



Beaverhill Bird Observatory
Spring Report 2016

By
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Executive Summary

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory's spring migration monitoring was conducted by Head Biologist Kevin Methuen, along with Assistant Biologists Meghan Jacklin and Emily Cicon. Migration monitoring was conducted from April 1st to June 20th, which was approximately five weeks longer than usual. This was possible due to unusually warm temperatures observed in April, having three trained staff at the start of the season and adequate funds. BBO staff operated thirteen mist nets through these dates and recorded 849 captures of 53 species, achieving an overall capture rate of 24.7 birds per 100 net-hours. Many other monitoring programs and maintenance activities were completed by staff, board members, dedicated volunteers, and 8 student interns.

Migration Monitoring

Thirteen mist-nets (2, 2X, 8, 9, 9X, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, and 57) were operated from April 1st to June 20th on days that were above zero degrees Celsius, relatively calm, and free of precipitation. A total of 3432.5 net hours were accumulated despite a number of cold mornings in April and May, and over 10 rain days in May and June. A total of 849 birds were captured, of which 663 were newly banded. Species diversity was exceptional, with 53 species captured (Table 1).

Table 1. Numbers of captures, mist-netting effort, capture rates, and number of species caught during spring migration monitoring at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory since 2001.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Captures	629	950	754	532	276	242	408	382
Birds Banded	472	740	546	424	196	169	318	288
Net hours (NH)	1756	2569	2219	1809	1570	1615	1813	1828
Capture Rate (birds/100 NH)	35.8	37.0	34.0	29.4	17.6	15.0	22.5	20.9
Species	39	55	44	38	32	31	44	38

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total Captures	500	497	412	459	324	841	810	849
Birds Banded	351	333	241	307	211	561	641	663
Net hours (NH)	1608	2016	1884	1997	1884	2615	2859	3432
Capture Rate (birds/100 NH)	31.1	24.7	21.9	23.0	17.2	32.2	28.3	24.7
Species	39	38	40	39	36	43	45	54

The five most commonly captured species this spring were Slate-colored Junco (160 captures, representing 19% of all captures), Least Flycatcher (158 captures, representing 19% of all captures), Clay-colored Sparrow (82 birds captured, 9% of captures), House Wren (50 birds captured, 6% of captures) and Yellow Warbler (47 birds captured, 6% of captures). These top five species made up 59% of the total number of birds caught. See Table 2 for full banding results.



There were several exciting captures this spring. BBO staff caught a Red-tailed Hawk, three Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, a Black-billed Magpie, two Sharp-shinned Hawks, two Connecticut Warblers, two Swamp Sparrows, an Oregon Junco, and a Winter Wren! On April 23rd 86 birds were caught, 70 of which were Slate-colored Juncos. The staff had another busy day on May 24th after a weekend of rain during the peak of migration and managed to catch 90 birds of 28 species!

Table 2. Total number and type of capture per species during 2016 spring migration monitoring at Beaverhill Bird Observatory (BBO). Repeat captures were banded in 2016 at BBO, Return captures were banded at BBO in a previous year, Foreign captures were banded at a location other than BBO, and Other captures were caught in a mist net but released un-banded, or caught more than once in a single day.

Species	Banded	Repeat	Return	Foreign	Other	Total
Alder Flycatcher	8	0	0	0	0	8
American Goldfinch	7	0	1	0	0	8
American Redstart	11	0	0	0	2	13
American Robin	19	5	3	0	5	32
American Tree Sparrow	21	2	0	0	0	23
Baltimore Oriole	6	0	1	0	0	7
Black-and-white Warbler	1	0	0	0	0	1
Black-billed Magpie	1	0	0	0	0	1
Black-capped Chickadee	5	17	8	0	0	30
Blackpoll Warbler	2	0	0	0	0	2
Brown-headed Cowbird	4	3	1	0	1	9
Cedar Waxwing	8	0	0	0	0	8
Chipping Sparrow	4	1	0	0	0	5
Clay-colored Sparrow	71	7	1	0	3	82
Common Yellowthroat	2	0	0	0	0	2
Connecticut Warbler	2	0	0	0	0	2
Downy Woodpecker	3	0	0	0	0	3
Fox Sparrow	6	0	0	0	0	6
Gray Catbird	4	0	0	0	0	4
Gray-cheeked Thrush	4	0	0	0	0	4
Hairy Woodpecker	4	0	1	0	1	6
Hermit Thrush	6	1	0	0	0	7
House Wren	34	13	1	0	2	50
Least Flycatcher	101	39	13	0	5	158
Lincoln's Sparrow	2	0	0	0	0	2
Magnolia Warbler	5	0	0	0	0	5
Mourning Warbler	11	0	0	0	0	11
Myrtle Warbler	13	0	0	0	1	14
Northern Waterthrush	2	0	0	0	0	2
Orange-crowned Warbler	5	0	0	0	0	5
Oregon Junco	1	0	0	0	0	1
Ovenbird	4	0	0	0	0	4
Pine Siskin	5	0	0	0	0	5
Red-eyed Vireo	1	0	0	0	0	1
Red-tailed Hawk	0	0	0	0	1	1
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	3	2	0	0	0	5
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	4	0	0	0	0	4
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	0	0	0	0	3	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	0	0	0	0	2
Slate-colored Junco	148	4	0	0	8	160
Song Sparrow	9	0	0	0	1	10
Swainson's Thrush	29	0	0	0	0	29
Swamp Sparrow	2	0	0	0	0	2
Tennessee Warbler	10	0	0	0	0	10
Traill's Flycatcher	4	0	0	0	0	4

Tree Swallow	1	0	0	0	0	1
Warbling Vireo	9	3	3	0	0	15
Western Palm Warbler	1	0	0	0	0	1
White-breasted Nuthatch	0	0	1	0	0	1
White-crowned Sparrow	1	0	0	0	0	1
White-throated Sparrow	27	0	0	0	2	29
Winter Wren	1	0	0	0	0	1
Yellow Warbler	28	13	3	0	3	47
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	1	0	1	0	0	2
Total	663	110	38	0	38	849

Staff surveyed birds along a standardized census route each day between April 1st and June 20th. Census results are combined with other incidental observations and daily banding totals to produce a Daily Estimated Total (DET) of the number, and type of species migrating through the Beaverhill Natural Area. Looking back at the DET data, many days are worth noting. Highlights included large flocks of American Tree Sparrows (over 150 individuals in a single flock) in the first week of April, nearly 8000 Snow Geese and 11 Northern Harriers on April 11th, 44 American Robins on April 17th, over 400 Slate-colored Juncos on April 23rd, 900 Sandhill Cranes on May 3rd, and 53 Least Flycatchers on June 2nd. By starting migration monitoring on April 1st, BBO staff were able to provide exceptional coverage of spring migration.

Other Banding

Apart from regular mist-netting for migration monitoring, BBO staff banded chicks from a few nests this spring. Six Northern Saw-whet Owls were banded during an orientation that was held for the Observatory's eight student interns. For the Big Birding Breakfast, staff banded seven White-breasted Nuthatches and four Mountain Bluebirds from nearby nests.



Guests at the breakfast were quite thrilled to be a part of this experience. Staff also banded young from a Great Horned Owl nest with raptor bander Hardy Pletz, Irene Crosland and the Stauffer family.

Student Interns

The BBO is fortunate to have eight student interns this season. Three interns are monitoring Tree Swallow nest boxes, two are monitoring House Wren nest boxes, two are conducting breeding bird surveys, and one is conducting butterfly surveys along a standardized route. Each group of interns has a mentor, who volunteers their time to ensure their project is successful. Board member Laurie Hunt organizes the BBO internship program which is funded by SCiP (Serving Community internship Program). These interns allow the Observatory to complete many more projects than the staff would be able to do on their own, which we are very grateful for.



Natural Area Stewardship

Over a two-day period, staff and volunteers removed a section of barb wire fence from within the Beaverhill Natural Area. This particular section started on Accipiter Alley and ran through our former Park MAPS site, across Harrier Highway, and up to Amisk Creek. A huge thanks goes out to Steve Andersen, Suzanne and Rick Cicon, and Fraser Methuen who all helped the staff complete this job, which made the Natural Area a safer place for wildlife.



Education and Outreach

The annual Big Birding Breakfast was held on June 4th at the Observatory. Over 70 guests were treated to crepes made by the legendary Janos Kovacs. BBO staff conducted mist-netting for songbirds and Geoff Holroyd took guests on an interpretive walk to Lister lake. A big thanks goes out to all of our volunteers and board members who contributed to this successful event, especially board member Helen Trefry who was the lead organizer.



One issue of the Willet was produced this spring by board member Helen Trefry and distributed to members in addition to being posted on our website. The BBO Facebook page has continued to grow since being created in 2013 and is now at over 830 page "likes."

BBO Assistant Biologist Meghan Jacklin wrote an article about BBO's events and our early start date, welcoming visitors to the observatory. Her article was successfully published in the Tofield Mercury, the Tofield local newspaper.

With help from Nature Alberta the BBO co-hosted an event on site for International Migratory Bird Day. This year's bird day marked the centennial of the Migratory Birds Convention Act, which protects migratory birds and their nests.

Helen Trefry attended a Parrot conference in Edmonton with Ray the Saw-whet Owl, BBO's education owl, where she sold memberships and increased the awareness surrounding our programs. Geoff Holroyd promoted our programs at the Snow Goose Chase in Tofield and BBO Assistant Biologist Emily Cicon operated a bird banding demonstration. Emily also represented BBO at a career fair at Hairy Ainley School in Edmonton where over 1500 students were in attendance, and gave a presentation on owls to the Camrose Wildlife Stewardship Society. Meghan Jacklin presented a talk to a pre-kindergarten class in Edmonton, complete with crafts and our education owl.



Great Canadian Birdathon

This year's birdathon was a hit! Along with a team of board members and volunteers, the BBO staff set out to identify as many bird species as they could by sight and sound in a 24-hour period. Starting at midnight in the Natural Area, Common Nighthawk, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, and Marsh Wrens were the first few species recorded. Irene Crosland combed the mudflats in the morning which produced ample numbers of shorebirds, while Jeff Manchuk focused on the Blackfoot and Sherwood Park areas and Zoltan Domahidi covered the Edmonton area for us. The day was capped off at Elk Island National Park

where we spotted a Canvasback that had been eluding us and were treated to an American Bittern which flew low over our heads. Near sunset a few diehard birders kept searching for the last few species and managed to hear a Winter Wren singing, in addition to discovering a Northern Goshawk on her nest. In the end, the team managed to bring in 133 species and raised over \$1000 for the BBO and Bird Studies Canada. Way to go team!



Acknowledgements

Volunteers are the backbone of this organization, and our work would not be possible without the countless hours they contribute. Thanks to Sara Pierce who helped us with banding and fireproofing the base of the bunkhouses, and Victoria Hansen who provided banding support on multiple days. A huge thanks goes out to Jeremy Lambe, who volunteered every few days and was a big help with banding. A huge thanks also goes out to Irene Crosland, who also volunteered every few days and provided support with everything from banding to cookies, jams, and breads. Thanks to Steve Andersen, Alyssa Bohart, and Alyshia who all helped with banding, sign painting, and other activities on many days. Thanks to Rollie Perrot who helped set up and operate the Big Birding Breakfast. Thanks to Al Degroot who cooked bacon for the breakfast and helped set up the lab in April. Thanks to Suzanne and Rick Cicon and Fraser Methuen for helping remove barb wire fence from the Natural Area, and Connor Charchuk for providing bird identification expertise and helping set up our rain barrels.

A huge thanks to board member and BBO chair Geoff Holroyd who helped set up the lab in April, built us a new step, brought out water and set up rain barrels, wrote and edited many grant applications, patched the road into the lab, represented us at the Snow Goose Chase, organized the paperwork for the upcoming Casino and volunteered his time for the BBO almost every single day. A huge thanks also to board member Helen Trefry who wrote the Willet, represented us at the Parrot show, patched the road into the lab, made great muffins and organized the Big Birding Breakfast and volunteers for our Casino fundraiser. And thank you to Debra King, BBO's treasurer who worked behind the scene to keep BBO's financial resources in order. Thanks to all other board members for your help at and away from the observatory. Our work would not be possible without you.

A huge thanks also goes out to Chris Vervoort, Jeremy Lambe, and the student interns that helped us establish our new MAPS sites. And thanks to Chris for taking professional quality photos at the Big Birding Breakfast.

Thank you to Steve and Kay from the Wildbird General Store for providing us monthly in-kind support in the form of bird seed. Your generosity knows no bounds!

The Tofield Library has become the BBO afternoon office complete with couches to write reports, and the ability to scan and print. Thank you Connie, Diane, Susan, Ashley, and Katelynn for your weekly support.

[BBO Chair's Note: Thank you to the BBO assistant biologists, Meghan Jacklin and Emily Cicon who persevered to keep all the BBO activities running smoothly. AND thank you to Kevin Methuen who steered the field operation to the excellent level of accomplishments as shown in this seasonal report]

Finally, the BBO has to extend a massive thank you to our funders. Our 2016 spring operations were made possible by financial support from the Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Liquor and Gaming Commission, TD Friends of the Environment, Nature Canada's Labatiuk Fund, Bird Studies Canada's Baillie Fund, and personal donations.

