

Bird-banding Experiences in North America

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I consider myself fortunate to have been invited to take part in two important bird-banding projects during a visit my wife and I made to North America in 1976. The first was at the Tanque Verde Ranch in south-western Arizona, USA, on 15 April and the second was during 16-17 May at Prince Edward Point, Ontario, Canada. A regular annual or bi-annual banding programme has been in progress for some years at both places.

At Tanque Verde bird-banding is even one of the attractions advertising the merits of that popular holiday ranch, and guests attend and watch proceedings with interest. Chuck Corchran, from Minnesota, is in charge, ably assisted by Steve Russell, Professor of Biology at Tucson University, Don Lamm, well-known to many Australian ornithologists whilst on the staff of the American Embassy in Canberra, and a number of others mainly from the University and local Audubon Society.

During the previous six seasons the number of individual birds banded each year, with the number of species involved in brackets, are as follows:

1970— 590 (32) 1971—1006 (38) 1972— 736 (49)
1973—1678 (54) 1974—1688 (51) 1975—1265 (59)

The White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys* easily dominates the individual count with a total of 3 477 caught during the six years. Two clearly-distinguishable races, both of which breed at high elevations in north-western North America, pass through on migration—the nominate dark-lored form and the white-lored subspecies *gambelii*, the latter making up about 92% of the total. Previous to the present season 102 species have been taken at Tanque Verde in the mist-nets.

During the time of my participation (from approximately 04:30 to 11:00 hours) the number of birds netted was 154, of which 66 were re-traps. The morning's total comprised 22 species, of which may be mentioned of special interest the Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus* (not taken during the previous six years),

Broad-billed Hummingbird *Cyanthus latirostris* (seldom seen), Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus* and Western Kingbird *Tyrannus verticalis*. The last-mentioned two were additional to the avifauna banded at Tanque Verde. The addition of two species in one morning, after seven years of regular activity, caused more than ordinary interest. Personally, despite the severe cold, light drizzle and slippery tracks through thorn-scrub, whilst unfurling the nets before daylight, I found the six or more hours intensely interesting.

Prince Edward Point is at the tip of a peninsula jutting out into Lake Ontario, which appears more an inland sea, approximately 320 km long and 160 km wide, is nevertheless the smallest of the five great freshwater lakes of North America. A lighthouse on the point has done service to shipping for many years, but now being redundant it and a goodly area of land in the vicinity has been declared a fauna reserve and placed under the control of the Kingston Field Naturalists Society. The lighthouse has been comfortably furnished to provide working, eating and sleeping quarters.

During the banding season, covering some weeks both in spring and fall, members are rostered to do 24-hour shifts, with each group taking charge from midday one day to noon the next. Mrs Helen Quilliam, who is honorary Life President of the Club, invited my wife and me to join her for the 16-17 May shift. Unfortunately intermittent rain throughout heavily soaked the tracks and somewhat hampered us. It was necessary to take birds from the nets, put them in carrying boxes and drive the 400 metres to the lighthouse to do the weighing, measuring and

recording. However, despite this inconvenience, it was a most enjoyable experience, enabling me to see part of the spring warbler migration, which is so much a feature of eastern American ornithology.

We found that although twelve nets were available, as well as a Heligoland funnel-trap, so great was the movement that one net was sufficient to keep us fully occupied throughout. The total of birds caught during our stay was 67, with only three of that number re-traps. Of the 22 species banded (it was strangely co-incidental that this was the species total at Tanque Verde, although the individual total there was more than double that at Prince Edward Point) no fewer than 13 were members of the American Warbler family Parulidae, indicating the importance of that group in the North American migration movement. Possibly the only real surprise of our stay to the banding personnel was one Blue-winged Warbler *Vermivora pinus*, the only one trapped that season, so I was later informed.

Had the weather been fine it is certain this total may have been double, for the peninsula is a noted congregating spot for birds awaiting favourable weather to assist their long flight north across Lake Ontario. At least three to four further warbler species were observed there, although not trapped. One of the four Least Flycatchers *Empidonax minimus* banded appeared for some reason most distressed when released and would not fly away, so it was placed in a nearby bush on a sheltered branch, but each visit until dark showed it drooped and we believed it would not live overnight. However, in the morning, after a severe overnight storm, it could not be located until we surprisingly found it again in our lone net some 400 metres distant as lively as ever!

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Colour Tagging of Whistling Kites

I would like to advise everyone that I am colour wing tagging Whistling Kites *Haliastur spenurus*, and would appreciate information on any sightings.

The wing tags are fitted between the secondary and auxiliary feathers and may be seen with the naked eye up to 100 metres. Care should be taken when making observations, as birds may have one only or both wings tagged. Some colours may be less obvious than others.

Each tag is individually numbered so that it can be read from above as well as below if a person is close enough.

Information required is as follows: date, location, colour of wing tag or tags, the wing the tag is on, and, if possible, the number on the tag or tags.

Please write to:

Mr Johnny A. Estbergs, CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research, P.O. Box 39998, Winnellie, N.T. 5789.

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