

Beaverhill Bird Observatory LAB Update: May 1-10, 2005

Hello folks. Welcome to another year at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory. I am the new bander-in-charge, but I'm not new to the BBO. I'm Lisa Priestley, and as executive director I've been around for more than a year in this position, and for many years before as a volunteer. Our new staff person is Sara Majeski (Grant MacEwan College going into the university), and we are working together at the observatory this summer.

Well, it has been a little different this year. I was away at a banding workshop in Saskatchewan in early May (can't miss a good training session with Peter Pyle, author of our bird banding manual, to refresh my skills), so the lab was officially opened on May 3. That's not to say we weren't around before that date, oh yes, we were once again set up at the Tofield Nature Center for the Snow Goose Chase by the Edmonton Nature Club (thanks to Gill Priestley for helping out), and of course we also came out to see the various early migrants and nesting horned owls.

It has been relatively slow in the nets, only 36 captures (31 banded) in the first eight days, but we've had a nice diversity, 11 species. The Myrtle Warbler leads the race (12), with the Orange-crowned Warbler second (5). It was nice to recapture two Black-capped Chickadees that had been banded last year. A Black-and-white Warbler made an appearance the other day, and being a male was very boldly colored.

Sara and I made a visit to the Tree Swallow grid along with help from volunteers Bruce and Dale. The nests are just being started, a few strands of grass in a handful of the boxes. We made a disappointing, but exciting discovery in one box. A recently dead Tree Swallow was found, but it had a band on its leg. When we looked in our records we found that Matt Hanneman had banded it in 2002 as a nestling bird. This shows us that these small birds can live quite a long time, and frequently return to their natal area (where they hatched). Upon visiting Elson's Bluebird boxes we found 4 Mountain Bluebird nests.



Of course, we cannot forget the birds of prey. The Beaverhill area has been rich with them. In one day I saw a Rough-legged, Red-tailed, and Swainson's Hawk all in one stretch of road. We also banded the young at two Great Horned Owl nests with a large contingent of onlookers (friends and family), and followed this by a welcome barbeque at the BBO for Sara. We are fortunate to have a Saw-whet Owl nest close to the bird observatory again like last year. The male saw-whet was captured just the other day and we found it had a band on it (Sara with owl left). When we looked it up we discovered it had been banded last fall here at the BBO during fall migration.

So we must mention the cool birds that have been seen in the area (this may encourage more visitors, although we've had quite a few): Pied-billed Grebes are around in good numbers, Black-necked Stilts, Long-billed Curlew, Peregrine Falcon, Hudsonian Godwits, Sprague's Pipits, Cinnamon Teal, and a Blue Jay (you may think a Blue Jay is not cool, but we rarely get them out here, although they are common enough elsewhere).

So, in closing, come out and visit us, we are around almost every day (particularly in June and August), and are always eager to show people the best birding places and the work that we are doing. There's lots of water in the ponds, wetlands, and creeks, so no need to try and see the water on the lake. The weir is flowing, Kallel pond is flooded, and there are plenty of ducks and shorebirds to see.

Lisa Priestley and Sara Majeski and Buttons the Dog
Beaverhill Bird Observatory

