
Eastern Regional News



Eastern Bird Banding Association

Founded 1923

President's Message

In my search for a new Nominating Chairperson, I had asked a few people who used to be active in EBBA's leadership. One of the persons who declined, gave me an interesting reply, which is food for thought. The letter read in part: . . . "After being a party to many philosophical discussions on the purpose and goals for EBBA, I can only conclude that my views on future directions for EBBA are very much out of step with the bulk of the membership and most of the people serving on council. I would like to see EBBA focus on educating active and prospective banders so that their activities contribute to our knowledge of field ornithology . . . Yet, EBBA's leaders have continued to promote the organization as a group for "amateur" banders, which, in my view, magnifies the division between academics and other field ornithologists. No graduate student can afford to be active in an organization that bills itself as being for "amateur" ornithologists. A graduate student is trying to establish him/herself as a professional. I believe grad students could provide a rich source of energy, scientific expertise and new blood for EBBA while they could learn skills from the experienced banders in the EBBA membership. But EBBA has effectively cut off this source of support by insisting on remaining an organization for amateurs. Oh, I've heard all the arguments about how the financial support comes from the long-time members and how they will be alienated by the redirection of the organization. Money talks or at least it has in council, but I think the organization is headed for serious trouble based on demographics alone."

There is something that rings very true about those statements. They very strongly remind me of a time, now some 15 years ago, when I was Editor of *EBBA News* (EBBA's forerunner of *NABB*), when there were a number of months without new manuscripts. At that time, I began to solicit manuscripts from academia. That proved so successful that never again was there a shortage of manuscripts during my tenure. Those of you who still have some old *EBBA News* copies from 1972, 73, and 74, take a look

through them sometime . . . they were filled with papers on many different subjects and many of the authors were then or are now professional people. Those issues were crammed with information and during that time our membership flourished.

On our current membership list, there are only a dozen or so student members. There also seems to be a drop in the institutional category, and here I am specifically referring to libraries and academic institutions. That's not healthy for EBBA. We have to look beyond this decade. Another item, possibly unrelated to this subject, is the great difficulty we seem to have in filling committees. Most EBBA committees have to consist (per the By-Laws) of a chairperson *plus* two or three members. Only *one* person has volunteered to do something for EBBA. That's Brad Silfies, who I've appointed to Chairperson of the Conservation Committee this year. All other committees were filled mostly with people who were asked, rather than who volunteered their services of their own accord. In context with this entire subject, it could be another trend that needs closer examination.

In April 1988, my term as president ends. One of the recommendations I would like to make to my successor is to examine the philosophy and direction EBBA is taking, and to try to integrate in EBBA a healthy mix of members—members who hail from a wide range of disciplines. Bearing in mind the tremendous resource *North American Bird Bander* affords us, we, as an organization, need to invite academics rather than consciously shut them out. That is something that doesn't happen overnight. Merely asking them to join doesn't do the trick. We have to give them an environment they can identify with. In the long run, EBBA will prosper by such an adjustment in direction.

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