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Atlantic Flyway Review: Region II (North Central)- Fall 2011 McGill Bird Observatory

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Ellenville Station**414-0742**

Ellenville, Ulster County, NY

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The regular fall banding of passerines at the Ellenville station was suspended due to health problems. However, four nets were set up with an audio lure in October and November to sample the very active fall Northern Saw-whet Owl migration. Seventy-three new owls and eight foreign recoveries were captured on 19 nights, with the lure in use and nets open an average of four hours per date. Among the recoveries, two owls banded in Minnesota were remarkable, as was the recapture of a migrating adult two years after banding in November 2009.

Two subpermittees established stations in very different habitats in nearby Sullivan County, NY. Renee Davis banded 40 new saw-whet owls and caught two foreign recoveries near Youngsville, NY; and Lance Verderame banded 32 new and caught four foreign recoveries near Livingston Manor, NY.

McGill Bird Observatory**454-0739**

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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 2011, MBO operated its seventh 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 beginning at sunrise, except when limited by inclement weather; only six days of banding were completely lost to rain, and the record total of 6,393 net hours reflected the generally good weather throughout the season. Typically, all 16 nets were operated daily this fall. Most nets are 12-m Spidertech passerine nets, on standard 3-m poles; but due to a supplier shortage, we had to experiment at four locations with nets from Avinet, Ecotone, Manomet, and Eastern Bird Banding Association. This fall, bander-in-charge duties were handled primarily by Simon Duval and Gay Gruner.

This year's total of 2,789 birds banded was a record low, as was the rate of 44 birds banded /100 net hours. Repeats (607) and returns (38) were both close to normal, while the number of species banded (77) and observed (146) were both well above average.

Last fall we banded an incredible 2,359 Yellow-rumped Warblers; as expected, they fell back substantially this year to 106 (very close to the "odd-year" average of 110). However, many other warblers fared well this year, accounting for over half of the 14 species that set new records this fall. The warblers were Ovenbird (47), Tennessee (208), American Redstart (150), Cape May (19), Bay-breasted (7), Yellow (75), Chestnut-sided (36), and Blackpoll (47). Of note, at least three of those were likely related to the growing spruce budworm outbreak in Quebec. The other species with record-setting totals this fall were Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (24), Brown Creeper (14), Cedar Waxwing (45), Northern Cardinal (14), Chipping Sparrow (33), and Brown-headed Cowbird (1—our first ever outside of spring). These gains were offset by record lows for Least Flycatcher, Blue-headed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, American Robin, Palm Warbler, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and American Goldfinch.

Our peak period traditionally runs from around mid-September to early-mid October, but this year

it was eerily quiet throughout that period, with not only the Yellow-rumped Warblers scarce, but also kinglets and White-throated Sparrows (among others) just trickling through. Our busiest day this fall came surprisingly early in the season on 26 Aug, with just 112 birds banded, including 90 warblers of 17 species. The highest count of species observed in a day was 62 on 18 Sep, which was a record high for fall migration. New species observed this fall were Tundra Swan and Common Goldeneye, increasing our cumulative list for the site to 204 species.

Overall, our top 10 species banded for fall 2011 included six warblers for the first time ever, led by Magnolia Warbler, and also including Tennessee Warbler, American Redstart, Nashville Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat. Despite record (or near-record) low numbers, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, White-throated Sparrow, and Song Sparrow all still cracked the top 10, as they have in all previous years. A cumulative list of all species banded at MBO is updated after every season at www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/banded.html

Although not included in our Fall Migration Monitoring Program totals, we also operated our Northern Saw-whet Owl program for the fourth time, with a record count of 199 banded, plus nine foreign recoveries. Bob Barnhurst was the main bander for this program, and the results are testimony to his dedication to it.

As always, other research activities and education programs were integrated with the banding program. We provided ongoing training to more than 65 volunteers this fall, and collected a few hundred more photos to augment the ever-growing MBO Photo ID Library (www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/idlibrary.html) which, as usual, will be updated for many species over the course of the winter. We also launched a color-banding project of American Goldfinches and House Finches; although we expect most birds to remain relatively local, we encourage all banders to keep an eye out for any birds with white alphanumeric codes on black bands, and to report these to us through our form at www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/feederbirds.html



Northern Saw-whet Owl
Photo by R. Pantle