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Atlantic Flyway Review: Region II (North Central) Fall 2008 McGill Bird Observatory

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species banded (57) was the same as 2007, slightly above the long-term average. Mild weather permitted a tie with last year's high number of days of banding (44). However, the yield of 52b/100nh was below that of 2007 and well below previous highs for this location.

Weather conditions this fall were favorable for netting. Temperatures each month were within a degree or two of normal, and wind required furling nets only a couple of times all fall. Precipitation was about 2" below normal in August, and about an inch above normal in both September and October. My ability to keep nets open even though rain was forecast was improved by new availability of radar on high-speed internet (finally). A rare problem here occurred 21 Oct, when I caught too many birds: 53 were already in the nets when I checked them for the first time. I called for help in furling each net as soon as it was emptied, and rain began just as all were removed.

Overall, 66% of new birds were HY. Last year almost all juncos were adult (only 12% HY), but 51% were HY this year. In contrast, almost all catbirds were HY: 92% in 2007 and 82% this year. The top five species made up 48% of the total catch, and the top ten made up 66%, very close to 2007 numbers.

The fruits on the shrubs around the net lanes were plentiful, though not as abundant as in 2007. Silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera* sp.) and multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) had good fruits, though arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*) seemed to have fewer than usual. Robins and Cedar Waxwings were attracted to black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) fruits high overhead, but few were caught. For some unknown reason, the usual deer were absent, as evidenced by abundant apples that ultimately rotted on the ground.

Fruit-eating birds were well represented. Red-eyed Vireos were caught in the fourth highest numbers ever (52)—twice the average of all previous years. Catbird numbers were high (67), exceeded only a few times before, and White-throated Sparrow numbers

were good. However, all the thrushes were banded in numbers well below their highs of last year.

Ninety-nine warblers (16% of all bandings) of 15 species were caught, led by yellowthroats, Ovenbirds, black-throated blue, and magnolia. This represents a rebound in warblers from the lowest ever 8% of all bandings of last year, but well below the 25 to 30% of earlier years.

Two new species were banded for the first time here this fall: a female Cooper's Hawk and three Rusty Blackbirds, bringing the cumulative total to 108 species. A locally rare species, Connecticut Warbler, was banded on 8 Sep, the first since 1995 and only the fifth caught here.

Note: After watching a demonstration of saw-whet owl calling, catching, and banding, I decided to try to band a few here even though I had no reason to think that saw-whet owls migrated through my property. In 39 years of fall banding here I had not caught (or seen or heard) one, though I had had eight nets up all night on five dates in October in the late seventies. Even so, just before dark on 24 Oct 2008, I opened six of my usual 30 mm mesh nets (though 60 mm is standard for saw-whets) and started to broadcast the male advertising call as was used in the demonstration. To my great surprise, I caught seven owls in about three hours, and 29 more plus two repeats on succeeding evenings into early November. (No data on saw-whets is included in the totals for this report because the use of a broadcast call is not consistent with the protocols used in this banding project.) I am humbled by how little I really know about the migrating birds of my back yard.

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McGill Bird Observatory (MBO) was established in 2004 at the west end of the island of Montreal, on a 22-

ha property adjacent to the Morgan Arboretum (245 ha). It is the only observatory in Quebec to operate standardized spring and fall migration banding programs, and is a provisional member of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network. MBO is affiliated with McGill University, but operated by the Migration Research Foundation (MRF), a non-profit organization dedicated to the study of wildlife movements, especially as they relate to population monitoring and conservation.

In 2008, MBO operated its fourth full Fall Migration Monitoring Program, covering the usual 13-week period from 1 Aug through 30 Oct. A one-hour census trail was walked daily, and nets were open for five hours daily except when limited by inclement weather; only six days of banding were completely lost to rain, snow, or wind, and the total of 5612 net hours reflected the generally good weather throughout the season. Typically, all 16 nets were operated daily, except for one set of four were sometimes closed due to wind, and occasional closures of others due to unusually high capture rates. All nets are 12-m Spidertech passerine nets, set on standard 3-m poles. Photos are taken of each net lane annually to monitor (and allow mitigation of) habitat changes over time. This fall, our primary bander-in-charge was James Junda, with the remainder of the schedule shared among Marie-Anne Hudson, Barbara Frei, and Marcel Gahbauer.

The 2008 fall season shattered many records. Most notably, the total of 5083 birds banded was over 50% higher than the previous record of 3268, set in 2006. The rate of 91b/100nh was also a new high, though by a smaller margin, as we had 86 during the fairly rainy 2005 fall program. The 2008 numbers are attributable largely to a phenomenal movement of Yellow-rumped Warblers—1732 banded, representing 34% of our season total, and a stunning increase over the previous year's total of 68. However, we did have a respectable 522 in 2006, making the Yellow-rumped Warbler one of over a dozen species showing a distinct two-year cycle in numbers at MBO during fall migration.

Yellow-rumped Warblers were not the only unusually abundant species. Of the 78 species banded this fall, 30 were in record numbers, including another five that more than doubled previous high counts (Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Warbling Vireo, and Savannah Sparrow). Of note, 14 of the 23 warbler species banded were among those setting new records. Their dominance was reflected in our weekly totals see: <http://www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/log.html>, which for the first 11 weeks of the season were topped by warblers (Yellow Warbler to start, then American Redstart for two weeks, followed by four weeks each by Magnolia Warbler and Yellow-rumped Warbler).

Remarkably, few birds were at record low numbers this fall. These were Winter Wren (2 banded; previous low 4), Grey-cheeked Thrush (1; 3), Scarlet Tanager (1; 3), and American Tree Sparrow (13; 25). Four of the six species that we highlighted as unusually scarce in 2007 were among those with record highs in 2008, so we hope to see that pattern repeat in 2009.

Overall, our top 10 species for fall 2008 included five warblers and three sparrows, plus American Robin and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. The latter two species, along with Magnolia Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, and Song Sparrow have been in our fall top 10 every year. A cumulative list of all species banded at MBO is updated after every season at <http://www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/banded.html>. Our busiest days this fall were 29 Sep and 2 Oct, with 240 birds banded each day (and the total could have been much higher, had most nets not been closed temporarily to keep volume manageable). Yellow-rumped Warblers accounted for 73% and 64% of the birds banded, respectively, with Ruby-crowned Kinglet in second place both days. Whereas in 2007, we exceeded 100 birds banded in a day only three times; this year we passed that milestone on 14 occasions between 26 Sep and 15 Oct.

One male, four female, and 28 sex undetermined Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were released unbanded between 1 Aug and 10 Sep, but some individuals were likely caught more than once.

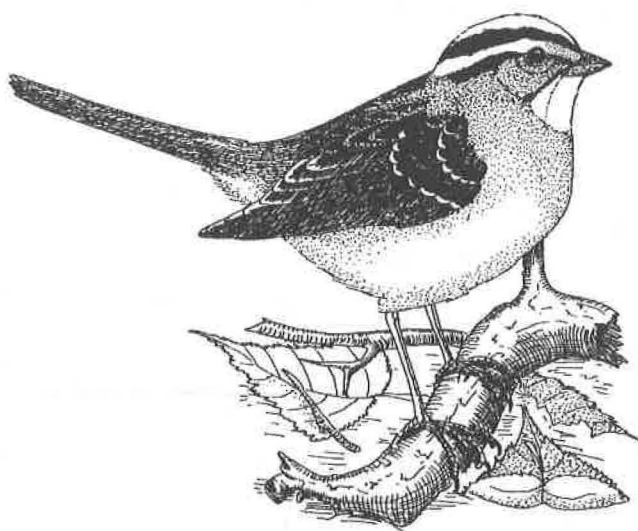
Despite the sharp increase in the number of birds banded this fall, the number of species remained very consistent, with this year's 78 comparing to 78, 75, and 77 in the first three years. However, we also set a new single-day record for diversity with 30 species banded on 7 Sep. The highest count of species observed in a day was 53, reached three times between 20 Aug and 10 Sep, while the total for the season was 139, near average.

Two species were banded for the first time during fall monitoring (Bicknell's Thrush and Pine Siskin), but both had been banded previously in other seasons, leaving our total species banded at 105. However, we did increase the list of species observed on site to 197, with the addition of Common Nighthawk, Ruffed Grouse, and our biggest rarity of the season, a very wayward Northern Gannet.

Repeats were also up in number this year to 904 (compared to 562 in 2007), though the number of species involved remained steady at 43. These included both residents and migrants, some of which stopped over for periods of more than a month. We also had 49 returns (not handled in at least three months) of 15 species, comparable to 46 returns of 12 species in fall 2007.

As usual, other research activities and education programs were integrated with the banding program. In early September, Marcel Gahbauer led a weekend workshop on "Knowing the common birds well, and being prepared for rarities," which involved an indoor photo-based seminar on Saturday, followed by banding the next morning. By chance, that happened to be the first day of the fall with over 100 captures, and the first time in MBO's history that 30 species were handled in a day, including 16 warblers and four vireos that offered great opportunities for comparison to

workshop participants. We also provided ongoing training to over 50 volunteers over the course of the season, including two who have now completed their apprenticeship and will join the banding team in 2009. Throughout the season, many more photos were taken to augment the ever-growing MBO Photo ID Library (<http://www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/idlibrary.html>), which is being updated for all species over the course of the winter.



White-throated sparrow
by George West