



the WILLET

Beaverhill Bird Observatory

Volume 12, Number 2

May 1999

Announcing the 4th Annual

Beaverhill Bird Observatory

Crepe Spectacular!!

*Come join the observatory summer staff,
your executive, and other BBO members
for breakfast and bird banding.*

*Crepe specialist (and bird bander)
Janos Kovacs will again be mass-producing
his famously delicious
fruity-choco-nutty crepes.*

*This years crepe-fest will take place on
June 13th at the banding observatory in the
Beaverhill Lake Natural Area*

*Come early because as we all know...
the early bird gets more crepes!!!*

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Ringling and Twitching

Karen Garvin

I know, this article sounds like it belongs in a medical journal, but honest, it's about birds! I was lucky enough to spend most of last year hiking about Britain and discovered that there was a tremendous opportunity for ringing and twitching there, otherwise known as banding and birding.

The two holy organizations for birders in the United Kingdom are the RSPB and the BTO. That mouthful translates into the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the British Trust for Ornithology, both very helpful to travelling nature nuts. Contacting the RSPB gave me a map showing every major Nature Reserve in Britain with detailed access information. The BTO was able to give me contact information on ringing groups and Natural History Societies in specific areas, as well as some smashing pocket-sized checklists to help me get a feel for what I might see in their lovely countries.

Birding in the UK is pretty straightforward - all you really need is some good binoculars, waterproof boots and midge repellent and you're sorted. Being geographically smaller than Alberta and rather well set up for travel, most of the coastline, estuaries, dales, peaks and moors are easily accessible to anyone with a car or the patience to use public transport. Without a car and with relatively little money I managed to hike and bird all over England and Scotland and add well over 100 new species of birds to my life list, not to mention a few cows, sheep, snakes, snails, seals, dolphins, sharks and heaps of flowers. Due to its size and high population, it is surprising to many that there is so much accessible protected countryside in England.

(continued on Page 2)

Message from the Chair

Jason Duxbury

It's official... the Beaverhill Bird Observatory is now an official member of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network (CMMN), a co-operative program of Bird Studies Canada, the Canadian Wildlife Service and the member stations. The BBO joins 12 other stations across Canada in a network formed to help coordinate migration monitoring efforts. The other full members of the network are:

Rocky Point Migration Monitoring Station, BC	Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, MI
Mackenzie Nature Observatory, BC	Long Point Bird Observatory, ON
Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, AB	Haldimand Bird Observatory, ON
Last Mountain Bird Observatory, SK	Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory, ON
Delta Marsh Bird Observatory, MB	Innis Point Bird Observatory, ON
Thunder Cape Bird Observatory, ON	Atlantic Bird Observatory, NS

An application for full membership from Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory is currently under review, but they are expected to be full members within a few months.

The BBO will now receive 50% of all Baillie Bird-a-thon proceeds that are raised by our own birders. The balance is retained by Bird Studies Canada as contributions toward the expenses of running the bird-a-thon, administrative costs of the CMMN, and a contribution to the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund. One of the key benefits of being a full member is that Birds Study Canada is committed to analyzing our data to produce annual indices. The BBO has standardized migration monitoring data dating back to 1992 and it will be interesting to see how our bird populations are faring compared to other populations across Canada. It is also hoped that the BBO can participate in joint projects with other member stations across the nation. Now that there are stations formally linked right across the country, there is a greater chance of detecting and documenting changes in migratory bird populations as they enter and leave Canada every year. It is great to know that there are other stations across Canada with to share our knowledge, data and even problems. I know I wouldn't mind visiting each station personally.... now all I have to decide whether to go west or east.... hmmm.

Ringling and Twitching *(continued from page 1)*

There are plenty of wild and even remote places where you can disappear for a day or seven. And Scotland, especially the islands and north-west highlands are the perfect destination for those of us who love walking in solitude, with the added feature of not having to worry about where you might fit in the food chain.

As for banding, the opportunities are numerous and diverse. There are many large, well-established observatories located on islands, estuaries and peninsulas that ring daily during migration and much of the rest of the year. Although all are coastal, there are excellent opportunities for viewing and banding waders, gulls, and huge colonies of seabirds. There are also hundreds of smaller ringing groups all over Britain. These are interested people in areas conducive to mist netting who organise themselves into groups and register with the BTO. They meet locally independently, in my experience usually banding one or two days a week depending

on weather and winds. The groups I banded with had about three regular banders who have been ringing forever and know Pyle and Svensson inside and out. Most groups were quite wary of letting me into their secret operations until they found out I had some banding experience and that I was Canadian.

My first ringing experience was in November in a willowy-marshy natural area at the end of a dizzyingly winding and fast single-lane road in south-east England. The group had a deluxe heated concrete shed where all the ringing was done. The general procedures were much the same as they are at BBO, with the only exceptions being everyone wore green wellies, tied the same knots on the guy-wires, and took a tea and biscuit break half way through the morning. Species regularly banded at this site (and lifers for me) included Great Tit, Blue Tit, Long-Tailed Tit, Blackcap, Robin, Goldcrest, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Dunnock, House Sparrow, and Blackbird.



My second go at ringing was in a younger mostly deciduous forested valley near Bristol in south-west England in December. Luckily we were banding in the evening, so at least the drive home on the winding, narrow, hedge-rowed road was in the dark. The valley is well known for its high concentration of raptors, and it was here that I finally saw my first Buzzard (equivalent to a Red Tail here) soaring over the green pastures. The group headquarters were in a cozy new wooden cabin hidden in the trees. Here we banded more woodland species including the beautiful Fieldfare and Redwing (both Thrush species). One interesting difference in operations is the practice of measuring a natural wing cord, not a flattened wing cord as is done at BBO. A bit awkward for me, but they assured me that it was far more accurate than the Canadian way, and it gave us a new topic to debate over a pint at the pub.

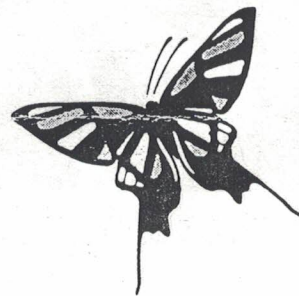
It must be obvious by now that I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Britain. The possibilities for adventure and discovery are endless for any natural history buff willing to be rained on for three weeks in a row! You can contact the RSPB at 011-44-01767-680551, and/or the BTO at 011-44-01842-750030.

If you have any questions about the article, please contact Karen Garvin at E-mail to: naturegirlkmg@hotmail.com, or write me at Box 1800, Inuvik NWT, XOE OTO.

Butterfly Counts At Banding Stations

Barb Beck

This year we are going to have more than 35 National Butterfly Association Butterfly Counts conducted in Alberta (California currently holds the record for number of counts with 24). Banding stations at Lesser Slave Lake and the Beaverhill Bird Observatory are included in two of the count circles.



The third annual BBO butterfly count will be held in the 3rd week in June. For more details contact Barb at Barb.Beck@UAlberta.CA

The count in Lesser Slave Lake will be held July 17 or 18th. Contact Frank Fraser by phone at (780) 849-7100 or Email: frank.fraser@env.gov.ab.ca

For information on the other National Butterfly Association Butterfly Counts being held in the province check out:

<http://owlnut.rr.ualberta.ca/~barb/butterfly.html>

Sweet Home Montana

Lisa Takats

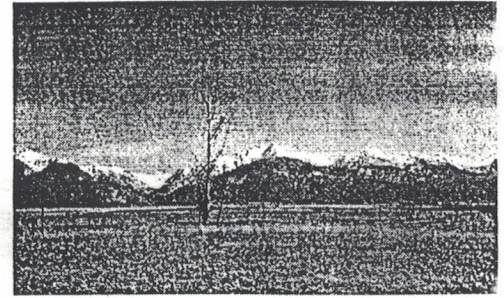
To escape the winter cold, a trip we made,
At the Owl Research Institute is where we stayed.
With Denver Holt, known as the 'Owl' man,
Who gets to the field whenever he can.

The first signs of spring were the geese,
And the beautiful weather would not cease.
By Calgary, there was a lack of snow,
But further south we would go.

Soon after, Jeff would exclaim with glee,
There were two Bald Eagles in a tree.
And as we ate lunch in the sun,
We new the raptor voyage had just begun.

As we drove toward the study place,
To count the most hawks was the race.
Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks galore,
To keep the count became a chore.

In the shelter belts of this conservation spot,
Long-eared Owls, there were a lot.
Four magpie nests is what they chose,
They were all 200 meters close.
54 birds in the roost we counted,
And a pellet search was quietly mounted.



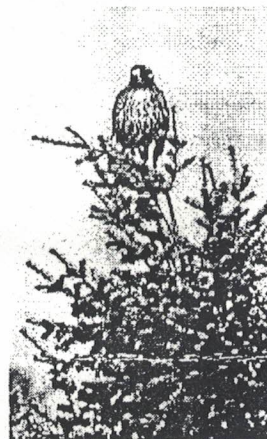
At night we viewed Short-eared Owl courtship,
This was turning out to be quite a trip.
A Peregrine Falcon made its presence known,
And a Golden Eagle, that was all alone.
As we departed this incredible spot,
We thought to ourselves, many species we've got.

In Kananaskis we saw eagles soar,
The flight seemed to be a simple chore.
Over the Rockies on their way up to breed,
A great adventure we did conceed.

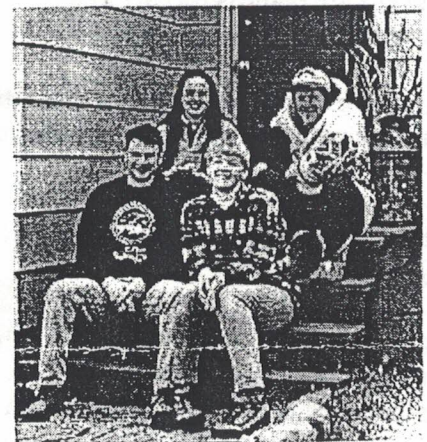
And as we drove back to winter we smiled all the way,
We knew that the spring was not far away.
Bringing the raptors back to their nests,
To find them and band will be our quests.



Jeff Adamyk with Long-eared Owl



Red-tailed Hawk



Jeff, Ann, Lisa, and Denver

Snakes on The Move

Jeff Sleno

At the first mention of snakes most people derive images of slithering, devious, and dangerous creatures that send shivers down their spine. Historically, snakes have been associated with phobias, fears, and an all around dislike. Is this an earned title though? There are those species of snakes that are venomous and may pose a threat, but contrary to public belief, snakes have not joined "the dark side". Our dislike of snakes is a learned behaviour, passed down from generation to generation. It is amazing that after a person harvests up enough courage to actually touch a real snake, their first remark is always, "oh wow, they aren't slimy!" And besides, if you actually take the time to get to know a snake, they are quite cute.

Snakes serve an important role in the functioning of an ecosystem. As such, snake species deserve attention and management. Here in Alberta, snakes will congregate at specific sites in the ground to hibernate, called hibernacula, and escape the cold temperatures during winter. These hibernacula are extremely important for the survival of an entire population of snakes. Due to development, cultivation, and our negative perception of snakes, these hibernacula are often destroyed. With the problem at hand, biologists Lisa Takats and Kris Kendell, in accordance with the Alberta Conservation Association and Alberta Environmental Protection-Fisheries and Wildlife Management Division, have implemented a two year study on the red-sided garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis*).

The study is directed at the feasibility of translocating a snake population from one hibernaculum to another, as a possible management tool. Initiated in the fall of 1998, and more recently in the spring of 1999, red-sided garter snakes were relocated from their original hibernaculum to another known hibernaculum, 6 miles to the east. The snakes were processed, recording the length, weight, sex, and marked using scale clipping methods and PIT tags (passive integrated transponder), for future identification. The new hibernaculum was then enclosed by a 2 ft high plastic wall which restricts the snake dispersal and allows for finding the marked snakes to see if they overwintered successfully.

If the snakes survive the translocation and are able to adapt to a new location, new management options may be available. Already, the three garter snakes found in Alberta, red-sided, wandering, and plains are all listed as "Yellow" species due to years of steady population decline. More knowledge of these snakes is needed if we are able to manage their populations and stop the current trend. Public perception is also a very important tool for successfully managing these species. The next time a snake slithers onto your path, see it as a treat, rather than a traumatic experience. Besides, they really aren't slimy. For more information on this project or to report a den site please contact Lisa Takats Tel: (403) 427-1249 Fax: (403) 422-9685 Email: lisa.takats@env.gov.ab.ca.

Bird Banding Workshop Highlights

The Banding Workshop was a huge success with over 80 attendees throughout the three days. We would like to thank all of the speakers that presented at the workshop. A wide range of talks were presented ranging from raptors to observatory reports.

- ☛ Beaverhill Bird Observatory 1998 Operations Report – Christine Rice
- ☛ Calgary Bird Banding Society 1998 Annual Report – Doug Collister
- ☛ The Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory 1998 Annual Report – Stefan Jungkind
- ☛ Last Mountain Lake Bird Observatory 1998 Annual Report –
- ☛ Delta Marsh Bird Observatory 1998 Annual Report - Heidi den Haan
- ☛ Bird Studies Canada - Michael Bradstreet
- ☛ The Rankin Inlet Peregrine Falcon Project - Lisa Takats
- ☛ Separating Mourning and MacGillivray's Warblers, Early Results – Grahame Booth and Doug Collister
- ☛ Recent Winter Sightings of Piping Plovers Banded in Alberta & Saskatchewan-Isabelle Richardson
- ☛ Trapping, Banding, and Ageing of Snowy and Great Horned Owls - Hardy Pletz
- ☛ Volunteer Owl Monitoring Program, You'll Have a Hoot - Jeff Adamyk (speaker) and Lisa Takats
- ☛ Central Alberta Swainson's Hawks: Banding and Aspects of Their Natural History - Al DeGroot
- ☛ Satellite Telemetry of Peregrine 5735 in 1997/1998 - Geoff Holroyd (speaker) and Jason Duxbury
- ☛ Notes, Remarks and Comments From The Canadian Wildlife Service - Brenda Dale

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory would like to acknowledge the Canadian Wildlife Service for providing the guestspeaker, Michael Bradstreet's airfare.

Baillie Bird-a-thon

Kris Kendell and Lisa Takats

Baillie Bird-a-thon time is upon us again and the Beaverhill Bird Observatory teams are looking for sponsors. The bird-a-thon is a 24 hour birding extravaganza where birder watchers try to find as many species as possible. Last year the BBO had many pledges & collected \$ 3 987. We would like to take this opportunity to thanks all of our sponsors from 1998.

Mona Adams
Denise Auriat
Kathleen Ball
Janet Bates
Michael Best
Susan Blackman
Jean Burgess
Wendy Calvert
Blaine Campbell
Louise Campbell
Richard Clayton
Tim Coleman
Cheryl Cooke
Kevin Crockett
Susan Cubbit
Brenda Dale
El DeGroot
Loney Dickson
Brad and Cathy Duxbury
Fred and Karen Duxbury
Jason Duxbury

Michelle Edinga
Cam Fraser
Terry Fraser
Karen Garvin
Gary and Judy Gnam
Shannon Haszard
Tim Hibbard
Alan Hingston
Geoff Holroyd
Brain Hornby
Jeff Hoyem
Anne Kiel
Bill and Gong Kiel
Glenn Kuhn
Gerald McKeating
Camilla Morcos
Mike Norton
Marilyn and Ray Nydokus
Sandra Nydokus
Richard Olorenshaw
Melanie Ostpowich

Tom Packer
Rusk and Gail Redmond
Hans Schinke
Carl and Kari Scholz
Christine Scott
Glen Semenchuk
Darcey Shyry
Rob Sissions
Jeanne Sproule
Donald J. Stiles
Ian Stirling
Margaret and Josef Takats
Lisa Takats
Ed Telfer
Don Thomas
Helen Trefry
Jim Vollmershausen
Bill Wishart



If you would like to sponsor one of our birding teams please contact: Lisa Takats at 780-422-9536 or e-mail at lisa.takats@env.gov.ab.ca. You can sponsor a flat rate or per bird species found. If you would like to participate check out the website: <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/~bsc/brdathon.html>

CONTACTS

Beaverhill Bird Observatory

P.O. Box 1418, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 2N5 (membership \$10) - Chairperson-Jason Duxbury (433-5730)

Calgary Bird Banding Society

247 Parkside Cr. S.E., Calgary, Alberta, T2J 4J3 (membership \$20) - President-Doug Collister (246-2697)
- Treasurer-El Peterson (271-3741)

Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory

P.O. Box 730, Slave Lake, Alberta, T0G 2A0 - Chairperson-Marion Whitby (369-3581)

NEXT WILLET ISSUE

Material for the forthcoming newsletter should be sent to: Lisa Takats, editor, The Willet, 3535-105 A Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T6J 2M6. PHONE 422-9685, Email: lisa.takats@env.gov.ab.ca. Next newsletter deadline: July 1, 1999. Articles can be on bird banding, birdwatching, wildlife viewing, etc.