

Beaverhill Bird Observatory Update November 1 – 17, 2010

As I write this last report of the season, I gaze out at a snow covered yard, where the birds are frantically visiting our feeders, and the thermometer is registering -18°C this morning. It seems winter has come upon central Alberta quickly, but we can't complain about the amazing fall we had.

After another crazy pulse of owl at the end of October, we were really hoping the number of owls captured would drop off. This is the first year we have had funding to have staff (Katie and myself) out at the lab through to mid-November. The goal was to finally figure out when exactly the saw-whet migration ends. We have a very good idea of when they start coming through.

November 1 and the owls continued to move through, Katie caught 9, November 2 only one owl, November 3 I caught 6 owls. This was not looking good, when were the owls going to stop. Well, November 11 we had our first owl shut out since September 13. November 12, no owls. This was looking great, I wanted four nights in a row with no owls. BUT, this was not to be.....

On November 13, I was coming back to Tofield from Edmonton, and I noticed a large plume of smoke on the horizon. As I made my way towards it, I realized the dry lakebed was ON FIRE!!! AGAIN!! I called Katie immediately who was to be working on site and we agreed to make a run in to the lab to pack out all the important gear and books, and most importantly the five full propane tanks. The fire was far enough out that it was safe to be there. I called RCMP later in the evening and the fire was put out. November 14 we had drizzle, so again the nets could not be set. November 15 we had no owls in the nets. This was looking good.



Then, Katie spent her final night at the lab on November 16. A very light snow was falling, and as she headed to her second net check an owl was flapping around in the net, but no worries, it was a Long-eared Owl, number four for the fall. This is the highest number of Long-eared Owls we have ever captured in a fall season. The winter decided it would not hold off any longer and came in with a vengeance on November 17. I could not set the nets for that last night with the heavy snowfall and strong winds. I packed up the nets, cleaned out the lab, and headed home. The end of another successful Saw-whet Owl season, 304 saw-whets captured, 298 banded, two foreign encounters and four repeats captures.



We are pleased we had so many visitors so late in the season, with groups of friends, co-workers, volunteers, and City of Edmonton interpreters. It makes the dark nights much more enjoyable, particularly when we lose the solar power and we can't listen to a radio or work on the laptop for very long. The Annual General Meeting is scheduled tentatively for March 3 at the University of Alberta (see the website for announcements). We are always looking for volunteers or new board members so we encourage you to come and find out more about the bird observatory and our programs. If not, see you May 1, 2011 for the lab opening.

Cheers, Lisa Priestley and Katie Calon