

Letter from the Editor

My most rewarding experience with a bird had nothing to do with a rarity, or a state first or even a lifer in Costa Rica. Rather, it had to do with a common migrant, the Magnolia Warbler in Lake Forest, Illinois last May.

I volunteered to help band birds and record data at the Shaw Woods Avian Monitoring Project, led by Caleb Gordon, a professor at Lake Forest College (see the article by Gordon et al. on page 122). I had expected to feel frightened that I would somehow harm a bird while working to pry its legs from the finely meshed net. And I expected the tactile experience of softness while holding the bird to overcome me with indescribable emotions.

But I didn't expect to think about this breathing, 4.25 inch-long, 10-ounce yellow bird with handsome black breast streaks as a creature with powers humans could never possess. Holding a bird just the right way so it will be secure and safe brings home the reality that there is so much birds can do that humans cannot. Humans cannot fly without machines. Humans do not have something hidden within their brains that tells them where, when and how to migrate.

But humans can do something to protect birds and that is the kind of power we should not take for granted. It is my hope that Caleb Gordon's bird banding project will be a worthwhile human effort to help save the birds — and that citizen scientist efforts will always be done with the best interests of the bird at heart.

— Sheryl De Vore

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About our cover

Michael L.P. Retter created the cover drawing of White-faced Ibis. He is a contributing artist and author for IOS. Although he calls Illinois home, he has recently been leading field trips for birding festivals in Texas, and illustrated the pamphlet for the 2002 Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival, along with David Sibley and Louise Zemaits. Michael's long-term goal is to become a tour leader and freelance artist/author. He accepts commissioned work.

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