

[From Summer 1998]

Spring Migration

From March 15 to May 16, 1998, the Kiptopeake Environmental Station, Research and Education Laboratory (KESTREL) conducted a spring migrant bird census at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. The purpose of this survey was to document the number of migrant bird species that pass through the refuge.

The surveys were done primarily by Brian Taber of KESTREL and were conducted atop the 40-foot platform on the Southernmost refuge bunker. A total of 49,789 migrant birds of 160 species were recorded over 22 days. Of this total, 213 were raptors of 13 different species. Thirty-five percent of the raptors were falcons, with 51 American Kestrels, 21 Merlins, and 5 Peregrine Falcons. Other raptors of special note were 56 Ospreys and 13 Bald Eagles. A single White-tailed Kite and Swallow-tailed Kite were recorded on April 29.

Songbirds made up another large portion of the grand total. A variety of swallows, warblers, sparrows and others were recorded during the survey. Most notable were the more than 18,000 Yellow-rumped Warblers that were seen at an average of 30 per minute on March 15, the first day of the survey.

On May 16, 80 more species of birds were seen, This day also recorded more warbler species than any other day of the survey. However, most birds were not moving northward. During the whole census period, 22 species of warblers were observed and several Common Yellowthroats and Prairie Warblers appeared to be on territory by mid-April.

Over 4,800 swallows were recorded during the survey, with many seen on April 13 and May 15. On April 13, observers saw more than 400 swallows in 20 minutes, and on May 15, over 1,800 were seen in 2 hours. Flycatchers, wrens, thrushes, tanagers, and sparrows were also seen in low numbers during the Survey, but large numbers of blackbirds and grackles were observed.

Other birds observed migrating northward during the survey, included a few loons, cormorants in large flocks, shorebirds in several large flocks, herons, ibis, and ducks. Pending grant funding, the survey will be conducted next year to document further data on the migration of birds up the Eastern Shore.

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