Again this year we had a good number of children and adults attend the sessions on Purple Martin banding. We had a group of 35 youth who attended a Youth Day event at the Fin, Feather & Fur Conservation Society Club.

Ruthven Park **425-0795**
Haldimand County, Ontario
Banders: ***Rick Ludkin, Loretta Mousseau, Brian Pomfret,***
rludkin@hotmail.com

It was a strange fall banding season, a boom or bust situation for two of our main species: Cedar Waxwings and American Goldfinches. The Cedar Waxwing numbers could only be described as spectacular–we banded 1,481, well more than two standard deviations above the 14-year average of 129 and 819 above our previous high count (662 in 2011).

There has been an interesting increase in Cedar Waxwing numbers at Ruthven since we began fall banding in earnest in 1996. This increase is entwined in the arrival of wild grapes (*Vitis riparia)* to the site which began slowly in the initial years but jumped dramatically in 2010, as did bird numbers; in fact, you could almost say that you could date the arrival of wild grapes to the site with the increase in waxwing numbers. From 1996 to 2009 we averaged only 45.8 waxwings banded each fall. (Interestingly, we banded only two in 2009!) But then the floodgates opened: 422 in 2010; 662 in 2011; 196 in 2012.These numbers are related to the presence of wild grapes: in 2012 there were *none* due to weather anomalies in the spring and there was a drop-off (but only when compared to the two previous years). But this year we had a bumper crop of grapes, and waxwings were around in huge numbers starting in September and building through October/November. We banded 196 in September, 1,123 in October, and 162 in the first seven days of November.

On the other hand, American Goldfinch numbers plummeted. We banded only 198 for the season (just nine in September!). This is well below our 14-year average of 538 per fall season and last year's 1,316. What happened!? I do not know for sure but I suspect that they were decimated by conjunctivitis (*Mycloplasma gallisepticum)*, a disease that wiped out the House Finch population a number of years ago and is found in the family Fringillidae. We were seeing goldfinches with infected eyes in March, April and May, and a couple we captured in September were showing signs of it but not nearly as bad as those we saw in the spring. I can not come up with any other explanation as it appeared to be an average food year for them and summer weather was well within the norm. (While conjunctivitis is usually associated with House Finches, it has been noted in American Goldfinches. One report I saw mentioned infected goldfinches in the mid-eastern United States. We have had some of our birds recaptured down there. I wonder if they brought it back with them.....) But it just was not at Ruthven that there was a decline. When I questioned other birders and visitors that mentioned having bird feeders, I got the same answer: American Goldfinch numbers are way down. So something happened–something major and my guess is that it was conjunctivitis.

Photo by Rick Ludkin

But there were some other "funny" things happening as well. The numbers of "long-distance" warblers that we banded were all well below the September norm, although short-distance warbler numbers, like Yellow-rumped Warblers, were up (e.g., the 603 yellow-rumps that we banded was our second highest total for that species). On the other hand, most species of sparrows/juncos banded were well *above* the norm. Normally we get the long-distance warblers in September and the other

species late September through October. September was a good month in terms of weather so it is hard to understand. And, if there was a problem up north in the breeding area, one would think that warblers and sparrows would be affected similarly. Again, it is hard to understand.

Another factor in regard to the consideration of the warblers caught is that our net hours this season (9110) were the highest ever. (Since I retired two years ago I have been ratcheting up our net hours – we will go forward now with the present array of nets....but there has been a period of adjustment while we worked out what is manageable.) More net hours, one would think, should translate into more birds caught. But the number of birds caught per 100 net hours in September (23.89) was our lowest and this was reflected in our warbler numbers.

We continue to draw a large number of interested visitors and school groups. This fall we had 1,313 people visit the banding lab to discover what birds we are seeing and what we are doing.

A banding station, in order to run effectively and efficiently, must have good volunteers. This season 48 individuals contributed 1,524 hours of their time to help us do the job. We owe them a great deal of thanks.

We would also like to thank the Lower Grand River Land Trust and the staff of Ruthven Park National Historic Site for their ongoing support as well as the support of the Haldimand Bird Observatory. Also, funds raised through the Baillie Birdathon (Bird Studies Canada) are used to maintain/replace our equipment.

Rock Point Bird Banding Station 425-0793
Dunnville, Haldimand County, Ontario
James A. Smith, Bander
benavis@sympatio.ca

Chief Assistant(s) Kim Christoff, Jason Lymburner,
Web Site: www.rockpointbirdbanding.com

We had three licensed banders, five distance volunteers from Italy, England, U.S.A., British Columbia and Toronto, Ontario, 22 local volunteers and four from the park. The distance volunteers used the trailer that is there to accommodate them. The local volunteers drove in and helped out for various amounts of time. The park volunteers were usually young people who enjoyed what they were seeing and came out on a number of days to help us out. All the volunteers make what we do an easier job and teaching them how to band is always a good experience.

As in previous years, totals are kept for each net location. This enables us to know which nets are producing and which are not. Nets, except for our lowest catching net, have remained in the same location for the past 13 years. Our lowest net catch was 127 from a net location that we still have not had good success. The highest net total was 686 from a long-standing net which crosses a bit of marsh requiring a board walk plus the ends go out into a meadow. It is a three-net configuration which probably accounts for the high total. We used an aerial net this season resulting in 187 birds caught or 5.4% of our total catch. The ground traps were designed for Mourning Doves and anything smaller than a cowbird was able to escape.

We recaptured 537 birds in this season, a number being recaptured more than once. Again this year we caught the Blue Jay first banded in 2000. An American Goldfinch and two Gray Catbirds first banded in 2007, 10 chickadees and a Song Sparrow banded in 2009, 11 birds from 2010, 26 from 2011 and the remaining from 2012 and 2013.

We had a Yellow Warbler first banded at Long Point on 18 May and recovered by us on 19 Aug. Again this year we seemed to have problems with poorly read bands and so we have initiated a "read the number backwards to the bander" policy to try and eliminate this error.

We had no bands reported from other locations.

This year does not stand out in relation to totals, yet we had some of the best catches with several species: Mourning Doves, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Common Grackle, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow and Gray Catbird. Hairy Woodpecker, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Great-