



Beaverhill Bird Observatory's BirdSmart Education Program Report 2021-2022

By Jana Teefy
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The Beaverhill Bird Observatory's BirdSmart Education Program was another resounding success in 2021-22. The program operated from November 24, 2021, to April 29, 2022, and delivered a total of 195 presentations at 57 schools and 32 non-school events, reaching nearly 5800 students (including 158 special needs students) and 1100 adults - a stunning 300-500 % increase from the previous year's (COVID) education season! Grades 1-3 and 4-6 were the most popular presentation bookings at 52 (31%) and 42 (28%), respectively (Figure 1).

With uncertainty around Covid 19 and the transition into loosened restrictions, the program was offered in virtual and in-person formats, with the flexibility to change between as needed. In-person presentations were preferred, with 81% delivered that way and 19% delivered virtually (Figure 2); however, some schools' Covid policies only allowed them to host virtual presentations. Although virtual presentations are challenging, positive feedback was received regarding class engagement, including: *"Sara was an excellent presenter. You managed to engage the students without physically being in the classroom. That is challenging to do. You were passionate about your topic, and that came across."* – Edmonton Public Schools, and *"Shane was great - the weather wasn't what we had hoped for, but he evaluated the setting and came up with an outdoor presentation that worked. I had very positive feedback from attendees."* – Fort Saskatchewan Homeschool Group.

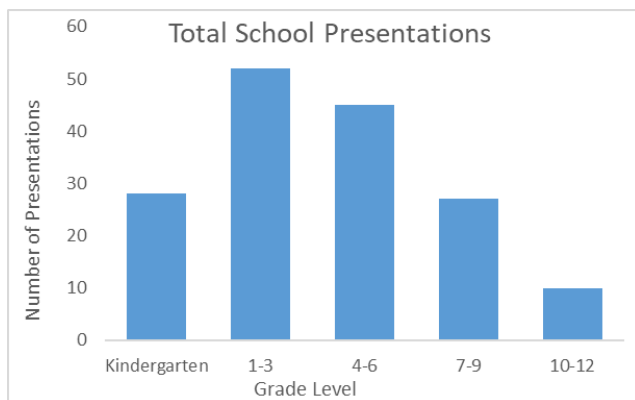


Figure 1. Total number of school presentations per age group

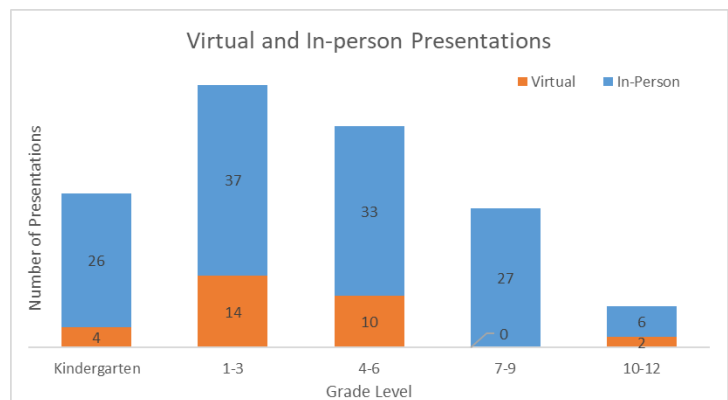


Figure 2. Total number of virtual and in-person school presentations per age group

Although the presentations are geared towards schools and designed to fit within the Alberta school curriculum, they can be easily adjusted to cater to any event and age group. A total of 32 presentations were completed for non-school groups, including in-store presentations (Wild Birds Unlimited and Backyard Birds Nature Shop), youth groups, Brownies, Sparks, Girl Guides, etc., private in-home presentations, and senior centers. Additionally, the staff presented at community events such as the Edmonton Canoe and Kayak Club AGM and produced pre-recorded Hockey Hooky presentations for the Edmonton Oil Kings (Figure 3).

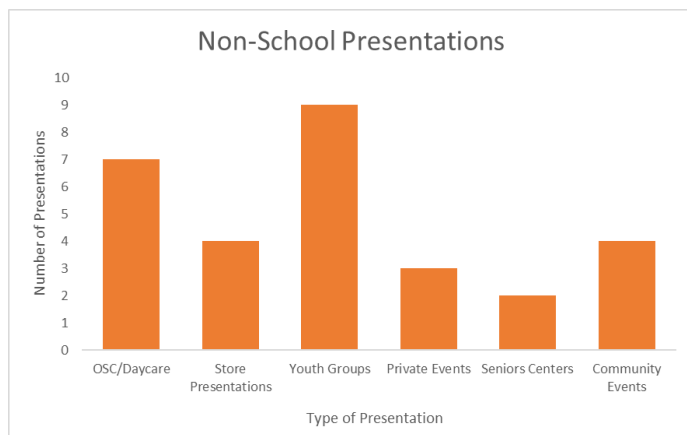


Figure 3. Total number of presentations at non-school events

The BirdSmart Education program reached schools across the province, including Alder Flats, Beaumont, Camrose, Devon, Drayton Valley, Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Lancaster Park, Leduc, Millet, Morinville, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove, St Albert, Stony Plain, Strathcona County, Strathmore, Thorhild, and Wabamun.

Presenters this season were head biologist Sara Pearce Meijerink and assistant biologist Shane Abernathy, accompanied by educational ambassador birds Maple the Peregrine Falcon and Remy the American Kestrel. Jana Teefy worked behind the scenes, scheduling, invoicing, and coordinating the presentations. Due to grant funding, provincial budget cuts, and sympathy for educators, the BBO offered presentations for this season at a drastically discounted rate of \$15 for virtual and \$20 + mileage for in-person, with a 10% discount applied for multiple bookings for the same day. After announcing the new pricing for the season, the staff were flooded with emails and booking requests. Schools were grateful for the affordability and left survey comments including, *"The price point makes it so affordable and the content is just right for younger students!"* – Homesteader School



Educational ambassador Remy
Photo by Jana Teefy



Educational ambassador Maple
Photo by Sara Pearce Meijerink

A resounding 93% of surveyed participants would participate in the program again, and 96% of participants would recommend the program to others. These results are down slightly from previous seasons, seemingly due to the limitations of virtual presentations (Figure 4). However, the schools were grateful for the virtual presentation option and the flexibility of the education staff throughout the season.

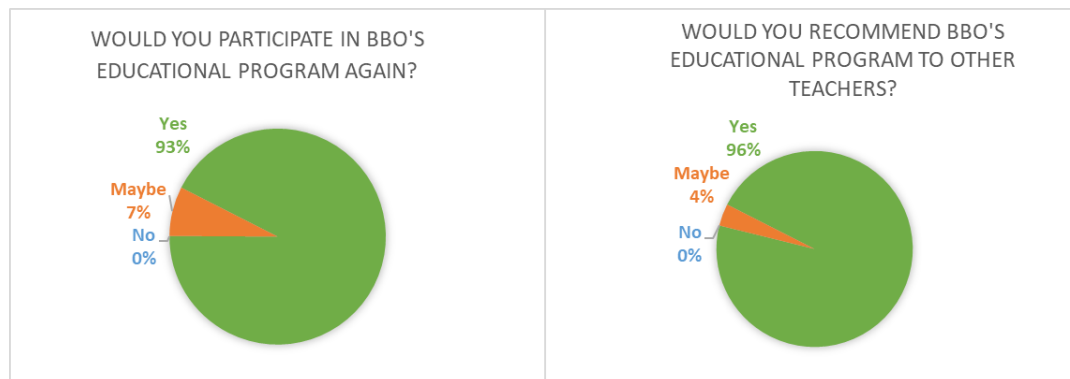


Figure 4. The number of survey participants that would participate in the program again and the number that would recommend the program to other teachers

Despite the challenges of covid throughout the education season, the feedback from the post-presentation surveys was overwhelmingly positive, with survey comments such as *"The vast and detailed knowledge presented and then discussed was thought-provoking and still has the kids asking questions and sharing their thoughts a week later."* – Homeschool group and *"The grade 2 students really loved the presentation! They were very interested in Remy and enjoyed listening to Shane... We definitely learned a lot and the students were full of stories about it the next day too! :) Definitely a blessing and a highlight for our class!"* – Parkland Immanuel Christian School.

Additional comments include *"I hope more people take advantage of this amazing opportunity."* – Private School, *"BBO is amazing."* - Backyard Birds Nature Shop, and *"I loved Remy"* -Aydin, 5.

Girl Guides of Canada commented *"This presentation was important for our Sparks for many reasons! We had a very strong nature theme this year and birds were a big topic. We have been on many nature walks, bird counts, did conservation talks and this presentation was the icing on the cake for them! Meeting a falcon up close was so fun and memorable - we know we are influencing the young generation to really connect and care for our future and theirs! Thank you so much!"*

This winter's BirdSmart Education Program was subsidized by the Edmonton Community Foundation's Environmental Operating Grand Charter which allowed us to offer presentations at much reduced cost. This BirdSmart Education program was also funded by the Community Environment Action Grant from the Alberta Climate Change Office, the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Commission, Alberta Conservation Association, and TD Friends of the Environment, for which we are thankful. The BBO would also like to thank Sara Pearce Meijerink, Shane Abernethy, and our ambassador birds Remy and Maple for their tireless work throughout the education season. We also extend a special thanks to Bill and Inger Paulsen, and Geoff Holroyd for their assistance in transporting our ambassador birds in and out of Edmonton. And finally, we would like to extend a hearty thank you to Phil and Helen Trefry for all they do daily for housing and taking care of our ambassador birds year-round.