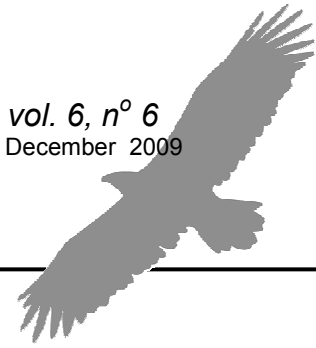




Explos-Nature
ÉDUCATION-RECHERCHE



Some final results from a rather quiet season

Although winter seems to be taking a surprisingly long time to settle in on the North Shore this year, the fall migration has all but come to a close. On the 25th of November, after three months of intensive work, the *Observatoire d'oiseaux de Tadoussac's* (OOT) visual counts program ended for another year. This fall was rather quiet, particularly regarding passerines and passerine-like species. In fact, only 40,155 individuals were recorded, making 2009 the second lowest season for this group of birds in the history of the observatory. To date, apart from 2005, when only 37,000 individuals were observed, the yearly total for this group has always exceeded 42,000, and the mean annual total for the period from 1996 to 2008 is over 82,000 individuals.



Finches such as the Pine Siskin were scarce in 2009.
© Samuel Belleau

One of the principal factors explaining the exceptionally low number of birds observed this year, was the absence of important numbers of finches, and in particular of Common Redpolls, Pine Siskins and White-winged Crossbills. These latter three species exhibit very variable east to west dispersal movements, and also undertake massive irruptions south of the boreal forest in certain years. However, in 2009, the combined total for these three species was only 6,230, compared to the annual mean of 40,478 individuals. Although the causes behind the low number of finches this year are probably multiple, high on the list is likely to be the poor seed crop of both coniferous (e.g., spruce) and deciduous (e.g., birch) trees in the North Shore region.

Other species were also present in rather low numbers. For example, only 3,319 American Crows and 150 Rusty Blackbird were recorded, which represents the 2nd and 3rd lowest totals, respectively, for these species since counts began 13 years ago. At the other extreme, the 4,910 Bohemian Waxwings observed is the second highest total for this species recorded at Tadoussac, only being exceeded by the 7,643 individuals recorded in 2008.

With regard to raptors, the season was marked by a very low number of American Kestrels. Only 485 individuals were recorded, which is only slightly higher than the 466 individuals observed in 1996. Although the number of individuals of this species recorded at the OOT has been declining since the early 2000s, the figure for 2009 is well below those obtained during the last three years, which were 707, 1,264 and 801 individuals, respectively. The heavy rains at the beginning of July, coupled with the low abundance of small mammals in the boreal this year, probably negatively affected the breeding success of this species.

It is also likely that the low abundance of small mammals had an effect on the population of Red-tailed Hawks nesting in the eastern boreal forest. The data collected by the OOT, suggest that Red-tailed Hawks have lower breeding success, and leave the boreal forest earlier, in years following an irruption of Boreal Owls. It is now known that the irruption of Boreal Owls south of their normal distribution zone is principally due to a trough in the abundance cycle of the Boreal Red Back Vole, which occurs approximately every four years. Although a link between the number of voles and the Red-tailed Hawk cycle has yet to be scientifically proven, the OOT's

data for 2009 continue to support this possibility. This year, 24% of the Red-tailed Hawks migrated prior to the 1st of October, compared to the mean for this period of 14%. Moreover, only 17% of individuals were juveniles. By comparison, hatch-year birds made up 74% of the population in 2007, and 61% in 2008.

Two of the more northerly nesting raptors, the Peregrine Falcon and the Rough-legged Hawk, were also present in lower numbers this year. Only 58 Peregrine Falcons were observed, which is the lowest number recorded since 2001. With regard to Rough-legged Hawks, a mere 81 individuals were observed, which represents the sharpest inter-annual drop in numbers ever recorded at the OOT. By comparison, the mean annual total for this species is 448, and the highest number recorded was 958 individuals in 1999. As mentioned in earlier issues of *The Migration Chronicle*, certain regions of the Arctic had a very wet summer, which could have reduced the reproductive success of these species.

Priority non-raptor species for the OOT		
Species	Weeks 12 to 13 15 th to 25 th Nov.	Total 2009
White-winged Crossbill	97	830
Common Redpoll	352	3 793
Pine Siskin	59	1 607
Pine Grosbeak	191	3 360
Purple Finch	11	815
Evening Grosbeak	134	699
Cedar Waxwing	0	2 084
Bohemian Waxwing	1 281	4 910
American Three-toed Woodpecker	2	43
Black-backed Woodpecker	1	205
Black-capped Chickadee	72	597
Boreal Chickadee	1	171
Rusty Blackbird	1	150
Horned Lark	0	979
American Pipit	0	2 099
American Robin	15	1 674

Aquatic species

Generally speaking, the daily totals noted for the OOT's priority aquatic species, which include the Common Eider, the Long-tailed Duck, and five species of larids, are very similar to the means for the last 13 years. Nevertheless, the 1,440 Double-crested Cormorants observed on the 31st of August, made up the largest group recorded at the OOT since 1996.

The winter season

The team at the OOT are going to be developing several new projects this winter, and among our main priorities, will be ensuring funding for a longer spring migration monitoring pilot study. Given the success of this year's rather short study, the objective for May 2010 – and beyond – is to establish a month-long program that would allow the quantification of the numbers of neotropical species migrating through the area during the spring. Linked to this, we will be investigating the possibility of developing a training program for banders. In addition, next January, we will start planning the second North Shore Migration Festival, which will be held in September 2010.

In order to move forward with our new research projects and maintain those already in place, the OOT needs to increase its income. If you would like to help ensure the future of our work, you can make a contribution to the Friends of the OOT Fund. All the necessary details can be found on our secure Internet site (<http://www.explos-nature.qc.ca/oot/contribuer.php>). Thank you in advance for your generosity!

On that note, we wish you a most enjoyable festive period and some great winter birdwatching.

We sincerely hope that you will join us again next year.

Editorial team: Pascal Côté (author, pascalcote@explo-nature.qc.ca) and Andrew P. Coughlan (translator, English version).

Our operations for the 2009 season are assured through the support provided by Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service and Science Horizons Youth Internship Program, the *Parc national du Saguenay*, the *ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune*, the Saguenay - St. Lawrence Marine Park, the *Fondation de la Faune du Québec*, Bird Protection Quebec, the *Centre de la conservation de la faune ailée*, *Municipalité de Tadoussac*, *CLD de la Haute-Côte-Nord*, Bird Study Canada's Baillie Birdathon, *Explos-Nature's Fonds de développement OOT* and the Friends of the OOT Fund.