
In Memoriam - John Miles

John Miles, co-founder of Haldimand Bird Observatory and Bander-in-charge at Selkirk Provincial Park, died on 14 Dec 2006 at age 64. He will be remembered as a legendary birder who made a lasting contribution to the study and conservation of Canada's birds and their habitats. A member of the Ontario Field Ornithologists and past president of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club, John was a retired banker who probably banded more birds in Ontario over the last four decades than any other person in the province.



John and Friends

Fellow banders called him a 'bander's bander'... 'an old-fashioned field biologist who did everything the proper way'. John did not want to miss a single migrant, so his coverage of spring migration was daily from 26 Feb to 12 Jun! And after a short few weeks' rest he would start up fall coverage on 4 Jul and run until 18 Nov or later! This

regimen entailed so many very early mornings, a long walk into his banding site (at Selkirk) and out again, and then afternoons and evenings of entering the data...day after day, year after year. In fall 2005, John managed to run Selkirk for 109 days despite a broken foot! It is hard to appreciate this level of commitment without having done it.

He had an amazing memory for birds, birding, birders and banding. He could recount the date and year of rare sightings; he could remember how many birds of which species in which season he had banded; his knowledge of bird lore was encyclopedic. And he was very willing to share it with any one who had an interest.

He turned many adults and children on to birds and banding. He was the kind of person who would save a special snake in a bag to show a youngster, or have a saw-whet owl waiting in a bird bag for a bander who had never had the pleasure of banding one.

He thrived on discussion – and no matter how hard you tried, you never quite felt you won an argument with John! He loved finding exceptions to rules, be it aberrant moult patterns or exceptions to generally accepted practices in banding.

For many banders, fall 2006 was disappointing due to bad weather and/or a general lack of birds. But John had his best fall season ever. His illness caused coverage to be only 78% of the previous year, but he banded 3883 birds of 85 species! The individual total was the station's best banding season...a nice 'going away' present, and it couldn't have happened to a more deserving person.

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Elizabeth Brooks