

## **Bird Banding in North America: The First Hundred Years.**

Author: Ralph, C. John

Source: The Auk, 126(3) : 702-703

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2009.4709.4>

---

BioOne Complete ([complete.BioOne.org](https://complete.BioOne.org)) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at [www.bioone.org/terms-of-use](https://www.bioone.org/terms-of-use).

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

---

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

*The Auk* 126(3):702–703, 2009

© The American Ornithologists' Union, 2009.

Printed in USA.

**Bird Banding in North America: The First Hundred Years.—**

Jerome A. Jackson, William E. Davis, Jr., and John Tautin, Editors. 2008. *Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club*, no. 15. Nuttall Ornithological Club, Cambridge, Massachusetts. 280 pp., 62 figures and photographs. ISBN 1-877973-45-9. Cloth, \$40.00.— Derived from a workshop held in 2002 at the North American Ornithological Conference in New Orleans, this is a book that will benefit people using banding as a technique, no matter their level. Banding, as a subject, is well covered in most regards, and the volume has much to recommend it. It is a review of many aspects of the monitoring and research methods and applications of bird banding. In 12 chapters, the authors deal with history, banding organizations and agencies, and the role of banding in various research and management applications. As a bander for half those years, I naturally found the book interesting and, further, learned of many applications that I hadn't fully appreciated.

As with any review, it is easy to accept as the reader's due the many and varied points that are covered well, and I am grateful the authors and editors of this book for these. However, I felt that some other aspects of banding should have been an integral part of this compendium on the technique. For example, much of the emphasis of the various chapters is on the subsequent recovery or recapture of birds, as well as the wonderful power of following individually marked birds, such as those wearing color bands.

These are important facets, and I was glad to learn of advances in uses of the data gathered. Recovery of a dead bird to learn where and how it died, and use of that datum to reconstruct the bird's movement and to determine, for example, harvest regulations for waterfowl, are certainly important. But there are exciting new applications that could have been covered in more depth, such as emerging techniques that involve the elucidation of life histories, physiology, and condition of birds that can really only be derived from capture and recaptures of birds. The determination of demographics, molt, measurements of size, and especially of fat and condition, are becoming vital to our understanding of very basic questions of how and why birds occur when and where they do. This is especially relevant given our headlong plunge into new climates and habitats in the next few decades. These look to be very different from the conditions under which birds have evolved at a much more pedestrian pace.

In addition, I think it would have been important to chronicle a few of the other dramatic changes in banding more fully. The advent of the mist net, which has largely supplanted grain-baited traps, and the battle of various people, notably Don Bleitz in southern California, to legalize nets were the major impetus behind our ability to regularly capture prodigious numbers of warblers, vireos, thrushes, and many other taxa. This tidal shift in our awareness of the complexities of each of the many landbird species is just now becoming apparent, now that we have the potential of knowledge from a more random sampling of the avifauna, not just trap-happy granivores. Also important, I think, are the sociological phenomena involved in the progression from a preponderance of backyard amateurs banding sparrows to the cooperative complex of more than 1,000 constant-effort mist-netting stations and observatories now spread across the Americas. The power of the detailed data taken at these stations is staggering, as is the recent proliferation of powerful software and hardware capable of simultaneously looking at hundreds of thousands of captures, recaptures, physiological data, and environmental variables. Finally, it would have been interesting for the book to have covered, perhaps as a cautionary tale, the politics involved in obtaining permits to band in the countries, states, and provinces of the Americas. These complexities are frustrating

at times and have seemed to slow the progress of the sciences that depend on the multiplicity of data available from captured birds.

The most pervasive influence driving bird banding, at least in North America, has been the perceived needs of the waterfowl hunting and management community. Landbird banding, by far the most complex in data gathered, has mostly taken a back seat to the juggernaut of ducks and geese, funded and encouraged largely by hunters. Most of us didn't realize, I think, how profound was the decision many years ago not to archive anything but the very basic data at the Canadian and U.S. banding authorities. The duck-centric banders and wildlife managers understandably felt that landbird recaptures, physiological data, and fine-scale location and effort data were not nearly as important as continent wide studies of duck migration and mortality. Thus, these detailed data were not, and are not, fully archived in the federal databases, and most still reside in many disparate data sets or filed in cabinets. Worse, I have found that the half-life of such data is about eight years! Some progress has been made in the past decade, following the lead of the nongovernmental banding program of the British Trust for Ornithology. The culture of bird observatories, led by Long Point, Powdermill, Point Reyes, and Manomet, has taken center stage, demonstrating the multifaceted value of banding data. The cooperative efforts of hundreds of stations in the breeding-season Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program and the year-round data-rescue and archiving efforts of the Landbird Monitoring Network of the Americas (LaMNA) and its parent, the Avian Knowledge Network (AKN), are filling this need outside of government, making available the multitude of research opportunities and predictive models that flow from constant-effort stations.

While I, at least, regret the omissions I have noted of perhaps a couple of chapters, they are understandable. The editors and authors are certainly to be commended on covering a prodigious amount of the subject. We are in their debt, as this volume will be useful to banders and ornithologists for some time.—  
C. JOHN RALPH, *U.S.D.A., Forest Service, Redwood Sciences Laboratory, 1700 Bayview Drive, Arcata, California 95521, USA.*  
*E-mail: [cjr2@humboldt.edu](mailto:cjr2@humboldt.edu)*