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Atlantic Flyway Review: Spring 2008 Long Point Bird Observatory

Stuart A. Mackenzie

Yousif S. Attia

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Appledore Island Migration Station 425-0703
Appledore Island, York County, ME
Sara Morris, Compiler; **David Bonter, Kristen Covino, Anthony Hill, David Holmes, Sara Morris, Becky Suomala, Mary Wright,** Banders
morriss@canisius.edu
Marygrace Barber, Amber Bratcher, Peggy Buckley, Liz Burton, Bill Clark, Margaret Hahn, Lindsay Herlihy, Tracy Holmes, Karen Mitchell, Charlotte Ott, Jeff Ott, Carlene Riccelli, Martha Stauffer, Brynne Stumpe, Amanda: Chief Assistants

Spring 2008 was an average season for our station. Our total number of birds banded was 2462, which was very close to our 16-year average of 2592. The 74 species we captured was exactly our average of 74.1 species. Even our 3404 net-hours were close to our average of 3492. The capture data for individual species indicated that there were no species that were significantly above or below their normal levels.

Species	#	% SY	% ASY
1. Common Yellowthroat	457	71.8	14.9
2. Magnolia Warbler	313	67.4	28.1
3. White-throated Sparrow	228	97.4	0.0
4. American Redstart	173	69.4	24.9
5. Red-eyed Vireo	99	15.2	6.1
6. Black-and-white Warbler	98	68.4	26.5
7. Northern Parula	96	67.7	29.2
8. Gray Catbird	90	71.1	15.6
9. Blackpoll Warbler	86	66.3	24.4
10. Northern Waterthrush	62	24.2	61.3

While the season was better than some of the recent slower years (e.g., 2005, 2006), it brought little excitement. Part of that was due to only a few "big days." Our highest day was 247 (26 May), which was the only day with over 200 captures. In fact, we had only nine days with over 100 captures, and we have come to expect a few more busy days in the spring. We did not lose any complete days to weather, although high winds and rain resulted in several days with fewer net hours than normal.

Although we did not capture any new species for the station, volunteers were pleased with a number of relatively unusual species: two Black-billed Cuckoos, one Hairy Woodpecker, one Red-bellied Woodpecker, four Cape May Warblers, one Pine Siskin, and one Purple Finch. We also saw Common Ravens on the island early in the season.

Kristen Covino continued her research on the effects of energetic condition on migratory decisions by migrant landbirds for her graduate work at the University of Maine. The banding station hosted visitors, adult education students, and students 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.

Long Point Bird Observatory 423-0800, 423-0801, 423-0802
Port Rowan, Norfolk County, On.
Yousif S. Attia and Stuart A. Mackenzie, Banders
lpbo@bsc-eoc.org
Hugh McArthur, Jody Allair: Chief Assistants

This was Long Point Bird Observatory's 48th spring migration monitoring program. The Old Cut field station opened on 1 Apr, with the Tip following on 29 Apr, and Breakwater on the 25th. Unpredictable weather conditions left many wondering when spring would arrive. Old Cut was overrun with the first wave of migrants on 7 Apr, including both kinglets; Brown Creepers; American Tree, Song, and Fox sparrows; Dark-eyed Juncos; and four blackbird species. A milestone was

reached that day when a Brown Creeper became the 750,000th bird banded at LPBO. We are the first station in North America to attain this remarkable goal.

Species	#	% SY	% ASY	% AHY
1. White-throated Sparrow	1038	52.5	20.1	27.4
2. Red-winged Blackbird	671	51.4	37.0	11.6
3. Blue Jay	615	52.2	42.1	5.7
4. Common Grackle	526	25.7	7.4	66.9
5. E. White-cr. Sparrow	470	47.0	23.8	29.1
6. Yellow Warbler	453	66.4	20.8	12.8
7. American Goldfinch	444	39.9	52.3	7.9
8. Magnolia Warbler	416	53.4	36.1	10.6
9. Gray Catbird	367	54.0	28.6	17.4
10. Ruby-crowned Kinglet	310	46.1	30.3	23.5

The Tip and Breakwater stations were busy as soon as traps and nets could be set up. Dark-eyed Juncos, White-throated Sparrows, Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and Brown-headed Cowbirds accounted for most of the birds at the Tip when the station opened. Blue-headed Vireos, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Hermit Thrushes were also moving, along with an early Grasshopper Sparrow on 18 Apr. Warm temperatures in mid-April brought a number of species at earlier-than-normal dates. Least Flycatcher, Swainson's Thrush, Indigo Bunting, Le Conte's Sparrow, and Black-throated Green and Hooded warblers were all recorded before May arrived. It was a promising start to spring, but then the weather changed. By the end of April, volunteers and staff began playing the waiting game. Unusually cold northerly winds through much of early May delayed the arrival of many migrants, although some small breaks in the weather-produced days with respectable numbers. Hardy species like Baltimore Orioles and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks arrived in average numbers, peaking in the second week of May.

When the winds finally cooperated, it 'rained' birds. Temperate migrants that had been waiting for better conditions and later Neotropical migrants overlapped during this period, resulting in high diversity. When conditions were favorable for migration, the radar units set up in the area this spring by Phil Taylor showed us that many northbound migrants used the tailwinds and warm weather to their advantage and flew right over Long Point. On 14 May (our biggest day), about 750 individuals of 60 species were banded between the three stations. The Tip station alone banded nearly 350 birds of 42 species and detected 120 species within the census area!

Managed water levels at the BSC headquarters' ponds attracted small numbers of all the expected shorebirds, plus a Willet of the 'Western' subspecies from 6-9 May. Both remote stations reported Whimbrel in healthy numbers, and there were reports of a Baird's Sandpiper at Breakwater around the May long weekend. Gull numbers peaked in mid-May, when over 2000 Ring-billed Gulls were counted at the Tip. The stations also had regular sightings of Glaucous, Iceland, Little, and Lesser Black-backed gulls. A Laughing Gull was observed at the Tip on 18 Jun. Examples of both Blue- and Golden-winged warbler hybrids were banded, with a Brewster's at the Tip on 5 May, and the rare Lawrence's Warbler at Breakwater on 2 May. Regional specialties including Yellow-throated Vireos, Cerulean and Hooded warblers, and Orchard Orioles were observed in higher numbers than in previous years. Red-bellied Woodpeckers continued to show trends of increased numbers. Southern overshoots included several records of White-eyed Vireos along with single Yellow-throated Warblers on 6 May and 1 Jun, a Worm-eating Warbler at Old Cut 24 May, and separate second-year male Summer Tanagers at the Tip and the Provincial Park. Oddly absent was Kentucky Warbler, a species that is observed regularly at Long Point in spring. Other highlights included a Black Vulture (26 Mar near Simcoe); an immature Little Blue Heron (28 Apr, Old Cut; 28 Apr-6 May, BSC headquarters pond); Long Point's third Snowy Plover (16 May, Long Point Provincial Park); and Long Point's fifth Blue Grosbeak (16 May, adult male banded at Breakwater). A Fish Crow was observed at the Tip on 19 May; if accepted by the Ontario Rare Birds Committee, it will be the first record for Long Point. Old Cut's male Yellow-headed

Blackbird returned in mid-April for the third straight year and was finally banded on 14 May.

This spring will be remembered for the unusual number of early migrants that lingered very late. When one finds both White-crowned and White-throated sparrows and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers on the same day, it is safe to assume we are dealing with an atypical season. Even American Tree Sparrows, a wintering species in southern Ontario, were found in the first week of May. This trend continued well into late May and early June. Finally, on 26 Jun, Long Point's fifth Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was found along Highway 24 near Backus Woods.

Volunteers banded 9598 birds of 124 species this past spring, bringing LPBO's grand total to 759,073 birds of 279 species. Overall numbers were down, but diversity was on par with previous years. Some unusual species, a few 'big days,' and the good company of fellow volunteers left a lasting impression. From the birds' perspective, although the timing was off this season, eventually they got to where they needed to go. From the birder's point of view – there's always next year.

Kestrel Haven **422-0764**
Avian Migration Observatory
Burdett, Schuyler County, NY
John and Sue Gregoire, Banders
khmo@att.net

This was a dismal spring. Weather was usually bad with winds picking up within an hour or two of opening on those days we were able to band safely. Just about all migrants were late and, at that, appeared in very few numbers. Wood Thrush did not arrive until closing day. American Goldfinches, our staple, were here in very small numbers. On a positive note, we welcomed our first assistant in the history of our operations in New York. Clara McCarthy, with an academic background in ecology and natural resources, has joined our field team as a sub-permittee. Her assistance and company has been very much welcomed and enjoyed.

Species	#	% SY	% ASY	% AHY
1. American Goldfinch	127	42	30	28*
2. Slate-colored Junco	52	42	50	8
3. Red-winged Blackbird	35	60	40	0
4. E.White-cr. Sparrow	34	0	0	100
5. White-throated Sparrow	27	22	41	7
6. American Robin	17	06	0	94
7. Blue Jay	16	88	12	0
8. Yellow Warbler	16	70	13	12
9. Chipping Sparrow	15	40	40	20
10. Common Yellowthroat	15	6	14	80

* See Text

We banded 503 individuals of 53 species in 26 days of operation. We also had 104 repeats, 114 returns, and 8 hummingbirds not banded. We had a foreign Tree Swallow captured on 27 Apr; although we reported this to BBL immediately, we have yet to hear of its origin by this date (12 Jun). The bird was an active nester here. Our measure of efficiency was 105 b/100nh for newly banded birds and 152 b/100nh overall. Our best day was 27 Apr with 57 banded and our most species diverse day was 6 May with 18 species banded.

Our age data are 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 Goldfinch banded at this station, we were able to definitively 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. 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 and advocate using multiple ageing cues when they are available.

Upon reflection and a close check of our banding and point count records over the last 23 years, we were