



2020-2021

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Newsletter

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



by [Kyle Shepard](#) on December 06, 2021

As 2021 comes to a close, we take time to reflect on how far BCA has come and bring you this update chronicling our progress. Many of you may know that Emma Rhodes and myself started this non-profit, Banding Coalition of the Americas, in March of 2020 as a way to carry the torch of our mentors. BCA has 2 major facets- research and outreach.

We believe that through our research we can provide necessary data that can be used to help protect birds as a whole. Late in 2019, we began a few projects to get the ball rolling but quickly realized that we needed help funding the things we wanted to do, thus BCA was born. Because of your support, we have been able to continue contributing valuable science for the good of our feathered friends.

Your support also allows us to fulfill the second half of our goals- outreach. Outreach is and will always be just as important to us as the actual research. In fact, this is probably how you found us, either through social media or in-person outreach. We host public events to share what banding is and the importance of what we do to hopefully inspire you and the next generation. After all, the time to care about the birds that fill our lives is now, not when they start to disappear. If at the end of the year we only get one person interested in birds, we have succeeded in making a better future.

THIS YEAR'S
PROJECTS



Scaly-breasted Munia

We are studying the scaly-breasted munia populations in the Southeastern United States. Because of our research these birds can be classified as "established exotics", meaning a non-native species that does not pose any real threat to native ecosystems. Most likely introduced by escapees from the pet trade, we are monitoring their current population status as well as studying their morphology, dispersal rate, and overall "life histories."

This project will always be open ended to an extent as we will continue to study them however to a lesser degree. To date, we have established a baseline for their molt patterns, average clutch size, nest size and build material as well as some very interesting family brooding behavior. Our molt data has been shared with several people so far and we are excited to announce that it will be used in Peter Pyle's newest edition of *Identification Guide to North American Birds* or the "Pyle guide" as we

affectionately call it. The Pyle guide is a reference that bird banders can use to help determine Age/Sex of a bird among other things. We are currently writing our own paper on these intriguing birds and how they are adapting to life in our part of the world.

Fort Morgan Banding



For those of you who do not know, Fort Morgan is where Emma and I met and trained under the guidance of Bob and Martha Sargent along with the rest of the Hummer/Bird Study Group crew. With the passing of Bob, this banding station ceased to exist. A few years later, another collaboration decided to start a new spring effort there. Not long after, Emma and I worked tirelessly to put on our own fall banding to help close the gap in research. After so much work and much financial support from folks like you, we hosted our largest public banding demonstration BCA has done to date. This station is also our largest outreach event. There is no doubt in my mind it was a huge success. To those of you who came to see it, we thank you for your compassion, support and eagerness to learn. With an excellent group of volunteers, we played the role of educator to around 400 visitors. We look forward to next time! This project will continue for as long as we are able.

Northern Saw-whet Owls

The Northern Saw-whet Owl is a small owl species that breeds in the boreal forests of Canada and then migrates south for the winter. These birds are believed to winter as far south as the Gulf Coast (key word being "believed".) Emma and I have started surveying for these owls in Alabama. We have two sites: one near Auburn University and one in Baldwin County very near Week's Bay. As of yet, no luck, however you only discover new things by

trying. To our knowledge, a Saw-whet at either site would be a new “southernmost” banding record in Alabama.

Migration and Urbanization Study



This project is closed to the public because it takes place on 14 acres of private property mostly consisting of cypress swamp and mixed bottomland hardwoods located in Orange Beach, AL. As neotropical migrants fly northbound from Central and South America, this site offers a habitat for tired birds to pause, rest, and refuel before continuing to their respective breeding grounds. It plays the same role as migrants move south to their wintering grounds.

We launched our pilot study of this property in April of 2020, and it showed enough promise to continue monitoring this site as the areas surrounding it become more and more urbanized. "Bird Hotspots" or stopover sites like these are essential to the survival of migratory bird species. Deforestation does not just affect migrants on their breeding and wintering grounds but also every single place they stop in between.

Most recently, this site played host to only the second confirmed record of a Yellow-green Vireo in Alabama. A rare bird indeed that caused quite a buzz among coastal birders. The first record was banded by someone on the Hummer/Bird Study Group

crew at Fort Morgan on Oct. 10, 2003. This project will continue for as long as we are able.

Wintering Hummingbirds in the Southeast



Every winter in the Southeastern U.S., a few individual hummingbirds instead of making the "typical" southward movement to Mexico will fly eastward where they will overwinter somewhere in the Southeastern U.S. More often than not, they are comprised of western species such as Rufous Hummingbirds and Black-chinned Hummingbirds in addition to several other species. Winter hummingbird research has been happening for decades, making us juniors to our mentors and colleagues respectively. Currently, we volunteer our time to help Fred Bassett of Hummingbird Research, Inc. to band as many winter hummingbirds as possible, to help record the current history of these tiny birds and how their migration patterns are shifting.

"Hummer Hosts" help us with this research by reporting hummingbirds that are observed at their feeders between November 15th through March 1st. If you have a hummingbird during this time, please let us know! Either us or another bander will come and band it. We tell folks to keep at least one feeder out during the winter. The feeder does not keep birds from migrating, rather, the feeder is attracting a bird to your house that is already in the area. Most winter hummingbirds appear in the middle of the winter season in December-February.

2022 Projects

In the coming year, we look forward to continuing our current projects with the addition of a Purple Martin study centralized in Alabama. The details of this project are not finalized yet however we hope to have it consist of a few parts: site fidelity, interannual return rate of offspring by use of colored numeric bands and potentially migration tracking using backpack geolocators.

Other Outreach To Date

Pascagoula River Audubon Center: We have established a new and fantastic working relation with PRAC doing outreach/banding demonstrations and look forward to many more events working with their staff.

Eastern Shore Art Center: Labeling event talking about the role of hummingbirds in plant pollination during their “Art of the Pollinator” event.

Cypress Grove Academy: Bird talk and banding explanation for school kids.

Zoom Class/ Facebook Live: Talks on the Basics of Migration

Emma and I strive to make any and all information free and available to everyone. 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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