

The Poetry of Steaks and Saw-whets 2013

Lisa Priestley, Chair

On the weekend of October 4-5, the Beaverhill Bird Observatory celebrated a very successful 11th annual Steaks and Saw-whets barbeque. The event sold out three weeks ahead! During the nights leading up to the weekend the Saw-whet Owls were moving through in low numbers, we had many nights with no owls captured, and the worry set in that there would be no owls captured. Following is a bit of poetry I put together about the event and all the wonderful volunteers, staff, and visitors that made it such a great weekend.

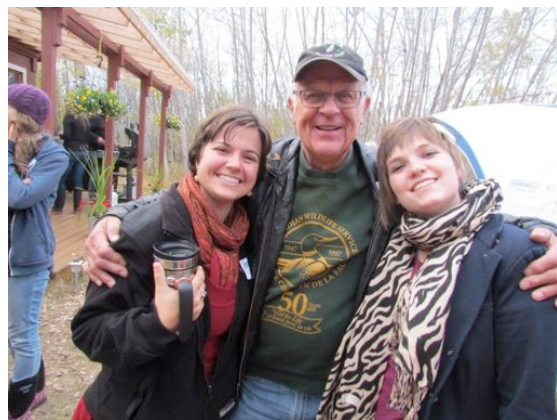
Saw-whet owls are cute little birds,
And for all the wildlife nerds,
The Steaks and Saw-whets event is the time to,
Celebrate fall movements which are always new.

In preparation we buy drink and food,
And lots of oil and lanterns to set the mood.
Homemade desserts prepared and potatoes chopped,
Counters cleaned and floors mopped.
Games laid out and trails cleared,
Almost done our staff and volunteers cheered.

And gallons of coffee and hot water ready.
Corn shucked and bowls filled with snacks and veggie.
Volunteers set tents and tables with covers,
The start of this 11th annual event hovers.

At five o'clock the first visitors arrive,
By 5:30 the lab looks like a busy beehive.
The chicken and steaks are barbequed fine,
And all that is left is for people to dine.

At 8 o'clock we set up the CD player and nets,
And then we all place our bets.



Top: Lisa Priestley; Bottom (from left to right):
Sara Pearce Meijerink, Hardy Pletz, Sian Ford

On some shirts and prizes to hopefully win.
'I'm a Herring Gull', and all the kids grin.

We talk about the work we are doing,
While we listen to a Great Horned Owl hooting.
Then the first group is led to look for caught owls,
While the coyotes serenade us with some howls.
Desserts served up and don't last long,
Having two or three is never wrong.

On check number 4 a Saw-whet Owl appears.
The stars shine bright as the sky clears.
We place aluminum bands on the little owls,
The female ones can give really good scowls.
Some measures like wing and weight to see,
Whether it is a male or female to be.

And finally a special guest to know,
Our friend Hardy brings a Great Horned Owl to show.
A large owl with horns up and eyes glaring,
With all the wondering eyes of kids staring.

And the people begin to depart for the night,
The happiness of everyone was quite a sight.
And next year we will do this all again,
Thinking about Saw-whets makes me grin.
They are such cute little owls that people all adore,
Working late nights with them is never a chore.



Top (from left to right): Dena Acorn, Amélie Roberto-Charron, John Acorn; Bottom (from left to right): Josef Takats, James Sheppard, Becky Sheppard

Thanks to Shell Fuelling Change, Alberta Conservation Association, Charles Labatiuk (Nature Canada), and the AGLC for supporting our annual event. We also appreciate the volunteers Becky and James Sheppard, Margaret and Josef Takats, Barb Beck, Bryn Spence, Geoff Holroyd, Thea Carpenter, Jason Duxbury, Sara Pearce Meijerink, Kevin Methuen, and Sian Ford who helped make the event so successful.

Habitat Succession and Bird Monitoring at BBO

Geoff Holroyd, Secretary

As a member of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network, BBO is committed to standardized mist net program during migration, spring and autumn. But an assumption at all stations is the habitat in and around the mist nets are stable from year to year. This is never the case as change is the only constant in our environments. CMMN stations have seen conifer plantations mature, devastating floods, shoreline succession, drought, storms and other natural and human caused changes. At BBO plant succession stimulated by drought has had an effect on the grasslands and forest in the natural area.

Two photos graphically illustrate the changes around the BBO lab. A photo posted on Google Earth by B. Christiansen shows what the surrounding habitat was like at our station almost 30 years ago. The lab and first bunk house are clearly visible with a University trailer in between. The access trail to the lab emerges from the woodland and extensive willow tracts and to the east is a trail into grassland. The small white square was a box for Purple Martins that was never used by these birds. In the 1980's, BBO's mist nets

were placed in the willows where migrant birds were most abundant and have been put up there every year since.

An aerial photo taken this June, 2013 by Amélie Roberto-Charon shows the lab partially hidden by trees and the two bunkhouses not visible at all. The trail to the lab is virtually all through forest. The clearings to the east of the lab where the martin house was located in 1985 are in-filled by trees.

Over the 30 years the aspen and balsam trees have invaded the clearings around the lab. The grasslands and maybe more important for bird trapping, the willows have disappeared around most of the nets. Many of our mist nets are now in woodland understory with dead willows as a reminder of their previous abundance. Some nets, those to the north, are still in willows.

This change is a continuum of the drying of the lake. Robert Lister in his book ‘The birds and birders of Beaverhills Lake’ shows the BBO lab area was underwater in the 1920’s when the lake’s shoreline formed ‘Francis Point’ on the south shore. The area was wet in the mid-1980’s when the bird observatory was formed, but the lake level and ground water table has continued to decline since then.

A challenge for the observatory is to determine how to react to this succession of plants from grasslands to willows to aspen / balsam trees. Are changes in bird capture rates related to real bird population changes or to changes in the habitats around the mist nets or both? By studying the changes in bird numbers at individual nets we can hopefully tease apart an answer to this question and determine how to move nets to adapt to these changes. This analysis is currently underway.

Photo 1. A 1985 aerial oblique of the BBO lab, bunkhouse and university trailer showing large clearing to the east of the lab by B. Christiansen extracted from Google Earth.



Photo 2. A 2013 aerial oblique of the same area with the BBO lab barely visible in the aspen forest by and Amélie Roberto-Charon on x June, 2013.



Who Am I?

I was spotted at the feeder during Steaks and Saw-whets this year, and am Canada's only endemic bird.

My common name commemorates the American amateur ornithologist Edward Harris.

Who am I?

Photo: Jason Duxbury

May 2013 Answer- Ovenbird

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 arobertocharron@gmail.com to become a volunteer!

Like us on Facebook

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And check out our website

www.beaverhillbirds.com

Material for the next newsletter can be sent to:

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

Email: arobertocharron@gmail.com

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