

Kestrel Haven Avian Migration Observatory
Burdett, Schuyler County, NY
John and Sue Gregoire
4226-07645
khmo@att.net

SPRING 2008 Atlantic Flyway Review Report

This was a dismal spring. Weather was usually bad with winds picking up within an hour or two of opening on those days we were able to band safely. Just about all migrants were late and, at that, appeared in very few numbers. Wood Thrush didn't arrive until closing day. American Goldfinches, our staple, were here in very small numbers. On a positive note, we welcome our first assistant in the history of our operations in New York. Clara McCarthy, with an academic background in ecology and natural resources, has joined our field team as a sub-permittee. Her assistance and company has been very much welcomed and enjoyed.

We banded 503 individuals of 53 species in 26 days of operation. We also had 104 repeats, 114 returns, and 8 hummingbirds not banded. We had a foreign Tree Swallow captured on 27 April; although we reported this to BBL immediately, we have yet to here of its origin by this date (12 June). The bird was an active nester here. Our measure of efficiency was 105 birds per 100 net hours for newly banded birds and 152 birds/100 NH overall. Our best day was 27 April with 57 banded and our most species diverse day was 06 May with 18 species banded.

Our age data as reported in Table 2 is somewhat skewed due to an ongoing study that has revealed covert feather shape to be a less than accurate age criterion in some species. We examined returns of known age birds and found less than 50% accuracy with this method of ageing. This was first noticed in Chipping Sparrows but we felt our sample size was too small. After achieving hundreds of returns of the thousands of American Goldfinch banded at this station, we were able to definitively determine that covert shape was an inaccurate means of age determination in this species. As a result, we aged all spring females as AHY and aged males according to other criteria. On known age returns of several other species we have seen so called "SY coverts" on many elder birds. While we will continue this study, we have lost confidence in this criterion for all species and advocate using multiple ageing cues when they are available.

Upon reflection and a close check of our banding and point count records over the last 23 years, we were dismayed to note the documentation of tragic declines in many migrant species. No longer do we see the large groups of neotropicals or "fallout" mornings. Many species have declined while some have been extirpated as breeders in this area.

While some of this can be attributed to neotropical deforestation and wintering habitat loss or fragmentation as well as increasing man-made hazards encountered during migration, the bulk of the cause is right here in the breeding grounds. No, the prime cause is not fragmentation or loss of habitat due to housing or population and consumerism growth. The root of the loss of these migrants is soundly rooted in changing agricultural practices.

In this area, small dairy farms following pasturing techniques have given way to huge agri-businesses that practice Concentrated Animal Feeding. The huge increase in the animal base has caused a need for a larger land base to handle liquid manure (slurry) and much of that pasture has given way to monocropped field crops in support of animal forage. Legumes such as alfalfa have largely replaced Hay. Very few species will nest in corn and alfalfa or in the biomass crops. To make matters worse, harvest techniques and timing occur more quickly and catch what birds that remain before they fledge.

Further, equipment has grown in size and efficiency demanding larger fields. The concomitant loss of hedgerow habitat has caused the degradation or loss of many species requiring such places for nesting. Add to that the burgeoning interest in growing bio-fuel crops and both field and edge nesting birds are in greater peril today than ever before. Short of eschewing dairy products and advocating against CAFOs and biomass energy schemes, there is little we can do. It's truly a depressing situation.

No new species were added to the cumulative station list of 131 species plus 5 forms; point count cumulative grew to 220 species seen at Kestrel Haven. Abnormalities were unremarkable and no significant health or parasite problems were noted. The real pleasure of this spring was in our returns.

We enjoyed 114 returning individuals! Of that number, over a third, or 45, were at least 4 years of age or older. The eldest return was a Downy Woodpecker at 9 years of age. The elders were:

- Four Downy Woodpeckers at 4, 4+ (2) and **9** years old
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at 5 years old
- Blue Jay at **7+** years old
- Four Black-capped Chickadees at 4, 4+ (2) and 6 years old
- Six American Robins at 4 (3), and 4+ (3) years old
- Three Gray Catbirds at 4 and 4+ (2) years old
- Brown Thrasher at 4+ years old
- Red-eyed Vireo at 4+ years old
- Four Yellow Warblers at 4, 4+, **7+**, and **8+** years old
- Two Common Yellowthroat at 4 years old
- Northern Cardinal at 6+ years old
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak at 4+ years old
- Song Sparrow at 4 years old
- Four Red-winged Blackbirds at 5+, **8(2)** and **8+** years old
- Two Baltimore Orioles at 4 years old
- Purple Finch at 4 years old
- Seven American Goldfinches at 4 (2), 4+, 5 (2), 5+ and 7+ years old.

We would like to thank A.L. Donahue, Bob and Judy Cosgriff, David Guaspari, Jay Schissel and Ruth Young for their financial support as well as Doris Cohrs, Barlow Rhodes, Stillman's Greenhouse for their advice, assistance and support. Thanks to Vicky Kelly for her continued maintenance of our website and to Alicia Plotkin for her special projects work.

Kestrel Haven Statistical Summaries Spring 2008:

Table I: Operations

First Day 10 April: Last 01 Jun
 Total Days in Operation 26
 Range of No. Nets Used 1 to 14
 Total Net Hours for Season* 480
 Number of Traps in Use 0 ** % of Total caught in traps N/A
 Largest Daily Catch 57 on 27 April
 Best Species Diversity: 18 species on 06 May
 Number birds banded 2007: 1,150; Number birds banded 2008: 506
 Total Species 2006: 63 Total Species 2007: 53
 Birds/100 net hours 2006: 139 Birds/100 net hours 2007: 105
 Species above 2 S.D. in 2006: N/A
 Species below 2 S.D. in 2006: N/A
 Weather influence ranking (+ or - or?)***: Mostly positive

* Based on 1 4-shelf 12m net x 1 hour of netting = 1 net hour (adjusted Accordingly for shorter or longer nets)

** List number and types used

*** Were general weather conditions overall during the season a negative or Positive or inconclusive factor in banding results?

Table II: List of Ten Most Commonly Banded Species Spring 2008

	Species	Number	%SY	%ASY	%AHY
1.	AMGO	127	42	30	28*
2.	SCJU	52	42	50	08
3.	RWBL	35	60	40	00
4.	EWCS	34	00	00	100
5.	WTSP	27	22	41	07
6.	AMRO	17	06	00	94
7.	BLJA	16	88	12	00
8.	YWAR	16	70	13	12
9.	CHSP	15	40	40	20
10.	COYE	15	06	14	80

* See text

Overall % SY = 30