

2010

Atlantic Flyway Review: Region IV Piedmont-Coastal Plain, Fall 2009 Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge Songbird Banding Station

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through 5 Oct, a Marsh Wren on 16 Sep, and a Bicknell's Thrush on 28 Sep.

Maren again diligently collected hundreds of tick samples for a researcher at Yale University for a Lyme disease study. In addition to the banders listed above, the following people volunteered many hours helping at the station: Harry Sears, Henry Davis, Doug Gill, Victoria Cadby, Hanson Robbins, Jeannine Fleegle, Bernie Lohr, Amanda Spears, Amanda Lindsey, Rachel Field, Bill Tracket, and Anne and Brennan O'Connor.

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At least two factors caused the major decrease in birds for 2009: loss of one major banding habitat, and a large number of days of rain preventing banding. In addition, the general lack of warbler species was pronounced, a fact that was also recorded during the nesting season when this station is also operated. This is the first autumn of operation that the numbers of Myrtle Warblers have dropped below 100 individuals.

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The 2009 fall season marked the start of a large research project on the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. The overall scope of this project is to sample and assess the shrub/scrub habitat which comprises a large part of the refuge. Included in the project were vegetation assessment, fruit counts, bird surveys (area searches), foraging observations (activity budgets), and mobbing. This all followed an already set NWR protocol. Included in this project was the opening and operation of a passerine banding station. The goal of the banding

station is to see if the surveying techniques (area searches) compare to what the banding station is catching, along with bird abundances and the overall condition of migrant birds.

Because this was the first year of operation, kinks had to be worked out. Because of other time-dependent projects, the banding station was opened on 15 Sep (a bit late for the early Neotropical migrants). Also, this was not meant to run as a constant-effort station. On average, this station ran five days a week, with days off mainly falling on bad weather days (which, as it turned out, were quite frequent over the Delmarva Peninsula this fall). It is not clear at this point how long this banding station will run, but it will at least run again in the 2010 fall season. It may last just two years, or maybe 20.

The banding station was in operation on 57 days between 15 Sep and 30 Nov. Because of the large number of expected captures, and a very limited number of staff (usually no more than two people running the station per day), this station was set up extremely tight and employed only 15 nets (five lines of three tandem 12-m nets). It took only two minutes to go from the banding station to the farthest net. By the end of the season, the station had banded 7,860 individuals with only 4,503 net hours (1.75 birds per net hour). In total, 83 species were banded, which is not bad considering a very large portion of the Neotropical migrants had passed through the area by the time the station opened on 15 Sep; 91.5% of the birds aged this season were in their Hatching Year, which is about normal for passerines passing down the Delmarva Peninsula.

Since this was the first year of operation, it is hard to determine what was expected and what was not. But a few species do stand out. The 122 Northern Parulas was extremely high and the 40 Northern Waterthrushes, 161 American Redstarts, and the 218 Common Yellowthroats were high considering the late start date. Gray Catbirds (625) were high, but expected, given the habitat. Thrush numbers were low, as expected, because forest was not part

of the banding station. A surprisingly low number of Black-throated Blue Warblers were banded: only 29; but their numbers were also extremely low at the nearby Kiptopeke Banding Station. The big species this season, and again, not unexpected because of the habitat, was Myrtle Warbler; the season total of 5,032 was huge. On most days after mid October, nets had to be closed early when Myrtles started to hit just to keep a level of banding sanity.

Highlights this season included banding two Clay-colored Sparrows, a rare migrant through the area. Also a flicker intergrade was banded, the fourth intergrade I have seen/banded on the Shore in the last nine years! The 18 Yellow Warblers were extremely high and the two Purple Finches and one Tree Swallow were not expected. And in the same category, a lone Seaside Sparrow was also banded. Being located so close to the Delmarva tip and in shrub/scrub habitat, raptors were extremely common as well. A total of 33 Sharp-shinned Hawks and six Cooper's Hawks were banded (and do not ask how many got out!). And in the highlight heartbreakers category, the near captures of a Green Heron (2 feet away before it popped out), a Merlin (same 2 feet), and a Black-billed Cuckoo (12 feet before it flapped out). How they still sting!

This project was a collaboration between the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge and the Center for Conservation Biology at William and Mary. I thank both of them for their support, supplies, and their continuing strive for habitat improvement. Their dedication for the betterment of wildlife on the Eastern Shore and their continuing research on species of greatest concern should be applauded by all.

Kiptopeke 371-0755
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In Fall 2009 the Kiptopeke Banding Station was in operation for its 47th consecutive year, dating back to 1963. The season started on 18 Aug and ran

through 22 Nov. The station operated for 93 of those days, capturing a total of 89 species, with a Yellow-throated Warbler on 9 Sep being perhaps the most unusual species caught. A total of 4,119 individuals were banded this season, just 57% of the season average of 7,167 since 1997 when the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory took over operation of the station. This decline was reflected clearly in the station's most common species, the Myrtle Warbler. The total of 1,749 was 51% of the 1997-2008 average of 3,429. The drop is the more notable since the station increased the number of nets from 22 to 24 this season, with the two nets ranking 1st and 4th in capture totals. These nets extended the station west to include a patch of developing scrub along the beach, and perhaps partially compensated for a loss of scrub habitat at the station in recent years. The incorporation of some additional nets lanes in the scrub on the station's eastern boundary is planned for fall 2010.

Finally, it is notable that Jethro Runco, Kiptopeke lead bander from 2001-2008, moved on to other opportunities this past fall, and it has been suggested that he took the birds with him. In any case, his birding and banding skill, unfailing good humor, and magnetic personality are missed by many. Ann Gilmore did an excellent job as the lead bander this season, ably supported during the busier month of October by veteran bander Peter Doherty. Sarah Bastarache served as the station's banding intern. Many able and dedicated volunteers once again lent their time and skills to the operation, and indeed, the station could not operate without them. As always, we extend our deepest thanks to them.

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This was the first year of banding on Kiawah Island, an 8,000-ac barrier island and residential/resort community approximately 20 mi southeast of