

## Weekly Update: June 22 – July 1

It's time again to fill you in on the happenings at the BBO. The summer M.A.P.S program is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> rotation and Crystal and I now have a new co-worker. Our newest partner in crime is Tessa Vesak. She is a summer student from Peace River, AB who loves working with birds, especially raptors, and aspires to become a Wildlife Rehabilitator. Tessa will be with us until the end of fall banding. We are very happy to have an extra set of hands around, as we are extremely busy with swallow nestling banding.

This update includes the last day of banding for M.A.P.S rotation 2 at WEIR MAPS station and the first day of banding for M.A.P.S rotation 3 at PARK MAPS station (you will have to wait until the next update for the WEIR and BLAB MAPS station results ... if that's not a reason to check the BBO site regularly, I don't know what is !?!) A total of 23 birds were handled; 15 of which were new captures (see table below). Although we haven't caught anything quite as exciting as a Cooper's hawk, we did band a Warbling Vireo, which is one of the prettiest birds to be found at the BBO, in my opinion.

Species	New	Recaptures	Recoveries	Total
Brown-headed Cowbird	1	0	0	1
Clay-colored Sparrow	3	1	0	4
Hermit Thrush	1	1	0	2
Least Flycatcher	5	3	3	11
Traill's Flycatcher	1	0	0	1
Warbling Vireo	1	0	0	1
Yellow Warbler	3	0	0	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>23</b>

We have also been very busy searching for nests in the area. Rarely do we pass by a willow without looking for a neatly woven yellow warbler nest sitting low in the crook of some branches. No longer do we pass by the trembling aspen and poplar tress nonchalantly ... we now look eagerly upward for well hidden least flycatcher nests, often the same color of the tree's bark. But I must say, nest searching is an art. You need a well-trained eye to spot some of these humble abodes. Thankfully the birds help us out by flying off the nest or doing the broken wing act, a well-known behavioural trait of the Killdeer. Interestingly enough, Crystal and I have witnessed female yellow warblers displaying this behaviour. On occasion a strange chirp will catch our attention and we'll head into the bushes looking up, down, and all around. It is always rewarding when you and discover the nest's contents, even more so when you find a nest without cowbird eggs or young!

The swallow grid takes up the remainder of our time. On a daily basis (weather permitting) we band swallow nestlings in the hopes of reaching the nest box before they fledge. Occasionally one brave nestling will fledge while we are banding its siblings. As Tessa says "a fugitive has escaped before we could cuff him." Out of the 50 swallow

nest boxes swallows occupy approximately 43 boxes, house wrens have settled 2 boxes, and about 5 boxes are either empty or unsuccessful. We hope to complete nestling banding next rotation so if you want to see some super cute little birds come out to the BBO one afternoon (July 12-14). You'll be sure to find us in the Swallow Grid ducking quickly as adult swallows dive bomb our heads desperately trying to protect their young. I am positive that we look quite foolish from afar ... if you're in need of a good laugh, come on out!

The birds aren't the only one's producing. The rose bushes are blooming, tiny sweet strawberries are becoming readily available, and the brilliant white flowers of yarrow can be seen throughout the area. There are many types of fungi in the Beaverhill Natural Area, and we have become acquainted with one in particular: mushrooms.

Our resident squirrel, affectionately named Theodore, has been bringing mushrooms into the lab for quite sometime and stashing them in an empty drawer. Needless to say upon first discovery of this cache I was a tad bit perplexed. I could not figure out what these things were especially since they were dried and had turned black. I decided to turn to Crystal and her wisdom to find out her thoughts on the contents of *the* bottom drawer.

"I found something disturbing," I said to Crystal one evening as I opened the drawer with a troubled look on my face. She cautiously peered into the drawer being sure to keep a safe distance. Judging from her body language I am certain she was expecting something much more "disturbing" than dried mushrooms. She said confidently, "they're mushrooms ... must be Theo's." Relief. Until recently we have lived in harmony with Theodore; however, this peaceful time has come to an end as he (we are assuming it's a male since a female squirrel would have enough sense to know that she wasn't in prime squirrel habitat and had turned around a long time ago!) has made his way into the ceiling and is busy making a nest with collected bits of insulation. After several poundings on the Lab walls and a few jabs at the ceiling with a broomstick, I have decided it is time to evict this tenant of ours. Don't worry; we'll be sure to relocate him to a place where his nest building efforts won't go to waste and where there are many other squirrel friends to keep him company.

Other highlights include a late night call from an American Bittern, and the large flocks of female Red-winged blackbirds that seem to congregate near a large murder of crows along Rowan's Route. It is quite a beautiful sight to see the blackbirds rise up from the fields only to swoop back down in perfect synchrony. As I witness this event I wonder if there is one bird giving the commands to ensure the flock is in order. Or is it just intuition. Mother Nature never ceases to amaze me. Also the early morning walks to the WEIR station are becoming more and more enjoyable. It takes approximately 20 minutes to get to the station, but in the wee morning hours it seems so much longer. On June 22<sup>nd</sup> the sun was just peaking through pink wispy clouds and a thick mist shrouded the weir and Lister Lake. It was such a peaceful and serene picture. Often the walk back to the lab after banding for 6 hours is even harder to endure as our feet seem to drag across the sandy paths and we dream of afternoon naps. But on this day as we neared the weir, we encountered one of those "I-wish-I-had-my-camera" moments. In a

mud hole on the south side of the weir stood an elegant American Avocet. It didn't seem to mind our presence and continued bobbing its beak in and out of the water searching for a late morning meal. Definitely one of the most memorable days I've had at the BBO, and I know Crystal enjoyed it as well: American Avocets being one of her favorite birds.

That's all for now folks. We hope to see you soon. There are so many wonders to explore at the BBO!

Cheers,  
Jill, Crystal and Tessa