

Beaverhill Bird Observatory Update October 15 to 31, 2008



We are starting slow on the number of captures of Saw-whet Owls. We caught 37 Saw-whets this past two weeks which brings our total to 127. Our lowest year was 138 so we are hoping to get to that number at least, definitely a lower year for Saw-whets. Talking to banders like Ray Cromie who have nestboxes they were saying that the number of nests and number of young per nest was way down this year. Our low numbers might be reflecting this.

We have also been attempting to trap a Short-eared Owl using a Swedish goshawk trap. The trap has been set on ten nights with no luck. I also observed two Short-eared Owls on one night along Rowan's Route, so Geoff Holroyd and Helen Trefry came out to try and catch them. But, they only saw a few Great Horned Owls along the road over the next two evenings. If you know where there are Short-eared Owls regularly seen please let us know. There are two satellite transmitters that need to be placed on the owls to begin learning about the movements these irruptive species do.

Other species observed include the resident Northern Flying Squirrels that visit our feeders nightly and the Tundra Swans that are still making a raucous at Lister Lake. It has been quite dark lately with no moon out, so the forest appears eerie in the light of my headlamp. We had a huge windstorm for two days (October 24/25) which knocked a fair number of trees around the Natural Area. The wind speeds were close to hurricane force. This brought in more foxtail barley seeds, and Buttons (my faithful owl companion) has now been outfitted with a mosquito net to cover her head so she doesn't breathe in any of the seeds. They can be quite harmful to dogs so if you plan to come out for a walk in the Natural Area I suggest not bringing your dog. Francis Point seems unaffected by the seed invasion so you can still your dog walking off leash there. I was out the other day checking for Short-eared Owls (we had an invasion in 2005-05 in winter), but only found the feathers of a depredated one at the viewing blind.



So we continue the fall migration for another few weeks, official end date is November 11. Our solar is starting to lose power, but the candlelight continues to burn in our little cabin. The wood stove warms us, although Buttons has taken on a new responsibility of keeping the volunteers warm between net checks which seem to make her and the volunteers quite happy. I need to thank the volunteers that came out to cover days or to band with me over the last two weeks: Jim and Barb Beck, Gerry and Robyn Beyersbergen, Katie Calon, Geoff Holroyd, Hedwig Lankau and Blaine McGowan. We had a nice barbeque with Gerry and Robyn and some friends with my two kids. They are not quite ready to be up late for the owls which is perhaps a good thing. So I will leave you now, and keep your fingers crossed that the snow holds out a little longer for us to complete our banding (though next week's forecast is for snow). One last update to come, think owls for me to reach at least 138!!

Cheers, Lisa Priestley

