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Banding at Mont Alto, Pennsylvania

A college-oriented program

Dr. Ronald R. Keiper

The banding station is located on the grounds of the Mont Alto Campus of the Pennsylvania State University, surrounded by the Michaux State Forest, in south-central Pennsylvania and has been in operation since I obtained my banding permit in the fall of 1972. It utilizes only Potter style traps and operates only from approximately 1 December to 1 May.

Since I am an educator who believes that learning must occur outside as well as inside the classroom, I have incorporated my banding activities into my instructional program. I require students in my courses to spend 6 hours of course-related activities outside of the classroom and offer banding as only one of the ways of satisfying this requirement. Students may also take up to 6 credits of "Special Problems", and may thereby assist in the operation of the banding station. The campus serves a large number of forestry and wildlife biology students and many of them are interested in observing this important management technique. Secondly, I use banding as a way of getting students to learn the identity of birds. Large

numbers of birds are attracted to the feeding stations, thus allowing students to easily observe a variety of species. Handling and banding also allow students to see some of the diagnostic characteristics at close range (such as the yellow lores of the mature White-throated Sparrow). Finally, students get a chance to carry out scientific procedures in the field rather than only in the laboratory, and learn the importance of meticulous data collection.

Although I, therefore, feel the main purpose of the Mont Alto banding site is educational in nature, some interesting data has been accumulated over the years and some of it is shared with you in this paper. Table 1 lists the 36 species banded as well as the numbers of each species banded in the years 1973-75. The data refers only to birds caught the first time; recaptured birds are not included in the totals. Even over as short a time period as this, fluctuations are clearly visible in the wintering populations of Evening Grosbeaks, Purple Finches, and Pine Siskins. Table 2 includes the most notable recaptures of birds banded by me at Mont Alto.

Table 1. Birds banded at Mont Alto Banding Station, 1973-75

Species	1973	1974	1975	Species	1973	1974	1975	Species	1973	1974	1975	
Hairy Woodpecker	0	0	1	White-throated Sparrow	18	73	49	Mockingbird	0	2	0	
Downy Woodpecker	0	0	2	Tree Sparrow	0	19	14	Catbird	0	1	0	
Red-bellied Woodpecker	0	1	0	Chipping Sparrow	5	6	0	Brown Thrasher	0	3	0	
Blue Jay	0	20	16	Field Sparrow	0	3	0	Carolina Wren	0	2	0	
Starling	0	5	5	Slate-colored Junco	29	125	171	House Wren	0	2	0	
Brown-headed Cowbird	2	8	1	Song Sparrow	0	7	11	White-breasted Nuthatch	12	8	2	
Common Grackle	0	4	0	Swamp Sparrow	1	2	0	Red-breasted Nuthatch	0	0	1	
Evening Grosbeak	98	1	34	Fox Sparrow	0	15	0	Tufted Titmouse	6	29	0	
Purple Finch	297	5	81	Rufous-sided Towhee	0	14	0	Black-capped Chickadee	6	11	6	
Am. Goldfinch	0	8	16	Cardinal	9	40	10	Golden-crowned Kinglet	1	1	0	
Pine Siskin	248	1	0	Cedar Waxwing	0	3	0	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1	2	0	
White-crowned Sparrow	0	1	0	House Sparrow	24	29	5	American Robin	0	1	0	
									Total (36 species)	757	452	425

Birds Banded and Recaptured at Mont Alto

Red-bellied Woodpecker (#772-20212): banded 22 March 1974, recaptured twice January 1975.

Blue Jay (#772-20242): banded 18 May 1974, recaptured 21 January 1975.

White-throated Sparrow (#113-108330): banded 4 January 1974, recaptured 2 May 1975.

Tree Sparrow (#27-43117): banded 17 January 1974, recaptured 8 January 1975.

— (#27-43124): banded 5 February 1974, recaptured 7 January 1975.

Chipping Sparrow (#1310-56597): banded 16 April 1973, recaptured 15 April 1974.

Slate-colored Junco (#27-43215): banded 14 February 1974, recaptured 18 January 1975.

Cardinal (#56-155701): banded 3 January 1974, recaptured 7 January 1975.

— (#56-155721): banded 3 February 1974, recaptured 28 March 1975.

White-breasted Nuthatch (#1141-73901): banded 12 November 1973, recaptured 12 April 1975.

— (#113-108303): banded 1 December 1972, recaptured 12 November 1973 and 10 February 1974.

— (#113-108312): banded 8 December 1972, recaptured 25 March 1975.

Tufted Titmouse (#113-108328): banded 4 January 1974, recaptured 12 January 1975, 17 March 1975, and 14 April 1975.

— (#25-173136): banded 20 January 1974, recaptured 16 April 1975.

Black-capped Chickadee (#1270-08943): banded 12 January 1973, recaptured twice January 1975.

In addition to these data, one other capture is of interest to me, that of a male Purple Finch captured 24 March 1973. The left eye was completely missing, but the injury was apparently quite old since there was no sign of infection and the area was completely healed. I would be interested to know if many banders have encountered birds with similar injuries that have healed.

Of the 1634 birds captured by me at Mont Alto in these three years, none have been previously banded by another bander. Likewise, only 2 of my banded birds have been recaptured elsewhere. A Black-capped Chickadee, banded by me on 25 January 1974 was captured at Hainesville, New York 31 December 1974. I have also been notified that a Slate-colored Junco, banded by me, has been recaptured, but the Bird Banding Laboratory so far has not supplied any information.

I wish to thank here the following students who, over the past three years, have greatly assisted in the operation of the Mont Alto banding station: Pat DiStefano, Jeff Holliday, Bob Butts, Chris Daum, Karl Schaeffer, Sharon Long, Roy Siefert, Dan Brown, and Scott Klinger.

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