



# the WILLET

Beaverhill Bird Observatory

Volume 18, Number 2

May 2005

## It's Birdathon Time Again!



Tom Godin's T-shirt design for this year's Birdathoners.

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, birders attempt to find as many bird species as they can, sponsored at a flat rate, or on a per-species basis. Birders can designate a favourite conservation organization to receive a portion of the funds they raise. Our birders designate the Beaverhill Bird Observatory so we can receive 50% of the funds we raise for bird research.

This year, the BBO will have three teams beating the bushes to find those few extra species:

**Team DuxBurt** – Jason Duxbury and Lisa Burt

**Team Falcon** – Geoff Holroyd, Helen Trefy and Rick Skibstead

**Birding Buddies** – Lisa and Chuck Priestley

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### Team DuxBurt

Joining Jason this year will be BBO alumnus Lisa Burt (1998). After her stint at the BBO, Lisa went on to participate in bird research in the Arctic and at the Long Point Bird Observatory in southern Ontario. Lisa's experiences in northern and eastern Canada have primed her to find those rare accidentals to add to Team DuxBurt's species tally.

### Team Falcon

Geoff, Helen and Rick are scheduled to be in the field banding Prairie Falcons. At least we know they will get one species. They predict they will get over 100 species

### Birding Buddies

The Priestley combo plan on conducting their Birdathon in the Rocky Mountain House area. As they move from the aspen-parkland into the montane sub-region, they are sure to get a multitude of species.

If you would like to sponsor a team, please send in the following form indicating the team you wish to sponsor and the amount of your pledge. You can pledge on a per-species basis, or a lump sum. Birds Studies Canada will issue a tax receipt.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address (for tax receipt):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Team you would like to pledge: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount of pledge: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return form to:

Beaverhill Bird Observatory

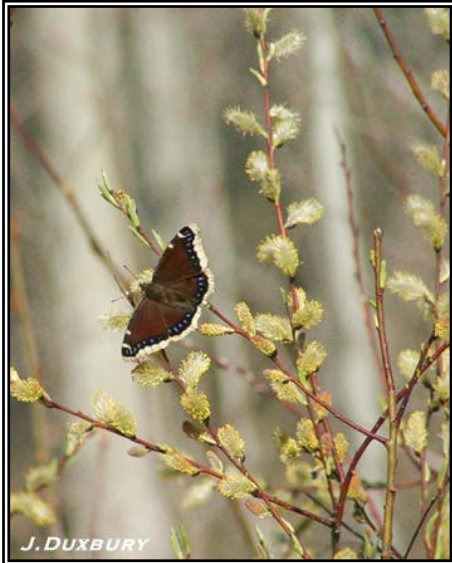
PO Box 1418, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 2N5

Or send a note to [lisa@beaverhillbirds.com](mailto:lisa@beaverhillbirds.com)

(Pledges will be collected after the Birdathons have been completed.)

## Out and About Beaverhill in April

Jason Duxbury



Signs of spring were everywhere; flowering willows and aspen, Mourning Cloak's were flying, Wood and Boreal Chorus Frogs had emerged from their winter hideouts, Sandhill Cranes were flying over head and Song Sparrows were announcing the onset of the bird migration. Given those signs, I was itching to get out to Beaverhill Lake to see what was in the area.



I started at what used to be the Stone House access to the lake. With the shrinking of the lake, the actual shore of the lake is now seen at a distance. However, the area still remains a pocket of prairie grasslands surrounded by the aspen parkland, and it was the grassland birds I came to check on. A pair of Mountain Bluebirds and a Northern Flicker greeted me on arrival. As I continued south, the sounds of Western Meadowlarks were soon heard. As I moved on, more and more meadowlarks were heard, likely the most I had ever seen or heard in the area. The chorus of meadowlarks was then joined by the downward tinkle of a Sprague's Pipit and the upwards chipping of Horned Larks. Except for the lack of other southern specialties like Chestnut-collared Longspurs and Lark Buntings, it was almost like being in the grasslands of southern Alberta.



The lake could be accessed at "Mundare Beach" on the eastern side of the lake. The water of the lake was covered by ducks. The majority of ducks were Northern Pintails and Northern Shovelers. Other species were spotted included Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals, Canvasbacks, Redheads, Common Goldeneyes, Gadwalls, Lesser Scaups, Ruddy Ducks, and Mallards. Near the edge of the water I picked out a very large white bird that appeared to have a long neck. My excitement was reduced when I realized it was an American White Pelican preening its chest. Once it stopped preening and faced forward, its long bill quickly became apparent.

Along the drive from Mundare Beach to Amisk Creek, I passed some fields with large gaggles of White-fronted and Canada Geese taking a break from the migrations north. The fence lines were dotted with Red-tailed Hawks, Rough-legged







Hawks and the occasional Swainson's Hawk. During my drive, a male Ring-necked Pheasant stepped onto the road, halting me in my tracks. While he crossed the road in no great hurry, I spotted a couple of Gray Partridges in the brush along the side of the road. The two partridges became four as another pair entered the scene only to be chased out by the more dominant male of the territory.

Approximately a mile east of the Amisk Creek Bridge a roadside pond contained a pair of scaup. There appeared to be a green sheen on the round head of the male, and with closer inspection the paired turned out to be Greater Scaups. The

Greater Scaup is northern nesting species that can be seen in the Beaverhill area only during migrations. Other than the Greater Scaup, the same species were found at Amisk Creek as compared to the eastern side of Beaverhill Lake.



The next stop was the flooded Kallal Field just outside of the Beaverhill Lake Natural Area. Many species of waterfowl, shorebirds and gulls are possibilities on the field each spring. At this time, Franklin's Gulls were scattered across



the western portion of the field. Mixed amongst the gulls were godwits. Most of the godwits were of the Marbled variety, but there were darker and smaller individuals that had the broad white, rump band of Hudsonian Godwits.

Finally, my morning drive ended at the Beaverhill Lake Natural Area. It

appeared that I was still too early for most songbird migrants. There were a few Song Sparrows, Tree Swallows and Juncos, but that was about the extent of the species. However, the most interesting aspect of the Natural Area this spring was the amount of water flowing into Beaverhill Lake from Lister Lake. While it hardly



means the lake levels of Beaverhill will return historical levels, the amount of water north of the weir view point is a nice surprise this spring. The last few years had seen very little water in the region. These water levels are likely temporary, but at least the south-eastern corner of Beaverhill Lake will provide staging habitat for migrating shorebirds and water fowl this year.



## Banding Workshop with Peter Pyle

Lisa Priestley

What a way to start the banding season!! We attended a Banding Workshop with Peter Pyle, the author of *THE* bird-banding manual. Brenda Dale of the Canadian Wildlife Service once again organized a workshop for banders in the prairie region to work on ageing of birds in hand. Eighteen participants from all five prairie banding stations and an additional MAPS station were involved in the workshop. Enrique Valdez (BBO), Sara Bumstead (new assistant bander at LSLBO) and I traveled together from Edmonton to attend. Some new and interesting things we learned included:



- the new terminology of molt patterns just published recently (Preformative Molt),
- woodpecker ageing to after third year
- Sprague's Pipit and Loggerhead Shrike ageing
- new MAPS molt pattern work for the summer
- new molt projects that could be undertaken with species that need more work

We were also able to visit the Sissons Nature Center and banding station to see their operations. It is always great to share experiences and methods with banders and to visit other sites. THANKS FOR THE EXPERIENCE!!

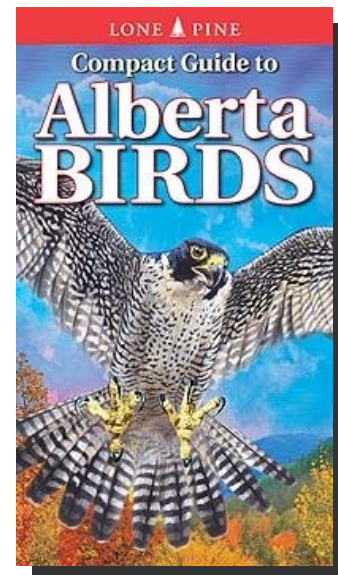
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## Compact Guide to Alberta Birds – A Review

Lisa Priestley

The Compact Guide to Alberta Birds (Contributors: J. Acorn, C. Fisher, A. Bezener, G Kennedy, K. Kagume, and C. Adama) profiles 83 of Alberta's most common or noteworthy species. Each account includes two pages of colour illustrations and a photograph of the bird's egg, along with key identification points (size, voice, status, habitat, nesting and similar birds), and a range map.

On looking through this bird guide I am impressed by three things: the illustrations have specific identification features pointed out on each bird (with lines pointing to the features), the range maps appear to be more accurate than other guides I've used, and the egg pictures are a good size to see. Further, the extra interesting boxes of information 'did you know' and 'look for' are great, loaded with cool facts about each bird like: "Britain's Royal Air Force named an aircraft the Harrier" or "in Greek mythology, Alcyon, the daughter of the wind god grieved so deeply for her drowned husband that the gods transformed them both into kingfishers". Much of the information is from various other guides that Lone Pine has put out, but the size of this book is quite nice and fits perfectly into a vest pocket.



I found, however, that some very common species were missed and should have been included in this compact guide (the Merlin or the Swainson's Hawk instead of the Sharp-shinned Hawk; White-throated Sparrow; American Redstart which is probably more common than the Common Yellowthroat).



Although similar birds are pictured at the bottom of each page, there is nothing to indicate the key differences. Some of the similar species noted I do not believe are that similar (eg. Snowy Owl and Northern Hawk Owl) and other similar species are missed (eg. male Northern Goshawk is similar to Northern Harrier). Finally, some key identification features have been missed (eg. spots on tail of Downy woodpecker).

Overall I find this a great new addition to my collection of bird books (for a good price) and recommend it to any new birders or long time birders with a passion for collecting new bird books. This book is available in retail outlets across Alberta or by calling Lone Pine at 1-800-661-9017, FAX: 1-800-424-7173 or E-mail: [accounts@lonepinepublishing.com](mailto:accounts@lonepinepublishing.com)

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## Birding News

Jason Duxbury



If you are just coming out of hibernation, you may not have heard that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker has returned from the dead. It has been over 60 years since the last sighting of North America's largest woodpecker, but recent documented sightings have confirmed the species lives on. Although a couple of birds were sighted last year, disclosure of the sightings did not occur until this spring when the sightings were published in *Science* (April 28, 2005).

*"The bird captured on video is clearly an Ivory-billed Woodpecker,"* said John Fitzpatrick, the *Science* article's lead author, and director of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. *"Amazingly, America may have another chance to protect the future of this spectacular bird and the awesome forests in which it lives."*

The forest in which the woodpeckers were found were in the Cache River and White River National Wildlife Refuges of eastern Arkansas. The Big Woods Conservation Partnership, which was led by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University and The Nature Conservancy, coordinated the efforts of over 50 volunteers. They managed to capture the woodpecker on only a few frames of video tape, but it was enough to confirm it was truly an Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Now we'll have to buy the updated field guides!

To the north of us, another great bird sighting. While not as spectacular as the Ivory-billed Woodpecker sighting, the birders in Whitehorse were thrilled with their tropical visitor. Only 2500km off from its normal summer range, a Hooded Oriole paid a visit to the community of Marsh Lake. Usually, the northern extent of its summer range is approximately central California, so it is providing a great opportunity for people to see this species without the expense of a trip down to the Golden State.



The sighting of this accidental species is a rare occurrence, but the sighting of accidental species can happen at any time. For example, remember the Curve-billed Thrasher in Barrhead in 1999? It too was thousands of kilometres from its normal range. Personally, I found a Lark Sparrow in the Northwest Territories. This species is normally restricted to the very south of Canada. My motto is "any bird, anywhere, any time". Happy bird watching!

## Word Search

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**Need a break? Try finding the listed words in the following word search. The following were found in the text of this issue of the Willet. Words can be forward, backward and diagonal. You can try rearranging the remaining letters at the end, however they may not spell anything!**

alberta	g w r i a p i n t a i l a i e	meadowlark
arctic	n g g e e l e n w a n s t f t	merlin
banding	i r r r h g a n r e t s i l a	migration
beaverhill	d r d f a s d n a l t e w f l	molt
birdathon	n e a f a s i i i e l l d w b	owl
bluebird	a o e e c b s f r d i u o i e	partridge
feather	b m h a w k l l g t w l g m r	pelican
fieldguide	r p d t d m l u a n r i e w t	pheasant
frog	m u e h a s i e e n i a r p a	pintail
godwit	a a r e p d h g p b d k p i r	pipit
grasslands	p e e r e n r t r o i s r p e	pyle
gull	s s i l i d e i w a l r t i t	redhead
harrier	i n r l y m v l b a t s d t i	scaup
hawk	g o r f s p a r r o w i r r e	sparrow
kingfisher	w e a h i r e k e e p d o o w	spring
lark	m n h s k w b a g r g n a n i	weir
lister		wetlands
maps		woodpecker



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### **Membership Information**

Memberships for the Beaverhill Bird Observatory Society:

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

Cheques can be made to the Beaverhill Bird Observatory and sent to:

PO Box 1418, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 2N5

### **NEXT WILLET ISSUE**

Material for the forthcoming newsletter should be sent to: Lisa Burt, editor, The Willet, Email: lburt@wael.ca. Next newsletter deadline: August 1, 2005. Articles can be on bird banding, bird watching, wildlife viewing, etc.