



Merry Christmas to everyone. May your holiday wishes come true.

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ADVANCE NOTICE

**OBBA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING &
BANDER EDUCATION SESSION**

AT

**BIRD STUDIES CANADA'S NEW HEADQUARTERS,
PORT ROWAN, ONTARIO**

**SATURDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2003 &
SUNDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2003**

The Saturday program will include the OBBA Annual Meeting, station reports and presentations of interest to Ontario bird banders. The Sunday program will consist of hands-on, interactive sessions covering a variety of banding topics. See also the questionnaire included with this newsletter. Everyone is invited to come and share their expertise and learn from other banders.

Full details will be available in the next newsletter.

For more information on the Bander Education Session or to get involved in organizing this new event contact: **David Okines** at **davidokines@aol.com** or **519-439-7694**.

Participants from the August Bander Education Workshop held at Long Point

Bander Education Workshop

Martha Caskey (with photo by Bruce Murphy)

On August 9 - 11 about 20 Ontario banders attended a Bander Education Workshop at Long Point. The workshop was co-sponsored by OBBA, Canadian Wildlife Service, the CWS Bird Banding Office, and Bird Studies Canada. The workshop has been given on previous occasions in western Canada and at least once in the Maritimes. However, this was the first session targeted specifically at Ontario banders. The people at the workshop came from all over the province - Temiskaming to Thunder Bay to Windsor to Ottawa and points between. I attended as the representative from Innis Point B.O. in Ottawa.

Our instructors were Ken Burton, founding member of the North American Banding Council and president of the Western Bird Banding Association, and Brenda Dale of the Canadian Wildlife Service, Prairie and Northern Region.

The workshop was a training exercise aimed at increasing our understanding of various molt patterns among various species of birds, learning how to distinguish juvenal from adult feathers and using this knowledge to correctly age birds. We also received valuable instruction in how to use our Pyle manuals most efficiently to extract this plumage sequence information.

The workshop began with a talk on these subjects on Friday evening. Saturday and Sunday consisted of practical sessions in the morning and further discussion and presentation from Ken following the practical sessions. The practical sessions were divided into two types – one where Ken examined birds just banded at Long Point and pointed out relevant plumage characteristics to us, and the second where we in our turn examined a total of 40 wing out specimens provided by Mark Peck of the Royal Ontario Museum and individually determined species, age and sex. Each morning was divided among the 2 practical sessions with half the group with Ken at the nets and the other half sweating over their “bird on a stick” exercises.

photo of study skins

On Saturday evening we all enjoyed the hospitality of Eric and Lorna Machell at a barbeque at their home. Following the course itself, Jon McCracken generously provided a guided tour of the new Bird Studies Canada building and grounds to some of the course participants.

The participants all pronounced the workshop extremely valuable. Of course, such a group had plenty of practical suggestions for the instructors, which they valiantly and graciously tried to handle – including more opportunity and more time for small team discussions of the specimens right after individual examinations. I think we’ll all remember those flicker specimens for a while. Also, it was a great opportunity for some to renew old acquaintances and for others like myself to make new ones with fellow banders. I hope that this is just the first of a series of such workshops in Ontario and I would encourage other banders to attend future sessions. A highly educational and enjoyable experience!

ONTARIO BANDERS WORKSHOP – AUG. 9 to AUG. 11, 2002

Photos and article by Jim Smith



This event was hosted by Bird Studies Canada at their Old Cut Banding Station. In this picture the twenty participants and guests gathered for the Friday night presentation. Slides were shown to illustrate the presentation on feather and moult. For some the lecture was considered very basic but for others it was new and fresh and made some points clearer in their minds. The level of participants varied from expert to those who had been banding for only a short learning experience just in the sharing

period of time. This diversity in skill levels made for a and exchanging of ideas between participants. Some more experienced banders expressed that they too had learned from the exchanges that occurred.

Ken Burton, from California, was the facilitator for the weekend event. Ken presented and clarified material from Pyle's book "Identification Guide to North American Birds" as well as creating his own charts to help with the concepts. The group was divided so that half the morning was spent with Ken who used the live birds caught at Old Cut to point out feather characteristics, which gave clues to age and sex. The other half of the group were involved with Brenda Dale in examining 20 bird skins. This was reversed in the second half of the morning. The afternoon was spent in lectures and going over the results of the skins exercise from the morning.



Brenda Dale from CWS Edmonton has worked with Ken before in numerous workshops held in the west as well as the workshop in Atlantic Canada last October. Brenda was the facilitator for the skins exercise. Each person had to work independently and was given 6 minutes to examine each skin and determine the species, age and sex of the bird. This was not a test situation although the intense concentration and the flipping of Pyles book for the proper page gave every appearance of a test. Since part of the afternoon was spent

in going over the birds and you were able to mark your own effort no evaluation was intended.

The lack of immediate feedback in this exercise caused concerns for many people and in the second day the format was changed to include small group discussions on the skins. Many found this to be a more helpful learning experience.



Saturday evening saw the participants enjoying a turkey barbeque hosted by Eric and Lorna Machell. This event was sponsored by the Ontario Bird Banding Association. This gave participants a social time in which ideas and networking was accomplished. Everyone enjoyed the evening and the beautiful setting of the Machell's home.

On Sunday the format remained the same except that participants had the benefit of the material and experience of Saturday so that personal results from the skins and the live birds had added enjoyment. The change of format so that small groups discussed the individual skins was appreciated by most. Wrap-up occurred around noon with pizza being shared.

The following are comments from participants on the workshop:

“I was very happy to see it be so successful.”

“I too enjoyed the workshop. Very well organized!”

“Thank you for making a workshop into a wonderful thing.”

“I learned a lot and I'm sure everyone went away with a deeper understanding of Pyle and rarin' to put our ideas into practice.”

“I enjoyed the workshop, it was a great learning experience, and I now feel much happier...working with Pyle.”

Many people and organizations were involved in making this workshop a success. From Cindy Cartwright's and my initial inquiries, and finding out that Bird Studies Canada had it on the agenda for next year, things moved quickly. Since I had taken the workshop in Nova Scotia at the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network Conference I knew that it was something that I wanted to see in Ontario. Monies to pay for the Ken Burton's travel and other expenses were generated from the Canadian Wildlife Services through the Bird Banding Office. Monies for Brenda Dale came from the Ontario division of Canadian Wildlife Services. Travel expenses were covered by Ontario Bird Banding Association for people who felt they needed help plus the cost of the barbeque at Machell's. The facilities and boarding for a number of participants and liquid refreshments for the barbeque plus travel expenses were covered by Bird Studies Canada. All in all a meshing of ideas and resources, which produced a workshop where real learning and sharing was achieved.

My observation is that Ontario has a wealth of “expert” banders so that a banding workshop should be an annual event. Just the sharing of information for banders who quite often have only themselves to rely on is invaluable.

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Audrey Heagy

The **2002 Bander Education Workshop** held at Long Point in August was a great success with more than 20 participants from across Ontario. The OBBA was a co-sponsor of this workshop, in cooperation with Bird Studies Canada, the Canadian Bird Banding Office, Canadian Wildlife Service (Ontario Region) and the Royal Ontario Museum. Ken Burton and Brenda Dale did a great job as the workshop leaders.

The OBBA would like to express our especial gratitude to two of our members who shouldered most of the behind-the-scenes work for our organization. **Jim Smith** headed up our workshop "committee", which meant that he did pretty much anything that needed doing from taking the lead in preparing the information notice for the workshop to delivering the refreshments for the Saturday night BBQ. Thank you Jim and your support team. The other person who played a critical role in ensuring that OBBA's involvement in the workshop was such a success was **Lorna Machell**, who did a fantastic job of organizing and hosting the Saturday evening BBQ. The BBQ provided a wonderful opportunity for the workshop participants to relax, socialize and talk shop. Thank you Lorna for all your work (and thank you Eric for offering to host the BBQ at your home). Thanks also to everyone else who pitched in and helped out as needed.

In addition to learning tons of information about moult and how to effectively use Pyle's passerine guide, the workshop gave me and other OBBA Board members a chance to learn more about what OBBA members want from the OBBA as an organization. More Ontario workshops was one unanimous response! Also, several people suggested that we should move our Annual General Meeting to a different venue and make it a 2-day event with more opportunities to socialize, swap banding stories and include some hands-on sessions.

As a direct result of this feedback, the 2003 OBBA Annual General Meeting will be held at Bird Studies Canada's new headquarters facilities at Port Rowan Ontario on the weekend of February 22-23, 2003. The Saturday session will follow much the same format as in previous years, with the AGM, station reports and presentations. The Sunday program will focus on Bander Education and will include some hands-on and show-and-tell sessions and cover a variety of topics of interest to our members.

Since this Bander Education program is a new undertaking for us we are looking to our members for input and assistance. Please take a few minutes to complete and return the short questionnaire enclosed with this newsletter. For more information or to get involved in organizing this event please contact David Okines (davidokines@aol.com, 519-439-7694).

The Ontario Bird Banding Association website moved to a new URL earlier this year. The updated website can be found at www.ontbanding.org. Thank you to our new webmaster, Jason Sodergren, for getting our site re-located and functional again.

The next OBBA Board meeting will be held in January 2003. Please contact Audrey Heagy or Eric Machell if you have any items you want discussed.

RAPTOR BANDING AT HOLIDAY BEACH

By Rachel A. Powless, Carl A. Pascoe and Phil Roberts

Hawk banding at Holiday Beach began in 1989 with not much more than a tent-like structure, a number of scientific observations, and two enthusiastic raptor banders looking for a chance to structure and shape some environmental hypothesis and facilitate a permanent banding station. That year the father and son team of Art and Tom Carpenter banded a credible 16 birds: ten Red-tailed Hawks and six Cooper's Hawks, along with one Golden Eagle that had to be released since the permit did not include Golden Eagles. The Carpenters banded under a station permit issued to the Essex Region Conservation Authority in which Tom was the administrator. The following season the Carpenters were joined by Phil Roberts, who had just returned home to the region and was a Master permit holder thanks to years of working with Martin Wernaart and Dr. David Brewer at the Mountsberg Wildlife Centre in Guelph.

Today, Phil remains our hawk blind pioneer but Holiday Beach now has a staff of dedicated volunteers. The current group of hawk banders started with Steve Dickson acquiring a sub-permit under the newly formed station permit issued to the Holiday Beach Migration Observatory (HBMO) in 1993, then John St. Louis and Corey Balkwill followed. Corey in turn convinced his retired parents Dorothy and Gary to become involved and they were issued permits in 2000. The group continues to develop and grow. Phil Roberts is our Banding Director with a fluctuating staff of 10 or more volunteer banders and assistants, including a decade of help from Martin Wernaart and his wife Terri Groh. Our newest sub-permit holder is Jason Sodergren, who doubles as our Webmaster in his spare time. Many of us at HBMO hold down several volunteer positions within the organization.

Our banding facilities have gone through several renovations and locations since 1989. In the years since our tent, we have built two permanent wooden structures. One is the Lake Blind, which replaced the temporary canvas blind. A second blind, named the Marsh Blind, was constructed inland from Lake Erie. It is in the proximity of the Big Creek marsh but sits on a neighboring farm field. Both blinds are identical in dimension and set-ups, and lure techniques are very similar allowing us to compare capture data separate from the variables of trapping from both sites. Our group relies mainly on mist nets surrounding the lures to trap hawks. Each lure set-up also has a bow net, which is probably used less than 10% of the time. Typically both stations use 2 3/8 in. mesh nets early in the season for the Sharp-shinned Hawk and American Kestrel migration, then switch to a coarser 4 in. mesh as the larger hawks start flying later in the season.

Hawk banding and passerine banding similarities begin and end with placing a band on the bird, in this case a very large band. Strategy is a continuing integral piece of the puzzle in hawk banding. Every individual hawk bander has his or her own technique in luring the bird down. Hawk banders learn quickly which techniques work for which species. Luring the bird towards the blind is just half the battle. I have seen many hawks swoop down very close to the lure (both live and artificial lures) and then quickly veer-off. Innumerable hawks are not fooled by the set-up and this could be considered a prime reason why our banded hawks are predominantly hatch year.

Once the bander has the hawk's attention it becomes a battle of wits and the bander is quite often the loser. Hawks outmaneuver the bander more times than not, yet it is the pursuit of strategy and the pure majesty of the bird that motivates the bander to continue. Once the hawk is set to approach the bander must manipulate the lure in such a way as to keep the bird's attention on the device and not the

impending nets. And what a sight it is! A hawk's remarkably commanding wings will fold symmetrically back as their legs and talons fully extend both forward and downward. We have the privilege and honour of watching nature in all of its magnificence. There has never been a time when a bander tires of studying a raptors approach. Who would? Who could? Two of the most spectacular birds of prey to observe in this game of tactical methodology are the Red-tailed Hawk and the Northern Harrier. The Red-tailed hawk is dazzling as it soars in flight yet is awesome with talons-down. We then are able to experience the Red-tail's powerful beauty as it readies its outstretched talons. The Northern Harrier on the other hand, hunts like a stealth fighter with hearing so acute you'd almost swear it could hear your thoughts! And, you just never and I mean never know if the bird is completely paying attention to the lure. Why? The Harrier will get spooked if it hears anything out of the ordinary, which includes someone in the banding station sneezing. The Harrier's rocking motion is a mixture of grace, agility and strength.

Just because the bird has become entangled in the nets doesn't mean the bander's strategy in luring techniques is successful. Many birds have quickly escaped before the bander even moves toward the door. At this point, the bander is still experiencing the adrenalin rush yet realizes this is the component of hawk banding which must be precise yet ever alert to the safety of the bird and themselves. The bander must successfully take control of the hawk's talons, and then begin the process of net removal, which can get dicey if the bird is a falcon. Falcon's can nip and bite as well as any Cardinal or Grosbeak and will draw blood. Red-tailed hawks can leave some nasty puncture wounds, too.

photo Jason DorthUm Rt net 2

Within the evolution of HBMO hawk banding, many of our members have shifted a portion of their focus towards the education of the surrounding communities of Essex County. These banders take great pride in meeting the public with one or more of our rehabilitated raptors. Several hawk banders find it an absolutely joyous occasion to spend time with school age children and bring along a raptor. Many of these children have become faithful participants at our Festival of Hawks each year as more and more families throughout Essex County are making it a family tradition to attend the festival in September.

Phil Roberts, Jason Sodergren, Gary and Dorothy Balkwill, Dorothy McLeer and Bev Wannick are those very special banders and banding assistants who are adept at feeling comfortable and relaxed in making public presentations during our festival days. It is exciting to see them in action. Many times each year, I make it a point to listen to several of their hawk demonstrations whether it is with a newly banded bird or with one of our rehabilitated visitors. It is a magical moment when all ears, young and

old are listening to every word that our knowledgeable banders are expressing. As the audience listens, their eyes are riveted towards the hawk-in-hand. The banders are standing on a small stage with a backdrop of a demo net and a substantial wooded area surrounding the festival grounds. At times, I can hear only the bander's voice and the leaves as they drop to the ground. Then, with warning the bander will drop down off the stage and allow the audience to become part of the experience. This is the component I love best and I'm not sure if this is purely an innate birding experience or some ethereal moment. The crowd will completely surround the bander then regroup by height allowing the children and smaller adults to push forward. The tallest participants backup intuitively and become part of the outer fringe. (I've seen this many times while birding and it still makes me chuckle.) Anyway, this intimate faction of interested individuals keeps just enough distance for the bander to blend yet will maintain the hawk's comfort zone. It's an intimate moment in time, which is quite phenomenal and knocks my birder pins off! We take time to look at the other members of the audience and observe the transformation from awe struck observers to participants in this unique chance to be within arms reach of a wild bird that is about to continue the remarkable journey that is fall migration.

We still feel the excitement that we experienced when we were privileged to see our first hawk at a demonstration at Holiday Beach. To have the amazing opportunity to see one of these magnificent creatures so closely that you can see the individual feathers, the subtle range of colors that no scope or binocular can ever resolve short of the Hubble telescope is fortunate, indeed. And of course there are the raptor's intense eyes with their wide range of hues, which Carl finds irresistible to photograph. Carl is always joined by other participant's cameras and up close it is possible for anyone to get spectacular photographs that show aspects of the hawks that are otherwise out of the realm of the average photographer. It is a moment captured on film, and most of all, within the hearts and minds of all of the people who have been afforded this privilege thanks to HBMO and the love for the birds that they are so eager to share with our visitors to Holiday Beach.

photo ek_2_3

Human interaction with nature is a triumphant combination that should not be a rare occurrence. Close encounters of this kind should be nurtured and praised for the educational victory they have come to be. Hawk banding is more than the banding of hawks - it is the relationship that develops between the bander and the raptor during a very short interval of time. The bander recognizes this occasion as an investment in future returns in oh-so-many-ways. Keep looking up and good birding to all.
