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The Early Bird Gets...Counted!

Results from 2010 Breeding Landbird Survey at Weir Farm

Background

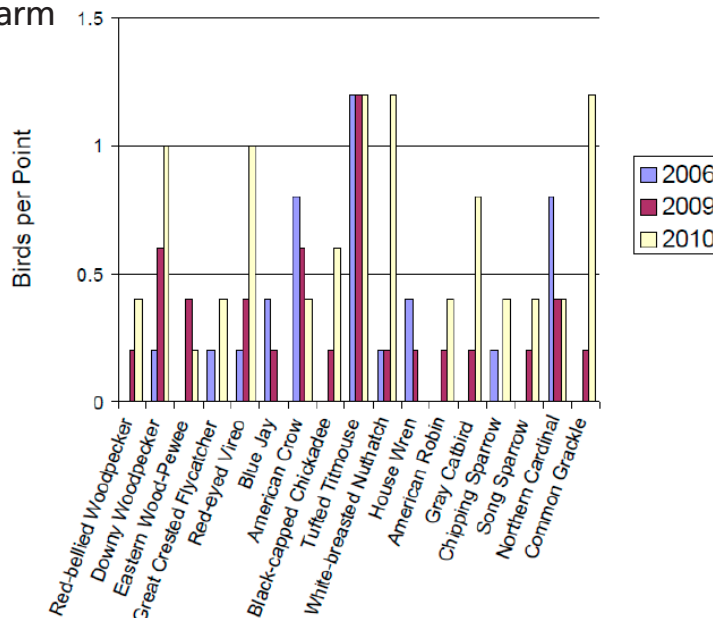
With the invaluable help of volunteer birders that traverse mosquito infested forests and who start their surveys even before the sun wakes up in the morning, the Northeast Temperate Network (NETN) and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) have been monitoring breeding landbirds in most network parks 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 Weir Farm lying in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Coast 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 characterized, and if a subset of species are rare and hard to detect, the results could be biased. Also,



Yellow-throated Vireo
Dan Pancamo photo



The 10 most common species detected at Weir Farm 2006 - 2010.

many NETN parks were founded with a primary objective to manage for the historical landscape rather than biological integrity or 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

Results and Findings

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.

Five point count stations were established at Weir Farm in 2006. During 2010 surveys, observers detected 105 birds of 25 species, compared to 61 individuals of 22 species in 2009, and 94 individuals of 29 species in 2006. Ten point counts were conducted each year. In total, 37 species were recorded. Average abundance during the first site survey was 7.7 birds per point. In 2010, relative abundance during the first survey increased, while species richness declined by one. It should be noted that the observation of a Blackpoll Warbler during the first survey in 2009 represented a late migrant, as the species' breeding range does not extend into southern CT. Four species of conservation concern: Eastern Wood-Pewee, Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, and Baltimore Oriole were detected during the 3-survey years.

33 Species Found in Weir Farm

American Crow
American Goldfinch
American Redstart
American Robin
Baltimore Oriole
Black-capped Chickadee
Blackpoll Warbler
Blue Jay
Carolina Wren
Chipping Sparrow
Common Grackle
Downy Woodpecker
Eastern Phoebe
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Gray Catbird
Great Crested Flycatcher
House Wren
Mourning Dove
Northern Cardinal
Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted Flicker)
Ovenbird
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Red-eyed Vireo
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-winged Blackbird
Scarlet Tanager
Song Sparrow
Tufted Titmouse
Warbling Vireo
White-breasted Nuthatch
Wood Thrush
Yellow-throated Vireo

The park-wide forest avian ecological integrity assessment for all years combined at the park resulted in three categories ranked as “Good,” seven ranked as “Caution,” and three ranked as “Significant Concern”. Guilds within the structural category earned no “Good” rankings, while “Significant Concern” ratings reflected low abundance of canopy and single brooded species, and high abundance of shrub nesting

species, indicative of the park’s location within a suburban, fragmented landscape. 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:

Baltimore Oriole



The Baltimore oriole is one of the most recognizable and well-known neotropical migratory birds. It is named for its brilliant orange and black plumage, which is reminiscent of the crest of Lord Baltimore who

was an important figure in history of the state of Maryland.

Orioles actually spend most of the year in the tropics, from Mexico to northern South America, where they inhabit lush, tropical forests and feed on nectar, pollen, fruit, and insects.

They tend to favor coffee and cacao

plantations where they are grown in the traditional manner with the shrubs



Larry Page photo.

growing under a shady canopy of forest trees.

Pairs of males and females form flocks of about 10 individuals, although sometimes as many as 30 or 40 are in a single flock. Apart from members of a few warbler species, Baltimore Orioles are often the most common migratory bird in these agricultural forests. The birds favor the tops of trees where they forage among the blossoms for nectar and pollen. Like other nectar/sap feeding birds, Orioles have a specialized tongue which resembles a brush to help them lap up the nectar.

By April, most Baltimore Orioles have begun the journey north to their breeding grounds in North America, which span most of the eastern United States and into southern Canada. Instead of the dense forests that so many other migratory birds favor, Orioles prefer open forests such as those along rivers and city parks.

Females build an unusual grassy hanging nest that is suspended like a sack from the end of a branch. The shape of the nest may help deter predators from eating the eggs or young because they are well-hidden and the entrance to the nest is difficult to access. The nest is often built in an elm, sycamore, or cottonwood tree. The female lays four to five eggs in late spring or early summer and incubates them alone. Then, both the male and the female feed the young. Pairs make only one nesting attempt per year. By August or early September, most Orioles are on their way back to the neotropics.

More Information

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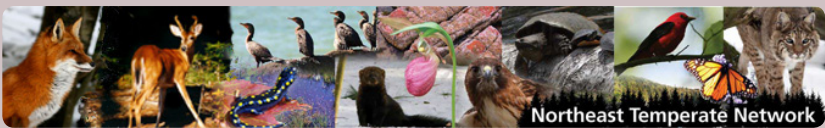
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Full Report online at:
http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/NETN/monitor/flashmo_220_nature/monitor_flash.cfm



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