



# *Inland Regional News*

***Inland Bird Banding Association***

**Founded 1922**

## **NATURE NOTES FROM ....**

Sand Bluff Banding Station is hosting this fall's Annual Meeting of IBBA. **Tom Little** has provided a brief history of the station here.

In 1967, Lee G. Johnson purchased 182 acres along the Sugar River near the Illinois-Wisconsin border to use as a site for mist netting migrating birds. A few temporary nets were the early operations and facilities at the site consisted of the back gate of a beat-up station wagon. Bill Miles and Tom Ellis (both deceased) and Tom and Ruth Little joined the operation in the early years and soon a shack replaced the station wagon. The shack regularly underwent renewal projects beginning by replacing the walls, floors and ceilings and continuing from there. Ultimately, with help from the Winnebago County Forest Preserve (which now owns part of the land) and the Barbara Mae Atwood Foundation, a modern and permanent building with electricity and water was built. Current banders include master permittees Lee Johnson and Richard Hamilton and subpermittees Tom and Ruth Little and Lynda Johnson.

During the early years, sometimes with fewer than 50 nets, the station caught from 7,000 to 15,000 birds per year. Now, using more than 100 nets, much improved checking techniques, more volunteers, and strong prairie restoration efforts,

annual totals for birds banded remain in the 5,000 to 7,000 range. These totals give a good indication of the decline of bird populations. In 1994, 119 species and 7065 individuals were banded at Sand Bluff and we recorded 269 returns. This is the highest total for the station since 1984. Between 1984 and 1994, annual totals have been in the range of 5,500 to 6,000. Northern Illinois has been in or near drought from 1988 through 1993. We suspect that the return of normal moisture has had an influence on the number of birds caught.

The species list for Sand Bluff has passed 160 (and does not include assorted hybrids and subspecies). Rarities taken at Sand Bluff include Prairie Falcon in 1993, Blue Grosbeak in 1984, Swainson's Warbler in 1990, and Long-eared Owl and Swainson's Hawk in 1987. The birds most commonly banded at the station are Dark-eyed Junco and American Goldfinch, each of which will comprise 9 - 12% of the total catch of the year. Recoveries of birds banded at the station included Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings and Sharp-shinned Hawks in Central America, and Gray-cheeked Thrushes in far western Canada.

Currently, the Sand Bluff Banding Station operates 120 sections of net; the actual number of nets open is dependent on the number of

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volunteers available. More than 40 volunteers rotate shifts during the banding seasons which run from 1 March through 31 May and 1 September through 30 November. Nets are open (weather, volunteers and light permitting) on Friday afternoon until dark, Saturday from just before dawn until dark, and from just before dawn until about 11:00 on Sundays. School classes from

Rockford, Illinois, and Beloit, Wisconsin, may visit the station during the week by appointment. Education is an important goal of the staff at Sand Bluff who talk with visitors about birds and migration, lead nature walks, and speak before groups around northern Illinois. Financing comes from donations, newsletter subscription, speaking fees and sales.

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