North American Bird Bander

Volume 30 | Issue 1 Article 19

2005

Golden Gate Raptor Observatory

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Western Station Reports

Ventana Wilderness Society's Big Sur Ornithology Lab

Ventana Wilderness Society's Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL), located in Monterey County, California, had a wonderful fall and a delightful winter this year. In cooperation with the Xerces Society, we hosted our Third Annual Monarch Butterfly Workshop/Symposium at Andrew Molera State Park in October, 2004. This training workshop and research symposium was attended by over 30 researchers, scientists, and butterfly enthusiasts. In late February, we completed our fourth consecutive year of monitoring overwintering Monarch Butterflies in Monterey County. While we found that there were fewer butterflies than last year at some sites, other sites boasted record numbers! We also presented results of our Monarch Butterfly monitoring at a special Monarch Butterfly Symposium held in early March at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Branch of the Entomological Society of America.

Our year-round banding at the BSOL field station in Andrew Molera State Park yielded some wonderfully unexpected captures last fall, including birds such as Dusky Flycatcher, Magnolia Warbler, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Least Flycatcher. But our star catch was a Dusky Warbler, a vagrant old-world warbler from Asia! Irruptive Pine Siskins were abundant this winter, resulting in higher-than-usual captures of that species. We also continued our educational research program at Carmel Middle School, where students are provided the opportunity to watch the mist-netting and bird-banding process. And thanks to funding from the California Army National Guard, we are currently monitoring a pair of nesting Bald Eagles at Camp Roberts in the Salinas Valley. As the breeding season approaches, we are preparing for avian monitoring projects on the Nacimiento, Salinas, and Carmel rivers. We are also gearing up for spring migration, which has started early this year on the California coast. Another migrant will be moving in permanently this June: Karen Ritchie, a former BSOL intern who has just completed her Masters at Appalachian State University, will assume the title of BSOL Program Coordinator. Karen will be taking over from Jessica Griffiths, who has acted as Interim Program Coordinator since Sarah Stock's departure last October. We invite you to visit the Ventana Wilderness Society website (http://www.ventanaws.org) to read monthly lab updates, take the monthly bird quizzes, and view updated lists of all birds captured.

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We recaptured a female Cooper's Hawk in late August that we had banded here in the Headlands as an AHY bird on 15 Oct 1991, making this the oldest wild Cooper's Hawk for which I have been able to find any report. In 2004 she would have been more than 14 years old. Indications from the molt and feather wear patterns (suspension cline) suggest that she bred in 2004.

We set new station banding records for number of Cooper's Hawks (719); for number of Merlins (29); and for number of Prairie Falcons (6). Our overall total of 1802 raptors banded was also a new station high for us.

Another exciting event for our banders was the recapture of a Peregrine on 21 Sep 2004, which had been banded in the Yukon Territory on 12 Jul 2004 as a nestling. An additional five Peregrines were captured and banded at the GGRO in 2004.

Visit the GGRO webpage at: http://www.ggro.org

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Northern Saw-Whet Owl Migration at Beaverhill Lake Natural Area Fall 2004

A Northern Saw-whet Owl migration monitoring program was initiated at Beaverhill Lake Natural Area in central Alberta. In 2002 and 2003, 145 and 151 saw-whets were captured, respectively, using a standard migration monitoring protocol. A full-time program was run in 2004, with the objectives of:

1) determining how many saw-whets were migrating through the Beaverhill Lake region,
2) determining what age and sex classes of saw-whets were moving through the area,
3) determining the timing of the fall migration of saw-whets, and
4) providing educational opportunities for the public.

The main study site is located on the southeast end of Beaverhill Lake in central Alberta (53°22.8'N, 112°31.6'W elevation). In 2004, four saw-whet owl mist nets (60-mm mesh) were set up about 150 m away from the banding laboratory. Two nets were set adjacent to each other to form an L-shaped net array, and two single nets were set on their own. Nets were opened one hour after sunset, and the solicitation call of the saw-whet breeding advertising call (Cannings 1993) was broadcast with a CD player next to the L-shaped net array. Nets were set for four hours from 15 Aug to 10 Oct and for six hours from 11 Oct to 15 Nov. Nets were checked every half-hour, and any captured owls were removed from the nets and brought back to the lab for processing. Data collected included: age (Pyle 1997), sex (Brinker - www.projectowlnet.org/df.htm), weight, wing chord, tail length, and flight feather molt pattern.

In 2004, we caught an amazing 309 saw-whet owls! This is more than double the number of owls captures in any previous year. Most of the owls were hatch-year birds, and most were females.

Public response to the saw-whet migration research was high. In 2004, 104 members of the public attended public events over two evenings. An additional 42 people came out to the lab to observe the work on various other nights during the season.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for funding support from Shell Environmental Fund, Alberta Conservation Association, Beaverhill Bird Observatory, and the Canadian Wildlife Service. Many individuals helped with field data collection at Beaverhill Lake in 2004, including BBO staff Matt Hanneman, Jill Thompson, and Tessa Vesak. Many thanks to ALL 12 volunteers (120 person-nights), in particular Chuck Priestley, Bryn Spence, Martina Frey, and Juanita Mumby.

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Table 1. The number of Northern Saw-whet Owls captured at Beaverhill Lake, 2002-2004

Year	No. of Nights	No. of Net Hours	No. of Owls Captured	No. of Owls/Net Hour
2002	74	1097.00	145	0.132
2003	64	903.00	151	0.167
2004	75	1172.00	309	0.264
Total	**213**	-	**322**	-

See pictures on WBBA's web page