



# the WILLET

Beaverhill Bird Observatory

Volume 18, Number 1

January 2005



**February 11 – 13**  
**Room 2-36**  
**Earth Sciences Building**  
**University of Alberta**

**Friday February 11**  
**Guest Speaker: Lynn Oliphant**  
**Doors at 7:00, Talk at 7:30**

**Saturday, February 12**  
**All Day Bird Banding Workshop**  
**Presentations of bird**  
**research and conservation**  
**Doors at 8:30am, Talks commence at 9:00**

**Sunday, February 13**  
**Raptor Banding Field Trip**  
**Time and Place TBA**

**If you would like to talk about your project at the workshop, please contact Matt Hanneman at: [m\\_hanneman@shaw.ca](mailto:m_hanneman@shaw.ca)**

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## **Steaks and Saw-whets 2004**

*Jason Duxbury*

On a regular fall evening at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory, you can sit and listen to the fall leaves rustle, the soft calling of Sandhill Cranes flying over, or perhaps catch a glimpse of a migrating hawk.

Also, the smell of the colourful leaves lying on the ground is what you would expect as you relax at the lab. However, on the evening of Friday Sept 24, you would have also heard the sounds of steaks and chicken grilling on the BBQ's and the smell of the BBQ wafting deep into the woods. It was Steaks and Saw-whets 2004.

On top of the sounds of laughing and conversation, you would have also heard the constant call of the Saw-whet Owl recording that was playing deep in the woods. The owl recording is used to draw in migrating Saw-whet owls to the nearby aspen woods.

Dinner was served as the mist-nets were set, and conversation turned to guessing the number of owls that would be caught that night. With steak, chicken, potatoes, corn-on-the-cob, salads and all the desserts one should ever eat, it was a feast for everyone at the lab.

While dinner was winding down, the first net-check took place. Normally, the first check proves to be fruitless, but on this night there was already a capture! The staff brought the little female Saw-whet back to the lab in order to band it in front of the gathered crowd.

*Continued on Page 2*

## Steaks and Saw-whets Continued...

This provided the visitors with a fantastic opportunity to see a Northern Saw-whet up close. What a hit! Once the owl had its new piece of jewellery and everyone had a chance to get a great look at the owl, it was released back into the night. However, the owl didn't go very far, opting to perch in an aspen for all to see!



*Matt with his catch*

To the joy of those visiting on the night, the first owl would not be the last. Before the last group set off for the parking lot, another four more owls would be caught. As the last visitors departed,

their one last stop at a mist net proved to be well-timed as three more owls were caught in a net. With the three owls safely in Matt's arms, the group departed for a beautiful night walk through the Beaverhill Lake Natural area back to their cars.

Unfortunately for those who planned to come out the following night for the second round of Steaks and Saw-whets, the weather did not cooperate. Rain and wind made for a miserable night and no owls were banded.



*Friday night's first catch*

*-J.Duxbury*

So another (partially) great Steaks and Saw-whets is in the books. Thank you to everyone who came out this year. Now all

we can do is wait for next year's event and hope for the same weather we had on the Friday night. See you next fall!



*Friday's well fed Crew*

## 2004 Banding Highlights

A complete summary of the 2004 field season at the banding lab will be available in the annual report. Not including raptor trapping, 1870 birds of 67 species were captured this year in mist-nets or were banded at nests. The top 10 species captured at the lab this year are listed in the table. Interesting captures this year included: 3 Winter Wrens, 2 Brown Creepers, 2 Nashville Warblers, 1 Western Flycatcher, 1 Chestnut-sided Warbler and a Connecticut Warbler. The biggest news this fall was the capture of 309 Northern Saw-whet Owls and 3 Boreal Owls in an owl migration monitoring program

Species	New Bandings	Repeats	Recoveries	Total Captured
Least Flycatcher	179	73	9	261
Tree Swallow	203	16	0	219
Myrtle Warbler	177	13	0	190
Black-capped Chickadee	51	61	1	113
Yellow Warbler	63	40	3	106
American Redstart	90	4	0	94
Clay-colored Sparrow	66	10	3	79
Swainson's Thrush	70	5	0	75
Chipping Sparrow	54	4	0	58
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	50	2	0	52



***This Great Gray Owl was caught and banded by Lisa Priestley right in front of the lab on October 26. This was a new species for the BBO.***



There were also plenty of other raptors to band. Species caught this year included Great Horned Owl, Boreal Owl, Great Gray Owl, Short-eared Owl, Cooper's Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk.



## Baillie Birdathon 2004, A Southwestern Alberta Voyage

Lisa Priestley with Sidekick Chuck Priestley

It was nearing the end of the month and the weather was just not cooperating. We needed to get our Baillie Birdathon completed by the end of May, and it was the 29<sup>th</sup>!! Unfortunately, Bryn and Juanita could not join us this year, so it would be Chuck and myself, well, we added a few passengers, read on to find out.



So early on a clear and warm Sunday morning we awoke to the sounds of a variety of birds calling in the yard. The house is in an older community in Edmonton, and the area is quite heavily treed, so it wasn't hard to get our list going with some migrant songbirds. The first bird heard at 6:15 a.m. was an **Ovenbird** of all things. The **Robins** and **Blue Jays** were making some racket (probably trying to scare away a cat), and a **White-throated Sparrow** and **Tennessee Warbler** also announced their presence. As we departed, a **White-crowned Sparrow** bid us farewell.

We packed up the truck complete with Lady the family dog, and made our way out of Edmonton. The familiar **Rock Pigeons**, **Black-billed Magpie**, and **American Crows** flew over. Chuck was eager to find a pet store to get some lure mice for our Bal Chatri cage (to catch hawks and kestrels), but the stores would not be open for a while. We headed south out of the city down highway 2 and quickly added **Mallard**, **Canada Goose**, **Red-winged Blackbird**, **Common Raven**, **Redhead**, **European Starling**, **Black Tern**, **Red-tailed Hawk**, and **Tree Swallow**.

Some ponds near Lacombe provided a large number of species: songbirds like **Yellow-headed Blackbird**, **Clay-colored Sparrow**, **Least Flycatcher**, **House Wren**, **Yellow Warbler**, **Cedar Waxwing**, **Cliff Swallow**, **Baltimore Oriole**, and waterfowl like **Ruddy Duck**, **Bufflehead**, **Canvasback**, **Gadwall**, **American Widgeon**, **Northern Shoveler**, **American Coot**, and **Red-necked Grebe**. As we drove through

Lacombe we spotted a **Brewer's Blackbird** and as we stopped for gas some **House Sparrows** chirped loudly. Thirty-six species and counting

As we passed by Bowden, we found a Great Horned Owl roadkill, but since it looked fairly old, we decided we could not count it, however, we did check for bands (no luck). Chuck still wanted to get some mice, so we checked our trusty GPS unit for the nearest pet store and found one listed for Olds. But, when we went into the store, they told us only frozen mice were available. We discussed it further and then asked if they had gerbils, nope, no luck, how about guinea pigs. Yes, and they had dwarf ones, which would work well. I have to say this was a huge mistake. Within one half hour of acquiring this animal, Chuck became convinced that using 'Baillie' the hamster as a lure was not an option, so now we have a new pet at home (Aego, our owl, keeps eyeing it, wondering why she keeps getting frozen mice instead of the real thing). The trip to Olds did add a

**Swainson's Hawk**, but we had to be content to just watch it hunting for food. As with our previous Baillie Birdathon we spotted an **Ostrich**, but again we held it in reserve in case we needed an extra species at the end.



On highway 22 we added **Mourning Dove**, **Mountain Bluebird**, and a beautiful full adult (over five years old) **Bald Eagle**. South of Cochrane we spotted a **Great Horned Owl** on an old Osprey nest, but no Osprey. At 1 p.m. we arrived a Bragg Creek, just as a **Pileated Woodpecker** flew through a stand of old trees. We stopped along the highway at a man-made pond to view some **Red-breasted Mergansers** and checked on some on **Common Mergansers** the Sheep River. Through Black-Diamond we heard a **Savannah Sparrow**.

Our next stop would be southwest of Black Diamond along the foothills, along a road that eventually hits a dead end along the boundary of Kananskis. We had a line on a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** nest. The

female owl was nowhere to be seen but when climbed we could hear a young owl in the nest. With much effort we managed to extract it from the cavity, band it, and collect a feather for isotope and genetic analyses. As we did this we continued to count more birds, including **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, and **Hairy Woodpecker**. Fifty species!!!

We drove further south along the road and found **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Lincoln's Sparrow**, **American Redstart**, **Purple Finch**, **White-winged**



**Crossbills**, and **Warbling Vireo**. And pond just east of there would add a **Sora**. As we dove highway 543 towards Frank Lake we spotted a large group of **Franklin's Gulls**, and a pond in High River had **Common Goldeneye**, **American Avocet**, **Wilson's Phalarope**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, **California Gull**, **Herring Gull**, **Marbled Godwit**, **Least Sandpiper**, and **Long-billed Dowitcher**. Adding on **Western Meadowlark**, **Northern Pintail**, **Green-winged** and **Blue-winged Teals**, and **Willet** was easy, and the **Cinnamon Teal** near Frank Lake was a favourite.

Frank Lake is located off highway 23 just east of High River. I had heard this was a good lake for bird-watching, and we had never been there before. And sure enough, our stop paid off. **Eared** and **Western Grebes**, **Marsh Wren**, and a **Northern Harrier**, and something we did not expect . . . we had finished searching for birds and had jumped back into the vehicle, but as we drove out, I said, "we

should stop to take a photo of us with Lady with the prairies and mountains in the distance. So we stepped out, set up the camera, and as we stood there getting the photo, a **White-faced Ibis** flew over the marsh!! 78 species, not bad.

Well, it was getting late and we needed to head back north. En route we added **Killdeer**, **Gray Partridge**, **Vesper Sparrow**, and **Brown-headed Cowbird**. Another stop at the pond near Lacombe and we added **Common Yellowthroat**, **Common Loon** and **Ring-billed Gull**. Then a smaller pond further off the main road had a **Pied-billed Grebe** and **Song Sparrow**. By then it was getting quite dark, so we drove straight through to Edmonton, and called it a night. But, we wanted to get a few more species in the morning.



May 31<sup>st</sup> and the birds continued being added, a **Blackpoll Warbler** and **Black-capped Chickadee** in the yard. Then to Hawrelak Park where we added **White-breasted Nuthatch**, **Western Tanager**, and **Myrtle Warbler**. Next stop Whitemud Creek to add **Downy Woodpecker** and **Pine Siskin**. Finally, with breakfast on our minds we arrived at Tim Horton's across from the Clinical Sciences Building at the university and observed the **Peregrine Falcon** on the nest box.

A total of 95 species, not quite 100, but we were pleased, considering we did some work for Chuck's thesis!

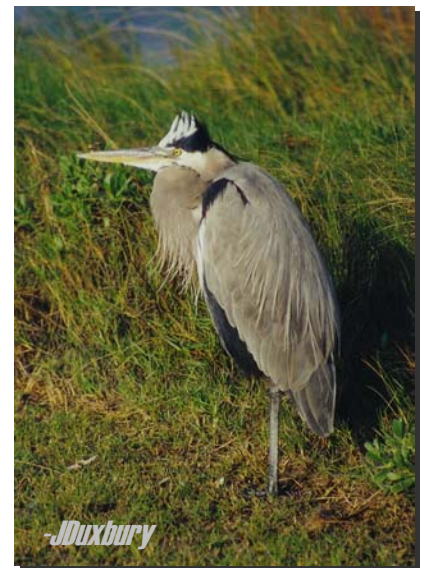
## Announcement: Beaverhill Bird Observatory Annual General Meeting

The BBO will be holding its AGM in conjunction with the BBO Bird Banding Workshop, Saturday, February 12. The meeting will commence at 1:00 in room 2-36 in the Earth Sciences Building. The building is on Saskatchewan Drive at the north end of the University of Alberta campus.

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

### BBO Birds 2004

bittern	r e k c i l f m a g p i e c r	owls
canvasback	e g r c o r m o r a n t q u e	peeps
coot	l b o f a x w o r r a p s e d	pelican
cormorant	b i t l b b s h r i k e s r h	raptor
dowitcher	r t p y d b s o r i g o i e e	redhead
duck	a t a c e e d a n r o b i n a	robin
eagle	w e r a q l n o v g g l d k d	ruddy
flicker	s r k t n g l f w n b o e i p	shrike
flycatcher	t n t c n a d o i i a i l l e	siskin
goldenfinch	e v k h o e n m w n t c r l e	snowgoose
grosbeak	a v c e r s m i y l c c h d p	songbirds
heron	k i u r e u l r k d e h h e s	sora
hummingbird	s r d z h q s w m s d g a e o	sparrow
killdeer	p e l i c a n h o d i u s r r	steaks
maggie	c o o t d r a l l a m s r m a	thrush
mallard		vireo
oriole		warbler
		yellowlegs



#### **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: Jason Duxbury, editor, The Willet, 146-52512 RR 214, Ardrossan, Alberta, T8E 2H1. Phone: 780-922-3326, Email: [jduxbury@telus.net](mailto:jduxbury@telus.net). Next newsletter deadline: June 1, 2005. Articles can be on bird banding, bird watching, wildlife viewing, etc.