

This is the 14th installment in our regular feature presenting a brief synopsis of the banding and encounter records submitted to the Bird Banding Lab for a particular species. Each installment will feature a new species; suggestions for species to be covered or data to be presented are welcome (swgabrey@gmail.com).

Space limitations of NABB prohibit any in-depth analysis of the data and these notes are not meant to show any trends in population parameters such as population density or growth rate, geographic distribution, etc., and should not be viewed as a definitive analysis of the status of the species.

Although the banding program began in the 1920s, the currently available digital records for banding data include only those records from 1960 to the present (pre-1960 banding data are available in other formats, however). All encounters, including those of birds banded before 1960, are available in digital format. The following summary includes

only those birds banded and encountered from Jan 1960 through Jun 2022.

Because of safety concerns related to vultures' habit of defecating on their legs to regulate body temperature, the BBL began phasing out use of standard metal bands in the late 1970s, replacing them with back, head, or wing tags. The first of these alternative markers reported in the BBL database was used in 1977; the last metal band was used in 1988. In the following discussion, "band" refers to a marker of some kind (band, tag, or other).

Banded birds

Numbers and Age and Sex Categories.— Since 1960, 4,863 Black Vultures have been banded in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean (Table 1). Twelve percent (n = 574) of the vultures were banded with standard metal bands and the remaining 88% (n = 4,289) were marked with

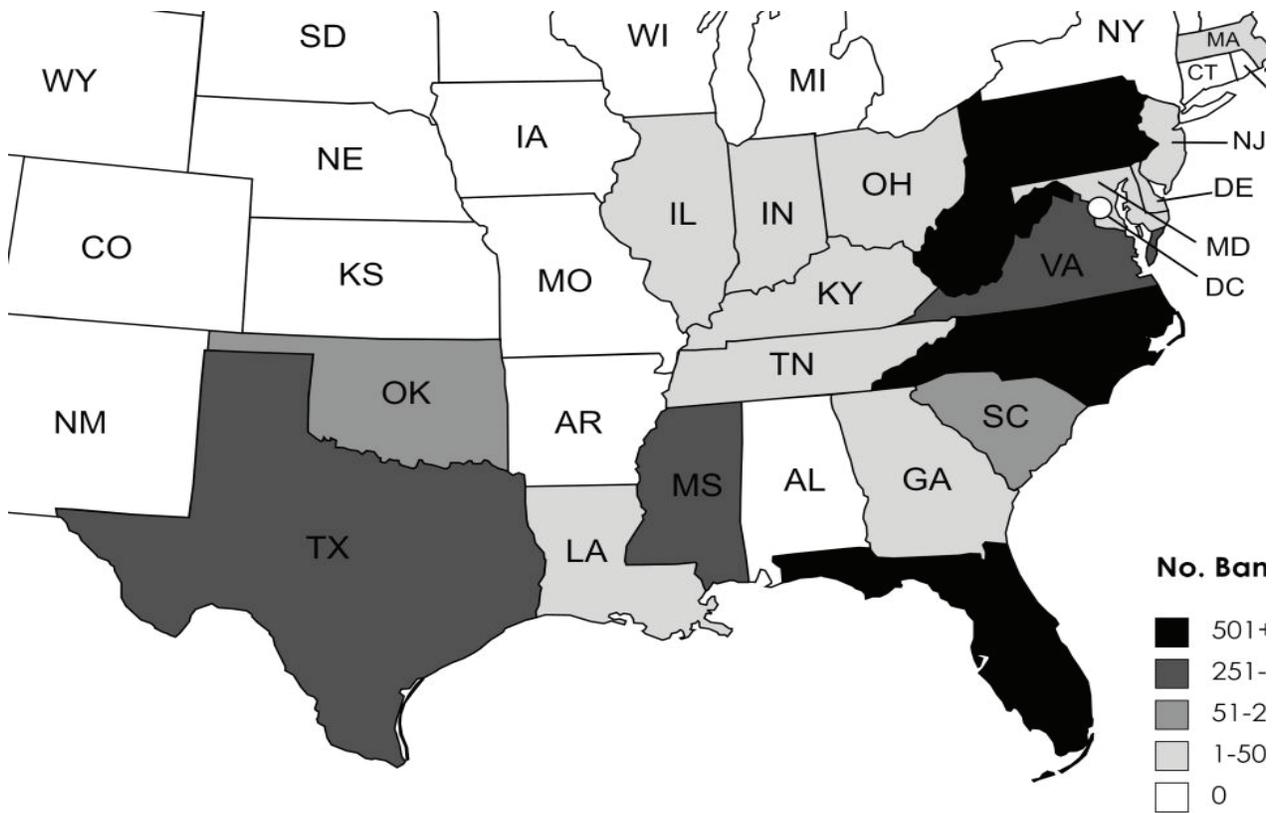


Figure 1. Number of Black Vultures banded in the United States between 1960 and Jun 2022 (n = 4,861). Not shown: 1 banded in Nova Scotia and 1 banded in Trinidad.

wing tags or other alternative markers (including 42 fitted with satellite transmitters). Sex was identified (either at banding or upon encounter) for 8% (n = 369); of these, 43% were males (n = 158) and 57% were females (n = 211). Twenty percent of the males were aged as HY or L (n = 31) and 80% were aged as AHY, SY, ASY, TY, or ATY (n = 127); none were aged as U. Eighteen percent of the females were aged as HY or L (n = 38), 82% were aged as AHY, SY, ASY, TY, or ATY (n = 172), and <1% were aged as U (n = 1). Ten percent of the 4,494 vultures for which sex was not identified were aged as HY or L (n = 466), 80% were aged as AHY, SY, ASY, TY, or ATY (n = 3,593), and 10% were aged as U (n = 435).

Geographic distribution.— Black Vultures have been banded in 20 of the United States (n = 4,861), in 1 Canadian province (n = 1), and in 1 Caribbean country (n = 1; Figure 1). The top 5 states (Florida, n = 1,309; North Carolina, n = 696; Pennsylvania, n = 656; West Virginia, n = 616; and Virginia, n = 500) accounted for 78% of all vultures banded in the United States.

Seasonal distribution.— Twenty-nine percent (n = 1,401) of the Black Vultures banded in the United States were banded between May and Aug, 13% (n = 612) between Sep and Oct, 44% (n = 2,135) between Nov and Feb, and 15% (n = 713) between Mar and Apr. One vulture was banded in May in Nova Scotia and one in Dec in Trinidad.



Black Vulture Com Stock studios

Encounters

Numbers and Age and Sex Categories.— There have been 2,029 encounters representing 1,034 Black Vultures in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean between 1960 and Jun 2022 (Table 2). No encounter records had invalid or mismatched sex, age, or species data, and no vultures were encountered on the day they were banded. Fifty-five percent (n= 573) of the vultures were encountered once, 38% (n = 391) were encountered 2 - 4 times; 6% (n = 63) were encountered 5 - 9 times, and <1% (n = 6) were encountered 10 - 17 times.

Sex was identified for 6 encountered vultures: 2 males (1 L and 1 AHY) and 4 females (2 ASY, 1 HY, and 1 L) (Table 2). Nine percent (n = 90) of the remaining 1,028 vultures were aged as L or HY, 87% (n = 896) were aged as AHY, SY, ASY, TY, or ATY, and 4% (n = 42) were aged as U.

Fifteen of the 1,034 vultures were 7 yr 0 mo or older when encountered, only one of which was of known sex (an HY-F). Three of the remaining 14 oldest vultures were aged as L or HY and 11 were aged as AHY, SY or older at banding. Ten percent of encountered vultures (n = 100) were between 5 yr 0 mo and 6 yr 11 mo, 31% (n = 321) were between 3 yr 0 mo and 4 yr 11 mo, 52% (n = 534) between 1 yr 0 mo and 2 yr 11 mo, and 6% (n = 64) were aged 11 mo or less or had no age recorded.

The oldest vulture overall was an AHY-U banded in Dec 2005 in Florida and encountered (how obtained = 29: “saw or photographed neck collar, color band, or other marker...while bird was free”) in Jan 2016, also in Florida (minimum age at encounter 11 yr 7 mo). The oldest known female was an HY-F banded in Nov 1979 in North Carolina and encountered (how obtained = 66: “...trapped and released during banding operations”) in Apr 1987, also in North Carolina (minimum age at encounter 7 yr 10 mo, 9th oldest overall). The oldest known male was an AHY-M banded in May 2013 in Delaware and encountered (how obtained = 29) in Sep 2018 in Pennsylvania (minimum age at encounter 6 yr, 3 mo, 25th oldest overall). The oldest vulture banded as an L was an L-U banded in Apr 2013 in Delaware and encountered (how obtained = 29) in Jan 2021, also in Delaware Oct. - Dec.

(minimum age at encounter 7 yr 7 mo, 12th oldest overall). The oldest vulture aged HY at banding was an HY-U banded in Jun 1980 in North Carolina and encountered in Jan 1989 (how obtained = 66), also in North Carolina (minimum age at encounter 8 yr 7 mo, 5th oldest overall).

Geographic distribution.— Sixty-seven percent (n = 694) of the vultures were encountered in the state in which they were banded (Table 2). Six vultures were encountered 501 km (311 mi) or more from their banding location; sex was not identified for any of them, and all were aged as AHY, SY or older at banding. Two percent of all encountered vultures (n = 18) were encountered between 301 - 500 km (187 - 310 mi), 24% (n = 245) between 101 - 300 km (63 - 186 mi), 21% (n = 217) between 51 - 100 km (32 - 62 mi), and 53% (n = 548) at 50 km (31 mi) or less. The greatest distance between band and encounter locations was 1,283 km (797 mi) for an ASY-U banded in Jun 2013 in Pennsylvania and encountered (how obtained = 29) in Apr 2021 in Quebec. The greatest distance for a known female (and 14th greatest overall) was 341 km (212 mi) for an ASY-F banded in Feb 2021 in Mississippi and encountered (how obtained = 29) in May 2021 in Kentucky. The greatest distance for a known male (and 630th greatest overall) was 35 km (22 mi) for an ASY-M banded in May 2013 in Delaware and encountered (how obtained = 29) in Sep 2018 in Pennsylvania. The greatest distance for a vulture aged as L (and 68th greatest overall) was 196 km (122 mi) for an L-U banded in Jul 2015 in Pennsylvania and encountered (how obtained = 29) in Apr 2020 in West Virginia. The greatest distance for an HY (and 24th greatest overall) was 306 km (190 mi) for an HY-U banded in Oct 2019 in West Virginia and encountered (how obtained = 66) in Aug 2020 in Ohio.

Other interesting encounters.— A Black Vulture banded as an L-U in Aug 2015 in Pennsylvania was encountered 17 times through Nov 2021 in Delaware (14 encounters), Pennsylvania (2), and New Jersey (1). The New Jersey encounter was 118 km (74 mi) from the banding location while the remaining 16 were all less than 21 km (13 mi). Another vulture banded as L-U in Jul 2015 in Pennsylvania was encountered 16 times through

Apr 2021 in Delaware (11), Maryland (3), and Pennsylvania and New Jersey (1 each); distances ranged from 8 - 135 km (5 - 84 mi) from the banding location. A vulture banded as an AHY-U in Mar 2010 in Virginia was encountered 3 times between Jan and Apr 2013, once each in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey at distances ranging from 399 - 678 km (248 - 421 mi). A vulture banded as an ASY-U in Nov 2018 in West Virginia was encountered once each in Feb and Mar 2019 in West Virginia, again in May 2019 in Maryland (328 km [204 mi] from its banding location) and then found dead in May 2021 back in West Virginia, 121 km (75 mi) from its banding location.

Birds banded before 1960.— More than 20,000 Black Vultures were reportedly banded by E. A. McIlhenny (creator of Tabasco sauce) between 1934 and 1946 at Avery Island, Louisiana, at least 2,300 of which were retrapped at the same location during the same period (see Parmalee and Parmalee, 1967, *Condor* 69:146-155 and references therein). Excluding the Avery Island vultures, 67 vultures banded before 1960 were

encountered and are included in the BBL digital database. Thirty-nine were aged as U, 22 as AHY, and 6 as HY, L, or J (obsolete code for Juvenile, presumably refers to HY); sex was unknown for all 67. The earliest banding date for a vulture that was later encountered was May 1924 for a vulture banded as a U-U in Georgia and found dead in Oct 1924, 32 km (20 mi) from its banding location. The oldest vulture banded before 1960 was an AHY-U banded in Apr 1935 (minimum age at encounter 6 yr 6 mo) in Virginia and found dead in Dec 1940 in West Virginia, 48 km (30 mi) from its banding location. The greatest distance between banding and encounter locations was 243 km (151 mi) for an AHY-U banded in Apr 1935 in Virginia and encountered in Mar 1936 in North Carolina.

Acknowledgements.— I thank the dozens of permit holders who have banded Black Vultures over the decades, all the individuals who reported encounters, and staff at the Bird Banding Lab for supplying the data.

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Table 1. Number of Black Vultures banded and encountered in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean between 1960 and Jun 2022 by age at banding and sex (either sex at banding or sex updated upon encounter).

Age code	Banded birds				Encountered birds			
	Male	Female	Unknown	Total	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
L	7	6	202	215	1	1	35	37
HY	24	32	264	320		1	55	56
SY	51	56	534	641			163	163
AHY	10	23	1,621	1,654	1		169	170
TY	0	0	160	160			84	84
ASY	65	93	1,162	1,320		2	409	411
ATY	1		116	117			71	71
Unknown		1	435	436			42	42
Total	158	211	4,494	4,863	2	4	1,028	1,034

Table 2. Banding region and encounter region of Black Vultures banded and encountered in the United States and Canada between Jan 1960 and Jun 2022 (n = 1,034).

Banding state	Encounter State																				Totals			
	CT	DE	DC	FL	GA	IN	KY	MD	MA	MS	NH	NJ	NY	NC	OH	PA	QC	RI	SC	TN		TX	VA	WV
DE		2														3								5
FL				307															1					308
IN						3	1																	4
MA									1															1
MI							1			1														2
NC														15										15
OH						1									1									2
PA	2	13	1					50			1	38	3			255	1					8	2	374
SC					5			1								1			11					18
TX																					17			17
VA			1					11										1				15	1	29
WV		1	1				1	58				2		2	14	41				2		71	66	259
Total	2	16	3	307	5	4	3	120	1	1	1	40	3	17	15	300	1	1	12	2	17	94	69	1,034



Western Regional News

President's Message

This is my first letter as WBBA President, and it gives me an opportunity to look forward to what vision I have for WBBA in the next year or so. WBBA, and the other banding associations, are gathering places for banders' unique skills and perspectives on what happens when we have a bird in hand. Very few people are so lucky to experience holding these feathered treasures in our hands for a few moments before releasing them again. I hope that you still experience wonder and joy in each of those moments. However, it is important to remember that it is not about us, but about each of those individual birds and what we can do to learn about them, how to share that knowledge, and how to make the world a better place for them.

So, my goals are to help you with the learning, the sharing, and the making the world a better place and ask you to help others do the same. Invite a school or Scout group to visit your banding operation, prepare a social media post about something unique about your banding station, or ask the local nature center if you can give a talk during their summer kids programs. The more people see birds, the more they will appreciate the birds around them and work to conserve a place for them to thrive.

By the time you read this, we will have sent WBBA members an email survey asking what WBBA can do for them and what they can do to help WBBA be the best organization it can be.