



Volume 24, Number 2

May 2011

BIG BIRDING BREAKFAST

June 4, 2011

at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory

Join the Beaverhill Bird Observatory for our annual BIG Birding Breakfast in celebration of Spring Migration. We will be serving Crepes made by famous Hungarian chef Janos Kovacs. Bacon, fruit, coffee, tea, and juice are also on the menu. Watch bird banding up close, walk the net lanes with our staff and meet the bird observatory executive and volunteers. Cost is \$10 per person.

To register please contact Lisa Priestley (780) 918-4804 or E-mail lisa@beaverhillbirds.com

Supported by Alberta Conservation Association, Edmonton Nature Club, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission

BEAVERHILL BIRD OBSERVATORY OPENS MAY 1



The Beaverhill Bird Observatory opened on May 1. We are pleased to have Katie Calon and Meaghan Bouchard returning for another season at the lab. Katie also has her two dogs at the lab this year, Annie and a new addition Synchro.

The birds are moving through the area on migration, while others are settling down to nest in the Natural Area. We hope you come out to visit the staff. Updates will be posted every two weeks or so throughout the summer on the BBO website. The lab phone number is 780-819-9927 to find out the work schedule.

This year, our staff are joined by three people from the Golondrinas project, working on Tree Swallows in and around the Natural Area. Ghazi Mahjoub, Sara Berk, and Maya Wilson will be on site till mid-July. The Beaverhill Bird Observatory, helped with hosting a workshop for all the Golondrinas staff that will be working in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. Thanks to Justin Proctor (one of the staff from last year) for coordinating everything. We are looking forward to another successful season!!

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

Funding from Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Sport Recreation Parks and Wildlife Foundation, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Shell Environmental Fund, TD Friends of the Environment, and the Charles Labatiuk Endowment Fund (Nature Canada), and the Alberta Government Community Spirit Program is greatly appreciated.

5 GRAM TRANSMITTER DEMONSTRATES DISPERSAL HYPOTHESIS IN BURROWING OWLS

by Geoff Holroyd and Helen Trefry, Environment Canada, Edmonton, Alberta

In the last issue of Willet Newsletter we told you about the southward migration from Canada of a Burrowing Owl wearing a 5gm solar PTT-100. The second article was about our visit to the owl in winter in Baja. Now, the spring story of this owl is just as revealing with new information about the northward migration of this iconic prairie owl.



To quickly recap, the transmitter was attached to a female owl that nesting successfully in southern Alberta. She flew to Baja Sur, Mexico via New Mexico in November. She spent the winter near the town of Guerrero Negro, within sight of Laguna Ojo de Liebre, where thousands of Grey Whales spend the winter to breed and calve. The habitat was dry desert with sparse low shrubs and cactus.

She delayed her northward departure until early April, a time when Burrowing Owls have already started to arrive in Canada. By April 11, she was near Ensenada, Baja Norte, Mexico just south of the California border. Then she made a remarkable movement. Five days later on April 16, she was 20 km east of Denver, Colorado, a 1400 km straight line distance. We assume she returned via her autumn route as this would have meant she avoided the heart of the Rocky Mountains, in which case she flew about 1700 km. This flight is comparable to the speed and distance of movements of peregrine falcons, but totally unexpected by a round-winged small owl. Previous efforts of tracking Burrowing Owls by airplane with traditional VHF transmitters found they moved about 200 km/night in the fall so this female was in a hurry to head north.

In the next three days she only moved 100km north. She was 30 km east of Fort Collins and she has stayed there! The LC3 record placed her in the middle of a prairie dog colony. In Colorado, as in Mexico, we were grateful for the assistance of local biologists who have made efforts to locate the bird for us. So far they have confirmed 2 pairs of owls within 50m of this location and presumably one is our female and she will nest there. We will confirm this in the summer.

The ability to study breeding dispersal has important conservation implications. The number of Burrowing Owls has declined in prairie Canada to the point that they were declared endangered in 1995. Their numbers declined 20% per year during the 1990's decade. The numbers have stayed depressed since. Stable isotope analysis of breeding burrowing owls in Canada led to the hypothesis that the decline was caused by high rates of breeding and natal dispersal that resulted in a net emigration of owls from Canada to the US and Mexico. Satellite transmitters provide a new technique to study these dispersal movements, which may occur at a scale almost impossible to study with traditional techniques such as banding and VHF telemetry. Even though this owl was a successful breeder in 2010 in Alberta, she has stopped short in Colorado and is apparently nesting in one of the core breeding areas for Burrowing Owls remaining in North America. She has chosen a black-tailed prairie dog town, habitat shown in Colorado and Montana to be preferred breeding habitat for this species. We suspected the population of owls in the US Great Plains are in decline and are being backfilled by owls from Canada. The recovery of the Burrowing Owls in Canada is therefore dependent on what happens to the owl in the US and Mexico during both the wintering and breeding season. This makes the recovery of the Burrowing Owl in Canada a Tri-national conservation issue that will require cooperation similar to what we have seen in the study of this owl.



PURPLE MARTINS IN CAMROSE

by Murray Green (original from *The Camrose Booster*)

From all of the achievements credited to the Camrose Wildlife and Greenspace Stewardship Project none is more noteworthy or recognizable than the impressive success in bringing back Purple Martins to Camrose and the local rural areas. Each year with valuable assistance from the Camrose and District Fish and Game Association, the City of Camrose, and other partners, several new “condominium-style” Purple Martin houses are built and installed on public land in or near Camrose. These Martin houses are taken care of by dedicated community members (keepers). These individuals and other interested residents or visitors to Camrose are provided with educational opportunities on Purple Martins, other species of birds and wildlife. The project also provides information on habitats and greenspace co-existence between nature and man.

This year’s Purple Martin festival will be held in Camrose on June 5. The festival is organized by the Camrose Wildlife and Stewardship Society and is scheduled to be held from 8:45 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will be bus tours, walking tours, keynote speakers and booths all about the birds. Guide **Michael Barr** will offer short in-town bus tours to view Purple Martins and their “landlords.” The landlords will offer practical tips to attract Martins and maintain their nest boxes. The first tour will depart at 8:45 a.m. and a second one at 11 a.m.

Participants can also take short walking tours to nearby Purple Martin nesting structures and possibly see their eggs or newly hatched young. Dr. Glen Hvenegaard will lead a tour at 9 a.m. to talk about Purple Martins and other birds. Dr. Michael Mucz will conduct a tour at 10 a.m. on medicinal plants and Dan Olofson offers a third tour beginning at 11 a.m. on Cyber Martins.

A slate of speakers will highlight several bird and nature related topics.

9:15 a.m. - **Chuck Priestley** (STRIX Ecological Consulting) will talk on important bird areas and Purple Martins

10:15 a.m. - **Dr. Geoff Holroyd** (Research Scientist, Environment Canada) will talk about Purple Martin migrations, “Martins Don’t Eat Mosquitoes, but They do Winter in Brazil”.

11:15 a.m. - **Dr. Hvenegaard** (University of Alberta, Augustana Campus) will talk about connecting children with nature

During lunch, bird box kits will be available for purchase as potential Father’s Day gifts from children. The kits may be assembled on site. Also during lunch, Glenys Smith will begin her story telling session as she recalls and shares some local insights. At 1 p.m. keynote speaker **Chris Fisher** will talk on the parallels in bird and human migrations. For the last number of years, he has been leading worldwide nature adventures to every continent. By invigorating audiences with story lines that connect must-see sites with their rich legacy of history, culture and wilderness, Chris makes what is often inaccessible, familiar to all. Various natural history and environmental organizations will have displays available.



Arne Ramm, and Ron Blatz assist Tom Tomaszewski, who is one of the community’s most dedicated and knowledgeable Purple Martin experts, relocate a Purple Martin house to prime Martin real estate.



(c) STRIX Ecological

The Camrose Wildlife and Stewardship Society promotes environmental education, community-based nature activities, and sustainable use of our important wildlife and greenspace resources. In the summer, with support from the City of Camrose, they host weekly events on natural history, support planning and management, and conduct research. By installing structures around the city, Purple Martin populations have grown from eight pairs in 2003 to 173 pairs in 2009.

To register or for more information about the Purple Martin Festival, contact Chris Clarkson at cclarkson@camrose.ca or phone 780-672-9195.

EDMONTON BIRD BANDING SOCIETY 2010 RESULTS

by Janos Kovacs and Jonathan Martin-DeMoor

The Edmonton Bird Banding Society had a productive banding season in 2010 at their site at the Strathcona Science Park. Volunteers worked many days throughout the year and we would like to thank them for their help.

Common Name	Total	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Alder Flycatcher	38						2	6	29	1			
American Goldfinch	29					1	12	1	15				
American Redstart	69					1	1		62	5			
American Robin	64				3	6	6	7	15	20	7		
American Tree Sparrow	54				23					15	16		
"Band Lost"	2						2						
Baltimore Oriole	7					1	2	2	2				
Barn Swallow	2						2						
Black-and-white Warbler	6								6				
Bay-breasted Warbler	1								1				
Black-capped Chickadee	256	5	1	18	42	18	3	38	72	36	20	3	
Brown-headed Cowbird	13					10	1	1	1				
Blue-headed Vireo	4								4				
Blue Jay	5								3	2			
Blackpoll Warbler	30					2	1		15	12			
Bohemian Waxwing	2										2		
Brown Creeper	1									1			
Black-throated Green Warbler	2								2				
Canada Warbler	1								1				
Clay-colored Sparrow	131					42	24	15	43	7			
Cedar Waxwing	113					3	7	20	61	22			
Chipping Sparrow	73					56	4	7	6				
Cliff Swallow	7						7						
Cape May Warbler	7							2	5				
Common Redpoll	349	27	74	203	45								
Common Yellowthroat	1									1			
Chestnut-sided Warbler	1									1			
Dark-eyed Junco	2									2			
Downy Woodpecker	48			3	13	13		8	6	2	3		
Eastern Phoebe	3							1	2				
Golden-crowned Kinglet	1									1			
Gray-cheeked Thrush	1									1			
Gray Catbird	19					3	2	8	5	1			
Gambel's White-cr. Sparrow	11					3				8			
Harris's Sparrow	1									1			
Hairy Woodpecker	6	1			1	2					2		
Hermit Thrush	16					4				10	2		
House Finch	2					1				1			
Hoary Redpoll	16	1	1	6	8								
House Wren	22					1	1	11	9				
Least Flycatcher	110					9	18	21	56	6			
Lincoln's Sparrow	24					9		1	4	10			
Magnolia Warbler	9								9				
MacGillivray's Warbler	1									1			
Mourning Warbler	5						1		3	1			
Myrtle Warbler	311					35		20	92	164			
Nashville Warbler	3									3			
Northern Waterthrush	13								10	3			

Orange-crowned Warbler	223				8			5	207	3			
Oregon Junco	1			1									
Ovenbird	53				1		7	41	4				
Philadelphia Vireo	4							4					
Pine Siskin	192	1		9	21	27		8	93	33			
Purple Finch	41				1	7	4	7	16	3	3		
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	17							3	14				
Red-breasted Nuthatch	22			1	6	5			6	3	1		
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	8					2				6			
Red-eyed Vireo	71						6	11	50	4			
Red-winged Blackbird	11					8	2	1					
Savannah Sparrow	79				1	66	1	2	9				
Slate-colored Junco	261			1	73	16	1	1	9	130	30		
Song Sparrow	59				2	15	3	14	24		1		
Solitary Vireo	1								1				
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4								3	1			
Swamp Sparrow	2									2			
Swainson's Thrush	54					14	3	7	20	10			
Tennessee Warbler	598					3		268	319	8			
Tree Swallow	92						42	50					
Traill's Flycatcher	21						4	1	14	2			
Warbling Vireo	7					1			5	1			
White-breasted Nuthatch	19			3	4	1		1	3	3	4		
White-crowned Sparrow	7					4				3			
Western Tanager	17					1		3	13				
Wilson's Warbler	39								24	15			
Western Palm Warbler	10					1			3	6			
White-throated Sparrow	181					39	5	16	47	73	1		
White-winged Crossbill	1								1				
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	4							1	3				
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2				1					1			
Yellow-shafted Flicker	1									1			
Yellow Warbler	402					20	26	151	199	6			
Total	4396	35	76	244	245	459	193	721	1465	860	94	4	0

BAT MONITORING AND APPRECIATION IN CENTRAL ALBERTA

by Chuck Priestley and Lisa Priestley

Reliable information on the population status and migratory behaviour of bats is absent across most of North America. In contrast, research over the past several decades had greatly added to our understanding of bird migratory behaviour and population status. One of the most concerning issues has been the precipitous declines in many aerial insectivorous birds (Nebel et al. 2010). Although bats have unique characteristics that separate them from birds, they share many of the same resource requirements, and thus may be experiencing similar population changes. Two recent threats may be contributing to declines in bat population across North America. Wind energy facilities in Alberta, and elsewhere, have resulted in large numbers of migratory-bat fatalities (Arnett et al. 2008). Several thousand wind turbines are projected to be constructed in North America, which cumulatively, have the potential to cause substantial population decline. Another threat to bats across North America is white-nose syndrome; a disease associated with a fungal pathogen which results in mass-starvation at winter hibernacula (Blehert



et al. 2009). This pathogen was discovered in 2006 in New York, has already spread to Canada, and is likely to reach Alberta within the next few years. Precipitous population declines have already been observed where this pathogen occurs. Presently we are unlikely to detect even major declines in bat populations in Alberta or across much of the rest of Canada. For these reasons, the Alberta Bat Action Team (ABAT), the leading panel of experts on bat biology and management in Alberta, regards the monitoring of bat populations as being high priority.

Starting in 2009, detectors were set up at various locations with three primary goals: 1) to better understand the timing of bat migration and emergence from hibernacula, 2) to gain a better understanding of the distribution of bats across North America and patterns of bat migration, and 3) the long-term monitoring of bat populations. In collaboration with researchers at the University of Calgary, long-term bat monitoring stations are presently installed at multiple locations in Alberta and Manitoba, including: the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory, multiple locations within the Crowsnest Pass, and at two locations at the Delta Marsh Field station in Manitoba. The efficacy of long-term monitoring will depend on the degree of spatial replication, necessitating the installation of additional detectors across western Canada. These monitoring stations are anticipated to be in operation indefinitely, allowing assessments of long-term population changes. ABAT has suggested the establishment of bat monitoring stations at bird observatories (including Beaverhill Bird Observatory), as these sites already have the infrastructure and personal to accommodate bat monitoring activities.

In addition to increased monitoring efforts, it is worthwhile to increase outreach efforts to increase public awareness and stewardship of bats. Even though bats are critical to the ecosystems they occupy, they are sometimes viewed in a negative way by people. It is likely that more people would appreciate bats if they had an opportunity to get to know them better. Beaverhill Bird Observatory is initiating a bat project in 2011 to monitor bat populations and work on public engagement. We thank Alberta Conservation Association for their support of our new program.

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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:** September 1, 2011.