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Atlantic Flyway Review: Spring 2009 Ruthven Park

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Special appreciation is extended to Bill Kaiser and the Board of the Genesee Land Trust for use of their land.

Ruthven Park

425-0795

Cayuga, Haldimand County, ON

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Chief Assistants: Loretta Mousseau, Brian Pomfret

Migration monitoring started on 1 Apr and ran through to 31 May. In total we banded/monitored on 57 of a possible 61 days (93% coverage). Days missed were due to very bad weather. On some days, some (sometimes all) nets were not opened due to rain or high winds and ground traps were used alone. We had 26 people volunteer their time, ranging from one day to 34 days, to help out (see list below).

- 377 American Goldfinch**
- 99 White-throated Sparrow**
- 93 Slate-colored Junco**
- 81 Yellow Warbler**
- 80 Chipping Sparrow**
- 77 Gray Catbird**
- 66 Pine Siskin**
- 61 Red-winged Blackbird**
- 47 Rose-breasted Grosbeak**
- 37 Song Sparrow**

Sixteen 12-m nets were set out in 10 net lanes cut into the shrubby second growth surrounding the historic mansion. Nine of these net lanes have been in place since 1996. We set up a new net in an area that we had planted in red-osier dogwood five years ago specifically for this purpose. The vegetation around the nets is "managed" to try to maintain second growth conditions (both because migrant birds tend to really like it and to keep the data comparable over time). As well as nets, we caught birds using up to five walk-in ground traps and one Potter trap. These were especially effective when the juncos and sparrows were moving in April/early May.

We have run two sets of feeders for many years now and these attracted many moving birds during this

time, especially American Goldfinches, Dark-eyed Juncos, and sparrows.

April tended to be cold and damp. May was cool and damp. In fact, this was one of the coldest and wettest springs we have encountered for many years. There was a pronounced effect on insects – mosquitoes, which can be hellacious, were present only late and in small numbers, to the point that the part of the census that went through the forest was never intimidating. Despite periods of poor weather, we never had a "big day" (which we interpret as a day on which we band 100+ birds) but we did catch birds in good steady numbers throughout the banding period.

Our banding total of **1,677** was our second highest (behind 1,888 in 2007). We set a new record for April banding, 766, and we began to think about a new spring record but...the bottom fell out in May when our capture rate was only 30.9 b/100nh, the second lowest in our history. Our "biggest" day was 28 Apr, when we banded 71 birds. On the bright side, we had the most diversity—88 species banded.

We had record high spring numbers for nine species:

- Orange-crowned Warbler (2) – we usually only see these in the fall
- American Redstart (18)
- Yellow-breasted Chat (1) – only the 2nd one banded at Ruthven
- Prothonotary Warblers (2) – a first for us
- Indigo Bunting (26)
- Swamp Sparrow (23)
- Fox Sparrow (4)
- Purple Finch (19)
- Pine Siskin (66) – an irruption; the next highest previous spring total was 2.

- We had 249 "Returns" of 35 species. Especially noteworthy was a Yellow Warbler that was banded in 2000. The most commonly retrapped returning birds were Song Sparrows (36), American Goldfinches (28), and Yellow Warblers (28).

We especially thank the Ontario Power Generation Corporation for their generous donation of funds to refurbish the banding lab. We were able to triple the space available for banding and for visitors, which is especially important as we had a record 432 visitors this spring.

We thank the Lower Grand River Land Trust for their ongoing support of the banding program at Ruthven Park. This includes the use of the grounds, use of the banding lab building, and financial support. Ruthven Park staff, Marilyn Havelka (CAO), and Robin Richardson have been great to work with (especially when they bring tea and goodies). Christine Madliger, Species-at-Risk Coordinator, has also been a great help. Haldimand Bird Observatory, of which Ruthven is one of three field stations, receives support from the Baillie Birdathon Fund, administered through Bird Studies Canada. We thank Pat Chow-Fraser from McMaster University's Biodiversity Program for her involvement (and that of her students).

Thanks to all that made this such a successful (and fun!) season:

(28-35 days) Brian Pomfret; **(21-27 days)** Rick Ludkin; **(14-20 days)** Christine Madliger; **(7-13 days)** Loretta Mousseau; Nancy Furber, Jeff MacLeod (this does not include the enormous amount of time Jeff has put into developing and running the blog – check out: <http://ruthvenpark.ca/natureblog>; **(4-6 days)** Faye Socholotiuk and Peter Thoem; **(1-3 days)** Mitch Beck, David MacLeod, Alexis Richardson, Phil Alaimo, Pat Mousseau, John Shoveler, Jessica Condon, Tanya Kerr, Elaine Serena, Marg Ludkin, Margaret Troy, Michelle Kenny, Mike Alkema, Peter Scholtens, Charles Smith, Tim MacLeod, Ken Perry, and John Clark.

Rock Point Banding Station

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Kim Christoff, Rick Young.

On the whole, this was another cool spring with winter coat and heater on early mornings well into May. We lost a number of days at the beginning of April because of wet cold weather. We used the same equipment as in previous years, with nets in double configurations and remaining in the same position as previous year. Some net lanes had to have double decking to bring us above the water level from previous years. As was the case last year, we had 15 species represented by only one individual, plus another 19 species having more than one and fewer than five individuals. Only 16 species showed totals of greater than 20 individuals. It was interesting to note that White-throated Sparrows had a high date about five days earlier than previous years. The pattern of arrival was different from last year, with most birds coming in a typical bell curve with no earlier peeks. On the whole, it was a spring similar to the last four years.

<u>No.</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>% SY</u>	<u>% ASY</u>	<u>% AHY</u>
186	White-throated Sparrow	70	29	1
169	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	66	32	22
95	American Goldfinch	74	14	2
93	Red-winged Blackbird	68	32	0
79	Yellow Warbler	84	16*	0
86	Gray Catbird	58	41	1
68	Golden-crowned Kinglet	65	35	0
68	Common Grackle	41	22	37
65	Magnolia Warbler	55	44	1
56	Slate-colored Junco	39	60	1
50	Common Yellowthroat	62	34	4

* See Comment in narrative