



2022

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Newsletter

A culmination of our projects, progress and where we are going.



by [Kyle Shepard](#) on January 1, 2023

With this new year ushering in Alabama's Year of the Bird, we take a brief moment to reflect on what was accomplished in 2022. I'm happy to say we have grown in both size and in number of projects.

2022 was a year of fun challenges, intense research, hours upon hours for data crunching, and writing papers. I'd like to extend my many thanks to all of our volunteers that have worked tirelessly alongside us to continue our mission- bring our passion for our feathered friends to the general public in various ways, through educational Facebook posts, outreach events, guest lectures and banding demonstrations.

To our supporters, we thank you for your continued support both in person and from afar. Without you, we would not be where we are today.

Without further ado, let's get down to the nitty gritty.

THIS YEAR'S
Chronicles

January

Every time a new year rolls around we are smack dab in the middle of winter hummingbird season. We band as many wintering hummers as we can in an effort to help better understand winter populations and movements in the Southeastern US.

This project is partnered with Fred Bassett and Fred Dietrich (belonging to Hummingbird Research Inc.- Fred Bassett's non-profit) who have been doing this work far longer than we have. Between the Freds, Emma Rhodes and myself, we cover the entirety of AL, GA, FL, and MS south of I20 with Fred B. taking the brunt of the traveling to band these amazing creatures. Frankly, it's difficult to keep up with Fred B. as he is as much of a migrant as the hummers we chase and though we try our best to keep up, he always out paces us. Perks of being retired. It's an honor working with these fine gentlemen, gleaning as much information as I can along the way. A recent discussion between Bassett and myself left me with a self-imposed challenge- when he retires from banding hummers (hopefully a long time from now) Emma and I will continue to do our best to fill his shoes. However, the following words came straight from Fred's mouth, "No one is stupid enough to do what I do. I've been fortunate to be able to devote so much time to doing this." Most folks would leave it at that but me being me I retorted with, "Well I'm sure as hell going to try!"



February

Our wintering hummers continued through February intermittently while I was mostly pulled away to do my actual job (got to pay the bills.) However, the Southeastern Purple Martin Project really started to take shape. One of the largest obstacles with this project was finding a reliable and affordable source of alpha-numeric aluminum color bands. These are similar to the normal federal bands that we use; however, they are much easier to read in the field with a scope or good binoculars. The company that most Purple Martin (PUMA) banders used for their color bands went out of business in 2021 leaving us in a sticky situation. We searched and searched, eventually finding an Australian company that fit the bill but was cost prohibitive because of the sheer number of color bands we planned to use.



Some of you know that I love to work with my hands and make banding equipment and tools out of everyday objects (a necessary skill for a bander on a budget). I figured since we form our own hummingbird bands, I should be able to make other bands... right? So that's precisely what I did! After a few days of tinkering and some bloody thumbs, I had finally perfected the art of making aluminum bands by hand! BUT, there was still the

matter of getting letters and numbers onto a piece of colored anodized aluminum. So, I blew the budget. Well, my budget, not BCA's budget. I sank a considerable amount of money into a laser engraver to etch the alpha-numeric into the aluminum before cutting the sheet to proper height, then to proper length then rounding them into bands. It worked like a charm, so I set up shop in my spare bedroom/catch-all room and got to work making bands for hours on end. In the meantime, Emma worked diligently to prepare the final permitting paperwork, nest check datasheets, researching geolocator deployment procedures, and coordinating with Dr. T.J. Zenzal

who agreed to help us with this project. Emma also gave a presentation titled “All About Hummingbirds” to the Orange Audubon Society.

March

March 1st brought about the end of our 2021-2022 winter hummer season with one last adult female Rufous Hummingbird. We continued our preparations for the Southeastern Purple Martin Project as well. Mid-March brought about our first public event of the year at Kreher Preserve in Auburn, AL. This was a 2-day banding demonstration that consisted of a good number of birds and visitors with chilly weather to boot.



The end of March brought us another public banding demo for our friends at the Environmental Studies Center in Mobile, AL for their Open House. This demo was much closer to a tabling event than a banding demo because of scarce bird activity. I think for the whole day we banded one Northern Cardinal. It was a good event nonetheless.

April

April was a busy busy month for us and started with a week of migration banding at our closed, private Orange Beach, AL site. This session was unique as 18 acres of adjacent properties were clear-cut for housing developments. As depressing as losing that important neighboring habitat was, it's helping to further that project in a way. The whole purpose of the Orange Beach site is to study the effects of urbanization in reference to migrant and resident use of shrinking habitat. It will take several more years to get a true understanding of how a quickly growing city affects the use of these smaller fragmented habitats.

We expect to see higher numbers of migrants using the habitat left as they are now forced to consolidate into a smaller area. I think we started to see this but like I said, time will tell for sure. Based on observations during that week, the resident birds seem to have abandoned that habitat for nesting locations in the surrounding neighborhood and only use the swampy site for foraging.





I also spent a day at Mary G. Montgomery Highschool in Saraland, AL giving a talk on banding and research to one of their Agriculture classes. It was a great talk with attentive and curious students.

In the third week of April, I traveled to Holt, FL to join the crew there for a Purple Martin nest check and to discuss logistics. Emma received news that we were awarded two small grants she submitted in-support of our martin work.

Finally, to round out this busy month, Emma and I hosted a more intensive bander training session for her undergrads and colleagues at Auburn University.

May and June

These months were devoted solely to the Southeastern Purple Martin Project and one of our largest achievements of the year. During these months we worked hand-in-hand with Purple Martin landlords of 4 colonies across AL, GA, and FL to get as many nestling martins banded as possible. We also banded and deployed 22 geolocators on adult martins under the expert guidance of Dr. T.J. Zenzal with USGS. He was gracious enough to give his time and knowledge to train us in the art of attaching geos to martins in the safest way possible. All in all, we banded roughly 600 martins in these two months. Not only was this a huge undertaking for us as BCA but also a huge win for Purple Martins in the southeast. The southeastern states (with the exception of Orlando, FL) have been a massive knowledge gap for Purple Martin research. We take pride in knowing that we are collecting valuable data on this declining species while working with the landlords (who are doing the important weekly nest checks) in this massive community science project.





July

In July, we got a slight reprieve from all of our projects but no time to rest as we were in full swing preparing for our Fall Fort Morgan event (our biggest public event of the year).

August



During the first week of August, I spent my time in Elkins, WV helping Fred Dietrich to train this year's batch of up and coming hummingbird banders. During this training week, we banded north of 300 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds over the course of 3 days. Elkins is absolutely covered in hummers making their way south through the mountains during their fall migration. It makes for an excellent training ground.



While I was busy with hummer training, Emma assisted Julia Elliott, our third director, with her hummingbird banding event at Smith-Gilbert Gardens in Kennesaw, GA. Emma also was hosted on NPR's Creature Comforts radio station to talk about our banding projects and Purple Martins.

September-October

During September, we were back to full speed starting with our first western hummingbird of the fall/winter season- an adult female Rufous Hummingbird. Shortly thereafter, it was back to Orange Beach for our fall migration assessment of our closed site. Final preparations for Fort Morgan were made, and I got in a little bit of fall migration

hummingbird banding in as well. Our friends at the Pascagoula River Audubon Center also invited us again to their annual Hummingbird and Nature Festival where we conducted public hummingbird banding. Emma assisted Fred Bassett with a hummer banding event at Kreher Preserve in Auburn, AL.

The last couple of days in September and into the first week of October we hosted our largest and most popular banding event of the year at the Fort Morgan State Historic Site in Fort Morgan, AL. This event is always a massive undertaking but well worth it to be able to get the general public face to face with and make a connection with the birds moving through our area during fall migration. This year we had roughly 800 visitors to the site with plenty of birds to show.



During this week, we banded Alabama's 3rd record of Yellow-green Vireo. We were also happy to be able to band a Chuck-will's-widow and an Eastern Whip-poor-will. A whole heck of a lot has to come together for this event to happen, and it requires an entire year to plan. That being said, every moment spent planning is all made worth it the moment we see visitors' faces light up as they are face to face with these amazing creatures.

November-December

November brought us back around to wintering hummers and our first Scaly-breasted Munias banded in MS. December continued our winter hummer banding all the way through to our last banded bird of 2022- an adult female Rufous Hummingbird. We also conducted a banding demo for our friends at Pascagoula River Audubon Center.

Notes

Our Scaly-breasted Munia work is cited in Peter Pyle's 2nd edition to the Identification Guide to North American Birds. This is the "bander's bible" and we're excited that we contributed at least a small part to the new edition. Emma and I are also busy preparing our munia research for publication so we hope to share that with you in the near future.

2023 Projects

This year we plan to continue all of our current projects as is with one notable exception. Our Southeastern Purple Martin Project has grown! Instead of the original 4 colonies to survey we are up to 6 with a possible 7th as I type this. For this project we plan on banding between 800-1000 Purple Martins and deploying an additional 78 geolocators for a total of 100 geos deployed for the project.

We have a few more new exciting things coming that I can't quite divulge yet so check in every once in a while on Facebook to see what we are up to!

Emma and I strive to make any and all information free and available to everyone. You can find reports and banding summaries accessible on our website. We are excited for the new year and the potential challenges that may come. With both of us working full-time jobs and running BCA/doing research, it can get a little hectic at times. Thank you for joining our BCA family as we continue on this journey. Follow along with us on our website, bandingcoalition.org, or on Facebook under Banding Coalition of the Americas.

If you think we have earned your support, please consider making a donation so that we can keep these projects going. We run on volunteer power so that all donations can go straight to our research and outreach programs.



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