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The Early Bird Gets...Counted!

Results from 2010 Breeding Landbird Survey at Vanderbilt Mansion

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 Vanderbilt Mansion 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.

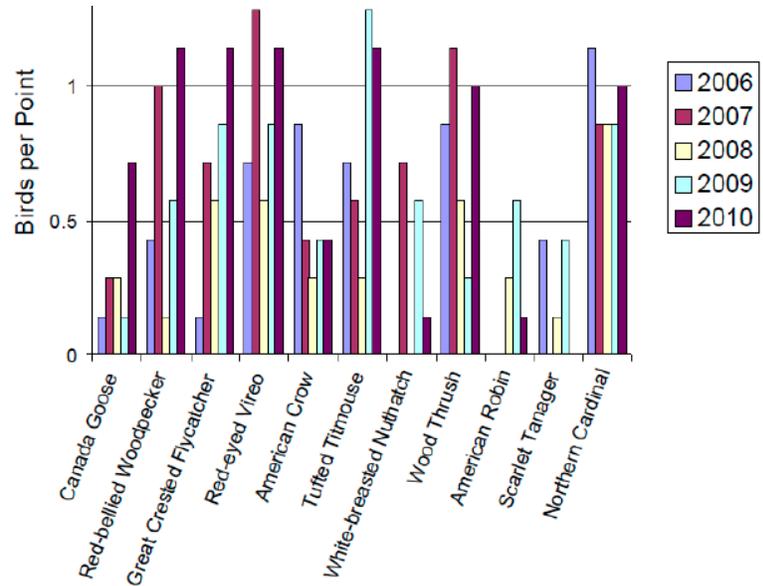
Purpose and Scope

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 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 ecosystem

Red-bellied Woodpecker
Ken Thomas photo



The 10 most common species detected at Vanderbilt, 2006 - 2010.

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

The Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites consist of three separate park units at which study sites were established and surveyed annually since 2006. One study site with 7 point counts was established at the Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site. Sixty-five individual birds of 19 species were detected in 2010, compared to 58 of 18 species in 2009, 43 of 20 species in 2008, 63 of 18 species in 2007, and 59 of 22 species in 2006. Seven point counts were conducted each year. In total, 33 species were recorded, and there was an average abundance of 8.2 birds per point. In 2010, relative abundance and species richness increased over 2009, and three species were detected for the first time (Mallard, Barred Owl, and Eastern Bluebird). Four species of conservation concern (Black-billed Cuckoo, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Wood Thrush, and Worm-Eating Warbler) were detected during the 5-survey years. The park-wide forest avian Ecological Integrity Assessment (EIA) for all years combined in the park resulted in four categories ranked

33 Bird Species in Vanderbilt

American Crow
American Redstart
American Robin
Barred Owl
Black-billed Cuckoo
Blue Jay
Canada Goose
Carolina Wren
Chipping Sparrow
Common Yellowthroat
Downy Woodpecker
Eastern Bluebird
Eastern Phoebe
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Fish Crow
Great Crested Flycatcher
Hairy Woodpecker
House Wren
Indigo Bunting
Mallard
Mourning Dove
Northern Cardinal
Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted Flicker)
Ovenbird
Pileated Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Red-eyed Vireo
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Scarlet Tanager
Tufted Titmouse
White-breasted Nuthatch
Wood Thrush
Worm-eating Warbler

as “Good,” five ranked as “Caution,” and four ranked as “Significant Concern” . Guilds within the structural category earned no “Good” rankings, while “Significant Concern” ratings for metrics measuring abundance of canopy and single brooded species is indicative of the park’s location within a 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:



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

A tiny, long-tailed bird of deciduous forests and scrublands, the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher makes its presence known by its soft but emphatic “spee” calls and its near constant motion. It is the most

widespread member of its genus in North America and the only Polioptila found in cold temperate regions. It is the only truly migratory Gnatcatcher, most other members of its genus are permanent residents of the Neotropics.

Adult males are blue-grey on the upperparts with white underparts and have a long slender bill, long

the unbrow. Both sexes have a white eye ring.

They inhabit a wide range of wooded habitats but prefer moist areas with broad-leaved trees, often at or near habitat edges. They forage actively near tips of branches in trees or shrubs, mainly eating insects, insect eggs and spiders. They either hover over foliage and pick off insects (gleaning), or fly to catch insects in on the wing, a practice known as “hawking”. A theory about its habit of flicking its white-edged tail from side to side while foraging is that this action may help flush hiding insects that the Gnatcatcher can then easily pick off.

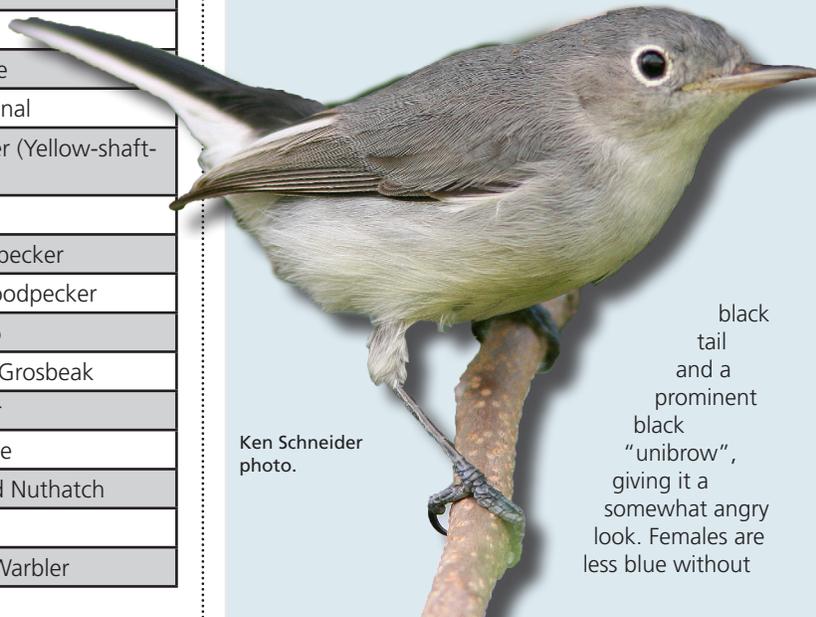
The soft, highpitched, and nasal rambling song of the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher usually contains some mimicked songs of other bird species.

Their breeding habitat includes open deciduous woods and shrublands in southern Ontario, the eastern and southwestern United States, and

Mexico. They are tree nesters and build an open cup nest (similar to Ruby-throated

Hummingbirds) with high walls, made of spider webbing or caterpillar silk, and covered with lichens or bark flakes. Both parents help construct the nest which is placed far out from the tree-trunk on a horizontal limb and lined with grass stems, bark strips, plant down, hair, feathers, or other fine fibers. They both feed the young and may raise two broods in a season.

Gnatcatchers migrate to the southern United States, Mexico, northern Central America (Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras), Cuba, Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the Cayman Islands. Populations of this species have increased over the past 25 years, expanding northward, most dramatically in the northeastern U.S. and southeastern Canada.



Ken Schneider photo.

black tail and a prominent black “unibrow”, giving it a somewhat angry look. Females are less blue without

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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