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Atlantic Flyway Review: Region IV (Piedmont-Coastal Plain) Fall 2005 Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park

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year, forcing us to move our nets farther inland from the beach for better vegetation camouflage for the nets.

The most exhilaration capture of 2005 was the 78 Tree Swallows that filled one net in two seconds. Fortunately, we were having an otherwise slow day and everyone's attention was quickly directed to the task of clearing this one net. Many thanks go to our volunteers for their quick response with careful handling techniques.

JIBS continues to be a highly favored field trip for the Colonial Coast Birding Festival. We enjoy educating people, particularly interested youth, about what we are doing and why we band birds. On one of the field trips, a young fellow, age 5, proceeded to astound everyone present. He could name every species presented, as well as sex the bird when possible. Equally astounding, the child was self taught and had not seen many of the birds personally until coming to the station. We can only hope that he will continue his interest in ornithology.

Many thanks and great appreciation go to our volunteers and everyone who supports the station. Without their help the station could not exist.

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This was the fourth year of mist netting at BBCFSP during fall migration, and the third complete season. Eleven to 16 nets were placed in a restored hardwood hammock that is part of a multi-million dollar project to return native vegetation to the park. The goals of this banding project are to determine whether the restored habitats are suitable for fall migrant landbirds, and also to describe migration in south Florida.

We started banding this year on 29 Aug, nearly two weeks later than in previous years. The site was damaged by the passage of Hurricane Katrina four days earlier as a Category 1 storm. Close to 50% of the canopy was lost in this storm, and two net locations had to be adjusted slightly.

Migration was steady through early September, with a significant movement of birds following Hurricane Rita's passage to the south of Florida around 20 Sep. Late September and the first half of

October continued at a brisk pace, with several days of over 100 birds captured per 100 net hours. The 25th of Sep was a peak day, with a site record of 218 b/100nh.

In past years migration has tended to slow down by late October, but this year Hurricane Wilma paid us a visit on 24 Oct, with Category 2 conditions at the study site. Our banding area was unrecognizable when we returned the next day. We had removed our nets but left the banding tent up. It was still there the next day, even though the winds probably gusted near 120 MPH and 50 to 60% of the trees had been blown down. The remaining trees were completely stripped of their leaves and there was no fruit to be seen anywhere. We were able to clear or relocate 8 to 11 lanes and begin banding immediately after Wilma, and we continued for three more weeks, finally shutting down on 14 Nov. The cold front that drew Wilma up into south Florida from where she was parked on the Yucatán Peninsula gave us our final serious push of migrants on 25 and 26 Oct.

We captured some fascinating birds this year. Fourteen species were banded for the first time: Common Ground-dove, Whip-poor-will, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher; Golden-winged (two), Blue-winged, Nashville, Townsend's, Blackburnian, Connecticut and Canada warblers; Seaside, Grasshopper and Lincoln's sparrows; and a Thick-billed Vireo, possibly the first banded on the mainland U.S. We captured 1374 birds of 59 species at an overall rate of 45 b/100nh. This is close to the 1445 birds captured in 2004 at a rate of 41 b/100nh. The overall diversity was much greater this year, but some of the star species from 2004 were lower in number during 2005. Hawks, thrushes, and tanagers were not well represented this year, and several early warbler species (Louisiana Waterthrush, Kentucky Warbler) were missed because of the late start of the field season. In spite of this, we banded a record 27 species of warblers and three species of sparrows. Sparrow diversity is low in extreme southern Florida, so catching any species is a surprise, especially since the nets are placed in tropical woodland.

The overall composition of the most banded species remained similar to 2004, with Ovenbird and Black-throated Blue Warbler one and two, respectively. American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush, and Red-eyed Vireo showed modest increases in 2005, while Black-and-white Warbler

and Northern Parula were captured at a little more than 50% of their 2004 levels. Two of the signature species from 2004 were also slightly less abundant in 2005: 69 Worm-eating Warblers (97 in 2004) and 14 Swainson's Warblers (22 in 2004). Gray Catbirds and Common Yellowthroats, on the other hand, showed significant increases, with 143 banded of the former (99 in 2004) and 95 of the latter (39 in 2004). Some of the changes in species abundance possibly are the result of hurricane damage to the site. The loss of canopy and increase in brush may attract and hold certain species to the area, while at the same time altering the vegetation structure around the nets affects the 'catchability' of other species. The 2006 field season may give us more insight into the nature of these changes and the implications for stopover on our site.

Adult migrants continue to make up a significant percentage of our captures, with only 60.5% of the overall total consisting of hatching-year (HY) birds. This percentage has remained fairly constant over the four years the site has been operating. The percent of HY birds within species has been less consistent, but generally still shows a greater proportion of adults to young than many other coastal banding stations report. The increase over the last two seasons in the captures of Red-eyed Vireos, Common Yellowthroats and Gray Catbirds has come with an increase in the percentage of adults. For example, Red-eyed Vireos in 2003 were 93.3% HY (30 banded), in 2004, 94.2% HY (52 banded) and in 2005, 76.4% HY of 72 banded. Species such as American Redstart, Black-and-white Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler and Northern Waterthrush continue to vary between 40 and 60% adults over the years of the study.

A record 20 birds returned from previous years, all as winter residents except for the six permanent resident Northern Cardinals recaptured. A Gray Catbird and an American Redstart were the first returns of those species we have recorded. Eight Ovenbirds and four Blue-gray Gnatcatchers rounded out the returns. One Ovenbird banded in 2002 has returned every winter since. We captured no foreign recoveries in 2005.

Special thanks go to Liz Golden, Robin Diaz, Orion Weldon (all banders in training), Amber Albores and David Cimprich for their assistance during the field season, and to Robert Yero the Park manager for

allowing us special access, when the Park was closed after the storms.

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My banding activities in 2005 covered the same period as in 2004, and the number of net hours was almost identical. Hence, the juxtaposition of the data from both years in the tables can tell my story: The number of birds captured in 2005 was only one half of what it was in 2004, making the netting efficiency a dismal six b/100nh. Interestingly, the total number of species was not much lower in 2005 than it had been in 2004, suggesting that a poor showing in 2005 was shared by many species. An overriding factor contributing to the scarcity of birds must have been a persistent drought that was associated with high temperatures. Whereas the month of August was much wetter than average and kept my boggy area flooded until early September, the hurricanes that devastated areas west and south of here provided only minimal precipitation in September and nothing more than an occasional drizzle in October. As a consequence, leaf litter and soil in my yard and the adjoining woods dried out, ground cover and many shrubs wilted, and trees like the water oak prematurely shed their leaves.

In spite of the small number of captured birds, a feature quite consistent with earlier years was that the top two positions in the list of the ten most commonly banded species were taken by White-eyed Vireo and Northern Cardinal, and that the Hooded Warbler retained a relatively high rank. The absence from the list of the Myrtle Warbler for the third year in a row is troubling. It cannot be attributed to a later arrival, because captures of Myrtle Warblers remained relatively rare events also in the weeks following the period covered by my AFR reports.

Two returns were recorded: an Ovenbird captured on 11 Sep had been banded on 9 Sep 2004, and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet netted on 14 Nov had been banded on 11 Nov 2004. Both were second-year birds in 2005.

I thank U.S Cellular for its permission to conduct banding activities in the woods surrounding their telecommunication tower.