NEW ‘MONITORING AVIAN PRODUCTIVITY AND SURVIVAL’ (MAPS) STATION ESTABLISHED IN WASCANA CENTRE, REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN, SUMMER 2010

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The ‘Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survival’ (MAPS) Program was established in 1989 by David DeSantes and the Institute for Bird Populations. There are currently over 500 MAPS stations across North America, with only three active stations in Saskatchewan, including Wascana Centre in Regina, SK. The program aims to monitor the population dynamics of North American landbird species. Banding stations set up mist nets and capture, band, age, and sex birds. With this information, it is possible to determine annual survival and reproduction estimates for many of the species captured. Population trends of the station’s breeding bird populations can then be determined (e.g., within Wascana Centre). These trends can also be compared to other areas of similar habitat. On a large scale, the data can also be used to understand how broad landscape features influence survival and reproduction.

In 1975, a nesting survey was conducted in the Waterfowl Park (WP), within Wascana Centre.¹ This survey encompassed the entire WP, which includes the Habitat Conservation Area (HCA; see Fig. 1). Donison (1976) confirmed breeding records for 67 species within the WP.¹ This survey provided an impressive amount of information, but was conducted in an opportunistic searching pattern. There has never been a standardized study conducted in Wascana Centre to monitor population trends of resident songbird species. Therefore, in 2010, Wascana Centre established a MAPS station to study the local breeding bird species. Here we discuss the results of the first year of monitoring.

Methods

Study site. Wascana’s MAPS station is set up in the HCA (Fig. 1), a fenced area that was set aside for wildlife in 1962. The HCA is located along Wascana Creek within the city of Regina, SK. The University of Regina sits opposite the HCA on the other side of the creek. The area was formerly privately owned and used as market gardens. The main habitat is a planted tame grassland, dominated by crested wheatgrass (Agropyron cristatum) and smooth brome grass (Bromus inermis). Some native wildflowers, including goatsbeard (Tragopogon dubius), wooly yarrow (Achillea millefolium), and Canada anenome (Anemone canadensis) can be found here as well. Caragana sp.
hedgerows originally used to delineate individual properties have spread dramatically; however, a large portion of these rows was removed in 2009. The south and west sides of the HCA are bordered by Wascana Creek and surrounding marsh dominated by cattails (*Typha* sp.), bulrush (*Scirpus* sp.), and willow (*Salix* sp.).

**Netting.** Following standardized MAPS protocol, mist nets were used at the station for 6 days during summer 2010 as follows: 15 and 26 June; 7, 16, and 30 July; and 6 August. Ten 12-m mist nets were set up within the HCA, spaced approximately 50 to 100 m apart. Nets were opened at sunrise at each session and closed 6 h later. Mist nets were checked approximately every 30 min for captured birds. All birds were removed from the net, placed in a cloth bag, and taken to the banding station for processing. Each bird was banded, weighed, sexed, and aged (e.g., see Fig. 2, inside back cover, top). We also collected a variety of morphological information, including development of a brood patch, cloacal protuberance, fat deposits, and feather moult and wear. Once the measurements were complete, the bird was released.

**Observations.** Observations were also made of all birds seen/heard during each session. Based on the behaviour or general observation made, breeding status was assigned as Confirmed (current nest found, carrying nesting material, carrying food, distraction display, or local, just fledged, bird present); Probable (courtship/copulation, territorial behaviour, song); or Observed (banded, encountered, flyover). After all sessions were completed, year status was assigned as Breeder, Likely Breeder, Transient, or Migrant.

**Results**

**Netting.** In total, nets were open for 36 h (432 net-hours), and 386 birds of 26 species were captured. Of those, 332
were newly banded, while 54 recaptures were made during a later session (Table 1). Therefore, the capture rate was 0.9 birds per net-hour. Comparisons of age classes were made of the four species that were most frequently captured this summer (HY: Hatch Year, SY: Second Year, ASY: After Second Year, AHY: After Hatch Year; Table 2). The proportion of HY birds was relatively high (>40%) for yellow warblers (*Dendroica petechia*), gray catbirds (*Dumetella carolinensis*), and American robins (*Turdus migratorius*), while only a small proportion of HY red-winged blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) were captured.

**Observations.** During the six sessions, 49 species were observed within the study area (Table 3). Breeding was confirmed for 23 species, breeding was likely for an additional 19 species, and five transient species and two migrant species were also observed. We also compared the species list from the study conducted in Waterfowl Park in 1976 (Table 3). Nineteen species that were present in 1975 were absent in 2010. Conversely, eight species that were documented in 2010 were not noted in 1975, four of which were Breeders or Likely Breeders.

**Discussion.** This is the first time a standardized study focusing on breeding birds within Wascana Centre has been undertaken. Because 2010 was the first year of the study, we have no current data to which we can compare our results. Donison’s (1976) methodology was completely different from that of our study, and therefore, no large-scale comparisons between the data sets can be made. We are able to simply compare the two lists of species noted during the two studies (see Table 3).

It is possible to compare age classes within species from this breeding season to determine potential nesting success. Table 2 shows that high proportions of young birds were captured for
yellow warblers, gray catbirds, and American robins during the breeding season, suggesting that these birds had good local reproductive success in 2010. Interestingly, low numbers of adult American robins were captured. This capture rate is likely low due to the adults’ ability to escape from the nets because of their large size (i.e. they are too large for the mist net holes) in addition to the adults’ behaviour of continually struggling once captured in the net and typically escaping. Only 22% of red-winged blackbirds captured were HY birds, which is much lower than the other three species, suggesting that this species did not have as successful a breeding season. However, it is more likely that the earlier nesting behaviour of red-winged blackbirds would have resulted in fledged young and adults already dispersing from the area by the first session on 16 June. More in-depth analysis will be available.
for most species once multiple years of data have been acquired.

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1. Donison R (1976) Regina Waterfowl Park nesting survey. Blue Jay 34:103-116.

Great egret (Ardea alba), photographed at Highfield Dam, southwest of Herbert, SK, on 27 September 2010. The last time it was seen was on 3 October.
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