

## Bird Banding

*His ceremonies laid by,  
in his nakedness he appears  
but a man; and though his affections  
are higher mounted than ours,  
yet when they stoop,  
they stoop with the like wing.*

*- Shakespeare, Henry V*

We caught the birds  
in mist nets overnight.

Dimmed plumage—comfortable  
in a wooden box with many small rooms.

It doesn't sound like much  
of a ceremony, but I was chosen.

They gathered around  
in a group and saw legs,

fragile as dry twigs,  
encircled with special

pliers in careful hands,  
tiny numbers on metal.

Memory beats its wings  
against my skin, then rests.

My fingers embrace  
both sides of a downy head,

small heartbeat  
in my hand and

the exhilaration  
of releasing it

while all the others  
watch it fly away.

*For Bob Dewire*