Thunder Cape News

Volume 17 (2)
October 2010

by John Woodcock

The Thunder Cape Bird Observatory's 19th season of spring migration monitoring began April 27 and ran continuously until June 11. The 2010 spring banding season at Thunder Cape Bird Observatory was one of the slower seasons with only 1,171 birds banded of 76 species. Mean values for the previous 18 years were 2,724 banded of 79 species.

The most abundant species banded was Chipping Sparrow with 190 banded, far below the previous 18 year mean of 435. An average of 23 birds was banded per day throughout the migration monitoring period. There were no days when over 100 birds were banded. Above average numbers of Pileated Woodpecker and Mourning Dove were banded, otherwise banding totals were below average.

One species, Black Vulture, was observed for the first time in the history of Thunder Cape and was likely the first record for the Thunder Bay District. One species of bird was banded this season that had not been banded previously at Thunder Cape in the spring: Great-crested Flycatcher.

Fair weather prevailed throughout the spring with little precipitation and milder temperatures than usual. The mean daily temperature (8.2^{o}C) in May was above average. There were 6 days with rain, no days with snow, and 4 foggy days. The peak species date was May 18, when 67 species were documented. The highest ET occurred on May 30, attributable in part to 753 Cedar Waxwing observed that day.

Four volunteers contributed a total of 127 volunteer days.

Field Sparrow

WATERFOWL
Generally, waterfowl numbers observed were lower than what was experienced in previous years. This may be attributable to an early spring with inland lakes becoming ice-free earlier than usual and waterfowl moving-on before the start of migration monitoring.


C. Sukha with Sharp-shinned Hawk

Seventy-two **Red-throated Loon** were observed this season with peak numbers (15) observed on May 14. The last of the season was observed on June 8. **Common Loon** were observed daily, on average 9 per day (down from 15/day last year), with highest numbers observed on May 29. **Horned Grebe** were observed on one day only: Apr. 27. Only 12 **Red-necked Grebe** were observed this season, the last on May 20. An average of 36 **Double-crested Cormorant** were observed daily throughout the migration monitoring period, up from 28 last year. A few pairs of **Canada Geese** were observed throughout May & June, all likely local breeders. Migrating flocks were observed May 25 to June 8, likely non-breeders. Small numbers of **Greater Scaup** were observed the first week of May. **White-winged Scoters** were observed at regular intervals throughout May. Small numbers of **Long-tailed Ducks** were observed the first half of May with the last of the season observed on May 17. Small numbers of **Common Goldeneye** were also seen sporadically throughout May. An average of 7 **Common Merganser** and 24 **Red-breasted Merganser** were observed daily throughout the migration monitoring period, both lower than last year. Peak numbers of both species were observed on May 5. Twenty **Great Blue Heron** and 68 **Turkey Vulture** were observed this season, both totals higher than last year. Only one **Lesser Yellowlegs** was observed this season, on May 26.

RAPTORS
Bald Eagle were observed most days, likely the birds nesting on nearby Hare Island (2.5 km NW of TCBO). Small numbers of **Sharp-shinned Hawks** were observed most days during May; 9 were banded this season. The first of the season was observed on May 2, the last on June 8, and peak numbers (8) were seen on May 16. A few **Broad-winged Hawk** were observed migrating in the first half of May. Only 6 **American Kestrel** were seen this season. A pair of **Merlin** were present throughout the season, likely local breeders. The few **Peregrine Falcon** observed were also likely local territorial birds. One **Golden Eagle** was observed soaring above the Sleeping Giant on May 4.

WOODPECKERS
Yellow-shafted Flicker were observed most days throughout the migration monitoring period. Record high numbers (6) of Pileated Woodpecker were banded this season. As is typical of the spring very few other woodpeckers were observed or banded.

PASSERINES
The number of all flycatcher species banded this season was well below average. The first **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** of the season was banded on

May 28. The first **Traill's Flycatcher** was banded June 3 and the first **Least Flycatcher** of the season was banded on May 21. The dates of these 'first' flycatcher detections was later than average.

The first **Red-eyed Vireo** of the season were banded and observed on May 24. Record low numbers were banded this season. The first **Blue-headed Vireo** of the season was observed on May 1 and the first **Philadelphia Vireo** was observed on May 22. These dates were about average.

Below average numbers of **Blue Jay** were banded this season. A nesting pair was present at the Cape at the opening of the season and they were observed most days. The first migrating birds were observed on May 16. Peak numbers were observed May 28 when 152 were observed. The first **Tree Swallow** of the season was observed on April 24. A few migrating birds were observed the first 2 weeks of May. A pair nested at the Cape and they were observed most days.

Black-capped Chickadee were scarce this spring, only 4 were banded. Below average numbers of **Red-breasted Nuthatch** were banded this season. Above average numbers of **Brown Creeper** were banded this season, most of them prior to April 27. Below average numbers of **Ruby-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were banded. The last **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** of the season was observed on May 12. **Eastern Bluebird** were regularly observed between May 20 and the end of the season. Average numbers of **Hermit Thrush** were banded this season, the first on April 27 and the last on June 7. The first **Swainson's Thrush** of the season was observed on May 16. Above average numbers were banded this season. Average numbers of **Veery** were banded this season, the first on May 19. **Cedar Waxwing** numbers were lower than the previous 3 years. The first birds that were observed on April 24 were likely birds that overwintered. Migrating flocks were present continuously after May 24. Peak numbers were observed on May 30.

Small numbers of **Scarlet Tanager** were observed the last week of May; an early individual was observed on May 16. **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** were commonly present from May 16 to May 24, peak numbers were seen on May 18. Below average numbers were banded. Average numbers of **Indigo Bunting** were banded this season. The first birds were observed on May 17.

Great-crested Flycatcher

WARBLERS

The first **Orange-crowned Warbler** of the season was observed on May 1 and the last on May 22. Well below average numbers were banded. The first **Tennessee Warbler** was observed on May 17. Well below average numbers were banded. Peak numbers of **Nashville Warbler** were observed on May 2 and 16. The first of the season was banded on April 30. Banding totals were about 50% lower than average. The first **Northern**

Parula of the season was observed on May 16 and the last on June 9. None were banded. The first **Yellow Warbler** of the season was observed on May 17 and the last on June 7. Banding totals were about 50% lower than average. The first **Chestnut-sided Warbler** of the season was observed and banded on May 16 and the last was banded on May 25. Banding totals were about 50% lower than average. The first **Magnolia Warbler** were observed and banded on May 16, slightly below average numbers were banded. The first **Cape May Warbler** of the season was observed on May 11, well below average numbers were banded. The first **Black-throated Blue Warbler** of the season was observed on May 12 and the last on June 1. Average numbers were banded. **Myrtle Warblers** were most common during the first 3 weeks of May with peak numbers observed (74) and banded (7) on May 2. Near record low numbers were banded. The first **Black-throated Green Warbler** of the season were observed on May 2. Peak numbers were observed on May 16. Above average numbers were banded. The first **Blackburnian Warbler** of the season was banded on May 16 and the last on June 9. Banding totals were about 50% lower than average. The first **Western Palm Warbler** were observed and banded on April 29. The last of the season was observed on May 23. Well below average numbers were banded. **Bay-breasted Warbler** were observed on only 3 days, May 22-24. Only one was banded. Similarly **Blackpoll Warbler** were observed on only 2 days, May 23 and May 26. None were banded. The first **Black and White Warbler** of the season was observed on May 6. Peak numbers were observed on May 16. Average numbers were banded. The first **American Redstart** of the season were observed and banded on May 16. Peak numbers were seen on May 22. Slightly above average numbers were banded. The first **Ovenbird** of the season was banded May 16 which was also the day that peak numbers were observed. The first **Northern Waterthrush** was banded on May 2 and the last of the season was banded on May 25. Average numbers were banded this season. The first **Common Yellowthroat** of the season was observed and banded on May 16 and the last on June 7. Below average numbers were banded. The first **Wilson's Warbler** of the season was observed on May 21 and the last on May 26. Below average numbers were banded this season. The first **Canada Warbler** of the season was observed on May 18. Below average numbers were banded.

SPARROWS

American Tree Sparrow were observed only during the final days of April. **Chipping Sparrow** were first observed and banded on April 29. Peak numbers were banded (28) and observed (101) on May 17. Well below average numbers were banded. The first **Clay-colored Sparrow** of the season was observed on May 7 and the last was banded on June 7. Slightly above average numbers were banded. The first **Savannah Sparrow** of the season was banded on May 5 and the last on May 31. Well below average numbers were banded this spring. **Song Sparrows** were present at the Cape when we arrived on April 21 consisting of at least two territorial males that were present at least to the end of June. Below average numbers were banded. **Lincoln's Sparrow** were first banded and observed on May 17. Well below average numbers were banded this season. **Swamp Sparrow** first appeared on April 30. Below average numbers were banded. The first **White-throated Sparrow** of the

season was banded on April 29. Peak numbers were banded and observed on May 1. Average numbers were banded. Only one **White-crowned Sparrow** was observed this season, on May 8 and another was banded on June 6. A few **Slate-colored Juncos** were observed between April 21 and May 8. Below average numbers were banded.

Other PASSERINES

Red-winged Blackbird and **Common Grackle** were present throughout the migration monitoring period with peak numbers observed during the first 3 weeks of May. Average numbers were banded this season. Peak numbers **Brown-headed Cowbird** were observed during the first and third weeks of May. The first **Baltimore Oriole** of the season was observed on May 14, the last on May 25.

Very few finches were encountered this season. The first **Purple Finch** of the season were observed on May 2 and the last on June 7. None were banded. **Pine Siskin** were scarce throughout the season. Well below average numbers were banded. **American Goldfinches** were first observed on April 28. Well below average numbers were banded.

Where Do Our Birds Go?

John Woodcock

The placement of numbered bands on birds allows us to keep track of individuals and when they are recaptured or recovered, it provides us with the opportunity to learn important facts about their life history.

For example, at Thunder Cape we banded a Magnolia Warbler in July of 1993 and recaptured it in June of 2000, revealing to us that this bird had a life span of at least 7 years. This was a longevity record for this species.

Recapturing banded birds can tell us a lot about the timing of their breeding. For example, this spring we banded four migrating Swainson's Thrushes at Thunder Cape between May 30 and June 2. Two weeks later all four birds were recaptured at our M.A.P.S. (Monitoring Avian Productivity & Survivorship) station about 1 km north of TCBO in full breeding condition. Thus we can say that, for this species at least, locally breeding birds arrive early in June and breeding can begin as early as 2 weeks after arrival in the spring.

Banding can tell us about the speed a bird travels when migrating. At TCBO we banded a Pine Siskin on May 24 2009. On June 18 2009, 25 days later, it was recovered in Athabasca, Alberta having travelled a 'straight line' distance of 2,000 km, or 80 km per day at an average speed of 13 km/hr (assuming it flew 6 hours a day each day). A Saw-whet Owl we banded on September 21 2008 was recaptured 1,500 km away 3 weeks later in Pisgah State Park, New Hampshire. It flew an average of 71.5 km/day or about 12 km/hr (assuming it flew 6 hours a day each day).

Migration routes become apparent when we examine recapture records. At TCBO we have banded Sharp-shinned Hawks, that winter in Central & South America, and were recaptured enroute at Biscayne Point, Florida (2,600 km away) and in Catemeco, Mexico (3,400 km away. This suggests that they travel south through eastern United States, cross the Gulf of Mexico, and continue south through Mexico.

Banding can reveal how far birds may wander. In October 1999 we banded a Common Redpoll at TCBO; it was recaptured in April 2002 at 100 Mile House British Columbia, approximately 3,300 km away. A Pine Siskin was banded at TCBO on June 2 2009 and was recaptured on August 7 2009 in Robb Alberta 2,000 km away.

While it is well known that birds have a strong tendency to breed in the same vicinity each year (site fidelity) it is only recently that we have come to realize, through banding, that most wintering birds return to the same locations each winter. The recapture of banded birds on the wintering grounds provides connectivity between breeding populations and wintering populations. If there are concerns about the health of a population of birds then conservation efforts need to be directed not only to the breeding grounds but also to the wintering grounds. Most of our long-distance migrants spend at most 4 months of the year in Canada. They spend about a month travelling south in the fall and a month returning north in the spring. The remaining 6 months of the year are spent on the wintering grounds. A Tennessee Warbler that we banded at TCBO was recaptured at a MoSI (Monitoring Winter Survivorship) station in Panama 4,500 km to the south. Through banding and recapture we now know more of the complete life cycle of this bird. This 9 gram bird holds the record for the furthest recapture of a TCBO bird. To find out more about the MAPS & MoSI programs go to:
http://www.birdpop.org/programs.htm

During the last 10 years we have banded over 86,000 birds at TCBO and we have had 159 birds of 24 species recaptured in 75 other locations. This may seem a small return for our efforts but it represents about 1 in 540 being recaptured that makes for excellent odds. I'm sure if the lotteries had such odds we would all be purchasing tickets.

Rarities of TCBO by C. Sukha

By far the species most frequently recaptured was the Northern Saw-whet Owl with 85 recoveries made in 34 locations in 9 states and 2 provinces. More birds (17) were recovered at Hawk Ridge, Duluth Minnesota than at any other location. An additional 18 birds were recovered in 7 other locations in Minnesota: 6 at Arnold, 5 at Lakewood, and 3 at Tofte. Nine birds were recovered at Whitefish Point Michigan at the eastern terminus of Lake Superior. This data suggests that Saw-whet Owls may migrate by two routes from Thunder Cape: 1) to the western shore of Lake Superior and thence south or 2) east along the north

shore of Lake Superior to Sault Ste. Marie and then south. Some of the more remote recoveries of Saw-whet Owls were made at Long Point Bird Observatory, Metamora Illinois, Nashville Indiana, Chesterfield New Hampshire, Edenwold Saskatchewan, and Fairmont West Virginia.

The second most frequently recaptured species was Sharp-shinned Hawk with 41 recoveries made in 14 locations in 8 states and one province. More Sharp-shinned Hawks (18) were recovered at Hawk Ridge than at any other location. An additional 10 birds were recovered in Minnesota at Arnold, Lakewood and Grand Marais. Two birds were recovered in Michigan at Paradise and Whitefish Point. More remote recoveries were made at Catemeco Mexico, Biscayne Point Florida, Geneva Indiana, Hernando Mississippi, and Kettering Ohio.

The only other raptors that have been recovered were three Northern Goshawks, with two of the recaptures being made at Hawk Ridge and one near Birmingham Alabama.

We have had three geese recovered, a Cackling Goose recovered near Katy Texas, a Canada Goose at Crystal Lake Illinois and a Canada Goose near Horicon Wisconsin.

Perhaps the most renowned and unusual recapture of a TCBO banded bird was a Green-tailed Towhee banded in June 2006 and recovered in January 2007 at a bird feeder in Mountain Lake Minnesota at Rev. Gardner's Feeder. Unusual in that this species does not normally occur this far north and renowned because the story made the National Post.

We have had two American Redstarts and a Black-throated Blue Warbler recovered in Ohio, Blue Jays recovered in Wisconsin and Minnesota, a Brown Creeper in Illinois, a Hermit Thrush in Indiana, Myrtle Warblers in South Carolina & Minnesota, Pine Siskin in British Columbia, Alberta & Manitoba, a Red-breasted Nuthatch in Minnesota, a Red-winged Blackbird in Michigan and a Swainson's Thrush recovered in Isle Royale National Park. Closer to home a Saw-whet Owl, a Black-capped Chickadee and a Yellow Warbler were recovered in Thunder Bay and a Purple Finch was recovered in Nipigon.

You can contribute by reporting your encounters with banded birds. Phone 1-800-327-2263, write Bird Band, Washington D.C., USA or on the internet at http://www.reportband.gov/.

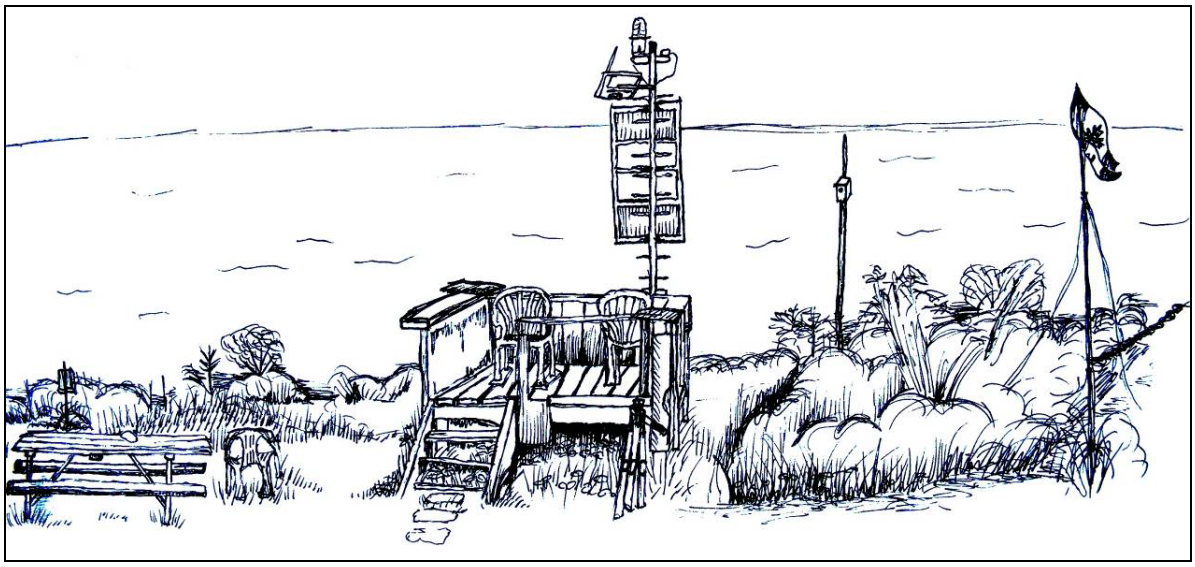
STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

John Woodcock has returned to Thunder Cape for his 9th year as Program Coordinator for spring and fall migration monitoring.

Many thanks to all the volunteers who contributed a total of 127 volunteer days to assist running programs this season:

- 1 month or more: Christopher Sukha, Jennifer Jeffreys and Maureen Woodcock
- 1 to 13 days: Nick Bartok

Our volunteers came from Vancouver B.C., Field Ontario, London Ontario and Thunder Bay



TCBO view from a window by Jenn Jeffreys

A WORD OF THANKS

We thank Al Comeau and the Staff of Sleeping Giant Park, Mel Aylward, Meghan Aylward, Peggy Simons, Esther and Fred Paasolainen, Allan and Sharon Gilbert. To all these generous people, our thanks for donations and for helping with TCBO programs. A special belated thanks to Joe Mauro for building & installing a new counter in the banding lab.

ABOUT THE CAPE

Thunder Cape Bird Observatory (http://www.tbfn.org/tcbotbfn.htm) is a joint project of the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources – Wildlife Assessment Program (OMNR - WAP), and Bird Studies Canada working in partnership with Sleeping Giant Provincial Park, and then Canadian Coast Guard. Core funding for the migration monitoring at Thunder Cape is provided by OMNR – WAP, to contribute to its assessment of bird population trends in Ontario.

Thunder Cape News is published twice yearly by the Thunder Cape Bird Observatory Committee (a subcommittee of the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists).

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