
News, Notes, Comments

NABC BANDER CERTIFICATION

The NABC bander certification session, which had been tentatively scheduled to be held in conjunction with the 2001 EBBA annual meeting, regrettably has been postponed. It is hoped that the session will be re-scheduled for fall 2001 at a time and place to be announced in upcoming issues of *North American Bird Bander* and on the EBBA web page at: <http://www.pronetisp.net/~bpbird/>

Announcing

Hummingbird Research Group 2001 Banders Conference 15 - 18 August 2001 Silver City, New Mexico

The conference will be held at the Grey Feathers Lodge, located north of Silver City, NM, in the Gila National Forest, skirting the Gila Wilderness Area. Programs will begin in the afternoon of 15 Aug. and conclude midday on 18 Aug. Direct questions and program ideas to **Joan Day-Martin** at ramsearth@netzero.net or (505) 281-1482.

Registration fee: \$35.00, to be sent to Joan Day-Martin, 146 Kuhn Drive, Tijeras, NM 87059. When registering, please include e-mail address if available.

The **conference site** is located approximately 150 mi from El Paso, 250 mi from Albuquerque, 112 mi from Las Cruces, 230 mi from Tucson, 350 mi from Phoenix, and 1 hour N. of Silver City at Junction 15 and 35. Vehicles should be filled with gas upon leaving Silver City as none is available near the conference site.

Lodging for the conference may be found at:

Grey Feathers Lodge (505) 536-3206 or stay@greyfeathers.com. Restaurant on site.

Spirit Canyon Lodge (505) 536-9459 or info@spiritcanyon.com

Lake Roberts Cabins 1-800-224-1080 or cabins@lakeroberts.com

Forest Lodge (505) 536-9336 or 3oaksco@WNMC.net

Wilderness Lodge (505) 536-9749.

Camping is also available around Lake Roberts and at the conference site.

Second Year Golden-crowned Sparrow with Incomplete Skull

On 10 November 2000 I recaptured a Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*; GCSP) at one of my banding sites, located in Los Altos, California.

I routinely assess plumage characteristics before skulling birds, especially GCSP, because the reliability of these characteristics is part of what I am testing in these birds. My plumage assessments include rectrix shape (tapered, truncate, intermediate) shape of primary coverts (tapered, truncate, intermediate), and crown value (see "Age-Specific Crown Variation in Basic-Plumaged Golden-crowned Sparrows," *NABB* 24:138). In 1999, I started examining iris color on GCSPs to determine if there was a discernable difference between hatching-year/second-year (HY/SY) and after-hatching-year/after-second-year (AHY/ASY) birds, particularly individuals with crown 2 aged after January 1. I initially used the terms "gray-brown" or "red-brown" for iris evaluations; and this year, to standardize my assessments, I began using Munsell color charts as a reference.

Based on the above characteristics, I aged the bird as AHY. Unexpectedly, upon skulling the bird, I found two small unpneumatized windows of uneven size at the top of the skull. The window on the right half measured 5.8 mm x 1.8 mm and the window on the left half measured 1.5 mm x 1.5 mm. The results of plumage and iris color assessments were: truncate rectrices and primary coverts, crown value of 2, iris color in Munsell range of dark reddish-brown, a color I find mostly on adult birds.

The bird was banded on 3 December 1999 as HY. The skull ossification was recorded with a MAPS value of 3, which equals 34-66% pneumatization of the skull. This includes the rear half and some of the front, midline, and sides of the skull. Plumage and iris assessments at that time were: rectrix shape not done due to unassessable condition of the feathers, primary coverts tapered, crown value of 2, iris color recorded as "gray-brown," a color I find mostly on young birds.

In the *Identification Guide to North American Birds*, Part I, by Peter Pyle (1997. Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, CA), the author states that skulling is a very reliable technique for ageing passerines in the fall and, in some species, through the winter into spring. He cautions that, though some individuals of certain species can retain larger windows through

spring, a variable number of individuals of species can show smaller windows and will never completely pneumatize their skulls. In several years of banding, I have examined the skulls of more than a thousand GCSPs and have found skulling to be very reliable for ageing individuals of this species. I have found that complete skull pneumatization of HY birds may be expected beginning in mid-November, but many young birds can show large windows, greater than 2 mm, well into December. Rarely I find individuals demonstrating smaller windows into January.

The GCSP I recaptured in November is the only bird of this species I have observed that demonstrated an incomplete skull this far into its second year. Indeed, it may be an individual who retains pneumatized windows for the rest of its life.

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Recent Literature

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEWS

A bibliometric review of the recent literature in ornithology. L. M. Bautista and J. C. Pantoja. 2000. *Ardeola* 47:109-121. Departamento de Ecología, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, CSIC, José Gutiérrez Abascal, 2.28006, Madrid, Espana (A review of 1,308,244 papers abstracted in *Zoological Record* between 1978 and 1998 indicated that 15% were on birds, second only to the number of papers on insects. A comparison of these with papers abstracted in earlier decades demonstrated trends in research within ornithology, with significant increases in the proportion of papers on population dynamics, physiology and biochemistry, and predation, declines in the proportion of papers on catalogues, checklists and

atlases and on breeding biology, and little change in the proportion of other topics. While single-author papers are most frequent, the proportion of co-authored papers has increased, as has the average number of authors per paper.) MKM

BANDING HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHIES

Myrtle Agnes Biggs (1912-1998). R. Kilsdonk. 1999. *Alta. Nat.* 29:71. 23 Oriole Crescent., Sherwood Park, Alta. T8A 0B2 (Brief biography of prominent Alberta naturalist, photographer and artist, whose contributions to ornithology included banding of young hawks on coulee cliffs as early as 1938.) MKM