

Braddock Bay Raptor Research

Banding Information and Protocols for Training New Banders

The intent of this document is to provide an overview of the BBRR banding operation and the training protocol we have designed to train persons interested in becoming a bander.

Brief history of the banding operation at BBRR

The BBRR banding operation was initiated by Clayton Taylor in 1984. BBRR was formed in 1986 to ensure the continued study of the hawk migration at Braddock Bay. Our location provides the opportunity to capture birds along the Great Lakes during the spring migration and also at the end of summer during a rather unique flight of Red-tailed Hawks. Thirteen species of hawks, falcons and eagles have been regularly documented at the hawk watch and many have been captured and banded at our stations. Raptors banded at Braddock Bay have been found in Florida, Virginia, Ohio, Minnesota, Canada and many other locations. Birds banded in Canada and nearby states have been recaptured at Braddock Bay. A Sharp-shinned Hawk holds the record for the furthest recapture – it was banded in Vera Cruz.

BBRR's current licensed banders

Susie Cotsworth

Jason Couch

Barbara French

Jill Heimrich

Melissa Mance-Coniglio

David Mathiason (Master Permit)

Dan Niven (Master Permit)

Jim Saller

Tim Willis (Master Permit)

Frequently asked questions

Is hawk banding something to which I can dedicate a great deal of time and effort?

Banding birds takes a great deal of knowledge and skill. It is a privilege that should be taken very seriously and one that is regulated by the state and federal agencies. After reviewing this document, you should discuss any concerns you may have with one of the banders.

Why is it important to band birds of prey?

Bird banding is a research technique that has allowed scientists to identify individual birds over time. Valuable information including migration routes, dispersal patterns, longevity, behavior,

population trends, disease issues and much more can be studied by banding birds. Birds of prey are at the top of the avian food chain, and therefore are key indicators of environmental change.

Please be prepared to discuss why **you** want to become a bander.

How long will it take to become a licensed bander?

This is a difficult question to answer, and it may be different for each individual. In general, this process takes multiple seasons (spring and summer) in the blind. Someone training to become a bander must work under the supervision of one of the licensed banders at all times, which may influence the length of the process due to scheduling. You must remember that this activity does not occur year round and is weather dependent. It is not uncommon for it to take several years to become licensed. If you have previous bird banding and trapping experience (any kind of birds) this may accelerate the timeframe.

What is involved in applying for a banding license (also referred to as a permit)?

There are two types of banding licenses or permits, which include a master banding permit and a sub-permit. The USGS Bird Banding Lab is the federal agency that issues banding permits. The application is available on their website (www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/) and should be reviewed. To obtain either permit you must have a research project which requires banding the birds to be successful. You must also document the number of birds you have handled, trapped and banded (under supervision). Documentation of your experience, knowledge of birds of prey and three letters of recommendation (on a standard form) from three currently licensed banders or other ornithologists will be required. The NYS DEC is the state agency that issues the state license. The DEC requires a copy of the federal license before they will issue the state permit.

There are several differences between a master and a sub-permit. As mentioned earlier, to apply for a master permit a research project must be proposed that cannot be accomplished without banding the birds. Documentation of the necessary knowledge, experience and the recommendations of other licensed banders are needed. The master permit holder can have sub-permittees on their license, orders bands from the Banding Lab for their own use and for all of their sub-permittees, and is responsible for timely submission of all banding data produced by everyone under their license.

A sub-permit can be obtained by working with a bander who currently holds a master permit and has an existing project. The sub-permit will detail what birds can be captured and banded, and what capture techniques are allowed based on the request of the master permit holder. Bands must be obtained from the master permit holder, and all banding data is sub-mitted to that person.

Besides capturing and banding birds, what else is involved in being a BBRR bander?

The following is a list of the responsibilities that the banders handle as a team:

- Set-up and take down of the banding stations which includes mowing, clearing trees and brush, trimming trap lanes, etc.
- Maintenance of the banding stations and equipment, which includes construction and cleaning (and more!)
- Trail maintenance (mulching, trimming shrubs, maintaining boardwalks)
- Lure bird capture and care, including participating in the regular feeding schedule of lure birds housed at the remote blinds during banding seasons
- Manning the station for public tours
- Speaking to the public about the banding process
- Involvement in Bird of Prey Days and other BBRR events
- Participation in regular banders meetings
- Communicating with other banders on a regular basis regarding the progress of trainees

What can I do to study outside the blind?

There are several things that can be done to study.

- Spending time at the hawk watch helps with identification skills
- Visit other sites where you can watch birds of prey (Montezuma, etc.) conducting their daily activities
- Visit Braddock Bay Bird Observatory to observe song bird banding
- Obtain a copy of the banding manual to study
- Learn bird of prey characteristics in field guides
- Visit the Bird Banding Lab Website
- Resources are also available on the BBRR website

Vocabulary commonly used in the blind

Alpha code – a four letter abbreviation assigned to each bird species often used in record keeping (RTHA = Red-tailed Hawk, EABL = Eastern Bluebird)

Bal-chatri or BC – a small trap made of wire mesh and monofilament loops used when road trapping

Banding station – includes the blind and the surrounding land where traps and mist nets are located

“BIT” – bander in training

Blind – small building from which the banders operate the banding station without being detected by the birds

Bow trap – a spring loaded trap constructed with a metal frame and nylon netting

Butt end band – aluminum leg band closed around the birds leg with specialized banding pliers used on smaller birds such as American Kestrel’s and Sharp-shinned Hawks

Foreign recovery – a bird banded at another banding location (not BBRR) captured at our banding station

Gaboon – a term of endearment, coined by Fran Hammerstrom (raptor biologist) used by licensed banders referring to a rookie or trainee

Jesses – straps of leather or cord comfortably attached to the legs of lure birds to secure them to the trap line

Lock-on band – aluminum band with an extra flap of metal used to secure the band on larger hawks to prevent removal

Lure bird – non-native birds (pigeons, starlings, and house sparrows) used to lure birds of prey into a mist net or bow trap (**these should NEVER be referred to as “bait”**)

Mist net – a nylon net used by ornithologists to capture birds for research, which is suspended between two poles and becomes almost invisible when properly deployed

Processing – basic processing includes: removing a bird from a capture device, placing it in a can, banding, aging, sexing, weighing and measuring the wing cord (additional data can be collected as well)

Recapture – a bird banded at BBRR banding stations that is captured again

Scribe – to write down (in this case, to write down information collected for each banded bird)

Surge – bow trap using a bungee cord to “free line” the lure bird (makes the lure bird appear loose) to attract a hawk into the trap

Triangle - three mist nets, often set up around a bow trap, in the shape of a triangle (used primarily to catch smaller hawks and falcons)

Wing cord – a common measurement taken from the bird’s wrist to the end of its longest primary feather

Note: The following protocol may be altered based on the prior experience of the trainee. In addition, changes to this protocol can be made at the discretion of the supervising bander. The supervising bander is the bander in charge of training a specific trainee on that particular day.

BBRR Training Protocol

Before the training process can begin, you will need to secure one of the licensed banders as your mentor. During your training, it is important to spend time with as many of the banders as possible at different banding stations – they all have something to offer! It is the responsibility of you and the supervising banders to regularly communicate with all banders regarding your progress in training.

1. We suggest that all trainees participate in the BBRR Raptor Education Course.
2. If the timeframe is appropriate, any trainee should be present to learn how to set-up the banding station at the beginning of the season.
3. All trainees should participate in the capture of lure birds as well as helping to water and feed them.
4. Training in the blind begins with spending time observing all aspects of the banding operation.
5. A trainee can help the banders by serving as a scribe when birds are processed. This allows a person to observe how to handle the birds, learn alpha codes, identify different species, age birds, sex birds, how to take measurements, band sizes, etc.
6. Learning to put jackets/jesses on the lure birds and putting them on the lines/changing them when needed is a way to get comfortable handling live birds.
7. Once the trainee becomes comfortable, they can help to process the smaller birds which require a butt end band (Sharp-shinned Hawks, American Kestrels, etc.) **with supervision.** (Handling birds is always at the discretion of the bander.) This will give the trainee the opportunity to demonstrate their skills including identification, aging, sexing, appropriate measurements and comfort/safety precautions when handling the birds.
8. When the bander feels it is appropriate, the trainee can move up to handling and processing larger birds which will need a lock-on band.
9. Safely removing birds from the mist nets or bow traps is a skill learned once the bander is comfortable that the trainee is ready for this step.
10. Learning to run lines to capture the birds is the **last step** in the training process.
11. At the end of the season, trainees should participate in closing the blinds.
12. Trainees may also be asked to demonstrate what they have learned at the end of the banding season.

13. At the end of the season, the licensed banders will discuss the trainee's strengths and weakness, give feedback and offer ideas for improvement. They will also determine if it is appropriate for a trainee to continue with the banding operation.

Bird banding is an activity that can expose you to certain diseases, such as psittacosis and tetanus. You will be handling wild birds of prey that can harm you with their beaks and talons. Puncture wounds are typically treated by thorough washing and a tetanus shot. Lure bird care will require you to clean waste from cages – this waste can dry and become airborne – precautions should be taken.

Is there anything we should know about you?

Do you have any experience with any of the following?

- Any kind of bird banding or trapping procedure
- Working with potentially dangerous animals of any kind
- Bird identification or surveys