

Beaverhill Bird Observatory Update May 10 to 16, 2008

Banding started off great this second week, but the end of the week blew us away—literally. Monday started off with our regular compliment of chickadees, sparrows, and thrushes, and threw in a Least Flycatcher to spice things up. Banders will know that Least Flycatchers have few rivals in their ability to get really tangled up, and they are tricky little birds—they will show signs of stress in the net such as closing their eyes, panting, or fluffing their feathers causing the conscientious bander to work furiously to get them out quickly, cutting threads in the net to speed the progress, and (if the Flycatcher's really good) release them unbanded at the net rather than transport them to the lab. I can't tell you how many Least Flycatchers have given me this act, caused me to act in the above fashion, and then as soon as I open my hand, they leave me a little "present" in the middle of my palm, and fly straight away, right as rain. Very clever indeed.



On Monday afternoon Robin and I made our first trip through the swallow grid. There are 49 nest boxes set up north of the lab that are designed for the gorgeous Tree Swallow. We monitor the boxes throughout the summer, banding both the adults and the young, and track the success rate of each pair. This week, the swallows were just starting to build their nests, we found a couple boxes with a few feathers and strands of grass, and we were able to band four adults. We were sad to find a few boxes with dead swallows inside—these birds come north as soon as they can in order to grab the prime nesting territories. Inevitably some of the birds that arrive first will be caught by a late cold snap, this year's late snowfall and freezing temperatures were especially bad, and unfortunately a number of these early arrivers may end up perishing.



Tuesday was pretty slow, with only two Brown-headed Cowbirds and two Purple Finches banded. Wednesday picked up a little, with five Cowbirds, and a pair each of Yellow Warblers and Least Flycatchers. Irene and her dog Onyx, both regular visitors to the lab, dropped by to watch some banding—we also enjoy having the opportunity to show off what we do here, and to let people get a good close look at a few birds.

On Thursday we caught a dozen birds including one "big" surprise, a Sharp-shinned Hawk. While this is about as small a hawk as you'll find, it's still a lot bigger than what we're normally catching. And it has talons. Thankfully, it was not stuck to badly and after *very carefully* extracting and banding it (and a couple of photos) we sent it on it's way.



And while the “sharpie” was pretty impressive, it’s not what I meant by “blown away”—a high pressure system moved in Wednesday afternoon, giving us clear skies and *big* winds. We had to close our nets a little early on Thursday and Friday, as the risk of injury to the birds increases if the nets are blown around too much, and we don’t want to chance that. Fortunately (in some senses), having a breeze blowing through the nets makes them much more visible to the birds, meaning that fewer will hit the net when it’s riskier for them to do so. The strong pressure front also seems to have pushed most of the rest of the migrating waterfowl along in front of it. These birds take advantage of these systems moving through to provide strong tailwinds and minimize the amount of energy the need to expend to get to their final breeding grounds further north. Smaller birds do the same thing, and we’re hoping that once the system’s finally passed through there’ll be a wave of new species hitting our nets next week. Stay tuned....

—JMDR

Species	Banded	Repeat ¹	Return ²	Foreign ³	Other ⁴	Total
Chipping Sparrow	10	1	0	0	0	11
Brown-headed Cowbird	5	0	0	0	0	5
Tree Swallow	5	0	0	0	0	5
Clay-colored Sparrow	3	1	0	0	0	4
Least Flycatcher	2	1	0	0	0	3
Yellow Warbler	2	1	0	0	0	3
American Robin	2	0	0	0	0	2
Black-capped Chickadee	0	2	0	0	0	2
Hermit Thrush	1	1	0	0	0	2
Purple Finch	2	0	0	0	0	2
Swainson's Thrush	2	0	0	0	0	2
White-throated Sparrow	2	0	0	0	0	2
Lincoln's Sparrow	1	0	0	0	0	1
Myrtle Warbler	1	0	0	0	0	1
Orange-crowned Warbler	1	0	0	0	0	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	0	0	0	0	1
White-crowned Sparrow	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	41	7	0	0	0	48

¹ Banded recently (within 90 days) at the BBO.

Net Hours: 340

² Banded at the BBO > 90 days prior to recapture (e.g. in a previous year).

Capture Rate: 14.1/100 NH

³ Banded at a location other than the BBO.

⁴ Caught in a mist-net but not banded (e.g. escaped net).

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