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Atlantic Flyway Review: Region II (North Central) Fall 2007 Alfred Station

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The 31st year of fall banding at Alfred Station began on 10 Jul and ended on 13 Nov 2007. From 1 to 1.5 nets were used on 51 days, for a total of 334.5 net hours. A total of 223 birds of 26 species were banded (66.7 b/100 net hours).

Hatching year percentages for all birds where age could be determined was 61.0%. The peak day occurred on 28 Oct, when 32 birds were banded; 59% of those banded were American Goldfinches. The day with the most species was 24 Oct with seven species banded. There were 24 repeats. There were 17 returns of birds banded in Alfred during previous seasons with four chickadees, all in their third year, showing the highest longevity. Hippoboscids were found on a Blue-winged Warbler. A Common Grackle had white feathers on the top of its head.

As in the previous seven years, no banding was done at this location from 12 Sep to 13 Oct, when I was banding at Braddock Bay.

Banding summaries were sent to regional compilers for the Allegany County Bird Club, Buffalo Ornithological Society, and the Atlantic Flyway Review. Several slide presentations on bird banding were given to local clubs, including the Alfred Lions Club and the Allegany County Bird Club. A banding demonstration was held at Foster Lake on 8 Sep.

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Early in the season weather was such that the majority of migrants overflowed our site during the evening hours. Weather also reduced our days and net hours with most birds arriving in large spurts, thus enhancing our measure of efficiency. Goldfinches returned in much greater numbers after a dismal fall showing last year, and we recaptured an Eastern Kingbird that set a new species longevity record. All in all, it was a pretty slow season for us and well within the capacity of this station that has never had more than two banders and no helpers. Of those banded, our species diversity was quite low and we had the lowest showing of young birds ever.

Of significance to banders, we have been studying ageing techniques in goldfinches and other species where we have a very large database and good returns over the years. Without question, the use of covert shape should be halted, as the accuracy level is very low and not near BBL standards. We are quite confident in stating this for goldfinches and have seen indications that the hypothesis holds in several other species. As Pyle's use of this characteristic is ubiquitous, the accuracy of the national database is in question. We believe banders should avoid this technique entirely and rely on several other more accurate ageing characteristics. In the final analysis, these observations emphasize the need to use multiple cues for ageing and the need for a better feedback/information-sharing system to update Pyle, which, after all, is, and always will be, a work in progress. Unless molt limits are discernible, we now age adult female goldfinches only as AHY.

We banded 3,151 new birds of 87 species in 85 days of operation. We also had 541 repeats, 124 returns, and 181 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. The hummingbirds were not banded. The total birds netted was 3,997, making our measure of efficiency 140 b/100nh for newly banded birds, and 178 b/100nh overall. Hatching-year birds were far below the norm, at 82%.