News, Notes, Comments

Bird Banding Techniques Workshop

For Master Banding Permit Holders and Sub-permittees

On Saturday, 2 October 1982, Point Reyes Bird Observatory plans to sponsor a banding techniques workshop in Marin County at P.R.B.O.'s Palomarin Research Station. This date was chosen to coincide with the maximum diversity and density of fall migrants at Palomarin. The workshop will focus on techniques for aging and sexing birds in the hand including skull pneumatization, plumage and mensural characters, and flight feather shape and wear characteristics. It will also include discussion of the value and usage of weight, fat, and molt data and recapture records. The workshop will be under the direction of P.R.B.O.'s Landbird Biologist, Dr. Dave DeSante.

Interested permit holders or sub-permittees should write to Bob Yutzy, P.R.B.O. Education, 4990 Shoreline Highway, Stinson Beach, CA 94970 for a more detailed agenda. The workshop group will be limited to 10 or 12 individuals. However, if there is enough interest, another workshop will be held on Sunday, October 3rd.

Come, share, and sharpen your skills.

Summer Field Seminars at Yosemite National Park

Bird Migration in Yosemite:
A Bird-Banding Workshop

A three-day course that will include practical field experience in actual bird-banding, record-keeping, and data analysis; students in teams will participate actively in the field endeavor. There will be twelve hours of lecture time, nineteen hours of field work. Equipment will be furnished. Participants camp in Crane Flat Campground and walk to the study site in Crane Flat Meadow.

27-29 August 1982
Seminar Fee — $50
2 Units Credit — $28

Instructor, Robert M. Stewart, received his M.A. in biology from Oregon State University; worked ten years (1969-79) as Research Ornithologist and Director of Education at Point Reyes Bird Observatory. He has extensive experience teaching classes in avian ecology and migration, and has amassed a vast amount of knowledge on Yosemite's resident and migratory bird populations. Presently he is teaching Ornithology at College of Marin, and leading trips for PRBO and other environmental organizations.

For further information and an enrollment form, write or call Seminar Coordinator, Yosemite Natural History Assn., P.O. Box 545, Yosemite National Park, CA 95389; phone 209-372-4532.

North American Loon Fund Grants

The North American Loon Fund (NALF) announces the availability of two grant programs for support of new or current research, management, or education projects that may yield useful information for Common Loon conservation in North America.

The first of these programs, the Robert J. Lurtsema Research Award, consists of a $1,000 stipend available annually for a suitable research project focused on a member of the Family Gaviidae. Preference will be given to students and independent researchers with limited availability of other funding.

The second program offers modest grants in support of research, management, or educational projects directly related to the conservation of Common Loons as a breeding species. Proposals in the range of $500 to $3,000 are most likely to be considered for funding.

Further guidelines for prospective applicants are available upon request from the NALF Grants Committee. Deadline for submission of proposals is 31 January 1983. Funding awards will be announced by 15 March.

Please submit guideline requests to: North American Loon Fund Grants Committee, North American Loon Fund, Meredith, NH 03253

Marked White Ibises

350 juvenile White Ibises have been tagged with orange wing flags bearing black numbers/letters, near Georgetown, SC. A report would be useful even if numbers cannot be distinguished. Notify BBL and Peter Frederick, Zoology Dept., Wilson Hall 046-A, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

Reflections on my beginnings

Regina M. VanScoy

Do you remember your first year of banding? How nervous you were the first time you put on a band, or took a bird from a trap or a mist net — all by yourself? I remember well because for me it has only been a few years. For some people everything runs smoothly. Then there are those that have things happen that shouldn't happen to any new bander — least of all me!!

Like the first day I put up mist nets and, of course, the first birds I caught were 2 Black-capped Chickadees. They weren't in the net more than 3 minutes when my husband found them, but these pint-sized Muhammed Ali's of the bird world had managed to entangle themselves to the point where we finally resorted to scissors for the final release. I can still see the defiant look in #1510-97001's eyes and feel the pain as he pinched and twisted that little paper cut on my finger just one more time!

Then my joy the day my husband finished the maze trap. The first day (while he was there to help me) we caught 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches — a new species and such delightful and cooperative little sprites — no trouble at all. The next morning I raced out before breakfast, sans thermals, and quickly set up my new trap. I blissfully relaxed during breakfast and, as I went upstairs to get dressed for the sub-zero weather, noticed that I had 2 Evening Grosbeaks in the maze trap. As I came down the stairs, I saw to my horror that I now had fifty Evening Grosbeaks in the trap. They seemed fairly calm — until I got out there — then bedlam erupted. Grosbeaks screamed and flew as I tried to herd them into the two collecting cages. I'd only made 20 collecting bags so I could collect only a few at a time. Frantically working the trap doors and trying to remain calm, I nonchalantly hollered to my neighbor that it was "just a few grosbeaks," when he peeked out from behind his garage with a bewildered expression on his face. A Black-capped Chickadee bite is an amusing experience — grosbeak bites are of another order of magnitude. I don't know how many times I was bitten, but by the time I got to grosbeak number 50 and she bit me 3 times, I just opened the trap door and said — GO! I still break out into a sweat thinking about all those screaming Evening Grosbeaks at once.

Then came my first recovery — the event all new banders wait for. We all dream of those non-stop migratory flights and recoveries by Jivaro Indians. Well my first recovery wasn't quite so exotic. I noticed a sickly looking, banded, Blue Jay at my feeder and several days later saw a dead and many times flattened Blue Jay on the dirt road next to our house. I looked and looked but couldn't find a band anywhere. Several weeks later I was busy talking to my husband, as he worked on our car, and happened to glance at the cinder blocks he was using to steady the wheels. As usual our neighbor's Bassett hound had made one of his daily "deposits" on it. Now this dog is renowned in our neighborhood for eating any kind of flotsam and jetsam, and I've seen him eat leather-hard, run-over, American Toads. I knew a dead Blue Jay would probably suit his palate just fine and there was the telltale sparkle of that band in the warm spring sunshine. In the name of science I retrieved No. 852-21073. I wonder what computer code I could have used for — Found In Barky Manure! Luckily I was spared the indignity of it all as the recovery was less than 90 days from the banding date and I hadn't as yet reported the banding.

With four years of banding under my belt, I take most things in stride now but I can still vividly remember how it felt the first time around — can you?

RD #1 Box 153, Limestone, NY 14753

Marked Laughing Gulls

Adult Laughing Gulls were color banded in summer 1981 in Florida as part of a study of communication in this species. Birds carry an aluminum FWS band on one leg and white in combination with red, blue, light green, or more white, on one or both legs. Observers are asked to report date, time, location, and activity, as well as color pattern as read from bird left leg top to bottom to bird right leg top to bottom. Please notify BBL and Penny L. Bernstein, Biology — NAMS, Stockton State College, Pomona, NJ 08240.

Rehabilitation

Ithaca, N.Y. Research in the care and rehabilitation of sick and injured wild birds will benefit from an auction 18 April in Chicago of a collection of rare domestic and imported wines.

Proceeds from the sale will establish an endowment for the Cornell University Wild Bird Research and Rehabilitation Fund, a cooperative project of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the New York State College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell.

Researchers at Cornell are developing new surgical techniques to save severely injured wild birds that would not otherwise survive their traumatic encounters with buildings, cars or power lines. Injured birds, including some in the endangered species category, are referred to the Cornell clinic by veterinarians, conservation officers and concerned individuals from throughout New York state and the Northeast.

In any given week the clinic may be caring for injured peregrine falcons, great horned owls, red-tailed hawks, various species of waterfowl and song birds, blue jays and even wild pigeons.

Among the techniques under study at Cornell is the use of electrical stimulation to promote healing of fractured bones. Miniaturized electronic devices, including tiny batteries, are temporarily implanted in the bird's body to produce an electrical field around fractures. Bones that had refused to knit for months begin to repair themselves in a matter of days and can be completely healed in six weeks. Before the experiments by Drs. Douglas MacCoy and Michael Collier, assistant professors of surgery in the College of Veterinary Medicine, the electrical stimulation technique had never been successfully applied to avian patients.

Cornell scientists are also studying nutritional needs of wild birds as well as reproductive behavior and diseases, including disorders of the eyes. Nine faculty members and more than 70 students, some of whom will specialize in avian medicine at zoos and other institutions, are involved in the combined research-teaching program.

Despite the best care that veterinary medical science can provide, not every bird is able to resume a fully functional life in the highly competitive natural world, explains Christopher Murphy, one of three student supervisors for the clinic. Some ex-patients are placed in zoos and others become part of captive breeding projects, such as the effort at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology to re-establish the peregrine falcon population in the United States.

After their hospital stay, the birds begin the sometimes lengthy rehabilitation process under the supervision of Laboratory of Ornithology staff members Michele Barclay and Donna Crossman. A recuperating bird is kept in one of the laboratory's six flight cages where it can be fed, observed and regain its strength.

Before any bird is released, its potential for survival in the wild is determined. If the bird can fly well and can catch prey, it is banded with a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leg band and set free. Through band recoveries, scientists are better able to gauge the success of the techniques used in the rehabilitation process.

The program's most recent success is the full recovery of a Cooper's Hawk. The hawk was found in an over-all weakened condition, treated at the Avian Clinic, and banded and released. The same hawk, identified by its band number, was seen three months later preying upon pigeons. Other band recoveries have proved that the birds made a successful re-entry into the wild.

No fees are charged for the care and rehabilitation of the injured wild birds. Income from the endowment established by the wine auction will help pay operating expenses of the project. Subsequent contributions to the endowment will allow support of many worthy projects.

For additional information on the Wild Bird Research and Rehabilitation Program: Roger Segelken, Cornell News Bureau, (607) 256-4206.

News Bureau, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

Marked Snow Geese

In July of 1980 and 1981, Snow Geese breeding in the Sagavanirktok River delta, Alaska, were marked with blue neck collars bearing a 4-symbol (2 letters, 2 numbers) code, to study migration routes, wintering areas, and interchange with other colonies. If you observe a blue-collared Snow Goose, please notify BBL and Declan Troy, LGL Alaska Research Associates, Inc., P.O. Box 80607, Fairbanks, AK 99708.