

Fort Drum Natural Resources



Wildlife Viewing Report – 21 June 2018

Birds

We haven't released a wildlife viewing report in a while, in part because much of Fort Drum has been shut down for recreation for the past few weeks. Access should be good for the upcoming July Fourth weekend, so now is a good time to run through some of the recent birding highlights from May and the first half of June.

Spring migration has been lackluster for the past few years, so the high volume of northbound migrants that passed through Fort Drum this May was a definite highlight of the year. Tennessee, Nashville, Bay-breasted, and Cape May Warblers moved through in especially large numbers, which wasn't that much of a surprise because these same species passed through Fort Drum in very high numbers last fall. More surprising was the good number of Blackpoll Warblers this May, as Blackpolls were unusually scarce on Drum last fall. Orange-crowned Warblers, generally rare in spring, were in Training Area (TA) 6A on 4 May and TA 3A on 16 May. The most unusual sighting of the spring was a **Yellow-breasted Chat** found in TA 6A on 14 May that remained through at least 18 May.

Thanks no doubt to an ongoing tent caterpillar outbreak, cuckoos have been more common on Fort Drum this spring than during the past few years. Black-billed Cuckoos are widespread in good numbers, especially in Training Areas dominated by young woods and shrubland. Although not nearly as common as Black-billed Cuckoos, Yellow-billed Cuckoos are widespread as well, mostly occurring in stands of relatively mature trees.



Black-billed Cuckoo in Training Area 3 in 2008.

At least a dozen singing male Sedge Wrens were in Training Areas 12 and 13

during May, an unusually large number for so early in the season. Efforts to find some of these birds on 21 June were only partially successful, and it seems that at least a few of the early-arriving Sedge Wrens have moved, perhaps because conditions are too dry in many areas this year. Surveys over the coming weeks will hopefully provide some insight into whether these birds moved elsewhere on Fort Drum or left the installation entirely. The closest Sedge Wren to any road is east of Antwerp Tank Trail about 0.25-mile south of Poagland Road, and can usually be heard and occasionally seen from the road. Henslow's Sparrows are declining throughout Jefferson County, and Fort Drum is no exception. The five territorial males currently known to be present on Fort Drum are all far from roads. One male that spent at least a week or two singing near Gray Road appears to have moved elsewhere. A Short-eared Owl has been seen in TA 12 several times since mid-May and is presumed to be nesting, but the nest site so far has eluded detection.

On 21 June a Philadelphia Vireo was observed along Antwerp Tank Trail in a patch of cottonwood and birch. Presumably this is the same male that spent several weeks in this patch of trees last summer and was the first confirmed breeding-season record on Fort Drum. On the 21st he was singing a song that seemed slightly different from Red-eyed Vireo song tonally, but unlike most descriptions of Philadelphia Vireo song had very short pauses between phrases, so that song delivery did not seem particularly slow.

Whip-poor-will surveys were conducted along FUSA Boulevard and Carr Road on the night of 29-30 May. It was a spectacular night for nocturnal birds, with a bright moon and no wind. On the two 10-stop routes combined a total of 60 Eastern Whip-poor-wills, 12 Barred Owls, and 2 Northern Saw-whet Owls were heard. Afterward, a drive through the fields along Antwerp Tank Trail netted another half-dozen whip-poor-wills and several very vocal Sedge Wrens. No Common Nighthawks were detected on these surveys, primarily because nighthawks are largely restricted to the sandy portion of Fort Drum farther to the south, where nighthawks have been seen many mornings since about 22 May.

Between mid-May and 20 June Golden-winged Warbler surveys were conducted throughout Fort Drum, focusing mostly on the southern and central portions of the installation. As has been the case in recent years, more phenotypic Blue-winged Warblers than Golden-winged Warblers were found, with obvious hybrids making up about 15-20% of all “winged warblers” seen (based on DNA work conducted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology many of our phenotypic Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers are hybrids, too). The only location where phenotypic Golden-winged Warblers outnumbered Blue-winged Warblers on surveys this year was along Reedville Road. Some areas, such as Training Area 6A and parts of TA 3 seem to have been completely taken over by Blue-winged Warblers. One interesting observation has been that about 25-30% of phenotypic Golden-winged Warblers seen in 2016 sang Blue-winged Warbler song, but no Blue-wings were seen singing Golden-wing song. About 5-8 years ago, when Golden-winged Warblers still outnumbered Blue-winged Warblers, it was much more common to see Blue-winged Warblers singing Golden-wing song.

Trumpeter Swan was documented on Fort Drum for the first time this spring, and since then Trumpeters have been observed in locations throughout the installation, including TAs 10, 12, 17, and 19. It is not clear whether one or more pairs are present or these are non-breeding individuals wandering around. Nesting has not been confirmed, but seems possible in at least two locations.

Here are a few short notes about a few more species visiting birders often ask about: As usual, several pairs of Red-headed Woodpeckers are nesting in the open oak woods immediately east of the airfield. In the sandy fields in the same area and all around the airfield are numerous Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrows, with many Clay-colored Sparrows scattered around. Upland Sandpipers are tough to find on Fort Drum because most are in off-limits areas, but they are occasionally seen east of the airfield. Mourning Warblers are scattered throughout Fort Drum, with a couple of reliable locations near the intersection of Lake School Road and South Tank Trail; look for cut over woods on these roads west and south of the intersection.



Philadelphia Vireo being banded in Training Area 3 in 2011.

Species observed on Fort Drum from 1 May - 21 June 2018:

Canada Goose	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Chipping Sparrow
Trumpeter Swan	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Clay-colored Sparrow
Wood Duck	Alder Flycatcher	Field Sparrow
Mallard	Willow Flycatcher	Vesper Sparrow
American Black Duck	Least Flycatcher	Savannah Sparrow
Hooded Merganser	Eastern Phoebe	Grasshopper Sparrow
Ring-necked Pheasant	Great Crested Flycatcher	Henslow's Sparrow
Ruffed Grouse	Eastern Kingbird	Song Sparrow
Wild Turkey	Yellow-throated Vireo	Swamp Sparrow
Pied-billed Grebe	Blue-headed Vireo	White-throated Sparrow
Rock Pigeon	Philadelphia Vireo	White-crowned Sparrow
Mourning Dove	Warbling Vireo	Dark-eyed Junco
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Red-eyed Vireo	YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT
Black-billed Cuckoo	Blue Jay	Bobolink
Common Nighthawk	American Crow	Eastern Meadowlark
Eastern Whip-poor-will	Common Raven	Baltimore Oriole
Chimney Swift	Horned Lark	Red-winged Blackbird
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Tree Swallow	Brown-headed Cowbird
Virginia Rail	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Common Grackle
Common Gallinule	Bank Swallow	Ovenbird
Killdeer	Barn Swallow	Northern Waterthrush
Upland Sandpiper	Black-capped Chickadee	Golden-winged Warbler
Ring-billed Gull	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Blue-winged Warbler
Common Loon	White-breasted Nuthatch	Black-and-white Warbler
American Bittern	Brown Creeper	Tennessee Warbler
Great Blue Heron	House Wren	Orange-crowned Warbler
Green Heron	Winter Wren	Nashville Warbler
Turkey Vulture	Sedge Wren	Mourning Warbler
Osprey	Marsh Wren	Common Yellowthroat
Bald Eagle	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	American Redstart
Northern Harrier	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Cape May Warbler
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Cerulean Warbler
Cooper's Hawk	Eastern Bluebird	Northern Parula
Northern Goshawk	Veery	Magnolia Warbler
Red-shouldered Hawk	Swainson's Thrush	Bay-breasted Warbler
Broad-winged Hawk	Hermit Thrush	Blackburnian Warbler
Red-tailed Hawk	Wood Thrush	Yellow Warbler
Rough-legged Hawk	American Robin	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Eastern Screech-Owl	Gray Catbird	Blackpoll Warbler
Barred Owl	Brown Thrasher	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Short-eared Owl	European Starling	Palm Warbler
Northern Saw-whet Owl	Cedar Waxwing	Pine Warbler
Belted Kingfisher	House Sparrow	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Red-headed Woodpecker	American Pipit	Prairie Warbler
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	House Finch	Black-throated Green Warbler
Downy Woodpecker	Purple Finch	Canada Warbler
Hairy Woodpecker	Red Crossbill	Wilson's Warbler
Northern Flicker	Pine Siskin	Scarlet Tanager
Pileated Woodpecker	American Goldfinch	Northern Cardinal
American Kestrel	Eastern Towhee	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Merlin		Indigo bunting