

Reflections from Bob Dean:

In 8 years of operation at the Yankauer Preserve we banded 407 birds of 30 species. Northern cardinal beat out wood thrush (93 to 80) for the most captures. Other species that were caught in good numbers with their totals were: Carolina wren 49, red-eyed vireo 24, downy woodpecker and Carolina chickadee tied at 20, and gray catbird 18. We also managed five species of warblers and three flycatchers.

There was a highlight and lowlight involving barred owls. On one occasion as we approached a net just off the south trail I could see something large through the brush. Assuming at first that it was a turkey, I sprinted past the helpers who were in front of me in hopes of saving the net only to find a barred owl. After carrying it back to the station it was discovered that we didn't have a band large enough for it. Barred owls' eyes are generally depicted as black, but up close are the deepest blue imaginable. When banding alone one day I approached a net and saw a mangled cardinal stuck in it. Sitting immediately at the base of the nearest tree, I waited to see if the culprit might return. Within five minutes a barred owl flew in above the net and began working his way closer to his prey until I intervened and spooked him/her out of the area. On the fortunate side, it was the only casualty we had in the eight-year study.

On another day I found our only broad-winged hawk of the study caught firmly about three feet away from a wood thrush that looked relieved to see me!

Some additional observations to share...

Did you know that pileated woodpeckers scream while in the hand? I mean from the moment they see someone coming toward them in the net until they are released. It's really loud.

We caught one yellow-billed cuckoo. They are deceptively large birds. Their bills, when closed at the tip, are still slightly open in the middle. I suspect this enables them to carry caterpillars, their favorite food, without cutting them into pieces and losing some parts.

Blue-gray gnatcatchers are really small.

The first year we banded I spotted a hummingbird flying into a tree-of-heaven not far from where we did the banding and saw her go to a nest. We watched with great interest as the young appeared several weeks later with their tiny bills visible over the edge of the nest. On the next banding day they were much longer, though still notably shorter than the adults. On the next banding day they had fledged and the nest was somewhat disheveled as the young more than filled it when nearly grown.

2002 was our biggest year with 100 birds banded, plus recaptures.

In 2003 and 2004 over 30% of our captures were birds we had previously banded. It was a fairly even mix of local birds like woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and cardinals; and migrants like flycatchers, vireos, catbirds, wood thrushes, and indigo buntings.

