

Beaverhill Bird Observatory Update May 8-14, 2006

Greetings again from the BBO. Despite a loss of some banding hours due to rain or wind, we have been keeping very busy out here! On Monday the weather was too windy for the mist-nets, but that didn't keep us from heading out to the swallow grid. We managed to catch and band 7 tree swallows using the famous dash and cover technique. Even though they were occupied the boxes showed very little nest starts, so we have to wait a while yet for eggs. Allicia's patience was tested as she sat behind a bush waiting for a pair of mountain bluebirds to enter a box they regularly perch on, but they must have known what she was up to and refused to enter. We hope they will stick around and nest in one of these boxes.

On the days that were agreeable for banding American Robins, Chipping Sparrows and a Slate-coloured Junco were netted. One robin was already wearing an older style band, though we haven't yet determined when or where this bird was banded. Recapturing birds is one of the most exciting occurrences in bird-banding. Least flycatchers banded here at BBO have been recovered in Guatemala, giving us an idea of just how far south these birds go for the winter. Banding can also provide information on how old birds can live, and Lisa Priestley told us one story of a recaptured wren that had been banded 10 years before!



Chipping Sparrow

For Wednesday and Thursday this week we were happy to have Barb and Jim Beck out to help with our training. We have both "survived" Barb Beck's bird and butterfly identification course at the University of Alberta, so it was great to receive a personal introduction to the world of butterfly-ing. We went for a walk with our butterfly nets and came up with Milbert's Tortoiseshells, Red-disked Alpines, Cabbage Whites, and a Green Comma. Afterwards we headed outside of the natural area in search of more butterflies but ended up doing more birdwatching than butterfly chasing- although Jim slammed on the brakes on the way out to get a closer look at a Clouded Sulphur butterfly on the road in front of the vehicle! There are many birds in the area and we had great views of a courting Ruddy Duck, numerous Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Marbled Godwit, Lesser Yellowlegs, a Common Snipe and a few Swainson's Hawks. Eared Grebes, Red-necked Grebes and a Cinnamon Teal also showed off their red, bronze and gold colours in the afternoon sun. A Rough-legged Hawk is still hunting around this area which was a nice surprise as they have usually moved north by this time.



Katie with spring butterflies

Nests found this week include a Black-billed Magpie nest with four eggs (so that is why we have heard all the noise around here!), and... though it may not really count as a nest, we discovered a coyote den with a plush, pointy eared pup sitting on top. After seeing the pup disappear we decided to wait a short distance away, and 20 minutes later two pups popped out and lounged near the entrance and we had a good look at them. Katie also came across a baby porcupine huddled with its head under a log while walking through the forested part of the nature area. It no doubt thought it was invisible, and without a lucky glance downward he likely would have escaped notice. So with all these baby mammals around there can be no doubt that spring is in full swing, and we look forward to baby birds in a while!

As this week draws to a (rainy) close, we look forward to the steady rise in the number of species around, and brace ourselves for this ‘wall of birds’ caught in the nets which we have been told about. We also hope to see more visitors as the weather improves. Keep in mind the Big Birding breakfast May 28th. Special thanks to Barb and Jim Beck for coming out to help with our training and taking us out for ice cream at Mom’s in Tofield!

Until next week! Yours in birding,

-Katie Cameron and Allicia Kelly

Table 1: Results from Spring Migration Monitoring May 8-14, 2006.

Species	Banded	Recaptures	Other	Total
American Robin	0	2	0	2
Clay-colored Sparrow	1	0	0	1
Chipping Sparrow	1	0	0	1
Long-eared Owl	1	0	0	1
Myrtle Warbler	1	0	0	1
Slate-colored Junco	1	0	0	1
Song Sparrow	1	0	0	1
Swainson's Thrush	2	0	0	2
Total	8	2	0	10