
Site Fidelity and a Longevity Record of Wintering Hermit Thrushes in Maryland

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ABSTRACT

Hermit Thrushes (Catharus guttatus) are common wintering passerine in much of the southeastern United States, but few studies have been done on their site fidelity on the wintering grounds both within and between seasons. Foreman's Branch Bird Observatory near Chestertown, MD, has banded 1,502 Hermit Thrushes since 1998. Seventy-one birds have been recaptured as repeats and 59 of those were overwintering individuals. Twenty-six birds have returned in a subsequent winter (some for several years). One of these individuals represents a new longevity record (10 yr, 10 mo). Although anecdotal, these data indicate at least some site fidelity both within and between winter seasons for Hermit Thrushes in Maryland.

INTRODUCTION

Many migratory passerines breeding in northern latitudes are known to exhibit site fidelity and defend territories on their wintering grounds (Rohwer et al. 2005). Here we add observations on the Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) that provide evidence of local site fidelity in winter and

hedgerows, some well-established second growth woodlots, and a man-made lake. The entire property was designated an Audubon Important Bird Area in Nov 2006.

The wood lots attracting Hermit Thrushes are dominated by loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), Virginia pine (*P. virginiana*), several oak species (*Quercus* spp.), two hickory species mockernut (*Carya tomentosa*) and pignut (*C. glabra*), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), and American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). Dominant understory species include American holly (*Ilex opaca*), sumac (*Rhus* spp.), greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*) and several *Rubus* species. Recovering from a long history of disturbance including logging, these stands have received periodic prescribed understory burns for decades.

Banding - FBBO has operated since 1998 and has served primarily as a migration monitoring station, but has intercepted many of the breeding and wintering birds in the area as well. The station operated up to 100 mist nets (6- and 12-m length, 2.6-m high, 4-shelf, 30-mm mesh, nylon Japanese mist nets), depending on conditions and available staff. Our protocol dictated that nets were open from sunrise until early afternoon, March through May and August through November. Nets were sometimes opened December through February for occasional winter banding. All captured birds were banded with standard numbered aluminum bands from the US Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) and sexed and aged to the extent possible using Pyle (1997). Standard biometric data were collected including wing chord, fat, and weight. Birds that were recaptured during the same winter season (not calendar year) were considered to be overwintering if the capture dates were at least two weeks apart and those dates were beyond the normal expected window of migration. Individuals whose status was uncertain were excluded from this analysis.

RESULTS

In 10 years of operation, FBBO has banded 1,502 individual Hermit Thrushes; adding recaptures, we

have 1,713 handlings. Seventy-one Hermit Thrushes at FBBO have been recaptured after their initial banding; 59 of these were determined to be

which 18% of birds in Louisiana returned in subsequent winters.

Most of our Hermit Thrushes were captured only once, in the autumn months of October and

