

Beaverhill Bird Observatory

The WILLET

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Editor Helen Trefry, Layout Darren Gilday

Songbird Banding Events 2022

As spring arrives, many of us are itching to see our firsts-of-the-year. Our first American Robin, Snow Goose, Mountain Bluebird, White-throated Sparrow, etc. And before we know it, the Warblers will be back!! BBO staff will be on site starting May 1, banding birds starting 30 minutes before dawn for 6 hours every day, weather permitting. Already people are asking if BBO will be hosting Songbird Banding events this spring. And we are here to tell you – YES WE WILL BE!! BBO is excited to host the public once more for this annual migration of our beautiful songbirds as they head up to their breeding territories. Events will be hosted during the weekends of May into early June for visitors to enjoy and up close and personal look at our birds, while also getting to talk one-on-one with our biologists about conservation issues impacting them and how we can all make small changes in our lives to be more bird friendly. Ticket sales for these banding events will begin in early May so stay tuned as we will email you as a BBO member once more when ticket sales open up!



Territorial Acknowledgement: Beaverhill Bird Observatory is located within Treaty 6 territory, a traditional gathering place for diverse Indigenous Nations, including the Plains Cree, Metis, Blackfoot, Saulteaux and Nakoda Sioux People, who are the original stewards of the Beaverhill Lake area since time immemorial.

Bird Smart and BirdBytes and Outreach

BBO biologists Sara Pearce Meijerink and Shane Abernathy are still providing educational talks in person and virtually with a live falcon until the end of April. To date, this winter's BirdSmart education program has already reached 4,527 students and 957 adults about the importance of birds, conservation and taking individual action to reduce climate change. The program is fully booked for the remainder of the winter, with funding graciously provided by the Alberta Community Environment Action Grant,

Edmonton Community Foundation, Alberta Conservation Association, TD Friends of the Environment, and Alberta Gaming Liquor and Cannabis Commission.

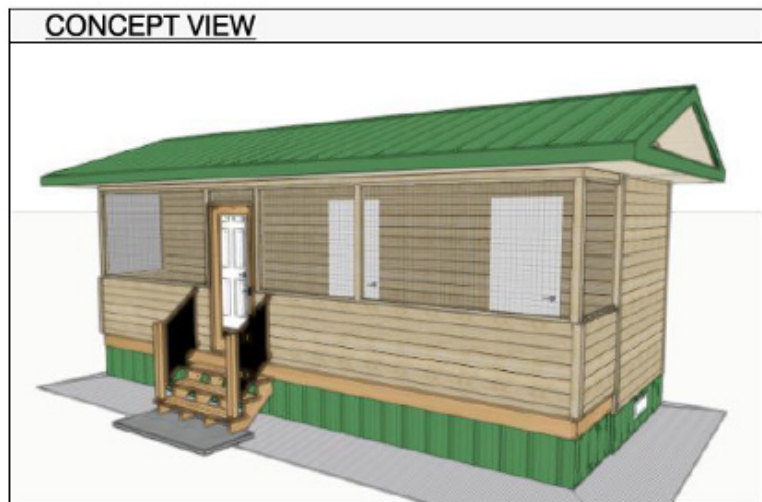
Since April 2021, Shane has been producing short educational videos about birds and their biology, called BirdBytes. These videos are routinely posted to YouTube and Instagram, and are beginning to be uploaded to TikTok as well. Between all platforms, these videos have accrued approximately 75,000 views and Shane is continuing to produce more!



In additionally, BBO staff hosted two experimental livestreams during the banding season which were successful enough that they will be continued going forward. If you want to see what it's like banding Songbirds or Owls, these livestreams are uploaded on our YouTube Channel as well!

One more bunkhouse – our last building to be replaced.

Affectionately known as “Nuthatch Nest”, our second bunkhouse is not in good shape. We refurbished it's insides with old insulation from the replacement of Raven's Roost, but clearly 35+ year-old reused insulation in the walls doesn't help with an uninsulated plywood floor. Nuthatch Nest is itself about 35 year's old and showing its age. The space is cramped for 3 people and you hope that your workmates don't snore :). Rose and John Scott have come-up with a superb design that allows for bunkbeds in three separate rooms and a screened-in porch in a similar footprint as the current cabin.



We don't have a firm quote but we estimate the cost at \$40,000, but maybe more if the price of wood doesn't drop. This is where we need your help. Since this building is for staff and volunteers and not for the general public it is not eligible for any government community grants. We have to do this on our own. We replaced Raven's Roost and our old Lab with your help. We are confident, with your help, we can get this final building replaced this fall.

www.beaverhillbirds.com/get-involved/donate/Website

Your donations are not limited to Cash. By donating securities (stocks, bonds or mutual funds) directly to a charity as opposed to selling them and donating the proceeds, the capital gains tax can be eliminated. This means more money for the charity and a greater charitable tax credit for you. In Alberta, in-kind gifts of shares and mutual funds may provide up to \$240 of additional tax savings for every \$1,000 of capital gain than would be the case if you sold the shares and gave the proceeds to charity. We encourage you to talk to your financial advisor before making such a donation. Securities can be donated to BBO through CanadaHelps.

www.canadahelps.org/en/donate/donate-securities/.

A New BBO Project with Alberta Community Bat Program

BBO is collaborating with the Alberta Community Bat Program to determine the best design for bat boxes in Alberta. Cory Olson, the project lead of Alberta's Community Bat Program has loaned BBO 18 data-loggers to record temperature and humidity in bat boxes currently established in the Beaverhill Natural Area. In early April, prior to the arrival of bats, volunteers Geoff Holroyd and Helen Trefry installed the 18 data loggers in 6 multi-chambered maternity boxes (2 per box, front and back) and in 6 single chamber boxes (2 small and 4 large). Cory supplied wire holders with screws and washers to slide the data-loggers within the in-ner and outer compartments of the boxes to compare conditions in both layers. We will remove them at the end of October so that Cory can analyze the environmental conditions.



Photo: Geoff installing a data logger in a bat house – photo by Helen Trefry

BBO EDI Statement

At the Beaverhill Bird Observatory (BBO) we believe that there is a place for everyone in the conservation community. We strive to ensure our organization provides a welcoming, equitable and inclusive environment for all.

As an organisation, our current initiatives include:

- Developing partnerships with organisations that serve communities underrepresented in conservation sciences;
- Continuing to offer the Young Ornithologist Workshop at no cost to participants
 - ◇ Spots have been designated for youth who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People Of Colour.
- Pursuing grants that enable us to run community outreach programs
- Offering paid internship programs to post secondary students; and
- Providing opportunities for volunteers to build field skills

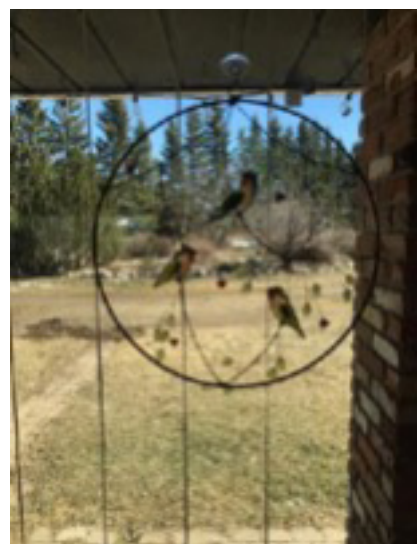
If you would like to work with us, or have an idea for how we could achieve our goals, please send us an email at info@beaverhillbirds.com. We would love to hear from you!

Interns

Interns play an important role in monitoring at BBO - everything from Bats, Butterflies, Tree Swallows, House Wrens, and Breeding Bird Census Surveys. Intern reports are now available to read on our [website](#). BBO is proud to be hosting 8 interns in 2022.

Thanks to Carol and Gary Dodd and Alberta Conservation Association for funding the intern program in 2021.

Windows- please don't ignore this cause of millions of birds' deaths! As the migrants return, everyone loves to witness their beauty and song during this annual ritual. But every year comments on Facebook sites and elsewhere mention individuals finding dead or stunned birds under their windows. Comments such as "how lucky you were to have this beauty in the hand" or "fortunately it flew away fine" are naive. Many times these birds are not fine when they fly off, but suffering from a concussion that will make them easy prey to a cat or other predator. Frequently one hears of dead ruffed grouse that hit windows- which can be a scary and costly event if the window is broken. Studies have shown that rural homeowners are more likely to have



window strikes but everyone should take some responsibility in how to avoid these mishaps. Between 150 – 350 million birds die each year in Canada from window strikes. Please explore some of the many options available. Putting verticle lines on your windows, is one of the best options out there, and it is what is being used at BBO and at BBO Board members' homes with great success!

www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC9xQkUtQ98



2022 returning BBO Staff from top to bottom, left to right; Sara Pearce Meijerink, Shane Abernethy, Jana Teefy and Jon Van Arragon



Beaverhill Bird Observatory

Geoff Holroyd's Young Ornithologists' Workshop

a Natural History Camp

July 30- August 5th 2022

Are you 15-18 years old and interested in birds and nature?

Would you like to experience hands on learning on how to identify, sex, age and band birds at Alberta's oldest bird banding station?

Would you like to spend a week living in a camp setting with other teens with similar outdoor interests, learning from biologists and going on field trips? Apply for this FREE one week workshop (travel to the station not included).



Location: Beaverhill Bird Observatory, near Tofield, AB.

Visit www.beaverhillbirds.com for more details and to download your application form!

Questions and applications to: helentrefry@gmail.com

If you are Indigenous, Black or a person of Color, we would love to receive an application from you.

Owl Migration Monitoring

Owl monitoring occurred between September 1st and November 12th. At the start of the season, we began operating; four mist nets with a male Saw-whet Owl audio lure, two mist nets with a female Saw-whet Owl audio lure, and one mist net with a Long-eared Owl audio lure. Starting October 15th we began using two additional mist nets with a Boreal Owl audio lure. This year, the female Saw-whet Owl nets were moved to a new location, before the beginning of the monitoring period to account for increased light

disturbance from the newly constructed research and education building. This new location is more sheltered and has less disturbances from human activities, creating a significant improvement on the previous location.

Over the course of the fall season, we accumulated 1,123 playback hours across our four targeted programs (418.5 from the male Saw-whet Owl lure, 401.75 from the female Saw-whet Owl lure, 194.75 from the Long-eared Owl lure and 108 from the Boreal Owl lure). We captured 345 owls in total: 252 in the nets with the male lure, and 68 in nets with a female lure, yielding capture rates of 62.1 captures/100 playback hours and 16.9 captures/100 playback hours respectively. A more detailed breakdown of capture rates can be found below in Table 3. These are considerably higher than last year! Among these owls were a couple of very special ones, including the 5000th Northern Saw-whet Owl captured in our monitoring program’s history and the first Barred Owl ever captured within the Beaverhill Natural Area! Another notable capture was a foreign recapture that had originally been banded in Pennsylvania, nearly 3000 km away. To complete the circle, an owl banded by us this fall was then recaptured in the same state 17 days later!

Table 3: Captures by species during owl migration monitoring

Species	Banded	Repeat 1	Return 2	Foreign 3	Other 4	Total
Northern Saw- whet Owl	322	11	1	3		337
Long-Eared Owl	7					7
Barred Owl	1					1
Total	330	11	1	3		345



Two Adorable Northern Saw-whet Owls.



BBO's first ever captured and banded Barred Owl!

More Great Journeys of Saw-whet Owls

by Geoff Holroyd, BBO, Chair

BBO to Pennsylvania:

The autumn of 2021 was remarkable for band recoveries of Saw-whets. In the last issue of the Willet, Shane told us of a banded owl trapped at BBO that was originally banded in Pennsylvania two years earlier. Little did we know at the time an even more dramatic record was about to appear in our email inbox. A female owl that we banded on 11 October 2021 was re-trapped alive in Pennsylvania by Scott Weidensaul on 7 November; 3,000 km in only 17 days after banding! This hatch-year female flew an average of 176 km per night if she flew in a straight line! Hopefully she had following winds to help her get that far that quickly. The capture site is in a mixed habitat of forest and farm land in the northern part of the Appalachian Mountains of central Pennsylvania. Maybe she was headed for some left-over chocolate since the capture site is only 5 km northwest of Hershey, Pennsylvania and she was there only one week after Halloween.



South Dakota to BBO: Another remarkable record is an adult female owl caught on 15 October that was already banded in South Dakota on 25 May 2019. The May date sprung off the page for me; that is breeding season, not migration time. Indeed this owl was banded as a nestling (!) by Colin Wooley of the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies in the North Cave Hills in northwest South Dakota. The habitat here is rolling hills with scattered ridges and lines of trees interspersed in grasslands. We have wondered for years where to our migrating owls breed. The number of owls that we catch in autumn does not correspond with the productivity of the local owl population. When large numbers of owls are caught at BBO, there is not necessarily a lot of young produced in nest boxes locally. The stable isotope analysis that Chuck Priestley and I did for his MSc

thesis research suggested that some of the owls caught at BBO had isotope signatures consistent with more southerly populations. This implies that owls to the south of BBO come north into the boreal forest after breeding season then head southeast passing through BBO. This record would seem to be an example of such a movement! A fabulous banding record!

A Saw-whet Owl that didn't migrate and didn't survive the winter: One of the reasons for banding owls is to learn about their movements and biology. Sometimes the news isn't happy. On 6 January 2022, Paul Epp found a dead banded Saw-whet Owl on his driveway. The owl's keel (breast bone) was very prominent indicating that it died of starvation. At that time a cold air mass covered Alberta. The owl was banded at Beaverhill Bird Observatory on 11 October 2020 as a hatch-year female; she was about 1.5 years old when she died about 250 km south of BBO. We don't know where the owl spent the intervening year and half. We do know that many owls especially young and females head to eastern North America where winter is not as severe. This owl not only decided to stay in Alberta but went south to near Hassar, north-east of Calgary to an area that is mostly cultivated fields and pothole wetlands. Presumably the willow edges to the potholes had mice or voles that attracted this owl there, but not enough to sustain her. While this owl taught us a bit more about the mystery of their movements, we are sad to report its demise. Thanks to Paul Epp for reporting the band to the Canadian Wildlife Service.

AND an old owl: Richard Chamberland banded a second-year female owl on the south-east edge of Edmonton on 13 October 2018. We caught this owl on 21 October 2021, 40 km east. We don't know how far it had traveled in the intervening years, but it was now 5 years old! This is not a record for Saw-whets but a cool old bird nevertheless!

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[Free Lifetime Nature Alberta Membership.](#)

Nature Alberta members add their voice in support of the appreciation and conservation of nature in Alberta and receive several perks including 10% off merchandise and books in Nature Alberta's [Online Store.](#)

Share this link to instantly connect your members with their Free Lifetime Nature Alberta.

Membership: mailchi.mp/8b21716103c7/chpzlyjmn
And then don't forget to sign up for your own membership as well!



As we enjoy the return of our migrants and thrill at seeing them in flesh, there are other ways to enjoy birds as well - through images and carvings:

The Alberta Wildlife Carving Association presents the “Images of Nature Show” It will feature approximately 100 wood carvings representing birds and animals we are familiar with. Traditionally members of our audience says “It hard to believe the carvings are not real”

Admission to this Show is free for all!

April 30, 2022 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm
May 1, 2022 10:00 am - 2:30 pm
Whitcroft Community Hall
314, 52313 RR 232
Sherwood Park.



albertawildlifecarving.squarespace.com/awca-images-of-nature-show

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

BBO is only able to continue to do long term monitoring and public engagement programs thanks to the generosity and support of our sponsors. We sincerely thank the following organizations for helping to fund our research and education programs: Alberta Community Environment Action Fund, Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Gaming Liquor & Cannabis Commission, Augustana Outdoor Club, B & M Plumbing and Heating Ltd, Beaver County, Bass Pro Shops and Cabella’s Outdoor Fund, Birds Canada Birdathon, Canada Summer Jobs, Claystone Waste Ltd., Eco Canada Co-op, Edmonton Community Foundation Action Grant, Edmonton Nature Club, Employment and Social Development Canada, Engineering Link Incorporated, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Epp Memorial Signs, Hauser Home Hardware, NAIT BioSci Tech Club, Nature Canada’s Charles Labatiuk Nature Endowment Fund, TD Friends of the Environment Fund, Clay-stone Waste Ltd, Moonshine Café and the Wild Bird General Store. Peter Silvius and Moonlight Electric for the installation of the tower to provide power to Ravens Roost, and donations made in memory of Mary Hughes Weir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF DONORS

None of our work would be possible without the generous support of our donors. All those who donated \$50 or more in 2021 are listed here; all others nonetheless receive our sincere thanks.

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