Western Regional News

Western Bird Banding Association

Founded 1925

President's Message

On 30-31 January 1990, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in consultation with the Canadian Wildlife Service, held a workshop at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center to evaluate non-game bird banding in North America. The purpose was to review the role of the Bird Banding Laboratory and plan for its future in order to assure the most effective use of banding and Banding Lab resources in the conservation of migratory birds. This is a summary of my statement to the workshop on behalf of WBBA.

A. Objectives of the Western Bird Banding Association (WBBA)

1. To encourage scientific inquiry into the biology and ecology of birds and bird populations through studies involving the in-hand examination and banding of birds.
2. To promote communication among the bird banders of western North America and provide a forum for them to share information.
3. To disseminate information among bird banders regarding methods, techniques and equipment for (1) capturing, holding, banding and releasing birds, (2) recording information on birds in the hand including mensural data and information on physical and reproductive condition, and (3) making accurate in-hand determinations of species, age and sex.
4. To provide a journal for bird banders in which to publish the results of their studies in an inexpensive and timely manner.

B. WBBA Perspectives on the Most Important Subjects to be Discussed

1. The most important topic is how to encourage the collection, analysis and utilization of data obtained from the in-hand examination and banding of birds in order to promote their conservation. This broad goal should underlie all our discussions and should be the basis for any reorganization of the Bird Banding Laboratory and/or banding in North America. Several aspects of this topic warrant detailed discussion.

a. How to encourage individuals to band productively with an emphasis on (1) banding and study of key species, (2) banding in key habitats, (3) banding at optimal times of the year, (4) development of standardized long-term studies, and (5) collection of the most useful data on each bird.

b. Establishment of cooperative banding programs to provide critical data for bird conservation, and recruitment of banders for these programs.

c. Elimination of "ring and fling" banding.

d. The best use of banding and in-hand examination of birds in environmental education to promote understanding of the role of bird banding in local/global conservation issues.

2. The second topic of discussion stems directly from the first: the use of information obtained from in-hand examination and banding of birds as a means of population monitoring, particularly monitoring productivity and survivorship by means of constant effort banding, and monitoring population trends by standardized banding during migration. The emphasis of this discussion should be on banding and in-hand examination as a tool to address population questions that can be answered efficiently in no other way.

3. The third topic deals with better management and utilization of banding data. Here our vision should be wide and far reaching--and our proposals should be innovative and creative. At this critical juncture, we have the unique opportunity to suggest new ideas that may sound heretical and revolutionary, but we must take this opportunity to create new solutions to some of the oldest and most persistent

problems that the Bird Banding Laboratory and bird banders face. Specific topics to be addressed include:

a. Ways to improve entry, storage and retrieval of banding data. Even with recent improvements, we have not developed or implemented the most efficient procedures for scheduling and proofing banding data.

b. The Bird Banding Laboratory may not be the best or only location for storage and retrieval of banding data. Perhaps the administration, storage and retrieval of certain banding data could be more efficiently delegated to other responsible organizations.

c. All birds that are examined in the hand need not be banded. Banding might be limited to those studies where recapture, resighting and recovery are probable and important.

d. Return and recapture data may constitute some of the most valuable information that banders collect. We have not yet developed a means for utilizing these data.

e. How to better use the additional data often routinely gathered by banders, including physical, reproductive, molt, mensural, and plumage characters of birds examined in hand. We need to consider the value of such data and the problems associated with its collection, storage, retrieval and use, and to find creative solutions. Our present inability to deal efficiently with these data is a serious waste of potentially valuable information.

4. Finally, we need to discuss certain miscellaneous topics:

a. How to remove the barriers that restrict banding in Latin America, and to promote communication among the banders of Canada, the U.S., Mexico and Middle America, particularly regarding migratory Nearctic species.

b. The banding of rehabilitated birds.

c. Improving the responsiveness of banders to reports of their color-marked birds.

d. Helping all banders to operate in a highly ethical and responsible manner.

David F. DeSante

1990 WBBA ANNUAL MEETING

WELCOME TO ALBERTA! The 1990 meetings of WBBA will be hosted by the Beaverhill Bird Observatory 24-26 August in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Sitting on the North Saskatchewan River, Edmonton is surrounded by aspen-covered hills, ponds, and wetlands. Elk Island National Park and several other natural areas are just a short distance away; Jasper and Banff National Parks are within a day or so of the city. At the end of August, expect to see waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds, and much more in the Edmonton area.

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory will offer a banding session during the meetings, and Ernie Kuyt of the Canadian Wildlife Service has tentatively agreed to talk at the Saturday night banquet about his work to preserve the Whooping Cranes.

Edmonton may seem a great distance, but it will be worth the trip! Come join us for the 1990 festivities. **Brian Hornby is in charge of the local arrangements (202, 5008-86 Street, Edmonton, Alta. T6E 5S2; 403-468-1602).** If you are interested in giving a talk or a demonstration, or have questions about registration, contact the

Program Chair: Alan Gubanich, Department of Biology, University of Nevada, Reno, NV 89557 (702:784-6652). See you there!

1989 WBBA Annual Meeting

On the weekend of 13-15 October WBBA and Western Field Ornithologists held a joint meeting in Reno, Nevada, sponsored by the Department of Biology, University of Nevada-Reno and the Lahontan Audubon Society.

After an early morning field trip to Pyramid Lake, board meetings were held in late afternoon, followed by a barbecue at Rancho San Rafael and a WFO bird identification panel discussion.

Local field trips were held early Saturday morning, followed by the demonstrations listed below at Rancho San Rafael:

Raptor Trapping and Handling Techniques, Steve Hoffman

Identification, Ageing & Sexing of Four Hummingbird Species in Hand, using Bill Marking and Feather Patterns, Maryann Danielson

Adaptation of Rock Climbing Equipment and Techniques for Tree Climbing, Mark Stanback

Improved Methods for Capturing Nesting or Roosting Birds in Natural Cavities, Mark Stanback

Banding, Ageing, Skulling and Handling Techniques for Passerines, Dave DeSante

Techniques for Taking Blood Samples from Passerines, Janice Simpkin and Matt McAuliffe

Radio Telemetry: Equipment and Techniques, Barbara Kermeen

Radio Telemetry on Raptors for Reintroduction and Falconry, Gary Herron

A New Device for Marking and Counting Gull Nests, Hugh Judd

At the WBBA business meeting, the officers currently listed on the inside back cover of this journal were elected. Next, John Tautin, Chief of the USFWS Bird Banding Laboratory, presented a report on the current situation at the Lab and some plans for the future.

The afternoon paper session included the following papers:

Sex and Age Ratios of Wintering Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows in Southern California. Barbara Carlson, Univ. of California, Riverside.

Data on sex and age ratios were gathered on wintering Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows *(Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii)* at two inland valley and two desert sites in southern California. Data for four years at two sites and three years for the other two sites were analyzed. Sex was determined using the technique developed by Mewaldt and King (1986). Results from the data combined for all years tend to fit the trend of previous research where more females winter further south, while juveniles winter further north. However, individual year results between sites did not fluctuate the same way. The two inland sites had significant increases in the number of juveniles between winters 1986/87 and 1987/88 while the two desert sites showed significant decreases in juveniles between winters 1987/88 and 1988/89. Further investigation is needed to determine if these changes are due to different phenomena on the breeding grounds, wintering grounds, or sample size.

Sex ratios and latitude in Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows. M. W. Lincoln, L. R. Mewaldt, C. D. Barrentine, and C. E. Corchran.

In the four winter seasons 1985-86 to 1988-89 in simultaneous operations at four banding stations (Alviso, San Jose and Bakersfield, California and Tucson, Arizona), we processed 7589 individual Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows *(Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii).* Returning white-crowns were included as adults (AHY/ASY) once in each winter of return. New captures after 28 February each spring season were excluded from the samples. Using wing length data in the Mewaldt and King (1986, *J. Field Ornithol.*) Wingstat Program, we estimated sex ratios in HY/SY and AHY/ASY groupings at each station in each winter season.

Using this new method, we confirmed (e.g., King et al. 1985, *Condor*) that male Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows winter further north than females. We also learned that males tend to survive from winter to winter at a higher rate than females. Data from the 1986-87 winter season, however, suggest there was a lower male survival in the summer of 1986.

Considerations in choosing computers and software for analyzing bird behavior. M. Victoria McDonald, National Zoological Park Conservation Center.

Recording animal behavior in the field with detail and precision is difficult but can be augmented by using tape recorders, video cameras, event recorders and computers. In the last several years, the advent of truly portable, powerful laptops and applicable programs has made it practical to use a computer for taking behavioral notes, yet still maintain mobility in the field. Advantages include: more data per season, increased precision relative to time, greater accuracy in recording simultaneous events, standardized format and speed of summarizing and reporting data. Disadvantages include the computer's bulk, limited memory and battery life, potential electronic problems (especially during inclement weather), expense and training the observer. Programs selected must be suitable, preferably custom written or modified by the researcher, and should allow free-form notes. I evaluate five laptop computers and five commercial and non-commercial programs written for recording behavioral data. A handout summarizing computer and software characteristics will be distributed.

The Pacific Flyway Project. David Shuford, Point Reyes Bird Observatory.

The Pacific Flyway Project responds to the threats posed to migratory and wintering shorebirds by the destruction and degradation of the nation's wetlands. The project intends to obtain a measure of shorebird use in each major wetland, and to synthesize these data into a comprehensive picture of shorebird status and future prospects on the flyway. To date, a large number of volunteers, public agencies, and private conservation groups have collaborated to census shorebirds at most major wetlands in coastal California and as far afield as British Columbia, northern Baja California, Nevada and Utah. Census and monitoring work will expand to include most major wetlands west of the Rocky Mountains and from British Columbia to the tip of Baja California.

The Monitoring Avian Productivity (MAP) Project. David DeSante, Institute for Bird Populations.

The Monitoring Avian Productivity (MAP) Project is a cooperative effort among North American bird banders to establish a continent-wide network of constant effort mist-netting stations, operated during the breeding season, for the long-term monitoring of landbird productivity and survivorship. These critical data are not currently available from any other avian biomonitoring program in North America, and are necessary for the rigorous testing of hypotheses regarding population trends of landbirds. Twenty-two stations were established and operated across the country during the 1989 pilot study, with nine in western, seven in central and six in eastern North America. A preliminary overview of the results of this pilot study is presented. The long-term goal for this project is the establishment and operation of about 200 stations in North America, including a series of stations to be operated in cooperation with the National Park Service. The goal for 1990 is the establishment of 75 stations across the continent, including 25 in the western region. An invitation is extended to WBBA banders to join in this important cooperative endeavor.

Migratory Raptor Banding Results in the Goshute Mountains. Stephen W. Hoffman, Western Foundation for Raptor Conservation.

Since 1980, over 8,000 Falconiformes of 12 species have been banded along the Goshute Ridge in eastern Nevada. This is the largest raptor trapping and banding operation in the Western Hemisphere. This all-volunteer effort is being coordinated by the Western Foundation for Raptor Conservation. Thus far, 54 birds, including 21 Cooper's Hawks, 16 Sharp-shinned Hawks, and 10 Red-tailed Hawks have been encountered away from the study site. Encounters from 9 western states, 8 Mexican states (Sonora to Oaxaca) and 2 Canadian provinces suggest most eastern Nevada migrants over-winter in western Mexico and nest in the northern Rocky Mountain region that includes Alberta, British Columbia, Montana, Idaho and Washington. WFRC plans to continue this operation for many more years.

Major Fall Hummingbird Migration Route in Southern Arizona. Ruth Ogden Russell and Stephen M. Russell, University of Arizona.

Hummingbirds are inconspicuous migrants through the broad valleys between mountains in southeastern Arizona in fall, a time when there are few "hummingbird" flowers. The observation of a few hummingbirds at a feeder offers no insight into the actual numbers present in the area. In 1988 and to date in 1989, we have banded about 3,000 hummingbirds, taken from a single trap at one location in a predominantly open grassland region. Black-chinned are the most abundant migrants in late July and August, and decline in numbers as Rufous (mostly immature birds) pass in late August and early September. Heavily molting Anna's Hummingbirds increase in September and are abundant into October, some are present in November. We speculate about the origin and destination of Anna's Hummingbirds, which have been extending their breeding range eastward. An additional eight species have been banded, including about 50 Allen's. The return rate of birds banded during the first year suggests a rather fixed route.

Color Marking Western Gulls *(Larus occidentalis)* by Means of Paint Pellets Propelled by a Carbon Dioxide Gas Powered Pistol. Don S. McKensie, Lewis and Clark College.

A new technique for field marking gulls was developed as part of a study of the population dynamics of birds inhabiting the coastal region of Lincoln County, Newport, Oregon. A carbon dioxide gas powered pistol propelling regular oil base paint-filled pellets that explode on impact,

was used to mark 210 individuals during the spring/summer periods of 1987-88. The chief advantages of this technique are: gulls are marked without capture at a range of 50 feet; paint marks varied in size, color, shape and location on the body, leading to individual identification; the marking process did not appear to negatively alter bird behavior, mate acceptance, or mobility; 4% of the gulls marked were stunned, allowing in hand observations and banding. All individuals demonstrated full recovery within three minutes.

Following marking, field data were transferred to index file cards showing silhouettes of gull profiles. This system allowed fast reference as to date and site of markings, individual age status, and movement. The major limitation of this technique was that approximately one-third of the pellets failed to explode (not mark) upon impact.

After a buffet banquet in the evening, Ron LeValley took those attending on a photographic tour of the "Sea of Cortez."

Sunday morning field trips went to Stillwater NWR, Honey Lake, and Mt. Rose, and local areas. WBBA is very grateful to Alan Gubanich, Hugh Judd and their many co-workers for hosting an excellent annual meeting.

Financial Summary 8/1/88 to 7/31/89

Receipts		Expenditures	
Member Dues	$4,928	NABB Publication	$4,770
Contributions	341	Annual Report	763
Interest	917	Officers' Expenses	54
Sales	420	Sales Costs	566
NABB Adv.	340	Research Award	250
Meeting Deficit (88)			131
Meeting Advance (89)			400
TOTAL	$6,946		$6,934

1990 ANNUAL MEETING
Beaverhill Bird Observatory, Alberta, Canada
3rd Week of August