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Atlantic Flyway Review: Region IV Piedmont (Coastal Plain)- Fall 2016, Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park

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Atlantic Flyway Review: Region IV Piedmont (Coastal Plain)- Fall 2016, Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park

Authors

Michelle Davis, Robin Diaz, Elizabeth Golden, Miriam Avello, Mario Porcelli, and Marc Kramer

I would like to express gratitude to the Kiawah Conservancy and the Town of Kiawah Island for supporting our project by providing the funding to purchase banding supplies and to allow the hiring of seven bird banding technicians. Mattie VandenBoom, Blaine Carnes, Michael Gamble, Ryan Donnelly, Alison Nevins, Michael Rodgers, and Col Lauzau were a great addition to the team and their hard work was greatly appreciated! Additionally, we thank Kiawah Partners for permission to conduct research on their property. I would also like to thank all of the volunteers that participated during our banding season.

Please check out the KIBS blog in 2017. It is updated daily with the banding totals for each day, photos, interesting anecdotes, and occasionally information of ageing and sexing certain species. The blog can be viewed at www.kiawahislandbanding.blogspot.com.

Kiawah Island Banding Station Little Bear Banding Site (LBBS)

To complement the Captain Sam's Banding Site located at the west end of Kiawah Island, we initiated a new banding station on the east end of the island in 2015. The Little Bear Banding Site (LBBS) is situated at the extreme eastern end of the island about 14 km east of KIBS in secondary dune scrub/shrub and high marsh with wax-myrtle and baccharis being the dominant plant species. We operated 20 nets daily, weather permitting, from 22 August to 17 November. Nets were generally opened 30 minutes before sunrise and closed approximately 5-6 hours later.

We operated for 75 days resulting in 6,011.8 (nh). A total of 3,442 new individuals were banded and 1,035 birds were recaptured of 74 different species. The capture rate for new birds was 57.3 birds/100 nh with an additional 17.2 birds/100 nh as recaptures. Three species made up 55% of the season's catch: Yellow-rumped Warbler (19.1%), Gray Catbirds (18.1%), and Common Yellowthroats (18.1%). A few species were banded at LBBS that have never been banded before during the fall at KIBS. These included a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Warbling Vireo, and Yellow-green Vireo. The Yellow-green Vireo (a species that breeds in Mexico and Central

America and winter in South America) was a huge surprise! This species rarely makes it into the United States and represented the first state record for South Carolina.

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Cape Florida is in its fifteenth 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 26 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 16 Aug 2016 and the station was open on all but 6 days until we closed on 7 Nov. Nets were opened from first light until early afternoon on most days.

The 2016 fall season weather started out favorable for migration at our location. Unsettled weather and nighttime thundershowers were prevalent in Aug and the first part of Sept, causing birds to land at Cape Florida. A steady stream of birds were seen on radar moving through the area throughout Sept, but daily captures were dependent on the location

and timing of overnight convection. Hurricane Matthew threatened south Florida on 6 Oct, but the eye stayed offshore and the wind on the west side turned out to be inconsequential. A weak, dry front passed our latitude a few days after Matthew, and then persistent high pressure settled in for the remainder of the season. This high pressure caused strong northeast winds to develop on 12 Oct and they continued past 7 November, when we closed for the season. In fact, these winds were stronger on several days than the winds associated with Matthew, and the station was, as a consequence, closed for 4 days. This wind direction is not conducive to routing large numbers of migrants through Cape Florida.

The busiest day was on 4 Oct with 119 new captures, the only triple-digit day the whole season. Surprisingly, this day was right before Hurricane Matthew's closest pass to the banding station. The overall number of 1,932 birds captured during the 2016 season was the lowest since 2012, and 1,422 of these were captured prior to the hurricane. The overall capture rate of 20 birds/100 net hours was the lowest since 2002. However, capture rates have not been much higher for four of the last five seasons. Hurricane Matthew turned out to be a dividing line in the season, despite the lack of damage to our site. The capture rate before the storm was 23 birds/100 net hours while the capture rate afterwards was only 15 birds/100 net hours.

The total number of species captured in 2016 was 62; a respectable number but below the record-breaking 66 species captured in 2015. Among these were two species banded for the first time at Cape Florida: Savannah Sparrow and Bobolink. Both species are locally common in open grassy habitats, and it is possible that a hawk chased the Bobolink into a net located outside of the woods in a scrubby area. Our second Mangrove Cuckoo was banded this year, as was a Black-whiskered vireo, a rare fall capture. Both of these species are local breeders and their numbers may be increasing in BBCFSP as the hammock vegetation matures. The vireo was seen singing most days for the first several weeks of the season in the vicinity of the nets where he was eventually captured, suggesting that he held a territory here over the summer.

Other unusual captures included a Yellow-bellied flycatcher banded on 9 Oct and a Blue Grosbeak banded on 22 Oct. Individuals of both these species have only been captured two other times in 15 years of banding.

The overall number of individuals banded across the most abundant species was remarkably consistent with the last several seasons. Ovenbird was the top species banded in 2016, with 338 captures. American Redstart was the second most abundant species banded at the CFBS with 275 captures, and Black-throated blue warblers rounded out the top three species with 244 captured in 2016. Gray Catbirds had been increasing over the last several years and had broken into the top three in 2013 and 2015, but this fall proved different. Only 92 catbirds were captured in 2016, far below the 14-year average of 152.1. This appears to have been a regional phenomenon, as fewer catbirds were seen both in migration and in traditional overwintering sites across south Florida. On the other hand, site records were broken in 2016 for Worm-eating warbler and Swainson's warbler. Other common species such as Northern Waterthrush and Black-and-White warbler were banded in similar numbers to those recorded in other recent years.

Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (49 captures) and Swainson's Thrush (54 captures) were unusual additions to the top ten list. Weather patterns caused an entire season's worth of Catharus Thrushes to land at our site on 1 and 2 October. Late migrants included three Red-eyed Vireos banded on 1 and 3 November; the bulk of this species has already passed through south Florida by the end of September. A Louisiana Waterthrush banded on 1 Oct had a healed broken leg; this injury probably contributed to its very late passage.

We captured 16 returning birds of 7 species, with wintering Ovenbirds banded within the last four years making up half of these. The restored hammocks of BBCFSP have proven to be a consistently good wintering site for this species, with individuals returning for many seasons. Returns of the resident Northern cardinals were remarkably low this year, with only one individual banded in 2013 captured. No foreign recoveries were captured this fall.

This project would not be possible without the assistance of the dedicated volunteer extractors for the 2016 season: thanks go to Elsa Alvear, Eliana Ardila, Miriam Avello, Barb and Ted Center, Celeste de Palma, Noah Frade, Jim King, Mark Kramer, Elizabeth Lago, Mark Lopez, Dan O'Malley, Mario, Nico and Lucas Porcelli, David Schaffter, and Lorena Siqueira. Special thanks go to Art Yerian the Park manager, for continuing to support our project.