

Thunder Cape News

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by **Rinchen Boardman**

SPRING 2013 SYNOPSIS

For the past 22 continuous years, migration monitoring has been undertaken by a small group of qualified banders and volunteers adhering to a standardised protocol. The spring season runs annually for a period of 35 days commencing, as access allows, in the later week of April and running into early June. Records of all captured avian individuals and those utilising a defined area encountered by personnel throughout a seven hour period are compiled. Each day begins one half hour before sunrise. A constant watch is maintained for six of these hours commencing at sunrise. Birds are captured in 14 mist nets, 8 hawk nets, two Heligoland traps, a Jay-trap and eight ground traps. Each trap and net is located in the same location each year. Vegetation in proximity to these is maintained as best as conditions allow providing uniform conditions each year.

Winter was severe and extended over much of eastern North America in 2014. Most of Lake Superior was ice covered due to constant well below freezing



temperatures. There were also record amounts of snow fall. As a consequence, the station was not able to open until May 7. On May 6 we were able to boat in travelling through areas of drifting ice. Pack ice continued well into May and snow covered many of our net lanes for more than two weeks after our season opening. This year's opening date represents about a 10 day delay in our migration monitoring programme.



Blackburnian Warbler

Our spring 2014 standard protocol banding effort produced 1488 individuals of 74 species/forms. It must be said in this note that there were no interruptions of any species over the course of the season. Over the past years Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees, Chipping Sparrows, Savannah Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, Slate-coloured Juncos and Pine Siskins, luring and additional banding have provided additional captures increasing the banding totals. Cold wet, windy conditions for birds were very poor over most of the migration period.

We recaptured 168 individuals initially banded this season, of 28 species. Two returning Black-capped Chickadees from 2011 graced our hands and lab. It is always heartening to retrieve a return.

Favourable weather conditions allowed us to open our nets for 72% of our total season capacity. The capture rate is approximately 0.44 birds per net hour. On an average daily basis 42.5 birds were processed.

The first day of the season, May 7, offered our first 'over one hundred' day with 177 captured of 17 species. In addition, there were 3 more of these days, notably; May 18, 120 individuals of 22 species, May 24, 126 captured of 35 species and May 25 with 113 handled of 29 species.

Thankfully, none of our nets were destroyed by large mammals (bear, moose, and deer). Only one net was damaged by a disturbed deer.

Each recent banding season has recorded new species topping or totalling far higher than average historical data. This season was no exception. **Blue-headed Vireo** numbering 45 beat the previous high of 18

in 2009. **Brown Creeper**, tallying 45, topped the past high of 34 set in 2004. There were 114 **Golden-crowned Kinglet** shattering the high of 27 in 2004! **Gray-cheeked Thrush**, 4 captured, represents a new high. Only one other **Wood Thrush** has been captured at the station, that being in 2001. This season 3 were banded.

A species not regularly caught, **Winter Wren** tied the previous record of 2. **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, 48 handled, became the second highest record as did **Northern Parula** with 12 individuals. **Wilson's Warbler**, totalling 26, also became a second highest note alongside **Clay-coloured Sparrow**, 17.

A third highest count of **Canada Warbler** kept us busy with 33 birds. Other species of note with above average and healthy numbers in comparison to past seasons are **Blackburnian Warbler** (19), **American Redstart** (89) and **Baltimore Oriole** (8).

Some startlingly low counts included **Sharp-shinned Hawk** with only 3 captured, **Trill's Flycatcher** (6), **Blue Jay** (92), **Black-capped Chickadee** (4), **Tennessee Warbler** (7), **Cape May Warbler** (7), **Myrtle Warbler** (45), **White-throated Sparrow** (36), **Slate-coloured Junco** (22), and **American Goldfinch** (7).

Weather

May 6- June 10

Our arrival date of May 6 began with a temperature of -1C. By dusk it was 3C. The first operational day began at 5C and increased to 6C by midday. The last day of the season, June 10, provided us with a dawn temperature of 3C and a midday thermometer reading of 10C. Over the season the average sunrise temperature was 4.5C and noon temperature 7C. On

most days, an icy wind blew off the waters of Lake Superior. Wind or rain cancelled netting on 3 days and had major effect on two others. Having, at times, a sparse crew, excellent coverage was provided over most of the season.



Wood Thrush

Standard Banding

Non-Passerines

One species of diurnal raptor was caught this season; **Sharp-shinned Hawk**. Only 3 individuals were captured. This represents a station low. The historical annual average for this species is 11. One nocturnal species was banded. A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was captured in the early morning of May 8. A total of 3 **Mourning Doves** were captured this spring. **Yellow-shafted Flicker** was represented by 18 individuals. Also above average capture rate were 2 **Pileated Woodpeckers**.

Tyrant Flycatchers

Varying numbers of flycatchers were banded over the season. The 5 species included 1 **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, 6 **Trail's Flycatchers**, 16 **Least Flycatchers**, 6 **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers**, and 1 **Eastern Phoebe**. Of these, both **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** and **Trail's Flycatcher** were below station average and **Least Flycatcher** was well above the average.

Vireos

Philadelphia Vireos were handled on 5 occasions between May 26 and June 6. **Red-eyed Vireos** (10) were captured during the same period. **Blue-headed Vireos**, totalling 26, became a station high exceeding the 18 birds in 2009.

Jays, Chickadees and Kinglets

This season 92 **Blue Jays** were caught and banded. They accumulated in numbers from mid-May until June 10. This sum is much below the average station capture of 143. Traditionally **Black-capped Chickadee** numbers vary greatly. This year was no exception with only 4 banded. There have been other years when few or none have been encountered. **Red-breasted Nuthatch** fared well with 45 banded, tying the second highest tally of 2008. The station average is about 14. **Brown Creeper** followed with the same number of 45, another station high! **Winter Wren** (2) represents a station high, equalling a number of other years. **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were captured on 114 occasions, the highest ever. On our busy day for these wee birds our nets captured 89 individuals. **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** also tallied second highest for the station about double the average, finishing with a healthy total of 48.

Thrushes and Mimids

Eastern Bluebirds (2) were banded on May 31. **Wood Thrush** were handled on 3 occasions, 2 on May 29 and another on June 10. This is both a station high and only the second record for TCBO. **Swainson's Thrush** were captured from May 21 to June 9. Their sum equalled 36. **Veery** moved through a little earlier and tallied 6 birds, about average. **Gray-cheeked Thrush** exceeded past years with 4 individuals processed. **Hermit Thrush** were also captured in line with the average

of 10. A single **Gray Catbird** was banded on May 21, not always a usual visitor.

Waxwings

This was a spring that small flocks of **Cedar Waxwing** were seen regularly during the latter half of the season, however only 1 adult female was processed on May 31. This is well below what the station has encountered in previous years.

Wood Warblers

Tennessee Warblers passed through in mid-May. The station caught 7 birds, low in comparison to previous years. **Orange-crowned Warblers** (14) spread out their arrival between May 12 and May 25. **Nashville Warblers** passed through the lab 65 times, below average. With a total of 12 **Northern Parula**, this season became the second highest count. **Yellow Warblers** (5) arrived in late May. So too did **Chestnut-sided Warblers**. We captured 24, about average. Brilliant **Magnolia Warblers** filtered through from May 11 until the end of May with a good showing of 62 birds. **Cape May Warblers** seem to be following a declining pattern over the past few years with only 7 individuals captured. **Black-throated Blue Warbler** (9) tallied about average. **Myrtle Warblers**, as predicted, were prevalent for the first half of May. However, they made a poor showing of 45 individuals. **Black-throated Green Warbler** (14) was below station average. **Blackburnian Warbler** provided a healthy sum of 19 bright birds. A perennially reliable species found throughout May, the **Western Palm Warbler**, provided a below average total of 31. **Bay-breasted Warbler** (3) and **Blackpoll Warbler** (2), though not regularly abundant species, had below average totals. **American Redstart** (89)

and **Black-and-white Warbler** (34) were above historical averages. **Ovenbird**, with 22 banded, maintained average expectations whilst **Northern Waterthrush** (13) exceeded. **Common Yellowthroat** (19), **Wilson's Warbler** (26) and **Canada Warbler** (33) all had a good showing. This season, **Wilson's Warbler** racked a second highest showing and **Canada Warbler** became the third highest in our data set.

Tanagers, Cardinals, & Allies

A **Western Tanager** surprised the crew, caught on May 20. Only one other has been captured, that being in 1995! **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** (12) arrived in mid-May. **Indigo Bunting** (3) were slightly below par this year.

Sparrows & Allies

Chipping Sparrows, while abundant with 193 processed, displayed an annual low count. **Clay-colored Sparrows** had a second highest count of 17. **American Tree Sparrows** (8), passing through from May 8-12 provided numbers as expected. **Vesper Sparrow** (1) on May 25 is not a usual occurrence. **Song Sparrows** (12) provided about half the season average. **Lincoln's Sparrow** (15) was slightly above average while **Swamp Sparrow** finished at average, 24. **Savannah Sparrows** were processed 25 times. In mid-May there were 6 **White-crowned Sparrows** banded, 1 **Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow** and 7 **Eastern White-crowned Sparrows** recorded, average in comparison to past years. **White-throated Sparrow** (36) is an unexpected low tally. There seemed to be an absence of **Slate-colored Junco** (22) this year. One **Oregon Junco** was banded.

Icterids

Baltimore Orioles (8) both gracing our

hummingbird feeder and lab offered a better than average total. **Red-winged Blackbirds** totalled 11. Both **Brown-headed Cowbird** (3) and **Common Grackle** (3) showed low comparative numbers.

Finches & Old World Sparrows

Despite increasing observations of **American Goldfinch** only 7 were captured. This is well below the station average of 32. One **House Sparrow** fascinated us on May 25.

Foreign Recoveries

A total of 18 **Northern Saw-whet Owls** were encountered in our most recent group of Reports to Bander from the Banding Office. These birds were first captured and banded at the station between September 28, 2011 and October 16, 2013. They were encountered in Jackson County, Illinois, Portage County, Wisconsin, and St. Louis County in Minnesota, U.S.A. Of unique note were two individuals banded on 28 September, 2011 and recovered about a month later at Long Point Bird Observatory!

In addition, two **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, one banded on August 28, 2012, the other a year later on September 26, 2013 were again caught near Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota. Both were captured October 1, 2013.

And last and tiniest; a hatch year male **Golden-crowned Kinglet** banded by the station on October 4, 2013 was encountered on October 21, 2103 in Steele County, Minnesota, U.S.A.

Observations

Single individuals of **Red-throated Loon** were spotted on May 8 and 9. **Common Loon** were sighted on most days, peaking

on May 10 with a count of 364. **Horned Grebe** were present on May 9, 10, 11 and 12. Thirteen were visible on May 10. **Red-necked Grebe** were seen from the beginning of the season until May 21. The largest number was 49 on May 10. Two **American White Pelican** were observed on June 7. **Double-crested Cormorant** provided nearly daily sightings. The highest single count was 28 on May 18. **Canada Geese** were encountered sporadically commencing on May 7 (30 birds) with notable migrating flocks of 100 both on May 28 and 29, 143 on June 3 and 130 on June 7. Mallard were occasionally seen. One **American Black Duck** was seen on May 29. A **Gadwall** was seen on May 7. **Greater Scaup** were observed during the second and third weeks of May. A high day was of 87 birds on May 8. **White-winged Scoter** were seen on three occasions, the greatest number was 14 on May 18. There were 8 **Surf Scoters** viewed on May 21. Small rafts of **Long-tailed Duck** were seen frequently in varying numbers throughout May. The largest group was of 61 individuals on May 21. **Common Goldeneye** were seen throughout most of the season. Their most abundant period was the second week of May with a high of 17 on May 11. Both **Common** and **Red-breasted Merganser** were observed on all days. On May 18 the highest number of **Common** was 26 and on same day highest for **Red-breasted** was 107. **Great Blue Heron** were an occasional visitor and a total of 23 **Turkey Vultures** soared overhead throughout the spring.

There were frequent sightings of **Bald Eagle** in different plumage phases over the season. They may well be breeding nearby on Hare Island. One **Northern Harrier** flew through overhead on June 5. **Sharp-shinned Hawk** were observed from mid-

May onward usually as a single sighting. Only 1 **Broad-winged Hawk** was noted on May 29. **American Kestrel** were occasional visitors being seen throughout May. This year, as in years past, a pair of **Merlin** kept our ears and eyes attuned as they defended their territory and intercepted prey. **Peregrine Falcon**, likely breeding nearby, were occasional visitors. **Killdeer** were represented on three days in mid-May, totalling 6 birds. There were 10 **Semipalmated Plover** on May 21. **Spotted Sandpiper** were present throughout the latter half of May with a movement of 10 on May 21. **Greater Yellowlegs** flew by on May 18, 20 and 21 totalling 4 individuals. A **Solitary Sandpiper** was seen on May 9. There were 75 **Dunlin** on a busy and foggy May 21. **Whimbrel** (6) rested on May 21 and another on June 1. June 2 saw a **Semipalmated Sandpiper**. On May 21 there were also an additional 105 unidentified *Calidris* species and 29 **Dowitcher** species.

The first **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was seen on May 8. They were neighbours to us for the season.

Only 1 **Downy Woodpecker** was noted this season. There were 3 sightings of **Hairy Woodpecker**. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was a rare visitor on two occasions. **Yellow-shafted Flicker** migrated in numbers during much of May with peaks being on May 7 (25) and May 11 (32). **Pileated Woodpeckers** were occasional visitors during May.

There were four sightings of **Olive-sided Flycatchers** beginning on May 26. An **Eastern Wood-Pee-wee** appeared on May 31. **Traill's Flycatchers** were observed on 8 occasions from mid-May until close. **Least Flycatchers** were prevalent from

mid-May on in ones and twos. **Eastern Kingbird** were spotted 7 times over the later half of the season.

A single late **Horned Lark** was seen along the shore on May 30.

The first **Tree Swallows** appeared on May 10. Over the course of the season there were regular visits to the station.

Philadelphia Vireo frequented the station on May 26 (6), 31 (1) and June 6 (1). Feisty **Red-eyed Vireos** arrived on May 19 and were seen until the second last day of operation. **Blue-headed Vireo** visited for the period between May 10 and May 22. On May 13 the Daily Estimated Total was 16!

Commencing May 19 **Blue Jays** built in numbers until season close. There were a number of 40-87 bird days.

Veery, arriving May 14 were present on 7 days totalling 9 birds. **Grey-cheeked Thrush** from May 14-22 totalled 5 individuals. **Swainson's Thrush** were present from May 21 until the end of the season. A high number of 8 was achieved on May 24. **Hermit Thrush** were about from May 7-21. There were 5 on May 11. There were no large flocks of migrating **American Robin** despite their nearly daily presence from start to finish.

As noted in the banding data there were very few flocks of **Black-capped Chickadees**. On May 11 and May 18 we counted a total of 22 and 21 respectively. Regular single sightings were recorded. **Brown Creeper** peaked on May 7 at 25. **Red-breasted Nuthatch** passed through daily between May 8 and 19 with steady numbers between 24 and 7. Both species of **Kinglet** followed the same time period

as **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. The total for **Golden-crowned Kinglet** on May 7 was 128.

Tennessee Warbler and **Orange-crowned Warbler** arrived May 12 and continued passage until the last week of May with high counts being 15 and 21 respectively. A similar passage of **Northern Parula** and **Nashville Warbler** occurred with their numbers summing 11 and 53. The first **Yellow Warbler** was seen and heard on May 14. They were counted on a daily basis thereafter as single individuals. **Chestnut-sided Warbler** arrived on May 18 and were visible until June 5. We counted 31 individuals on May 25. **Magnolia Warblers** were present from May 11 until the end of the season. May 24 was the highest number recorded at 30. **Cape May Warblers** appeared on the same date and remained constant until the end of the month. Small numbers of **Black-throated Blue Warbler** were seen from May 18 through to June 5. **Myrtle Warblers** were seen on nearly every day from May 6 until June 8. Strong numbers were recorded for this species peaking at 50 birds on May 22. The first **Black-throated Green Warblers** and **Blackburnian Warblers** were observed on May 13. They were seen throughout most of the count period thereafter. The ever present **Western Palm Warbler** was noted on our first banding day continuing to be recorded until June 3. **Bay-breasted Warblers** were seen 7 times between May 13 and May 27. **Blackpoll Warblers** passed through between May 13 and May 24. **Black-and-white Warbler** was a regular migrant throughout the entire spring season. **American Redstart** showed their colours from May 13 until June 6 peaking during the last week of May with a high of 63 on May 24. **Ovenbird** were regular

visitors from May 11 until the end of the month. A high of 9 was recorded on May 22. **Northern Waterthrush** arrived a day earlier and were not seen after May 29. A small count of **Mourning Warblers** commenced on May 24 and ended on June 5. **Common Yellowthroat** first arrived on May 13 and continued to be present until the end of season. The **Wilson's Warbler** arrival date this year was May 14. On May 25 a group of 21 was noted. **Canada Warbler** first appeared on May 19. They were seen and banded up to June 7 this year.

A single **Scarlet Tanager** was sighted on May 21. **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** arrived early on May 11 and carried through until June 5. **Indigo Bunting** first appeared May 19 and were seen on occasion to June 4.

Early **American Tree Sparrow** en route to the northern bogs arrived May 8 and left by May 13. **Chipping Sparrows** were abundant from our arrival day at the station throughout May. Our highest Daily Estimated Total was 130 on May 18. **Clay-colored Sparrows** were observed regularly from May 13 through to June 10. **Savannah Sparrows** showed their numbers throughout May until June 6. **Song Sparrows**, some on territory, were seen throughout the count period. There were a few days during the second week of May when as many as 8 were observed. Little **Lincoln's Sparrows** arrived on May 10 and completed their passage by May 26. **Swamp Sparrow** moved through in small numbers from May 7 up to May 25. One **Harris's Sparrow** was observed on May 19. **White-throated Sparrows** had first arrived by May 6, peaked on May 11 with 21 individuals and save for local breeders, left by the third week of the month. **White-crowned Sparrow** and its

forms arrived May 8 and were present until May 25. There was no large influx this season. **Slate-colored Junco** were present at our arrival and continued their flow until the end of the month. The largest number seen was that of 21 encountered on May 15.

Red-winged Blackbirds were present in no higher numbers than 15 throughout May. There were 50 **Rusty Blackbirds** on May 7 and disappeared by May 17.

Common Grackle were seen throughout the season in a no higher count than 17 on start date. There were the odd single and pair of **Brown-headed Cowbirds** in May. **Baltimore Orioles** fed from the hummingbird feeders commencing May 14 and ending on May 29. The most numerous day was May 19 with 5 bright and vocal birds.

Evening Grosbeak were seen singly on two days toward the end on the season. Small numbers of **Pine Siskin** were active flying overhead on many days from start to finish. **American Goldfinch** were also regular visitors with a flock of 50 on May 24. Very few were captured. **Purple Finch** were noted only during the first week of the season

The most important list of all

This being a transition year for Programme Coordinators I personally wish to thank John Woodcock for his guidance and support. Volunteers contributed 81 days to this spring migration programme of which two individuals contributed 3 or more weeks. Three others participated for a few days. Much gratitude is given to each individual and every hour dedicated!

Those contributing in the autumn with great diligence, support, camaraderie and

enthusiasm include Huang Bo, Gillian Holmes, Allan Gilbert, Kyle Myschowoda, and John Woodcock

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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