

Title: Bird Banding as a Worldwide Bird Conservation Effort through Teaching Teens to Young Adults

Overall Goal/Objective:

The primary objective is to train teens through young adults the skills they need in a safe and responsible manner to pursue banding jobs that work for bird conservation anywhere in the world, including the Caribbean.

The Wing Island Bird Banding Station (WIBBS) was opened in 2000 at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History by Master Bander Susan Finnegan. WIBBS is an all-volunteer station, existing solely on grants and donations to buy equipment. Each year, fall and spring migration monitoring takes place as well as breeding bird surveys. WIBBS has participated in the MAPS program, which stands for Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship, for many years at a second site we run in the Punkhorn Parklands of Brewster. Over the years WIBBS has put on many banding demonstrations for both young people and adults. As an NABC (North American Banding Council) Trainer, Sue has also held many week-long banding classes. For the past twelve years Sue's overall objective has been to teach bird banding to middle and high school students, college students majoring in wildlife biology or related fields, and young biologists.

As an NABC Trainer, Sue teaches sound and ethical bird banding practices ensuring these young biologists and future biologists bring that training with them into the field, which is very important when working with wildlife. Her former students have obtained banding jobs all over the country and the world working to conserve birds and many of them have gone on to publish their data. They've also gone on to assist with public outreach and education through banding demonstrations. As of this writing they've worked in China, Australia, the Midway Atoll in north Pacific Ocean, Canada, Dubai, and numerous states in the U.S.

Participants come from nearby organizations including Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge, National Seashore, and Mass Audubon. Three students have come from Cape Cod Community College. Others contact the station through the blog on Facebook- Wing Island Bird Banding Station or Instagram- wing\_banders. A partnership was formed with Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge where a student would work with me for fall migration monitoring, stay at their dorm for free, but donate 20 hours/week to the refuge. We would advertise on Ornithology Exchange if needed, but this year due to Covid-19 MNWR can't house anyone in their dorm so that has been cancelled.

Specific Action: The specific action being proposed is to be able to continue teaching students who are either studying biology or are early in their careers and to foster an appreciation for birds with teenagers in the hopes they will continue their studies working for bird conservation.

Budget: In order to teach banding, one needs mist nets which are very expensive. \$1,150.00 for 7 mist nets. From Avinet, each 12- meter mist net costs \$165.00. Between our two sites, we have 50 nets in total. Mist nets in our salty environment typically last 3 years with mending but then have to be thrown out because they fall apart.

Timetable/Continuity: This is an ongoing project beginning each spring and lasting through the

3<sup>rd</sup> week in November.

Implementing Institution:

Bob Dwyer, Executive Director  
Cape Cod Museum of Natural History  
869 Main Street  
Brewster, MA 02631

Project Officer:

Susan Finnegan, NABC Certified Master Bander and Trainer  
Manager, Wing Island Bird Banding Station

Sue has been banding birds for the past 26 years, studying for 6 years under a Master Bander before obtaining her own Master Permit in 2000 when she opened the Wing Island Bird Banding Station. She became certified with NABC in 2001 and passed the trainer level in 2003. She has studied with Peter Pyle, ornithologist and author of "Identification Guide to North American Birds" in Point Reyes, CA and is currently authoring a paper with him on Wilson's Storm-petrels. She also studied extensively at Powdermill Avian Research Center in Pennsylvania. She studied banding hummingbirds in West Virginia and obtained special permission to band them by the Bird Banding Laboratory in 2005.

Comments from some former students (to show the need):

-My time at the Wing Island Banding Station afforded a unique opportunity to develop the fundamental skills of a field ornithologist. Developing basic banding skills early in my career has served as a pillar, I believe, allowing me to rise to the top of applicant pools and progress as a professional ornithologist in ways I may not have otherwise. Often, it appears prospective employers need people with banding skills but have little ability to teach. Sue's natural teaching ability, knowledge of birds, and stewardship of Wing Island has positively affected everybody I know that has ever spent time at the station. In this way, I see Sue and her work training people at the Wing Island Bird Banding Station as a 'source' population, fledging budding ornithologists that disperse throughout the region and beyond. I'm very thankful our paths happened to cross.  
Ben L.

- Sue Finnegan has been an AMAZING banding mentor to many people throughout the years. She has certainly helped me gain important banding skills I needed to have when applying for other banding opportunities, as well as graduate school. Meghan N.

- Learning from Sue was such an important stepping stone, and I have been able to use the skills and knowledge I learned to further my career in wildlife ecology and ornithology. I am currently working as a demography technician for the critically endangered Florida grasshopper sparrow, where I use avital for the intensive field monitoring we do at Three Lakes WMA to monitor the success of one of the last remaining populations of Florida grasshopper sparrow, of which there are less than 100 birds left in the wild. I'm confident that without Sue's help and expert training I wouldn't be where I am today! I hope to pursue more opportunities with bird

conservation and banding work across the US and eventually obtain NABC certification.  
Amanda A.

-Sue's teaching was the primary qualification that helped me to obtain a job at a fall migration station on Kiawah Island in S.C in 2016. It was one of the best experiences of my career! At Rookery Bay NERR in Florida where I work, we are talking about attempting to start a banding education station at the reserve with me at the helm. Marie L.

-I had never banded a bird and never taken birds out of mist-nets before working with Sue. Over the course of my field seasons, I've probably taught 50+ technicians and interns how to band terns and plovers. Today, I run a MAPS station where ESF students get to volunteer to learn about bird banding and research. My experience working with Sue really changed the way that I thought about birds and how I thought that I could work with them. I hadn't imagined doing research as a career, and so working with Sue really set me on a path that has landed with a PhD and my dream job working for USGS. I'm always grateful for the season that I was able to spend on Wing Island. Michelle S., Ph.D

-I started banding with Sue at Wing Island after attending a banding demonstration in my sophomore year of high school. Up until that point, I'd been generally interested in birds and conservation science, but had yet to experience any 'real-life' applications of these interests; Sue became my introduction not only to banding, but to the wider world of data science, field work, and the possibilities of a career in a discipline that I'd previously considered only a hobby. Sue's banding instruction was such a formative and inspirational experience that I chose to make it the subject of my college application essay, and today I'm a declared Biology/Ecology major at Dartmouth College with aspirations for a future in bird-related study. Currently I'm working as a "Wildlife Technician" for a reputable consulting company at a wind farm in Vermont, where I monitor bird and bat fatalities for purposes of understanding wildlife strikes and complying with federal regulations. At the instance of my hiring, my interviewers expressed how impressed they were with my background & field experience in bird identification, and I believe I owe my position to the hours I spent at Wing with Sue.  
Maddie N.

-Wing Island Banding Station gave me the skills and experience I needed last fall to be able to get a banding assistant position this year at Powdermill banding station. Sue was always ready to teach and answer any questions I had. She patiently walked me and others through aging all the different bird species we caught till we were confident enough to be able to accurately age them on our own. She helped me use Pyle, mend nets, and gain a lot of confidence in handling birds. I am so excited to use all the skills I learned there to help in bird conservation. I could not have asked for a better mentor or banding community. Catherine W.

-I spent a fall season interning at the Wing Island Banding Station. I've had many banding jobs all over the country since and have worked with many Master Banders and Sue is by far the best teacher I have ever worked with. Jeremy P.

-Learning to band with Sue was one of the highlights of my career! Sue is such a patient and knowledgeable teacher and tirelessly worked with me as I learned to see the different molt patterns for the birds we captured. It took me a solid month to see the subtle differences in coloration in the molt pattern of Song Sparrows, but Sue never gave up on me and encouraged

me to keep looking. After my internship with her, I went on to lead a seabird monitoring crew, where I banded terns, puffins, guillemots, and eiders. This is a position I would never have gotten without the skills I gained from her. Even today, my time at the Wing Island Banding Station inspires me to keep moving forward, and I am considering pursuing a banding license of my own! Bradford B.

I am a qualified British bird ringer who had the privilege of banding with Sue Finnegan at Wing Island in the Spring of 2018. As a ringer and as a professional educationalist I was impressed by the skill Sue displayed in her teaching and training which took place in the field. Whether she was showing us differences in techniques between American and British systems of banding, or encouraging local enthusiasts, or illustrating the niceties of aging birds with university students Sue displayed an excellent depth of knowledge and understanding of the needs of her listeners. This was supported by the number of students I met at Wing Island who had especially returned there from their studies to band for a few days. They were very grateful for the training they had received there under Sue's guidance which was standing them in such good stead as they progressed in their professional and academic careers as ornithologists. Similar expressions of support were made by the local volunteers who helped her in her work. I consider those who live close to Wing Island to be fortunate indeed to have such a centre of banding and ornithological excellence in their midst. John Lucas-Member of the Isle of Wight Ringing Group, U.K.

