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Atlantic Flyway Review: Region IV Piedmont-Coastal Plain, Fall 2009 Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park

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number of Myrtle Warblers on Helicopter Island this fall. Another recapture that was quite stunning was an adult female Painted Bunting caught in exactly the same net on the same day as one year ago. A Gray Catbird banded as a second year (code 5) bird was caught this fall, now showing the molt pattern of an adult. An adult male Common Yellowthroat caught originally in the fall of 2008 as an adult was also recaptured approximately 200 yd from the original net. All these birds are showing significant site fidelity.

The season would not have been as eventful for me without the help of the following volunteers: Bill Horton, Judy and Joe Dziak, Denise Huckaby, Laura Ostapko, and Carla Vanderbilt, a bander trainee. And, of course, I am always grateful for the help and support of all the Tomoka State Park rangers and employees.

Bill Baggs

254-0800

Cape Florida State Park

Key Biscayne, Miami-Dade Co., FL

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Cape Florida is in its eighth year as a fall migration banding station. The park is on the southern tip of a mostly developed barrier island just off the coast of Miami. We have up to 19 nets set in a restored tropical hardwood hammock that is part of a multi-million dollar effort to return native vegetation to the park following Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

We started banding on 15 Aug and were open on all but five days until we closed on 6 Nov. We ran anywhere from 10 to 19 nets from first light until early afternoon on most days. The weather in 2009 was very placid. There were no tropical storm threats or near passes, and rainfall was infrequent. Winds were generally very light through the entire fall. The first decent front passed around 28 Sep, with three days of SW to W winds. This front stalled over extreme southern Florida and the rainy boundary created one of the most spectacular fallouts we have had at Cape Florida, 30 Sep and 1

Oct; 193 birds were banded on 30 Sep, with 112 more banded on 1 Oct, for a two-day total of 305 birds of 33 species. This included 19 species of warblers and quite a few tanagers, vireos, and flycatchers. South Florida was engulfed by a record-breaking heat wave (90+ degrees) immediately after this fallout, which did not break until the typical mid-October front passed on 18 Oct. This front was fairly powerful, and temperatures dropped into the high 50's for the first time since spring. As often happens with strong fronts, birds were able to move through quickly on the NW winds, so most of our migration was complete by 21 Oct. Our location is too far south to get many short-distance migrants, so we wrapped up the season on 6 Nov.

This year (2009) was a good migration season for the birds themselves, as they had an easy passage south with few weather obstacles. They seemed to not need to make use of our site as a stopover and, as a consequence, our total birds banded was down quite a bit from previous years, and the birds/100 net hours was the second lowest in eight years of banding here. We banded one new species for the site, Marsh Wren, and record numbers of several other species, all because of the unusual species composition in the late September fallout. Five Blackburnian Warblers were banded in 2009; we had captured two in the previous seven years. The ten Summer Tanagers banded this season surpassed the six banded previously in all years combined, and Tennessee Warblers were also well represented, with 17 banded in 2009. Previous season highs of these were six birds. Eastern Wood-Pewees and White-eyed Vireos also were captured in record numbers: six of the former in 2009 (previous high was two in 2005) and 45 vireos banded in 2009, compared to 40 in 2006. These vireos stayed onsite an average of 5.3 days and gained considerable weight in that time.

Red-eyed Vireos, in contrast, continued a steady decline in total numbers banded since a high of 169 in 2006, with only 31 captures in 2009; the lowest number since 2003. Thrushes were not as abundant in 2009, particularly Veery; however a Gray-

cheeked/Bicknell's Thrush intergrade was banded on 29 Oct. Cape May Warblers also had a slow year; whether this was a result of the lack of strong east winds or to population fluctuations cannot be determined. The four banded in 2009 is similar to the six banded in 2002-2006, but is significantly fewer than the 23 banded in 2007 and 24 from 2008. Some of the missing birds were Black-throated Blue Warblers: we banded only 365 in 2009, compared to 580 in 2008, 442 in 2007 and 558 in 2006. American Redstarts were also down, with 194 banded in 2009, compared to 264 (2008), 219 (2007) and 307 (2006). However, Ovenbird numbers remained remarkably consistent, with 253 captures in 2009 compared to 253 in 2008, 234 in 2007, and 364 in 2006. It is possible that the regrowth of the canopy since Hurricane Wilma in 2005 has affected the capture rates of certain species that are otherwise predictable migrants through south Florida. Raptor numbers were also down in 2009 at our site, both in captures and in sightings; this is probably weather-related.

We captured ten returning birds of seven species, including Black-and-white Warbler, Painted Bunting, and Gray Catbird. The oldest return was one Northern Cardinal banded in fall 2004. All returns were of either resident or wintering species. One Ovenbird banded on 1 Sep was recovered dead on 3 Sep in a Miami neighborhood approximately 16 km west of Cape Florida.

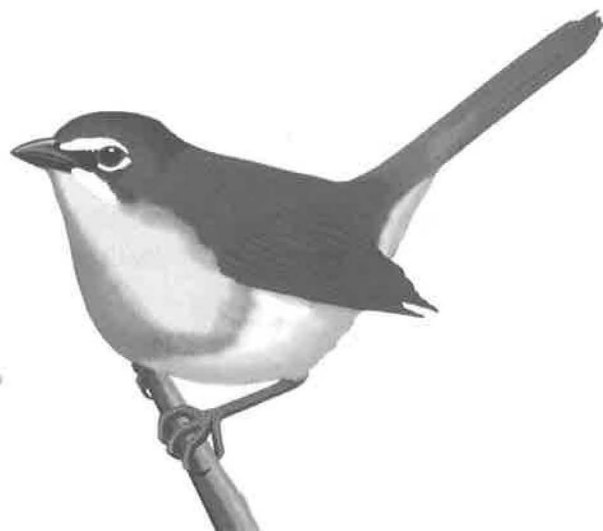
Erica Hernandez joined our crew as a regular bander this season. Many thanks to Angel and Mariel Abreu for providing the radar loops of the South Florida and Southeastern United States throughout the entire migration period. Special thanks go to Park Manager Robert Yero for continuing to support our project.

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Banding activity in the fall season of 2009 at my suburban, partially wooded location (not on a lake

shore!) covered a period that was not very different from that in 2008. Comparison of the data shows a slight improvement of netting success, but much of it has to be attributed to a doubling of the number of Northern Cardinals banded in 2009. Aside from documenting an apparently productive breeding season of cardinals, my banding records reveal that transient migrants were scarce again in 2009. In fact, fewer than 50% of the banded birds were presumed migrants. As speculated in my report for 2008, stopovers at my inland banding location may be affected by the conditions at the coast and over the Gulf of Mexico, which were quite favorable in 2009 for a quick continuation of migratory activity because of a calm hurricane season. I am afraid, however, that this does not tell the whole story.

Even though I banded just one Swainson's Thrush, thrushes as a group, with 26 individuals, made the largest contribution to the number of banded migrants. Only 12 warblers of eight species were captured, but among them was the second Yellow-breasted Chat ever banded at my station. Somewhat reassuring are the near normal rates of return of migrants that had been wintering near my home in a previous year. By the end of the period covered by this report I already had documented the third return of a Hermit Thrush and the fourth return of an Ovenbird.



Yellow -breasted Chat
by George West