

HELPING WILDLIFE THROUGH BIRD BANDING

by Liz Thunstrom, WRA Volunteer

Banding or ringing of wild birds began in North America in the early twentieth century. As bird populations decreased, largely through unregulated hunting, a new reporting system became a necessity. The Audubon Society was a strong force behind initiating a system. Since many species of birds in North America are migratory, especially waterfowl, a continent wide program became necessary.



In Canada, bird banders operate under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Wildlife Service. Permits are usually issued for scientific purposes only and so it is unusual to have permits granted for the banding of rehabilitated birds. No such permits are currently allowed in the US.

I have banded since 1987 and hold a Masters permit, allowing me to band all Passerine birds. These birds include songbirds such as swallows, finches and robins as well as waterfowl and raptors. Band sizes come in a wide range since each species has its own special requirement. For example, the type of band used for an eagle's leg requires rivets. Regardless of where the bands are sighted or found, the information gets back to the respective Canadian Wildlife Service's office and the bird bander.

Some of the more notable returns I have seen include a shearwater, rescued at sea and released off the west coast of Vancouver Island, and later observed on its breeding ground in New Zealand. A red-tailed hawk, released in 1987 after its injuries were treated, returned to WRA ten years later after crashing into a window in Richmond. A fledgling robin raised at WRA came back five years later, and was successfully rehabilitated again. This is an exceptional life span for a robin in the wild.

Banding gives wildlife rehabilitators useful information on the survival and dispersion of birds that have been treated or raised in care. It lets us know that animals treated properly can indeed return to live and breed successfully. If you see or find a unique bird with a leg band, please report it to the nearest wildlife rehabilitation facility, Canadian Wildlife Service office or call 1-800-327-BAND.