

Wing Island Bird Banding Station 2020 Yearly Report

For the past twenty years I have run a bird banding station on Wing Island, a 9-acre parcel of land consisting of upland shrub/woodland surrounded on all sides by a large salt marsh, located behind the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History.

Spring banding was a bit different this year due to the restrictions from Covid. I banded by myself severely limiting the number of nets we typically use and number of days. By mid-June I was able to open up the banding to our volunteers as we only band outside.

We had a total of only 60 banding days for 2020 compared with 82 last year due to Covid restrictions. Nets were open for a total of 7,613 net-hours. 3,188 birds were netted giving us an average of 42 birds/100 net-hrs. As of this writing a total of 77,943 birds have been netted since the opening of the station with 52,896 new birds banded.

858 birds were recaptured during the season. The majority were birds banded in 2020, but 138 were birds returning from previous years. The most exciting recapture was of a Prairie Warbler we originally banded in 2012 as an ASY (After Second Year) bird, meaning we knew he was older than 2 years but couldn't age him beyond that. Recapturing him in 2020 meant he was at least 11 years and 3 months old making him the oldest Prairie Warbler on record! Other older birds included four birds 10 years old or older – three Gray Catbirds (one we first banded in 2012 and hadn't recaptured him until again until 2020) and a Common Yellowthroat; one 9 year old Common Yellowthroat; three 8 year old birds- Gray Catbird, Black-capped Chickadee, and Song Sparrow; four 7 year old birds- Gray Catbird, Common Yellowthroat, Black-capped Chickadee, and Red-breasted Nuthatch; four birds who were 7 years old or older- Eastern Towhee, Gray Catbird, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow Warbler; Five 6 year old birds- Gray Catbirds (2), Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, and Black-capped Chickadee. We had nine birds at 5 years old or older, twenty-four at 4 years old or older, and twenty-nine were 3 years old or older. The remaining returns were in their second year. We had one foreign recapture, meaning another banding station banded the bird, which was a Myrtle Warbler first banded in 2019 in Wellfleet.

78 species were banded this year. With the 2020 winter finch irruption we banded our first Pine Siskins (53) and Common Redpolls (21) on the island. I banded this species at my home in previous years but it was exciting to capture them on Wing Island. Our top ten species for 2020 were: Gray Catbird (745), Myrtle Warbler (228), Song Sparrow (162), Common Yellowthroat (118), Black-capped Chickadee (88), American Goldfinch (80), Northern Cardinal (66), Pine Siskin (53), Blue Jay (48) and Swamp Sparrow (71). Myrtle Warbler numbers have declined for the third year in a row. It is probably due to the change in habitat on Wing Island since it has been slowly overrun with honeysuckle and other invasives driving out the much-loved native species like Bayberry.

Comparing fall recapture data from previous years we had exceptionally low numbers of Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglet, Brown Creeper, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, and Pine Warbler. We had higher than normal captures of Blue Jay, Carolina Wren, Hairy Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Red-winged

Blackbird, Common Redpoll, Pine Siskin, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. We are lucky to catch even one Yellow-billed Cuckoo let alone five!

Our largest daily catch was on September 25 with 105 birds captured. We also had our highest species diversity on that date- 26 species. Besides our winter finch capture mentioned above, other birds of note banded this year included two Connecticut Warblers, three Gray-cheeked Thrushes, and a Rufous Hummingbird banded at a private home in December.

A number of biologists came to learn from me during the fall season, either from scratch or to improve their ageing skills. Alex Burdo, who spent the whole season with me, learned everything from extracting birds from mist nets to being able to process most birds without my help. Cat Werth, Keegan Burke, Dan Errichetti and Keenan Yakola also spent some time brushing up on processing and ageing techniques. Mike Babcock, a ringer from the U.K. who banded with me last year spent most of this fall improving his ageing skills before returning home. A big thank you of course to Gretchen Putonen, a bander who has been helping me since 2002 and numerous other people who helped out for a short time. Thanks also to Gerry and Karen Beetham who helped to maintain the net lanes and Michelle Chambers who helped me with data input. I also had fun this spring/summer teaching my 3- and 4-year-old grandchildren to band at my house when they spent a few months living with us. Now when they come to visit the first thing they want to do is band some birds!

Thanks very much to the Cape Cod Bird Club for the generous grant of \$1,000 to help us buy much needed mist nets. We have 50 mist nets in all (between Wing Island and my other field station in the Punkhorn) and at \$165.00 a pop it is difficult to find funding. We are an all volunteer station so every little bit helps! The French Foundation has also donated in the past and we get occasional monetary support from the museum.

During the banding season I write a banding blog on Facebook- Wing Island Bird Banding Station which is open to the public. You don't have to belong to Facebook to view it, just put it in the search. For those on Instagram, check out wing_banders.

I'll be looking for volunteers in the spring so for those with an interest or if you know of any biologists that may like to learn banding please contact me at suefinnegan@comcast.net. Keep in mind we start our day before dawn and you must be in good physical shape as there is a great deal of walking (4-5 miles) sometimes over rough terrain. I am especially in need of people who can help out with the following: net lane maintenance (weed whacking and pruning), importing data into excel which can be done either at home or at the banding table while we are banding, and mist net extraction.

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