

One of Chan Robbins first jobs in the Federal government was as a biologist in the Bird Banding Laboratory in 1943. For some perspective, Frederick Lincoln was the BBL Chief and the concept of using mist nets to capture birds represented the latest technology. At the time, mist nets were constructed from silk, just imagine what a silk mist net would cost today. How times have changed and one remarkable aspect of Chan's legacy is how he changed with the times. Chan was a bird bander for most of his adult life, relinquishing his banding permit in 2015 when he was no longer physically able to band birds. His pioneering banding projects included initiating the long-term studies of breeding albatross populations on Midway Atoll and his studies of wintering Neotropical migratory birds in the Caribbean basin, Central America, and South America. He was among the first scientists to demonstrate the importance of wintering habitats for the conservation of these migratory species, resulting in the formation of Partners in Flight and other hemispheric programs emphasizing bird conservation. While he travelled the world for his scientific studies, Chan also documented changes to the migratory bird populations in his own backyard where he conducted a migration banding station for over 40 years.

Chan was an enthusiastic supporter of bird banding and bird banders throughout his life. He was an active participant in the bird banding associations, a regular contributor to their publications, and encouraged many budding bird banders to acquire the skills and knowledge to qualify for their banding permits. Many scientists and bird banders of today received their initial exposure to serious bird banding activities by accompanying Chan during his annual winter trips to band migratory birds in the Neotropics. Chan mentored and encouraged the development of multiple generations of bird banders and marveled at how the latest generation of bird banders has adapted new technologies to greatly expand our understanding of bird migration.

For bird banding, Chan was a teacher, a mentor, an innovator, and a cheerleader. His scientific contributions were innumerable, but perhaps his greatest contribution was not a journal article but rather his vision and understanding of the direction that bird banding needed to progress in order to remain an integral component of bird conservation and population management. Chan was always a gentleman and respectful of others, grateful to those who assisted him in his many projects and always willing to provide assistance to others. His cheerful demeanor and positive attitude will be missed and his leadership will not be easily replaced.

Bruce Peterjohn
BBL Chief
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