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# Development of a Bander

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In September 1936 a 9-year-old boy in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, received Taverner's *Birds of Canada* as a birthday present. Two aunts had joined together to buy it, for three dollars was an unheard-of amount to spend on one book for a little boy in depression times. The boy was able to identify from the Allan Brooks' paintings in the book, most of the common birds in the backyard. Two years later, the boy encountered some birds he could not identify. His father sent him to consult with Mrs. Isabel Priestly, co-author of the wildlife column in the weekly newspaper, the *Yorkton Enterprise*, and she at once recognized his description as being that of immature American Goldfinches.

The boy and his friends were invited to accompany Mrs. Priestly on her weekly walks around "the muskeg" on the western outskirts of Yorkton. Before long, the boy was "hooked" on birds.

In 1942, Mrs. Priestly suggested that they compile a list of species they had seen on these walks. The boy enthusiastically offered instead to mimeograph the list, for he had learned to type while immobilized with an ankle fracture in Grade 5, and now in grade 9 was the operator of a small mimeographing business that printed the Rotary Club's weekly bulletin.

The 5-page list of 193 definite and 6 hypothetical species, pathetic as it appears now in retrospect, got rave reviews in A.G. Lawrence's "Chickadee Notes" in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, and Lawrence's praise was reprinted as a news item in the Regina and Saskatoon dailies. Letters poured in, each person telling of his or her observations, a society was formed, and the *Blue Jay*, now a respected and successful natural history regional journal, was launched. The boy was the secretary-treasurer, typed the stencils and mimeographed the first three volumes.

In the spring of 1943, the boy, now in grade 10, was offered summer employment with Ducks Unlimited. Thus began five years of summer employment getting paid for work he loved. Ducks Unlimited paid the cost of the barley for bait, the chicken-wire for the traps, and paid 10 cents per duck banded the first year and 20 cents per

duck thereafter. The boy was thereby so wealthy that he hired his cousin, three years younger, to help him. [Banding has been a big *expense* ever since.]

The boys soon had ten funnel-opening bait traps in use, and to visit them rode 20 miles on their bicycles each day through August and the first half of September. They carried all their gear, but fortunately had a depot near the lake to store barley, for they used as much as 10 pounds per trap per day. The summer days reached 100°F. on occasion, but the cold rainy days of September were the worst — their hands would get so numb they could no longer close the pliers until a kind farmer's wife who lived near the shore of the marsh would give them tea to thaw them out.

When winter came, the monthly batches of recoveries were read with interest and often with real excitement. One Blue-winged Teal banded on 22 August got south well ahead of the hunting season and collided with a water tower at Chase, Kansas on 7 September. Canvasbacks and Redheads went east to Lake St. Clair near Detroit and Lake St. Francis near Montreal, before turning south to winter in Chesapeake Bay. Mallards went south along the Mississippi to Arkansas and Louisiana. Pintails crossed the Rocky Mountains to Oregon and California and went as far south as Mexico and Nicaragua. American Wigeon, then called Baldpates, went to Mexico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. The lowly American Coot, that pattered its feet on the water and hardly seemed able to fly, travelled to Cuba, Jamaica, Dominican Republic and the Cayman Islands. The greatest traveller of all was the little Blue-winged Teal: three were shot in Cuba, two in Puerto Rico, two in Venezuela, and three in Columbia. Not surprisingly, the boy was now "hooked" on bird banding. It became a life-long obsession.

Years later, still a boy at heart, he met Allen Duvall of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at a meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union. He was flattered to learn that his was the only banding permit knowingly issued under-age — because of the specific wartime needs of Ducks Unlimited.

(Western)