

Bird Banding at Allegra Collister Nature Preserve - Fall 2005

Another bird banding season comes to a close with feelings of disappointment (can't we band just one more day?) and happiness (I don't have to get out of my warm bed so early in the mornings.). For now, we will have to be content with our memories of the season.

It was a good fall season. Banders were busy monitoring nets for 30 mornings beginning August 27th and ending October 29th. The nice fall weather allowed us to keep the station open a few days longer than normal. And, the warm days seemed to delay some of the migrant species from continuing travel to their wintering grounds.

Although this was not a record season, the results were pretty good. Total birds banded, 634. Different species captured, 53 (or, 57 when subspecies are counted).

We celebrated 3 notable bandings: 1) A species that is seen occasionally on the power lines and fence wires near the gulch is the Western Kingbird. Until now, one had never been caught. On Aug.29th, we added our first Western Kingbird, a hatch year bird of uncertain gender, to the record book. We were excited to add a new species to our ACNP list. 2) In the spring of 2000, we had captured our first Magnolia Warbler. We were pleased when, on Sept.16th, our second record of the Magnolia Warbler was netted. A hatch year female that we photographed and documented. 3) By Oct.21st we thought all the warbler species were probably gone. Were we ever surprised to find a Prairie Warbler in the net! This bird is out of range and tardy. Another first for ACNP! After studying all the field marks and reviewing several field guides, a hatch year female seemed to be the most likely age and gender. Pictured and documented. Then, imagine our shock when we recaptured the same bird again on Oct.29th! It must like ACNP! At least, it gained weight from the day of its original "weigh-in". We hope it migrates swiftly to warmer climes.

A Cordilleran Flycatcher was a bit unusual. Our first since the fall of 1996. And, only the seventh record since 1991.

Of course, Wilson's Warbler was the leader again with 134 banded. Gambel's variety of White-crowned Sparrow came in second at 98. Third, Orange-crowned Warbler showed 75. And, Lincoln 's Sparrow came in a distant fourth with 32; however, that's the highest seasonal count for the species.

No new species were sighted in or over the gulch. We are always on the lookout for those birds that avoid the nets. Sometimes, on the slow days, it's nice to be just a "birder".

We all commented that some of the other gulch regulars were absent or few in number. No coyotes were seen or heard. No sign of our bear. No deer. Elk tracks were found; but, only far away bugling was heard. A few cottontails fell prey to what we think was a sly fox. Never did see the bull snake. The voles, mice and rats were

more secretive than in previous seasons. Butterflies were plentiful.

It has been a privilege to witness the spectacles of nature at ACNP. Change is happening. The habitat is slowly transitioning. The old dead trees and shrubs are falling and decaying. There is an overall sense that the area is much more mature in ways that we have been remiss to notice. More invasive weeds have crept in. The trails tend to be more overgrown. The fruit and berry crop isn't as bountiful as it used to be. Perhaps fewer spring flowers bloom. Some of the short grasses don't seem to grow as vigorously. But, that's OK.

Change is good. Even the banding team will be different next year. Joe Harrison is giving up his role as lead bander. Who will take his place has not been determined. However, it is important that the banding effort continue uninterrupted. Someone will accept the reins and make the bird banding studies better than ever.

The new fencing has given the gulch the appearance of being more appreciated and better protected. To the average passerby, it leaves them with the impression that someone cares. And, it seems that less trash has been discarded along the roadside fence line. Let's hope it stays that way.

We sincerely thank everyone for their ongoing support and interest in the bird banding studies.

The Bird Banders,

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