



Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) 3:

Training Observers V2.1

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Revision History Log

Prev. Version #	Revision Date	Author	Changes Made	Reason for Change	New Version #
1.0	Oct. 2006	T. Gardali	Minor wordsmith	NPS internal revision comments	2.0
2.0	Dec 2018	D. Humple	Institutional name change from PBRO to Point Blue	Clarity	2.1

This Standard Operating Procedure is available in digital format from [San Francisco Bay Area Network website](#) and the [NPS Data Store](#).

This Standard Operating Procedure explains the training procedures that all supervisors should follow to teach (1) how to identify birds by sight and sound; (2) steps for conducting point count surveys, including distance estimations; (3) how to conduct banding and mist-netting; and (4) steps for data entry, proofing, and management.

Identifying birds by sight and sound

Any observers who do not already have extensive experience identifying local birds by sight and sound will be trained in identification and will study and practice identification prior to conducting any surveys on their own. Point count observers will always have some previous experience with local birds, and frequently will have previous experience point counting local birds. Even experienced observers will review identification and bird lists prior to the point count season. Point count observers who are new to point counting in the area will work with a locally-experienced point counter, practicing calls, songs, and visual identification of birds they encounter while birding and during mock point count surveys.

Learning birds by sight and sound is a multi-faceted process. It involves (1) regular independent birding and seeking out any birds the observer does not recognize by sight or sound; (2) accompanying experienced observers who can help them identify the birds they see, hear, or band; (3) studying bird sounds via CDs and multi-media DVDs; (4) studying birds in field guides; and (5) studying study skins in order to learn how to identify birds in the hand.

Point Count Surveys (VCP)

Point counters with prior experience using our point count protocols will carefully review the protocols before the point count season. Point counters without prior experience either point counting local birds or using Point Blue Conservation Science's point count protocols will accompany an experienced biologist in the field to conduct mock point count surveys until the trainer is confident that the trainee is (1) familiar with all aspects of the point count protocols; (2) is correctly identifying almost all the birds by sight and sound; and (3) is appropriately placing birds in distance bands. Our biologists use Range Finders when conducting point counts in order to increase accuracy of distance estimation, but we still require biologists to be able to estimate distances as they will not use the range finder for every single bird detected, especially those detected aurally. In addition, throughout the point count season, it is critical that both experienced and new point counters continually recalibrate their distance estimations using the range finder or by actually pacing out a distance. This is done while walking between points or while walking back to the car after having completed the transect.

Mist-netting

It is critical that new banders receive intensive training in handling and extracting techniques, safety issues, data collection and field protocols, and bird identification.

Novice banders are trained intensively by their supervisor for their first two weeks of banding. Their training continues by experienced banders for up to an additional four more weeks (length of time required depends on individual ability to quickly pick up skills and numbers of bird captured). They band exclusively as a third, or “extra”, bander until they have attained the skills and experience to band with only one other person, skills which includes (1) safe, quick and competent extraction of birds from mist-nets; (2) good handling skills; (3) accurate collection of data during processing; and (4) identification skills. Experienced banders who have never banded with Point Blue Conservation Science receive 1-4 days of intensive training on our specific protocols, depending on need, in order to learn our specific protocols, coding systems, and local species. For all banders, training continues throughout the season by regularly banding with their supervisor or a more experienced bander, and weekly check-in meetings to discuss banding topics and questions.

Data entry, proofing and management

Data entry, proofing and management are obviously integral components of data collection and must be done regularly and rigorously. Biologists are trained in the process by their supervisor and through hands-on learning with an experienced person. The supervisor conducts regular check-ins throughout the field season on the status of the data to ensure that these steps are taking place with the frequency and precision required. See also Data Management SOP for more details.