

# Thunder Cape News

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by John Woodcock

## FALL 2012 SYNOPSIS

Fall migration monitoring began on August 1 and ran continuously until October 25. Similar to the fall of 2011, this was a below average banding season (6<sup>th</sup> lowest banding total of 22 years) with 3,561 birds banded of 96 species/forms. There were three days when over 100 birds were banded during the standard count period (Oct. 11, 19 & 21). On Oct. 11 there was a fallout of Black-capped Chickadees, Golden-crowned Kinglets and Slate-colored Juncos. On Oct. 19 there was an eruption of Black-capped Chickadees. Oct. 21 brought good numbers of Black-capped Chickadees and Slate-colored Juncos. The peak species date was Aug. 18 when 57 species were documented. The highest estimated total (ET) occurred on Sept. 24, attributable mainly to over 1,800 Scaup that migrated through that day. The most abundant species banded was Northern Saw-whet Owl with 622 banded, the fourth highest banding total in TCBO's 22 years of operation. There were record low numbers of Black-throated Blue Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Swamp Sparrow and Snow Bunting banded and lower than average numbers of most warblers. Semipalmated



Plover was banded for the first time this season.



**Semipalmated Plover banded on Aug 18**

Warm, summer weather prevailed until about mid-September when there was an abrupt change to cooler, windy weather that continued to the end of the season.

Ten volunteers contributed a total of 307 volunteer days.

We had two groups of MNR rangers visit for a few days each for educational experiences in

exchange for help with trimming vegetation. A trio of otters took up residence in our rock crib for a week providing all with ample photo opportunities. We watched a young black bear swimming the 10 km crossing from Pie Island. A film crew from Blue Ant Media visited for a day to capture the essence of Thunder Cape to be included in a documentary on Sleeping Giant Provincial Park to be aired on TVO, perhaps in June 2013.



**Black Bear after swimming from Pie Island**

#### WATERFOWL

The first **Red-throated Loon** of the fall was observed on Aug. 12. An additional 15 birds were observed between Aug. 14 and Sept. 12. **Common Loon** were observed most days, with peak numbers (26) seen on Aug. 28 and a mean of seven observed per day. **Horned Grebe** were first observed on Aug. 2, with peak numbers (14) seen on Sept. 12 and the last on Oct. 20. **Red-necked Grebe** were observed most days, with peak numbers (116) observed on Aug. 26 and the last observed on Oct. 24. **American White Pelican** (7) were observed on Oct. 5 only. **Double-crested Cormorant** were observed most days until late-Sept., with peak numbers (160) observed on Aug. 3. A mean of 62 birds were observed daily in Aug. and an average of five per day were observed in Sept. Highest numbers of **Canada Geese** were observed in mid-Sept.

Small numbers of **American Wigeon** and **Mallard** were observed on scattered occasions. Only one **Green-winged Teal** was observed this fall. Two amazing flocks of 150 and 40 **Blue-winged Teal** flew past on Aug. 26. **Greater Scaup** were observed between Sept. 10 and Oct. 17. Large numbers were observed Sept. 24 and 27; 1,398 and 540 respectively. The first **White-winged Scoter** this season was observed on Aug. 13 but this species was not observed again until Sept. 20. **Bufflehead** were observed on Oct. 23 & 24 only. **Common Merganser** were observed most days. Peak migration was observed on Oct. 23 when 513 were observed. **Red-breasted Merganser** were scarce most of the season. **Common Goldeneye** were observed most days in Aug. & Sept. but were scarce throughout Oct.

#### RAPTORS

**Turkey Vulture** were observed between Aug. 10 and Oct. 22 most commonly in late-Sept. and early-Oct., with peak numbers (18) seen on Oct. 8. Five **Osprey** were observed migrating between Aug. 21 and Sept. 14. **Bald Eagle** were observed most days, the pair nesting on nearby Hare Island returned again this year. Highest numbers (23) were seen on Oct. 22. Peak numbers (170) of **Sharp-shinned Hawk** were observed on Aug. 29. The first of the season was observed and banded on Aug. 1. The last of the season was observed on October 22. The number banded (266) was above average (212) although 156 were banded outside of the standard count period (mid-afternoon) using audio playback starting in the afternoon. **Broad-winged Hawk** were observed between Aug. 15 and Sept. 26. Maximum numbers (97) were seen on Sept. 7. Nineteen **Red-tailed Hawk** were observed between Aug. 28 and Sept. 15. Eleven **Rough-legged Hawk** were observed between Oct. 10 and Oct. 24. Four **Golden Eagle** were observed between Oct. 10 and Oct. 20. An early **American Kestrel** was



observed on Aug. 1, otherwise the first of the season occurred on Aug. 23 and the last of the season was seen on Oct. 11 with peak numbers (6) seen on Sept 17. Small numbers of **Merlin** were observed most days between Aug. 1 and Oct. 12, again a pair nested not far from the observatory. Small numbers of **Peregrine Falcon** were observed from Aug. 23 through October 9 when the last of the season was observed. Highest numbers (97) of **Northern Saw-whet Owl** were banded on the night of Sept. 17/18, an early date to be seeing such high numbers of birds. The same night a record high number of birds (47) were captured in one 45 minute trapping session. The number banded this season (622) was well above average (359).



**Least Sandpiper**

#### WOODPECKERS

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** were observed between Sept. 14 and Oct. 3, the number banded (4) was below average (11). **Downy Woodpecker** were scarce until mid-Sept. They were encountered regularly in fair numbers throughout the rest of Sept. and Oct. Peak numbers (42) were observed on Oct. 20. The number banded (29) was below average (84). Except for two observed on Sept. 28 **Hairy Woodpecker** were absent all season and none were banded, the first time this happened since 1999. **Black-backed**

**Woodpecker** were also scarce this season, only 2 were banded, well below the average of 18. **Yellow-shafted Flicker** were common during the second half of Sept. only. The number banded (11) was below average (18). Maximum numbers (23) were observed on Sept. 23. **Pileated Woodpecker** were sporadically observed between Aug. 23 and Oct. 15. Average numbers were banded (6) this season.

#### PASSERINES

Forty-five **Olive-sided Flycatcher** were documented between Aug. 7 and Aug. 26, only one was banded. Small numbers of **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** were observed between Aug. 7 and Sept. 13, the number banded (15) was below average (25). **Trail's Flycatcher** were observed between Aug. 2 and Sept. 22. The number banded (75) was above average (64). **Least Flycatchers** were observed between Aug. 3 and Aug. 28. The number banded (13) was below average (18). The first **Eastern Kingbird** of the season was observed on Aug. 9 and the last was observed on Sept. 13. **Red-eyed Vireo** were observed between Aug. 4 and Oct. 22. The number banded (24) was below average (39).

No **Gray Jay** were observed this season. **Blue Jay** were scarce until the third week of Aug. but were common thereafter. Peak numbers (341) were observed on Sept. 21. The number banded (41) was below average (55). One **Horned Lark** was observed on Sept. 15 but no more were seen until Oct. 3. Peak numbers (148) were seen on Oct. 4. The number banded (108) was above average (37). **Black-capped Chickadee** were present in small numbers in Aug. The number observed each day greatly increased around mid-Sept. Peak numbers (1,141) were observed on Oct. 19. The number banded (516) was about average (498). A few **Boreal Chickadee** were observed in Oct., with peak numbers observed on Oct. 20. **Red-breasted Nuthatch** were

common all season. Peak numbers (45) were recorded on Aug. 25. The number banded (40) was well below average (109). **Brown Creeper** were sporadically present most of the season. The number banded (66) was below average (97). **Winter Wren** were also sporadically present most of the season. The number banded (8) was below average (12). **Golden-crowned Kinglet** were uncommon until early Oct. Peak numbers (43) were seen on Oct. 11. The number banded (107) was below average (171). **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** were scarce the entire season. The number banded (12) was well below average (70). **Eastern Bluebird** were encountered only between Oct. 10 and Oct. 19. The number banded (8) was above average (2). **Swainson's Thrush** were encountered most days between Aug. 1 and Sept. 25, peak numbers (19) were observed on Sept. 5. The number banded (127) was about average (132). Small numbers of **Hermit Thrush** were observed sporadically between Aug. 2 and Oct. 17. The number banded (13) was about average (14). **American Robin** were scarce until late Sept. The first migrating flocks appeared on Sept. 28. Peak numbers (437) were observed on Oct. 11. The number banded (28) was double the average (14). The first **American Pipit** of the season was observed on Sept. 14 and the last on Oct. 6. Peak numbers (57) were observed on Sept. 22. No **Bohemian Waxwings** were encountered this season. **Cedar Waxwings** were common to abundant until early Oct. with peak numbers observed (293) on Sept. 26. The last of the season was observed on Oct. 22. The number banded (18) was below average (43).

#### WARBLERS

Small numbers of **Tennessee Warbler** were observed between Aug. 12 and Sept. 6 with peak numbers (24) on Sept. 26. The number banded (20) was well below average (163). Only 6 **Orange-crowned Warbler** were observed this season. The number banded (3)

was well below average (18). The last of the season was observed on Oct. 7. Small numbers of **Nashville Warbler** were observed between Aug. 1 and the last on Sept. 21. Peak numbers (21) were observed on Aug. 25. The number banded (48) was well below average (188). **Yellow Warbler** were regularly encountered the first half of Aug. but were scarce thereafter. The last was observed on Sept. 5. The number banded (12) was close to average (13). **Chestnut-sided Warbler** were sporadically observed between Aug. 10 and Aug. 25 when the last was seen. Small numbers of **Magnolia Warbler** were encountered throughout Aug. and were scarce thereafter. The last was observed on Sept. 28. The number banded (38) was below average (84). Small numbers of **Cape May Warbler** were observed between Aug. 2 and the last observation on Aug 27. The number banded (12) was below average (43). Only five **Black-throated Blue Warbler** were encountered this season. The number banded (3) was well below average (15). The last of the season was observed on Sept. 6. **Myrtle Warbler** were fairly common throughout Aug. but were scarce thereafter. Peak numbers (19) were observed on Aug. 15. The last of the season was observed on Oct. 1. The number banded (102) was well below average (198). Small numbers of **Black-throated Green Warbler** were encountered during Aug. with peak numbers (27) seen on Aug. 25. The last observation was made on Sept. 4. The number banded (28) was below average (61). **Blackburnian Warbler** were encountered only between Aug. 6 and Aug. 25. The number banded (7) was below average (21). The first **Western Palm Warbler** was encountered on Aug. 25 and last of the season observed on Oct. 10. Peak numbers (27) were seen on Sept. 21. The number banded (38) was well below average (200). **Bay-breasted Warbler** were scarce this season with only 6 observations, all made in Aug. The number banded (5) was below average (17). The last

was observed on Aug. 23. The first **Blackpoll Warbler** of the season was observed on Aug. 18 and the last on Sept. 13. The number banded (7) was well below average (60). **Black and White Warbler** were encountered most days in Aug. but were scarce thereafter. Peak numbers (15) were observed on Aug. 7 and the last of the season was seen on Sept. 13. The number banded (56) was close to average (63). **American Redstart** were common throughout most of Aug. but uncommon the rest of the season. Peak numbers (81) were seen on Aug. 15 and the last of the season observed on Sept. 27. The number banded (121) was below average (191). Small numbers of **Ovenbird** were encountered irregularly from Aug. 1 to Sept. 18. The number banded (15) was below average (27).



**LeConte's Sparrow**

Fair numbers of **Northern Waterthrush** were observed in Aug. and small numbers were sporadically encountered until the last on Oct. 1. Peak numbers (26) were seen on Aug. 18. The number banded (84) was average (83). Small numbers of **Mourning Warbler** were encountered irregularly between Aug. 9 and the last on Aug. 31. The number banded (15) was below average (26). Only four **Common Yellowthroat** were encountered this season. The last was seen on Oct. 1. The number banded (1) was well below average (13).

**Wilson's Warbler** observations were scarce with only six encountered in Aug. and 5 in Sept. with the last seen on Sept. 16. The number banded (8) was below average (18). At least a few **Canada Warbler** were encountered most days during Aug. Peak numbers were encountered on Aug. 15. The last was observed on Aug. 27. The number banded (38) was close to average (41).

## SPARROWS

**American Tree Sparrow** were uncommon this year. Peak numbers were observed on Oct. 21. The number banded (22) was well below average (71). **Chipping Sparrow** were very common most days during the first three weeks of August but were scarce thereafter. Peak numbers (56) were observed on Aug. 7 and the last of the season was observed on Sept. 28. The number banded (54) was below average (111). **Savannah Sparrow** were encountered most days in Sept. and Oct. with peak numbers (44) observed on Sept. 14 and the last of the season observed on Oct. 21. The number banded (143) was close to average (154). **Song Sparrow** were very common throughout August and present to the end of the season. Peak numbers (18) were observed on Aug. 14. The number banded (68) was average (68). Small numbers of **Lincoln's Sparrow** were observed between Aug. 24 and Oct. 15 with peak numbers (6) seen on Sept. 26. The number banded (27) was below average (43). Small numbers of **Swamp Sparrow** were encountered between Sept. 14 and Oct. 24. The number banded (11) was below average (28). **White-throated Sparrow** were common throughout Aug. and Sept. and observed most days until the end of the season. The number banded (72) was well above average (49). **White-crowned Sparrow** were encountered most days between Sept. 11 and Oct. 22 with the 'Gambel's subspecies outnumbering the 'Eastern' subspecies. The number banded was above average. Small numbers of **Slate-**

**colored Junco** were encountered from Aug. 8 to early-Oct. when larger numbers began appearing. Peak numbers were (100) observed on Oct. 21. The number banded (134) was below average (369).

#### OTHER PASSERINES

**Lapland Longspur** were first observed on Sept. 23, peak numbers were seen on the same day and the last was observed on Oct. 25. The number banded (38) was above average (33). The first **Snow Bunting** of the season was observed on Oct. 12, peak numbers (37) were seen on Oct. 24. None were banded. **Red-winged Blackbird** were common most days throughout Aug. and Sept. but scarce thereafter. The last of the season was observed on Oct. 12. The number banded (13) was above average (6). The first **Rusty Blackbird** of the season was documented on Aug. 27 and the last on Oct. 24. Peak numbers (186) seen on Oct. 4. **Common Grackle** were first observed on Aug. 14 and were very common after Sept. 6. Peak numbers (197) were seen on Sept. 14. The number banded (10) was average (10). The first **Common Redpoll** appeared on Oct. 15. The number banded (2) was below average (17). **Red Crossbill** were abundant throughout much of Aug. in flocks of 10 to 100, all heading west. The last flock was observed on Sept. 4. Peak numbers (333) were observed on Aug. 23. None were banded. **Pine Siskin** were scarce until mid-Sept. but then were fairly common to the end of the season. Peak numbers (430) were seen on Sept. 24. The number banded (24) was above average (20). Small numbers of **American Goldfinch** were observed throughout most of the season. Peak numbers (37) seen on Sept. 15. The number banded (16) was average (15).

#### FALL HIGHLIGHTS

First ever banded at the Cape:

- **Semipalmated Plover** (1) Aug. 18

Highest totals banded at the Cape in the fall:

- **Semipalmated Sandpiper** (9)
- **Least Sandpiper** (8)
- **European Starling** (2)

#### Other Highlights

- **Red-throated Loon** – 16 between Aug. 12 and Sept. 12
- **American White Pelican** – 7 on Oct. 5
- **Gadwall** – 3 on Aug. 26, 2 on Sept. 30
- **Redhead** – 35, 40 & 175 on Sept. 24, 27 & Oct. 3 respectively
- **Blue-winged Teal** – 192 on Aug. 26
- **Cooper's Hawk** – 4 on Aug. 29
- **Common Tern** – one observed Aug. 6
- **Bonaparte's Gull** – 4 observed Aug. 6
- **Pectoral Sandpiper** – Sept. 23 & 24
- **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** – Sept. 20 the last of the season was observed
- **Boreal Owl** – one banded Oct. 15
- **Red-bellied Woodpecker** – Oct. 22
- **White-breasted Nuthatch** – 5 banded between Oct. 10 & 22 and 21 betw. Oct. 6 & 22
- **Black-billed Cuckoo** – one banded Sept. 17 & one observed Sept. 26
- **Eastern Phoebe** – Aug. 31
- **Eastern Wood-Pewee** – 1 on Aug. 10
- **Bobolink** – one banded Oct. 1
- **Northern Cardinal** – one banded Oct. 21
- **Leconte's Sparrow** – Oct. 8 & 11
- **Oregon Junco** – one banded Oct. 1
- **Monarch Butterfly** – Sept. 13 the last of the season was observed

**Table 1. Fall totals of individuals and species/forms banded (1998-2012), mean of 1991 through 2011.**

Year	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	Mean
Individuals	3561	3719	4321	3383	3521	7819	4921	6817	5333	7124	4502	6844	2322	4063	2482	4944
Species	96	93	112	91	100	112	94	97	92	101	92	93	89	101	89	95

**Table 2. The 20 most abundant birds banded in the fall 2012, with comparative totals from previous years.**

Rank 2012	Species (overall fall ranking 1991–2011)	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
1	Northern Saw-whet Owl (1)	622	781	625	449	227	481	422	360	137	573
2	Black-capped Chickadee (29)	516	25	285	63	116	483	203	70	545	1143
3	Sharp-shinned Hawk (2)	266	385	195	103	127	119	60	126	94	203
4	Savannah Sparrow (6)	143	141	388	99	127	268	208	269	102	204
5	Slate-colored Junco (3)	134	312	110	66	139	403	47	515	886	487
6	Swainson's Thrush (11)	127	66	249	148	73	363	97	153	116	273
7	American Redstart (7)	121	126	86	125	138	261	181	149	91	253
8	Horned Lark (21)	108	41	39	14	7	100	10	172	32	52
9	Golden-crowned Kinglet (12)	107	75	59	108	260	92	587	213	485	117
10	Northern Waterthrush (4)	84	169	95	51	80	93	192	155	51	70
11	Trail's Flycatcher (18)	75	51	81	45	53	159	52	109	45	48
12	White-throated Sparrow (19)	72	51	54	40	32	129	74	36	31	38
13	Song Sparrow (14)	68	57	72	46	32	103	81	77	53	98
14	Brown Creeper (23)	66	40	74	149	176	134	192	156	119	130
15	Black-and-White Warbler (26)	56	29	43	53	64	140	76	84	45	78
16	Chipping Sparrow (10)	54	96	79	146	149	245	266	190	86	74
17	Myrtle Warbler (9)	50	102	94	185	181	371	258	466	184	343
18	Nashville Warbler (5)	48	155	110	205	194	592	195	792	189	171
19	Blue Jay (30)	41	24	112	43	58	202	72	157	83	90
20	Red-breasted Nuthatch (17)	40	52	28	95	84	137	182	47	170	143

**STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

Many thanks to all the volunteers who contributed a total of 308 volunteer days to assist running migration monitoring programs this season:

1 month or more: Patricia Burri, Scott Pynn, Gillian Holmes, Devin Fischer, Claudia Fleuter and Rachel Davenport

1 to 13 days: Darren Elder and Ted Armstrong

Our volunteers came from Switzerland, England, Germany, and Ontario: Courtice, London, Toronto and Thunder Bay.

We thank the Staff of Sleeping Giant Park and the TCBO Committee for their support. For their help with transporting volunteers we thank Brian Moore, Maureen Woodcock, Allan and Sharon Gilbert. The Saxberg family at the Silver Islet General Store provided parking space.





Fall 2012 crew: Claudia Fleuter, Rachel Davenport, John Woodcock and Devon Fischer

**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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Committee (a subcommittee of the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists).

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