

Refuge bird expert shares birding knowledge and skills

by Candace Ward



Refuge bird expert Todd Eskelin will be sharing his knowledge on August 28th

Whether it's bird watching at your home feeder or traveling to exotic places in search of a rare "life list" bird, birding represents one of life's most fascinating pleasures. Have you ever realized that much of our knowledge about birds is a result of skilled bird capture and banding work? Biological Technician Todd Eskelin will share just how important such work is in a program, *The How and Why of Bird Banding*, at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge on Saturday, August 28, at 11:00 a.m. Todd will set up mist nets and live capture birds demonstrating banding techniques first hand.

Todd has traveled the length and breadth of Alaska researching seabirds, songbirds, and migratory waterfowl. Since 1993 he has worked on a variety of bird research projects in north central Alaska, the Gulf of Alaska, the Alaska Peninsula, Kodiak Island, and on the Kenai Peninsula. In addition, Todd has also flown long hours in a Cessna 206 conducting sea duck surveys for the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service on the North Slope, over the Bering Sea, and from Scammon Bay to False Pass.

Todd grew up on the Kenai Peninsula. He credits his fascination for birds from his college days at Lewis & Clark College in Oregon. He studied ornithology under Dr. Don McKenzie and found he was fascinated by what could be learned from the delicate birds he handled during bird banding sessions. He also enjoyed teaching other students bird banding techniques. Todd has given banding demonstrations to hundreds of students throughout Alaska. He has also trained numerous professional resource agency staff in banding techniques.

Todd has experienced some interesting bird encounters over the years. He banded a redpoll on the Alaska Peninsula that he later recaptured in Soldotna along Funny River Rd. When observing the Kenai River Flats for distant migrants, he spotted a semi-palmated sandpiper with a distinctively colored leg band and found it had originally been banded in Ecuador.

Besides his many biological duties, Todd enthusiastically helps visitors with precise and technical birding questions. Numerous times he has expertly identified an unknown bird that has everyone else stumped. Since Todd cannot always be available, he collaborated on the creation of Refuge specific guide, *Birding the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge*. This booklet helps birders to locate birds by habitat on refuge trails and adjacent to roadway areas. This guide is available for purchase at the Refuge Visitor Center. At Todd's Saturday program, *The How and Why of Bird Banding*, there will be a free drawing to win the guide along with other birding items. Join us for a fun and eye opening program.

Candace Ward has worked as a park ranger at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge for seventeen years in the refuge education and visitor service programs. She is an avid backyard birder and enjoys expanding her birding horizons. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna, call 262-7021 or see the website at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.