

## Steaks and Saw-whets

*October 1 and 2, 2010 at the  
Beaverhill Bird Observatory*

Join the Beaverhill Bird Observatory volunteers, staff and executive for an evening barbeque and netting of Northern Saw-whet Owls. Steaks, chicken, hotdogs, veggie burgers, corn, potatoes, and all the fixings are served. An assortment of homemade desserts is followed by setting up mist nets to capture saw-whet owls on migration. This annual event sells out quickly so please book early to ensure your spot!!



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

**Cost:** \$25 for adults, free for kids under 12.

**Contact:** For more information and to register, contact Chuck Priestley at (780) 984-6957 or e-mail [chuck@strixecological.ca](mailto:chuck@strixecological.ca).

Supported by Alberta Conservation Association, Nature Canada, and Edmonton Nature Club

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## Beaverhill Bird Observatory Lab Open for Fall Migration



Fall migration monitoring is running at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory lab. The lab will be open till October 10 for songbird migration and till the end of October for Saw-whet Owl monitoring. Katie Calon and Lisa Priestley are monitoring birds heading south to their wintering grounds. Katie will be running the songbird banding from September 1 through October 10 and then switching over to the night shift for saw-whets. Lisa will be running the saw-whet banding September 10 through October 10. The staff will be banding on most days and welcome you to come out and visit them to observe the banding. Please call to make sure someone will be on site (phone 780-819-9927). See you at the lab! Check for lab updates at <http://beaverhillbirds.com/summaries.php>.

# BEAVERHILL BIRD OBSERVATORY HAS BEEN AWARDED ANOTHER CASINO – DECEMBER 7 AND 8, 2010

We **NEED** volunteers to help with chip running, count room, banker, and cashier positions. If you would be interested in volunteering for this important fund raising event please contact Lisa Priestley, [lisa@beaverhillbirds.com](mailto:lisa@beaverhillbirds.com) or phone 780-918-4808.

## A Night of Trapping Saw-whets: What Time Should I Have Gone to Bed?

by Geoff Holroyd

The evening of October 8, 2009 was shaping up to be ideal Saw-whet Owl trapping weather. The owl migration at Beaverhill Lake Bird Observatory had been slow this autumn. Weather had been warm and one could imagine the owls were hanging around, and not being pushed to migrate. Between September 10 and 18 only one owl had been caught. By October 5 the total was 42, not bad, but lower than previous years. October 7<sup>th</sup> the temperature had dropped and strong north winds could have started moving owls south. It was too windy to set up the fine mist nets to try trapping that night, so my dog Gemma and I headed out to set up the nets full of optimism on October 8<sup>th</sup>.



We were not disappointed. Sunset was at 6:49 p.m. so we started the call playback and opened the four mist nets at 8 p.m. The large waning moon appeared glowing in the east over a thin layer of cirrus clouds. On the first two checks of the nets (every 30 minutes) we caught 5 owls. I was ecstatic, in previous evenings in September I had trapped only 1 owl per night, so 5 owls in the first hour were awesome. Although the next net check was a bust, owls were caught every check during the next 9 net checks with 4 owls caught at 1 a.m. A bonus was one of the four was a retrap/recovery. I could only dream where from, but hopefully a long way away! These captures encouraged me not to roll out my sleeping bag at 2 a.m. after a 6 hour shift, but keep going to see how many owls I could catch in the wee hours of the night.

*“Was it worth it?”* I thought to myself.

By 1 a.m. I had caught 19 owls, and by 3 a.m. I had caught 22, only 3 more in two hours. By 5 a.m. I had not caught any more. So tired and bored, I wrote the first draft of this article, and made the graph. At 5:30 a.m. light snow was falling. The temperature had not dropped, so I decided to keep netting. Would it be worthwhile? I speculated that the owls might have a flurry of activity just before dawn. There was a flurry, our first snow flurry of the year at the lake! But no flurry of owls.

Dawn occurred at 7:47 a.m., so light started at 6:47 a.m. and I closed the nets at 7:00 a.m. Since no owls were caught after 3 a.m., I definitely should have gone to bed then. According to Figure 2, I could have gone to bed at 1 a.m. and only missed two owls and slept even more. But then I would not have all those wonderful zeros after 3 a.m. to prove that the owls were not active that late in the night. Collecting zeros is a necessary part of biology, but the least favourite part for scientists. At least I had boosted the seasonal total owls caught to 64! Tonight I will go to bed early and let Lisa and Katie ponder how late to stay awake. ☺

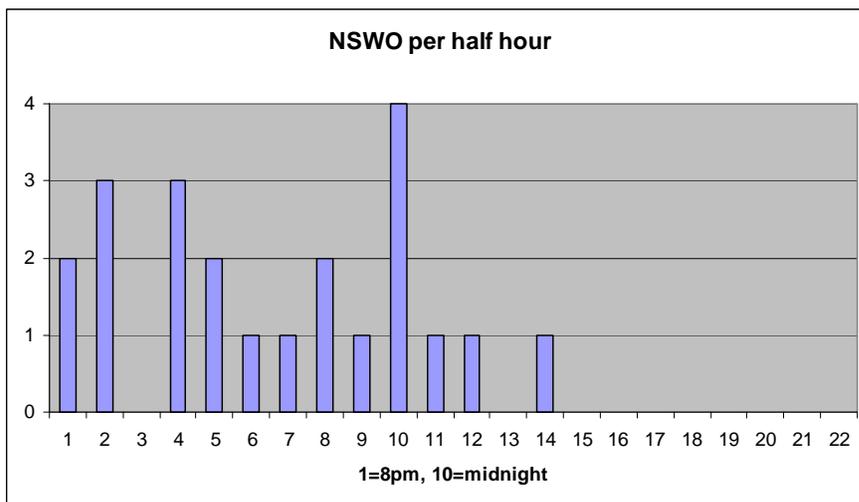


Figure 1. Number of Saw-whet Owls per half hour starting at 8 p.m. October 7 and ending at 7 a.m. October 8.

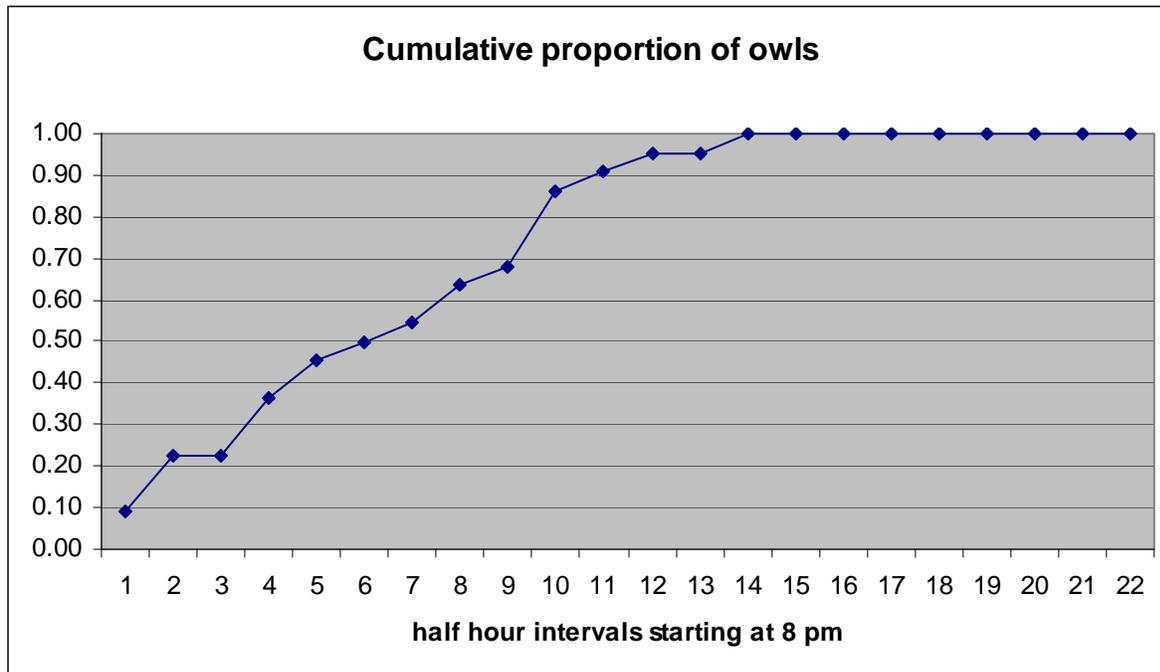


Figure 2. Cumulative number of owls caught each half hour starting at 8pm shows that most owls were caught by the 10<sup>th</sup> net check at 1 a.m.

## A Hoot of a Time, Tales of Owl Banding at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory



Great Horned Owl adult and chick on the nest

by Meaghan Bouchard

There has been much (owl activity) this year at the BBO, from trapping Short-eared Owls out on the lake bed to banding Saw-whet Owls residing in their nest boxes. The staff from the Observatory were also fortunate enough to be invited out to band Great Horned Owl chicks with Al DeGroot and Hardy Pletz, who have been banding raptors for many years. As someone who has never taken part in any hands-on raptor work, I found the experience very exciting!

So on a beautiful June afternoon, Katie, Justin, Thera and I piled into the car and made our way down the gravel roads of Tofield. Al and Hardy had a number of nests that they knew of and wished to visit. This was good because to the inexperienced eye, a stick nest high in the trees 50 m from the road is not evident at first glance. Nor are the owls themselves. Despite their size, they are well camouflaged.

The first nest we arrived at already had one chick that had left the nest. It is common for the chicks to become “branchers”, leaving the nest before they can fly and then climbing up snags and branches while the parents continue to care for them. Hardy and Katie managed to unceremoniously remove him from his tree, but his siblings were not looking as though they would follow suit. So the rest of us hiked out to the stand of trees and watched Al get geared up to go after the other chicks. The outfit for retrieving owls from their

nest located 30ft in the air in a slender aspen is eclectic to say the least. The ensemble of climbing spurs, motorcycle helmet and belt is completed by a leather jacket, fringe and all. This gear proved necessary as Al scaled to the first nest. The 2 adults were less than impressed at his invasion, and repeatedly dove at him and even connected a few times.

The chicks were ferried down in a leather sac to waiting hands. Hardy then fitted each with a lock on style band and we each got our chance at holding the chicks as well as some great photos. The chicks were then hoisted back up to their nest and left in peace. Out of the 6 nests we visited, 3 nests were accessible and 8 chicks were banded. Katie even had a go at climbing for the last nest of the day! All in all, it was a great afternoon and a great experience and I can't wait to go again next year!



## Golondrinas de las Americas

by Katie Calon

We had three staff working at the bird observatory on the Golondrinas project through Cornell University, Justin Proctor, Thera Lombardi, and Juan Ksillas. The Tree Swallows had a very comparable year to 2009, except that a higher percentage of the nests were successful, and more adult birds were banded and recaptured. A summary of nesting statistics for the Tree Swallows in 2009 and 2010 is presented in Table 2. In addition to the Tree Swallow grids, a nest of 5 Tree Swallow chicks were successfully raised in 'The Cabin', a nest box found in the trees near the lab.

Table 2. Breeding data for Tree Swallows monitored at BBO during the Golondrinas de las Americas project in 2009 & 2010.

Grid	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
	R	R	T	T	S	S	Total	Total
Available boxes	48	48	49	49	50	50	147	147
TRES nest attempts	23	26	39	26	5	12	67	64
Boxes with successful TRES nests (%)	39.6	41.7	67.3	53.1	10.0	18.0	38.8	46.7
Failed TRES nests	4	6	6	0	0	3	10	9
Rate of TRES nest failure (%)	17.4	12.5	15.4	0	0	25	14.9	14.1
Avg TRES young/nest	4.2	4.8	5.7	4.5	4.2	4.4	5.1	4.6
Highest clutch size	6	7	7	7	5	7	7	7
Lowest clutch size	1	2	3	1	3	2	1	1
MOBL nests	1	5	1	2	2	1	4	8
HOWR nests	0	1	2	7	0	0	2	8
Adult TRES banded	27	43	64	59	7	18	98	120
Adult recapture rate (%)	14.8	41.9	39.1	54.2	14.3	27.8	30.6	57.1
Total TRES fledglings	80	96	187	118	21	40	288	254

## Membership Information

\$10/yr for an individual, \$20/yr for a family, \$25/yr Supporting, \$25/yr Corporate, \$100/yr Sustaining, \$500 (one time) Life Membership

Cheques can be made to the Beaverhill Bird Observatory and sent to: Box 1418, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 2N5

Material for the next newsletter can be sent to:

Lisa Priestley, Editor, Box 1418, Edmonton, AB T5J 2N5.

Email: [lisa@beaverhillbirds.com](mailto:lisa@beaverhillbirds.com). Articles and photos can be on Bird banding, bird watching, wildlife viewing, personal nature photos, etc. Deadline: December 31, 2010.