



Fending for themselves

The woodpecker banding program for the 2006 season finished on the 22 October. A total of 67 Black-backed and 78 American Three-toed Woodpeckers were caught. These figures are similar to the averages for the last 11 years. As in previous years, approximately 95 % of the individuals banded were dispersing juveniles. Under certain conditions, relatively large numbers of these Boreal forest residents travel considerable distances in search of food and/or new breeding territories; dispersing juvenile woodpeckers often set up territories far from the area where



This Black-backed Woodpecker made a short stop off at Tadoussac.

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they fledged. The distance travelled, and the number of dispersing juveniles, varies greatly between years. When food supplies are short, the juveniles, being less dominant than the adults, are forced to leave their parent's territory. However, while these displacements may constitute an important risk, they may also lead to the discovery of recently burnt areas that are rich in wood-boring insect larvae. According to the scientist Jacques Ibarzabal and his research team at the *Université du Québec à Chicoutimi*, dispersing juvenile Black-backed Woodpeckers represent the age group most likely to find and rapidly colonise recent burns. However, strangely enough, when we compare the age classes of woodpeckers in mature forest stands with those in recently burnt stands, there doesn't appear to be a higher number of juveniles on the burnt sites. According to the scientists, the juveniles are rapidly joined by adults dispersing from areas where they failed to breed. The latter phenomenon is perhaps a consequence of reduced food availability. If adults disperse too, why do we catch mainly juveniles at the *Observatoire d'oiseaux de Tadoussac* (OOT)? Does the

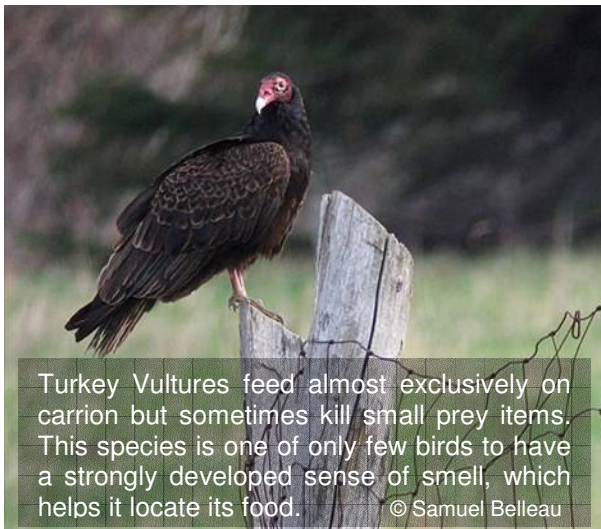
dispersion pattern differ between age groups? Or is there a bias in our capture methods? There still seems to be a lot more to learn concerning woodpecker dispersion (for further information, see Huot and Ibarzabal, 2006. *Annales Zoologici Fennici*).

BANDING STATION The owl banding is the only banding program still running and will do so up until the 31 October. During the last two weeks, the number of Northern Saw-whet Owls banded increased from 71 to 99. This slowing down of the rate of capture, suggests that we have past the migration peak for this species. A technical problem with our playback equipment meant that for five days we were unable to diffuse the Boreal Owl call. This interruption may well have affected the capture of this species because as soon as the material had been repaired, we caught our first three Boreal Owls of the season.

Number of owls and woodpeckers banded		
Species	Weeks 8 and 9	Total 2006
Northern Saw-whet Owl	28	127
Boreal Owl	3	3
American Three-toed Woodpecker	11	78
Black-backed Woodpecker	18	67

Banders : Christophe Buidin and Yann Rochepault

THE TURKEY VULTURE'S MARCH NORTH Over the last 20 years, the Turkey Vulture's breeding range has undergone a huge northward expansion. It wasn't that long ago that the observation of this species in Québec was considered something exceptional. It seems likely that a number of factors, acting in concert, have aided this scavenger in its move north. High on the list, is an increase in traffic intensity that has, in turn, increased the annual number of



animal road kills. Other potentially important factors include climate change and the increase in the amount of more open habitat due to clear cutting. Nevertheless, the arrival of Turkey Vultures along the North Shore is still a relatively recent event. The OOT's dataset clearly documents the establishment of this species further north: less than one individual per year was observed prior 1999; however, 22 individuals were recorded in 2003 and a new record of 54 individuals has been set this year. Interestingly a close relative of the Turkey Vulture, the Black Vulture, has also been undergoing a northward expansion. Initially present largely in Central America and the south of the United States, this species is now regularly observed as far north as Virginia and Maryland. How long will it be before this species starts to establish itself in Québec too? Keep your eyes open...

VISUAL COUNTS The number of migrating raptors is rather low this year, with little over 7,675 individuals to date. This phenomenon is hard to explain, particularly as other observatories in eastern North America, such as Hawk Mountain (Pennsylvania) and Hawk Ridge (Minnesota), have not been recording lower than average numbers at their stations. Nevertheless, the 25 October was a very good day, with 15 Bald and five Golden Eagles being recorded. Raptor aside, a number of new species for the season have been observed over the last two weeks, including Long-tailed Duck, Pine Grosbeak and Snow Bunting – a foretaste of winter. Some of the most impressive sightings over the last two weeks have been the huge passages of White-winged Crossbills. The single day record of 3,030 individuals set on the 1 November 2000 was broken four times during the last two weeks! The new record of 8,565 was set on the 25 October. According to the OOT's data, the migration peak for this species can occur during the first few days of November. Therefore, it is possible that a new record will be set this week. Watch this space...

Keep your eyes open and enjoy the migration!

Raptor counts		
Species	Weeks 8 and 9 12 to 25 oct.	Total 2006
Osprey	8	735
Bald Eagle	30	95
Northern Harrier	12	211
Sharp-shinned Hawk	233	2790
Goshawk	9	67
Broad-winged Hawk	0	439
Red-tailed Hawk	437	2160
Rough-legged Hawk	90	175
Golden Eagle	9	19
American Kestrel	8	706
Merlin	8	127
Peregrine Falcon	9	72
Gyrfalcon	1	1
Turkey Vulture	1	54
Unidentified raptor	1	27
TOTAL	855	7675

Top-five migrating passerines	
Weeks 8 and 9	Total 2006
White-winged crossbill (28 908)	White-winged crossbill (35 252)
Common Redpoll (4 823)	Cedar Waxwing (10 623)
American crow (2 456)	Pine Siskin (9 732)
Pine Siskin (900)	Common Redpoll (4 859)
American Robin (747)	Yellow-rumped Warbler (4 225)

Official counters : Samuel Belleau and Samuel Denault

Editorial team: Émilie Berthiaume (author, emilieberthiaume@explos-nature.qc.ca), Bruno Drolet (editor, French version) and Andrew P. Coughlan (editor and translator, English version).

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