PRODUCTIVITY AND SURVIVAL OF THE RUSTY BLACKBIRD IN ALASKA: TOWARDS A SYNTHETIC ANALYSIS OF STATEWIDE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

David F. Tessler, Steven M. Matsuoka, David Shaw, April Harding-Scurr, David Loomis, Erin Cooper, and James A. Johnson, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, david.tessler@alaska.gov

We initiated a collaborative research effort at Rusty Blackbird breeding sites across Alaska to determine if there are demographic deficits in the state which may be contributing to the specie's long-term decline. This collaborative effort ran from 2009 until 2012, and included study sites in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Joint Base Elmendorf -Richardson, Fort Wainwright, Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge, Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, and the Copper River Delta in Chugach National Forest. We employed a coordinated banding and resighting strategy to determine breeding site and mate fidelity, natal philopatry, and adult and juvenile survival. We followed nest fate from territory establishment through the conclusion of breeding efforts, and collected data on nesting effort, nest survival, hatching and fledging success, gross productivity, and causes of loss. While analyses of data from many of the constituent study sites are nearing completion, synthetic analysis of the statewide data sets will begin winter 2012-2013. Preliminary results from individual study sites suggest relatively high levels of productivity throughout the state, variable but moderate levels of apparent overwinter adult survival, and low levels of natal philopatry, juvenile survival, or both. Synthesis of these statewide data collections is necessary to determine what demographic parameters, if any, are limiting Rusty Blackbird populations in Alaska.

International Rusty Blackbird Working Group Workshop

OCTOBER 16-18, 2012
Radisson Plymouth Harbor
Plymouth, Massachusetts

Courtesy of Gerhard Hoffmann