The Harrier

The newsletter of the Haldimand Bird Observatory

2018 Edition



The Haldimand Bird Observatory aims to promote and foster the operation of banding and migration monitoring stations and to further our knowledge of bird populations and migration patterns in the former county of Haldimand.

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Haldimand Bird Observatory (HBO) Spring Banding Report – 2017

By Rick Ludkin, Head Bander - Ruthven Park

This Spring was memorable for its weather: cold with record rains throughout April and much of May.

About Ruthven Park Banding Station:

The HBO banding station at Ruthven Park was founded in the Fall of 1995 as a pilot and came into full operation – for Spring and Fall seasons – in 1996. It is run largely on a volunteer basis; the Bander-in-Charge position is paid. The station is situated on the grounds of Ruthven Park National Historic Site, the banding lab being about 100 m from the historic mansion. The entrance to the site is located about 2 km north of the town of Cayuga on Highway/Regional Road 54. (Latitude/Longitude: 425 – 0795). Bird Studies Canada runs 3 banding sites – Long Point Bird Observatory – which are within 50 kilometers. Ruthven is an "inland" station while the others are on the north shore of Lake Erie; the mix of species and number of birds can be quite different between Ruthven and the coastal sites.



Tree Swallow at Ruthven Park. Photo: E. Campanelli

Migration Monitoring Program:

Migration monitoring follows a standardized protocol so that each day includes:

- Banding following a "constant effort" format (6 hours per day starting with the opening of nets half an hour before sun up)
- A structured census
- Recording of recaptures from previous days/years or from other locations
- Recording of general birding observations
- Generation of an "Estimated Total" (ET) for each species on that day based on the above data

The ET data generated provides the basis for long-term trend analysis of certain bird populations (Neotropical migrants). This analysis is carried out by Bird Studies Canada. Banding data is maintained in a central data base overseen and managed by the Canadian Wildlife Service and the US Geological Survey.

We continued to run and train a group of young people in the skills of bird banding. This group of up to 9 teens deployed 5 nets in areas adjacent to the "regular" netting area. This allowed us to easily oversee their efforts and facilitated training. Under supervision, they banded the birds they caught, but the banding data they generated was not used in our standardized calculations.

Equipment:

We deployed 19 twelve-metre mist nets (30 mm mesh) in 11 net lanes. These net lanes are longstanding with some being in the same place since 1995 and 9 have been in place since 2000. Most of the lanes have been cut into the dogwood/scrub edge habitat that acts as a buffer between the lawns and fields/meadows of the historic site and the surrounding forest. Over the years, care has been taken to try to maintain vegetation levels similar to previous years – forest regeneration is always a difficulty. On some days, not all the nets were utilized – especially on days with high winds and/or light scattered showers. We do not open nets during periods of rain.

We also deployed up to 8 traps: 7 walk-in traps and a hanging trap. The use of traps (except for the hanging trap which mainly caught American Goldfinches) was curtailed toward the end of the season when ground-feeding birds had moved through and food on the ground might encourage House Sparrows which interfere with our Purple Martin colony.



After-second-year male Yellow Warbler Photo: L. Oldfield



White-throated Sparrow Photo: EJC

<u>Results:</u>

As noted above, we had a lot of cold, wet, windy weather in April that significantly limited the use of nets. We would not use (or would close) nets if they were directly affected by wind; we would limit the number of nets used in cold conditions; we would close nets during periods of shower activity; and we would not open at all if it was raining steadily. As a result, our total net hours for April of 2,802 (1 net hour = 1 12-meter net open for 1 hour) was only 81.9% of what they would have been in optimal conditions. We were able to counter this by the use of traps. Walk-in traps were effective for ground-feeding species, and the hanging trap was instrumental in helping us band a record 527 American Goldfinches, but they had no impact on the capture of insectivorous species.

The poor conditions that we encountered throughout the month acted to slow down the northward migration and hold birds in place with the result that the April banding total of 939 was our highest since we began Spring banding in 1996. It should be noted though that this total was made up, to a large extent, by American Goldfinches: 383 or 40.8% of the April catch. The rate of capture (22.63 birds per 100 net hours) was slightly above the 9-year average despite restricted use of nets; however, a large proportion of the goldfinches were caught in the hanging trap.

Usually banding numbers pick up in May, but this year the cold and wet conditions seemed to slow down the arrival of long-distance migrants – but it held short-distance migrants up as well. For example, we were banding good numbers of Ruby-crowned Kinglets and White-throated Sparrows up to the middle of May (May 15th); normally they have all moved through by the end of April. The poor conditions, which were evident throughout the eastern United States, seem to have held up long-distance migrants. The bulk of various neotropical warblers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Baltimore Orioles did not arrive until May 10th.

Due to the poor conditions in the first part of May, we felt that long-distance migrants may have "flown over" our site, making up for lost time south of us. On the whole, we banded 360 warblers this Spring, which represents 18% of the total birds banded. But if you take Yellow-rumped Warblers, Yellow Warblers, Blue-winged Warblers, and Common Yellowthroats out of the mix (the first tends to be a short-distance migrant and the other 3 are local breeders), then warblers make up only 5% of the number banded – our lowest total in 20 years. Yet reports from colleagues further north suggest that long-distance warbler numbers were up or were consistent with other years.

We never had a "big day" in May – defined as banding over 100 birds in a day. Our best day was only 72 banded on May 16th; this is a full week later than the "big day" (67 birds) the year before. Still, our May total of 1,057 was our 6th highest. The main "push" of migrants was between May 9th and 19th during which time we banded 608 (or 57.5%) of the birds banded in May.

Overall we banded a total of 1,996 birds of 87 species at a rate of 25.9 birds per 100 net hours.

Through the Spring we saw (but didn't necessarily band) **147** species. Highlights included: American Bittern, Great Egret, Common Terns, Whip-poor-will, and 27 species of warbler (including a Hooded Warbler).



Chipping Sparrow originally banded in 2010. Photo: MMG

<u>Returns:</u>

These are birds that were banded at Ruthven in other years and recaptured here this Spring. We get a fairly large number of returning migrants each year which breed here as well as winter residents.

Species	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	TOTAL
Mourning Dove									1	3	2	1	7
Red-bellied Woodpecker							1	1					2
Yellow-billed Cuckoo									1				1
Downy Woodpecker			1			1		2	1	4	3	11	23
Tree Swallow												1	1
Blue Jay	1			1							5	1	8
Tufted Titmouse												1	1
Black-capped Chickadee								1			5	10	16
White-breasted Nuthatch							1				1	6	8
House Wren							-				1	1	2
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher												2	2
Eastern Bluebird											1		1
American Robin						1					5	6	12
Gray Catbird									1		3	6	10
Warbling Vireo												1	1
Red-eyed Vireo									1	2		1	4
Blue-winged Warbler										1	2	2	5
Yellow Warbler							1			1	4	16	22
Common Yellowthroat									1			1	2
Northern Cardinal							1				4	2	7
Rose-breasted Grosbeak											4	5	9
Indigo Bunting										3		1	4
American Tree Sparrow							1				3		4
Chipping Sparrow						2			2	2	1	2	9
Field Sparrow											1	1	2
Song Sparrow						1			1	6	2	10	20
Dark-eyed Junco										1	2	5	8
Red-winged Blackbird					1			3	1		2	2	9
Brown-headed Cowbird										4	3	10	17
Orchard Oriole									1		1		2
Baltimore Oriole						1		1	1	1	2	5	11
House Finch											1		1
American Goldfinch							1	3	2	9	13	80	108
Total	1	0	1	1	1	6	6	11	14	37	71	190	339

YEAR

<u>Recoveries (for which we received notification from the Banding Office this Spring):</u> These are birds banded at Ruthven and recovered elsewhere.

- American Goldfinch; banded 10/19/2017; recovered 06/14/2017; Mississauga, ON
- White-crowned Sparrow; banded 10/26/2016; recovered 01/13/2017; Seacliffe, ON
- **American Tree Sparrow; banded 11/23/2016; recovered 04/26/2017; Hilliardton Marsh Banding Station, New Liskeard area
- Chestnut-sided Warbler; banded 09/10/2016; recovered 05/24/2017; Hilliardton Marsh Banding Station, New Liskeard area

Foreign Recaptures (for which we received notification from the Banding Office this Spring): These are birds banded at another location but recaptured at Ruthven.

• Snow Bunting; Banded 02/17/2015 at King City, ON; recaptured 02/-4/2017 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON

<u>Visitors:</u>

This Spring we had **1,042 visitors**, made up of interested adults and students.



Bander-in-charge Rick Ludkin with visitors Rhiannon and Ellie



Joanne, Dorothy, and Dianne enjoy a spring visit to the banding lab

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the Lower Grand River Land Trust for their ongoing support of the banding program at Ruthven Park. This includes the use of the grounds, use of the banding lab building, and financial support. Ruthven staff Marilynn Havelka (CAO) and Natalie Campbell (Education Coordinator) have been especially helpful and supportive. Natalie has done a wonderful job coordinating the visitation by numerous school groups. We would also like to thank the University of Windsor for their practical support and personnel (Christine Madliger and Chris Harris). Haldimand Bird Observatory also provides a great deal of practical support. Our Baillie Birdathon Team, **The Ruthven Ringers**, was made up of **Rick Ludkin**, **Alessandra Wilcox**, **Giovanni and Ezra Campanelli and Samuel Strachan**.

We are able to operate at the level we do because of the input of a dedicated group of volunteers. In total, this group put in **1,648 volunteer hours** (up by about 300 hours over last year). Those who contributed a significant amount of time and effort this Spring (i.e., >20 hours) are:

- Nancy Furber
- Carol Jones
- Mike Furber
- Dave Maida
- Elaine Serena
- Joanne Fleet
- Sian Ford
- Caleb Scholtens
- Alessandra Wilcox
- Marnie Gibson
- Faye Socholotiuk
- Ezra Campanelli
- Samuel Strachan
- Debbie Lindeman
- Laura Oldfield
- Kim Robillard
- Amy Beach
- Ethan Gosnell
- Polina Utkina
- Jaimie Juriansz
- Janet Juriansz
- Jared Isaacs



Young and talented banders; L-R: Caleb, Ben, Alessandra, Giovanni, Ezra, Samuel, Ethan, Tessa



Alessandra demonstrating how to extract a bird. Photo: E. Campanelli

Haldimand Bird Observatory (HBO) Fall Banding Report – 2017

By Rick Ludkin, Head Bander - Ruthven Park

This Fall banding season was memorable for its weather: hot summer temperatures that continued well into October.

Standard Migration Monitoring Program:

Migration monitoring follows a standardized protocol that each day includes:

- Banding following a "constant effort" format (6 hours per day starting with the opening of nets half an hour before sun up)
- A structured census
- Recording of recaptures from previous days/years or from other locations
- Recording of general birding observations
- Generation of an "Estimated Total" (ET) for each species on that day based on the above data

The ET data generated provides the basis for long-term trend analysis of certain bird populations (Neotropical migrants). This analysis is carried out by Bird Studies Canada. Banding data is maintained in a central data base overseen and managed by the Canadian Wildlife Service and the US Geological Survey.



From left: Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Black-throated Blue Warbler, American Woodcock

Equipment:

We deployed 21 twelve-metre mist nets (30 mm mesh) in 12 net lanes. These net lanes are longstanding with some being in the same place since 1995 and 9 have been in place since 2000. Most of the lanes have been cut into the dogwood/scrub edge habitat that acts as a buffer between the lawns and fields/meadows of the historic site and the surrounding forest. Over the years, care has been taken to try to maintain vegetation levels similar to previous years – forest regeneration is always a difficulty. On some days not all of the nets were utilized or some may have been closed early – especially on days with high winds and/or light scattered showers. We do not open nets during periods of sustained rain. We also deployed up to 8 traps: 7 walk-in traps and a hanging trap. The use of traps (except for the hanging trap which mainly caught American Goldfinches) did not begin until ground-feeding birds began to migrate into the area – around the end of September.

Non-standard Banding Program:

In order to train upcoming banders and provide them with real field experience, we help interested people (of all ages) to set up and run a set of 5-6 nets. These nets are separate from the standardized array and the birds caught in them are not considered as part of the standard banding totals or in the birds banded/100net hour calculations that we do. We account for non-standard banded birds as observation data points in doing ET calculations. The practical advantage for the station (besides training new banders) is that it allows us to tap into ecological niches that the standard array of nets does not touch (e.g., the standard nets do not give us much of an idea of what birds are moving in the river flats or deeper in the forest).



One of the exciting things about Ruthven's banding lab is that the banding crew often changes from day to day, leading to great conversations and new opportunities to learn from each other.

<u>Results:</u>

Standard Banding Program:

As noted above, we had unusually hot weather that lasted late into the fall. We toyed with the term "never-ending summer" when referring to it. It wasn't until very late in October, into November that we consistently began to get daytime temperatures in the single digits – and NO freezing temperatures at all (although we did have a couple of mornings with frost with the temperature at 0°C). Further, we did not get much precipitation. Over the course of the 67-day banding period we were unable to completely open nets on only 2 days, and we had only a few days where the number of net hours was reduced because of wind or intermittent showers.

We were asked on many occasions whether the hot weather was delaying the migration – the thinking was that if cold temperatures "push" migrants out of their northern breeding areas then unseasonably hot temperatures would not promote it and migrants would linger. We didn't see any evidence of this. If anything, the good conditions allowed migrants to make a fairly easy passage, and we felt that they were passing over our site on their way south – but within their usual time frames. Generally we need poor weather to bring birds down – fallout conditions.

One calculation we make is to average the number of birds banded per 10-day period in September and October (11 days for the last period in October). September usually starts off "slow", but builds toward the end of the month leading into October when we see a marked increase for the month. For example, the 6-year average (2011-2016) of birds banded per day for 10-day periods in September and October look like this: 33, 31, 43 in September followed by 76, 75, 69 in October. This fall, September started off normally – 34 and 32 birds banded per day during the first two periods (very similar to the mean) but then the total *dropped* significantly to only 26 birds per day (vs 43) and we limped into the first period of October banding only 31 birds per day, well below the average (76). But then the numbers exploded in the second 10-day period going to 114/day (vs 75). This was helped by **our biggest banding day ever at Ruthven: 342 birds on October 12**th – the result of a fallout from rainy conditions during the previous night. But then numbers dropped right off again, plummeting to only 27 birds per day (vs an average of 69).

I think that during periods of good migration weather, birds take off at the beginning of the night from daytime roosts north of Lake Ontario. They then cross both Lake Ontario and Erie on their way south, with stragglers coming down along the north shore of Lake Erie rather than chance an open water crossing during daylight when they would be readily visible to avian predators. In doing so, they essentially "miss" Ruthven. And, for the most part, this was the dynamic affecting us this season. Birds were simply taking advantage of the great weather....and bypassed us.

Overall we banded a total of 2,869 birds of 81 species at a rate of 37.4 birds per 100 net hours.



Male Northern Flicker - note the large black "moustache". Photo: NRF



Male Blue-winged Warbler - note the black eye stripe. Photo: MMG

Non-standard Banding Program:

We did not keep track of net hours in this program – we were more interested in teaching extraction methods, aging and sexing, and taking morphometrics. The group **banded 259 birds of 47 species**. Included in these numbers are the **32 Northern Saw-whet Owls** that we banded. We decided to put them in this category as this banding effort is not standardized. Of interest is that on our record "big day" – 342 birds banded on October 12^{th} – the non-standard banders added *another* 37 birds to push that banding total to 379!

Observations:

Through the fall we saw (but didn't necessarily band) **134** species. Highlights included: **Olive-sided Flycatcher, Great Egret, Marsh Wren, Common Nighthawk, and 23 species of warbler.**

<u>Returns:</u>

These are birds that were banded at Ruthven in the first half of the year or in other years and recaptured at Ruthven this fall.

							Jan-	
Species	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Mourning Dove						3		3
Red-bellied Woodpecker							1	1
Downy Woodpecker						2	1	3
Blue Jay			1		2		2	5
Black-capped Chickadee					3	3	1	7
Tufted Titmouse							1	1
White-breasted Nuthatch					3	3	2	8
House Wren							1	1
American Robin					1	1	1	3
Gray Catbird							1	1
Blue-winged Warbler			1					1
Common Yellowthroat				2			7	9
Northern Cardinal	1				2	1		4
American Tree Sparrow			1					1
Chipping Sparrow				1				1
Field Sparrow							3	3
Song Sparrow				2	1	4	7	14
House Finch					1			1
American Goldfinch	1	2		2	12	14	16	47
TOTALS	2	2	3	7	25	31	44	114



A comparison of fall thrushes. From left: Gray-cheeked Thrush, Wood Thrush, Swainson's Thrush. Photo: MMG

Recoveries (for which we received notification from the Banding Office this Fall):

These are birds banded at Ruthven and recovered elsewhere.

- Mourning Dove; banded 04/06/2016; recovered 11/10/2017; Anderson Co. South Carolina
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak; banded 05/10/2016; recovered 08/22/2016; Cambridge ON
- American Tree Sparrow; banded 02/05/2013; recovered 04/12/2014; Oriskany, ON
- Gray Catbird; banded 10/03/2017; recovered 10/15/2017; Oriskany, ON
- Brown-headed Cowbird; banded 07/15/2015; recovered 04/16/2016; Oriskany, ON
- Black-capped Chickadee; banded 11/02/2016; recovered 05/12/2017; Rochester, NY
- Northern Saw-whet Owl; banded 11/07/2015; recovered 11/12/2017; Youngsville, Sullivan Co., NY
- Northern Saw-whet Owl; banded 11/24/2016; recovered 10/20/2017; Franklin Co., NY
- Northern Saw-whet Owl; banded 10/11/2014; recovered 10/19/2017; Potter Co., PA
- Cedar Waxwing; banded 11/04/2013; recovered 08/15/2017; Oakland Co., Michigan
- Snow Bunting; 02/12/2017; recovered 04/10/2017; Magpie, QC

<u>Foreign Recaptures (for which we received notification from the Banding Office this Fall):</u> These are birds banded at another location but recaptured at Ruthven.

- Snow Bunting; banded 02/12/2014 at Port Rowan, ON; recaptured 02/16/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 01/23/2013 at Fergus, ON; recaptured 02/13/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 02/06/2015 at Port Rowan, ON; recaptured 03/07/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 01/14/2015 at Fergus, ON; recaptured 02/06/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON

- Snow Bunting; banded 01/17/2015 at Fergus, ON; recaptured 02/17/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 01/17/2015 at Fergus, ON; recaptured 02/22/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 02/05/2015 at Cambridge, ON; recaptured 02/16/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 02/22/2015 at Cambridge, ON; recaptured 03/05/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 01/31/2013 at LPBO, ON; recaptured 02/10/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 01/22/2015 at LPBO, ON; recaptured 02/14/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 01/23/2015 at LPBO, ON; recaptured 03/07/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 02/05/2014 at , Holiday Beach, ON; recaptured 03/02/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- now Bunting; banded 12/27/2013 at Fergus, ON; recaptured 02/11/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Snow Bunting; banded 02/13/2015 at Fergus, ON; recaptured 03/05/2015 at Duxbury Rd. site, Hagersville, ON
- Black-capped Chickadee; banded 10/26/2014 at Rock Point PP, ON; recaptured 04/07/2015 at Ruthven Park



Ruthven is a great place to see birds in the hand, as well as in their natural habitats. Left: Dark-eyed Junco (photo: B. Fotheringham), right: Yellow-rumped Warbler (photo: KMP)

<u>Acknowledgements:</u>

I would like to thank the **Lower Grand River Land Trust** for their ongoing support of the banding program at Ruthven Park. This includes the use of the grounds, use of the banding lab building and

financial support. Ruthven Staff **Marilynn Havelka** (CAO) and **Natalie Campbell** (Education Coordinator) have been especially helpful and supportive. Natalie has done a wonderful job coordinating the visitation by numerous school groups. We would also like to thank the University of Windsor for their practical support and personnel (Christine Madliger and Chris Harris). Haldimand Bird Observatory also provides a great deal of practical support.

We are able to operate at the level we do because of the input of a dedicated group of volunteers. In total, this group put in **1,673 volunteer hours**. Those who contributed a significant amount of time and effort this Fall (i.e., >20 hours) are:

- Nancy Furber
- Carol Jones
- Dave Maida
- Marnie Gibson
- Karen Petrie
- Sian Ford
- Ralph Beaumont
- David Brewer
- Sue Merritt
- Aidan Petrie
- Alessandra Wilcox
- Faye Socholotiuk
- Ezra Campanelli
- Samuel Strachan
- Debbie Lindeman
- Kim Robillard
- Ethan Gosnell
- Claire Gosnell
- Callie Stirling
- Jaimie Juriansz
- Hannah Stassen
- Callum Daniels
- Maorgan Pilzak
- Lauren Witterick

Visitors:

This Fall we had **907 visitors**, made up of interested adults and students.

Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Report - 2016 - Ruthven Park Banding Station

By Nancy Furber, Bird Bander

The fall of 2016 marked our 6th season of Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) banding at the Ruthven Park Banding Station. What started as a vision six years ago with the anticipation of banding the first owl has developed into a dedicated program. This season marked a new banding record for Ruthven Park! (Ruthven Park Nature Blog, November 17th – Finishing With A Flair) A total of 90 Northern Saw-whet Owls were banded, surpassing the old record of 88 owls banded in 2012. In total, this brings our six-year banding total to 365 birds.

In the park, there were two study areas where an array of mist nets and sound systems (male Sawwhet territorial vocalization on a continuous loop) were established. One site was located along the Grand River with a series of five nets using the main sound system. A second, smaller sound system, was placed among six passerine banding nets, 200 meters inland from the river. On twenty evenings, between October 8th and November 16th (Figure 1), these areas were operational between 8 p.m. and 1 a.m., with net checks occurring every hour. We adjusted our hours based on weather conditions and to maximize our time to take advantage of peak Saw-whet Owl migration. The busiest night was October 30th, when a total of 17 owls were caught and processed – 16 Northern Sawwhet Owls and 1 Eastern Screech Owl. Owls were trapped on sixteen of the twenty evenings the nets were opened (Figure 1).



Figure 1 - Number of owls banded and retrapped during the 2016 banding season.

Of the 104 owls we handled over the season, we banded 90 Northern Saw-whet Owls and 1 Eastern Screech Owl. There were 14 Northern Saw-whet Owl retraps with six foreign (previously banded at another site) and 7 Ruthven 2016 bands. Of the 90 Saw-whet Owls banded, 67% were females, 13% were males, and 20% were unknown. In regards to age, 64% were hatch year (HY), 16% were second year (SY), 14% were after second year (ASY), and 6% were after hatch year (AHY). The six foreign retrap owls were initially banded in the United States (Pennsylvania and Michigan), in Ontario (Leamington, Nanticoke, and Dry Lake, Cayuga) and in D'Alembert, Quebec. The owl from Nanticoke was a male and was banded on October 8th, 2012. We handled the same owl last year on October 30th, 2016 and again this year on November 11th!



Some of the beautiful Northern Saw-whet Owls banded at Ruthven. Photos: B. Fotheringham

Thanks to Ruthven Park National Historic Site, Rick Ludkin (head bander), and to the many volunteers who helped to make this a new record season. It's an all-volunteer operation for Rick and I, and I'm indebted to Rick for his support with this program and the tireless hours that he contributes. Without him, this new record would not have been possible to achieve. A special thanks to Irene and Bob Fotheringham who were there on many of the busier evenings to help. It would not be the same without Irene's delicious baked goods and hot drinks to feed the many visitors and keep the banding crew going late into the night. They made any evening a fun night to be together.

In conclusion, we celebrated a new milestone banding a record number of 90 Northern Saw-whet Owls. There were over 100 visitors during a period of ten evenings and on the evening of October 22nd, there was a new record of over 40 visitors hoping to see these fascinating little raptors. The starlit night at Ruthven is a sight to see and on crisp, clear nights with the stars blazing overhead you may hear the Great Horned Owls hooting, an Eastern Screech winnowing, and coyotes yipping and howling. We look forward to continuing this program in the fall of 2017 and volunteers/visitors are always welcome.

Our Contribution to the Canadian Snow Bunting Network

By Nancy Furber, Bird Bander

In 2010, the Canadian Snow Bunting Network was formed by Rick Ludkin (Head Bander – Ruthven Park Banding Station), Dr. Oliver Love (Professor - University of Windsor), and Christie Macdonald (at that time with Environment Canada). Through their inspiration and experience, they began an effort to bring banders together throughout Canada with a common goal of banding Snow Buntings. This formed the basis for the current network of volunteers across Canada (from Newfoundland to the Yukon) and the United States. Encouraging banders to get out in the cold weather and focus on Snow Buntings has paid dividends in increasing the number of birds recovered between banding sites, thereby broadening the picture of their migration dynamics (several Snow Buntings banded in southern Ontario, including one of "ours", have been recovered in Greenland)!

Since 2010, the Ruthven Park Banding team, led by Rick Ludkin and Nancy Furber, has been participating in this winter banding project. The success and growth of the program over the past eight years has been phenomenal. We experimented at first, moving the bait site throughout rural Haldimand County, trying out six different locations, before finally settling on two sites to capture and band the Snow Buntings. For over four years, the birds have returned each year to these two sites.



Snow buntings enjoying cracked corn at a bait site. Photo: B. Fotheringham

Array of walk-in traps used to capture Snow Buntings. Photo: B. Fotheringham

One of the bait sites is in a field just outside of Hagersville (the Duxbury Road site), and the second site is in a field just outside of York (by the York Airport on Stony Creek Road). Both small towns are in southern Ontario surrounded by agricultural land – mostly soya beans, corn, and winter wheat. Each winter, the big swirling flocks do not show up until a prolonged cold snap brings a dusting of snow to the stubble, fallow fields. It is not until later in the season when the weather is consistently cold and with a good snow base that they stay put long enough to begin feeding regularly in the area. The number of birds that we see/catch at our bait sites each year can drastically fluctuate depending on the presence or absence of snow – no snow translates into no Snow Buntings.

Since the beginning of our program in 2010, we have banded a total of 12,577 Snow Buntings (Table 1). It is late January 2018 at the time of this writing and we've had a successful start to the 2017/2018 banding season, banding 799 Snow Buntings, 138 Horned Larks, and 29 Lapland Longspurs thus far. The season started earlier with an opportunity to band in December (2017). The cold temperatures and thin (but sufficient) snow cover continued into January, keeping the buntings coming to our bait site. Now, for the past two weeks the banding has been on hold due to warm, wet weather. I'm sure it won't be long until the weather changes, bringing the needed snow and cold to draw the Snow Buntings back to the corn at the bait sites.



Bird bander Nancy Furber extracting Snow Buntings from a walk-in trap. Photo: B. Fotheringham



Along with Snow Buntings, Horned Larks are often trapped while winter banding. Photo: B. Fotheringham

Table 1 - Total number of Snow Buntings banded by year	

Year	Number of Snow Buntings
2010	985
2010/2011	2,844
2012	41
2013	268
2013/2014	2,550
2015	3,462
2016	851
2016/2017	777
2017/2018 (to date)	799
	Total = 12,577

Northern Saw-whet Owls and Night Life at Ruthven National Park

By Nancy Furber, Bird Bander

The Ruthven Park Banding Station runs a Northern Saw-whet Owl banding project which is open to the public. It's an evening program that will challenge your senses and bring new awareness and appreciation for this beautiful park.

Our project, starting from small beginnings in 2010, has grown into a successful migration monitoring program drawing new visitors and volunteers each season. Secretive Northern Saw-whet Owls breed primarily in the boreal forest, and most of them migrate south in the fall to winter in the US, from Pennsylvania to West Virginia. During their fall migration, we open our mist nets from dusk until at least midnight each rainless night from the first of October to the first full week of November. Next to the nets, a sound system (male Saw-whet territorial vocalization on a continuous loop) is established in anticipation of luring the owls into the nets on their migration.

Once the owls are trapped and returned to the banding lab, the banding process is quick. Each owl gets a numbered leg band, age is determined under ultraviolet light looking at the replacement patterns of the flight feathers (new feathers fluoresce a bright pink), we take a series of measurements (wing, weight) to determine the sex, and then, the bird is 'released' (i.e., placed in a juniper bush giving it time in the dark for its eyes to readjust).



Northern Saw-whet Owl perched in a maple tree. Photo: B. Fotheringham

In 2017, it was an unseasonably warm/wet fall and the owl nets were opened between September 30th and November 06^{th.} Owls were trapped on nine of the eleven evenings the nets were opened. We banded 33 owls - 32 Northern Saw-whet Owls and one Eastern Screech Owl. There was one Northern Saw-whet Owl foreign retrap (banded by D. Lamble, near Fergus, Ontario on October 13th, 2017). Half of the owls banded were young or hatch year birds and most of them were females (Table 1).

Age	Percentage of Owls
Hatch Year	50%
Second Year	3%
After Second Year	47%

	Percentage of
Sex	Owls
Female	91%
Male	3%
Unknown	6%



Viewing the feathers under ultraviolet light allows owls to be aged (new feathers glow a bright pink). Photo: J. Furber



Screech Owls are also occasionally banded during the Saw-Whet Owl season. Photo: B. Fotheringham

Over the past eight years, we have banded a total of 397 saw-whets. The fall of 2016 marked a new banding record for Ruthven Park (Table 2). Many people have attended the banding program and within the last two years the number of visitors have swelled with the popularity of it. Plan on visiting Ruthven during one of our owl banding programs and experience the night life; keep an eye on the <u>Ruthven Park Nature Blog</u> for more details about owl banding in fall 2018.

Table 1 - Age and sex of Northern Saw-whet Owls banded at Ruthven in 2017

Year	Nights Open	# Owls Banded
2010	4	5
2011	14	55
2012	20	88
2013	19	23
2014	14	62
2015	19	42
2016	20	90
2017	11	32

Table 2 - Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Season Summary

Bird Banding Quiz

Choose which answer is the most correct.

- 1. Banding birds contributes information to learning more about a species':
 - a) migratory route
 - b) wintering location
 - c) clutch size
 - d) longevity
 - e) a, b & d
- 2. The male of which commonly banded species has a **very** different plumage appearance in summer than in winter:
 - a) Black-capped Chickadee
 - b) American Robin
 - c) Common Yellowthroat
 - d) American Goldfinch
 - e) House Finch
- 3. When a bander is trying to "age" a bird in the hand, one of the **most** important observations for most species involves:
 - a) measuring the wing chord.
 - b) examining the shape and moult limits of the primary coverts.
 - c) determining the fat level.
 - d) examining the uppertail coverts.
 - e) determining the length of the alula.
- 4. Which species of warbler tends to have the longest oceanic migratory distance between its nesting and wintering ranges.
 - a) Cape May Warbler
 - b) Blackpoll Warbler
 - c) Wilson's Warbler
 - d) Palm Warbler
 - e) Tennessee Warbler
- 5. Which statement is **false**:
 - a) the primary coverts on hatch-year birds are usually narrow and somewhat worn.
 - b) The tarsus is the part of the leg on which a band is applied.
 - c) At least some truncate primaries are found on most hatch-year birds.
 - d) In aging birds in the hand there will always be some individuals that appear to be an exception to the rule.
 - e) Wing chords should be measured without flattening the wing to the ruler.

Bird Banding Quiz Answers

- 1. e
- 2. d
- 3. b
- 4. b
- 5. c

Haldímand Bírd Observatory's Annual General Meetíng

Saturday, April 28

Ruthven Park Coach House; 243 Hwy #54, Cayuga, ON

Full day of activities with business meeting and presentation beginning at 1:00pm



Presentation by David Brewer

"Bird Migration"

Learn about the historical debate, how birds navigate, examples of amazing migratory feats, what we have learned from banding, and new techniques for studying the migratory journeys of birds

The meeting will also feature reports on banding activities, pizza and treats available for purchase at lunch, and a bucket raffle for bird-themed prizes, including a signed copy of David Brewer's new book, "Birds New to Science"

