



# The WILLET

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Editor: Helen Trefry

## A Challenge from the Chair – Geoff Holroyd

The Edmonton Community Foundation has stepped up with a new challenge. One of their donors is offering to match contributions to BBO's Endowment Fund 2:1 up to a maximum of \$50,000. The BBO board is challenging our members to [donate](#) by matching any contributions this year up to a total of \$15,000, and I have added my own challenge to our membership. I will also match any donations up to a total of \$10,000. So let's do the math. If you donate \$100, I will match it and the BBO board will match it; that makes a contribution to ECF of \$300. Then their donor will match it 2:1, so your donation of \$100 is now \$900 added to BBO's Endowment Fund; thus our endowment fund could grow by \$150,000 by December 31. With over \$180,000 already in our Fund that would total over \$300,000 which at 4% per year, this amount will generate over \$12,000 per year in perpetuity for the BBO.

2021 has been an amazing year for BBO. We have built a new Education and Research Center in the midst of a pandemic! The center offers expanded space to host the public for banding demonstrations, giving them first-hand experience with wild birds up close. Also on the main floor is expanded living space for staff to prepare meals and any visitor treats. Upstairs is one giant room that was used to host educational talks for the Young Ornithologists in August. With furnishing provided from an Edmonton Community Foundation grant we have new chairs, tables and screen to host groups and staff office space.

As we look to the future when we can open our new center fully to host public and workshops, I hope that you will consider [donating to our endowment fund](#) as this most opportune time. With a 9:1 match, your donation will go much further than usual. And when your total annual donations are over \$250, you save 50% in income tax. So your \$100 donation will cost you \$50 and add \$900 to BBO's Endowment Fund. Likewise a \$1000 donation will cost you \$500 and add \$9,000 to the fund. The future of BBO is very bright and with your help we can ensure its future forever.



## From the Editor

As the Fall Migration banding season closes and the owl migration ends, BBO can reflect back on what was a semi-normal year with adjustments due to the rise and fall of the Covid waves. The new center was finished in time for the spring banding season but it was decided to not run the group events of the past, and focus on small events that met the Alberta Health guidelines. Then Alberta was “open for the summer” and BBO was able to run the Geoff Holroyd Young Ornithologists’ Workshop with every attendee fully vaccinated. Soon though another wave arrived with restrictions and again BBO went back to hosting the public Fall Migration and Owl Banding events with small groups outside. The record heat also contributed to a strange year. We are grateful to the flexibility of the Beaverhill Bird Observatory staff in adjusting to these challenges.

Below are some of the highlights from the spring and summer and how your donations are being spent - thanks to all who contributed in time and funds over the summer.

### New Facility Improvements:

The new solar system with a Tesla battery arrived in time to be functional for the summer season. John and Rose Scott were again instrumental volunteers in organizing the installation. With solar power on site, we now are able to have improved wi-fi and cell service, meaning the staff are able to be more efficient with their digital communications and it opens up more ways for the BBO to reach the public! This fall BBO hosted our first ever Live Stream banding events, one during [Fall Migration banding](#) and one during [Owl Migration banding](#). Our staff also produced many [BirdByte videos](#) which are fun short educational videos featuring the birds we capture and research, and some fun facts about each species!



Rose and John Scott also arranged for a large propane tank to be installed on site, meaning staff no longer have to make multiple trips to town to refill small propane bottles to power the fridge and stove. Thanks to a very generous visitor, BBO received a donation for a new bird bath to update our old rustic set up (a plastic tray placed on a falling apart wooden shelf) which has brought lots of enjoyment to the birds and our visitors!



## A New Outhouse!

Every organization has jobs that no board member is keen to tackle. BBO was lucky to have the enthusiastic Emily MacLellan, and her husband Graeme take on the job of digging a new hole for the new outhouse with a pump-out tank! Thanks to the Edmonton Community Foundation for funding.



## A New Banding Table

Our new building has a new banding table thanks to a donation made by Russ Mann and Johann Pelech Mann! In September we were finally able to retire our old banding table which had served us well for many years but its character, aka flecking paint and worn out panels, was really showing. Our new banding table allows sufficient space for two banders to work side by side comfortably, sharing data sheets and instruments while also quickly processing and releasing banded birds. The added drawers underneath provide storage space for all our gear, bandings, data



binders and more in one convenient location! Thank you Russ and Johann.

## Road Access Construction by Geoff Holroyd

In early July, a group of hardy volunteers and staff met at the front gate to be greeted by 4 truckloads of gravel. With Bob (Bobcat) Schwartz helping we made short work of spreading the gravel into the deep vehicle ruts across the first part of the pasture. Although we have traversed this pasture for almost 40 years, the trail took a beating with the heavy rains and heavy public traffic in 2020. Even though BBO was basically closed to all but two staff in 2020, the public still came out in droves to enjoy the great outdoors. Escaping the isolation of COVID-19 protocol, the natural area provided a safe place for people to enjoy nature. We don't have traffic numbers, but the increased number of vehicles rutted the wet pasture and began to braid the trail. Thanks to our hard working crew we dispersed the gravel into the ruts in just one morning! Thanks to Alberta Conservation Association who funded the gravel purchase, and volunteers and staff: Sara Pearce Meijerink, Glen Hvenegaard, Thea Carpenter, Bob Schwartz, Matt Turnbull, Peter Maguire, Christie Campbell, Jon Van Arragon, Jana Teefy and Geoff Holroyd who is taking the group photo.



Photos by Geoff Holroyd.



## 2021 Young Ornithologist Workshop

This year's group of enthusiastic birders came from across Alberta and British Columbia. The students spent a week on site with our biologists, learning how to extract, measure and band birds. They also had afternoon workshops on wetland ecosystems (thanks to leader Matt Turnbull), butterflies (led by David Lawrie), wildlife rehabilitation (with Kim Bloom), raptors and falconry (with Phil and Helen Trefry), tree swallows ecology (presented by Geoff Holroyd) and seabird research (presented by Sarah Hudson). Their Big Birding Day, where the youth spend a full 24hours birding to try and see



as many species of birds as possible, was led by volunteers Irene Crosland and Geoff Holroyd. Together, the group saw a resulting and impressive total of over 120 species! During down time, the students studied bird skins provided by Canadian Wildlife Service to hone their aging and sexing skills and the new upstairs story in the new building was perfect for such activities.

Helen Trefry organized the logistics of the Workshop with a long list of volunteers assisting with preparing food. Thank you to all the cooks and to Jac Curry for being on site kitchen manager, making sure everyone was fed. Thank you to the staff for the extra work required for this event (Sara Pearce Meijerink, Shane Abernathy, Jon Van Arragon and Jana Teefy).



**Front Row:** Raegan Giesbrecht, Silas Fuellbrandt, Xavier Quantz, Aiden Flewelling, “Gemma”, BBO Chair Geoff Holroyd, Evan Larson, and Hazel Flesher

**Back Row:** Henry Mingay, Evan Edwards, Cameron Montgomery, Jac Curry (volunteer), Jana Teefy (BBO), Shane Abernathy (BBO), Stephanie Thunberg (volunteer), Sara Pearce-Meijerink (BBO), “Taiga”, and James Tedder.



## Help Support BBO and reduce your plastic waste: TruEarth - Plastic-free, Zero Waste Laundry Detergent

700,000,000 plastic laundry jugs are dumped into landfills across North America annually. Not Tru Earth!

The zero waste laundry detergent strips are packaged in a plastic-free compostable cardboard sleeve. Better yet, the plastic-free package doubles as a shipping envelope further cutting back on waste.

**BBO will get 20% from every sale. And if you purchase now, you can get 30% off!**

Click [HERE](#) to support our fundraiser and reduce your carbon footprint.

Board Member Rose Scott says: “I have used the laundry strips and organic wool dryer balls for over a year and am very pleased.”



## The Skunks Who Earned Their Keep By Jana Teefy (BBO biologist)



A foraging Steve-ling  
Photo credit: Jana Teefy

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory has a long history of enjoying resident wildlife in the natural area. From Frank the Porcupine and Martha the Moose, to the flying squirrels Stella and Gilbert. However, there was one resident of note this summer. Over the winter, the BBO built a beautiful new research and education center in the place of the old and rustic research shack. That shack, however, housed much wildlife in its 37 years, one of which was Steve the Skunk. With the construction of the new building came animal proofing, and poor Steve was left homeless. Luckily, the old bunkhouse (Nuthatch Nest) was not sufficiently animal-proofed, and Steve did not have to travel far to find a new den. However, along with securing a new home this year, Steve also secured a mate, Stevie. This soon resulted in a bundle of Steve-lings, much to the displeasure of the summer staff living in Nuthatch Nest. Imagine the stench! With patience, the staff

waited until the Steve-lings were old enough to disperse, then they deployed industrial radios and "dad rock" under the bunkhouse to encourage the skunks' departure.

Meanwhile, the summer continued to be hot and dry. With the heat waves and lack of rain came the wasps. Staff noticed a number of wasp nests popping up everywhere, including the apex of the new building, far from reach. They also discovered several ground nests, many of which were near frequently used trails. Some were found the hard way; others were only discovered once they were mysteriously unearthed. The staff were getting nervous with all these wasps around, as the annual Young Ornithologists Workshop was days away and they were about to host 10 youth and a group of volunteers helping with the workshop for the next week. The night before the youth were to arrive, a particularly large ground nest was found along the trail to the outhouse. The staff brainstormed ideas and came up with a plan involving rain gear, bug jackets, soapy water, and an early start. Sara, the head biologist, and Taiga the dog, got up early and prepared to take charge of the arduous task; but first, they needed to use the facilities. As they rounded the corner, they happened upon the skunk family digging up the ground nest! Unfortunately, the Steves family were scared off the nest, leaving it partially deconstructed. The staff decided to leave the nest alone and see what would happen. Luckily, Steve and his family returned the following night to finish off the job.

Their good luck continued as numerous ground nests were found in the following weeks, all unearthed by Steve and his family. After some research, we learned that skunks find wasp larvae are a delicacy and are willing to put up with the wasp stings to get them, and they will even eat the adult wasps too. Who knew? Needless to say, the staff now have a fond appreciation for the skunks. Steve and his family have earned their keep and are allowed to stay. They are currently living under the Sea-Can for now, and will soon take up residence in a Skunk Bunk the staff will build for them this autumn.



An unearthed underground wasp nest  
Photo credit: Jana Teefy



## **The Great Journey of a Saw-whet** by Shane Abernethy (BBO Biologist)

When most people think of fall migration, they imagine a vast southward movement, of birds fixating on landmarks pointing them due south and following them unerringly. And for the most part, that's more or less correct. Northern Saw-Whet Owls in Western Canada, though, take a somewhat different approach. While their movement is overall southward, the actual route they take is a bit of an odd one.

The poster bird for that route is a Saw-whet Owl recaptured at the BBO this fall. Its band number was unfamiliar to everyone associated with the observatory, prompting staff to report it to the US Fish and Wildlife Service to view the original record. And then came a surprise: that owl had originally been banded in 2019 in Pennsylvania, nearly three thousand kilometers away! BBO has logged much further distance migrants, but the odd seeming part is that the majority of that distance was eastward. Why would an owl move from east of the Great Lakes all the way to Alberta?



There are several possibilities. One is that this older female simply dispersed westward as she aged. However, that theory is anticlimactic and as such will not be dwelt upon. The second theory is based on her recapture date versus her original banding date: mid-September versus very late October, two years earlier. Six weeks may not seem like much of a difference, but it's an enormous one in migration terms.

Another piece of the puzzle are banders near Saskatoon, five hundred kilometers due east of the BBO. These banders recapture our birds with unusual frequency. On their way to wintering grounds, Saw-whet Owls in Alberta seem to migrate east instead of south. A past study done by BBO staff has also confirmed that Saw-whet Owls usually migrate due east, and then only swing south once they hit the Great Lakes.

A couple of years ago one of 'our' banded Saw-whets was trapped in Duluth at the western end of Lake Superior. We are connecting the dots of this owl's migration. The important takeaway is that they appear to be passing by the Great Plains, and are willing to make a considerable detour to do so.

There is much that remains to be understood about owl migration, and recaptures like this one demonstrate the continued importance of long-term monitoring. I wish it well on its continued journey, whichever way it decides to go.

## Internships

BBO was pleased to host 8 interns this summer to help with our long term monitoring of wildlife populations within the Beaverhill Natural Area. This year's interns are as follows: Sunny Guo and Dominic Wong (Tree Swallow interns; mentor Shane Abernathy), Claudia Cruz and Sam Bennett (House Wren interns; mentor Jana Teefy), Ryan Corp (Breeding Bird Census intern; mentor Jon Van Arragon), Michelle Hoang (Butterfly intern; mentor Dave Lawrie), and Kayley Burke and Celine Gerlich (Bat interns; mentor Erin Low). The interns work throughout the summer on their monitoring projects, making weekly visits to the BBO to collect their data, before submitting written reports of their work which is then [published on our website](#). The data that is collected also contributes to our historical data sets of wildlife monitoring within the natural area.

This year's intern program was funded by Carole and Gary Dodd. We sincerely thank them for providing funding to help launch these students' career experiences.

BBO no longer receives government funds for the internships: please consider [donating](#) to ensure future students have this opportunity.

## A Hummingbird Happy Ending

by Geoff Holroyd



An urgent call from a hummingbird watcher, Faye Hough, on August 10, set off an unexpected series of events. A male Ruby-throated Hummingbird that was visiting her feeder had something around its bill (see photo left). She feared that the hummer could not feed properly and needed someone to trap it and remove the object off its bill. She lives near the Ukrainian Village, east of Edmonton, about 34 km from me by road. I went there and within 40 minutes had trapped the bird. The wrapper on its bill was the thorax of a wasp! The thorax was impaled back to front with the strong exoskeleton and two wings attached, forming a ring around the bill. I suspect the bird had further pushed the thorax down its bill when it tried to feed for syrup. I removed the thorax, let the bird feed some syrup and released it. The next day Faye reported the hummer was feeding normally at her feeders. She then posted the story on Alberta Birds Facebook page crediting me and

BBO. Within a day it had gone viral = 1,500 likes, 300 comments and 40 shares. BBO received a \$40 donation and 5 new people became [life time members of the BBO!](#) A success story ☺

Photos by Faye Hough and Alyssa Hough



## **THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS and Donors, including all who donated to the Birdathon participants in 2021**

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory extends a massive thank you to our many funders who supported our projects and conservation efforts in 2020-2021. We could not have accomplished so much if it was not for you! Thank you to:

Alberta Community Environment Action Fund	Alberta Conservation Association
Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Commission	Birds Canada's Great Canadian Birdathon
Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund	Beaver County
CanadaHelps Partner Giving	Canada Summer Jobs
Carson Integrated	Claystone Waste
Clean Harbors' Community Enhancement Grant	Edmonton Community Foundation
ECO Canada Co-op	Epps Memorial and Cedar Signs
FlipGive	Fortis Alberta,
Hauser Home Hardware – Camrose	Moonshine Café – Tofield
Nature Canada's Charles Labatiuk Nature Endowment Fund	NAIT Biological Science Students
PayPal Giving Fund	Spencer Environmental Management Services
TD Friends of Environment	WildBird General Store

We give a special thank you to the generous donations made in memory of Mary Hughes Weir. THANK YOU!!