

EXPECTATIONS – NABC CERTIFIED PASSERINE BANDER EVALUATIONS

The purpose of the bander evaluation is to determine if a candidate can safely, efficiently, and accurately complete all tasks associated with operating a passerine banding station.¹

While evaluations are occasionally administered at the conclusion of an instructional banding course, the evaluation session itself is not a class. Rather, it is a sort of “final exam” that ideally leads to the NABC certifying that a bander has reached a high level of excellence. Candidates with limited experience (a single season, a small number of birds or species) may find they would benefit from more training before attempting bander-level certification, and they may find the assistant bander examination more suitable. Because much of the exam consists of identifying and aging birds, candidates are strongly encouraged to take the examination in a location that offers a familiar suite of species. Ideally, all candidates – both successful and not – will improve as a result of the evaluation.

The bander level of certification indicates that the candidate has achieved a high level of knowledge and skill in capturing, identifying, banding, ageing, sexing, and measuring birds; knows how to collect and keep appropriate records; and can supervise others in conducting the same tasks.

Passerine bander candidates will be expected to demonstrate both personal knowledge and practical competence in the following areas:

1. Ethics – including the Banders’ Code of Ethics and the NABC Photography Guidelines
2. Purpose, goals and scientific value of banding
3. Design of research projects
4. Banding protocols – development and importance
5. Knowledge of permit authorizations, restrictions and responsibilities (both federal and local)
6. Communications with BBL/BBO or other relevant banding authorities
7. Data submission using Bandit or other relevant submission program
8. Data management, quality and collection
9. Metadata and daily logs – types and importance
10. Bird handling – proper grips, transferring hands, releasing, spreading wings and tail, opening a bird’s bill
11. Species identification
12. External anatomy of birds including feather tracts and facial markings
13. Bird bands – kinds, sizes, use
14. Applying, adjusting, and removing bands

¹ "Safely" refers to the safety and health of both the birds captured and handled and the people involved. "Efficiently" refers to the need to minimize stress of captured birds by processing and releasing them quickly. "Accurately" refers to the necessity to correctly identify, and where possible sex and age each bird, take the correct measurements in a repeatable manner, record the data correctly, and complete and submit schedules in a timely fashion.

15. Standard measurements – wing chord, wing formula, tail, bill, tarsus, plumage features (caps, etc.)
16. Plumage and molt – terminology, use in aging, Humphrey-Parkes-Howell (HPH) and/or Wolfe-Ryder-Pyle (WRP)²
17. Aging techniques (including skulling)
18. Sexing techniques
19. Using Pyle (1997)
20. Auxiliary markers – types and uses
21. Capture techniques – knowledge of and proper use of mistnets, traps, etc. (including setup)
22. Extracting birds from mistnets
23. Appropriate holding containers or carrying devices
24. Behavior of birds (as related to banding)
25. Avian first aid – common injuries, their prevention and treatment
26. Avian parasites and disease
27. Handling stressed, injured, sick or dead birds
28. Banding during the breeding season – special considerations
29. Banding during unusual conditions – weather, fallout
30. When and how to document rarities or unusual birds
31. Human first aid – common injuries, their prevention and treatment
32. Public relations – banding demonstrations, communicating effectively to the public about banding and its scientific value, proper use of social media and other outreach platforms
33. Bander equipment – types and sources
34. Bander resources – essential library, websites, organizations
35. History and future of banding
36. Supervising assistants

The candidate should be very familiar with the *North American Banders' Study Guide*, the *North American Bander's Manual for Banding Passerines and Near-Passerines*, the CWS/USGS Bird Banding Manual < http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2014/ec/CW66-113-1-1990-eng.pdf>, and the first 40 pages of Pyle's *Identification Guide to North American Birds Part I* (1997); should practice the Banders' Code of Ethics; and should have intensive "hands-on" training and experience in performing the above tasks.

A testing fee of \$35 USD and a banding CV must be submitted prior to the exam. Two or more NABC certified Trainers will conduct the evaluation, which consists of the following assessments:

Written Exam: The candidate must score 80% on a closed book exam including a variety of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions covering all aspects of the banding process. Candidates scoring below 80% may be eligible for the assistant bander level, and will be allowed

² Bander-level candidates do not need to know both the Humphrey-Parkes-Howell (HPH) and the Wolfe-Ryder-Pyle (WRP) age classification systems; knowledge of one will suffice for bander-level certification as candidates will be given the opportunity to answer molt and aging questions using either HPH or WRP. However, all candidates are strongly encouraged to learn both systems.

to take the field practical at the discretion of the session organizers. Whenever possible, this should be taken prior to the evaluation session. A list of trainers who may be willing to proctor the exam can be found on the NABC website: <http://www.nabanding.net/list-of-trainers/>.

Specimen / Pictorial Exam: Prior to the evaluation, the candidate will be sent a list of species commonly encountered at the evaluation site. The specimen exam tests the candidate's ability to identify, age, and sex species from that list. The exam uses specimens and/or photos. Books and other standard reference are available for use during the exam.

Field Practical: Through a series of at least four separate field tests, evaluators will assess the candidate's ability to operate a passerine banding station. All aspects of running a banding station are evaluated, including station management, bird processing, data recording, extraction, and mistnet use. During the field practical, the candidate will be asked questions regarding both observed issues and scenarios not encountered in the field. These questions do not imply the candidate has committed an error – the evaluators are simply trying to assess the breadth and depth of the candidate's knowledge. The field practical can be intimidating and stressful; candidates should try to quickly, efficiently, and accurately proceed as they would in their own environments.

While tools and reference materials are generally available at the evaluation site, candidates may wish to bring their own copies of Pyle, guidebooks, etc.

Certification is contingent upon the candidate (1) passing the written exam (score $\geq 80\%$), (2) correctly identifying all species typically encountered at the evaluation site, (3) handling all birds without causing avoidable harm or injury, (4) committing few aging and sexing errors, and (5) demonstrating the ability to safely, efficiently and accurately operate a passerine banding station.

Standards for passing are high, because the welfare of the birds and the quality of the data depends on the candidate's knowledge and ability. Evidence of a lack of awareness or skill that, in the opinion of the evaluators, endangers the safety or welfare of the birds, can override scores and result in failure. Once the examination is complete the candidate will have an opportunity to discuss the evaluation with the evaluators and will receive a report that summarizes his or her efforts. Feedback is appreciated. We continue to strive to make the evaluation process valid and fair.

Candidates who do not pass at the bander level may be eligible for certification at the level of bander-assistant. Bander assistants are qualified to assist a bander or trainer with extraction and/or processing. Trainers can provide details regarding specific passing criteria.

The United States Bird Banding Lab and the Canada Bird Banding Office do not require proof of certification when applying for permits, nor does certification guarantee receipt of permits. However, pursuing and obtaining certification is a sign that a bander cares about ethics, safety, and accuracy, and has achieved a level of competence in those areas.