

Migration Summary, October 16 to 31, 2023

By Gill Holmes, Assistant Bander

In the last two weeks of October, we experienced a variation of temperatures, from the low teens in the first week of October, to a high of 21 on October 21. We also had a handful of rough weather days, with high precipitation and strong northerly winds. Capture numbers also varied, from a day of no captures (October 27) to the highest number of birds captured this season, with 78 birds banded in 8 species on October 23.

On October 16, strong north winds and ongoing light-to medium precipitation forced us to close our nets after an hour of being open. During that hour, however, we banded the season's first Eastern towhee. On census, we observed a flock of terns, including thirteen Common terns and two Forster's terns, along with a small flock of six Bonaparte's gulls foraging in the high winds. The morning of October 17 was calm, with continuing north winds, and we banded the first White-crowned sparrow of the season. On census, we had the first sighting of a Horned grebe and a Red-breasted merganser. In the evening, we opened the owl nets for the first time this season, and captured three Northern Saw-whet owls within the first round.

The winds shifted south on October 18, bringing warmer temperatures. During the census we observed many Eastern bluebirds and four Tree swallows flying over the Tip. On the east shore, we spotted a Greater scaup and two Lesser scaup females loafing together. We heard a Red-breasted nuthatch around the banding station. On October 19, temperatures remained high, with a continuing strong south wind. We saw many hawks during the census, including Sharp-shinned and Red-tailed hawks and several Peregrine falcons. At the Pond, we observed a pair of Trumpeter swans. At the banding station, we banded two Swainson's thrushes and recaptured a same-season Hermit thrush.

October 20 brought light rain and high temperatures. On census, we observed an increase in late fall passerines, including Winter wren, Blue-headed vireos, and Brown creepers. Surprisingly, we banded an American woodcock, a hatch-year male.



American Woodcock. Photo credit: Gill Holmes

October 20 was the last day we saw the local Great egret that had been present since early August. That next day the wind switched to the northwest, cooling down temperatures. We captured a Marsh wren during the early morning, a first observation for the fall season. On census, we observed eight Eastern meadowlarks, an elevated number of Turkey vultures (18) and the last flock of American white pelicans. While banding, we observed a male White-tailed deer in the net lanes, which resulted in a broken net, which we removed, leaving us with nine 9-metre nets for the rest of the banding season.

On October 22, we observed four Gadwalls in the Pond, along with three Belted kingfishers and a Broad-winged hawk. On the eastern shore, we spotted four warbler species, including Pine warblers, Nashville warblers, and Common yellowthroats. We banded our first Fox sparrow. That evening, we opened the owl nets and banded five hatch-year Northern saw-whet owls and one same-year recapture. We had strong northwest winds on October 23, and observed numerous American goldfinches, Pine siskins, Slate-coloured juncos, and White-throated sparrows. On census, we observed a juvenile Red-headed woodpecker, and at the banding station, we captured 28 Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) warblers and one Blue-headed vireo.

There followed two slow banding days on October 24 and 25, with temperatures increasing again. On October 24, we observed Purple and House finches at the banding station and a small group of Black-capped chickadees. On October 25, we observed a significant number of Greater black-backed gulls. We didn't open the nets on October 26, which was a slow migratory day for many American robins. The slow days continued on October 27, but we spotted ten Killdeer at the Point, and observed the highest number of Blue jays since the beginning of October. Another slow banding day on October 28, despite high north winds. We heard a Great-horned owl in the morning while opening the nets.

October 29 was another day of rain, with strong winds from the northeast and continuous rain for the entire morning. The Point was overrun with sparrows, including Field sparrows, Swamp sparrows, and Song sparrows. On the western shore, we observed four Common loons and a group of three Buffleheads flying across the Tip. On October 30, on-and-off rain continued throughout the morning; however, we banded 68 individuals of 6 species, including 60 kinglets. On census, we observed a Caspian tern at the Tip and a Merlin harassing the European starlings over the Pond. On October 31, which was Halloween and our last day of banding, we saw more than 50 American crows soaring above the banding station and banded an adult male Sharp-shinned hawk. On census, we observed a Horned lark and a late season Magnolia warbler. In true spooky fashion, we watched thousands of migrating blackbirds, including Red-wing blackbirds, Common grackles, and Rusty blackbirds.

Overall, the last two weeks of October brought us many late fall species, including an abundance of sparrows, blackbirds and kinglets. Our most abundant species captured were Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned kinglets. Across the Island, we spotted flocks of Lapland longspurs and Horned larks in the ploughed fields, and at the north end we observed an adult male White-winged scoter accompanied by a female Redhead, and a lone Black scoter and Common merganser.