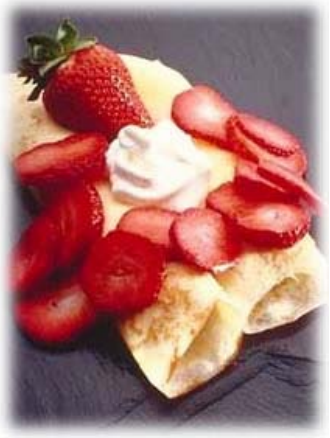
the WILLET
Beaverhill Bird Observatory

Volume 17, Number 2 May 2004

Crepe Spectacular



June 20, 2004

Take dad out to the Beaverhill Bird Observatory on Father's Day for some delicious crepes. World famous chef and bander Janos Kovacs will be cooking up his famous crepes complete with a choice of fillings including fruit, chocolate, and nuts. Juice, coffee, and tea also provided. Sit back enjoy some good food and watch the banding work taking place. Meet some of the bird observatory executive and enjoy a day in the field.

Check the BBO website for directions.

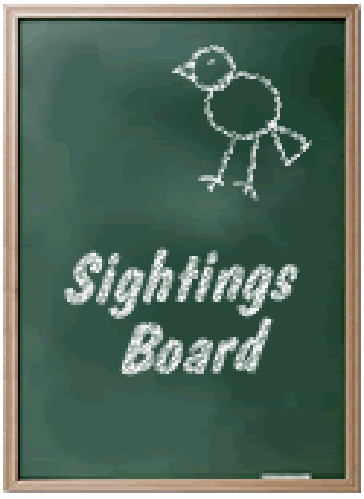
www.beaverhillbirds.com/bbobackgroundmaps.htm

CHECK OUT THE NEW LOOK

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory has a new look. Our website has been updated to make navigating through our information much easier. We have added new photographs and more information about our various programs and events.

As you enter the website, there are the latest news is highlighted. There are pull down menus across the top to check out particular information. We also have a new map that can be printed to help you get out to the bird observatory for a visit. We have added publications to the site, so you can read the latest information from our data.

An exciting new addition is the sightings board, where you can report your bird sightings for others to see.



Check our website out!!
www.beaverhillbirds.com

The 2004 Baillie Birdathon

Want to have a *lot* of fun and help birds and nature at the same time? Do a Birdathon this May! Birdathoners just can't help coming back for more, year after year!

More than 7,500 people from across Canada (and from several countries around the world) participate in and/or sponsor Birdathon in May of every year. During a 24-hour period in May, they attempt to find as many bird species as they can, sponsored at a flat rate, or on a per-species basis. More than $194,000 was raised this way in 2003. Birders can designate a favourite conservation organization to receive a portion of the funds they raise. Bird observatories can also be designated as recipients of fund raising. As a further incentive, our sponsors have provided some wonderful prizes for participants to win. Every registered participant receives the Official Birdathon T-Shirt (designed by Tom Godin of 100 Mile House, BC).

To find out more about Birdathon, contact at Bird Studies Canada at 1-888-448-BIRD (2473), or e-mail **birdathon@bsc-eoc.org.** If you would like to participate, you can register here.

Name _____

Address _____

I would like to sponsor the:

☐ Beaverhill Bird Observatory Staff (Crystal Rausch and Jill Thompson)

☐ Birding Buddies (Chuck Priestley, Lisa Priestley, Bryn Spence, Juanita Mumby)

☐ East and West (Geoff Holroyd and Michael Bradstreet)

☐ Redstart Renegades (Matt Hanneman and Meanook crew)

The amount I would like to sponsor is:

_____ cents per species

_____ flat rate

☐ I have included a cheque.

☐ I will send a cheque when the Birdathon is complete, please let me know.

Please send to Beaverhill Bird Observatory, Box 1418, Edmonton, AB T5J 2N5
You can also e-mail us at lisa@beaverhillbirds.com

The 2003 BBO Banding Summary – Matt Hanneman

The season went by successfully and as usual, with many lasting memories. The staff was kept busy with very strenuous work, which involved watching birds, listening to birds, counting birds, and most importantly banding birds. The BBO staffing team was composed of newcomer Tara Worobetz, and myself, returning as head bander. The BBO was also lucky to have a 3 month volunteer, Kim McKinnon, and a high school student Kyla Dolen joined us in July and August.

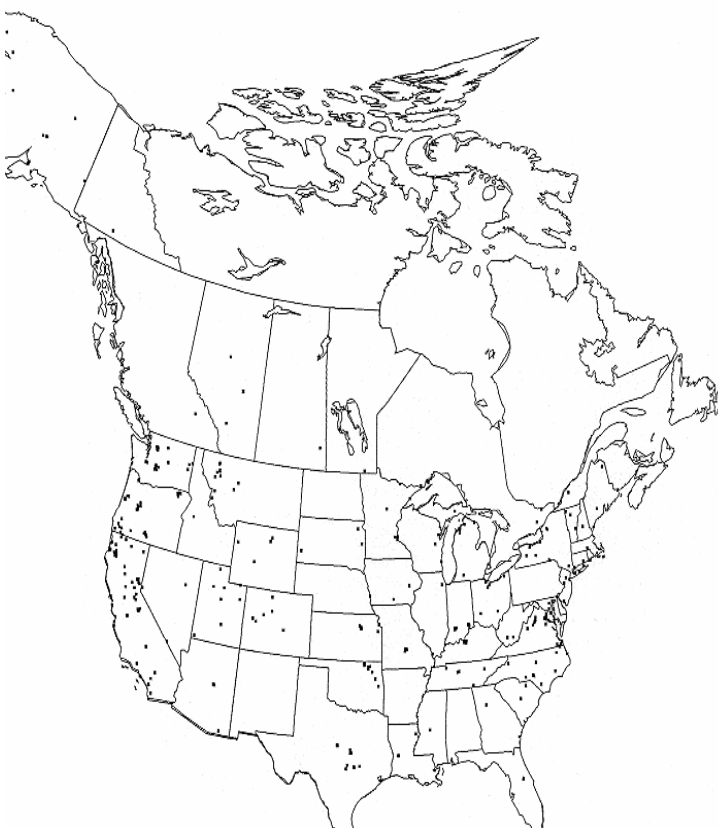
Table 1: Number of each species captured on site at Beaverhill Bird Observatory in 2003.

Species Caught	*# Caught	Species Caught	*# Caught
Bald Eagle	***1***	Gray Catbird	2
American Kestrel	1	Cedar Waxwing	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Cape May Warbler	7
Northern Saw-whet Owl	155	Tennessee Warbler	63
Boreal Owl	***1***	Orange-crowned Warbler	61
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	4	Magnolia Warbler	17
Yellow-shafted Flicker	4	Myrtle Warbler	342
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	11	Yellow-rumped Warbler	1
Downy Woodpecker	12	Black-and-white Warbler	6
Hairy Woodpecker	6	Black-throated Green Warbler	1
Western Wood-Pewee	3	Bay-breasted Warbler	2
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	2	Blackpoll Warbler	14
Alder Flycatcher	6	Western Palm Warbler	6
Least Flycatcher	552	Yellow Warbler	258
Traill's Flycatcher	24	Mourning Warbler	8
Eastern Phoebe	2	Connecticut Warbler	1
Northern Shrike	1	Canada Warbler	2
Blue-headed Vireo	2	Wilson's Warbler	37
Red-eyed Vireo	8	Ovenbird	31
Philadelphia Vireo	4	Northern Waterthrush	15
Warbling Vireo	18	Common Yellowthroat	4
Black-billed Magpie	1	American Redstart	46
Tree Swallow	217	American Tree Sparrow	71
Cliff Swallow	***1***	Chipping Sparrow	20
Black-capped Chickadee	130	Clay-colored Sparrow	85
Brown Creeper	3	Fox Sparrow	1
Red-breasted Nuthatch	6	Savannah Sparrow	12
House Wren	91	Lincoln Sparrow	23
Winter Wren	2	Song Sparrow	6
Golden-crowned Kinglet	5	White-throated Sparrow	54
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	65	White-crowned Sparrow	7
Veery	4	Slate-colored Junco	24
Gray-cheeked Thrush	3	Sparrow sp.	2
Swainson's Thrush	54	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	3
Hermit Thrush	55	Brown-headed Cowbird	15
American Robin	8	American Goldfinch	8

Grand Total	**2689**

WHAT IS MAPS??

The Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) Program was created by The Institute for Bird Populations in 1989 to assess and monitor the vital rates and population dynamics of over 120 species of North American landbirds in order to provide critical conservation and management information on their populations. The MAPS Program utilizes constant-effort mist netting and banding at a continent-wide network of monitoring stations staffed by both professional biologists and highly trained volunteers.



Since its first season, MAPS has grown from 16 to over 500 stations (see map for locations) and has received the support and endorsement of many federal agencies and conservation groups. For the past nine years, IBP has been publishing monitoring results from MAPS (DeSante 1992, DeSante and Burton 1994, DeSante et al. 1993, 1996, 1998, 2000). These papers have documented pronounced annual variation in regional productivity indices as well as the pattern that increases or decreases in productivity in a given year are typically followed by respective increases or decreases in population size the following year.

There are three important reasons why monitoring vital rates (primary demographic parameters such as productivity and survivorship) must be a component of any integrated avian population monitoring scheme. First, environmental stressors and management actions affect vital rates directly and usually without the time lags that so often occur with population size. Second, vital rates provide crucial information about the stage of the life cycle at which population change is being effected. Third, monitoring vital rates provides crucial information about the viability of the population being monitored and about the quality of the habitat or landscape in which the population occurs. Estimating primary demographic parameters is critical for understanding population dynamics and is directly applicable to population models that can be used to assess land-management practices by examining the effects of the landscapes they produce on vital rates.

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory runs the MAPS program from June 10 through July 31 at three stations around the Beaverhill Natural Area each year. Please let us know if you are interested in coming out to see the work. You can reach us at our lab phone: 991-6864. For more information on the MAPS program check out the website: http://www.birdpop.org/maps.htm

Bare-Handed Banders

-Matt Hanneman

The BBO has always been known as a migratory bird banding station with the use of standardized capture techniques such as mist nets and raptor traps. However, the 2003 season at the BBO was presented with a new form of capturing birds. Bare-hands are usually not thought of when looking at ways to capture wild birds, but there were several very unusual situations when birds would simply fly up and allow the BBO staff to perform this very odd technique. It was almost as if the birds have accepted their role at the BBO and surrendered themselves in the name of research. On five occasions and one very close call the BBO staff were able to catch wild birds using nothing more than their own two hands.

The first of these bizarre captures came after a night of heavy rain in the spring. We had just set up songbird nets when a Lesser Yellowlegs was seen scurrying near the net lanes. Without too much effort, I managed to scoop it up for a closer observation. It appeared to be waterlogged and disoriented from the storm and only waiting for the sun to emerge to dry itself off. Unfortunately, I had little knowledge about banding and aging shorebirds so it went without a band, but I got some excellent photos.

Another water-loving bird decided to descend on the BBO during its migration and give me a great one-on-one experience. It happened one night during Northern Saw-whet Owl monitoring as I was coming back from an owl check. A rustling in the bush beside the path gave me a startle. Using my headlamp, I searched the bushes to find none other than a Sora hanging out on a branch for the night. It was attracted to the light of my head lamp, making it very easy to catch bare-handed, bring to the lab and snap some photos before releasing it.

While on the topic of shorebirds there was another time this year when a friendly critter approached the lab. One afternoon we heard an unknown squeaking or piping sound near the lab. Upon investigation, we found a lone young Common Snipe still sporting its natal down plumage. However, the Snipe appeared sick or weak for some reason as it could barely walk and was very skinny. Feeding it dead invertebrates and giving it water, we valiantly tried to nurse it to health but, sadly, the young snipe did not make it over night. We gave it a proper burial and had to say our goodbyes.

On a nice relaxing afternoon there was yet another very uncanny bare-handed capture that still has me in disbelief. This time it was a young Cliff Swallow that I had seen flying around the lab who decided it wanted a shiny new band before heading south. It was swooping around, checking out the lab, when it perched on the rafters of the lab porch. With nothing but curiosity on my mind, I slowing came towards it while it seemed to have just as much curiosity about me. However, my curiosity changed to potential banding opportunity as I was able to come face to face to it. Slowly standing up on a chair, I reached up

behind it and simply plucked it from its perch. I then made sure it was wearing a band and snapped some photos before letting it go on its way. Who would have guessed that the first Cliff Swallow ever banded at the BBO was to be caught bare-handed.

Another spectacular bare-handed capture came on an evening when Chuck and Lisa Priestley were out at the lab one weekend to continue NSWO coverage. It was again during an owl check when a movement in the trees right between the bunkhouses caught their attention. To their amazement, they found a juvenile Bald Eagle grounded for the night. Of all the places to roost for the night the Eagle, unwittingly, chose right in the middle of a banding station with a couple of the biggest raptor banding fanatics manning the station. Fate was definitely not on its side that evening. With quick thinking and adrenaline pumping at an all time high Chuck went into action. With talons the size of his fist he thought it would be wiser to use a net instead of the bare-handed approach. However, after a stealthy stalk and a quick swoop it ended up in the hands of Chuck and Lisa. The largest band size at the BBO (size 9) was strapped on before they let go on its merry way.

This next bare-handed adventure did not end up with a successful capture, but was close enough to warrant a full account. In general, owls are held with very high admiration at the BBO and are enthusiastically sought out for a chance at banding. However, the Short-eared Owl is regarded with one of the highest esteem, since the BBO has yet to find a way to capture this attractive species.

To my disbelief, the chance presented itself one night during NSWO monitoring, along with the opportunity for me to become a hero. It happened when I saw an owl flying around the lab, at first believed to be a Long-eared owl. I caught a few fleeting glimpses, but it eventually perched on the roof of my car. Shining my light on it, I realized this was the elusive Short-eared Owl. I immediately started my approach with the owl in the spotlight of my headlamp, but my light footsteps were no match for its acute hearing and its gaze was fixed to the ground with every step I took. With the headlamp, ironically not on my head, but in my hand and the other poised for the grasp, I approached within mere inches of it. At the last moment before the lunge, my adrenaline and excitement got the best of me, and I made a movement with my headlamp. Never able to forgive myself, I helplessly watched the Owl flapped noiselessly into the night not to be seen again. Had I been wearing the headlamp the way it was intended, the Short-eared owl would have been added to BBO's banding list and I might have had a statue of myself erected at the lab in my honor. Well maybe not, but it would have been remarkable none the less.

With all these bizarre barehanded captures, the BBO might have to look into adding bare hands to the list of capture methods. At this rate, there will no longer be the need for mist nets in the future and the birds will just line up for a band.

NEXT WILLET ISSUE

Material for the forthcoming newsletter should be sent to: Jason Duxbury, editor, The Willet, 146-52512 RR214, Ardrossan, Alberta, T8E 2H1. Phone: 780-922-3326, Email: jduxbury@telus.net. Next newsletter deadline: August 1, 2004. Articles can be on bird banding, birdwatching, wildlife viewing, etc.