



Volume 27, Number 1

January 2014

Annual General Meeting

Thursday, March 6th at the University of Alberta.

Report from our Treasurer, nominations for new board members, and voting in the new executive.
Come see how the BBO works!

Time: 7:00 - 7:30 pm, with a regular executive meeting to follow

Location: Weldwood Room, 812 General Services Building, University of Alberta

Cost: Free, snacks and drinks provided.

Contact: If you are interested in becoming involved with BBO please contact Amélie Roberto-Charron at (780) 915-1301 or by email at arobertocharron@gmail.com

Beaverhill Bird Observatory Celebrates 30 Year in Operation!

In honour of the Beaverhill Bird Observatory's 30th year anniversary, we have made a compilation of articles put together by volunteers, interns, board members and staff of memories made on site during the last 30 years. Thanks to all those that contributed!

Congratulations to the BBO on their 30th Anniversary!

Irene Crosland

My memories could be summed up two ways, friendships formed and delight with new songs learned and birds identified. Over the years it feels like the Natural area is 'mine' over winter as the quiet trails invite me to go skiing and do so with only the sighing of winter winds. Then comes spring and with it the May first arrival of BBO staff. Who will return and who will be the new staff I will get to know. Many of you have become friends. This year's staff dubbed me their Field Mom. I am honoured. Thank you so much. In turn you have taught me ways to



Irene with a Northern Saw Whet Owl.

www.beaverhillbirds.com

identify birds by their songs, sharing quirky ways to remember them...the bobbing sprinkler=Tennessee Warbler. Different seasons I have had my favorite bird and the year I spotted a Warbling Vireo creating its nest, weaving it onto a ball with marsh grasses and sharing that with the staff was tops. Bringing out my young granddaughter to get her first taste of seeing birds released from the nets was wonderful. God bless you all in caring for Creation's little feathered friends.

An Intern Experience: A Toast to the BBO **Emily Cicon**

Celebrating 30 years of existence is something, which not even I can attest to achieving (or truthfully even imagine) and is itself something to be commended. As a first-time intern with the BBO this past summer, I must admit I was little aware of this long existing mark in the bird conservation and research community. This, undoubtedly, changed after my internship ran its course and I left with an immense respect for the work being done – not to mention numerous stories of home-made birthday cake, mid-morning coffee, mosquitopocalypses, and more than one tree swallow dive-bombing; however, beyond providing an abundance of anecdotal material and the intended career education, as is the over-arching internship goal, my experiences with the BBO imparted “life lessons” for which it is difficult to fully express my gratitude.

Lesson 1: First days are hard enough; don't make them harder by not asking for help.



Emily setting up Tree Swallow nest boxes.

My first day as an intern went as such: after a morning of learning the ropes of mist-netting and the general day-to-day activity of the BBO, I set-forth with full-intentions of setting up my nest box grid in one afternoon. Simple enough, right? Take the old boxes off, put the new ones up, and voilà -eventually the tree swallows will build their nests. After five or six hours of working in the heat, I was left with only a marginally completed grid, armfuls (no exaggeration) of mosquito bites, tears, and a nasty case of dehydration. I, as many before me and after me will continue to do, had fallen victim to the desire to make a good first impression and as such put good judgement aside and tried to work through what I could simply not do alone. Leaving the BBO that day with a grand total of 15 out of 50 nest boxes completed, I couldn't help but be discouraged – even with the director's pep-talk and reassurance of the future “pay-off” when all was done and the first hatchlings safely in nest.

Addendum to lesson 1: First days are hard, but convincing yourself to come back the next day is even harder. To this note, with no small amount of will-power and frankly more mental flip-flopping than I'd like to acknowledge, I convinced myself not to give up. With the help of the director, her assistant, and a few good sets of wire cutters, we completed the project the following day with far less frustration and proof of the long touted efficacy of team-work.

Lesson 2: Hard work pays off.

As a tree swallow intern, my job was to wander from nest box to nest box a couple of times a week and collect data such as clutch size, age of chicks, etc. To some, this may sound to be a deceptively mundane assignment (present readers excluded, of course); however, not only was I recording information, I was also being provided with an opportunity to watch the development of the chicks and the parenting behaviour of the adults from as close a proximity as possible. The transformation from a vulnerable hatchling through the various stages of feather emergence and consciousness into a fully feathered and active fledgling is both fascinating from a biological point of view and aesthetically captivating to the artistic eye. This experience became the embodiment of the pay-off of my literal blood, sweat, and tears previously alluded to by my supervisor.



Tree Swallow Nest.

Lesson 3: Don't quit looking for exceptional people; there are more than you'd expect (in unexpected places).

From my own perspective, the BBO represents a collective of individuals who acknowledge not only the biological significance of the avian community, but also the intrinsic value. Besides myself, this past summer there were more than ten other university-age interns, not to mention the numerous volunteers and the staff themselves- all of whom were willing to spend their weekends, face less than ideal weather, and other deterrents in the hopes of contributing to the knowledge base surrounding our feathered friends. With sincerity, I describe these individuals as exceptional and admit surprise at finding them located at the unassuming BBO lab outside of Tofield, Alberta. To find a group of like-minded individuals who may differ greatly in all other aspects can be no less than inspirational to anyone with an ounce of conservation drive.



Group of dedicated volunteers, board members, interns and staff.

Although some of these “lessons” may seem obvious or even cliché, their verity is something which can truly only be realized through experience – and I was fortunate enough to have these experiences play out in the care of the BBO. While my internship has concluded, the stories created, lessons learned, and friendships formed will persist and I can only hope that they will grow in number with each new intern, volunteer, and visitor. The contributions and values of the BBO extend beyond its stated goals and for this and many other reasons I raise a figurative glass to the BBO and wish it luck for the next 30 years.

The BBO: Hello Love! Julia Jackson

Driving into the BBO is quite the experience. The day I drove in to volunteer for the first time, I was sure that I must have taken a wrong turn somewhere, but sure enough after driving on progressively less clear roads and a twenty-minute walk, I had arrived. I was amazed at how removed the BBO was from the outside world. For me this was an amazingly pleasant surprise. As someone who was brought up as a total city girl I was craving to find a place where I could escape, and I had finally found the place! Once we caught our first bird I knew I was hooked on the BBO experience.



Seemingly endless amounts of birds!



Julia with a Northern Saw Whet Owl.

It is wonderful to assist with the process of banding birds when there is what seems like an endless amount of birds caught. Nonetheless, there are also days where few or no birds are caught. On those days I am still happy spending time at the BBO, because it means escaping from the city, and hanging out with the banders, who are always very lovely to spend time with.

Although we didn't catch anything, one of my favorite memories at the BBO was when a friend and I drove there one night in

heavy snowfall for Saw-whet Owl Banding. After entering the first gate, I felt disoriented since the road was entirely covered in snow, and after a wrong turn or two we finally made it to the BBO. My suspicion of the snow preventing the nets from being put up that night unfortunately rang true. Instead we spent the evening drinking tea and talking about bird projects while playing Settlers of Catan. It is experiences like these that make me associate the BBO with escaping from the outside world.

Volunteering at the BBO has been highly educational. As someone who is breaking into the field of wildlife ecology, the experience I have received at the BBO is priceless, and I have enjoyed every minute of it.

BBO HIGHLIGHTS

Steve Andersen

Over the past year the BBO has become one of my favourite places to spend time. In May I began an internship studying butterfly biodiversity, which made me a bit of an oddball in a world of birders, but I couldn't have felt more at home.

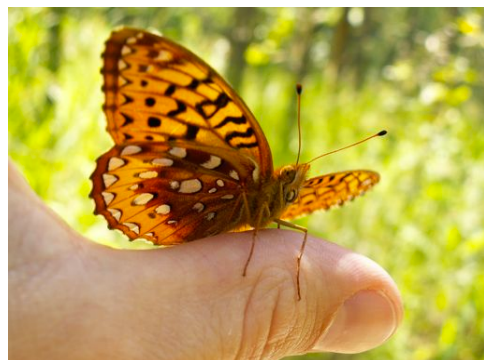
Carpooling out from Edmonton with the other interns I got to meet just about everyone at one point or another. We talked about raptors and mountain bluebirds, trips to Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre, weekend plans and career plans. Some days we were on the road at ridiculous hours to get to the lab before sunrise, other times we'd head out at noon, but the visits were always memorable.

One afternoon Amélie Roberto-Charron, the BBO's perpetually energetic and enthusiastic Executive Director, excitedly told the volunteers that bander Al DeGroot was going out in search of raptors and had offered to take us along. Al's first stop was a nest box of American Kestrel chicks; cooperative little birds that didn't seem to mind being handled but would watch you with an eerie intensity. As their parents berated us from the air, Al explained how to determine the sex of a Kestrel by its plumage: males have slate coloured wings while females' are red-brown. With the chicks banded and tucked back in their nest box, we headed out along gravel roads in search of other raptors. We caught an adult American Kestrel, who was beautiful though less friendly than the chicks, but the real treat came at the end of the day.



Al checking a Kestrel box.

Al spotted a Red-tailed Hawk on a power pole and casually laid a bal-chatri trap along the side of the road. We all waited, and waited. The hawk did not seem at all convinced. We were about to give up and call it a day, when suddenly the hawk dove down for the bait. A few minutes later Amélie was heading back to the truck with an enormous Red-tail in hand and an equally enormous grin. She put the biggest, chunkiest band I'd ever seen on the hawk and then we each got to practice holding it. After releasing it and thanking Al for such an incredible afternoon, we headed back to the lab. Just another day volunteering at the BBO!



Great Spangled Fritillary.

One problem with surveying butterflies at the BBO was that I really didn't have much previous experience identifying them. I had taken several entomology courses at the U of A, so I had a sound foundation to work from, but I was far from ready to start collecting data. John Acorn, entomologist extraordinaire and longtime member of the BBO, came to my rescue. John took me out and showed me how to

catch butterflies, how to handle them, and how to ID them. When he'd go on summer butterfly expeditions he'd invite me along. When I ran into a challenging butterfly, I'd send John a photo and in no time he'd write back with tips on how to distinguish Pearl Crescents from Northern Crescents, or whatever happened to be perplexing me that day. Before long I was getting the hang of it!

My butterfly study involved weekly surveys of the forests and grasslands around the BBO. One weekend in June I finished doing my survey and headed back to the lab for a meeting of the interns that Amélie had called. The summer's first (and only) intern meeting turned out to involve a birthday cake. Am had seen online that my birthday fell on a day I'd be at the lab and organized a party. In most workplaces you're lucky if your supervisor remembers your birthday. At the BBO she'll drive into town for ingredients and bake you a cake in a kitchen that lacks running water. I don't think there's anywhere I'd have rather been for birthday.

As an aside, later in the summer Geoff Holroyd built a system to feed the kitchen sink with water from the rain barrel. Thanks to his ingenuity washing the dishes has been a breeze ever since.

Some weekends I would stay overnight at the BBO, bunking in the men's cabin with Kevin Methuen, a tall, friendly guy who frequently sports a mischievous grin and spent the summer working as the BBO's Field Assistant. For several years he's organized weekly nature walks at the U of A and he was actually one of the first people to get me interested in birding. Staying the night at the BBO allows you to be out late looking for owls or up bright and early with the song birds (or both if you have sufficient caffeine), but it also presents some amusing problems. One morning we woke up early to find the ground crisp with frost. As the sun rose, a whole troop of birders headed out into the woods to put up mist nets wearing socks for mittens.



Steve on his birthday!



Night sky at BBO.

Late in the fall we spent an evening at the lab banding Saw-whets. The leaves were long gone, there was snow on the ground, and we had traded in our socks for proper mitts. The sky had been overcast but around midnight, as the banding was drawing to a close, the clouds cleared. Above us was the most amazing display of northern lights I have ever seen. We all stood outside in the cold, necks craned to the sky, and watched them flicker from one horizon to the other for a good twenty minutes. Not a bad way to end a season at the BBO.

As a kid I grew up on a farm, and for a long time I thought that getting out of the city was what I liked so much about the BBO. But looking back, that's not it at all. Everyone you meet at the BBO is warm and friendly, and there's an amazing culture of sharing knowledge. A place that could easily be cold and cliquy is instead warm and inviting. The people are what make the BBO such a special place.

Battle RoyOWL

Sian Ford

I was an intern at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory (BBO) for the 2013 field season, and volunteered at the BBO through the fall, with Amélie Roberto-Charron and Sara Pearce Meijerink. My favorite memory at BBO took place this past fall.



The 2013 Fall Staff, Sara, Amélie and Sian, with a Great-horned Owl!

It had been a slow morning, the migration season coming to a chilly close with few birds to speak of. By October all of the action was taking place after sundown, when the owl nets went up. On one particular evening, about half an hour before the nets were due to be set, Amélie, Sara and I were tucking in to a quick dinner when we were interrupted by a strange noise outside the lab. A sort of mewling that Amélie immediately recognized as a long-eared owl. With our dinner abandoned on the table, we rushed as silently as we could outside. Sitting in the large conifer beside the lab was a great horned owl, who was being relentlessly harassed by a pair of long-eared owls. The dive-bombing did not seem to deter the larger bird until the long-eared attack force began to grow. More owls

seemed to appear out of nowhere, flying in from every direction until a total of six long-eared owls were joining in on their attempt to chase off the great horned. Relentlessly they dove at the big owl, the calls of another could be heard off in the distance. Eventually the constant berating by the long-eared owls seemed to finally convince the great horned owl that there were better places to hunt. Still huddled on the corner of the lab deck, we watched as the great horned owl finally took wing, swooping away over the trees, the battalion of long-eared owls right on his tail.

Water Levels

Sara Berk

I visited BBO for the first time in 2010 with a Golondrinas field crew. I then spent two summers at the BBO. In 2011 I came with a Golondrinas field crew, and worked at BBO studying the Tree Swallow over the summer. In 2012 I returned to run a season to complete my senior thesis at Hampshire College on feather corticosterone (stress hormone) and reproductive effort in Tree Swallows. My favorite BBO memory is when the lake started to come back! I visited the BBO in 2010 while it was still dry, and it was so cool to come back in 2011 and see water running over the weir and Northern Shovelers and Blue-winged Teals floating along. Definitely a magical experience to see a field turn into a lake in the span of a year.



Sara with an American Kestrel chick.

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The Night Life At The BBO

Sara Pearce Meijerink

Beaverhill Bird Observatory is a wonderful banding station where you can go, get lots in the woods and forget about the outside world for a while. It is open from early spring to late fall and I have been fortunate enough to volunteer and work at the BBO for the last two falls. I have enjoyed the fall migration banding and have now become very familiar with our lovely Myrtle Warblers, who's numbers seem to be NEVER ENDING, and of course the famous Least Flycatchers. What stands out the most for me about BBO though, and one of the main reasons why I return every year, is the owl banding.



Gorgeous Myrtle Warbler.



Northern Saw-whet Owl.

Every fall, Northern Saw-Whet Owls (NSWO) migrate through the BBO and a couple hundred of them get banded here each year. It is always so much fun to see these adorable little raptors hanging upside down in the nets and have them look up at you as if to say; "Hey, want to get me out of here now?". Everyone loves the NSWOs and I've even seen big, tough looking men, who you'd think could wrestle a bear bear-handed, see a NSWO and immediately produce the biggest smile you've ever seen and emit an "Awwwwwwwww...." Just like any little girl would! No one can resist the charm of a NSWO and they can melt anyone's heart. NSWOs are such a thrill to band and even though it's the same species of bird, night after night, I can't get enough of them!

Every once and a while, during NSWO banding, we even get a surprise visitor in the nets which is always exciting. We usually catch one or two Long-Eared Owls each year and even a couple of Boreal Owls later on in the season. Catching another species of owl is always the highlight of the evening. But even if we get skunked and no owls show up that night, there is always something to see at the BBO. In the fall, you can always count on the two resident Northern Flying Squirrels, Stella and Gilbert, to visit the bird feeders each night. Gilbert is a bit shy due to the fact that he has been caught in the owl nets one-too-many times, but Stella is super friendly and you can get pretty close to her for a great photo. Then there is, of course, Frank.... The large, obese, resident porcupine.... Frank shows up at the BBO



Sara with a Long-eared Owl

every night to eat the fallen birdseeds that piles up underneath the feeders. He is large, he is slow moving and he is a beautiful blond colour so he's hard to miss (as long as you shine a light in his direction). It is indeed a rare night when you don't see Frank at the feeders! So even if there are no owls to be caught that night, there are always some wildlife friends to say "Good Evening" at the BBO.

The Initiation

Richard Krikun

I had the pleasure of working at the BBO for three summers, from 2000 to 2002. Some of my fondness memories occurred during my first summer there. I was fresh out of University, I had never conducted field work before, and pretty much every bird I saw was new to me. The whole experience was new and fantastic. I quickly learned that working with birds in the field is great, but it's the people you work with that truly makes the experience memorable. I had the pleasure of working with Chuck Priestley and Tyler Flockhart during the summer of 2000. It was the second summer at the BBO for both Chuck and Ty at the BBO, so I was the "new guy." We quickly hit it off, but I still had to go through a rather unexpected initiation.

I refer to this initiation as "The Test." Chuck and Ty actually spent a few weeks setting this prank up. As I was learning how to band birds and conduct the various bird counts Chuck and Ty would remind me that Jason Duxbury (the BBO Chair at the time) was going to come out and test me on my skills; he would gauge me on how accurate I was to make sure I was consistent with other banders. There was no set date for this evaluation, so I was getting nervous.

One rainy morning the guys let me sleep in. Eventually one of them pounded on my bunk door yelling that I had better get up because Jason was here to conduct the evaluation, but I missed him. The weather was too dreadful for the practical portion of the evaluation, but he dropped off a written exam. Unfortunately Jason had to leave because something unexpected came up, so he left Chuck and Ty in charge of it. And there on the table was a hand-written exam that consisted of multiple choice, short answer, and a long answer questions. I had three hours to complete it. The situation seemed suspicious, but the handwriting on the test did not match either Chuck or Ty's. With that I settled in to write it and I quickly realized I was going to fail this thing. Badly.



Rich with a Northern Hawk Owl.

The multiple choice and short answer questions consisted of basic bird questions revolving around bird banding and monitoring. Why do we band birds? How many primaries do warblers have? I didn't know any of it. The long answer essay question forced me to recount the historical importance of Beaverhill Lake to birds and conservation and the history of the BBO. I had to include terms such as "wier", "Francis Point", "IBA", and "Dick Dekker." I had no clue who Francis Point was or what IBA stood for, but I faked it. It took me most of the three hour time limit to complete the test. A few times during it Chuck or Ty would step in to see how I was doing, but they largely left me alone.

As I finished the exam and handed it in, Chuck and Ty confessed it was a very elaborate hoax. They spent the morning when I was sleeping to write the questions. They even went as far to make sure the handwriting didn't match their own. They had only come in a few times because they were cracking up so hard they could not keep a straight face when they saw me sweating over this thing. I immediately posted the exam on the notice board, and there it stayed during the rest of the busy and fun summer. I don't think it ever got graded.

Assistant Bander Memories

Kevin Methuen

Happy 30th birthday to the BBO! I have not known this place long but feel privileged to have spent one of these celebrated thirty summers there as the 2013 banding assistant.



Kevin on his first day!

Once the gig started and we completed our first shift I was simply happy to be alive. The first night we entered the lab covered in snow, hardly making it in by high centering my car on most of the road. That night we froze in the kitchen beside the wood stove not sleeping at all. Welcome to the BBO!

Then I had to learn to band birds, and how to hold onto House Wrens. I'm not sure you ever really find a comfortable hold on them with big hands like mine. We began to catch the most beautiful of birds like Baltimore Orioles, Common Yellowthroats, and Ovenbirds. I loved finding out how the Magnolia Warbler's tail looks as if it's been dipped in black paint. Extracting my first chickadee was one of the most memorable experiences for me as a bird bander. It felt so good! They are the sassiest little birds you will ever meet.

I remember during a BLAB net check I caught a grouse and Am caught a hummingbird. I thought I would be surprising her but I did not realize she was thinking the same thing. Our expressions at the time when we presented one another with the birds was pretty hilarious.

As much as I do love birds, looking back on my summer the thing that made it such a huge part of my life were the people that I met. I have to acknowledge all of the board members, visitors, volunteers, interns, and of course the Executive Director Amelie Roberto-Charron who taught me how to band birds, who is editing these words, and who has since become my girlfriend (so I suppose it would be intelligent to mention her somewhere in here). Catching owls with Ray Crombie and raptor banding with Al Degroot were world-class experiences for me that will never be forgotten.

We were also spoiled when we received baked goods from volunteers like Irene, and Donna and Ted but were mostly spoiled by their presence. I am forever indebted to the BBO for the life experiences I gained last summer and for the positive changes that have come through my relationship with Am.



Kevin with the grouse!

Who Am I?



I'm an aerial insectivore that nests in natural cavities or man made nest boxes.

I winter in Mexico, South America and the Carribean. Who am I?

Fun facts about this species:

- This summer the Beaverhill Bird Observatory is hoping to deploy geolocators on these birds, to support this project, please vote for BBO on the Shell Fuelling Change website

October 2013 Answer- Harris Sparrow

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

Interested in getting more involved with the Beaverhill Bird Observatory?

Become a volunteer!

Visit our website: www.beaverhillbirds.com or email Amélie at arobertocharon@gmail.com to become a volunteer!

Like us on Facebook: Search for Beaverhill Bird Observatory!

Follow us on Twitter @BBObservatory

And check out our new website, www.beaverhillbirds.com, launching May 1st!

Material for the next newsletter can be sent to:

Amélie Roberto-Charron, Editor, Box 1418, Edmonton, AB T5J 2N5.

Email: arobertocharon@gmail.com

Articles and photos can be on bird banding, bird watching, wildlife viewing, personal nature photos, etc. Deadline: August 15, 2013.

We gratefully acknowledge Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Sport Recreation Parks and Wildlife Foundation, Community Spirit Program, Environment Canada Science Horizons, Shell Environmental Fund, and Nature Canada (Charles Labatiuk Fund) for their support.