



# Long-Term Volunteer Handbook

*Welcome! This handbook is designed to give you an idea of the setup, goings-on, and expectations during your stay at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory. We look forward to working with you!*

## **What is bird banding, and why is it important?**

Bird banding is a research technique used to understand bird populations. We catch birds in mist nets, place a lightweight numbered band on their leg, and collect data on their age, sex, and measurements to learn about migratory routes, lifespans, age and sex ratios, and population trends.

## **What you can expect from us**

We accept long-term volunteers of all skill levels, and our staff will ensure you receive thorough hands-on training in the fundamentals of bird banding and support your learning and well-being throughout the process. We want you to get the most out of this experience, so if you have any goals in mind for your stay, we will do our best to help you achieve them!

## **What we expect from you**

During your stay at the BBO, we ask that you do your part in keeping our communal spaces clean and tidy (doing your dishes, limiting clutter, etc.). We also ask that you assist staff with tasks beyond banding. Please be prepared to wake up early (for songbirds) or stay up late (for owls) and do lots of walking throughout the day. **Banding birds is a privilege** that you will work towards by building upon other fundamental skills (scribing, extracting, etc.). Although we will ensure that you get the opportunity to band, priority is to be given to staff. This is especially true on busy days, when staff will band, and we will ask you to help out with scribing, net checks, and events.

## **Contact Information**

As you work through this handbook and prepare for your stay, please reach out if you have any questions!

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## Our Programs & Events

Our field season runs from May to mid-November and is broken into **4 banding programs**:

1. Spring songbird Migration Monitoring (daily banding from May 1st to June 9th)
2. M.A.P.S. (periodic banding from June 10th to August 8th)
3. Fall songbird Migration Monitoring (daily banding from July 20th to October 20th)
4. Owl Migration Monitoring (nightly banding from September 1st to mid-November)

During spring Migration Monitoring, fall Migration Monitoring, and owl Migration Monitoring, we host **weekly ticketed banding events** for the public to attend. These events are limited to 20 attendees, and we provide drinks and snacks for them.

We also host **4 larger events** throughout the field season (please refer to the Long-Term Volunteer Calendar for the exact dates of the events):

1. Snow Goose Festival (2 days)
  - a. Tour groups are led into the natural area to birdwatch and observe banding operations  
Banding on these days is non-standard, and begins around 9am
  - b. Staff help run our booth at a trade show held in Tofield
2. World Migratory Bird Day (1 day)
  - a. Free and open house-style event with no limit on attendees
  - b. Staff and volunteers provide drinks and snacks to attendees, and host activities (crafts, face painting, feather toss for Tree Swallows, etc.) in addition to normal songbird banding
3. Big Birding Breakfast (2 days)
  - a. 50 attendees each morning
  - b. Staff and volunteers prepare a home-cooked breakfast and host activities (crafts, face painting, etc.) in addition to normal songbird banding
4. Supper and Saw-whets (2 days)
  - a. 50 attendees each evening
  - b. Staff and volunteers prepare a home-cooked dinner and host activities (crafts, face painting, etc.) in addition to normal owl banding

Events, especially our owl events, are busy and we need all hands on deck! Please do your part by helping with greeting visitors, crowd entertainment and management, directing visitors on net checks, refilling snacks and drinks, doing dishes, and assisting with setup/cleanup.

## A Typical Day

On a typical day of spring and fall songbird Migration Monitoring, nets are opened **30 minutes before sunrise** and operated for 6 hours. During songbird Migration Monitoring, a daily census is conducted 1.5 hours after net open. It follows a set route and lasts 40 minutes, documenting all birds seen/heard. One staff member will run census while the others carry out banding. On a typical owl banding day, nets are opened **30 minutes after sunset** and operated for 6 or 7 hours. The remainder of the days are spent doing maintenance tasks, office work, other monitoring projects, etc

M.A.P.S. banding only occurs on 3 days of every 10-day period and is highly weather dependant. The remaining non-banding days are often dedicated to the banding of Tree Swallow and Purple Martin nestlings, individual monitoring projects, trail maintenance and stewardship activities, and other tasks as necessary.

## BBO Location, Grounds, and Amenities

We are a relatively secluded research station, nestled in the forest approximately 10 minutes east of the town of Tofield, AB and 1 hour east of the city of Edmonton, AB. Staff visit Tofield regularly to launder our bird bags, refill drinking water jugs, get groceries or supplies, and visit *Mom's Ice Cream Corral!* Staff members spend their days off in and around Edmonton.

The grounds of the BBO is composed of a few buildings: 1 main building, 2 bunkhouses, an outhouse, and an outdoor solar shower with a foot-pump mechanism. Picnic tables are located in the station's clearing. We have 17 songbird Migration Monitoring nets and 10 owl Migration Monitoring nets, both arrays organized along ~1km loops.

The main station hosts our banding room, kitchen and sitting area, and an upstairs dedicated to displays, ambassador bird housing, and extra workspaces. Our kitchen has a gas stove and oven, refrigerators/freezers, various appliances, and is fully stocked with cooking and eating utensils. Drinking water is brought in from Tofield. Meals are not provided, so you will be responsible for your own meals and groceries.

Parking space is available in our Staff/Volunteer Parking Lot, which is about a ~400m walk from the station (see *Directions & Map*).

## Before Your Stay

Before you become a Long-Term Volunteer, **please complete the following:**

- Lifetime membership (\$10)
- Long-term volunteer application
  - Once your application is approved, we will reach out to you to schedule an online interview.
- Training and quizzes (also located on our website). By no means do we expect you to have a complete understanding of the trickier topics, but having a baseline knowledge will be very helpful!
  - Introduction to Scribing
  - Songbird Net Check Assistant
  - Songbird Extractor
  - Songbird Banding Assistant
- Familiarize yourself with our Top 20 Species List

## Suggested Packing List

We suggest that you include the following items when packing for your stay:

- Layers! - hot days are often accompanied by cool mornings
- Comfortable hiking shoes
- Rubber boots (can be provided) and rain gear
- Toiletries and a towel
- Daypack
- Water bottle and travel mug
- Headlamp
- Binoculars and/or a camera
- Sleeping bag/blanket and pillow (can be provided)
  - Bunkhouse accommodations will be provided, including a bunk bed and dresser.
- Mosquito-proof clothing (ex. long pants and long-sleeved shirts)
  - We are unable to wear bug spray while handling birds
  - We have some bug jackets available to borrow

## Additional Resources

To further prepare for your visit, here are some additional resources you may wish to use:

- North American Banding Council manuals
- NatureInstruct modules
  - The Dendroica module helps with learning identification by sight and sound
  - The Piranga module allows you to compare photos of birds of different ages and sexes
- BBO Banding Summaries
  - This page on the BBO website is where we publish our weekly summaries. They can give you an idea of who we catch and what we do on a regular basis!

## Directions & Map

Visit our Contact Us page to see an interactive map showing the BBO's location, as well as door-to-door instructions to arrive at the front gate of the BBO. Per the map below, there are two parking lots at the BBO: a Visitor Parking Lot (bottom left) and a Staff/Volunteer Parking Lot (top left). After arriving at the front gate of the BBO, go through it (closing it behind you) and follow the road through a field, veering left through another gate labelled "authorized" after you reach the Visitor Parking Lot. This marks the beginning of "Accipiter Alley" and will eventually lead you to the Staff/Volunteer Parking Lot.

