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Atlantic Flyway Review: Spring 2007 Long Point Bird Observatory

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508. The 72 species banded was exactly our spring average and was higher than the number of species banded in the past four springs. Similarly, we operated for close to our average number of net hours (spring 2007: 3404; spring average 3295 ± 862). The higher-than-average number of species also resulted in slightly more b/100nh than normal (spring 2007: 91.4; spring average 77.6 ± 18.3). We even captured two new species for the station—a Fox Sparrow banded on 11 May and a Least Bittern captured on 23 May. Additionally, a Blue Grosbeak banded on 3 Jun was a new species for spring migration on Appledore

	% SY	% ASY	% AHY
620 Com. Yellowthroat	79.8	12.4	7.8
435 Magnolia Warbler	84.7	11.0	4.3
315 Am. Redstart	81.3	11.4	7.3
176 Red-eyed Vireo	11.9	6.3	81.8
135 White-thr Sparrow	97.8		2.2
128 Blackpoll Warbler	84.4	7.8	7.8
103 BI & Wh Warbler	84.0	14.6	1.0
93 BI-thr Blue Warb.	83.9	14.0	2.2
85 Canada Warbler	68.2	17.6	14.1
82 Northern Parula	69.5	25.6	4.9

Several species of birds were captured in higher than average numbers. Five species were captured in higher numbers than any previous year: Acadian Flycatcher (11, average 3, previous high 6), American Redstart (315, average 143, previous high 270), Black-throated Blue Warbler (93, average 41, previous high 79), Indigo Bunting (9, average 3, previous high 7), and Summer Tanager (5, previous high 3). The other species captured in numbers significantly higher than normal was the Traill's Flycatcher (80, spring average 36). Four additional species were within their normal spring ranges, but were on the high end of the range: Blackpoll Warbler (128, average 81), Chestnut-sided Warbler (42, average 27), Magnolia Warbler (435, average 296), and Yellow Warbler (45, average 27). The only species that was below the normal range was the Veery (4, average 18, previous low 11).

During the spring season, Kristen Covino, a master's student at the University of Maine, collected data on the effects of energetic condition on migratory decisions by migrant landbirds. Many

Appledore faculty, students, and researchers enjoyed watching the glowing light from the birds she released at night. The banding station hosted many guests who were visiting or taking classes at the Shoals Marine Lab. We were particularly pleased to host students from David Bonter's Field Ornithology class. The station could not continue without the continued logistic and financial assistance from the Shoals Marine Lab. We also are very grateful for the contributions of our dedicated volunteers and Canisius College.

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One might expect that after 47 years of migration monitoring at Long Point (LPBO) there might be a tendency for us to grow complacent. Fortunately, Mother Nature is rarely predictable. When you combine her capriciousness and the effect it has upon migrating birds, along with the constantly changing cast of volunteers and visitors, there is little room for boredom at LPBO.

	% SY	% ASY	% AHY
2173 Wh-thr Sparrow	63.1	10.9	26.0
857 Red-wg Blackbd	41.0	42.0	17.0
829 Br-hd Cowbird	34.3	1.2	64.5
744 Sl-col Junco	61.8	26.8	11.4
648 Chipping Spar.	41.3	7.6	51.1
637 Ruby-cr Kinglet	53.9	25.1	21.0
589 Magnolia Warb	64.0	18.2	17.8
528 Com Grackle	21.2		78.8
497 Gray Catbird	62.6	21.3	16.1
482 E Wh-cr Sparrow	51.5	11.8	36.7

Weather is the ultimate force on the overall shape of spring migration. The intricacies of continental weather systems in combination with the influence of the Great Lakes make the seasonal pilgrimage of northbound migrants very difficult to predict. With the consistently cool weather we experienced throughout the season, there was an additional degree of uncertainty as to the final result.

Spring migration began in earnest in early March with the arrival of several waterfowl species along with the usual Killdeer, American Woodcocks, and large flocks of blackbirds. Tundra Swans appeared in large numbers around mid-March and lingered by the thousands despite the frozen Inner Bay and marshes. Joining them were five species of geese which, along with a flock of Brant in May, completed the sextet of geese known to occur in Ontario.

Migration monitoring officially began at the Old Cut field station on 1 Apr and at the Tip and Breakwater on the 11th and 17th, respectively. Staff and volunteer assistants dusted off the equipment and placed the nets in preparation for the anticipated migratory rush. While warm south winds during the last week of March allowed many early season migrants to appear in large numbers, over-eager swallows and assistants had their dreams dashed by the miserably cool first half of April. Prevailing northeast winds produced few migrants, though 500 Common Loons along with 400 Horned and two Red-necked grebes flying past the Tip on the 16th were notable exceptions. Warbler numbers remained very low throughout April. Indeed, the first one did not appear at the Tip until the 17th—remarkably, it was a stunning male Prothonotary, the earliest one ever seen at Long Point. Perhaps even more astounding was a young Whooping Crane that flew past observers standing on the dyke at Old Cut on the evening of the 13th. While this individual was undoubtedly part of the eastern North American re-introduction flock, it was, nevertheless, the first Whooping Crane that anyone had laid eyes on at Long Point since 1898!

Winds briefly switched to the south in the third week of April allowing thousands of backlogged migrants to fall on Long Point. A total of 839 birds were banded on the 22nd, followed by 625 on the 23rd. Numbers on the 22nd were comprised mainly of early season migrants, such as Brown Creepers, kinglets, Hermit Thrushes, and White-throated Sparrows. By the 23rd, the mix was more typical of mid-April with new arrivals including House Wrens and Blue-headed Vireos. A return to northeast winds quickly subdued this initial rush until the 28th when the majority of White-throated and White-crowned sparrows finally arrived en masse. On the 29th, a Black Vulture was flushed with a flock of

Turkey Vultures from the beach at the Tip. Almost five hours later, the flock traveled 30 km to be seen over Old Cut by alerted observers. All of the vultures, including the Black, roosted in the nearby provincial park. Early the next morning as the sun rose in the sky so too did the flock and, after a brief sally back and forth over Old Cut, proceeded west off Long Point, not to be seen again.

The pace increased once again in early May. Larger Neotropical migrants, such as Baltimore Orioles and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks arrived on moderate winds to be followed shortly thereafter by the smaller warblers and vireos. May 9th was a banner day with 985 birds of 70 species banded. Breakwater was the busiest of the three stations, though the others certainly were not lacking for numbers or diversity. While Gray Catbirds were the most numerous, over 400 warblers of 25 species were also banded. Rarities that day included three Kentucky Warblers, one Worm-eating, one Cerulean, and one Yellow-throated warbler.

Diversity peaked during the third week of May with a feathered cocktail of warblers, vireos, thrushes, and flycatchers. With the persistent north winds, early migrants, such as Hermit Thrushes, kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and White-throated Sparrows were all still part of the mix. The 16th was another great day with 112 species recorded in the Old Cut census area alone.

This year, May might best be remembered as the month of the sparrow. Beyond the usual masses of expected species, notable sightings included numerous Grasshoppers as well as individual Clay-colored, Nelson's Sharp-tailed, and LeConte's sparrows. The ultimate surprise came on the 30th when a peculiar sparrow baffled observers until it was finally caught in a net and determined to be a Cassin's. This is the second time that one of this southwest United States specialty has found its way to Long Point. The first one was banded at the Tip almost 20 years ago on 15 Aug 1987.

Below-average temperatures held into late May, controlling the pace of migration and, at times, holding it up for brief periods. While the temperatures were cool, wet, and windy days were few and far between, allowing the nets at exposed locations like the Tip and Breakwater to operate at peak

efficiency. Combined with a good number of tardy migrants, banding totals remained high well into early June. Because of this consistency, a grand total of 15,548 birds of 140 species were banded this spring. This is the highest spring banding total since monitoring began in 1960.

Does this mean an overall increase in the number of migrants through Long Point in 2007? It is hard to say since our trends are calculated on daily estimated totals of birds, which include our daily census counts as well as the banding totals each day. However, it does reflect favorably on the dedication of everyone who contributed to this spring's migration monitoring effort. Maintaining our research throughout our 47th spring would not have been possible without our international corps of volunteers, the Friends of LPBO, our project partners, and our members and supporters.

A detailed weekly account of the 2007 spring season at Long Point is available at www.bsc-eoc.org/longpoint/index.jsp?targetpg=lpbosight

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We were able to operate on many fewer days than normal, yet achieved more net hours and a record spring in both bandings and returns. This was largely thanks to the hordes of American Goldfinches that passed through in late April. Although numbers within other species were lower, we had nice diversity, albeit in ones and twos.

We banded a record 1,150 individuals of 63 species in 25 days of operation. We also had 142 repeats, a record 152 returns, and seven hummingbirds not banded. Our measure of efficiency was 138.8 b/100nh for newly banded birds and 175.2 b/100nh overall. Our best day was 28 Apr with 164 banded (130 goldfinches!) and our most species diverse day was 17 May with 24 species banded.

Our age data as reported in Table 2 is somewhat skewed due to an ongoing study that has revealed covert feather shape to be a less-than-accurate age criterion in some species. We examined

returns of known-age birds and found less than 50% accuracy with this method of ageing. This was first noticed in Chipping Sparrows, but we felt our sample size was too small. After achieving hundreds of returns of the thousands of American Goldfinches banded at this station, we were definitively able to determine that covert shape was an inaccurate means of age determination in this species. As a result, we aged all spring females as AHY and aged males according to other criteria. It makes one wonder what other species do not conform, especially those we band in smaller numbers. On known-age returns of several other species, we have seen so called "SY coverts" on many elder birds. While we will continue this study, we have lost confidence in this criterion for all species.

	% SY	% ASY	% AHY
711 Amer Goldfinch	35	19	46
58 Ruby-cr Kinglet	67	33	
44 Chipping Spar	61	39	
42 Wh-thr Sparrow	38	62	
25 Red-wg Blackbd	72	28	
22 E Wh-cr Spar		100	
19 Song Sparrow	5		95
18 Cedar Waxwing	66	44	
18 Amer Robin	5	56	39
16 Com Yellowthr			100

No new species were added to the cumulative station list of 131 species plus five forms; point count cumulative remains at 218 species seen at Kestrel Haven. Abnormalities were unremarkable and most species were found in normal numbers. While we banded many nifty species, the real pleasure was in our returns.

We received a report of an American Tree Sparrow banded here in 2001 and recovered near Irondale, Ontario, some 180 miles northwest, on 13 Apr 2007; the bird was seven years old.

We enjoyed 152 returning individuals! Of that number, over a third, or 55, were at least four years of age or older. **The eldest return was a Hairy Woodpecker at over 13 years of age.** The elders were:

- Eastern Phoebe at 4 years old
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at 4 years old
- Hairy Woodpeckers at 13+ and 10 years old
- Downy Woodpeckers (2) at 5 years old
- Blue Jay at 4 years old