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Letter from the editor

Never in its history has bird banding been more controversial. The age-old practice of fitting birds with tags to track their movements is currently juxtaposed between the old-time recreational bird banders and a new breed of scientifically driven banders. While we must not forget the years of dedicated banding work by such Illinois legends as the late and beloved Karl Bartel, we must now consider the fact that to help protect avian species, we need more science in banding.

For instance, Dr. Scott Robinson's banding work in the Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois is providing new insights on neotropical migrants. What he and his team of researchers are learning will illuminate why neotropical migrant species' numbers are declining and what needs to be done to solve the problem. Meanwhile, Leslie and Dennis DeCourcey are working at the Chicagoland Bird Observatory, Illinois' newest bird-banding station, to gain specific information on migratory patterns of passerines. Their work may provide more clues about Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism.

In this issue, we explore the changing world of bird banding in Illinois as well as the nation. We indeed owe a great deal of respect to the endeavors of recreational bird banders. But it is time for bird banding to move in a new direction. What is most important today is the need for banding with a more clearly defined scientific purpose - one which could insure protection of avian species that migrate through and breed in Illinois.

Sheryl De Vore

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About Our Cover

Meadowlark art editor Denis Kania drew the cover illustration of a Least Bittern with young. Champaign County had its first documented breeding record for this species the summer of 1993. Kania has exhibited his drawings at the Midwest Birding Symposium and most recently has had his works published by the Illinois Nature Conservancy. He accepts commissioned work and can be contacted at: 1536 Preston Road, Naperville, IL 60563.