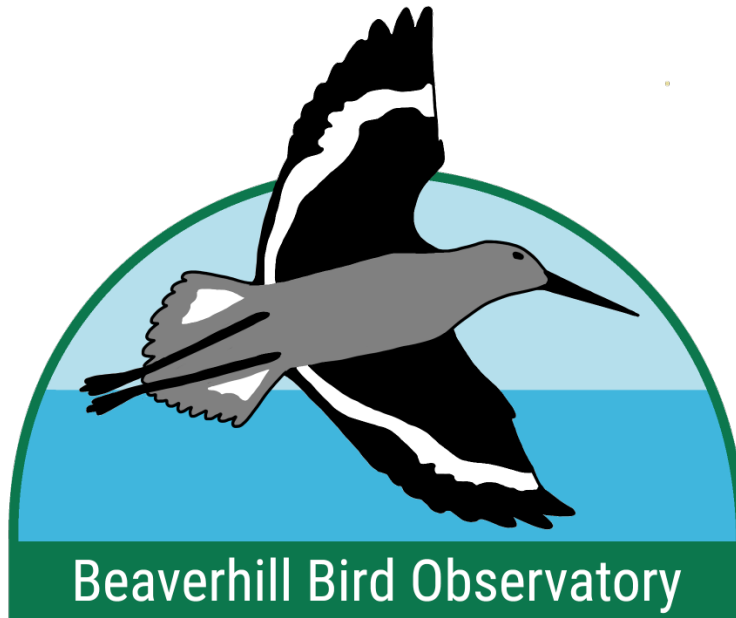




**Beaverhill Bird Observatory
Summer Report 2026**

**Jon Van Arragon
September 3, 2026**

Introduction

Every year is different at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory, and the summer of 2026 was certainly a memorable one! The BBO field crew for summer 2026 once again consisted of head biologist Jana Teefy, assistant biologist Jon Van Arragon, and field biologists Emelie Dykstra, Xavier Quantz, and Willow Zilliox. With all the faces remaining familiar, we were expecting a similarly stable summer of research and education. A typical BBO summer features the operation of 3 MAPS stations, nestling banding, individual staff projects, and the Young Ornithologists Workshop to cap the season off. This summer, however, was not a typical one! Over the last two and a half months, nature has thrown every possible curveball at us: severe flooding, high winds, downed trees, and endless legions of mosquitoes.



Jon exploring the flooded trails. Waders or a boat were required to navigate the natural area during the flood!

Despite nature's efforts, we still had a successful summer at the BBO. We celebrated running our Young Ornithologists' Workshop for its 10th year with a wonderful and enthusiastic group of 9 youth. In early July, staff (along with bat biologist Victoria Berg) conducted a bat emergence count at several of our large multi-chambered bat boxes. Staff were successfully able to conduct their independent projects: shorebird surveys, marsh bird monitoring, Least Flycatcher nest monitoring, and a forest breeding bird census. Student interns were all able to conduct at least partial surveys as well!

MAPS Banding

The Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program is coordinated by the Institute for Bird Populations and aims to determine population trends of locally breeding species across North America. BBO has participated in this program since its inception in 1989 and operates 3 MAPS stations at different locations in the natural area. Banding occurs at each of these sites once per 10-day period, with the periods at BBO stretching from June 10 – August 8 each year. Each station has ten 12-meter mist nets arranged in two walking loops to ensure birds can be extracted and processed efficiently. Nets are opened at sunrise and operated for 6 hours, assuming favorable weather conditions with winds below 20 km/h and temperatures between 0°C and 27°C.



Least Flycatchers are our most common forest breeder, so it's no surprise they made up the majority of our MAPS captures this year!

Unfortunately, MAPS banding this year was disrupted significantly by the natural area flooding. Our two most productive MAPS stations, SOPO and LILA, were too flooded to access (let alone band at) for the entire summer starting in mid-June. BLAB was not subjected to severe flooding and was still able to operate normally for most of the field season.

BBO Lab (BLAB) banding

The BBO Lab (BLAB) station is the oldest MAPS station at BBO. Due to the forest canopy continuing to outgrow the height of our mist nets, capture rate and species diversity are both low at this station. BLAB was mostly unaffected by site flooding and thus was able to operate for nearly the whole season. BLAB operated on June 12th and July 7th, 14th, 22nd, and 30th. In total, at BLAB we caught 41 birds in 169.5 net hours, or 24.2 captures per 100 nets hours. The most common species caught was Least Flycatcher by a mile with 33 captures (82.5% of total captures).

Sora Pond (SOPO) banding

The Sora Pond (SOPO) MAPS station is located on the east side of the natural area, between Lister Lake and the smaller water body of Sora Pond. The habitat is a mix of young aspen and poplar forest, cattail marshes, and willow shrubland. The diverse habitat at this station supports similarly diverse populations of birds, with SOPO usually having the highest species diversity and capture rate of BBO's MAPS stations. SOPO was run on June 13th, after which flooding rendered the station inaccessible. At SOPO we caught 68 birds in 53.5 net hours, or 127.1 captures per 100 net hours. The most common species was Red-winged Blackbird with 19 captures (27.9% of captures), followed closely by Least Flycatcher with 18 captures (26.4% of captures). A Veery was banded on SOPO, which was notable as we had not caught one at BBO since 2023!



The flooded SOPO banding area, with our table and chairs for scale. This is normally a grassy clearing!

Lister Lake (LILA) banding



This Veery was a veery exciting capture – our first since 2023!

The Lister Lake (LILA) station is situated on the northwest shore of Lister Lake, where young poplar forest meets the dense willows and cattails along the lakeshore. LILA was run on June 14th, after which flooding rendered the station inaccessible. At LILA we caught 44 birds in 57.5 net hours, or 76.5 captures per 100 net hours. The most common species was Yellow Warbler with 16 captures (36.4% of captures), followed by Least Flycatcher and Red-winged Blackbird with 6 captures each (13.6% of captures).

Nestling Banding

The BBO maintains three grids of Tree Swallow nesting boxes, with a total of over 200 boxes between them.

Nestling banding efforts were limited during summer 2026 due to flooding of the nesting grids. The optimal period for banding nestling swallows corresponded almost exactly with the peak of flooding in the natural area, so the nestlings banded were only those in very early or very late nest clutches. In total 26 Tree Swallow, 26 Purple Martin, and 6 Northern House Wren nestlings were banded.

In July we received an inquiry from WILDNorth, a wildlife rehab organization, regarding nest boxes. They had 2 sets of orphaned Northern House Wren nestlings in their care which required near-constant feeding, and they were looking to foster these nestlings into a wild wren nest. We had nests with nestlings that were close in age, so the orphaned chicks were fostered into those boxes. We are thrilled to share that the fostering was successful and the fostered young fledged along with their adopted siblings! Thank you to WILDNorth for always looking out for our little feathered friends!



Four adorable Northern House Wren nestlings in their nest box after being banded!

Geoff Holroyd Young Ornithologists' Workshop



The 2025 Young Ornithologists' Workshop participants! From left to right: (top) Mary Sirohay, Claire Tong, Sylvie Schimann, Emelie Dykstra, Willow Zilliox, Jana Teefy, Xavier Quantz, Jon Van Arragon, Calvin Bonn (bottom) Henry Van Arragon-Dengerink, Luix Huxley, Quinn Courtemanche, Sofia Manuel, Luca Smith, Sam Bachard, Dave Lawrie, Geoff Holroyd, Raven Holroyd (dog)

This year was the 10th edition of the BBO's Young Ornithologists' Workshop! We hosted 9 youth ages 15-18 for an unforgettable week of bird banding, learning, and outdoor fun. The participants camped in the clearing around the BBO lab and woke up every morning for songbird banding. Over the course of the week the participants gained confidence recording data during banding, handling birds safely, banding birds, and extracting them from the nets! We also attempted 2 nights of owl banding during the workshop, and while no owls were captured a Long-eared Owl was heard around one of the nets!

The workshop featured many other activities in addition to bird banding! Dave Lawrie gave a talk about butterflies before leading the youth into the grassland to catch butterflies and other insects. Vitoria Berg gave a presentation about the unique adaptations of bats and had youth search for bats using sensors that pick up echolocation frequencies. Geoff Holroyd led the youth through a dissection of failed Purple Martin eggs to try and determine the reason for the eggs' failure, as well as giving the youth a talk on saw-whet owls and showing them the delicate process of hummingbird banding. Helen and Phil Trefry graciously hosted attendees at their farm and educated them about the history of falconry and Peregrine Falcon conservation. To cap the week off, Irene Crosland and Andra Bismanis took the youth on a big birding day to see as many species as possible. Stops included visiting Red Deer Lake for shorebirds, checking out Miquelon Lake Provincial Park for waterfowl, and finally ending at Geoff's house for some a pizza supper and paddling on the lake. A Black-throated Green Warbler and a Cape May Warbler showed up as the pizza was consumed. By the end of the day the species count was 108!



Workshop participants got lots of banding experience under the careful supervision of the BBO staff!

The Young Ornithologists' Workshop is the most exciting week of the year, and also the one where we rely the most on outside help. Thank you to all our volunteer speakers who lead activities: Geoff Holroyd, Helen and Phil Trefry, Dave Lawrie, Victoria Berg, Irene Crosland, and Andra Bismanis! Thank you to Sue Teefy, Rebecca Warren, and Will Van Arragon for providing assistance transporting youth to and from the airport! Thank you to all the volunteers who cooked meals for the workshop: Helen Trefry, Irene Crosland, Linda Kershaw, Bev Lucky, Inger Paulsen, Rose Scott, and Carmen Patry. Thank you to long-term volunteer Calvin Bonn, who stayed with us for the entire workshop and was a huge help in all the day-to-day operations! And a huge thank you to Jana Teefy and Helen Trefry for undertaking the massive task of organizing the entire workshop!

Staff Projects

Staff conducted 4 individual research projects this season, all of which concluded during the summer. Jon ran shorebird surveys at Mundare Beach on the east side of Beaverhill Lake, Emelie surveyed Least Flycatcher nests and monitored nest reuse, Xavier conducted callback surveys for rails and other marsh birds in Lister Lake, and Willow conducted breeding bird

censuses to map out the territories of forest birds. The reports for the projects will be published on our website and summaries in the Willet when they are completed, so keep an eye out for those!

Summer Internships

In addition to the monitoring programs conducted by staff, each year the BBO hires student interns who assist us with other long-term monitoring research. This year we had 8 interns assisting with programs including Tree Swallow (2), House Wren (2), and Purple Martin nest box monitoring, butterfly surveys, bat monitoring, and a grassland breeding bird census.

Interns completed weekly surveys for their respective projects, though all experienced several weeks of interruption during the flooding. With their surveys finished, our interns have been hard at work writing reports analyzing their findings. These reports are posted on the BBO website and will be made available as they are completed!



A canoe is not typically needed to access our Tree Swallow nesting boxes, but that's just the kind of summer it was!

Thank you so much to our amazing 2026 interns and intern mentors for your hard work and perseverance!

Tree Swallow Nest Box Surveys:

Interns: Kelsey Poloney and Taylor Wild

Mentor: Ivy Schoepf

House Wren Nest Box Surveys:

Interns: Nikolas Robinson and James Dyer

Mentors: Willow Zilliox and Zach Antoniow

Purple Martin Nest Box Surveys:

Intern: Maia Visscher

Mentor: Glen Hvenegaard

Butterfly Surveys:

Intern: Sarah Van der Veen

Mentor: John Acorn

Grassland Breeding Bird Surveys:

Intern: Lauren Schollie

Mentor: Jon Van Arragon

Bat Surveys:

Intern: Amelie Soleil Despins

Mentor: Jody Rintoul

Acknowledgements

The BBO's work is made possible by the support of an amazing network of volunteers. Thank you to the BBO board of directors, especially treasurer Rose Scott, for all your behind the scenes support that helps make everything we do possible! Thank you to our long-term volunteers during these crazy summer months: Nadia Wilkins, Ariel Chen, and Calvin Bonn! Thank you to Adam and Liz Chaney for your generous donation of new net crosses for the BBO net lanes and your help installing them! Thank you to all the BBO staff for running the day-to-day operations of the station: Jana Teefy, Jon Van Arragon, Emelie Dykstra, Xavier Quantz, and Willow Zilliox! And thank you to all the event attendees, donors, and visitors who make BBO such a special place to work!

Table 1. BBO Lab (BLAB) MAPS Banding Totals

Species	Banded	Repeat ¹	Return ²	Foreign ³	Other ⁴	Total
Black-capped Chickadee		1				1
Eastern Warbling Vireo	1					1
Least Flycatcher	16	9	8			33
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	2					2
Ruby-throated Hummingbird					1	1
Yellow Warbler	1	1	1			3
TOTALS	20	11	9	0	1	41

49.5 net-hours

1 Banded recently (within 90 days) at the BBO

24.2 captures/100 net-hours

2 Banded at the BBO >90 days prior to recapture (e.g. in a previous year).

3 Banded at a location other than the BBO

4 Caught in a mist-net but not banded (e.g. escaped net).

Table 2. Sora Pond (SOPO) MAPS Banding Totals

Species	Banded	Repeat ¹	Return ²	Foreign ³	Other ⁴	Total
Alder Flycatcher	1					1
Trail's Flycatcher	1					1
Least Flycatcher	11	2	5			18
Black-capped Chickadee	1		1			2
Northern House Wren	9	1	1			11
American Robin	1					1
Cedar Waxwing	1					1
Yellow Warbler	3		3		1	7
Common Yellowthroat	1					1
Song Sparrow			1			1
Red-winged Blackbird	14	1	1		3	19
American Goldfinch	1					1
Gray Catbird			1			1
Swamp Sparrow	2					2
Veery	1					1
TOTALS	47	4	13	0	4	68

53.5 net-hours

1 Banded recently (within 90 days) at the BBO

127.1 captures/100 net-hours

2 Banded at the BBO >90 days prior to recapture (e.g. in a previous year).

3 Banded at a location other than the BBO

4 Caught in a mist-net but not banded (e.g. escaped net).

Table 3. Lister Lake (LILA) MAPS Banding Totals

Species	Banded	Repeat¹	Return²	Foreign³	Other⁴	Total
Alder Flycatcher	1					1
Traill's Flycatcher	1					1
Least Flycatcher	5	1				6
House Wren	2					2
Eastern Warbling Vireo	1					1
Yellow Warbler	9	4	3			16
Clay-colored Sparrow	1					1
Song Sparrow	2	1				3
Red-winged Blackbird	5				1	6
Brown-headed Cowbird	1					1
American Goldfinch	1					1
Veery		1				1
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1		1			2
Gray Catbird	1					1
Common Grackle	1					1
TOTALS	32	7	4		1	44

57.5 net-hours

1 Banded recently (within 90 days) at the BBO

76.5 captures/100 net-hours

2 Banded at the BBO >90 days prior to recapture (e.g. in a previous year).

3 Banded at a location other than the BBO

4 Caught in a mist-net but not banded (e.g. escaped net).



The Beaverhill Bird Observatory is a proud member of the Beaver County and Tofield communities. We thank our many supporters and funders that are shown below, plus donations made in memory of Mary Hughes Weir, John Honsaker, and from the Wainwright Wildlife Society. Visit www.beaverhillbirds.com for more information.



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A Special Thank You

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2025 Audited Financial Statements