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Atlantic Flyway Review: Region II (North Central)- Fall 2009 McGill Bird Observatory

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More typical of this banding season were Red-eyed Vireo numbers: only four were caught, as compared with an average of 25 per year for the previous 39 years. I have noticed in the past that they are often caught in the nets closest to arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*) shrubs, which this year bore no fruits at all.

Fruit production by other shrubs around the net lanes varied greatly, with most in low average quantities, fewer than in 2008. Silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*) and multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) had fair amounts of fruits. Honeysuckle (*Lonicera* sp.) had perhaps one quarter as many fruits as last year and blueberries had small amounts.

Only 49 warblers (15% of all birds banded) of 13 species were caught in 2009, reflecting drops in numbers in most warbler species. The total of only seven Common Yellowthroats, the lowest ever here, compares with an average of 27 per year for all previous years. Other major declines were found in Black-capped Chickadees (14 banded vs 30 in previous years), Ruby-crowned Kinglets (8 vs 35), and White-throated Sparrows (12 vs 39).

Once again I used three or four of the same nets and in the same locations as above, with a caller to bring in migrating Northern Saw-whet Owls, catching 52 new ones on 15 evenings between 20 Oct and late Nov. Five foreign recoveries brought additional excitement (about 10% of all captures –how different from passerine banding!). Twenty-five visitors enjoyed the owls. Data from owl banding is not included in the above AFR numbers.

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McGill Bird Observatory (MBO) in Montreal is a full member of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network, and the only station in Quebec to conduct

standardized spring and fall migration banding programs. MBO is 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 2009, MBO operated its fifth 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 four days of banding were completely lost to rain, snow, or wind, and the record total of 5817 net hours reflected the generally good weather throughout the season. Typically, all 16 nets were operated daily, except for one set of four 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, bander-in-charge duties were shared by Simon Duval, Marcel Gahbauer, and Gay Gruner.

In comparison to 2008, our total of 3389 birds banded this fall was roughly one-third lower, but this was almost entirely due to the number of Yellow-rumped Warblers banded dropping from 1732 to 106. Correspondingly, our rate of capture of new birds (58b/100nh) was much lower than last year (91b/100nh), but comparable to 2007 (53b/100nh).

While the drop in Yellow-rumped Warblers this fall may appear alarming, it fits perfectly with a strong two-year cycle we have observed for this species throughout our five years of operation. Others that appear to peak in “even” years include Magnolia Warbler and Baltimore Oriole, while some species are distinctly showing the reverse pattern with peaks in “odd” years, including Black-capped Chickadee, Swamp Sparrow, and Fox Sparrow. We plan to explore these patterns further in the coming years.

Overall, the fall 2009 season was a good one at MBO, with record counts for 21 of the 75 species we banded. Among these were four with at least twice as many individuals as in any previous fall: Yellow-shafted Flicker (9), Red-breasted Nuthatch (4), Hermit Thrush (86), and Red-winged Blackbird (30). Of note, we had record counts for five of 11 sparrow species banded this fall (American Tree, Fox, Song, White-throated sparrows, and Slate-colored Junco), but just four of 22 warbler species (Yellow, Black-throated Blue, Mourning warblers, and American Redstart). In contrast, last fall we set new records for 14 of 23 warblers. The greater dominance of sparrows was reflected in our weekly totals (see <http://www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/log.html>), which were topped by sparrows for 10 of 13 weeks, whereas last year a warbler species was the most frequently banded bird for the first 11 weeks of the season.

Overall, our top 10 species for fall 2009 included three sparrows, three warblers, and two thrushes, plus Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Black-capped Chickadee. Half of these species have consistently been in our fall top 10 every year (Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, Magnolia Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, and Song Sparrow). A cumulative list of all species banded at MBO is updated after every season at <http://www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/banded.html>

Our busiest day this fall was 8 Oct, with 166 birds banded. Ruby-crowned Kinglets accounted for 46% of the birds banded, with Eastern White-crowned Sparrow surprisingly in second place with 10%. This season was much less extreme than 2008; we exceeded 100 birds banded in a day only six times, compared with 14 times last year. Though these busy days were mostly concentrated in early October, a surge towards the end of October added the last of the six busy days.

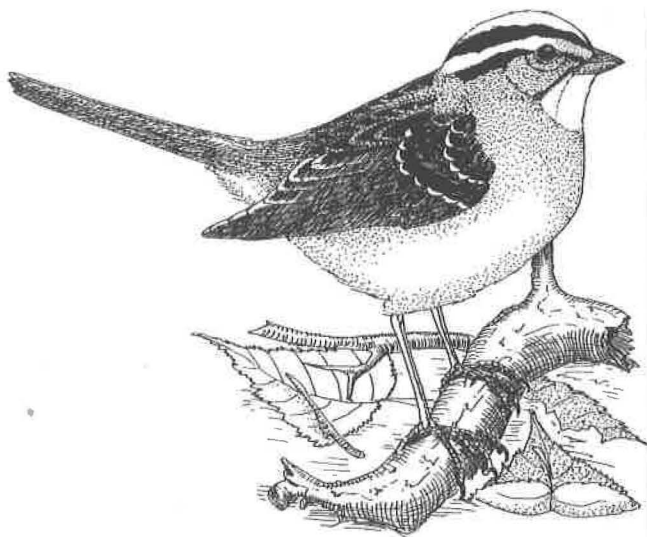
Fourteen males, 21 females, and 26 undetermined Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were released unbanded between 1 Aug and 12 Sep, but some individuals were likely caught more than once.

The number of species banded during the fall season was at the low end of our normal range of 75 to 78. The highest count of species observed in a day was 56, on 21 Aug, while the total for the season was an above-average 147.

No new species were banded this fall, but we increased our list of species observed on site to 199, with the addition of a vagrant Townsend's Solitaire that arrived on the last day of the season and lingered for at least a week after that.

Repeats were back to normal this year with 607, representing 39 species, slightly below average (43 species). These included both residents and migrants, some of which stopped over for periods of more than one month. We also had 42 returns (not handled in at least three months) of 18 species, comparable to 49 returns of 15 species in fall 2008.

As usual, other research activities and education programs were integrated with the banding program. We provided ongoing training to 68 volunteers over the course of the season, and took many more photos to augment the ever-growing MBO Photo ID Library <http://www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/idlibrary.html>, which will again be updated for all species over the course of the winter.



White-throated Sparrow
by George West