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Species Snapshot: Eastern Screech-Owl

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A long-lived and site-faithful junco

I have been banding songbirds and other near-passerine species coming to my bird feeders each winter since 2006-2007, using a combination of Potter traps and mist nets as weather permits. This is at my home in eastern Vinton County, within the hilly unglaciated Appalachian plateau region of southeastern Ohio. My special interest is in monitoring longevity and winter site fidelity in migrant sparrows and finches.

On 13 Feb 2018, I recaptured a male Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco I had banded on 16 Jan 2009. It had been four seasons since I had encountered any other of the 109 juncos I banded in that winter. And he has been recaptured at least once during every winter but one (2015-2016) in the years since banding. Aged as second year at banding, he had a wing chord of 74 mm, tail 66 mm, weight was 21.9 g, and fat score was one. On 13 Feb 2018, wing chord was 78 mm, tail 69 mm, weight 20.4 g, and fat again scored as one. One other junco returned in the eighth winter after banding. This bird has been the only one to return nine seasons later.

At this writing, in November 2018, juncos are yet to put in an appearance at my feeders. As you might expect, I am rooting for this particular male to appear in a trap or net again this winter.

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Species Snapshot: Eastern Screech-Owl (*Megascops asio*)

This is the sixth installment in our regular feature presenting a brief synopsis of the banding and encounter records submitted to the Bird Banding Lab for a particular species. Each installment will feature a new species; suggestions for species to be covered or data to be presented are welcome (swgabrey@gmail.com). Space limitations of NABB prohibit any in-depth analysis of the data and these notes are not meant to show any trends in population parameters such as population

density or growth rate, geographic distribution, etc. and should not be viewed as a definitive analysis of the status of the species. Although the banding program began in the 1920s, the currently available digital records for banding data include only those records from 1960 to the present (pre-1960 banding data are available in other formats.) All encounters, including those of birds banded before 1960, are available in digital format. The following summary includes only those birds banded and encountered from 1960 through Aug 2018 in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Banded birds

Numbers and Age and Sex Categories

Since 1960, 31,848 Eastern Screech-owls have been banded in the US, Canada, and Mexico (Table 1). Sex was identified (either at banding or upon encounter) for just 7% (n = 2,256); of these, 27% (n = 613) were males and 73% were females (n = 1,643). Of those banded as males, 79% (n = 484) were aged as ATY, TY, SY, ASY, or AHY compared to 18% (n = 112) aged as L or HY, and 3% (n = 17) aged as U. Of those banded as females, 89% (n = 1,460) were aged as ATY, TY, SY, ASY, or AHY compared to 10% (n = 163) aged as L or HY, and 1% (n = 20) aged as U. Of the 29,592 screech-owls for which sex was not identified, 34% (n = 9,963) were aged as ATY, TY, SY, ASY, or AHY compared to 58% (n = 17,028) aged as L or HY, and 9% (n = 2,601) aged as U.

Geographic distribution

Since 1960, Eastern Screech-owls have been banded in 41 of the United States (n = 29,166), 4 Canadian provinces (n = 2,680), and 1 Mexican state (n = 2) (Figure 1). About half of the screech-owls banded in the US were from 6 states: Ohio (n = 4,629), Texas (n = 3,814), Florida (n = 1,674), North Carolina (n = 1,594), Nebraska (n = 1,462), and South Carolina (n = 1,430). Three-quarters of the screech-owls banded in Canada were from Ontario (n = 2,035). The 2 screech-owls banded in Mexico were from Sonora.

Seasonal distribution

Over 53% (n = 16,863) of all Eastern Screech-owls banded in the US, Canada, and Mexico were banded between May and Aug, 12% (n = 3,969)

between Sep and Oct, 21% (n = 6,713) between Nov and Feb, and 13% (n = 4,303) between Mar and Apr (Table 2).

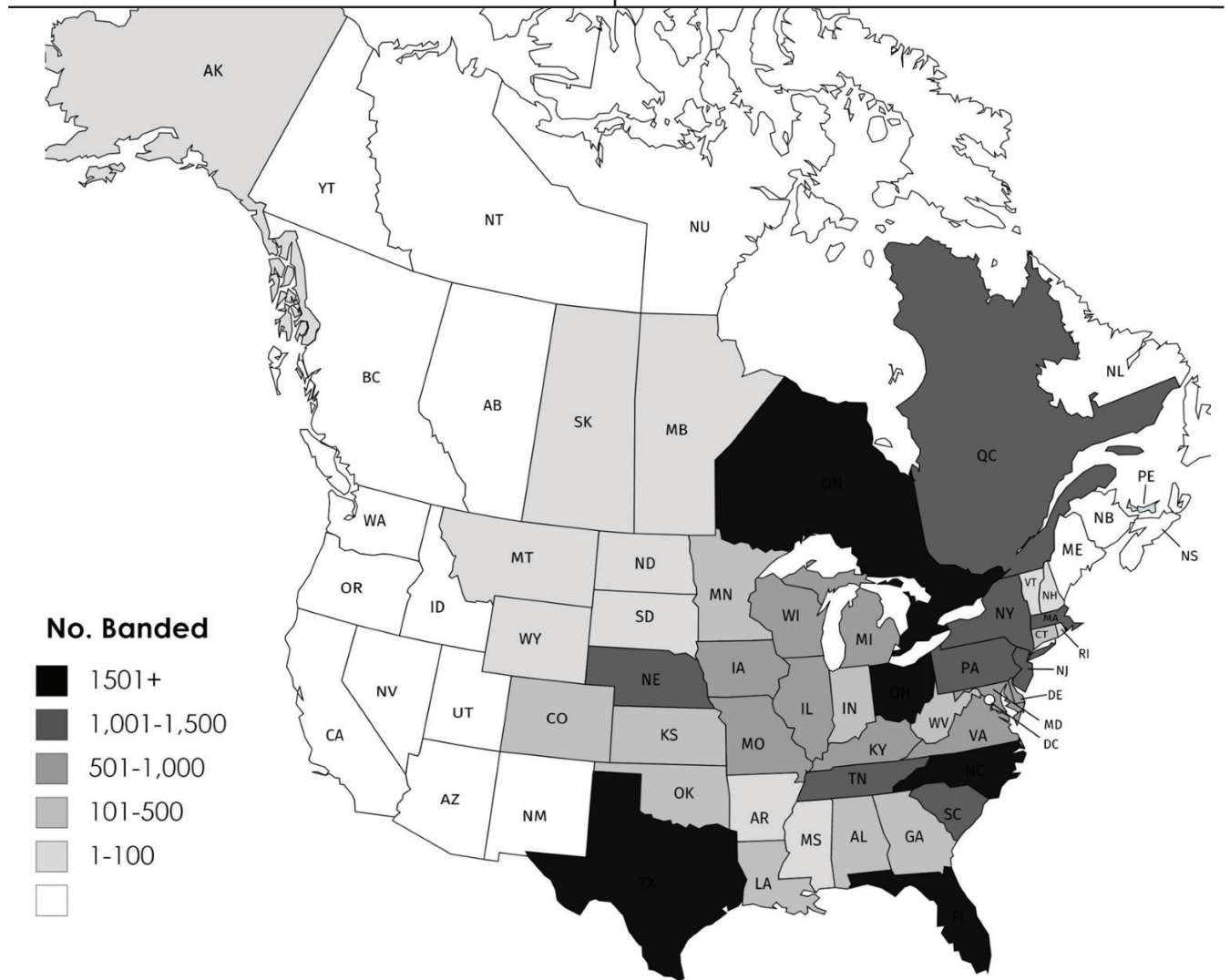
Encounters

Numbers and Age and Sex Categories

There have been 684 encounters representing 662 Eastern Screech-owls banded in the US, Canada, and Mexico between 1960 and Aug 2018. No encounter records had invalid or mismatched sex, age, or species data, and there were no encounters on the same day as banded or multiple encounters on a single day. Twenty-two encounters had a how obtained code of 98 (band only) and one had a code of 70 (purchased); I included these records in the age/sex and encounter location summaries but did not include them in the longevity or distance between encounter and banding locations summary. Twelve screech-owls were encountered

twice and five were encountered three times; the following summary is based on only the most recent encounter for the birds with multiple encounters.

Sex was identified for 9% of the screech-owls (n = 59) encountered; 32% were males and 68% females (Table 1). At least 80% of each sex (17 of 19 males and 32 of 40 females) were banded as AHY, SY, or AHY compared to about 10-18% (2 of 19 males and 7 of 40 females) banded as HY or L and <1% (0 of 19 males and 1 of 40 females) banded as U. Of the 603 screech-owls for which sex was not recorded, 40% (n = 238) were aged as AHY, SY, or AHY compared to 49% (n = 298) banded as HY or L and 11% (n = 67) banded as U. No birds banded as TY or ATY were encountered. The oldest screech-owl encountered was banded as an AHY-F in Apr 1994 in Texas and encountered about 10 miles from its banding location in Dec



Age code	Banded birds				Encountered birds			
	Male	Female	Unknown	Total	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
AHY	419	1,313	9,014	10,746	15	31	225	271
HY	79	124	8,783	8,986	1	7	176	184
L	33	39	8,245	8,317	1		122	123
SY	35	86	637	758	1		10	11
ASY	22	52	287	361	1	1	3	5
TY	1	2	12	15				
ATY	7	7	13	27				
Unknown	17	20	2,601	2,638		1	67	68
Total	613	1,643	29,592	31,848	19	40	603	662

Country/region	Nov - Feb	Mar - Apr	May - Aug	Sep - Oct	Total
US	6,182	3,925	15,858	3,201	29,166
Canada	531	377	1,005	767	2,680
Mexico		1		1	2
Total	6,713	4,303	16,863	3,969	31,848

Banding state	Encounter state									
	Same	DC	IN	IA	KY	MD	NJ	NC	Unknown	Total
United States										
Ohio	79		1		1			1	1	83
Texas	66									66
Nebraska	44			2					1	47
New York	36								1	37
Wisconsin	33									33
Massachusetts	31									31
Delaware	27					2				29
Florida	28									28
Pennsylvania	24						1			25
New Jersey	22									22
Iowa	21									21
North Carolina	20							1		21
Illinois	19									19
Minnesota	18									18
Tennessee	16									16
Maryland	13	1								14
Michigan	14									14
South Carolina	13									13
Alabama	8									8
Connecticut	8									8
Colorado	7									7
Missouri	6									6
Virginia	6									6
Indiana	4									4
Kentucky	4									4
Louisiana	4									4
Oklahoma	4									4
West Virginia	3									3
Kansas	1									1
Mississippi	1									1
Montana	1									1
South Dakota	1									1
Canada										
Ontario	58									58
Quebec	6									6
Manitoba	3									3
Total	649	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	4	662

2006 (minimum age at encounter 13 yr 6 mon). The oldest male (and the 12th oldest overall) encountered was banded as L in May 1969 in Ohio and encountered about 12 miles from its banding location in Feb 1978 (minimum age at encounter 8 yr 9 mon). Of the 15 oldest screech-owls encountered (minimum age 8 yr 6 mon), sex was known for just 3 (2 AHY-F and 1 L-M). Seven of the remaining unknown sex screech-owls were banded as AHY, 3 as L, and 1 each as SY and HY. Five of these 15 oldest were encountered at their banding locations while the remaining 10 were encountered between 9 and 25 miles from their banding location.

Geographic distribution

Of the 662 unique Eastern Screech-owls encountered, 90% (n = 595) were banded in the US and 10% (n = 67) in Canada. All but 13 screech-owls were encountered in the state or province in which they were banded (Table 3). I excluded the 23 screech-owls with encounter codes of 98 and 70 and an additional 6 screech-owls with no reported distance between banding and encounter locations. Of the remaining 633, 475 screech-owls were encountered no more than 10 miles from their banding location, 144 encountered between 10 and 50 miles, and 20 encountered > 50 miles from their banding location. The greatest distance between banding and encounter locations was 273 miles for a HY-F banded in Sep 2001 in New York and encountered in Jan 2002, also in New York. The greatest distance for a screech-owl banded as L (sex unknown) was 221 miles for a bird banded in New York in May 2004 and encountered in Jul 2004, also in New York. Most of the screech-owls (17 of 20) encountered more than 50 miles from their banding location were of unknown sex. The remaining three for which sex was known included the previously referenced HY-F, an ASY-F (243 miles, North Carolina, banded Jun 2002 and encountered May 2005), and an AHY-F (218 miles, Ohio, banded May 1970 and encountered Nov 1974). The greatest distance between banding and encounter locations for a male was 14 miles for an AHY banded in Apr 1983 in Ohio and encountered in Feb 1984, also in Ohio.

Other Interesting Encounters

Four of the five screech-owls encountered 3 times were all encountered at their banding location. The fifth was an AHY-M banded in Jan 1963 in West Boxford, MA. It was encountered at the banding location in Feb 1964, again in Nov 1967, and found dead inside a building 9 miles away in Jan 1969. Of the 123 encountered owls banded as L, 3 were encountered at least 10 yr after banding, 12 encountered between 5 and 9 yr after banding, and 108 encountered 4 yr or less after banding. Just 2 of the birds banded as L were encountered on more than 1 occasion. One was banded in Jun 1965 in New Hartford, IA, and caught due to disease in Jul 1965 and found dead later that month. The other was banded in May 1983 in Lacarne, OH, and encountered at its banding location in Jan 1984 and found dead 8 miles away in Feb 1984. Nine of the owls banded as L were encountered at least 20 miles from their banding location (maximum 221 miles), 30 encountered between 11 and 20 miles from their banding location, and 36 encountered between 1 and 10 miles from their banding location. The remaining 48 were either encountered at their banding location or no distance was reported. About 60% (n = 19,053) of all Eastern Screech-owls were banded with a bird status code of 3 (normal bird) compared to 21% (n = 6,750) as bird status 7 (rehabilitated, sick or injured, held > 24 hr) and 18% (n = 5,832) as bird status 4 (hand-reared/hacked, taken as egg, nestling or orphan). The remaining 213 were banded as bird status 2, 5, 6, or 8. The encounter rate was 2.3% for rehabilitated birds (n = 153), 1.7% for hand-reared birds (n = 98), and 2.1% for normal birds (n = 405). Seven Eastern Screech-owl bands were reported to BBL 20 years or more after the bird was banded, six of which were reported with a "how obtained" code of 98 (band or band number only). The seventh was reported with a "how obtained" code of 70 (purchased, eBay, traded); the band was from a L-U banded in Millbury, OH, in May 1983 and reportedly obtained in Aug 2015, 32 years after the bird was banded. The longest duration between banding and reporting was 50 years, for a bird banded as L-U in Mt. Pleasant, MI, in Apr 1961; the band was "found on the ground" 20 miles away

in Breckenridge, MI, in Sep 1991. A band from an owl banded as HY-U in Ranken, MO, in Jul 1981 was found “under about 6 inches of dirt” by a person metal detecting 4 miles away in Eureka, MO, 37 years later in Apr 2018. The longest time between banding and encounter dates for a band with the bird still attached was 12 years (this is the longevity record AHY-F described earlier).

Acknowledgements

I thank the approximately 1,200 permit holders who have banded Eastern Screech-owls over the decades, all the individuals who reported encounters, and staff at the Bird Banding Lab for supplying the data.

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Founded in 1925

Western Regional News

WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MTG - BRIGHTON, COLORADO 20 - 22 September, 2019

The Western Bird Banding Association (WBBA) and the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (BCR) are pleased to invite you to Brighton, Colorado for WBBA's 2019 annual meeting. We expect many informative scientific presentations on banding, banding at the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies stations, field trips in the beautiful Rocky Mountains, possibly a trip to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and, as always, many fun social opportunities at which to network and to enjoy the company of your fellow banders.

We will update you with further schedule details and how to register as that information becomes available. It will also be posted on the WBBA website (westernbirdbanding.org). In the meantime, save the dates!

We hope to see you there!
The WBBA Board

Annual Summary of Birds Banded in 2017, in the WBBA Region

The 2017 Annual Bird Banding Summary for the Western Bird Banding Association has one major change and several minor changes. The major change is that birds banded in Mexico will no longer be included in this annual report. Manuel Grosselet at Tierra de Aves A.C. has graciously agreed to collate the birds banded in Mexico. Then, for the minor changes, you will note that I have eliminated the AOU#'s and alpha codes. Although the two have not changed, the phylogenetic landscape has changed with the re-arrangement of the family of birds. Although field guides like the National Geographic Society's Birds of North America reflect these changes, museums I am familiar with (e.g. Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History and the Western Foundation of Zoology) have retained the older taxonomy. And much to my chagrin, my younger banders are happy with the alphabetical arrangement of birds. Last, there is the constant changes in taxonomy, most recently the Scrub-Jays.