



Beaverhill Bird Observatory
Spring Report 2020

By
Sara Pearce Meijerink

July 1st, 2020

Executive Summary during the Year of COVID-19

This year, research at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory was very different, as in many research stations across the world. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our research programs were altered and many of our public engagement events were postponed. This spring our research programs were managed by our Head Biologist Sara Pearce Meijerink along with Summer Student Jon Van Arragon. Assistant Biologist Karambir Singh ran our BirdSmart education program digitally providing presentations to students and the general public via online webinars. There was no bird banding this spring, as it was not feasible to do so while maintaining a 2m physical distance from each other. Visitors were encouraged to stay away from our buildings to reduce the spread of the virus and since it was not possible to have volunteers or interns, BBO staff took on the responsibility of conducting the weekly surveys of our long term monitoring programs for birds, bats, and butterflies.

Double Daily Census

In replacement of Migration Monitoring this spring, BBO staff ran a double daily census. These censuses ran from May 1st until June 9th. The first census route is the same standardized route staff have surveyed in previous years, occurring within the first two hours of sunrise and took 40mins to walk. The second census route we standardized this year, occurring an hour after the first census, walking to the Weir along Duck Drive in order to increase our observations of shorebirds, waterbirds and warblers in the willow and marsh habitats. This proved to be very informative and our sightings this spring were phenomenal!



White-faced Ibises at the weir



Black-crowned Night Heron

Highlight species seen on migration census this year include the hundred of Snow Geese, Ross Geese, White-fronted Geese and Sandhill Cranes flying north for the breeding season. BBO Staff heard a Black-throated Green Warbler on census and saw a couple of Northern Waterthrushes. Numerous Blackpoll Warblers were seen and heard, particularly in the willows near the weir. As well, a pair of Black-crowned Night Herons frequented the weir, along with the very exciting sighting of 100+ White-faced Ibises that have remained there

for the entire spring!! It looks like they will be breeding here this year, as due to high levels of precipitation and snow melt, Beaverhill Lake is full and the sedges and grass to the north of the Weir remain flooded!



Trail 'Harrier Highway' flooded due to high water levels and beaver activity. May 1, 2020

Observations from first and second census were entered into our Daily Estimated Total (DET) data sheet (first census entered into the "census" column, second census entered into the "other observations" column). These were then combined to reflect the total number, and type of species migrating through the Beaverhill Natural Area and these records were posted on eBird. Other noteworthy observation include an increased number of Nelson's Sparrows in the flooded lakebed

and the presence of our two female Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (but no males to date).

Intern Monitoring Programs

Due to COVID-19, the BBO was unable to engage university students to assist in our long term monitoring program internships. Instead, BBO staff conducted the weekly surveys, monitoring all our locally breeding Tree Swallows, House Wrens, Bats and Butterflies. Their surveys continue into the summer months.



Above: Jon walking the flooded ditches to survey the Tree Swallow Road Grid



Left: Sara with an unexpected bat roosting in our bunkhouse screen door!

Other Activities

This spring, volunteer John Scott spent many hours building BBO two beautiful new Purple Martin Colony Boxes and on May 3rd, the first one was delivered to site. In the afternoon, John Scott, along with BBO Treasurer Rose Scott, Chair Geoff Holroyd and BBO Staff managed to install and raise our new Purple Martin box, to the delight of the Tree Swallows! Over the course of the spring, many Tree Swallows were seen perching on top of this box before finally, a pair of Purple Martins showed up and claimed residency! Let's hope more decide to join them! This box will replace the old box that was erected a few years ago but needs too much repair.

Staff spent a lot of time this spring trying to keep out a resident skunk, who thought that burrowing under the lab building would be a good idea. Many burrowing attempts were blocked, to the frustration of both the skunk and our staff.

Jon, our summer student, spent a couple afternoons installing the newest Alberta Parks Signage to help improve visitor navigation and experience, including trail map signs with a "You Are Here" marker.



John and Geoff with our newly installed Purple Martin Colony Box



Out of the 20 Northern Saw-whet Owl nesting boxes located in the Beaverhill Natural Area, BBO Staff were happy to report that 2 boxes were occupied this spring! Sara with help from volunteer Irene surveyed the boxes in early May and indeed, 2 females Saw-whet Owls poked their heads out to see what they were doing, and between the two of them, there were 11 eggs! Hopefully in the summer, our staff will be able to band some Northern Saw-whet Owl chicks!

Staff also spent time doing nest searching in the natural area and trail maintenance due to high winds and heavy beaver activity.

Female Northern Saw-whet Owl, peering out from her nest box at BBO Staff and Volunteer

Great Canadian Birdathon

BBO staff and volunteers did a socially distancing Birdathon this year. With driving in a car convoy and using radios to communicate, together they birded throughout the Beaverhill Natural Area and traveled to Amisk Creek, Tofield Lama Pond and Miquelon Provincial Park. 103 bird species were spotted and highlight species included Short-eared Owl, Northern Shrike, Cinnamon Teal, White-faced Ibises and American Avocets. Together, along with other Birdathon members across the province of Alberta and even in Ontario, we raised \$695 for bird conservation!

Geoff Holroyd and Helen Trefry also did a Birdathon for the BBO and saw 114 species! Highlights included Grasshopper Sparrow at Mundare Beach. Through their determination and experienced fundraising efforts, together they managed to raise a whopping \$5,000 for bird conservation! Way to go you two!!



BBO Birdathon Team! Birding at a social distance!

Big Birding Breakfast

Due to COVID -19 the Big Birding Breakfast was cancelled this year.

Education and Outreach

The BBO BirdSmart education team, led by Sara Pearce Meijerink, Stephanie Thunberg and Karambir Singh, completed 41 digital webinars in May and 36 webinars in June!

The BirdSmart program provided in-person presentations across the province of Alberta from November 1st, 2019 until COVID-19 prematurely closed our in-person programming on March 14, 2020, coinciding with Alberta Health Services recommended school closures and limitations on afterschool programs and social gatherings. Our staff then diligently went to work, converting our presentations to webinar formats and we began providing free digital webinars to the public through Zoom and to digital classrooms through Google Meets from April 9th, 2020 until June 25th, 2020.



Karambir presenting to junior school students about Wetland Conservation and Climate Change

Overall, 136 in-person presentations were given to school audiences this winter ranging from pre-kindergarten to Grade 12. Approximately 4,452 students and 465 adults from 51 different schools were reached across all of Alberta! Presentation topics focused on climate change, owls of Alberta, and the main threats facing birds.

Staff and volunteers also gave 26 presentations to non-school groups which reached approximately 12,225 people at different adult and youth group organizations. Youth groups included Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, while adult groups included senior's homes, universities, museums, churches and clubs. Our staff attended 11 events this winter reaching a total of 2,177 people. These events included; birthday parties, retail store events, science nights, family carnivals, university events, craft fairs and sporting events. During all events staff manned a booth, provided public education and interpreting, and were accompanied by a live owl or falcon.

Through our digital webinars an additional 1,074 students, 95 adults, and 536 unknown-age individuals were reached from all around the country including; Fort Saint John (British Columbia), Barrie (Ontario), Viking, Medicine Hat, Cochrane, Jasper, Sherwood Park, Morinville, Drumheller, Spruce Grove, Ryley, Athabasca, Slave Lake, Leduc, Edson, Olds, Mundare, Calgary and Edmonton.



Sara presenting at the Oil King's Hockey Hooky Game, on the big screen to an audience of 9,000 students and 2,000 adults about Bird Conservation & Climate Change

To sum it all up, the total outreach for the 2019/2020 BirdSmart education season reached 16,105 students, 4,383 adults and 536 unknown-age webinar attendees, or you can say 21,024 individuals!

Karambir also published 13 new climate changed blog posts this winter on our website which were shared through our social media with the public. You can read these blogs to learn how climate change is impacting our natural world and how you can help reduce your carbon footprint at: <http://www.beaverhillbirds.com/publications/climate-change-blog/>

Acknowledgements

For supporting our daily operations, thank you BBO Chair, Geoff Holroyd for continuing to store the BBO gear, for delivering our propane to site, editing documents and over-seeing the program; Darren Macgregor for maintaining our website; Rose Scott for managing BBO's finances; Helen and Phil Trefry for housing our education owls, the loan of a peregrine falcon and many other support tasks; and Irene Crosland for being an awesome field mom to BBO staff! Thank you to all the BBO board members, who have worked diligently getting our renewed lease permit application in order, and for continuing to work hard in their spare time, to help move the BBO forward in all its research and education efforts. This organization wouldn't be the same without your help! Thank you to all the BBO visitors and interested volunteers! Your continued support means the world to us and we hope we can have volunteers join our operation once again soon. Thank you to **Steve and Kay** from the **Wildbird General Store** for providing us monthly in-kind support in the form of birdseed, even during these challenging times. Your continued support and generosity is sincerely appreciated.

Finally, the BBO has to extend a massive thank you to our funders. Our 2020 spring operations were made possible by financial support from the Alberta Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Commission, the Alberta Community Environment Action Grant Program, Nature Canada's Charles Labatiuk Nature Endowment Fund, Birds Canada's Baillie Fund, TD Friends of the Environment, The Wildbird General Store, Eco-Canada Coop Program, Fortis Alberta, Edmonton Oil Kings Hockey Club, and personal donations.