

BIG Birding Breakfast

*May 31, 2008 at the
Beaverhill Bird Observatory*

Join us as we celebrate the spring birds of Beaverhill Lake. Learn about our various programs and see bird banding up close. Breakfast (crepes, bacon, fruits, juice, coffee, tea) provided.



Time: Nets go up at 4:45 a.m. and run till 10:45 (weather dependent). Guided walks to weir throughout the day if there is interest. Swallow nest box banding in afternoon.

Cost: \$10 (or buy a membership and it's free).

Contact: To register, Lisa Priestley lisa@beaverhillbirds.com or ph: (780) 918-4804.

Support for this event provided by Alberta Conservation Association.

Welcome to the NEW Staff at the Bird Observatory

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory welcomes our NEW staff Jonathan Martin-DeMoor and Robin Pimm for the 2008 season. Jonathan is a graduate student at the University of Alberta completing a Masters degree and worked at the bird observatory last fall. Robin is graduating this spring from the University of Alberta with a Bachelor of Science degree. We encourage you to come out to the lab and meet our new staff and see the banding operations this field season. The colourful songbirds are migrating through on their way to the boreal forest. Read about the latest observations at:

<http://www.beaverhillbirds.com/summaries.php>



Volunteers Make All the Difference

As a non-profit charitable organization, the Beaverhill Bird Observatory relies heavily on volunteers to coordinate our activities and run the lab and help with volunteer programs. Our executive meets monthly to discuss finances, fund raising, projects, and lab operations. We also have volunteers cover summer banding staff days off. This spring Katie Calon, Anna Daku, and Matt Hanneman have been running the station on weekends. They also bring out family and friends to show them the operations (see photos below).



*Volunteer bander and board member Matt Hanneman shows his children how cool banding is.
(photos by Matt and Anita Hanneman)*

You will find some of our executive (Al DeGroot and Jim Beck) on site working on the lab expansion throughout the summer. Our Tree Swallow nestboxes continually need replacing and James Sheppard with his son Keegan have built many boxes. And our new seamstress Barb Beck has been busily sewing up bird bags (used for carrying the birds back to the lab from the nets). Chuck Priestley and Bryn Spence have put up and checked hundreds of Saw-whet Owl nest boxes over the years. Phil Trefry and Napi the Burrowing Owl volunteered their time at a display set up at the Tofield Community Center for the Snow Goose chase at the end of April (photo right). We had a casino two years ago and had many volunteers cover shifts throughout the two days. If you are interested in volunteering with the BBO, there are many different ways to do so. Contact the Beaverhill Bird Observatory to find out more contact chuckp@strixenvironmental.ca .



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

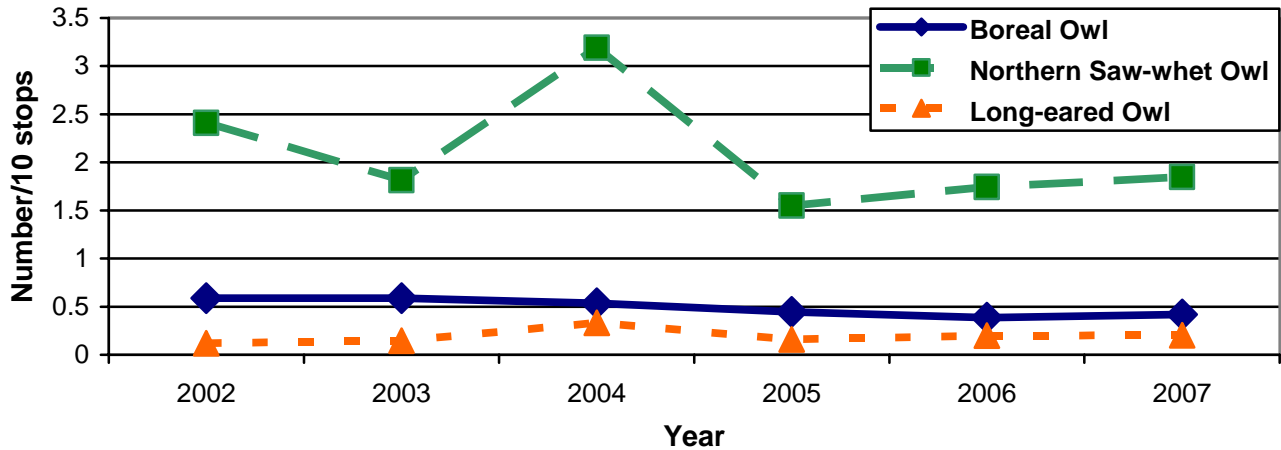
The Beaverhill Bird Observatory has been awarded a casino for Thanksgiving weekend, October 11-12. If you are interested in working a shift for us please contact Lisa Priestley lisa@beaverhillbirds.com or phone 918-4804.

The OWL FILES

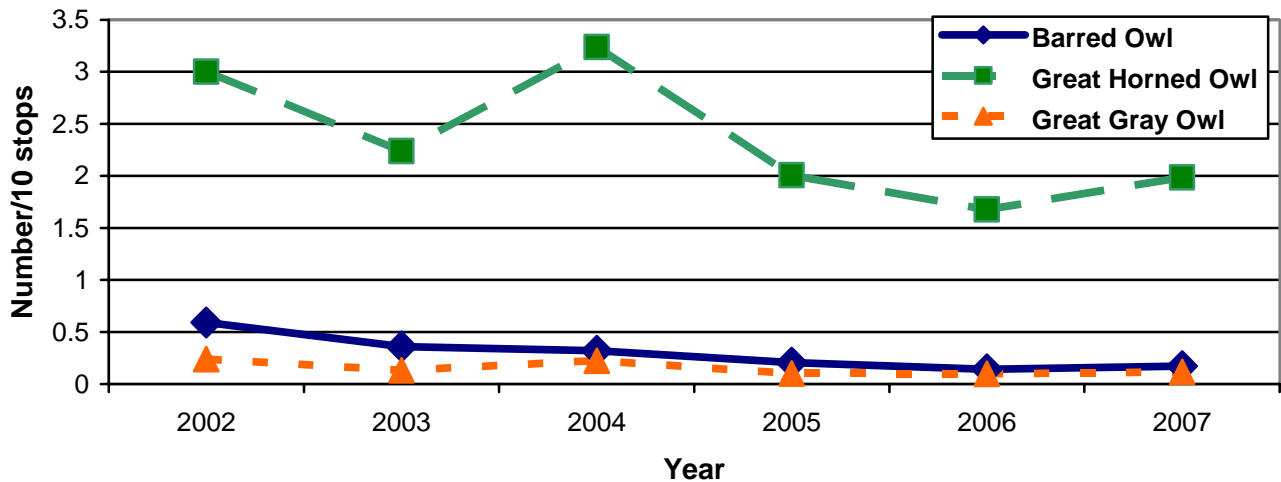
Owl Trends from the 2002-2007 Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey

by Lisa Priestley

The Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey has been running as a full time program for six years. We are able to begin looking at changes in the number of owls being observed each year. It is estimated that 10 years of data will be required for trend analysis for owls; however it is interesting to begin to look at how numbers change from year to year. Of the eight species detected on owl survey, six have high enough abundances to look at year to year changes.

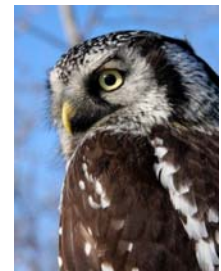


Number of Boreal, Northern Saw-whet, and Long-eared Owls detected 2002-2007.



Number of Barred, Great Horned, and Great Gray Owls detected 2002-2007.

The number of Saw-whet Owls and Great Horned Owls observed show more variation year to year than other species of owls detected. The year 2004 was an excellent years for breeding owls, most likely due to large prey populations. The Northern Pygmy Owl and Northern Hawk Owl are still absent from surveys, however these species are diurnal and in we will be initiating a pilot day time survey in the boreal, foothills and mountains in 2009. Funding for the 2008 Alberta owl survey is from Manning Forest Research Fund and Alberta Conservation Association.



Baillie Birdathon 2008 – Sam and Kate’s First Birdathon

by Lisa Priestley, Photos by Lisa and Gill Priestley

This year’s Baillie Birdathon was our children’s first. Sam is 2 years three months and Kate just turned one. It was planned to overlap with a visit to Rocky Mountain to see a special nest. You will have to read on to find out what kind of nest we were looking for. Our Honda CR-V was full with Chuck, Lisa, Sam, Kate, Grandma Gill, and Buttons the dog. We left from Tofield at 7:30 a.m. and began the count with **Purple Martin**, **Ring-billed**, and **Franklin’s Gull**. The ponds on highway 14 had a variety of waterfowl and the ever present **Canada Geese**. We were fortunate to see a **Great Blue Heron** en route to Edmonton and a **Double-crested Cormorant** flew over the Anthony Henday (which made skipping Hastings Lake less hard). With Tim Horton’s in hand we left Edmonton with 21 species.



We stopped at Barnett lake near Lacombe and found 22 species, notably a **Ring-necked Duck**, **Western Wood-Pewee**, and one of our favourites, the **Ruddy Duck**. The woods along the lake were full of songbirds and we had to dust off our ears to remember the calls. It was nice to hear that spring was finally here.



Continuing south we added **Swainson’s Hawk** and a **Pileated Woodpecker** flew over near our turnoff to highway 11 to Rocky Mountain House. Some **Wilson’s Phalaropes** and an **American Kestrel** brought us to 50 species as we pulled in to Rocky Mountain House. We had to stop for a potty break (yes, I’m a mom) and added the elusive **House Sparrow**. By 11:30 we headed out for more birding.

We headed to a mixedwood forest north of Crimson Lake provincial park and stepped out of the vehicle to hear **White-throated Sparrow**, **Swainson’s Thrush**, and **Black-and-white Warbler**. Chuck grabbed his trusty hand net and walked up to a large aspen with a small cavity so larger than 3 inches in size. He tapped and tapped but the bird we were looking for did not appear. Unfortunately the cavity was too high to take a peak with a mirror (even with a 16 foot ladder). With a short walk through the forest, and a few whistled toots we found the species we had traveled all this way for, a **Northern Pygmy Owl**. Most probably the male, he sat there at the top of the highest aspen and watched us search the forest for other cavities that may contain his mate. Although it was disappointing not to confirm the nest site, it was still nice to see the owl. On our drive down to Crimson Lake we spotted a **Mountain Bluebird**.



We arrived at Crimson Lake picnic area in time for lunch and sat looking out at the lake while eating sandwiches, veggies and my aunt’s famous shrimp dip. The park did not disappoint as we heard **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, **Varied Thrush**, and watched **Bonaparte’s Gulls** and **Red-necked Grebes** on the lake. After our tummies were full and we had a good look at the lake, we departed in the afternoon and drove north on HW22 towards Drayton Valley.



Brewer's Blackbirds and Bank Swallows were added as we made our way to Brazeau. A Bald Eagle greeted us at the dam and we heard Northern Flicker and Western Palm Warbler. After a late dinner in Drayton Valley we headed home. We completed the birdathon early in the morning, observing birds in our yard in Tofield. The resident Merlins were calling and we heard and saw White-crowned Sparrows, Orange-crowned and Tennessee Warblers, and Purple Finches. The final species of our count was the first House Wren of the year. A total of 85 species, not bad for Sam and Kate's first birdathon. If you would like to sponsor our team please send a cheque made out to Bird Studies Canada to Beaverhill Bird Observatory, Box 1418, Edmonton, AB T5J 2N5 and include a note that you are sponsoring the Priestley Team. Any sponsorship over \$10 will receive a tax receipt.



Beaverhill Bird Observatory Joins Golondrinas de las Americas

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory has partnered with a new International program. Golondrinas de las Americas is a community of biologists dedicated to studying Tree Swallows and their tropical nearest relatives from Alaska to Argentina, combining detailed studies of the breeding biology of the birds with standardized sampling of the swallows' aerial insect prey. This network will allow the group to monitor the effects of weather and insect density on avian breeding on both short and long time scales at a hierarchy of spatial scales across the entire Western Hemisphere.

This long-term, correlative monitoring has obvious merit for studies of:

- global change
- differences between tropical and temperate ecosystems
- tropical-temperate life history difference in birds and insects.

There are sites established in Alaska, New York, Tennessee and Belize, with many other sites and collaborators from across North and South America in various stages of development. The BBO will be adding an additional 50 Tree Swallow nest boxes to their grid of 50 boxes, and a biologist will be coming to stay at the lab in June and July.

Swallows in the genus *Tachycineta* are particularly suited for comparative studies because they share very similar foraging strategies and are totally dependent on other species for manufacturing the tree holes (or nest boxes) that they require for breeding. Thus they are:

- uncommonly tenacious and resistant to disturbance
- excellent subjects for detailed observations and experiments
- rich sources of educational opportunities with students of a broad range of ages and abilities.

For more information on this project see the website: <http://golondrinas.cornell.edu/>



WORD SEARCH – Spring Migration at Beaverhill

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BEAVERHILL BAGS
LAKE NATURAL
MIGRATION THERMALS
DUCKS CRANES
GEESE SHOREBIRDS
SONGBIRD BINOCULARS
SPARROW COUNTING
WARBLER EARLY
BANDING MORNING
CENSUS RULER
AGEING PYLE
SEXING SIZE
COLOR HAWK
MOLT NESTBOX
MEASURE BANDERS
WING PATTERN
TAIL FEATHERS
FAT
WEATHER
MISTNET

Membership Information

\$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:
Box 1418, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 2N5

Material for the next newsletter can be sent to: Lisa Priestley, Editor, Box 1418, Edmonton, AB T5J 2N5. Email: lisa@beaverhillbirds.com . Articles and photos can be on bird banding, bird watching, wildlife viewing, personal nature photos, etc. Deadline: August 31, 2008