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Atlantic Flyway Review: Region IV Piedmont-Coastal Plain, Fall 2011 Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park

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foliage. Migrating birds were present but extremely high. In all, only 45 birds were captured, and because of the high number of pygmy rattlesnakes, we will not use that area again. Another site will be chosen for spring banding.

One of the most exciting birds caught was the Wood Thrush. It has been five years since the last one was banded. One was exciting, but catching four more, three in one morning, was unbelievable! Another species seen, in a higher number than in all previous years put together, was the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. All were caught within the same week and several were recaptured at least once before dispersing.

I did return to Helicopter Island for the month of November to improve the number of Myrtle Warblers caught and to continue collecting the data needed for my research project where the sapsuckers, a Chipping Sparrow and three Orange-crowned Warblers were caught.

Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park 254-0800

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Cape Florida is in its tenth 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 22 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 22 Aug and were open on all but six days until we closed on 11 Nov. We added two new net lanes to bring the total nets to 22, with one lane in a new habitat. This net location is in willows along the edge of a pond and it increased our captures of certain species, such as Prairie and Palm warblers, although the net was not used for half of the season because the lane flooded after heavy rains.

The 2011 fall season was active in terms of weather fronts, but with minimal tropical storm influence locally. Still, rainfall was higher than average, especially in October. Mosquitoes were horrible,

causing us to close the site for two days in early September until the wind shifted and the numbers became tolerable. A vigorous early front gave us our earliest 93-bird day, on 13 Sep. Several other frontal passages and nighttime rainfall events made for a steady season with no record-breaking days but decent numbers most days. Total birds/100 net hours (31) was up from the previous two slow years, but nothing like it was during the mid-part of the last decade when b/100nh ranged from 41 to 50. A substantial front stalled in mid-October with a persistent band of rain across the Florida Keys, so south Florida had the largest pileup of migrants in several years. We banded over 100 birds per day for five days in a row and would probably have caught more but the same individuals stayed onsite and they became net-savvy. In general, the later migrants seemed to come through early this fall and the earlier migrants were later, but the wintering species did not arrive in any numbers before we closed for the season on 11 Nov. The total of 2,244 new birds captured of 62 species was nearly double the total from 2010, however, so the banders were happy.

Three species were banded for the first time at Cape Florida during the 2011 season: Black-billed Cuckoo, Eastern Screech-Owl, and Swamp Sparrow. Yellow-billed Cuckoos were abundant this season, and one or two Mangrove Cuckoos were seen near nets but not captured. Other treats were a female Cerulean Warbler that was recaptured two more times over a two-day period, and a troublesome 'Eastern' Wood-Pewee. This bird had a mostly dark lower mandible and a darker overall plumage, especially the vest, and many of its measurements overlapped with Western Wood-Pewee; however, we felt we did not have enough conclusive information to call it Western.

Gray Catbirds doubled their previous high of 143 set in 2005, with 287 captured in 2011. Worm-eating Warblers (132) and Swainson's Warblers (23) both beat their previous highs by one bird, and the rest of the species rounding out the top ten were caught in above-average numbers. Red-eyed Vireos continue their steady decline at our site, and dropped from the top ten in 2011, to be replaced by White-eyed Vireo.

This may be a consequence of our location on a barrier island rather than an overall decline in Red-eyed Vireos moving through Florida, as they were reported in relatively high numbers this fall by birders on the mainland.

We captured 24 returning birds of six species, including our first Swainson's Warbler return from a previous fall (2010). This suggests that the species does occasionally overwinter on our site, as all of our other returns were of either resident or potentially wintering species. The oldest returns were a resident Northern Cardinal and a wintering Gray Catbird, both banded as hatching-year birds in 2004.

Anna Scharnagl, Angel Abreu and Mariel Abreu all graduated to bander status in 2011, and David Schaffter and Bente Torvund provided a lot of assistance as extractors. Special thanks goes to David Foster, the new Park manager, for continuing to support our project.

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In past reports I have argued that my poor netting success in recent years might have been due to a persisting drought in this region that resulted in rather dry conditions of the high grounds where I operate my nets. Well, it got worse: the year 2011 ended with a rainfall deficit of almost 50%. No wonder, perhaps, that the netting success dipped to less than 4 b/100 nh.

A noteworthy event was the capture of a thrush that I recorded as a Gray-cheeked Thrush but that probably was a large (wing chord 97 mm) Bicknell's Thrush, my first. After having released the bird, I could not forget its somewhat unusual appearance, especially the tan hue to the rectrices; but then it was too late, of course, to have another look and take pictures. In addition to this thrush, I banded only five other thrushes this fall, four Veeries and a Hermit Thrush. I did not capture any Wood Thrush or Swainson's Thrush, both species having been regulars or even candidates for my top ten list not long ago. However,

the last time I netted a Swainson's Thrush was in 2009, and it was just one.

Not surprising, but depressing nevertheless, has been a continued scarcity of birds at my site throughout the winter. My "seed addicted" Ovenbird (*NABB* 33:66), however, was back for its seventh winter but it conformed to the general bleakness of the winter season and has stayed out of sight since 9 Nov, as I write this in early March.



Great Blue Heron
by George West