



Beaverhill Bird Observatory

Spring Report 2026

Xavier Quantz

Introduction



Net lane 61 filled with snow on April 30th

One of the recurring themes this spring was the abnormality of the weather. First of all, just before the field season began, we were hit by a major blizzard that caused the Snow Goose Festival to be closed and leaving us with the unenviable task of shovelling our net lanes clear. Shortly after, a brief heat wave rolled in. By the end of May, however, we were enduring the cold and gloom of a multi-day storm. All of this affected our field work, altered migration timing, and prevented some of our events.

Despite these hurdles, Head Biologist Jana Teefy and Assistant Biologists Jon van Arragon, Emelie Dykstra, Willow Zilliox, and Xavier Quantz continued working hard to make this another successful spring. This work included Migration Monitoring banding every day that weather allowed, running numerous events (including brand new workshops), conducting long-term monitoring projects, and much more.



Xavier posing atop a pile of snow vanquished from our net lanes

Banding



Mourning Warbler
(*Geothlypis philadelphia*)

Unsurprisingly, the odd weather this spring had a noticeable effect on our Spring Migration Monitoring. As always, spring banding occupied the majority of our time and occurred every morning that weather allowed. This resulted in a total 2,725.3 net hours between our 17 nets. Throughout the season, we caught 659 individual birds of 44 species. This year 70.0% (461) of the birds we caught were unbanded, while 27.5% (181) had been previously banded, either earlier this spring or in a previous year. The three most common species that we capture hasn't changed in many years and there was no deviation this year. Least Flycatchers made up almost a

quarter of all the birds we caught (163 captures and 24.7% of total captures). Although Clay-Coloured Sparrows (96 captures and 14.6% of total captures) and Yellow Warblers (89 captures and 13.5% of total captures) had significantly lower captures, they're numbers were still higher than any other species.



Ruffed Grouse
(*Bonasa umbellus*)

Table 1. Comparing Spring Migration Monitoring between years. More historical data was not included because four new nets were added to the standard line-up in 2025.

	2025	2026
Total Captures	909	659
Net Hours	3038.5	2725.3
Captures/100 Net Hours	29.9	25.6
Species Captured	46	44

The effects of the weather this year can be clearly seen as every banding metric is lower in 2026 compared to 2025. The most stark of these being the fact that 250 fewer birds were captured. One metric not shown in Table 1 are the returns, birds banded in a previous year. In 2025, 71 returns were captured while in 2026, 72 were captured. This may show that the weather only affected the migration of birds passing through the natural area while the birds that breed here were disrupted much less. This is great to see as returning birds are the most valuable data we can collect.



Fox Sparrow
(*Passerella iliaca*)



Veery
(*Catharus fuscescens*)

While we did catch fewer birds, the highlights of the season were arguably more exceptional than last spring! On the first day of the season a Fox Sparrow was spotted at our bird feeder. This is notable as they are typically only found much farther north in the boreal forest. Fortunately for us, just a few days later we caught not one but two of these spectacular birds! The other very notable species we caught this spring was a Veery. For both of these species it has been several years since one was captured at the BBO. Several other exciting, though regular, species were caught including a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Ruffed Grouse, Mourning Warbler, and Bay-breasted Warbler.



Bay-breasted Warbler
(*Setophaga castanea*)

While the vast majority of our spring banding is from the 17 Migration Monitoring nets we also had a pair of Saw-whet Owls successfully breed in one of our nest boxes. We banded the female as well as her single baby.

Events

The spring season usually begins with our largest event of the year, the Snow Goose Festival. Though the event was set to be another success, the sudden blizzard at the end of April meant that there was far too much snow and not nearly enough goose, so after much deliberation the Festival was canceled. Instead, the first event of the year was World Migratory Bird Day, which happened to coincide with the birthday of our ambassador bird Nina!



Nina the Burrowing Owl turned three on World Migratory Bird Day this year!



The BBO staff during a pit-stop of their Birdathon

This event included banding interpretation as usual, presentations on citizen science, a guided nature walk, and Tree Swallow feather toss.

Next up was the Birdathon, where the staff spent 20 consecutive hours searching for birds to help raise money for the BBO and Birds Canada. The staff found 110 species with some highlights including a Sharp-tailed Grouse, Dunlins, Surf Scoters, and Sabine's Gulls and managed to raise \$2,175! Geoff and Helen also conducted a Birdathon and saw 109 species and raised almost \$3,000. Thanks to all who supported these two teams!

We also hosted two new events. First, a workshop where we taught several members of the WildNorth staff how to age and sex birds to assist with their rehabbing. After that, we hosted another workshop where we brought several of our volunteers up to speed on bird extraction techniques. These workshops were quite successful, and we plan to introduce more in the coming months. Our next significant event was Big Birding Breakfast (BBB). Day one of BBB went off without a hitch; we entertained 47 visitors with crepes, bird banding, Tree Swallow feather toss, face painting by Emelie, and much more. Unfortunately, the weather took a turn for the worse and day two had to be canceled.



The BBO staff with faces painted, courtesy of Emelie, during Big Birding Breakfast!

In addition to all this, we hosted five standard Songbird Banding Events. Finally, we also hosted five school groups at the observatory. Between the 14 successful public events a total of 311 visitors were hosted at the BBO!

Projects

While banding is the highest priority during the spring, the BBO staff are each in charge of a long-term monitoring project. Emelie is continuing her research on Least Flycatcher nesting habits, Willow is taking over the Forest Breeding Bird Census, Xavier has returned to the Marsh Monitoring Program, and Jon began his second year of Shorebird Surveys. In addition to the staff-run projects, there are six projects done by 9 student interns. Tree Swallow nest boxes are monitored by Kelsey and Taylor, Purple Martin colonies by Maia, House Wren nest boxes by Nikolas and James, Grassland Breeding Bird Census by Lauren, butterflies by Sarah, and bat boxes by Amelie and Cassie. Also, thank you to the mentors for each of the respective intern monitoring projects: Ivy, Glen, Zach and Willow, Jon, John, and Jody.

While most of these projects are just getting off the ground in the spring season, Jon's Shorebird Surveys started right at the beginning of May. Between the ten surveys there have been 15,889 individual birds comprised of 28 species. Several rare shorebird species were spotted including Ruddy Turnstones, many many Dunlins, and two endangered species Red Knot and Piping Plover.



Two of the many Dunlins (*Calidris alpina*) that Jon found while surveying Mundare Beach

Volunteers

As a non-profit organization a huge part of what makes the Beaverhill Bird Observatory run as smoothly as it does is the work that our dedicated volunteers put in. Thank you to our Migration Monitoring volunteers: Ava, Bannor, Carmen, Elsa, Gabby, Jordyn, Juno, Kalia, Kelsey, Matt, Nash, Nikolas, and Patrick. As it is one of our busiest events, the Big Birding Breakfast requires a significant volunteer effort, so thank you to Janos, Geoff, Helen, Christie, Matt, and Sue. Finally, we were accompanied by four long-term volunteers who each spent at least one consecutive week at the observatory assisting with operations. Thank you for your help Adam and Jacob from Edmonton, Nadia from Massachusetts, and Ryan from Maryland.

<i>Species Name</i>	Banded	Repeat	Return	Unbanded	Grand Total
American Goldfinch	7		2		9
American Robin	7	4	4	1	16
American Tree Sparrow	1				1
Baltimore Oriole	10	15	8	1	34
Bay-breasted Warbler	1				1
Black-and-white Warbler	1				1
Black-capped Chickadee		5	5		10
Blackpoll Warbler	1				1
Brown-headed Cowbird		2	1	1	4
Cedar Waxwing	2				2
Chipping Sparrow	38				38
Clay-colored Sparrow	78	12	4	2	96
Common Yellowthroat	5			1	6
Eastern Warbling-Vireo	4	1	4		9
Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow	3				3
Gray Catbird	5		1		6
Gray-cheeked Thrush	1				1
Hairy Woodpecker		1		1	2
Hermit Thrush	2				2
Least Flycatcher	105	38	16	4	163
Lincoln's Sparrow	10				10
Mourning Warbler	1				1
Myrtle Warbler	9				9
Northern House Wren	26	6		1	33
Orange-crowned Warbler	2				2
Ovenbird	3				3
Red-breasted Nuthatch	1				1
Red-eyed Vireo	2				2
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1				1
Ruby-throated Hummingbird				3	3
Ruffed Grouse				1	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1				1
Slate-colored Junco	3				3
Song Sparrow	4				4
Swainson's Thrush	37				37
Tennessee Warbler	4				4
Traill's Flycatcher	12				12
Tree Swallow	6	2	3		11
Unidentified Warbling Vireo	1				1

Unspecified Yellow-rumped Warbler	3				3
Veery	1				1
White-throated Sparrow	17				17
Yellow Warbler	44	20	24	1	89
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2	3			5
Grand Total	461	109	72	17	659

2,575.25 net-hours

25.6 captures/100 net-hours

Repeat - banded 90 or fewer days ago, at the BBO
 Return - banded over 90 days ago, at the BBO
 Other - caught but not banded (e.g. escaped)



The Beaverhill Bird Observatory is a proud member of the Beaver County and Tofield communities. We thank our many supporters and funders that are shown below, plus donations made in memory of Mary Hughes Weir, John Honsaker, and from the Wainwright Wildlife Society. Visit www.beaverhillbirds.com for more information.



Environment and Climate Change Canada

