

This paper attempts to give a quantitative estimate of shorebird migration in the Montreal area. Many papers give species accounts in very general terms without attempting to estimate numbers of birds recorded. This may be due to inadequate data, or an unwillingness to estimate the numbers of a given species. Estimating numbers can be problematic, since only a small fraction of the birds passing through an area are usually seen.

Methods

Between 1968 and 1980 counts were made on one or two days per week from early April to early June, three or four days per week from July to mid September and one or two days per week until late November. For the Montreal area there are no records for any species of shorebird between 15 December and 24 February.

Weekly counts were made on Ile du Moine between late May and mid September for the period 1970-78. These counts showed the Montreal area does not have a summering population of non-breeding Arctic nesting migrants.

All the published literature on the shorebirds of the Montreal area has been researched (Wintle 1896, Terrill 1951, Ouellet 1974 and bird club reports (see reference list)). Some records have not been included here as the published information is inadequate, or in some cases incorrect.

Study Area and Results

The study area consists of the lowlands bordering the Ottawa River between Hawkesbury and Montreal, the lowlands bordering the St. Lawrence River between Dundee and Trois Rivieres, plus the areas bordering the Richlieu and Yamaska Rivers.

During the northward migration period from early April to the first week of June, there is a large area of excellent shorebird habitat available due to melting snow causing flooding of farmland near rivers. However, man-made changes to the main rivers have reduced the amount of good habitat. During the peak migration period mid May to early June many species can be found feeding by the flooded river banks. In most years by early June the water has run off the fields and the vegetation has started to grow rapidly, so making these areas unattractive to shorebirds.

Shorebird numbers seen in the Montreal area (see Table 1) are limited by the lack of suitable habitat, and also because the district does not appear to be a major staging area for any species. Some species have occurred in good sized flocks (see Table 1) but this is mostly an irregular phenomenon, and is not representative of the area. It is probable that a constant flow of shorebirds pass over the Montreal area on northward and southward migration routes, but only a small percentage of these are recorded when they are grounded by bad weather.

There are good numbers of Lesser Yellowlegs Tringa flavipes, Spotted Sandpiper Actitis macularia, Semipalmated Sandpiper Calidris pusilla, Least Sandpiper Calidris minutilla and Common Snipe Gallinago gallinago (see Table 1), but they are very thinly spread out over large areas, especially on the floating mats of pond weeds of the genus Potamogeton which form on the rivers during the southward migration from July to October.

The peak migration periods are from mid May to the first week of June and from the first week of July to mid September (Table 2). Systematic counts show that 90% of the shorebirds have gone south by mid September and do not return until mid May.

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UNPRECEDENTED PRESS ATTACK ON WSG EMBLEM

From the 'Daily Telegraph' 24 June 1983

BIRD'S NEST STORY BREAKS

A pair of oystercatchers which defied 75 mph express trains to nest on a railway track in Anglesey reckoned without British Rail's enthusiasm for good publicity.

Drivers approaching Valley Station, Anglesey, noticed that two birds always flew off, squawking angrily.

British Rail officials investigated and discovered three olive-brown eggs in a nest carefully hollowed out in gravel between the lines.

Yesterday BR invited cameramen to photograph the eggs, which had survived about 24 trains a day.

But as the photocall ended,

Mr John Reay, 39, a free-lance BBC cameraman from Llandudno, trod on them with his size 7½ feet.

Last night he said: "It is the worst thing that has ever happened to me in my 20 years in the job.

"I feel I have really put my foot in it."