

Net Results

SPRING 2004

Funding update

Grants, donations, and a challenge grant received!

In response to grant proposals, articles in local media, and letters of appeal, RRBO received a strong show of support in overcoming a project-threatening financial crisis. Donors came forward with sufficient funds to allow RRBO to remain operational through fiscal year (June) 2005.

Nearly 300 individual donors, and community groups and foundations provided support. A substantial grant was received from the James A. and Faith Knight Foundation of Ann Arbor. They have also issued the following challenge to RRBO: ***If we can raise \$10,000 by October 2004, they will match that \$10,000 dollar-for-dollar.*** An additional \$20,000 in funding would go a long way towards securing this vital project for years to come.

Other grants were received from the the Knight Foundation Fund of the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan, the University's Office of the Vice President of Research in Ann Arbor, and the Office of Sponsored Research here in Dearborn. Nearly every regional birding group made contributions: Washtenaw Audubon Society, Oakland Audubon Society, Macomb Audubon Society, Grosse Pointe Audubon, Sauk Trail Audubon, and Erie Shores Birding Association. The Dearborn Rotary Club provided funds for a year's worth of banding supplies.

Last year, state economic difficulties and the resulting budget cuts to higher education had a damaging impact on RRBO's funding. No longer able to

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More about our logo on page 4

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Woodpeckers on their way up!

Highlights of a typical winter bird walk can be subtle: the soft chip notes of several Yellow-rumped Warblers who have found the last clinging poison ivy berries in the forest, the single Pine Siskin fraternizing with dozens of American Goldfinches as they extract tiny seeds from alder cones, or the strident scolding of a Winter Wren, delivered from a snug brush pile. It isn't often that one can knowingly observe a major ecological event in the making.

So it was with great appreciation that I watched the intense woodpecker activity at dead and dying ash trees this winter, a phenomena which began last winter when trees became infested with the exotic Emerald Ash Borer, a beetle that is killing ash trees all over southeast Michigan.

RRBO has just completed its twelfth year of the ongoing winter bird population survey (WBPS). All birds are counted on an average of 12 visits between 20 Dec and 20 Feb each winter.



The strong bill of a Hairy Woodpecker can flake the bark off dying ash trees, exposing the tunnels of Emerald Ash Borer larva.

Aware that in the 1960s, trees which had been killed by Dutch elm disease resulted in a boom in Red-headed Woodpecker populations, I was eager to learn how the ash borer infestation would impact our resident woodpecker numbers. Data from the

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Woodpeckers on the rise

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WBPS will be a powerful tool in comparing baseline woodpecker numbers to any changes that occur in the coming years as ash trees die and decay.

All three species of resident woodpeckers - Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied - were at their highest numbers per average visit this year. Over the twelve years of the WBPS, both Hairy and Red-bellied Woodpecker numbers have sharply increased. The trend for Downy Woodpecker is only slightly increased over the life of the survey. However, the last two years have contributed to the increases in all three species.

It's too early to tell if the availability of ash borer larva as prey is contributing to the increases in Hairy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, which are clearly increasing at this site for other, undetermined reasons. If so, perhaps the larva are too deep or require too much effort to be exploited by the smaller Downy Woodpecker, thus not resulting in any increases? In any case, ash borer larva themselves will only play a small role in woodpecker population dynamics. As ash trees die, they will become infested with many more insects which will be available to woodpeckers, as well as other species. Further down the road, these trees will provide a huge increase in nesting opportunities for cavity nesters. We could easily see pronounced increases in woodpeckers, perhaps including a comeback of Red-headed Woodpeckers. Nuthatches, chickadees, and titmice also stand to benefit. It's early in the ash borer saga - the next decade will be extremely interesting to watch!

Fall 2003 banding highlights

A total of 2605 birds were netted (this includes birds released unbanded, including 23 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds) during fall banding 2003. The number of new birds banded, number of species, and capture rate were all above the fall average this season.

The highlight of the season was a "Yellow" Palm Warbler (usually found in the east) that was banded near the end of the season (see box at right).

A suite of warblers that specializes in feeding on spruce budworms during the nesting season (Cape May, Tennessee, and Bay-breasted Warblers) made a good showing this fall, reflecting the strong outbreak of this moth larva in the western U.S. and Canada.

Red-eyed Vireos, Chipping Sparrows, and Indigo Buntings were all banded in high numbers.

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Palm Warblers have two races -- "Western" Palm Warbler and "Eastern" or "Yellow" Palm Warbler. The western race is found in Michigan, and *The Birds of Michigan* reports that the eastern race (which breeds from Quebec to northern New England) is "at best casual" in the state and gives one documented record, a bird banded in Kalamazoo in 1990. RRBO banded an eastern Palm Warbler on 1 Nov 2003 (a late date for Palm Warbler at this site).

Summary of Birds Banded by RRBO fall 1992 through fall 2003

| | |
|---------------------------|------|
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | 10 |
| Virginia Rail | 1 |
| Killdeer | 1 |
| American Woodcock | 9 |
| Mourning Dove | 23 |
| Black-billed Cuckoo | 6 |
| Yellow-billed Cuckoo | 1 |
| Eastern Screech-owl | 8 |
| Northern Saw-whet Owl | 34 |
| Common Nighthawk | 1 |
| Red-headed Woodpecker | 1 |
| Red-bellied Woodpecker | 3 |
| Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | 2 |
| Downy Woodpecker | 142 |
| Hairy Woodpecker | 21 |
| Yellow-shafted Flicker | 91 |
| Eastern Wood-Pewee | 7 |
| Yellow-bellied Flycatcher | 44 |
| "Traill's" Flycatcher | 216 |
| Least Flycatcher | 151 |
| Eastern Phoebe | 13 |
| Great Crested Flycatcher | 21 |
| Eastern Kingbird | 25 |
| White-eyed Vireo | 6 |
| Blue-headed Vireo | 14 |
| Yellow-throated Vireo | 2 |
| Warbling Vireo | 80 |
| Philadelphia Vireo | 52 |
| Red-eyed Vireo | 269 |
| Blue Jay | 145 |
| Barn Swallow | 1 |
| Black-capped Chickadee | 334 |
| Tufted Titmouse | 55 |
| Red-breasted Nuthatch | 7 |
| White-breasted Nuthatch | 15 |
| Brown Creeper | 24 |
| Carolina Wren | 47 |
| House Wren | 262 |
| Winter Wren | 25 |
| Marsh Wren | 1 |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet | 194 |
| Ruby-crowned Kinglet | 333 |
| Blue-gray Gnatcatcher | 8 |
| Veery | 118 |
| Gray-cheeked Thrush | 200 |
| Swainson's Thrush | 1246 |
| Hermit Thrush | 715 |
| Wood Thrush | 138 |
| American Robin | 2070 |
| Gray Catbird | 2498 |
| Brown Thrasher | 34 |
| Cedar Waxwing | 256 |
| Blue-winged Warbler | 16 |
| Golden-winged Warbler | 6 |
| "Brewster's" Warbler | 3 |
| "Lawrence's" Warbler | 1 |
| Tennessee Warbler | 185 |
| Orange-crowned Warbler | 90 |
| Nashville Warbler | 428 |

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| | |
|-----------------------------|------|
| Virginia's Warbler | 1 |
| Northern Parula | 5 |
| Yellow Warbler | 250 |
| Chestnut-sided Warbler | 125 |
| Magnolia Warbler | 563 |
| Cape May Warbler | 21 |
| Black-throated Blue Warbler | 125 |
| Yellow-rumped Warbler | 1014 |
| Black-thr. Green Warbler | 59 |
| Blackburnian Warbler | 16 |
| Palm Warbler | 209 |
| Bay-breasted Warbler | 53 |
| Blackpoll Warbler | 282 |
| Black-and-white Warbler | 120 |
| American Redstart | 410 |
| Prothonotary Warbler | 1 |
| Ovenbird | 312 |
| Northern Waterthrush | 144 |
| Louisiana Waterthrush | 1 |
| Kentucky Warbler | 1 |
| Connecticut Warbler | 24 |
| Mourning Warbler | 67 |
| Common Yellowthroat | 291 |
| Hooded Warbler | 1 |
| Wilson's Warbler | 195 |
| Canada Warbler | 88 |
| Yellow-breasted Chat | 7 |
| Summer Tanager | 2 |
| Scarlet Tanager | 15 |
| Eastern Towhee | 11 |
| American Tree Sparrow | 93 |
| Chipping Sparrow | 62 |
| Clay-colored Sparrow | 4 |
| Field Sparrow | 40 |
| Savannah Sparrow | 16 |
| Fox Sparrow | 99 |
| Song Sparrow | 873 |
| Lincoln's Sparrow | 192 |
| Swamp Sparrow | 286 |
| White-throated Sparrow | 1391 |
| White-crowned Sparrow | 399 |
| Dark-eyed Junco | 541 |
| Northern Cardinal | 393 |
| Rose-breasted Grosbeak | 54 |
| Indigo Bunting | 158 |
| Red-winged Blackbird | 210 |
| Rusty Blackbird | 1 |
| Common Grackle | 146 |
| Brown-headed Cowbird | 74 |
| Orchard Oriole | 1 |
| Baltimore Oriole | 88 |
| Purple Finch | 32 |
| House Finch | 157 |
| Common Redpoll | 1 |
| Pine Siskin | 4 |
| American Goldfinch | 158 |

Total: 22,098

Fall banding 2003

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Many robins -- all young birds -- were found to have avian pox. This bacterial disease presents with scaly tumors on the feet and sometimes the bill. It's usually not fatal, and the lesions heal within a month, often leaving behind scars and deformities such as missing toes. From 1992-2002, RRBO banded only 18 birds with evidence of pox. This fall we banded 46 birds with pox, 44 of which were robins. Because pox can be transmitted between birds through feces, shed skin, etc., we had to take many extra precautions when handling birds. We also saw a fair number of otherwise healthy-appearing young robins that were weak or emaciated. This led us to wonder whether some disease or agent was infecting the robins and making them susceptible to pox, or whether the pox itself was causing the mortality. We did recapture a few robins that had healing pox lesions, and later in the season many birds did not have active lesions, but just showed missing toes, bill scars, and other evidence of healed pox lesions. A paper detailing this disease outbreak will be published in an upcoming issue of the journal *North American Bird Bander*.



Bizarre paddle-like extensions on the tail feathers of a House Wren.

Odd birds are always carefully documented. No exception was a House Wren banded in October that had unusual paddle-shaped extensions on five of its tail feathers (left). We've never seen anything like this, nor found any records from other banders.

It makes us wonder...what will 2004 bring??

Bird longevity records

Many people are curious about how long wild birds live. Bird banding can provide the answer, at least to the question of how long a bird *can* live, based on the longest period of time between capturing and recapturing a banded bird.

The Bird Banding Lab of the U.S. Geological Service maintains a web site that lists the longevity records of most species of North American Birds (www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/homepage/longvrec.htm). RRBO has now published a list of longevity records for birds banded on campus on its web site (www.rrbo.org). Twenty-one species are listed for which there are at least two years between captures. Our oldest bird is a Hairy Woodpecker, recaptured eleven years and eleven months after it was originally banded. Since it was banded as an adult, this is a minimum age estimate. Other old birds include an eight-year-old Wood Thrush, and a Gray Catbird and Northern Cardinal that were also approaching eight years. Surf on over to the web site to look at other senior birds; the page will be updated as we encounter other "old friends"!



A Gray Catbird like this one holds one of our longevity records.

Rouge River Bird Observatory

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About our Logo

The University of Michigan-Dearborn is located on property that was once the home of Henry Ford. Ford was not only an industrial leader, but a great nature and bird lover -- he was instrumental in convincing Congress to pass the Migratory Bird Treaty in 1913.

Throughout Ford's estate, Fair Lane, there are carvings and other representations of birds. The bird in our logo is taken from the copper ventillator covers in the powerhouse at Fair Lane. Our logo reflects the historical nature of our location.

Recent RRBO literature contributions

- Craves, J. A. and J. A. Fowler, Jr. 2003. Twenty-five years of the Detroit River Michigan-Ontario Christmas Bird Count. *Ontario Birds* 21:109-128.
- Bull, J. N. and J. A. Craves. 2003. Biodiversity of the Detroit River and Environs: Past, Present, and Future Prospects. Pp. 141-170 in *Honoring our Detroit River* (J. H. Hartig, ed.). Bloomfield Hills: Cranbrook Inst. of Science.
- Craves, J. A. Michigan range expansion for [Common Ringlet] *Coenonympha tullia inornata* (Lepidoptera: Satyridae). *Mich. Entom. Newsletter* 48(3&4):5.
- Craves, J. A. 2003. High incidence of avian pox in southeast Michigan, fall 2003. *North American Bird Bander* 28:168-169.
- Craves, J. A. 2004. "Yellow" Palm Warbler (*Dendroica palmarum hypochrysea*) banded in Wayne Co. *Michigan Birds & Natural History* (in press).
- Craves, J. A. 2004. First Michigan winter record of Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) in Wayne Co. *Michigan Birds & Natural History* (in press).

Funding and challenge grant update

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operate in the red or receive discretionary funds from the University, RRBO had to find the money to cover its operating costs for 2004 or face closure.

While the immediate crisis is over, but we need to look to the not-so-distant future. Our goal is to obtain enough unrestricted funding to sustain RRBO's operations for the long haul. Because research grants from scientific organizations to support ongoing projects are very difficult to find or obtain, we must seek private funding to grow an endowment to secure the long-term survival of RRBO.

This is definitely do-able. RRBO is an extremely cost-effective project. Through efficient use of well-trained volunteers (who put in over 1,000 hours annually) and in-kind donations of space, utility costs, printing, etc. from the University, RRBO operates on a budget of about \$50,000 a year.

Please consider making a gift to RRBO today. If we can meet the Knight Foundation challenge, your gift will double in value and RRBO will be one step closer to long-term sustainability.

Yes, I/we want to support the work of the Rouge River Bird Observatory

Enclosed is my/our gift of:

Name _____

\$25 \$100 \$150

Address _____

\$200 \$500 \$1,000

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Other \$ _____

Charge gift to: Visa Discover MasterCard AmEx

Account Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____ / _____

Signature: _____

Make checks payable to the University of Michigan-Dearborn. If you/your spouse work(s) for a matching gift company, please include your matching gift form. FOR OFFICE USE EID _____ 303732