



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

California Waterfowl President  
Bob McLandress



# Keep on Banding

**N**ow that we were granted a two-pintail limit for the 2009-10 season, it's time to sit back, relax, and celebrate, right? Definitely not. Celebrating is certainly warranted (and I suspect is being done), but relaxing is another story. Our cooperative banding efforts have to continue, and they need your support and funding to do so. Let's face it, the number and distribution of northern pintails gave us much needed encouragement this year, but the harvest model remains unchanged, and the harvest rate measurement used in the model is not derived from the best data available – band returns!

### Why we Should Band

Annual harvest rates for mallards are derived from band recoveries (adjusted for unreported bands); however, the harvest rate used for pintail in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) harvest strategy is presently determined from an inferior calculation without banding data. The USFWS does not believe that there are sufficient numbers of pintails being banded each year to use harvest rates allocated from band recoveries. Our preliminary banding data predicts a much times lower harvest rate than the rate currently used in the model. If harvest rate for mallards was calculated the same way as the pintail harvest rate, hunting mallards would be forbidden! The top staff person for USFWS has told us that he advocates using “the best data available.” For mallards, the best harvest rates are from banded birds, and this information allows us to document the potential impacts of hunting when liberal limits are the regulatory choice. As a result, we have been allotted liberal limits for many years, and even when production of young has been poor (e.g. 2006-08). Conclusion, to get the best data and have an opportunity for more liberal limits, we need to band more pintails!

Annual survival rates are also best determined from banded birds. Mathematical calculations used to determine annual survival rate estimates are based on the disappearance of banded birds over time. Precision of survival rate estimates improve as the number of successive years increases and a minimum of three years of consecutive banding is thought to be reasonable. Despite shortcomings, results indicate that survival rates have not shown any upward or downward change in 50 years. Population ups and downs are primarily driven by the production of young. So, to


convince USFWS that harvest does not drive pintail populations at present, we need to band more pintails.

So what happened this year? We got lucky! This spring, temperatures in the central and eastern Arctic were well below normal. The melting of ice and snow and invertebrate blooms were three to four weeks later than usual. I believe that many birds that would have flown into the far north to breed (beyond the traditional survey area) were attracted to abundant water in the northern prairie states or were at least delayed long enough to get counted last spring. This should give us confidence that there are indeed birds that are not getting counted during warm years, but under the current harvest regulations model - if next spring has more normal temperatures - we may experience a return to lower counts and lower limits– unless we can convince the USFWS to consider evidence with more data from banded birds.

### Where we Should Band

There is less evidence from band recoveries that pintail segregate into distinct breeding populations as suggested from banding of mallards. There is some distinction by flyway, but the USFWS has resisted any suggestions that pintail should be managed as “flyway” populations. It would take significant and wide-scale banding efforts to convince them otherwise. Therefore, we need to band as many pintail from as many regions of North America as possible. California Waterfowl cannot do it all, so we are encouraging our partners throughout the Pacific Flyway (we are currently fielding a crew in California and supporting a Canadian Wildlife Service banding crew in Saskatchewan). Our partners at the California Department of Fish and Game are fielding a banding crew as well, and a new entry, Nevada Department of Wildlife is banding pintail too!

### What we Should Band

Not just pintail will be banded. Every duck we capture of whatever species will receive a band (we will be faced with the same deficiency of data on wigeon, gadwall, etc. When hunting for these species is eventually challenged (and it will be). Data for hens is most critical, but drakes can provide meaningful information as well. California Waterfowl's philosophy – “when a duck is in hand, it gets a band.” 

# Banding Together

This past summer California Waterfowl employees and volunteers were out in wetlands across California slipping that valued piece of silver onto the legs of hundreds of ducks. They were up early and out late, slogging through marshes and getting splashed, scratched, and splattered with poop, and they did it all to build our knowledge of California's duck populations. If you haven't gotten to experience duck banding yet, let the following pages transport you into a summer with California's waterfowl.

Photos by Holly Heyser,  
Carina Port and  
Sarah Swenty





