

Gray Catbird banded by Woodlands Conservancy found in Illinois!



Don Norman and Emma DeLeon, Permitted Banders for Woodlands Conservancy
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This May, the Bird Banding Lab, to whom the Woodland Conservancy submits its banding records, reported that a Gray Catbird, with band # 2211-15735 struck a window in Illinois. This is the 1st offsite recovery from the 825 birds that have been banded by Woodlands Conservancy. A total of 23 catbirds have been captured over the past 5 years. The bird in question was captured on October 1, 2016 at the Woodlands Trail Station and was most likely on route to its summer breeding ground when it struck the window. The individual was of unknown sex and had completed a definitive fall basic molt; making it at least a second year bird. While it is unfortunate for the bird, we thank the person who noticed the band and turned in the info! We now have a more complete story about the migration our local population of catbirds undertakes each spring.

Catbirds are a very abundant migrant through the area in the spring and fall, but because banding only happens twice a month, the likelihood of capturing a lot of catbirds when they are moving through is a hit or miss. For example, on 11 October 2015, a total of 6 were captured in one morning, but no other banding occasion has captured more than one individual. We have some evidence that at least some of these birds are winter residents at the trail since we have captured catbirds in all months from October through April and as we have re-captured two individuals more than once in the same winter season. One bird was captured in Dec 2014 and again in Feb 2015 and other was captured in November 2015 and again in March 2016.

The story of Catbird 2211-15735 is important because it highlights why it is useful to band and study migratory birds. Different populations of birds take different migration routes to their spring breeding locations and encounter different hazards along the way. The Mississippi flyway running through the center of the country along the river is a common route and was likely taken by our bird. Catbirds breed across the Northern United States and Canada so other populations may take different routes. Knowing where a population breeds and where it winters can help pinpoint habitat issues for birds with declining populations. Looking at habitat fragmentation and at hazards, like cities, buildings, etc. along the way can also help us plan more bird friendly communities.

