



the WILLET

Beaverhill Bird Observatory

Volume 24, Number 3

September 2011

Steaks and Saw-whets

*September 30 and October 1, 2010
at the
Beaverhill Bird Observatory*



Join the Beaverhill Bird Observatory volunteers, staff and executive for an evening barbeque and netting of Northern Saw-whet Owls. Steaks, chicken, hotdogs, veggie burgers, corn, potatoes, and all the fixings are served. An assortment of homemade desserts is followed by setting up mist nets to capture saw-whet owls on migration. This annual event sells out quickly so please book early to ensure your spot!!

SOLED OUT

Time: Dinner is served between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m. Nets go up at 8:00 p.m.

Cost: \$25 for adults, free for kids under 12.

Contact: For more information and to register, contact Chuck Priestley at (780) 984-6957 or e-mail chuck@strixecological.ca.

Supported by Alberta Conservation Association, Nature Canada, and Edmonton Nature Club



Eastern Kingbird

Avocets, Bitterns and Cormorants, oh my! The Baillie Birdathon 2011

by Meaghan Bouchard

This year the staff (Katie Calon, head bander, and myself) at the BBO decided to participate in the Baillie Birdathon, an annual fundraiser for bird conservation and research. Participants can designate a specific recipient, such as a banding station, to receive a part of the funds they raise. The goal is to see as many bird species as possible during one day in May, so we set our sights on May 31st!

(Con't. from page 1)

Katie and I started the day off early, sneaking out to the Tree Swallow grids between net checks to see if we could spot the Short Eared Owl that had been seen hunting over the lakebed. We were not able to add the owl to our list, but did spot some other interesting species! A small flock of Wilson's Phalaropes flew over, and we saw a Northern Harrier hunting on the lake bed as well. Once banding was finished for the morning, we left the Natural Area, binoculars in hand. The Golondrinas crew (Sara, Maya and Ghazi) also decided to come with us, it was great to have 3 extra sets of eyes and the additional enthusiasm!

Our first stop was at Amisk creek, located approximately 1 km south of Beaverhill Lake. The abundance of open water this year meant the creek was crawling with waterfowl, and we added another handful of species to the list. We spotted some Redheads, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback and American Coots, as well as a Rusty Blackbird. My personal favourites at this site are always the Cliff Swallows though; they are amazing aerial acrobats and have a very neat nesting habit.

We took our lunch break in Tofield, bird-watching at the nature centre while we enjoyed our sandwiches. The Purple Martins were busy at the nest box mounted there, and the wetland area was full of Red-winged Blackbirds. We even glimpsed a Common Grackle as he flew over. Next it was time to pull out the scope and head over to the gravel pits south of Tofield to try and find some shorebirds. We were not disappointed! It is always great to see the elegant American Avocets, and it was fun to observe the large mixed flocks of Black-bellied Plovers and American Golden Plovers. The Willet also decided to call out just as we were leaving.



Sara, Maya and Katie watching the shorebirds at the gravel pits

The ponds along the back roads to Lindbrook were surprisingly quiet, but a walk through our friend's property there yielded us a Gray Catbird and a pair of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers (who were later found to have nested on property!). From there we made our way over to Islet Lake in the Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area, and the Black Terns and Common Loons we had seen there last year were still around, though we were disappointed the Trumpeter Swans were not. After watching the puppy romp in the water for a while we were off again!

Our last destination for the day was Elk Island National Park. The biggest find at Astotin Lake was the Bison taking a nap on the beach! The boardwalk gave us a nice view of the nesting Red-necked Grebes, as well as the Ruddy Ducks. The walk along Beaver Pond Trail finally gave a few of the older forest species we had been hoping for, including the White-throated Sparrow and Pileated Woodpecker. Our total **species count for the day was 79**, lower than we had hoped but a great day none the less!



Bison taking it easy by Astotin Lake

A big thank you to those who sponsored Katie and I this year, your generosity is very much appreciated! Thank you Barb and Jim Beck, Anna Desrosiers, Geoff Horoyd and Lisa Priestley for your donations.

Alder Flycatcher	Canvasback	Lesser Scaup	Ruddy Duck
American Avocet	Clay-coloured Sparrow	Lesser Yellowlegs	Ruffed Grouse
American Bittern	Cliff Swallow	Mallard	Rusty Blackbird
American Coot	Common Goldeneye	Marbled Godwit	Savannah Sparrow
American Crow	Common Grackle	Merlin	Short-billed Dowitcher
American Golden Plover	Common Loon	Mountain Bluebird	Song Sparrow
American Goldfinch	Common Raven	Mourning Dove	Sora
American Kestrel	Common Yellowthroat	Northern Harrier	Swainson's Hawk
American Robin	Double-crested Cormorant	Northern Shoveler	Tennessee Warbler
Baltimore Oriole	Eastern Kingbird	Pileated Woodpecker	Tree Swallow
Barn Swallow	European Starling	Purple Martin	Vesper Sparrow
Black Tern	Forster's Tern	Red-eyed Vireo	Warbling Vireo
Black-bellied Plover	Franklin's Gull	Redhead	White-throated Sparrow
Black-billed Magpie	Gadwall	Red-necked Grebe	Willet
Black-capped Chickadee	Gray Catbird	Red-tailed Hawk	Wilson's Phalarope
Blue-winged Teal	Green-winged Teal	Red-winged Blackbird	Wilson's Snipe
Brewer's Blackbird	House Sparrow	Ring-billed Gull	Yellow Warbler
Brown-headed Cowbird	House Wren	Ring-necked Duck	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Bufflehead	Killdeer	Rock Pigeon	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Canada Goose	Least Flycatcher	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	

SPRING 2011 Songbird Migration Monitoring

by Katie Calon

Songbird Migration Monitoring started on May 2nd and ran through to June 9th. Over the course of the spring banding period, a total of 412 birds of 40 different species were captured in 1884 net hours, yielding a total of 21.87 birds/100 net hours (Table 1). It does not appear as though the increase in water this year resulted in an increased number or diversity of birds. A list of all birds banded (total 241), repeat captured birds (total 89), returning birds (total 38), and other captures (total 44) is presented in Table 2.

The nets were set for 1884 net hours out of a possible 3120 (60%). Poor weather conditions (rain, wind) prevented banding or reduced net hours on 6 days. Staff days off accounted for 7 days of banding lost, and unfortunately no qualified volunteers were found to cover these days. A large number of the net hours (6 hours per day) were lost due to the fact that the aerial net (net 43X) was not run this spring at all (damaged). The top five species captured during Spring Migration Monitoring included; Least Flycatcher (117), Yellow Warbler (57), Clay-coloured Sparrow (49), House Wren (26), and Swainson's Thrush (22). This accounted for 66% of all captures during spring migration monitoring. The top five banded birds included; Least Flycatcher (59), Clay-coloured Sparrow (38), Swainson's Thrush (21), House Wren (17), and American Robin (14). This accounted for 62% of all banded birds during spring migration monitoring.

For the 2011 Tree Swallow season, the Golondrinas de las Americas project once again sent students to the BBO to conduct detailed studies on the three swallow grids. The entire contingent of Golondrinas students that were working in Canada for this summer (8 total!) arrived on May 16th, they stayed in Tofield and studied and trained up on the various protocols on the 17th, 18th, and 19th. After this, three students went to the site in Saskatchewan, and two went up to Prince George (including 2010 season's Justin Proctor). Three students stayed at BBO, and we welcomed Maya Wilson, Sara Berk, and Ghazi Mahjoub to the Nuthatch Nest. Part way through the season Ghazi returned home, and his replacement, Elsie Shogren came to stay with us. Sara had actually been on site last year, as she was part of the Saskatchewan crew for 2010. Nice to see her again!

Table 1. Ten year trends for spring bird captures and net hours at the BBO.

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Birds Captured	629	950	754	532	276	242	408	382	500	497	412
Birds Banded	472	740	546	424	196	169	318	288	351	333	241
Net Hours	1756	2569	2219	1809	1570	1615	1813	1828	1608	2016	1884
Capture Rate (birds/100 net hours)	35.83	36.98	33.98	29.41	17.46	14.98	22.84	20.9	31.09	24.65	21.87
Species Captured	39	55	44	38	32	31	44	38	39	38	40



The entire crew, before heading to their different sites

The “Golo crew” were responsible for checking the Tree Swallow boxes in early spring regularly to determine the stage of nest development. Once the first egg was laid in a nest, it was visited daily to monitor the rate of egg laying. In almost every case, a single egg was laid every day until the final clutch size was reached (generally 5 – 8 eggs per nest). In one unusual nest, four eggs were laid at a rate of one per day, and then three of the eggs disappeared (predation?). A single egg remained in the nest for the next 10 days, and then laying resumed as normal with 5 total eggs in that clutch.

By the end of spring (June 10), most of the Tree Swallows were either finishing laying eggs or had started incubating

their clutch. House Wrens and Mountain Bluebirds had also claimed their boxes and were well on their way with nesting and incubating. We look forward to seeing the results of the season.

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 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:** December 31, 2011.