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Nongame Bird Investigations

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**Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
PERFORMANCE REPORT (July 1, 1991 - June 30, 1992)**

Project:	Nongame & Endangered Species Investigations	No:	EW-2-4
Study:	Nongame Bird Investigations	No:	XIV
Job:	Rare Bird Monitoring & Stewardship	No.	A,B
Personnel:	Karen Terwilliger, Dana Bradshaw, Rick Reynolds, Don Schwab, Walter Smith, John Dillard	Costs	
		Total:	\$4,333
		State:	\$1,083
		Fed'l:	\$3,250

Status/Recommendations: On schedule, continue study

Summary

The Rare Bird Monitoring and Stewardship Program (RBMSP) was introduced to the birding public through a series of staff presentations and articles published in prominent state ornithological newsletters. Data forms and information packages were provided to volunteers and data was compiled in a newly developed database for the program. This program appears to be a promising method of capturing information on rare breeders by utilizing an effective volunteer manpower source.

VDGIF also began work as the state coordinating agency for the national Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Program. Two regional meetings were held with local, state, and federal cooperators to establish goals and objectives for implementation of the migratory bird program in Virginia. For monitoring initiatives, the Game Department set up 20 additional Breeding Bird Survey routes across the state, in addition to several smaller scale routes. DGIF also continued its efforts under the Rare Bird Monitoring Program, first established in 1990. Project personnel prepared guidelines for migratory bird habitat management to be incorporated into the Forestry Stewardship program, and as well as information for in-house use. For educational purposes, nongame staff prepared a 16-page color brochure on the plight of neotropical migratory birds for publication in Virginia Wildlife magazine and then later, under separate cover.

A. Objective: To develop and implement an effective volunteer program for monitoring and protecting Virginia rarest breeding birds.

Procedure

A joint letter was sent from VDGIF and the Department of Conservation and Recreation to follow up the rare bird sightings reported in the six year Atlas Program. Atlasers were contacted and asked to supply specific information on these species of concern.

A complete information package including a data form and topo maps, were sent to volunteers. Data were received after the field season and entered into the computer.

On the national level, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries staff attended the first organizational meeting of a new migratory bird program in December 1990 in Atlanta, Georgia. That meeting served to consolidate the interests and ideas of private, governmental, corporate, and academic individuals from across the country and gave rise to what is now known as the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Program. From that meeting emerged a working document with goals and objectives, and a multi-national coalition of interested parties with a plan to promote the conservation of neotropical migrants. The program has since been termed "Partners in Flight" in recognition of the cooperative venture with Canada and our Latin American neighbors to the South.

The Partners in Flight program is designed to determine the current status and causes of population changes among neotropical migratory birds. It will then promote plans to maintain stable populations and enhance or restore declining populations. To most efficiently direct the appropriate resources to the problems, the Partners in Flight program is being administered through four areas of involvement: monitoring, research, management, and education. DGIF is the program's coordinating agency in Virginia and is organizing its efforts to also target all four areas of involvement. With Virginia overlapping into both the Northeast and Southeast Regions, DGIF staff are participating in both regional programs.

Findings

Responses from atlasers on the Rare Bird Monitoring and Stewardship Program are still being received and processed.

Activities of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Program include the following:

Monitoring: Two meetings were held to address the issue of monitoring neotropical migratory birds. The first meeting was held in western Virginia and was designed to develop a monitoring program in conjunction with the National directive. The National Park Service and National Forest Service represented the principal landowners serving as cooperators in the west. It was recommended that adding new USFWS Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) routes was the best method for obtaining trend data. The second meeting, held in eastern Virginia, was designed to inform and solicit participation from other public landowners in the state, particularly military bases and National Wildlife Refuges.

Following these meetings, VDGIF added 20 new BBS routes across the state, with the

assistance of our federal and local cooperators. Most of these routes targeted mature forested habitats, because these habitats tend to represent the habitats most in demand by neotropical migrants. With the establishment of these routes, the maintenance of the data and coordination with the observers was turned over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Additional routes will be added in 1992-93 as involvement in the program grows. In addition to general monitoring, the monitoring of rare and neotropical migrants (yellow-winged warbler, whip-poor-will, etc.) or those using limited habitats (blackburnian warbler) will be dealt with on a case by case study. Also customized monitoring projects have been designed for some parties to make use of all skill levels, as represented by the Girl Scouts, in one case.

A VDGIF staff representative currently serves on the monitoring committee of the Southeast Working Group of the Partners in Flight Program.

Research: DGIF staff initiated one project to evaluate the effectiveness of doing canoe surveys along forested river shores to gain information on bird species that are typically under-sampled on random road surveys. Canoes were used to survey six 9 kilometer stretches of river on three different river systems in the Coastal Plain. Rivers selected for survey were the Nottoway, the Blackwater, and the Pamunkey. Only primarily forested routes were chosen, and all surveys were based on thirty points 300 meters apart down river. This information will be used to compare the effectiveness of this technique for monitoring rare or localized species versus using random roadside surveys, or nonrandom habitat-specific roadside surveys. Data from an appropriate number of other surveys is still being solicited before analysis can begin.

DGIF staff, in cooperation with other state and federal agencies is developing a network of MAPS stations throughout the state. Monitoring Avian Productivity Survivorship stations are a series of bird banding stations being established across the country to gain demographic data on neotropical migrants. These stations are being set up under the direction of Dr. David DeSante in California, who is a leader in the field of assessing bird population characteristics. Shenandoah National Park took the lead in bringing the MAPS program to Virginia. In addition, DGIF's Rare Bird Monitoring Program, initiated in 1990, collects nesting data on several rare neotropical migrants.

Management: DGIF staff developed a literature synthesis article on forest fragmentation. This article was applied to the issue in Virginia and presented background information, status in Virginia, and management recommendations. The article was distributed to DGIF land managers. In addition, a second set of guidelines and recommendations was prepared for use as an informational insert into Forestry Stewardship programs, as part of our agency's contribution to the Department of Forestry's landowner assistance program.

A DGIF staff representative currently serves on the management committee of the Northeast Working Group of the Partners in Flight program. In addition, this staff member

has also served on the steering committee for a national workshop for managers to be held in September, 1992 in Estes Park, Colorado.

Education: With the assistance of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, DGI staff produced a 16 page color brochure on the plight of neotropical migratory birds in Virginia. This document was designed as an educational brochure for natural resource personnel and interested citizens, and first appeared as a feature article in Virginia Wildlife magazine. It is now scheduled to be reprinted under separate cover as a stand alone brochure for general distribution.

B. Objective: To monitor the migration of passerines along the coastal flyway through banding efforts and observations

Procedure

A volunteer banding station has been in operation for twenty-nine years at Kiptopeke on Virginia's Eastern Shore. Mist nets capture migrating passerines and master banders band, record data, and release them. Banding coincides with peak migration. Banding and raptor counts are conducted from September 1 through October 31.

This year a great deal of time was spent in promoting the acquisition and protection of this site as a state park. In the meantime, banding was conducted at a new site on the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge because of the tenuous status of the property.

Findings

The station opened on August 31 and closed on October 25. Nets were not opened two days due to rain and one day due to personnel, so total days operated were 53.

The station located at Kiptopeke Beach for the past 28 years, was moved to the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge (ESVNR) this year due to projected development at the previous site. The refuge is three miles SE of the old location and is adjacent to the Kiptopeke community. Initially, 25 nets were operated south of the public use area. During the first three weeks, only one-fifth as many birds (10/day) were banded as compared to the same period in 1990. At the beginning of the fifth week, half of the nets were placed alongside nature trails in the public use area where undergrowth is thick and the yield increased to 97 birds/day for October, 40 percent better than last year.

During the 1991 season, 2456 birds of 67 species were banded in 9489 net hours. There were two recoveries of birds banded elsewhere and 79 repeats of birds banded this year. There were no recoveries of birds banded at Kiptopeke Beach in previous years.

The most commonly banded bird was, as in previous years, **Yellow-rumped warbler** (*Dendroica coronata*) (1508), followed by **Gray catbird** (*Dumetella carolinensis*) (134), **Common yellowthroat** (*Geothlypis trichas*) (119), **Northern waterthrush** (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) (72), and **Black-throated blue warbler** (*Dendroica caerulescens*) (52). **Belted kingfisher** (*Megaceryle alcyon*) was added to the station list which now stands at 156 species.

Changes in habitat at the new location probably explain many of the decreases in birds banded this year. There were fewer **flycatchers** (17), **vireos** (8), **American redstarts** (*Setophaga ruticilla*) (44), **Common yellowthroats** (119), and **Northern mockingbirds** (*Mimus polyglottos*) (2). These are the species that migrate in September and, as mentioned earlier, nets were located during that month in a habitat-deficient area so a decrease is understandable.

Not explained by change in habitat are decreases in **kinglets** (14) and **Palm warblers** (*Dendroica palmarum*) (35) and an increase in **Northern waterthrushes** (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) (72).

Licensed banders who rotated in charge of this station included Walter Smith, David Leake, John Dillard, Karen Terwilliger, and Don Schwab. They were helped by many volunteer assistants. Walter Smith provided a summary of results and invaluable help in operating the station. Permission to band on the refuge was granted by Sherman Stairs, refuge manager. Assistance was provided by Ben Nottingham and Steve Alvarez of the refuge staff.