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Atlantic Flyway Review: Region II (North Central) Fall 2007 Kestrel Haven Avian Migration Observatory

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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%.

The station's birds-banded list remains at 131 species plus five forms (136), and we increased the sighted list to 219, with the appearance of a young Barred Owl that stopped in for a few weeks. It emitted many plaintive cries for food and never attempted the normal Barred Owl call.

We had six days of over 100 birds banded, the largest occurring on 28 Sep with 153 birds, 140 of which were goldfinches. Overall numbers were much lower than the 22-year norm. Expected species were missed entirely with the most surprising being Black-billed Cuckoo, Canada Warbler, Eastern Towhee, and Brown-headed Cowbird. In all, many species were several Standard Deviations below norm, with the most striking being Least Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Cedar Waxwing, Common Yellowthroat, Indigo Bunting, Song Sparrow, and House Finch. On the positive side, we banded more Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers than ever before; at 26, they exceeded Downy Woodpeckers that are normally our most banded woodpecker species. Also high were Scarlet Tanagers of which we enjoyed some remarkable color variations, as the birds appeared in various ages and stages of molt. Masts to our north were very weak this year and we are enjoying an influx of winter "invaders." We banded record high numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches and high numbers of Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls. We hoped for Pine Grosbeak, crossbills, and Evening Grosbeaks that are being observed regionally but none appeared here. We banded our third Northern Shrike; it was our first adult.

Returns were terrific! The star was a female Eastern Kingbird that has nested in our gutters—usually in the same spot—each year since she was banded as a hatching-year bird. She is now over 11 years of age and the new holder of the species longevity record. Additionally, the BBL reported recovery of a 3+-year-old Veery and a 6-year-old goldfinch; both were found dead within 20 mi of here.

The eldest return was a Hairy Woodpecker that checked in at over 13 years of age. Of the 124 returns, 49 of 19 species were in excess of four years of age.

They shred out as follows:

- Two Hairy Woodpeckers at 13+ and 10.
- One **Eastern Kingbird at 11 and a few months.**
- One Acadian Flycatcher at 7+.
- One Gray Catbird at 7+.
- Two Northern Cardinals at 4 and 7.
- Seventeen American Goldfinch at 4 (2), 4+ (2), 5 (10), 6, 6+ and 7.
- Six Yellow Warblers at 4 (3), 5+, and 7 (2).
- A Common Grackle at 6+.
- Two Downy Woodpeckers at 5.
- One Common Yellowthroat at 5.
- One Song Sparrow at 5.
- Six Black-capped Chickadees at 4 (5) and 4+.
- One Red-winged Blackbird at 4+.
- One European Starling at 4+.
- One Purple Finch at 4+.
- One Eastern Tufted Titmouse at 4.
- One American Robin at 4.
- One Rose-breasted Grosbeak at 4.

In sum, our returns this year represented 4% of our banded total; a very nice return percentage.

A Black-capped Chickadee banded as an HY-U in Sep 2007 was found dead in West Virginia in Jan 2008.

Overall health was excellent. Hippoboscids flies were few and we had only one case of avian pox. That was a very minor tarsal infestation on a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Birds surviving despite severe injury were a goldfinch, a junco, and a Chipping Sparrow, each of which were missing an eye, and an Acadian Flycatcher that presented with a single tarsus. Once again we had flickers exhibiting red shafts and have some question as to whether or not these are truly intergrades or more likely the result of local diet as in waxwing tails and White-throated Sparrow lores. The luckiest-bird-of-the-season award goes to the junco that, when netted, was saturated with deer saliva. Assuming it had been partially masticated, we examined it for injury, cleaned, banded and released it, as it was apparently unharmed and healthy.

Odonata studies were very limited this year and inadvertent net captures were limited to five *Libellula lydia* and two *Aeshna umbrosa*. Numbers reflect the overall slow and spotty dragonfly season this year.

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This station began banding on 3 Jul and continued through 4 Nov for a total of 59 days. I used 1 to 7 nets and banded 433 birds of 41 species, which was a drop of 13 species from last fall. Of special significance is the drop in warbler species at this station. Five species of warblers were missing this year: American Redstart, Black-and-white Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Canada Warbler, and Ovenbird.

Among 39 returns were two five-year-old Black-capped Chickadees. All others were under four years of age.

Although average in many respects, the banding season at this station was lackluster. There were few cold fronts, with the exception of 18 Aug. The 20th of August was my best capture day. Of the 59 days I banded, there were very few days when nets had to be closed due to inclement weather. However, typical cold fronts from the NW do not produce birds at this station. "Blocking fronts," which typically are low-pressure systems just to the south, ground migrating birds and produce good banding totals.

The fields surrounding my banding area have been planted to corn and produced a good yield per acre. These fields have been fallow for many years and were excellent nesting habitat for a number of field species. Some of these species are no longer present or their numbers are much reduced. I think working the fields had a negative impact on the banding efforts here.

The most interesting highlight, and there was only one, was the capture of an Acadian Flycatcher on 28 Aug. This was the third of its kind banded here.

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The 2007 MAPS season was very successful. Catbirds, the dominant species, were all over the place and the whine of the young became background noise. As in 2006, I participated in Cloacal Swabbing and Feather Pulling for MAPS and LaMMNA (done during AFR). I had hoped that the success of MAPS would continue into the fall. August banding is usually dominated by Red-eyed Vireos. This August, I banded only 22, and in September, another 25. In previous years, 80-90 birds were banded in August and the same number in September. The reason for this decline in vireos may lie in the fact that only 35-40% of the native *Viburnum* and *Cornus* shrubs as well as the alien Autumn Olive had ripe fruit in early August. By the beginning of September, this percentage was only 50%. The shrubs with ripe berries were in small patches scattered throughout my hillside. The uneven pattern of ripeness extended into October. With no large areas of ripe berries, species such as Cedar Waxwings stayed in the trees.

Many species were absent from my nets. While this is not a "warbler" station, I average 19.4 species. This year I had only 16 species. Field and Lincoln's sparrows were also absent. There were several positive aspects of the season's banding. Catbird numbers were good and it was the second best year for Black-capped Chickadees. Forty-four cardinals was a record high. An Eastern Wood-Pewee was the first since 1995, and I caught the first Acadian Flycatcher since 1999.

The number of birds banded, the net hours and birds per 100 net hours were all average. Andi Martin helped with much of the banding and Harriet Marsi was consulted on several occasions. A footnote: my wild crabapple crop was a bumper one. I shared this fruit with the deer, as the birds were not interested.