

THE 1961 FALL MIGRATION AT MONHEGAN, MAINE

By Albert Schnitzer

Those who have read our article on banding on Monhegan Island in the March-April 1961 EBBA NEWS will recall that, when we embarked on this venture, we hoped our data would help toward reaching certain answers to questions that have intrigued students of migration. An indispensable portion of our plan included at least one additional banding effort during the same dates of the succeeding year.

When illness struck at our office, however, we thought we'd have to abandon the plan. Not until almost the last moment of the target dates were we able to arrange to take a hurried week to renew the project.

Upon arriving at the island, it was pleasant to be greeted as a friend by many of the islanders. This year, as the previous, they permitted us the run of the island; and again followed the progress of our banding with genuine interest and understanding. Profiting by last year's experimenting, we set up our nets at once at the meadow. This location has consistently yielded the widest variety of species. We also set up at Mrs. Cundy's and in the field across the road from Mrs. Cundy's. (I cite these locations for the sake of others who may wish to net at Monhegan.) As I mentioned in our previous EBBA article, the greatest concentration of birds occurs on the western side of the island, near the meadow and among the scattered dwellings of the village. This may be because there the birds find the choicest concentration of natural food. Aaron Bagg has questioned me as to the possibility that the birds may be led there by the configuration of the island, but I believe food and the direction of the mainland to the west takes the birds to the west side of the island.

In six days of netting we banded 755 birds of 45 species. Not a single one of these, however, was a return from last year. This could indicate three possibilities:

First, that the time schedule was off, that is that the birds we banded last year had either not yet arrived or else had already passed. Second, that the migration path is not constant, this is that the birds which land at Monhegan arrive there merely by chance, driven by wind and weather or some other variable cause, and will not necessarily retrace this route in some subsequent year. Or third, that the number of birds we netted both years was such a minute sample of those passing through that the odds were too great against any individual being retaken. Actually, we believe that some of all three possibilities apply.

With respect to timing, some of the stimuli that trigger the schedule of migration may vary, such as food supply and weather; but others, such as physiochemical or endocrinal changes that depend on sunlight duration, are likely to remain almost precise in their cyclic recurrence.

With respect to the path of migration, although few if any species migrate on so narrow a front as to guarantee repeated passage by an individual across a single spot, it seems reasonable to suppose that the path is, in some places, narrowed by certain topographical features. One might, therefore, expect a fair percentage of even the broad front migrants to be drawn to an island standing isolated in a wide gulf.

The third possibility seems quite compelling to us who have seen the enormous hosts of birds that pass Monhegan during the migration season. I cannot give more than a guess at the number, but certainly it must be at least in the dozens of millions. The few birds that we have thus far tagged must be but an infinitesimal portion of the whole.

Perhaps additional fall banding projects may answer some of these questions. We would be happy to have other banders who may wish to work at Monhegan communicate with us for suggestions or advice.

Numerical Summary of Birds Banded: October 4 to 9, 1961

Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	Cape May Warbler	1
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	1	Myrtle Warbler	262
Black-billed Cuckoo	3	Black-throated Green W.	1
Yellow-shafted Flicker	1	Bay-breasted Warbler	1
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	9	Blackpoll Warbler	11
Downy Woodpecker	14	Palm Warbler	15
Western Kingbird	3	Yellowthroat	3
Empidonax, sp.	1	Yellow-breasted Chat	2
Eastern Wood Pewee	1	American Redstart	1
Black-capped Chickadee	1	Bobolink	1
White-breasted Nuthatch	4	Baltimore Oriole	3
Red-breasted Nuthatch	9	Rusty Blackbird	1
Brown Creeper	13	Brown-headed Cowbird	2
Brown Thrasher	1	Purple Finch	11
Robin	1	American Goldfinch	2
Golden-crowned Kinglet	6	Savannah Sparrow	111
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	12	Slate-colored Junco	58
Cedar Waxwing	1	Chipping Sparrow	3
Solitary Vireo	8	White-crowned Sparrow	1
Red-eyed Vireo	5	White-throated Sparrow	40
Nashville Warbler	3	Swamp Sparrow	31
Parula Warbler	1	Song Sparrow	94
Magnolia Warbler	1		

Total birds banded: 755

Total net-hours: 372

Species banded: 45

Average birds per net-hour: 2.0