



**McGill Bird Observatory
Bander-in-training guidelines
April 2007**

The bander-in-training (BIT) guidelines have been revised and restructured to allow BITs to feel like they are learning in a structured and goal-oriented environment. In past years, BICs at the McGill Bird Observatory trained banders as the BIC saw fit. Now however, as there are many volunteers wishing to learn banding all at once, we feel it appropriate to provide – in writing – the steps that need to be taken before banding can occur. We are very proud to have so many people progressing towards a stage where they can begin banding, but must temper our enthusiasm with the knowledge that training is secondary to our primary goal: the safe and accurate monitoring of migratory passerines.

Bird safety is the first and foremost consideration when training a new bander. Thus, the best way to minimize stress and the potential for injury while the bird is being banded, is for it to be banded by someone who is very comfortable with handling (a good extractor), who knows what the species is without any doubt and with little time taken (a good identifier), and who is able to quickly age and sex it (a good bander).

As of Spring 2007, the following steps must be taken by all BITs before they will be allowed to band:

- 1) BITs must be excellent extractors, able to swiftly, carefully, and calmly deal with all extractions with confidence, but with the knowledge that sometimes two sets of eyes are better than one. There is no place for pride or ego in any aspect of bird handling. Bird safety comes first. A good extractor has lots of patience and gets lots of practice. Here, there is no substitute for practical experience: the more birds handled the better. However, it is critical that the extractor-in-training listens and watches BICs carefully as they extract birds, since tips and tricks derived from years of experience may prove invaluable if a bird is badly tangled. A good extractor is familiar with all the different grips, and is comfortable when it comes to actually placing a band on a bird. The series of motions required for banding can also be practiced at home with a pair of ordinary pliers, a button, marble or screw representing the band, and a stuffed bird. We are in the process of creating training videos that will walk BITs through the process of actually banding a bird. Simply being comfortable with the steps to take during banding can significantly reduce the stress of those first few bands.
- 2) BITs must be good observers. One of the best ways to improve species identification is to practice at every opportunity, whether it is during census with someone who is a Class 1 observer, reading through field guides, or identifying while extracting: practice makes perfect. The better your identification skills, the better and faster you will be at banding, and the less time spent handling the bird, the better.

- 3) BITs must be comfortable with the key points of ageing and sexing species commonly handled at MBO. It is much better to know what to look for before you have the bird in the hand, than to have the bird in the hand before deciding to learn what you need to look for by leafing through Pyle. BITs should practice ageing and sexing by scribing for the BIC, paying attention to what the BIC is doing and in what order, and attempting to age and sex all birds along with the BIC. It is also highly recommended to read through Pyle's species accounts and the MBO ID guides (www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/id/index.html) for the commonly banded birds at MBO so that you are familiar with the key points to look for before ever having to handle the bird. You will be amazed at how quickly ageing and sexing can be done when you know what to look for in advance, and how much knowing your species will reduce your stress levels, which in turn will likely reduce the stress felt by the bird.

The BICs will agree when a BIT has achieved these important goals, and will then ask if the BIT would like to band. Until that time, banding is done by BICs only. We hope you understand our change in training tactics, and look forward to seeing you all progress to the state where you can safely and quickly band your "first" bird.

Sincerely,

The McGill Bird Observatory's Banders-in-Charge

Marie-Anne Hudson
Barbara Frei
Marcel Gahbauer