

# Thunder Cape News

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by John Woodcock

## FALL SYNOPSIS

Fall migration monitoring began on August 1 2011 and ran continuously until October 25. Similar to fall 2010 this was a below average banding season (6<sup>th</sup> lowest banding total of 21 years) with 3,719 birds banded of 93 species / forms. The means for the previous 20 years are 5,024 banded of 95 species/forms. There were only 2 days when over 100 birds were banded during the standard count period (Sept. 20 & Oct. 4). There was a fallout of warblers on Sept. 20 and 100 Nashville Warblers were banded that day. On Oct. 4 there was a fallout of Slate-colored Juncos and 159 were banded. The peak species date was Sept. 22 when 65 species were documented. The highest estimated total number of migrants (ET) occurred on Oct. 22, attributable mainly to over 3,000 Common Mergansers that migrated through that day. The most abundant species banded was Northern Saw-whet Owl with 781 banded, the highest banding total in TCBO's 21 years of operation.

There were record low numbers of Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, Winter Wren, Cedar Waxwing, Chestnut-



sided Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, and Bay-breasted Warbler banded.

There was one species of bird banded this season that had not been banded previously at Thunder Cape in the fall: American Golden Plover.



**American Golden Plover**

Warm, summer weather prevailed throughout August and well into September. Banding was never busy, averaging only 41 birds per day. Things started to pick-up with the start of Saw-whet Owl monitoring in mid-September.

Twelve volunteers contributed a total of 318 volunteer days.



**Thunder Cape night birds (painting by Chris Sukha).**

#### WATERFOWL

The first **Red-throated Loon** of the season was observed on Aug. 29. An additional 37 birds were observed between Sept. 11 and Oct. 15. **Common Loon** were observed most days, with peak numbers (63) seen on Sept. 12 and a mean of 9 observed per day. **Horned Grebe** were first observed on Aug. 7, with peak numbers (87) seen on Sept. 11 and the last on Oct. 25. **Red-necked Grebe** were observed most days, with peak numbers (89) observed on Sept. 11 and the last observed on Oct. 25. **American White Pelican** were observed on Aug. 21 only. **Double-crested Cormorant** were observed most days until early-October, with peak numbers (253) observed on Aug. 18. A mean of 89 birds were observed daily in Aug. and an average of 2 per day were observed in Sept. Highest numbers

of **Canada Geese** were observed during the last 3 weeks of Sept. Small numbers of **American Wigeon**, **Mallard**, **Blue-winged Teal** and **Green-winged Teal** were observed on scattered occasions. **Greater Scaup** were observed migrating from mid-September to late-October. The first **White-winged Scoter** this season was observed on Sept. 12 but were not observed regularly until after Oct. 8. **Bufflehead** were observed on Oct. 10 only. **Common Merganser** were scarce in August but were observed most days thereafter. Peak migration was observed on Oct. 22 when 3,090 were observed heading south. **Red-breasted Merganser** were almost totally absent in August but were observed most days after Sept. 8. Peak numbers (226) were seen on Oct. 22. Small numbers of **Common Goldeneye** were observed Aug. & Oct. but were totally absent in Sept.

#### RAPTORS

**Turkey Vulture** were observed between Aug. 5 and Oct. 20, more commonly after mid-Sept., with peak numbers (55) seen on Oct. 16. Thirteen **Osprey** were observed migrating between Aug. 27 and Oct. 4. **Bald Eagle** were observed most days, the pair nesting on nearby Hare Island returned again this year. Highest numbers (48) were seen on Oct. 17. Peak numbers (173) of **Sharp-shinned Hawk** were observed on Aug. 30. The first of the season was observed & banded on Aug. 8. The last of the season was observed on October 20. Above average numbers (385) were banded, the third highest banding total in 21 years. 185 were banded during the standard count period and 200 were banded outside of the standard count period using audio playback. Small numbers of **Broad-winged Hawk** began appearing on Aug. 17. Maximum numbers (133) were seen on Sept. 15 and the last of the season was observed on Oct. 7. Sixty-four **Red-tailed Hawk** and 4 **Rough-legged Hawk** were observed in October. Seven **Golden Eagle** were observed



between Oct. 10 and Oct. 19. **American Kestrel** were regularly observed from the last week of August through early-October with peak numbers (19) seen on Sept 8. The last of the season was seen on October Oct. 15. Small numbers of **Merlin** were observed most days, again a pair nested not far from the observatory. The last of the season was seen on October 16. Maximum numbers were seen on Sept. 21. Small numbers of **Peregrine Falcon** were also observed most days from Aug. 1 through October 9 when the last of the season was observed. The Peregrines observed in the first half of Aug. were all likely a family of birds that nested nearby. The first **Northern Saw-whet Owl** of the season was banded on September 16; maximum numbers (122) were captured on the night of Sept. 22/23. Record high numbers (781) were banded this season.

#### WOODPECKERS

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** were present between Sept. 13 and Oct. 20, above average numbers were banded (18). **Downy Woodpecker** were virtually absent until mid-Sept. They were encountered regularly in small numbers throughout the rest of Sept. and Oct. Peak numbers (10) were observed on Oct. 6. Only 4 were banded, the lowest fall banding total ever for this species. **Hairy Woodpecker** were absent in Aug. and Sept. and scarce throughout Oct. Peak numbers (7) were seen on Oct. 19. Well below average numbers were banded (2). The first **Black-backed Woodpecker** of the season was observed on Aug. 25 though they were scarce until Oct. Peak numbers (23) were seen on Oct. 18. Average numbers were banded. Three **American Three-toed Woodpecker** were banded this season between Oct. 6 and Oct. 21. Well below average numbers of **Yellow-shafted Flicker** were banded (6) this season. They were scarce until mid-Sept. and were then present in small numbers until the last observed on Oct. 18. Maximum numbers (13)

were observed on Oct. 6. **Pileated Woodpecker** were sporadically observed between Sept. 8 and Oct. 23. Average numbers were banded (8) this season.



**Volunteers Cathryn Hoo, April Bartelt & Chris Davidson on watch**

#### PASSERINES

Eighty-two **Olive-sided Flycatcher** were documented between Aug. 7 and Aug. 26, 2 were banded. Small numbers of **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** were observed between Aug. 4 and Sept. 3, below average numbers were banded. **Traill's Flycatcher** were observed between Aug. 2 and Sept. 1, below average numbers were banded. **Least Flycatchers** were observed between Aug. 13 and Sept. 24, below average numbers were banded. The first **Eastern Kingbird** of the season was observed on Aug. 1 and the last was observed on Sept. 9. Small numbers of **Red-eyed Vireo** were observed between Aug. 1 and Sept. 25. Well below average numbers were banded. Only one **Gray Jay** was observed this season in stark contrast to the hundreds observed in 2010. **Blue Jay** were scarce until the second week of Sept. but were common from Sept. 8 to Oct. 9. Peak numbers (391 & 386) were observed on Sept. 20 & Sept. 23 respectively. Well below average numbers were banded. The first **Horned Lark** of the season were observed on Sept. 23 and

were seen regularly to the end of the season. Peak numbers (86) were seen on Oct. 19. Above average numbers were banded (41) this season. **Black-capped Chickadee** were present in small numbers the entire season. Peak numbers (26) were observed on Sept. 17. Well below average numbers were banded (25). No **Boreal Chickadee** were observed this season. **Red-breasted Nuthatch** were common throughout the count period with highest numbers seen in the last half of Sept. and first half of Oct. Peak numbers were recorded on Oct. 6. Well below average numbers were banded (52). **Brown Creeper** were practically absent until mid-Sept. Small numbers were encountered to the end of the season. Below average numbers were banded. **Winter Wren** were also almost totally absent until mid-Sept. Well below average numbers were banded (2). **Golden-crowned Kinglet** were uncommon until mid-September. Peak numbers (40) were seen on Oct. 6. Well below average numbers were banded. **Ruby-crowned kinglet** were scarce until the third week of Sept. Well below average numbers were banded. **Eastern Bluebird** were encountered only between Oct. 9 and Oct. 20. None were banded. Small numbers of **Swainson's Thrush** were seen between Aug. 7 and Oct. 1, peak numbers (13) were observed on Sept. The number banded (66) was about half the previous 20 year average of 133. Small numbers of **Hermit Thrush** were observed sporadically between Aug. 5 and Oct. 20. The number banded (14) was above average. **American Robin** were scarce throughout Aug. and most of Sept. Migratory flocks started appearing Sept. 20. Peak numbers (502) were observed on Oct. 10. Below average numbers were banded (9). The first **American Pipit** of the season was observed on Sept. 14 and the last on Oct. 19. They were encountered most days during the last 2 weeks of Sept. and the first 3 weeks of Oct. Peak numbers (155) were observed on Sept. 27. No **Bohemian Waxwings** were

encountered this season. **Cedar Waxwings** were common to abundant most of the season with peak numbers observed (897) on Sept. 25. The last of the season was banded on Oct. 25. Well below average numbers were banded.

#### WARBLERS

Very small numbers of **Tennessee Warbler** were observed at irregular intervals during Aug. and Sept. with peak numbers (23) occurring on Sept. 20. The last was observed on Sept. 28 (same date as last year). Well below average numbers were banded (33). There were only 6 days when **Orange-crowned Warbler** were observed. Well below average numbers were banded. The last of the season was observed on Oct. 16. Small numbers of **Nashville Warbler** were observed until mid-Aug. but were encountered irregularly most of the remainder of the season. Peak numbers were observed on Sept. 20. Below average numbers were banded. **Yellow Warbler** were scarce the entire season. The last was observed on Sept. 22. Below average numbers were banded. **Chestnut-sided Warbler** observations were sporadic and scarce with the last seen on Sept. 7. **Magnolia Warbler** were common the first 2 weeks of Aug. and scarce thereafter. The last was observed on Sept. 25. Below average numbers were banded. A few **Cape May Warbler** were sporadically observed the first half of Aug. with the last observation on Sept. 21. Well below average numbers were banded. **Black-throated Blue Warbler** were occasionally encountered between Aug. 11 and Sept. 22. Below average numbers were banded. **Myrtle Warbler** were common until Aug. 16 but were then scarce until mid-Sept. after which they were common to the end of Sept. Peak numbers (80) were observed on Sept. 20. The last of the season was observed on Oct. 19. The number banded (102) was well below the previous 20 year average of 207. Small numbers of **Black-throated Green**

**Warbler** were encountered during Aug. and Sept. with peak numbers (16) seen on Sept. 20. The last observation was made on Oct. 15. Well below average numbers were banded this fall. Most of the **Blackburnian Warbler** this season were encountered in the first 2 weeks of Aug., with the last of the season observed on Sept. 20. Well below average numbers were banded. **Western Palm Warbler** were first encountered on Aug. 19 but were not common until early-Sept., with the last of the season observed on Oct. 19. Peak numbers (84) were seen on Sept. 20. Below average numbers were banded this fall. **Bay-breasted Warbler** were almost totally absent this season with only 2 observation made in Aug. and 8 in Sept. Well below average numbers were banded. The last was observed on Sept. 22. The first **Blackpoll Warbler** of the season was observed on Aug. 5 and the last on Oct. 4. Well below average numbers were banded. Small numbers of **Black and White Warbler** were encountered regularly in Aug. but were practically absent thereafter. Peak numbers (8) were observed on Aug. 8 and the last of the season was seen on Sept. 7. Below average numbers were banded. **American Redstart** were fairly common throughout Aug. but uncommon the rest of the season. Peak numbers (20) were seen on Aug. 14 and the last of the season observed on Sept. 26. Below average numbers were banded. Small numbers of **Ovenbird** were encountered irregularly from Aug. 4 to Sept. 13. Below average numbers were banded. Fair numbers of **Northern Waterthrush** were clustered in mid-Aug. and small numbers were sporadically observed until the last on Sept. 19. Peak numbers (71) were seen on Aug. 22. Well above average numbers were banded (169). **Mourning Warbler** were uncommon, encountered irregularly between Aug. 2 and the last on Sept. 20, below average numbers were banded. One or two **Common Yellowthroat** were encountered almost daily throughout Aug. Observations were more

scattered in Sept. with the last seen on Oct. 9. Below average numbers were banded.

**Wilson's Warbler** observations were scarce with only 7 encountered in Aug., 2 in Sept., with the last seen on Sept. 2. Well below average numbers were banded. A few **Canada Warbler** were encountered most days during the first 3 week of Aug. but were scarce thereafter. The last was observed on Sept. 3. Below average numbers were banded.

#### SPARROWS

**American Tree Sparrow** were common between Oct. 17 and Oct. 25. Peak numbers were observed on Oct. 19. Below average numbers were banded. **Chipping Sparrow** were very common most days during the first 3 weeks of August but were scarce thereafter. None were encountered between Aug. 27 and Sept. 17. Peak numbers (52) were observed on Aug. 20 and the last of the season was observed on Oct. 9. Close to average numbers were banded. **Savannah Sparrow** were encountered most days between Aug. 21 and Oct. 10, with peak numbers (44) observed on Sept. 23 and the last of the season observed on Oct. 17. Average numbers (141) were banded. **Song Sparrow** were very common throughout August and early Sept. Peak numbers were observed on Aug. 16 and the last observation was on Oct. 22. Slightly below average numbers were banded. Small numbers of **Lincoln's Sparrow** were observed from late Aug. through late-Oct. with peak numbers (8) seen on Sept. 20. Above average numbers were banded. **Swamp Sparrow** were encountered at well spaced intervals throughout Sept. and Oct. Below average numbers were banded. Fair numbers of **White-throated Sparrow** were observed most days throughout Aug. and Sept. The last of the season was seen on Oct. 16. Average numbers were banded. **White-crowned Sparrow** were encountered most days between Sept. 17 and Oct. 23 with the 'Gambel's subspecies outnumbering the

'Eastern' subspecies. Well above average numbers were banded. Small numbers of **Slate-colored Junco** were encountered in Aug. and Sept and common throughout Oct. Peak numbers were (779) observed on Oct. 4. Below average numbers were banded.

#### Other PASSERINES

**Lapland Longspur** were first observed on Sept. 16, peak numbers (230) were seen on Oct. 17, and the last was observed on Oct. 24. Above average numbers were banded. The first **Snow Bunting** of the season was observed on Oct. 3, peak numbers (24) were seen on Oct. 18. Well below average numbers were banded. **Red-winged Blackbird** were common most days throughout Aug. but virtually absent thereafter. The last of the season was observed on Sept. 20. Record high numbers were banded. The first **Rusty Blackbird** of the season was documented on Sept. 9. Greatest numbers were encountered the last half of Sept. and the first half of Oct. with peak numbers (1,135) seen on Oct. 9. **Common Grackle**, first observed on Aug. 11, were very common after the first week of Sept. and encountered regularly the remainder of the season. Peak numbers (360) were seen on Sept. 23. Above average numbers were banded. **Common Redpoll** first appeared on Oct. 19 and were abundant to the end of the season. Well above average numbers were banded. Fair numbers of **Pine Siskin** were observed during the first half of Aug. None were observed between Aug. 17 and Sept. 6 but fair numbers were commonly observed thereafter. Peak numbers (827) were seen on Sept. 27. Well below average numbers were banded. Small numbers of **American Goldfinch** were seen in Aug. and Sept. Small flocks began appearing Sept. 20 with peak numbers (37) seen on Sept. 25. Well below average numbers were banded.

#### FALL HIGHLIGHTS

First ever banded at the Cape in the fall:

#### American Golden Plover (1)



Aerial view of Thunder Cape, February 2012.

Highest totals banded at the Cape in the fall:

Northern Saw-whet Owl (781)

Oregon Junco (6)

Red-winged Blackbird (21)

#### Other Highlights

Red-throated Loon – 38 Aug. 29 - Oct. 15

Wood Duck – 2 on Aug. 18

Redhead – small flocks Sept. 25, Oct. 3 & 9

Harlequin Duck – 2 on Oct. 22

Parasitic Jaeger – Sept. 21

Great Egret – Aug. 7, a new species for TCBO

Cooper's Hawk – 8

Caspian Tern – Aug. 4 & 5, and 5 on Aug. 9

Sora – one banded Sept. 3

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – Sept. 21 (last)

Boreal Owl – one banded Sept. 27

Red-bellied Woodpecker – Oct. 18

American Three-toed Woodpecker – 11

Northern Rough-winged Swallow – Aug. 17

Eastern Phoebe – 3 mid-Aug.

Gray Catbird – Oct. 11 & 12

Townsend's Solitaire – Oct. 4

Connecticut Warbler – banded Aug. 22, 24

Yellow-headed Blackbird – Aug. 20 & Sept. 2

Orchard Oriole – Sept. 23

House Finch – Oct. 2 and Oct. 16 & 17

**Table 1. Fall totals of individuals and species/forms banded (1997-2011), mean of 1991 through 2010.**

Year	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	Mean
individuals	3719	4321	3383	3521	7819	4921	6817	5333	7124	4502	6844	2322	4063	2482	4879	5024
Species	93	112	91	100	112	94	97	92	101	92	93	89	101	89	92	95

**Table 2. The 20 most abundant birds banded in the fall 2011, with comparative totals from previous years.**

Rank	Species (overall fall ranking 1991 –2010)	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002
1	Northern Saw-whet Owl (3)	781	625	449	227	481	422	360	137	573	413
2	Sharp-shinned Hawk (7)	385	195	103	127	119	60	126	94	203	119
3	Slate-colored Junco (2)	312	110	66	139	403	47	515	886	487	138
4	Northern Waterthrush (18)	169	95	51	80	93	192	155	51	70	118
5	Nashville Warbler (8)	155	110	205	194	592	195	792	189	171	96
6	Savannah Sparrow (11)	141	388	99	127	268	208	269	102	204	192
7	American Redstart (6)	126	86	125	138	261	181	149	91	253	217
8	Western Palm Warbler (4)	111	104	100	215	388	218	304	133	380	195
9	Myrtle Warbler (5)	102	94	185	181	371	258	466	184	343	161
10	Chipping Sparrow (13)	96	79	146	149	245	266	190	86	74	127
12	Golden-crowned Kinglet (10)	75	59	108	260	92	587	213	485	117	383
11	Swainson's Thrush (12)	66	249	148	73	363	97	153	116	273	60
13	Common Redpoll (55)	61	1	0	2	28	6	0	0	3	0
14a	Magnolia Warbler (17)	57	39	53	79	123	92	103	64	82	68
14b	Song Sparrow (22)	57	72	46	32	103	81	77	53	98	75
15	Lapland Longspur (35)	53	19	8	15	56	16	79	47	41	188
16	Red-breasted Nuthatch (14)	52	28	95	84	137	182	47	170	143	19
17a	Traill's Flycatcher (24)	51	81	45	53	159	52	109	45	48	32
17b	White-throated Sparrow (29)	51	54	40	32	129	74	36	31	38	45
18	Lincoln's Sparrow (32)	47	59	28	41	86	37	55	52	73	38

#### STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

John Woodcock has returned to Thunder Cape for his 10<sup>th</sup> year as Program Coordinator for fall migration monitoring.

Many thanks to the 12 volunteers who contributed a total of 318 volunteer days to assist running programs this season:

- 1 month or more: Chris Sukha, K. Hoo, Chris Davidson, M. Borders & April Bartelt

- 2 to 4 weeks: S. Casutt, Derek Connelly
- 1 to 13 days: Nick Escott, Sarah Malick, Aileen Rapson, L. Jennings & Chris Risley

Our volunteers came from and Thunder Bay, South Carolina, Minnesota & southern Ontario

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources provided funding through a Community Fish and Wildlife Involvement Program grant and a Species at Risk Stewardship Fund grant.





**October 2012 crew: April Bartelt. Chris Davidson. Kathrvn Hoo. Derek Connellv. Chris Sukha & John Woodcock**

**A WORD OF THANKS**

We thank Al Comeau and the Staff of Sleeping Giant Park, the TCBO Committee, Brian Moore, Maureen Woodcock, Allan Gilbert and Sharon Gilbert for their generous support. For their help with the new siding on the main cabin we thank Jim Dyson, Allan Gilbert, Tony Gilies, Dale Shippam, Walter Kuch & Janet Kuch.

**ABOUT THE CAPE**



Thunder Cape Bird Observatory 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.

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