



Dedicated to bird conservation through research and education

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK & STATION PROTOCOL

In partnership with



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WOODLANDS CONSERVANCY

Woodlands Conservancy was organized as a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) land trust in 2001 with the vision to be the regional conservancy model for the conservation of hardwood forests, and a leader in the advocacy and preservation of Louisiana's coastal forest ecosystems. Woodlands Conservancy has been conducting systematic, data-based ecosystem restoration work to remove non-native, invasive vegetation and reforest with native trees and understory plants to enhance the habitat for wildlife and migratory birds since 2007.

Hundreds of millions of birds cross the Gulf of Mexico each year and travel along the Mississippi Flyway with 2.5 million stopping daily in Louisiana to feed and rest. The bottomland hardwood forests managed by Woodlands Conservancy provide habitat for 18 species of Conservation Concern per Louisiana's comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy, the Wildlife Action Plan, and 9 species of Continental Importance according to Partners in Flight.

WOODLANDS CONSERVANCY BIRD OBSERVATORY

Bird banding began at Woodlands Conservancy in December 2013 with start-up funding provided by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP). We work as partners with the Louisiana Bird Observatory and utilize their data collection protocol at both Woodlands Trail in Belle Chasse and Delacroix Preserve in New Orleans on a monthly basis (once at each tract), usually on weekends. There are a total of 24 net lanes, and we typically operate 10-12 nets on any given day.

Woodlands Trail (WLTR)
449 F. Edward Hebert Blvd.
Belle Chasse, Louisiana 70037

Delacroix Preserve (NOLA)
700 Delacroix Road
New Orleans, LA 70131

Federally permitted, trained Master Banders or their sub-permittees utilize mist nets to capture resident and migratory birds at both Woodlands Trail and Delacroix Preserve. Each bird is outfitted with a numbered leg band and a variety of measurements are taken before the bird is released. Each band has a unique number on it so that if the bird is recaptured or found later, scientists will know when and where it was banded. The data is uploaded to the Louisiana Bird Observatory and to the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) and provides valuable information on a national, regional and site specific scale. Individual identification of birds makes it possible to study bird migration, and their behavior, social structure, life-span, survival rate, reproductive success and population growth. Locally, the Woodlands Conservancy Bird Observatory is obtaining data to assess bird characteristics and use of healthy forested wetland areas, restored forested areas and areas containing non-native vegetation in order to guide management decisions in this vital dwindling habitat.

Education

In addition to providing a source of important data on resident and migratory bird populations, banding stations also serve as outdoor classrooms to enhance the public's appreciation of our feathered friends. The stations provide valuable opportunities for volunteers and students to gain experience in scientific field techniques. Teachers and group leaders can arrange a visit for groups of students and individual visitors are welcome.

Volunteering at Woodlands Bird Observatory

Bird banding stations sometimes depend on volunteer helpers, referred to as citizen scientists; the hard work and dedication of volunteers often make it possible to operate bird banding stations smoothly and effectively. Volunteering at bird banding stations can provide you with the opportunity to learn more about Louisiana native habitats, bird populations and research skills that may help you decide on a career path, provide experience for your resume and give you a sense of contributing to the body of research that affects local and regional conservation decisions. Volunteer activities include a variety of tasks that are assigned depending on each individual volunteer's skills and experience.

The protocol outlined in the following pages is designed to provide you with an overview of volunteer opportunities and expectations for what you will experience as a volunteer and to set guidelines to ensure: 1) Human Safety, 2) Bird Safety and 3) Quality data.

Intentionally catching or harassing birds for any reason is prohibited by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, and as such, banders require a federal permit issued through the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory, regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. At each banding session, a licensed Master Bander or one of their licensed subpermittees must be present to oversee the banding process; this leader is called the Primary Bander. This person serves as the station manager and is responsible for verifying the skills of individual volunteers and assigning tasks. It is very important for volunteers to not participate in tasks not assigned by the Primary Bander. For example, extracting birds from mist nets and handling birds should only be done by those with sufficient experience and explicitly allowed by the Primary Bander. In other cases, the Primary Bander can oversee the training of those with less experience with these tasks to teach them and help them through the appropriate techniques.

Woodlands Conservancy Banding Day Protocol

Start of day procedures:

1. Volunteer Assignments

- a. Assignments for those in attendance are made by the Primary Bander and recorded before site activities begin. (See Banding Station Assignments Form)
- b. New Volunteers who arrive after initial assignments must report to the Primary Bander to receive their assignment before beginning any activities.

2. Bring equipment to banding station location.

- a. One or two volunteers will set up banding table.
- b. Remaining volunteers will set up nets at specified locations.

3. Net set-up Protocols

- a. Pairs of volunteers will work together to set up nets.
- b. Nets should be opened immediately upon set up, unless otherwise specified by the Primary Bander.
- c. If net set up takes more than 30 min, nets should be checked for birds before returning to the banding station.
- d. If any net lanes are flooded (have standing water), they should not be used on that day.

4. Area Searches

- a. The assigned volunteer will begin conducting area searches immediately following net set-up. This should be completed prior to the first round of net checks.

Net Check and Extraction:

1. All nets will be checked every 30 minutes or more frequently, depending on weather and other circumstances.
2. **Verified Bird Extractor** volunteers will carry out all bird extractions from nets.
 - a. These individuals must have personally extracted 100+ birds and their experience/skills verified by the station manager.
 - b. Novice volunteers can observe and assist with extractions, but must not attempt extractions themselves unless with the banding station manager or assigned to a Verified Bird Extractor by the banding station manager.
3. Any bird that is too difficult to extract in <3 minutes should be passed to the Primary Bander. Any bird showing signs of stress (panting, fluffing up, closing eyes, or drooping head), must be released prior to being brought to the banding station if it is capable of flying (if it is already banded, quickly make note of the band number). If it is not capable of flying away, it must be placed in a cloth bag and immediately brought to the attention of the Primary Bander.

Bird banding and data collection:

1. Volunteers assigned to specific tasks should maintain these throughout the day, unless they leave the station or are re-assigned.
2. All banding must be conducted by trained volunteers (those who have had their training and skills verified) or by the Primary Bander.
3. Bagged birds should be checked on every 5-10 min, particularly on hot or cold days. Any showing signs of stress should be brought to the attention of the Primary Bander. Typically the most stress-prone birds are processed first (hummingbirds, kinglets, warblers, and so on), and all bird bags should have a note of the species and time when it was extracted to facilitate this process.

End of day breakdown:

1. Nets will be closed about 5 hours after opening.
2. All nets should be cleaned, closed and furled, prior to taking them down. Once all nets are closed, volunteers can begin bagging the nets.
3. Individual net bags are counted twice and verified by the Primary Bander before being stored for the next banding station operation.

Woodlands Conservancy Banding Station Positions

1. **Banders:** responsible for banding and collecting data on age, sex, plumage characteristics and morphometrics.
 - a. Banders will include the Primary Bander as well as approved volunteers.
 - b. Volunteers should check with the Primary Bander prior to doing any banding.
 - c. When time allows, banding training will be conducted for all interested volunteers.

2. **Data recorders:** recorders are active participants in the banding process and help to ensure that data fields are not skipped or overlooked. These volunteers will record data for the banders, ensuring that all types of data are collected including:
 - a. Band number
 - b. Morphometric data – wing chord and weight
 - c. Age & sex information – plumage characteristics
 - d. Feather samples
 - e. Photographs

3. **Photographers:** these volunteers will photograph all birds banded.
 - a. Ideally all photos will be taken with the Banding Station camera for data collection purposes.
 - b. A photograph of the datasheet for the appropriate bird should be taken after a given bird is photographed to ensure appropriate ID.
 - c. Photos are to be taken in front of the backdrop to increase the consistency of lighting and photo quality.
 - d. Photos to be taken include: spread wing shot, tail feathers, photographers grip, data sheet showing band number.

4. **Bird extractors:** Verified Bird Extractor volunteers will be responsible for checking nets and extracting captured birds.
 - a. Verified Bird Extractor volunteers or the Primary Bander must always accompany novice volunteers.
 - b. Only the station manager or approved 'Verified Bird Extractor Trainers' can teach extraction and supervise novice volunteers at the nets.



Photo Release Form

For consideration given and which is hereby acknowledged, the undersigned hereby grants to **Woodlands Conservancy**, permission to take or have taken, still and moving photographs and audio recordings of _____ and consents and authorizes Woodlands Conservancy the use and reproduction of the photographs, films, and pictures to circulate and publicize the same by all means including without limit, the generality of the foregoing newspapers, television media, internet and brochures.

With regard to the foregoing material, no inducements or promises have been made to us/me to secure our/my signature(s) to this release other than the intention of Woodlands Conservancy to use such photographs, films and pictures for the primary purpose of educating, promoting and aiding the efforts of Woodlands Conservancy.

Signature

Date

Witness

Date



**Acknowledgment of
Volunteer Handbook & Banding Station Protocol**

I have read and agree to abide by Woodlands Conservancy's Volunteer Handbook & Banding Station Protocol.

Signature

Date

Name (please print)

