



Volume 30 Number 3

September 2017



## Steaks and Saw-whets

*Friday September 29 and  
Saturday  
September 30th*

Come out to the Beaverhill Bird Observatory (BBO) for a celebration of the annual fall movements of the tiny but mighty Northern Saw-whet Owl. A complete steak barbeque will be served followed by setting up mist nets to capture owls for banding. Learn about their

biology while observing owls up close. This popular event sells out so please book early to ensure your spot! **Online registration required.**

**Time:** Dinner served between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m. Nets go up at 8:00 p.m.

**Cost:** Members \$30 /person, Non-members \$40/person can include a \$10 life membership, free for kids under 12 when accompanied by their parents.

**Register:** Purchase tickets on-line at [www.beaverhillbirds.com](http://www.beaverhillbirds.com)

Beaverhill Bird Observatory events in 2017 are being Supported by ACA, TD Friends of the Environment, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, Nature Canada (Charles Labatiuk Conservation Fund), Bird Studies Canada (Baillie Fund), WWF, Community Environment Action Grant, Edmonton Nature Club, and individual donors.

[www.beaverhillbirds.com](http://www.beaverhillbirds.com)



**MEET "RICKI"** - a new Educational NSWO to assist in educational talks. BBO thanks the Community Environment Action Grant for providing funding for educational school talks and Phil and Helen Trefry for hand-feeding Ricki and housing the owls. Please contact [educationbirds@beaverhill.com](mailto:educationbirds@beaverhill.com) to arrange a talk.





# The 2nd BBO Geoff Holroyd Young Ornithologists' Workshop was a fun week!



**Dawson Shuflita, Cole Gaerber, Nataliya Hontar, Kevin Methuen (back row), Geoff Holroyd, Helen Trefry, Annalena Thiesen, Isabel Apkarian, Megan Kollman, Luke Zhou (back row), Jon Van Arragon, and Sara Pearce Meijerink**

Beaverhill Bird Observatory's Geoff Holroyd Young Ornithologists' Workshop hosted eight teens (ages 16-18 years) from Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. In addition, volunteer bander Luke Zhou, a student from China, joined in. They all participated in an intensive one week training workshop held the first week of August focusing on, what else, BIRDS! By camping and waking early to set up bird nets, they experienced life as a field biologist while developing their bird skills. They were taught the safe way to extract birds from mist nets, ageing and sexing of birds, proper banding techniques, how to conduct a bird census, and much more. Invited speakers talked about a wide range of topics: Brenda

Dale talked about citizen science, David Laurie about lepidopterans, Geoff Holroyd about tree swallows and burrowing owls and Helen and Phil Trefry gave a raptor tour. Kim Bloome from WildNorth discussed rehab and provided the opportunity to release ducklings. They were guided on a “Big Birding Day” by Gerald Romanchuk and Helen Trefry, which included trips to local birding hotspots, as well as Elk Island National Park and Islet Lake. This resulted in 118 species of birds identified, an admirable number given the time of the year when many birds were no longer singing. It was a fun week!

The students built ten Northern Saw-whet owl boxes, thanks to a grant from the World Wildlife Fund. The Beaverhill Bird Observatory (BBO) is also grateful for the support of individual donors that sponsored a Young Ornithologist, Tofield IGA for providing a discount on food, and the volunteers that helped throughout the week. This support makes it possible for BBO to offer this event for free so that no matter their background, youth keen on nature can participate. If you wish to sponsor a Young Ornithologist, check out [beaverhillbirds.com](http://beaverhillbirds.com) and if you know of a young person that might be interested in attending next year’s workshop contact [helentrefry@gmail.com](mailto:helentrefry@gmail.com) (Photos by Helen Trefry).



**Cole Gaerber bands his first Ruby-throated Hummingbird.**





**New NSWO boxes were built and placed in the Beaverhills Natural area.**



**Nataliya Hontar, a snake owner herself, admires a Plains Garter Snake; Megan Kollman (left) reads a band.**



**Kim Bloome (Wild North) and Annalena Thiesen watching dozens of newly released ducks as they head for the plentiful duck weed.**



**Dawson Shuflita and Jon Van Arragon comfortably looking for Sprague's Pipits at Elk Island Park's bison field.**



## Interns 2017



Laurie Hunt arranged for 12 interns to work on projects at BBO this summer. This would not happen without the supervision by the following mentors:

**Meghan Jacklin** (TRES grid) for Brandi Charette, Serena McKay, Cassandra Walker and Robyn Schnierer;

**Geoff Holroyd** (Breeding Bird Grid) for Myla-Rae Baldwin, Jeremy Lambe and Hannah Smith; **Steve Anderson** (Butterflies) for Maya Frederickson; **Sara Pearce Meijerink** (House Wrens) for Shyla Golly and Zach Antonio; **Jody Rintoul** (Bats) for Erin Low and Emily Gillmore. Thanks especially to those that donate their time as volunteers to be mentors.

## **Did you know that most species of small owls have a simultaneous tail moult?**

Banders do not normally trap owls with tail moult as it occurs after the young have fledged. Here is a photo of male NSWO Ray taken July 13th with all fresh tail feathers growing in, illustrating a tight moult of the entire tail, with the outer tail feathers being lost first ( known as centripetal moult). The centrifugal tail moult is more common among small owls, with the inner tail feathers lost first. The loss of a tail would mean less maneuverability for the owls but only for a short time.





**Big Birding Breakfast** (May) was a well attended crepe cook-off this year with volunteers Claude Roberto making French style crepes while Janos Kovacs churned out Hungarian style crepes the following day, utilizing the high tech technique of using a cordless drill for mixing batter. And behind the scenes, Joyce DeGroot cooking all that bacon!! Thanks cooks!







**Adults and Kids love the hands on of BBO!**





## **BBO's Canada 150 Bioblitz was August 18th:**

David Laurie talked moths while kids petted a Great-horned Owl- where else but at BBO!



**Underwings were a few of the species of moths attracted to the light.**

(Photos by Helmi Hess)

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## Habitat Improvement:

As stewards of the Beaverhills Natural Area, BBO continues to make improvements to the area for wildlife, including the removal of old barbwire fences hidden in the lakebed grass. Thanks to the volunteers for helping Kevin Methuen and staff remove the wire and to Trefrys for truck loan and wire disposal.

The staff are also always on the watch for cattle coming into the Natural Area, a common occurrence, which resulted in the duck nesting boxes getting knocked down this year. If you see anything like this in the area, report it to Parks!

The staff, along with the help of Geoff Holroyd and his riding mower, have kept the walking lanes open for the public- much appreciated!

(Photo: Helmi Hess)





# Purple Martin survival and dispersal study

By: Frida Rodriguez-Escobar, Glen Hvenegaard, Hardy Pletz, and Geoff Holroyd

In mid-July, the BBO and the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta were fortunate to work together on what ended up being an exciting Purple Martin banding marathon. They worked arduously across central Alberta, including colonies at the Sherwood Park Fish & Game Association, Wetaskiwin, Bashaw, Camrose, Lindbrook, and the Ellis Bird Farm.

In order to band nestlings or to recapture banded adults, we had to trap birds in their nesting boxes. Mostly, this involved lowering a nest box by winch, open hinged doors, and reaching in to hand capture the birds. However, sometimes this involved climbing on front-end loaders to access stationary nest boxes. Other times, this involved trapping all birds in a colony at midnight with trap doors that closed all access holes simultaneously. Overall, we put 556 bands on nestlings and 8 on adults. We also read bands from 37 birds banded in previous years. However, when we add in the results from the Ellis Bird Farm, these numbers will rise to over 650 banded nestlings and over 50 band recaptures. Over the past many years, master bander Hardy Pletz single-handedly banded thousands of young martins in the area. Since most of those martins were banded as nestlings at known locations, we know their age at recapture and dispersal distance.



(Photo: Glen Hvenegaard)

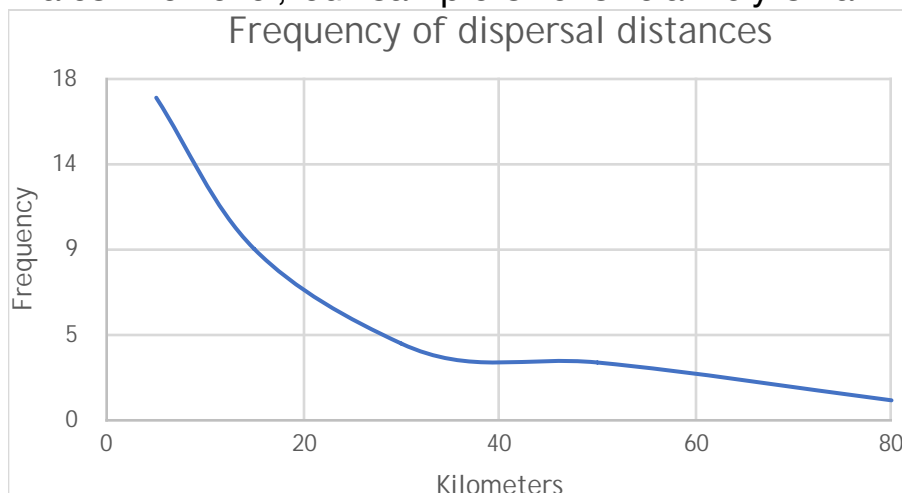


(Photo: Glen Hvenegaard)

Males comprised 60% of the recovered adults, females represented 35%, and the sex of 5% remained unknown. Of the 37 recovered adults, 65% were Second Year juveniles (SY) and 35% were in their third year or more (ASY).

We also obtained recapture records from the USGS Banding Office. The oldest Purple Martin in the records was 13 years old, recaptured in 1947. The oldest recapture in central Alberta was 7 years old, banded by Hardy Pletz in 2005 and encountered by Bob Buskas (one of our local martin gurus) in 2012.

The data collected this year suggests that at least 13 out of the 37 individuals returned to the place where they were banded as nestlings. Long distance dispersals were less frequent with just 4 individuals dispersing beyond 50 kilometers of their banding site. Only one individual (a 3-year-old male) dispersed more than 80 kilometers. This is consistent with previous studies of Purple Martins that noted natal philopatry or high nest-site fidelity for the species. Since more males than females were recovered, it is likely that fidelity is higher in males than in females. However, our sample size is relatively small in this first year of the study.







(Photo: Sara P. Meijerink above; Geoff Holroyd below)



# 2017 SUMMARY

University of Alberta-Augustana Campus  
Beaverhill Bird Observatory



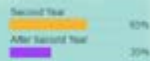
**566**  
New bands\*



■ Chicks (96.22%) ■ Adults (1.41%) ■ Destroyed (0.36%)

\* The efforts in Ellis Bird Farm are not included, stay tuned for the updated numbers!

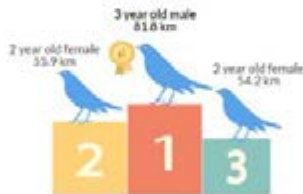
## 37 Band recoveries



The oldest Purple Martin ever recorded was 13 years old, found in Illinois in 1947 (Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 2015)

The oldest individual in our record was 7 years old when recovered by Bob Buskas in 2012

## FARTHEST DISPERSAL



## RECOVERY LOCATIONS



■ Carrioux (41.24%) ■ Bob Buskas (28.14%) ■ SPPGA Shooting Range (10.37%)  
■ Marion Trapline (5.18%) ■ Garth Haseguchi (5.18%)

\* We did significant efforts in Ellis Bird Farm, stay tuned for the updated numbers!

NOTES: Presented data comes from our 2017 records, results from other sources may vary. This is a summary of our banding and capture operations and general conclusions over Purple Martin population dynamics should be avoided.

(Frida Rodriquez-Escobar)



We would like to thank all of the Purple Martin Landlords for taking care of the martins, and for supporting our study by graciously allowing us to catch and band birds on their properties: Bob Buskas, John and Rose Scott, Frank Lee (Sherwood Park Fish and Game Shooting Range), Marvin Traptow, Ellis Bird Farm staff (especially Alisha Ritchie and Myrna Pearman), Allen and Ida Hay, Tom and Evva Tomaszewski, Merv and Hazel Duchescherer, and Rod Ross.

We thank the many people who helped us with the banding including Kevin Methuen, Meghan Jacklin, Sara Pearce-Meijerink, Luke Zhou, Carson Hvenegaard, Pam Hvenegaard, Stephanie Olson, Amalia and Robert Renman, Emily Grose, Dana Bulger, Wyatt Beach, and Jordan Nakonechny. We also acknowledge the many years of banding effort by Hardy Pletz who banded the many nestlings which provided the opportunity for this project to occur.

## **The 'Owl'berta Nocturnal Owl Survey**

(see Parkland Naturalist, Jan-Apr 2017 for complete paper)

*Lisa Takats Priestley, STRIX Ecological Consulting*

The Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey celebrated its 15th year of full time monitoring in 2016, in memory of Ray Cromie, a long-time owl surveyor and bander. The survey was initiated in 1998 with a few keen volunteers and gained momentum in 2002 when Bird Studies Canada initiated the national nocturnal owl survey and supported the development of the Alberta survey. The Alberta survey is now coordinated by STRIX Ecological Consulting and Beaverhill Bird Observatory.



We had 192 volunteers survey 99 owl survey routes across Alberta in 2016. The drier and milder weather during the winter of 2015-16, resulted in an early breeding season for owls, and volunteers found 578 owls (7 species) during surveys (Table 1). Long-term monitoring is important for longer lived species, like owls, particularly for species that may not breed every year.

Table 1: Number of owls

observed per route (10 stations), Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey 2011-2016.

Species	Y E A R					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Boreal Owl	0.35	0.51	0.30	0.41	0.41	<b>0.45</b>
Barred Owl	0.21	0.25	0.16	0.18	0.21	<b>0.21</b>
Great Gray Owl	0.08	0.14	0.07	0.10	0.11	<b>0.12</b>
Great Horned Owl	2.15	1.99	1.64	1.85	2.12	<b>2.06</b>
Long-eared Owl	0.15	0.16	0.30	0.32	0.29	<b>0.26</b>
Northern Pygmy Owl	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	<b>0.01</b>
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1.78	2.83	1.35	1.75	2.02	<b>*3.01</b>
Short-eared Owl	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.01	<b>0.00</b>
Number of Routes	100	99	100	98	98	<b>99</b>
Number of Volunteers	190	185	192	186	190	<b>192</b>

\* highest number ever detected since the survey was initiated in 1998

Long-term funding and in-kind support from Alberta Conservation Association, BBO, and STRIX Ecological Consulting allow us to keep this valuable program going. Bird Studies Canada coordinates the national database and promotes the programs through their magazine and website. The 2017 season has just ended, but please contact Lisa Priestley if you would like to participate in the 2018 survey [lisa@beaverhillbirds.com](mailto:lisa@beaverhillbirds.com). Please let us know where in the province you would like your survey route and a mailing address. Surveys are conducted between March 20 and May 5 along accessible roads, and we ask two evenings of your time.



**Luke Zhou** (left), an international Chinese student studying in Washington University, volunteered at BBO for over a month. He returned to Peru to continue a bird banding internship in that country. He wrote:

“It is hard to say goodbye after such an incredible experience, as it has always been. However, since I am planning on coming back to Canada for graduate school, I will definitely see you again BBO. Thank you for a great summer full of learning, adventures, and friendship.”

Luke is just one of many volunteers and interns that pass through BBO, benefiting from their stay there. Hope to see you at BBO for Fall Migration!

[www.beaverhillbirds.com](http://www.beaverhillbirds.com)