Western Regional News

Western Bird Banding Association Founded 1925

The 70th Annual Meeting of the Western Bird Banding Association

22-24 September 1995
Rio Grande Nature Center State Park
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Catherine Sandell and Steve Cox, co-chairs of the arrangements committee, put together an excellent, well-rounded meeting for the 55 attendees. The Nature Center building and grounds provided a convenient site for all local activities, and the staff went out of their way to accommodate the meeting.

A field trip on Friday to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge for water and desert birds was enjoyed by those who arrived early, and an evening social provided a good opportunity to visit with old friends.

On Saturday, starting at 6 am, Rio Grande Bird Research showed off their constant effort migration banding operation for us. The birds were cooperative, with a nice variety in the nets, and just a nice flow, so Steve Cox and his group could demonstrate the fine points of techniques like skulling.

As an added bonus Susan R. Blackshaw, presented two demonstrations of net-handling techniques. **An Improved Method of Net Handling and Storage.** (*NABB* 18: 49-50) and **Tie Ups and Tie Downs: a method for securing rolled nets.** (*NABB* 19: 99)

At the **annual membership meeting**, the following officers were elected:

President - Barbara A. Carlson
1st Vice Pres. - Dennis Vroman
2nd Vice Pres. - Catherine Sandell
Secretary - Kay Loughman
Treasurer - Kenneth Burton
Director (1996) - Stephanie Jones
Director (1997) - Bob Altman

The retiring Vice president, Tom Pogson, was thanked for all his efforts, especially assembling the excellent paper session which followed. The papers continued the trend of increasingly sophisticated use of banding data in presentations at WBBA meetings.

After an excellent Mexican buffet dinner in the Nature Center, Bill Howe, US Fish and Wildlife Service, presented the evening program on **Grassland Birds of our Western States,** highlighting the threats they face and the declines they have suffered.

On Sunday, one group visited Hawk Watch International's migration and banding site at Capilla Peak in the Manzano Mtns., while another group hunted desert birds in the foothills of the Sandias amid oaks and junipers, set in grassland.

WBBA thanks the Arrangements Committee and all who helped make this a very enjoyable and

rewarding meeting for the participants who came from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada and Oregon.

PAPERS PRESENTED

Effects of short-term weather variations on migrant landbird capture patterns, Albuquerque, NM: 1994. *Gustav Bodner, Wang Yong, and Deborah Finch, U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Experiment Station, Albuquerque, NM 87106.*

Since the spring of 1994, Neotropical migrant landbirds have been studied by the Forest Service with mist-nets and census counts at two sites along the Rio Grande in New Mexico. This paper focused on mist-net captures of over 5,000 birds during the fall of 1994, examining them for relations with weather variables including wind speed and direction, frontal movements, and barometric pressure. We predicted and found greater migration volumes during winds from northerly directions and during conditions that accompany such winds. Pooled bird variables, such as total birds banded or percentage of repeating individuals, were generally less correlated with weather than more specific subsets of the total catch, such as number of warblers or number of repeating sparrows. Analyses of captures were complicated by the fact that good flying weather could simultaneously increase arrival rates and departure rates. We tried various techniques to ameliorate this and also examined observations of birds actually flying over and presumably on southbound migratory flight.

The need for volunteers in research and monitoring programs. *Kenneth M. Burton and David F. DeSante, The Institute for Bird Populations (IBP), Point Reyes Station, CA 94956.*

MAPS was the first large-scale, coordinated monitoring program based on constant-effort mist-netting in North America. Starting in 1989 with 17 stations, MAPS has grown to approximately 362 stations in 1995. Federal support of MAPS increased dramatically with the establishment of "Partners in Flight," and the proportion of federally funded stations grew from 18% in 1989 to 60% in 1995 (77% in the West). The present political atmosphere in Washington does not favor continued federal funding; thus, there is an acute need for increased recruitment and training of volunteers for MAPS and other research and monitoring programs. In March 1995, IBP hosted a forum (summarized in *NABB* 20:1) to discuss various issues relating to bander recruitment, training, and licensing. This summer, IBP initiated on a pilot basis a program of short-term, intensive bander-training courses at various locations, aimed primarily at amateur birders with no prior banding experience. The results of these courses and plans for future courses will be discussed. WBBA members can be instrumental in this training effort by becoming certified as trainers and taking on trainees as apprentices.

Monitoring Neotropical migratory birds in forest habitat and transition zones surrounding montane meadows: 1992-1994. *Barbara A. Carlson, Motte Rimrock Reserve, University of California, Biology Dept., Riverside, CA 92521.*

Avian productivity has been studied at two sites in the San Bernardino Mountains in Southern California. The two sites, East Bluff Meadow, elevation 2320 meters (m) and Metcalf Meadows elevation 2260 m, are wet montane meadows with willows (*Salix* sp) and surrounded by yellow pine/white fir forest. Monitoring avian productivity and survival (MAPS) protocol using constant-effort mist-netting was a successful tool for showing changes in productivity (hatch year [HY] captures/100 net hours) caused by weather perturbations. An unusual June snowstorm in 1993 caused a reduction in HY produced for species breeding in or surrounding the meadows but not for species that breed at lower elevations (and not affected by the snowstorm) and disperse to the higher meadows prior to migration. In addition, although the elevation difference between meadows is only 60 m, the upper meadow, which had more snow longer, had a larger reduction. Productivity in both meadows recovered in 1994, in which the weather was more benign.

Mist netting White-winged Crossbills *(Loxia leucoptera)*: A three-year study. *Pierre Deviche and T. H. Pogson. Institute of Arctic Biology, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK 99775 and Alaska Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 80505, Fairbanks, AK 99708.*

White-winged Crossbills commonly breed in boreal conifer forests, yet are captured at a relatively low frequency owing to their nomadic behavior across seasons and to the fact that they

often feed at the top of trees. Between fall 1992 and summer 1995, we mist netted 470 individual WWCR of various ages and both sexes at a single site in Fairbanks, Alaska. For this, birds were attracted by a caged conspecific male placed next to a black (summer) or white (winter) 7 or 12 m-long mist net. While molting in the fall, the decoy was relatively ineffective for attracting other birds, and he was replaced with a chronically testosterone-treated male. Eight birds that were banded and released have been recaptured. Our data show that adult males and females exhibit parallel seasonal variations of their wing chord, body mass, and fat score. Birds in juvenile plumage and females with brood patches (an indicator of breeding) were caught mostly between May and July, suggesting that the interior Alaska WWCR population does not breed year-round, but seasonally.

Spotted Owl banding in Sub-Mogollon Arizona, dispersal and movement: Current knowledge. *Russel B. Duncan, Southwestern Field Biologists, 8230 E. Broadway Blvd., Suite W-8, Tucson, Arizona 85710 and Steven M. Speich, Dames & Moore, 1790 E. River Rd., Suite E-300, Tucson, Arizona 85718.*

The Mexican Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) is currently listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species. The recently released Draft Recovery Plan calls for population and habitat monitoring. The sub-Mogollon population, primarily located in southeastern Arizona, exist in a naturally dispersed and diverse habitat matrix of woodland and forest communities on isolated "sky-island" mountain ranges, mainly separated by semidesert grassland and locally desert scrub. These ranges are biogeographically linked to the Sierra Madre Occidental (Madrean) to the south and the Rocky Mountains (Petran) to the north. This is an ideal experimental setting to test hypotheses of dispersal, genetic isolation, and demography. We have banded over 175 adult, subadult, and juvenile Spotted Owls since 1990. Of the 62 hatching year juveniles banded to date, eight have been recaptured, having successfully dispersed from natal sites. One dispersed from the Patagonia to the Santa Rita mountains, a total distance of about 32 km (20 mi). The others dispersed within the mountain ranges in which they hatched, and one bred the year after hatching. In addition, a subadult banded as an elevational migrant in Sonoran Deciduous Riparian Forest within Sonoran Desert scrub at 838 m (2750 ft) in February 1990 was recaptured in the same mountain range within Rocky Mountain Montane Conifer Forest (mixed conifer) at 2560 m (8400 ft) in May 1994. Also briefly discussed was site fidelity and turnover of banded birds. A photographic travel guide to the varied Madrean and Petran owl habitats was also presented.

Inter-annual variation of weather and capture rates of landbirds in mist nets in Fairbanks, Alaska, during spring migration: 1992-1995. *T. H. Pogson, Alaska Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 80505, Fairbanks, AK 99708.*

We used 16 - 47 mist nets to accumulate 41,159 net hours on 175 days to sample the abundance of landbirds at Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in Fairbanks, Alaska, during the spring migrations of 1992-1995. Capture rates of landbirds were highest (14.2 birds/100 net-hr) in 1992, the year with the coldest spring (- 6.4° F below average in May) and the latest green-up (26 May). Capture rates were consistently lower (4.5-7.2 birds/100 net-hr) in 1993-95, years with consistently warm average temperatures in May (+ 3.0 - +5.1° F) and early green-ups (29 April - 3 May). The apparent relationship between the capture rates of birds and spring weather in central Alaska suggests that inter-annual variation in weather can affect the catchability of birds in mist nets. A hypothetical mechanism for the effect of spring weather on capture rates was described.

A comparison of two netting regimes on a study plot in coastal California. *Grant Ballard, Geoff Geupel and Nadav Nur, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Stinson Beach, CA 94970.*

We evaluate capture rates of juveniles and adult landbirds using the following two netting regimes: (1) ten 12-meter mist nets, spaced at maximum distances for safe operation and (2) twenty 12-meter mist nets at 14 sites (6 stacked) placed closer together on the same study plot at the Palomarin Field Station, Point Reyes National Seashore. The latter were run approximately five times as often as the former (5 to 6 days in 7 versus 1 to 2 days in 10) during the breeding season (1 May to 18 August). For resident species breeding in the immediate vicinity of the nets, results were compared to direct measures of productivity and breeding density as determined from nest monitoring, color banding of locals, and known

densities of adults as from spot-mapping censuses of color-banded individuals. Nets run 6 days per week captured an average of 43% of the Song Sparrows *(Melospiza melodia)* breeding within 100 meters of the nets, while nets run once per 10 days or 2 times per week averaged only 13%. Capture rates of Wrentits *(Chamaea fasciata)* did not significantly vary between netting regimes. Nets run with higher frequency detected change in productivity in Song Sparrows accurately while nets run with lower frequency mis-represented Song Sparrow productivity. Net distance from nest also influenced juvenile capture probability. Within season capture rates, differing intra-specific capture probabilities and other factors influencing demographic investigations are discussed.

Partitioning of the summer grounds by Orange-crowned Warblers into a breeding grounds, adult molting grounds and juvenile staging areas. *Jim Steele and John McCormick, Sierra Nevada Field Campus, San Francisco State University, Sattley, CA 96124.*

From 1992 to 1995 an array of five mist net monitoring sites ranging from 914 m to 2073 m in elevation within the Northern Sierra Nevada revealed different patterns of use by Orange-crowned Warblers. The warblers bred only at the low elevation site. Most individuals remained there from late March until mid-June and then dispersed before their prebasic molt. Coinciding with post-breeding dispersal, adult and juvenile captures peaked at a mid-elevation site in mid-June. We rarely recaptured juveniles, suggesting they continue to disperse; however, we recaptured adults from June through early September. Here adults completed molt, acquired fat and departed, presumably on migration. This is the first documented passerine molting ground. This adult sedentary behavior at mid-elevations affects capture ratios at higher elevations. At higher elevation sites, we captured juveniles with increasing abundance from July through early August. Juvenile capture ratios range from 5 juveniles: 1 adult to 18:1 at higher elevations. Also juveniles were more frequently recaptured at higher elevations with lengths of stay averaging 15 days. We suggest that these sites serve as juvenile staging areas and contribute substantially to juvenile survivorship. The use of molting grounds and juvenile staging areas has significant monitoring and management implications.

Report from the Banding Lab. *John Tautin.*

Mr.Tautin reported on the seemingly ever-changing structure of biological science units within the Interior Department. Current Congressional proposals would either change the name of the Bird Banding Lab's parent agency or make it part of the Geological Survey. The current Congress has not looked favorably on science budgets within the Interior Department, and the Banding Lab's budget is being squeezed ever tighter.

Reintroduction of breeding Tree Swallows to Ventura County, Southern California, 1991-1995. *Jan Wasserman, 1158 Beechwood St., Camarillo, California 98010*

Until recently it was thought that the Tree Swallow had been extirpated as a breeding species from Southern California, as the viable secondary cavities have been virtually wiped out by development and agriculture. Many studies have shown that Tree Swallows adapt extremely well to nest boxes, and in some cases may even prefer boxes to natural cavities. In 1991, I was asked to take over an existing nest box project at the Ventura Sewage Ponds at the Santa Clara River Mouth. There had been some success with nesting Tree Swallows since a single pair had been discovered there in 1980. Boxes are placed at 50 foot intervals at the perimeter of one pond with an additional 4 boxes placed randomly, for a total of 12 boxes. This became the control study, with sporadic uneven success throughout the last five years. Also, in 1991 an additional project was established at a site approximately 7 miles inland from the river mouth, at the United Water Conservation District's Freeman Diversion Plant. The project began with 3 boxes placed linearly 50' apart, with one successfully fledged clutch for a 33% success rate and has grown to a total of 60 boxes in 1995 with 100% success rate, most boxes being used at least twice per season. An additional 20 boxes were placed at a different United Water Conservation District locations late in the season (at their request, as there has been a noticeable decrease in the insect population at their first site), resulting in one successful clutch from a first year pair and showing the need for more nesting sites. Since these projects have been established, the Tree Swallow population has increased from a few random pairs to a large, continually growing, firmly entrenched colony throughout the county.

1996 WBBA Meeting

A retreat center near Sandy, Oregon (east of Portland) will be the site on the second weekend in September. Bob Altman will be in charge of the meeting committee and further details will appear in the next issue of NABB.

Joint Eastern and Inland Bird Banding Association Meeting

WBBA members are strongly encouraged to attend this meeting to be held in April 1996 at the Bird Banding Laboratory in Laurel , Maryland. Besides being an excellent meeting, the occasion will also provide an opportunity to see how the Banding Lab operates and meet more of their staff. See the News, Notes, Comments section for registration and location details on the meeting.

Volunteers Needed

Western Bird Banding Association has always relied on volunteers to compile its Annual Report and the time has come to recruit new volunteers for the task. After compiling the Report for the years (1988 through 1994), Coyote Creek Riparian station will be unable to handle the 1995 Report. Help is needed to continue this valuable report. If you can be part of a group effort to produce a report of 1995 activities, please contact WBBA's President, Barbara Carlson, at (909) 369-3179 or Kay Loughman (see address on inside back cover).

Western Bird Banding Association is very grateful to Coyote Creek for compiling the Annual Report for seven years, bringing more advanced computer technology to its production. Their efforts in continuing this traditional report, which dates back at least 60 years, give us an excellent overview of the type of banding projects being carried out in the west; this kind of information is not available elsewhere in the U S.

Budget and Status of the Bird Banding Laboratory

At the recent WBBA meeting in Albuquerque, Mr. John Tautin, chief of the Bird Banding Laboratory, discussed some of the problems and potential changes facing the Laboratory. Over the last several years they have lost a number of positions and face further cuts due to reduced appropriations currently being proposed in Congress. These reductions also affect their ability to maintain adequate stocks of bands.

Congress is also proposing to rename BBL's parent agency, the National Biological Service, or to make it part of the Geological Survey. As "customers" of the Bird Banding Laboratory, banders know the most about the effects of recent and proposed changes. Whether you favor or oppose the actions being voted on in Congress in the fall of 1995, you should make your views known to your Senators and Representatives.

Robert C. Tweit