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The Early Bird Gets...Counted!

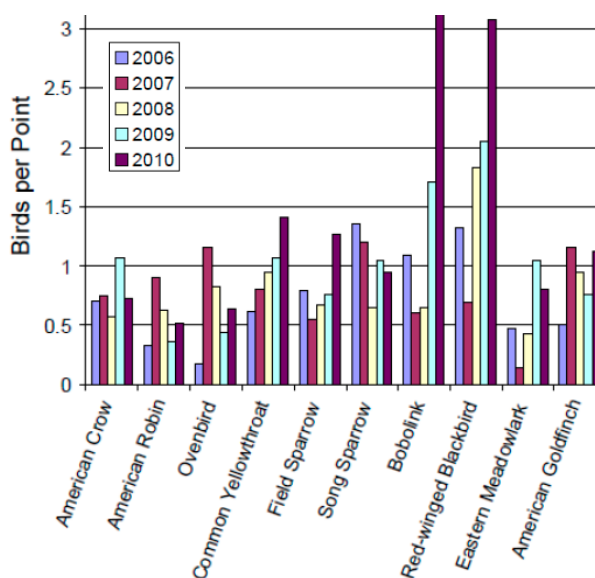
Results from 2010 Breeding Landbird Survey at Saratoga

Background

With the invaluable help of volunteer birders that traverse mosquito infested forests and who start their surveys even before the sun wakes up in the morning, the Northeast Temperate Network (NETN) and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) have been monitoring breeding landbirds in most network parks since 2006. On a broad scale, all 13 network parks are located within the temperate deciduous forest biome. At a finer scale, the parks range across four Bird Conservation Regions (BCR) with Saratoga lying in the Lower Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Plain BCR. BCR's, developed by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, are ecologically defined areas that provide a consistent framework for bird conservation across North America. Each BCR has its own unique list of "priority" species ranked by conservation importance according to a standardized set of criteria.

Purpose and Scope

This latest report summarizes data collected from 2006 through 2010. As with any long-term study, as more years of data accumulate, interpreting study results becomes more relevant and meaningful. Therefore, it is important to not read too much into the results of only a few years of data collection. Readers of the report should also treat the Ecological Integrity Assessment results as provisional because the assessment assumes that the bird community is completely



The 10 most common species detected at Saratoga 2006 - 2010.

ecosystem structure and function; thus, management action may not always be warranted when some groups of bird species are rated "significant concern." In an attempt to better characterize the bird community at each park and reduce bias, the 2010 assessment results presented for each park were produced by combining data from all survey years at the park. In the future, NETN plans to work directly with park managers to produce a parallel assessment based on park management goals.

Results and Findings

Six study sites consisting of 51 point counts were established in 2006 and 2007 in the park. During 2010 surveys, observers detected a total of 976 individual birds of 59 species (41 point counts), compared to 676 of 57 species (41 point counts) in 2009, 830 of 64 species (51 point counts) in 2008, 324 of 48 species (20 point counts) in 2007, and 495 individuals of 62 species (34 point counts) in 2006. During the 5-survey years a total of 3,301 individual birds of 83 species have been detected at Saratoga, with a mean abundance of 17.5 birds per point. During 2010, relative abundance and species richness increased over 2009, and a new species was detected (Cooper's Hawk). Eight species of conservation concern were recorded during the surveys: Black-Billed Cuckoo, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Wood Thrush, Blue-winged Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, and Baltimore Oriole. The park-wide forest avian Ecological Integrity Assessment (EIA) for all years combined at Saratoga resulted in four categories ranked as "Good," six ranked as "Caution," and three ranked as "Significant Concern". These results suggest that the forest bird community at Saratoga



Indigo Bunting
Kelly Colgan Azar
photo

characterized,
and if a subset
of species are
rare and hard to
detect, the results
could be biased. Also,
many NETN parks were
founded with a primary
objective to manage for the
historical landscape rather
than biological integrity or

83 Species Found in Saratoga

Acadian Flycatcher	Northern Cardinal
Alder Flycatcher	Northern Flicker
American Crow	Northern Harrier
American Goldfinch	Northern Mockingbird
American Kestrel	Northern Waterthrush
American Redstart	Orchard Oriole
American Robin	Ovenbird
American Woodcock	Pileated Woodpecker
Baltimore Oriole	Prairie Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler	Purple Finch
Black-billed Cuckoo	Red-bellied Woodpecker
Black-capped Chickadee	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Blue Jay	Red-eyed Vireo
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Red-tailed Hawk
Blue-winged Warbler	Red-winged Blackbird
Bobolink	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Brown Creeper	Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Brown Thrasher	Savannah Sparrow
Brown-headed Cowbird	Scarlet Tanager
Canada Goose	Song Sparrow
Cedar Waxwing	Tree Swallow
Chestnut-sided Warbler	Tufted Titmouse
Chipping Sparrow	Turkey Vulture
Common Grackle	Veery
Common Raven	Vesper Sparrow
Common Yellowthroat	Warbling Vireo
Coopers Hawk	White-breasted Nuthatch
Downy Woodpecker	Willow Flycatcher
Eastern Bluebird	Winter Wren
Eastern Kingbird	Wood Thrush
Eastern Meadowlark	Yellow Warbler
Eastern Phoebe	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Eastern Towhee	Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Yellow-rumped Warbler
European Starling	Yellow-throated Vireo
Field Sparrow	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Golden-winged Warbler	Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Gray Catbird	Yellow-throated Vireo
Great Crested Flycatcher	
Hairy Woodpecker	
Hermit Thrush	
House Wren	
Indigo Bunting	
Least Flycatcher	
Louisiana Waterthrush	
Mourning Dove	
Northern Bobwhite	

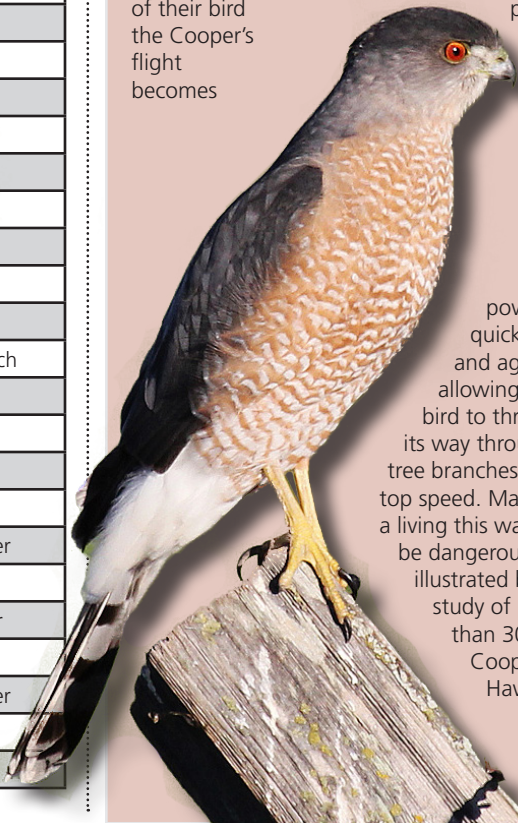
park may be affected by the generally fragmented landscape of small forest plots broken up by fields and early successional habitats, plus effects of deer on understory vegetation structure. The grassland avian EIA consisted of four “Caution” ratings. This community is considered a high priority in the region, and it would be prudent for the park to

continue its efforts to manage grassland habitat to support avian diversity. The EIA has been calculated for each site individually, and the results are provided in Appendix C of the report. For more information on findings for this park and all other Network parks, download the report from NETN’s Monitoring webpage.



Species Spotlight:
Cooper’s Hawk

Cooper’s Hawks, a kind of hawk known as accipiters, are extremely skillful fliers. They show the classic accipiter flight style which usually consists of a few stiff wingbeats followed by short glides. This differs from hawks such as Red-tails and Broad-wings, which are buteos, that employ more soaring in their flights. In pursuit of their bird prey, the Cooper’s flight becomes



powerful, quick, and agile, allowing the bird to thread its way through tree branches at top speed. Making a living this way can be dangerous, illustrated by a study of more than 300 Cooper’s Hawk

skeletons of which 23 percent showed old, healed-over fractures in the bones of the chest. Today they are quite common in woodlands, a turnaround from the mid-twentieth century when the use of DDT and widespread shooting greatly reduced their numbers. They are also fairly common urban and suburban birds, especially where there are plenty of Rock Pigeon and Mourning Dove prey. Some studies actually show their numbers are higher in towns than in their natural habitat. With their smaller lookalike, the Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper’s Hawks can make for tricky identifications. Both species are sometimes unwanted guests at bird feeders, looking for an easy meal. Cooper’s are about the size of a Crow and have rounded corners on their tails, and Sharpie’s are smaller, about Jay sized, and have a squared-off tail. One way to help tell them apart is to remember this little mnemonic: Cooper’s-Crow-Curved, and Sharpie-Smaller-Square. Cooper’s Hawks capture birds with their feet and kill it by repeated squeezing, unlike another efficient bird hunter, the Peregrine Falcon which tend to kill their prey by biting it or breaking its neck in high-speed mid-air collisions. Cooper’s Hawks hold their catch away from the body until it dies. They’ve even been known to drown their prey, holding a bird underwater until it stopped moving. Cooper’s Hawks mainly eat birds such as European Starlings, Mourning Doves, and Rock Pigeons. They also sometimes rob nests or eat chipmunks, hares, mice, squirrels, and bats. Mammals are more common in diets of Cooper’s Hawks in the West than the ones likely to be found in Saratoga NHP.

Andrew Reding photo.

More Information

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Full Report online at:
http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/NETN/monitor/flashmo_220_nature/monitor_flash.cfm



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