
Camarillo, CA 93010

Many thanks to Dr. Kerry P. Reese, Research Grant Committee Chairman, for starting the ball rolling with his generous donation.ttee Chairman, bird banding.

Moving? Please let the WBBA treasurer know as soon as possible since the Post Office will not forward copies of North American Bird Bander.



Support Western Bird Banding Association by becoming a sustaining member.

or

Encourage your fellow banders and sub-permittees to join Western Bird Banding Association.