

2010 Spring Banding Report



Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*)

**First Landing State Park
Virginia Beach, VA**

**Conducted by
Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory
www.cvwo.org**

March 1 to May 30, 2010

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For the sixth consecutive year Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (CVWO) conducted spring migratory songbird banding at First Landing State Park in Virginia Beach. The station was open a total of 80 days during the 2010 spring season. Banding was conducted on seven days between March 1, 2010 to March 14, 2010, and 73 days from March 15 to May 30. A total of 1,315 birds were banded. Fifty-seven were netted before March 15th; 83 birds were banded between March 15 and March 31. Three hundred ninety-three birds were marked in April; 782 in May.

At least one individual of 79 species was banded; there were 407 birds recaptured of which 44 were banded at First Landing in previous springs. Thirty-nine birds were released un-banded. Five species were new to the First Landing station this spring. In chronological order of first capture, the species are: Cooper's Hawk, Virginia Rail, American Crow, Green Heron and Tennessee Warbler.

The station is located along Long Creek and Broad Bay in Loblolly Pine and deciduous woodland among salt and brackish wetlands clustered around waypoint N 36 deg., 54.35'; W 076 deg., 01.73'. Net placement was essentially unchanged from 2009. Two, two-panel nets were placed in the sheltered wetland immediately west of the banding table during March and April to capture Swamp Sparrows using the wetland in modest numbers. The station protocol of previous seasons was followed.

Although the station is only accessible by foot, it again served as an education center this spring. A basic bander training session was held for the second consecutive year over two weekends and was attended by nine individuals from three states. Field training and seminars were given in net set-up, bird extraction, species identification, ageing and sexing, and banding protocol and practice. Senior, scouting and youth groups made scheduled and unscheduled visits to the station. An ornithology class from Virginia Commonwealth University for the third consecutive spring spent a productive April day at the station. Foot traffic was brisk over the course of the season (greater than 275 individuals) including many acquaintances from previous seasons and a number of tourists from abroad and from Canada. A blog was again posted for the First Landing Station at: <http://cvwofirstlandingspk.blogspot.com>. Finally, three individuals interested in honing their banding skills spent extensive time at the station. One was a teenager from Maine; the second was a field ornithologist from The Bahamas National Trust. Mindy Mathenia of Chicago, IL, CVWO's 2010 spring field intern, was the third.

The station for the second consecutive year provided research support to a Department of Defense study involving ticks transported by migrating passerines. Migrants were scanned for the presence of ticks. Ticks were removed and preserved; the species of the carrier was noted. Samples from fifty-one birds were gathered in 2010.

METHODS

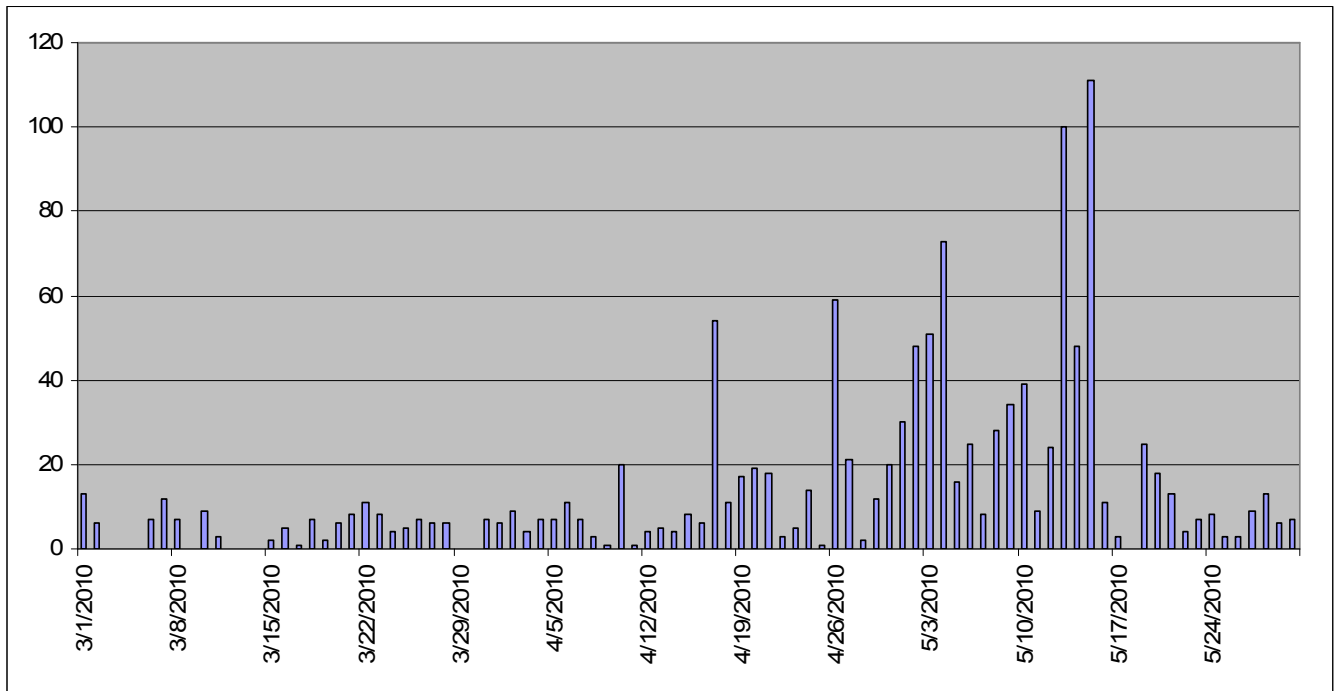
Mist nets were opened 30 minutes before local sunrise each day, weather permitting. Nets remained open for 6-9 hours (occasionally less) depending upon weather conditions and avian activity. Each net was 12 meters of 30 mm mesh, most with 4 panels or shelves. Each net was visited at intervals of 30-45 minutes. Three nets were aerial nets (two, four-panel nets stacked in the vertical plane). Netted birds were extracted and placed individually in a cotton bird bag suitable to the size of the species. A clothes pin denoting the net of capture was affixed to each bag. (The panel of capture for each bird netted in an aerial net was noted.) Birds were brought to the central banding table where they were identified, banded, measured, weighed, aged and sexed when indicated. Fat, molt and general condition were also evaluated.

Birds were handled in the general order of their capture and were released from the central banding table unless the individuals were active local breeders. Breeders showing brood patches and fledged juveniles were released near their place of capture. Newly-banded birds recaptured on the same day were generally released at the net without notation. Hummingbirds were released un-banded as that species is not generally banded at migratory stations. The welfare of each bird was considered during extraction and banding. Occasionally, birds were released un-banded at the net or at the banding table without all data being taken to prevent unnecessary stress.

Results

The 2010 spring migration followed a pattern that is typical of migratory banding along the mid-Atlantic and New England coast of the United States. North-bound migrants moved along the coast in greater numbers when southerly winds, usually associated with a warm front, prevailed; northerly and easterly winds, which usually accompanied the approach and passage of a cold front or a coastal storm, brought a lull in migrants.

The figure below illustrates this pattern during the 2010 season. The station was closed by rain, wind or high water on four days, only one of which was after March 30. Bird numbers from March 15 to April 17 were very low.



Once again the great majority of birds captured were spring migrants netted during the last ten days in April and the first twenty days of May. Of the top three most commonly banded birds, Common Yellowthroats were at an all-time high, Gray Catbirds were at an all-time low, and Yellow-rumped Warblers were about at the mean, when adjusted for differences in previous season opening dates. The top ten for this year and all previous springs are presented in Table 1.

TOP TEN		2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
1	COYE	204	102	201	200	151	95
2	GRCA	136	231	267	158	253	234
3	MYWA	91	104	53	63	137	87
4	SWSP	75	59	71	93	64	35
5	WTSP	69	41	15	70	32	62
6	BLPW	55	49	68	36	44	63
7	MAWR*	54	44	24	1		
7	AMRE	54	47	40	50	56	24
9	MAWA	48	30	77	33	31	24
10	RCKI	32	38	79	35	35	29
10	NOWA*	32	14	17	21	28	18

* 1st time in top 10

APPEARING IN TOP 10 IN PREVIOUS YEARS

BGGN	8	46	49	39	32	6	
BTBW	24	25	47	59	45	18	
HETH	29	26	17	20	45	25	
COGR	23	4	12	22	44	45	
YPWA	26	6 yr low	38	32	33	35	42

Table 1. A Comparison of the 10 most frequently banded birds across years

Among the migrant species banded in seasonal high numbers in 2010 were Common Yellowthroat, White-throated Sparrow, Marsh Wren and Northern Waterthrush. Among resident birds Eastern Bluebirds exceeded previous spring numbers; Red-wing Blackbirds did the same among summer residents. Among species with record low numbers were Gray Catbird, Yellow Palm Warbler and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers suffered a severe decline after four strong springs.

While 79 species were netted in 2010, a total of 111 species have been banded during the six seasons that the station has been open (not included in this total are the complexes e.g. Bicknell's/Gray-Cheeked Thrush, or morph, e.g. Western Palm Warbler). Of the total, 24 species have been banded only once, or only in one spring. Forty-six species have been

banded each spring; 41 species have been banded during at least two seasons. It should not, however, be inferred that a species not banded each spring at the station is not present in First Landing State Park in the vicinity of the station. Indeed, most of the “un-banded” species are present annually in modest numbers and are heard and/or seen by those operating the station.

SPECIES	2010	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	4	1	2	2	1
Mourning Dove	2	2	2	1	1	0
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	3 high	1	1	1	0	0
Red-bellied Woodpecker	1	5	2	0	3	0
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	0	1	2	1	0
Downy Woodpecker	8	4	3	6	3	6
Red-headed Woodpecker	1	1	0	1	0	0
Hairy Woodpecker	2	1	3	3	3	3
Yellow-shafted Flicker	2	1	2	0	2	2
Pileated Woodpecker	2	4	4	0	2	2
Acadian Flcatcher	3	1	4	1	1	0
Traill's Flycatcher	0	1	3	0	2	0
Eastern Phoebe	6	3	6	5	17	16
Great Crested Flycatcher	8	6	16	4	16	13
Eastern Kingbird	3	1	2	0	0	4
White-eyed Vireo	4	9	5	3	11	5
Red-eyed Vireo	9	7	13	9	8	9
Blue Jay	2	5	2	0	2	1
Carolina Chickadee	20	19	21	12	17	8
Tufted Titmouse	6	0	2	2	3	9
Brown-headed Nuthatch	6	1	1	1	3	1
Brown Creeper	3	3	1	4	2	3
Carolina Wren	8	7	4	5	7	12
House Wren	3	2	2	1	8	3
Winter Wren	1	1	4	2	2	0
Golden-crowned Kinglet	6 low	7	7	21	7	22
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	32	29	28	34	79	38
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	8	6	15	33	49	46
Veery	13	15	33	8	18	10
Gray-cheeked Thrush	2 tie low	3	17	5	18	2
Bicknell's Thrush	0 1st "miss"	2	3	5	2	1
Swainson's Thrush	6	12	23	8	15	5
Hermit Thrush	29	25	45	20	17	26
Wood Thrush	2 low	11	6	6	6	3

American Robin	0		1	8	1	0	3
Gray Catbird	136	low	234	253	158	267	231
Brown Thrasher	8		2	2	7	6	12
Blue-winged Warbler	0		0	2	3	2	2
Orange-crowned Warbler	2	high	0	1	1	0	0
Northern Parula	22		23	11	16	19	15
Yellow Warbler	3		0	1	3	5	1
Chestnut-sided Warbler	1		0	3	1	5	2
Magnolia Warbler	48		24	31	31	77	30
Black-throated Blue Warbler	24		18	45	55	47	25
Yellow-rumped Warbler	91		87	137	63	53	104
Black-throated Green Warbler	0		0	1	1	0	1
Pine Warbler	17		13	32	10	13	18
Prairie Warbler	20		20	15	22	33	15
Palm Warbler (Yellow)	26	low	42	35	33	32	38
Blackpoll Warbler	55		63	27	36	68	49
Black-and-white Warbler	23		18	28	38	14	31
American Redstart	54		24	56	49	40	47
Prothonotary Warbler	2	tie low	7	4	3	4	2
Worm-eating Warbler	2		5	1	11	3	3
Ovenbird	7		4	9	12	1	6
Northern Waterthrush	32	high	18	28	21	17	14
Louisiana Waterthrush	4	high	1	3	1	0	1
Common Yellowthroat	204	high	95	151	200	201	102
Hooded Warbler	0	1st "miss"	3	3	4	4	1
Wilson's Warbler	5		2	3	3	10	1
Canada Warbler	3		0	5	1	1	2
Yellow-breasted Chat	0	1st "miss"	1	2	2	3	5
Summer Tanager	0		3	2	0	0	1
Scarlet Tanager	1		0	1	0	3	0
Eastern Towhee	10		15	4	4	3	3
Song Sparrow	3	low	15	8	23	13	10
Swamp Sparrow	75		35	64	96	71	59
White-throated Sparrow	69	high	62	31	66	15	41
Slate-colored Junco	2		0	2	12	6	11
Northern Cardinal	14		11	13	15	17	19
Indigo Bunting	9		4	9	10	15	11
Red-winged Blackbird	11	high	0	2	3	3	6
Common Grackle	23		45	44	10	11	4
American Goldfinch	21		6	10	16	11	22
Marsh Wren	54	high	0	0	1	24	44
Bay-breasted warbler	0		0	0	1	0	0
House Finch	0		0	0	3	0	2

Blue-headed vireo	1	6	0	2	3	0
Alder flycatcher	0	0	0	1	3	0
Blue Grosbeak	6 high	1	0	1	0	3
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	3	1	0	1	3	1
Brown-headed Cowbird		4	0	2	2	0
Fox Sparrow	4	14	0	3	2	10
Eastern Bluebird	7 high	3	0	2	0	5
Savanah Sparrow	0	0	0	0	1	0
Seaside Sparrow	2	0	0	0	1	5
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow	3	0	0	0	6	1
Saltmarsh Sharptailed Sparrow	0	0	0	0	5	2
STSP	0	0	0	0	0	1
Field Sparrow	0	0	0	0	1	2
Painted Bunting	0	0	1	0	0	0
Belted Kingfisher	0	0	0	0	2	0
Yellow throated Vireo	0	0	0	0	1	0
American Woodcock	0	0	0	0	1	0
Cedar Waxwing	0	0	0	0	1	2
Mourning Warbler	0	0	0	0	1	1
Willow Flycatcher	0	0	0	0	1	0
Eastern Wood Pewee	0	0	0	0	1	0
Least Flycatcher	0	0	0	0	1	0
GCBT	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chipping Sparrow	0	0	0	0	0	1
Eastern Screech Owl	0	0	0	0	0	1
Least Sandpiper	0	0	0	0	0	1
Red-Shouldered Hawk	0	0	1	0	0	0
Palm Warbler (Western)	0	0	1	0	0	0
Lincoln's Sparrow	0	0	1	0	0	0
Baltimore Oriole	0	0	0	1	0	0
Bay-breasted warbler	0	0	0	1	0	0
Chuck-Will's Widow	0	0	0	1	0	0
Yellow-throated Warbler	0	0	0	1	0	0
Red-breasted Nuthatch	0	0	0	0	2	0
Coopers Hawk	1					
Virginia Rail	1					
Green Heron	1					
American Crow	1					
Tennessee Warbler	1					
Total	1315	1373	1263	1491	1282	1315

new in
2010
new in
2010
new in
2010
new in
2010
new in
2010

Species	79	81	79	85	79	79
111 species from all years plus Western Palm		mean all years= 1309.3 birds: 79.83 species				

Table 2. A Comparison of all species numbers by years

Again, there were no foreign recoveries during 2010. There were recaptures of 44 individuals of fifteen species banded at First Landing station in previous springs. Of these, there were 23 individuals of nine, year-around resident species: Carolina Chickadee (7 individuals), Northern Cardinal (5), Carolina Wren (3), Downy Woodpecker (2), Hairy Woodpecker (1), Pileated Woodpecker (2), Eastern Bluebird (1), Brown-headed Nuthatch (1) and Brown Thrasher (1). Of migratory, non-resident species there were 21 individuals of six species. (winter residents, 13 birds; migrant breeders, 8 birds). The winter resident species were: Yellow-rumped (“Myrtle”) Warbler (10), Hermit Thrush (1), and Ruby-crowned Kinglet (2). The spring migrant breeders were: Northern Parula (6), Great Crested Flycatcher (1) and Eastern Kingbird (1).

Remarkably, the first year-to-year recapture caught in 2010 was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet which P. Doherty marked on the first day of his first season at First Landing State Park in 2007. Of further note, the Hermit Thrush recaptured in 2010 has been netted each March since it was originally banded by J. Runco in 2006. A Pileated Woodpecker initially banded in 2006 was recaptured for the first time in 2010.

In summary, of recaptures from prior springs, there were three individuals banded in 2006, seven in 2007, five in 2008 and twenty-nine from 2009. Leaving aside the Hermit Thrush, of the 43 other recaptures from prior springs, ten had been captured once; only two had been recaptured twice.

Discussion

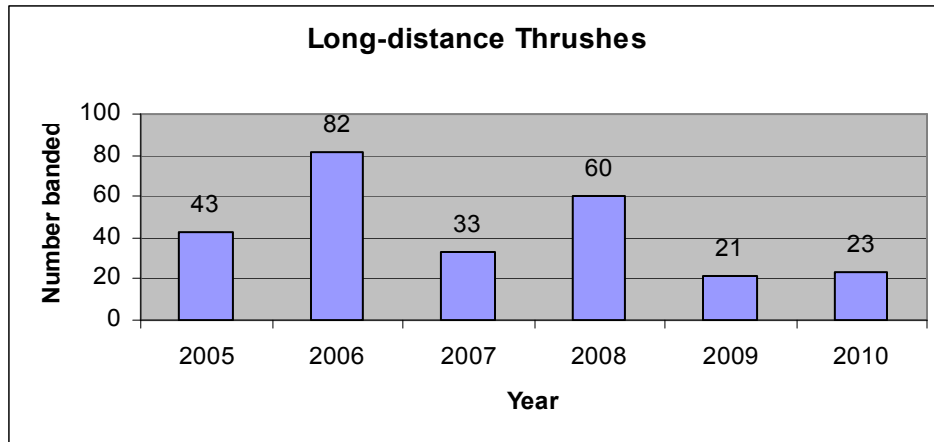
There has been little overall change in the total number of birds netted at First Landing during the first six years of spring banding. The average daily bird banding count was lower in 2010 at 16.44 than in four of the previous seasons, but adjustments in banding dates and net location and number between years render the differences insignificant. [New birds per banding day: 2005 = 17.8; 2006= 17.6; 2007= 19.0; 2008=20.7, 2009= 16.3].

Also, while five new species were banded at the station in 2010, the diversity of birds frequenting the habitat during the spring remains fundamentally unchanged. For example, for the first season ever a Yellow-breasted Chat was not netted during 2010; however, chats were heard and seen in the woodlands around the Station for three weeks. Their use of the forest canopy simply caused them not to encounter the mist nets. Usually the same is also the case for one or two of the seven woodpecker species which use First Landing. For the first spring this was not the case in 2010. The station banded a “clean sweep” of the seven *Picidae* which can be expected annually at First Landing: Red-headed, Red-bellied, Downy, Hairy and Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Northern Flicker.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird returned to the numbers netted and released in 2007 and 2008. Thirty hummers were released in 2010 after a record 69 flew off in 2009. The 2010 total compares with those of 27 in 2007 and 38 in 2008. Birdlines in Virginia and North Carolina contained many messages commenting upon what most observers thought to be low numbers of migrating Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. In comparison to 2009 First Landing numbers, such observations would seem to be accurate.

The placement of two and three-panel mist nets in the salt and brackish marshes around the station continued to provide captures which more accurately reflect the numbers of marsh birds which use the habitat. Marsh Wren numbers achieved another spring high and moved into the top ten for the first time; Swamp Sparrow became the fourth most numerous species of 2010. Seaside Sparrow and the Sharptailed Sparrows were also captured. The capture of a Virginia Rail (flushed into a mist net) confirmed that targeted efforts in future springs using walk-in traps and call-back tapes could yield some interesting results in both rail numbers and species present. It also confirmed the annual presence in and importance of the undeveloped portions of the Lynnhaven estuary to these wetland species, some of which are in steep decline.

Our level of concern increased for the long-distance migrant thrushes (as first expressed in 2009) this spring. The number of *Catharus* thrushes (Veery, Gray-cheeked, Bicknell's, Swainson's) and Wood Thrush continued at their low level of 2009. Only the Veery, with 13 individuals, had a modest increase in 2010; the Bicknell's, Gray-cheek and B/GC complex total of only two birds was a six-year low.



The 2009-10 winter in the Hampton Roads region was both cold and moist. The number of wintering migrants in the park in early March was low. Early tallies of Myrtle Warbler, Fox Sparrow and Song Sparrow were low. This seemed to match the lack of fruit and seed available as forage in the park in March. Perhaps the weather caused some birds to perish and others to move down the mid-Atlantic coast. The numbers of early migrants, such as the Eastern Phoebe and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher were discouraging in the context of the past three springs. Each of these species should be monitored.

Consideration also might be given to improving park habitat for wintering passerines in First Landing. As an urban park, fire has been suppressed for many years. Once common, Bob-white Quail have all but disappeared from the First Landing Park, a sign of poor foraging for seed crops. Perhaps a few test areas could be burned within or in close proximity to the banding station for evaluation of its effects on wintering passerines.

Notwithstanding, the seasonal totals and the diversity of species frequenting this fragment of passerine and near-passerine habitat within a large, developed urban coastal region remain remarkable. The number and diversity of year-to-year recaptures of resident and seasonal migrants within the station continue to build the case that First Landing provides breeding and wintering habitat within which individuals choose to return and within which they are able to survive and breed successfully. The data also underscores the need to conserve, preserve and manage a chain of such habitats, large, modest and small, along migration corridors of the mid-Atlantic coast for long-distance thru-migrant, seasonal resident and resident bird populations.

Acknowledgments

The First Landing Station would not function without the support of the staff of First Landing State Park. Eric Molleen deserves special mention for his quick assistance and good humor; so, too, Cindy, Jim, Paul and Eddie of the Park staff. Many able individuals volunteered their time, effort and expertise to set up the banding station and to help run it

on daily basis. Dr. Robert J. Reilly, Terry Jenkins and Kurt Pederson, our dear friend now returned to Norway, were always there when needed. William Nichols of Sandy Point, Maine and Denny Moore of Nassau, The Bahamas came to volunteer at First Landing in 2010 at their own expense. Each was of valuable assistance and improved their banding skills greatly. They were also fun to be with at 0500. Finally, Mindy Mathenia was an outstanding intern in 2010. We made the best choice out of a flood of applicants. Mindy is a serious student of biology with a graduate degree but little field experience. She became an able field ornithologist and bander this spring. Her company was always enjoyable and we wish her good fortune in her future field endeavors. Thank you.

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