
News, Notes, Comments

From the new Chief of the BBL

Dear Banders and partners:

On Apr 26, 2021, I began a journey as the Chief of the USGS Bird Banding Lab with great enthusiasm and excitement. While some of you are already familiar with me, I suspect that I am unfamiliar to many. I appreciate this opportunity to provide an introduction of myself both professionally and personally.



Since 2017, I have been working as a Biologist with the USGS BBL team to strengthen the data management system for bird banding and band encounters data sets, provide technical assistant to bird banders, and support research projects that use banding data. I have also been part of the BBL federal permit review team granting permits to scientists and amateur banders nationwide, served as a liaison for the scientific organizations (e.g. American Ornithological Society and others) and bird banding associations, and helped coordinate bird banding efforts in North America and the Western Hemisphere. However, my role in the BBL Team is not new. In 2006, I worked as a biological technician (contractor) for the USGS Bird Banding Lab and worked for 2 years curating banding data and encounter reports coming from Spanish-speaking countries (Monica Tomosy was the Chief at that time). I also helped the BBL initiate efforts in the Western Hemisphere Bird

Banding Network and provided support to the developments of Bandit, the software to submit bird banding data to the BBL. During this time at the BBL, I recognized that the Bird Banding Lab was a critical partner of the community managing bird populations in North America, including the Pacific, Central, Mississippi and Atlantic Flyways and that the BBL played a key role by managing banding data and receiving encounter reports to derive annual harvest and survival rates that are essential for bird population management and research. Moreover, I became aware of the great working relationships of the BBL with other organizations such as the North American Bird Banding Council (NABC), Bird Banding Associations (Western, Inland and Eastern) and other conservation groups that have placed bird banding as a key activity in their portfolio.

I transitioned out the BBL in 2008 to work on my Masters in Integrative Biology at the University of Illinois, where I examined various methods for surveying birds in tropical environments using acoustic monitoring (automated recorders and detection and classification algorithms), point counts and mist nets. In 2010, I started a Ph.D. in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and studied extra-pair mating behaviors in birds using automated radio telemetry, banding and color marking, behavioral observations, song, and genetic paternity analyses. During my graduate studies, I also examined stopover behavior of birds migrating across the Gulf of Mexico (a side collaborative project that I initiated in the year 2000 and a project that collaborators kept working on since then in the US, Mexico and Cuba). After obtaining my PhD in 2015, I held a postdoctoral position at the Illinois Natural History Survey where I examined new methodological and analytical approaches for autonomous acoustic recording data. I stayed at the Survey only a couple years until I joined the BBL again in January 2017 as a Biologist.

Being away from the BBL for 10 years allowed me to gain a broader understanding of what we do in the BBL, as well as appreciate its value in science. I now see the BBL not just as a long-term archive of banding data but as an important national resource like no other in the world - since 1920, supporting the collection, archiving, management and dissemination of information from banded and marked birds in North America. There is no doubt that realizing this makes my work very exciting as I see the potential for the BBL to become a truly integrated scientific program with potential for achieving both scientific excellence and financial sustainability.

Currently, as Chief, I will work with the BBL team and partners to ensure that the lab remains the premier resource for long-term bird banding and marking data in North America, and to make sure the BBL becomes a robust, integrated scientific program that rapidly adapts to new science needs, study methods, and technologies to facilitate successful and effective bird management and conservation. I will place emphasis in the following:

- Increase engagement and collaboration with our partners, local communities, and congressional offices
- Improve our communication with and provide leadership to our community of banders, including the federal agencies, scientific community, and amateur banders
- Integration of bird banding science with new technological advances to improve our scientific research and the management and conservation of birds

- Provide support and leadership to coordinated banding programs across North America
- Collaborations among coordinated banding projects, including international programs
- Increase BBL involvement in Community Science: continue our vision for a nationwide constituency of conservation supporters
- Coordinate and collaborate with other data archives that manage data related to birds and bird banding activities, such as animal tracking repositories, bird surveys, etc.
- Demonstrate our value to partners as we work to provide leadership in the bird banding science
- Develop a shared vision for the BBL of the future in which our partners see
- Strengthen our strategic science planning process to improve alignment of our science investments to partner needs
- Implement a new business model to achieve financial sustainability and growth

In closing, I am very excited about serving as BBL Chief and working together with all of you to develop the BBL of the next century. I hope this information has helped you learn something about me. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions, concerns, ideas or are just interested in getting to know each other more. Thank you in advance for your support and assistance.

Have a great day,
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Bird Banding tools

