



The WILLET

Edited by: Jana Teefy

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2026 Summary

By Jana Teefy, Head Biologist

2026 has proven to be an unpredictable year so far, with spring blizzards in late April, excessive thunderstorms, heavy rain and high winds thorough the summer. Unfortunately, the weather led to the cancellation of key events, including the Snow Goose Festival and part of Big Birding Breakfast. Luckily, most of our events were able to run smoothly, including World Migratory Bird Day, one day of our beloved Big Birding Breakfasts, and our spring songbird banding events. We introduced hands-on banding workshops for volunteers this year, which were a great success. The first was for the staff at WildNorth, who learned ageing and sexing of songbirds, and the second was for our more experienced volunteers who wanted to improve their skills in bird handling and extracting from mist nets. Both workshops received excellent feedback and were rewarding to complete. We will be running two more workshops this fall. More info can be found [here](#). Availability is limited, so apply now!

Despite the weather challenges, we forged ahead with our annual migration monitoring, MAPS monitoring, long-term intern and staff monitoring projects. Unsurprisingly, there was a noticeable decline in the total captures this year with 659 individuals and 44 species captured in our 17 standard nets, giving a total of 29.9 captures/100 net hours. Of those, 461 (70%) were newly banded and 181 (28%) were recaptures banded earlier this spring or returning from previous year. Least Flycatchers, Clay-colored Sparrows, and Yellow Warblers were our most common captures and highlight species such as Fox Sparrow, Veery, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Ruffed Grouse, Mourning Warbler, and Bay-breasted Warbler were rather exciting to band. Read the full spring report [here](#).

We hosted a handful of long-term volunteers who stayed on site for a week or more – Ryan (Maryland), Jacob (Edmonton), Adam (Edmonton), Nadia (Massachusetts), Ariel (Calgary), and Calvin (California). Unfortunately, some of our long-term volunteer shifts were cancelled due to the flooding in June (sorry Adrien and Mathias!!). Thank you to all of our local and long-term volunteers for all of your help so far this season! Are you interested in becoming a local or long-term volunteer? Find more information [here](#).

Upcoming:

- Fall Migration Monitoring, running July 20th to October 20th, is off to a great start already with over 300 captures and 26 species already!
- Our Young Ornithologists Workshop is underway. We welcomed 10 youths from across Canada to learn bird banding and what field biology is all about.
- Events start August 29th



Fox Sparrow



Bay-breasted Warbler



Ruffed Grouse

Forces of Nature

By Jana Teefy, Head Biologist

This spring brought unusually severe weather to the natural area, with blizzards, persistent rain, flooding and high winds creating challenging conditions for both people and wildlife. In late April, we experienced a major blizzard, shutting down events and access to the station. Luckily, most of the snow was melted again by the time we opened the station on May 1st. and we were able to set up after shoveling snow off the net lanes. Record breaking rain this spring has caused extensive flooding throughout Beaver County, including the town of Tofield and the Beaverhill Natural Area. On average, Beaver County receives 247 mm of rain each spring. This spring, we've had 653mm of rain, 246mm in June alone!

Our weir was designed to hold back water from Beaverhill Lake to create wetland habitat, now called Lister Lake, in times of low water. Unsurprisingly, the weir was not able to contain the excessive amounts of rainwater this year, which caused water to divert around the weir and flow through the forest and trail systems from Lister Lake into Beaverhill Lake, leaving the natural area inaccessible and forcing BBO to close down the station and leave site temporarily. During peak flooding in late June, water reached chest deep levels in the grassland between Lister and Beaverhill Lakes, hip deep levels on Harrier Highway, Flicker Freeway, and Duck Drive, near the weir, thigh deep on the interior trails, and ankle to mid-calf deep near the clearing. Thankfully, all of our buildings remained safe from flooding.

Unfortunately, this also included most of our MAPS nets, prevented us from running our summer banding at our Sora Pond and Lister Lake sites. Those sites remain flooded. Thankfully, we were able to run most of our BBO Lab MAPS site through the flooding as well as our staff and intern long-term monitoring projects when possible.

Sadly, this happened at the time that most of our breeding birds were incubating eggs or nestlings and the majority of our grassland nests were washed away. Many of the cup nests in trees also disintegrated in the rain or were blown out of the trees. Cavity nesters faced days of rain and were unable to feed their young. Despite these challenges, many of our birds attempted a second clutch! We are curious to see how this affects migration timing. It wasn't just the birds that were impacted by the floods. We have 3 known coyote dens and 2 snake hibernacula, all of which were or are still underwater.

Once the flowing water slowed, we had an abundance of standing water throughout the natural area, which led to unbearable population booms of mosquitoes, leaving the staff anemic and incredibly itchy. Some places reported up to 15x the average mosquito populations. Thankfully, this means plenty of food for our insectivore birds, bats and their young.

In addition to the rain, we have seen wind gusts reach up to 140 km/hr causing carnage in our forest, blowing over or breaking seemingly healthy trees, many onto the trails and some onto our nets. The main mast of our Motus tower was also damaged in some of the winter storms, disabling our Motus, cell booster, and wifi antennae for a few weeks. Thankfully, iTower Communications climbed our 80-foot tower and repaired the damaged mast and the staff are diligently working to clear the trails.

We look forward to welcoming you to the natural area. Please come prepared and bring waterproof footwear and mosquito protection. Conditions are slowly improving, but every storm means more fallen trees, standing water on the trails, and booms in mosquito populations. Abundant sunshine and the excessive rain also have the grass growing as fast as we can cut it. Please be patient as we are working hard to maintain access in the natural area.





Extraordinary Extracurriculars - Spring Events at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory

By Willow Zilliox

Every year, during spring and fall migration, an abundance of events are held at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory.

The first event hosted at the BBO this year was on May 9th for World Migratory Bird Day, an annual celebration of bird migration and chance to raise awareness for conservation, with this year's theme being citizen science. The day featured banding demonstrations, a feather toss to our nesting Tree Swallow colony, crafts and facepainting, and two presentations by Xavier Quantz and Willow Zilliox. Xavier's presentation demonstrated how to use the citizen science platforms eBird and iNaturalist, and was followed by a guided nature walk! Willow's presentation was focused on Alberta's wetlands and the BBO's Marsh Monitoring Program.

Well-known and well-loved are our Songbird Banding events, where guests accompany staff on a morning of banding. These events are held on weekends and provide the opportunity to watch and learn about the rationale and techniques of bird banding. We were able to host five of these events through the month of May.



BBO staff during their Birdathon Fundraiser



Yellow Warbler on a mist net during the songbird extracting workshop

A new addition made to our event portfolio is structured workshops! Currently not open to the general public, these days are dedicated to teaching the fundamental skills for banding, namely safe extraction from mist nets, ageing, and sexing. Following an introductory presentation by Jon, the participants gained hands-on experience sharpening their skills under the supervision of staff. Two workshops were held this spring. One was an extraction-based workshop attended by six BBO volunteers. The other was an ageing and sexing-based workshop attended by staff from WILDNorth, in reciprocation for a workshop on bird injuries they provided for BBO's staff back in March!



Emelie and Willow teaching ageing and sexing on a Sharp-shinned Hawk during a workshop

Another important spring day was the staff's annual Birdathon, held on May 20th. This day is a fundraiser in association with Birds Canada, with the aim of documenting as many species as possible in a 24-hour span. The BBO's "Brilliant & Beautiful Ornithologists" were able to see a whopping 110 species and raise \$2,175! Our immense gratitude goes out to everyone who donated to our team!

Finally, an annual favourite, Big Birding Breakfast, kicked off on May 30th! Attendees were treated to a wonderful breakfast prepared by dedicated volunteers and spent a fine morning learning about birds and bird banding! Unfortunately, rain storms prevented the second morning from unfolding.

Hosting events enables us to connect with bird enthusiasts in our community and share our knowledge and passion with others! Check out our website to see our fall event schedule and book tickets, we look forward to seeing you there!

A Forgetful Birdathon – 26 May 2026

By Geoff Holroyd



We even forgot to take a photo

It wasn't a Birdathon to forget but rather the participants who were forgetful. Our team named the Beaverill Birds comprised Helen and Geopff. Helen arrived at my shoreline property 10 minutes early already wired on coffee. "Lets go". So, I told her and Raven "kennel up" and away we went, no time for a look at my feeders nor the calm waters of Islet Lake. We made a few stops headed north with many expected birds missing and the forests and marshes relatively quiet. Was the cold dry spring going to hurt our species total? One thing not lacking was the many commuters whizzing by us- we forgot to do the Birdathon on a Sunday when roads are quieter.

At the entrance to Elk Island National Park, I anticipated birds on Astotin Lake. Then it hit Geoff. His scope was at home not in the car. He was anticipating taking it to the shore for a first view of Islet Lake. But forgot it. At about the same time Helen reached for her water bottle, not there. She had forgotten it at home. Where was the park pass? Forgotten at home. We double checked that Raven was in the car; We didn't forget her.

The birding was likewise desperate. At the park entrance there were neither Black Terns nor Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Tawayik Lake was dry, but a lonely Eastern Phoebe called from the picnic shelter. At Astotin Lake we scanned with binoculars, but many waterfowl were over a kilometer away. Were there Western Grebes or Scoters out there? Without a scope we couldn't tell. A colorful Avocet was on the shore which was a small consolation. It also became clear that some migrants had not yet returned with the full suite of thrush and warbler calls incomplete.

By now it was 9am and we had only seen 68 species, 10 or 20 species below the usual. A loon on the most northerly pond in the park was a welcome addition. Fortunately, the pond is small, so the missing scope wasn't needed.

At Cindy Wetland north of Mundare we added a few shorebirds, but it was obvious the bulk of the arctic migrants were already gone. By noon we were at 81 species when we should have 100. What do two desperate intrepid birders do? Stop at the Mundare Greenhouse and buy hanging plants for the BBO center.

We headed south with reports of shorebirds at Mundare beach on the east side of Beaverhill Lake. But once there we couldn't see or find the beach. We forgot to ask BBO staff where they accessed the 'beach'. The temperature hit 34C. I had a few drops of water for Raven but had forgotten to fill my water bottle or bring extra water. We also realized that we had forgotten to check the weather forecast. We were birding in a Heat Dome, no birds were calling in the grasslands, and we were now concerned about the dog and the plants in the heat.

At Amisk Bridge the Cliff Swallows were there and in Kallel Pond there were 100+ Ibis. Our species total was creeping up, but we forgot to count how high we were by that time. Must have been heat stroke which we fought off with ice creams at 'Mom's Ice Cream Parlor'. Then off for a 3pm tea at Helen's home where Phil and two friends were waiting to celebrate my birthday with a cake and a pie. A Grey Catbird called and our first hummingbird came to a feeder; we hadn't forgotten that we were on a Birdathon! We picked up Trefry's scope.

The next stop was a nice surprise. Edmonton birders had spotted shorebirds on the north shore of shriveled up Hastings Lake at the south end of Range Road 204. There we found a keen young birder putting on hip waders at +30C to try to see a Bar-tailed Godwit, a stray from Alaska. We checked eBird which showed a Hudsonian Godwit had also been seen the previous day. The drying lake was alive with waterfowl, gulls, terns, and a handful of shorebirds but no godwits for us. Time to quit. As Helen left Geoff's place, he saw her scope still in the back of his car; she had forgotten it!

The tally of the day showed a respectable 108 species, not a record but not too embarrassing. Thanks for your support of our Birds Canada Birdathon and the Beaverhill Bird Observatory. You can still donate at https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/Birds_Canada/p2p/birdathon26/team/beaverhill-birders/captain/beaverhill-birders or donate directly to BBO any time of the year at <https://www.beaverhillbirds.com/get-involved/donate/>

Cheers and Happy Birding Summer

Geoff Holroyd and Helen Trefry (and Raven)

UPDATE: 109 species; we forgot to write down the small group of Red-breasted Mergansers on Hastings Lake!

Snow Goose Festival Snowed Out

By Geoff Holroyd

Too much Snow and not enough goose. That was the story on April 25 and 26, 2026 when we cancelled the festival. A major low-pressure system sat over Saskatchewan sending weather, anticlockwise, through northern Alberta into the Edmonton region. A steady stream of moisture came south with -3°C temperatures. The snow was steady all day Friday and continued somewhat lighter but continued Saturday and another dusting overnight into Sunday morning. Vendors started calling the Tofield Town office to cancel their booths in the trade show in the Tofield Arena.



We called an emergency meeting of the organizing committee on Friday morning. The bus company said their buses were ready and able. Birding scouts were out finding flocks despite the snow. The county highway crew said the roads didn't need ploughing from his vantage point in Ryley, so we agreed to go ahead, Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead. But as the day wore on and the snow got deeper in Tofield, we worried that the roads wouldn't be open on Saturday morning, that the arena would be half empty with all the cancellations. Then the county highway supervisor said

that the ploughs would not be out early enough on Saturday to open the roads that we planned to use; the snow had reached Ryley. We had visions of our buses stuck with 30 passengers in the middle of the storm. Vanita and I quickly discussed the deteriorating conditions and agreed to cancel the festival. She had the unenviable task of contacting public who had purchased tickets, the banquet attendees and caterers, all the vendors, the buses and the volunteers to cancel the event.

The cancellation echoed through the internet, at least the local news contacts. While the cancellation was sad news, the intense storm brought much needed moisture to the Edmonton region. The ponds, creeks and lakes that were drying out last autumn will get a much need pulse of water when the temperatures reach 18C by the end of the week!

The event wasn't a total write-off. Over 5,000 copies of the Snow Goose Festival newspaper had been distributed to local newspaper subscribers, school children in and around Edmonton, through the local bird supply stores and numerous other outlets. The newspaper contained stories about Snow Goose migration, Trumpeter Swan conservation, Beaverhill Lake's shorebirds and marsh birds, Nest reuse by Least Flycatchers, Avian influenza, Upland Sandpipers, American Kestel migration and site fidelity, and the Beaverhill Biosphere. In other words, a lot of people were exposed to many bird conservation stories that they likely would not see otherwise. That is success in communications. Add in a few radio and TV interviews, articles in the Sherwood Park News and lots of social media coverage, and a lot of folks know about birds than they did in March. If you haven't seen the newspaper, it is on-line at www.snowgoosefestival.ca.

As for the Snow Geese, they were hunkered down in ponds and fields waiting for warmer temperatures to resume their flight to the arctic. During the storm, flocks of 2000 geese were reported in Beaver County fields, by our tenacious scouts.

Thanks to all who worked so hard to prepare for this year's Snow Goose Festival. To the amazing volunteers who stepped up when needed, THANKS. Geoff Holroyd and Vanita Eglauer - Snow Goose Festival co-chairs.

The UpsanDowns of Big Birding Breakfast 2026

By Geoff Holroyd

Saturday of the BBB was a perfect morning. The heat wave with temperatures in the high 20°C of the previous week broke on Saturday. Although it was a bit windy, staff were able to open the nets and catch migrant and resident birds on 30 May. A team of volunteers and staff served drinks, muffins and fruit while Janos, Sue, and Andra toiled in the kitchen creating a stream of crepes for the hungry visitors. Christie and Helen delivered the fresh food to the deck where plates were emptied quickly. Geoff greeted visitors as they arrived while Emelie, Willow and Xavier led net checks every 30 minutes.

Between net checks, Keith (Red-tailed Hawk) and Nina (Burrowing Owl) posed for selfies and talked about their history as avian ambassadors. Emelie created artistic face paints on all that asked. Geoff led visitors to the grasslands, talked about the ecology and migrations of Purple Martins and Tree Swallows based on BBO's research; then their favorite activity, sending feathers into the air to the enjoyment of the nesting Tree Swallows that swooped among the group to catch the feathers and take them to their new nests. Many attendees were repeat visitors who thanked us for another amazing morning.

Then the weather changed. Sunday started with strong winds and rain; high of 10°C. Over 30mm fell before noon. Fortunately, we decided to cancel on Saturday afternoon; no visitors were stranded with muddy roads and trails, and staff were left with dozens of muffins to tie them over until the sunshine arrives.

Many thanks to the staff and volunteers who made Saturday so successful.



Staff and volunteer, Nadia, with face paintings courtesy of Emelie during Big Birding Breakfast



Janos making crepes for Big Birding Breakfast

Volunteer Highlight

Janos Kovacs

By Geoff Holroyd



How many crepes has Janos made over the years? We don't know but the Crepe spectacular was started in 1996. With 30 years of crepe making the number is in the thousands! Janos has been the kitchen fixture making crepes non-stop on the Big Birding Breakfasts as it was renamed. In 2026 he refused to take a break until the BBO guests and staff's stomachs were satisfied.

When Janos is not at the Big Birding Breakfast, he is banding at the Lady Flower Gardens (Visser farm), and at Mackenzie Bird Observatory in northern BC. Previously he was an active member of the Nova

Scotia Bird Club and banded birds in that province. He has volunteered at the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory, Inglewood (Calgary) banding society, and Long Point Bird Observatory

I met with Janos and Joanie recently to learn more about his/their background. Just after WW2, Janos who was born and lived in Hungary caught goldfinches and sold them at the local farmers market to earn money to help his mother feed their family. Various people would show off the birds and those who had the prettiest song sold first. Two mentors were impressed by his care of the birds and offered to take him under their wings (couldn't resist) and his passion was born. They introduced him to bird banding; a lifetime hobby

During the 1956 Hungarian revolution Janos left his country by swimming across the Danube and escaping to Vienna and then on to a refugee camp in England. Shortly afterwards he was sent to Canada where he worked on the railway in Kamloops. Since his mother was ill, he returned to Hungary and did his military service and trained as a tool and die maker. Eventually these skills allowed him to travel to Vienna with his soccer team. He then made the decision not to return to Hungary. After living in Vienna for a while, he made his way back to Toronto in 1968. He was lucky enough to meet and marry a woman from Nova Scotia, Joanie who has stayed with him for over 55 years.

They lived in Nova Scotia for a few years, but it wasn't until after 1977 when they moved to Edmonton that Janos reconnected with bird banders and was able to return to his favourite hobby. In 1984 they went back to Nova Scotia for a decade where he banded birds including at Brier Island Banding Station. Then they moved back to Edmonton. Janos started a bird banding station at the Strathcona Science Park which operated for 23 years (1994-2016) before moving to Lady Flower Gardens in northeast Edmonton where it still operates. Janos hosted many groups at this easily accessible site in Edmonton. He took particular pleasure in mentoring young people about bird banding at these sites. Friends organized a surprise party for Janos in 2016 to thank him for his years of service as the master bander. At his 80th birthday party he said "Let's talk about birds all day long" with side conversations about orchids accepted.

Joanie mentioned the fulfillment Janos has found from his love of birds, nature and the comradery of the friends he has met along the way. Also, his enjoyment in mentoring young people here and when he is volunteering at MacKenzie Bird Observatory. They have one daughter and one granddaughter. Joanie was a fashion designer in Yorkville district of Toronto. In 1977 when they moved to Edmonton she went back to school for a degree in social work. They are both now retired and enjoy life in Old Strathcona with escapes to banding stations when the opportunity arises. Joanie commented that one of Janos's abilities was to ignore any local people politics while banding. He enjoyed banding birds and teaching others. Many current banders owe their skill and enjoyment to the pioneering efforts of Janos, with Joanie backing him. We at Beaverhill Bird Observatory thank Janos for his many efforts to support the growth of the bird observatory's programs.



Janos Kovacs with his new mug, a thank you present from BBO.



Janos in front of a primitive hut in Hungary



Janos at BBO making crepes for Big Birding Breakfast

Janos has made crepes since the inception of the Big Birding Breakfast in the late 1990s. At about 200 crepes per day times 2 days per year time 30 years, we estimate that Janos has made over 10,000 crepes to the enjoyment of generations of visitors and staff.

THANK YOU Janos!

Upcoming Events



Songbird Banding events starting on August 30th

Interpretive banding demonstrations where you can learn about migrating and locally breeding birds, how we age and sex birds, and the importance of bird banding for bird conservation.



Fall Owl Banding events starting on September 12th

Interpretive banding demonstrations where you can learn about migrating and locally breeding owls.

**By popular demand,
we are introducing
Adult Only Owl
Banding Events on
Sunday nights!**



Supper and Saw- whets September 26 and 27th

Featuring interpretive banding demonstrations, home-cooked vegetarian dinner, kids' crafts, face painting, and other family friendly activities.

[Get Your Tickets HERE!](#)

Workshops

We are excited to continue our adult workshops this fall! Open to current volunteers who have bird handling experience and want to improve their skills.

- Ageing and Sexing workshop August 29
- Extraction and handling workshop Sept 5

[Apply here!](#)

Interested in volunteering?

[Check it out here!](#)

Parking

Friendly reminder to park in the visitor parking lot and follow the walking trail into the observatory.

Parking in the staff parking lot is by request only.

Those with mobility difficulties are asked to contact

biologist@beaverhillbirds.com



Map marking the visitor parking lot and walking trails to the observatory

School field trips

Did you know that we offer class field trips to the observatory in the spring and fall for guided hikes and interpretive banding demonstrations?

BirdSmart Education

Now taking bookings for in-classroom curriculum-linked presentations with a live education raptor. Program starts November 18th, 2026

Contact

education@beaverhillbirds.com for more information



Questions?

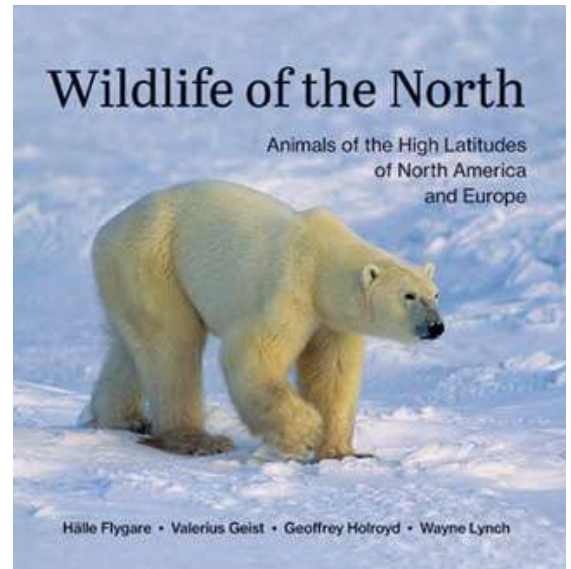
Reach out to our Events Team at education@beaverhillbirds.com

Wildlife of the North

Read about the polar mammals, birds, plants, icecaps and glaciers of North America and Europe with stunning photos. Co-authored by BBO Chair and ornithology expert with over 36 years experience in the Canadian Wildlife Service, Geoff Holroyd.

Signed copies available through Geoff Holroyd and at the observatory. Unsigned copies available through Amazon.

Get your copy now!



Tru Earth Detergent Fundraiser

Please consider supporting the environment and BBO by ordering through our fundraiser link or scan the QR code to place an order



Save Up to 50% on Back-to-School Bundles

*Select bundles only.



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Volunteer Highlight

Nadia Wilkins



My time spent as a long-term volunteer at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory was an incredible learning experience which reflected great expertise and passion from the staff, other volunteers, and surrounding community. I had found the BBO online and was a little apprehensive about traveling from Boston and living at the station for nearly a month, but I immediately found myself welcomed into the routine. Head Biologist Jana picked me up from the airport and delivered me to staff member Willow, who helped me pick up groceries in Tofield and get situated upon arrival, and by the very next morning I was up for migration monitoring banding at 4:30.

There is a lot to learn about the process. I had some previous experience assisting at a banding station but had minimal significant ability beyond scribing on paper; staff helped me with learning net open and checks, scribing with Google Sheets, and later learning extraction techniques and even doing some banding. I was very grateful for online learning materials that biologists Jon and Jana had put together on these many different aspects of the banding process for review before I arrived, but there is something really unique about getting to handle a bird physically.

As an enthusiastic birder, I was surprised by how drastic size differences felt in the hand: robins are almost uncomfortably large to hold (and live up to their genus name *Turdus* for reasons you could probably guess), while little Yellow Warblers seem even more delicate up close. Extracting birds from the net was something I didn't really understand until I had done it myself in person with supervision and excellent advice. Practice really does make better. Further, I had no real experience with aging and sexing birds, so it was very cool to dip my toes into this kind of learning using the Pyle guide and the much more intuitive guidance of staff. I feel that I have barely begun and that there is much more for me to understand in the future.

The collective thrill of encountering an interesting bird made every day feel different despite the routine. During my time volunteering, I encountered many Least Flycatchers and Yellow Warblers, which are quite cool themselves, but the odd Cedar Waxwing (so soft!) or the vocal Gray Catbird (meow!) brought smiles all around even on mornings when mosquitoes swarmed in the hundreds. A favorite individual of mine was a recaptured female Hairy Woodpecker that had previously been banded in 2014. This year, she has a nest right behind our outhouse with at least three very squeaky polka-dotted babies.

This opportunity for delight is definitely not exclusive to staff or volunteers: The BBO hosted several groups and events during my stay, including a Big Birding Breakfast with yummy crepes, several school classes, a workshop on extraction, and even curious hikers passing through. I also overlapped with two other long-term volunteers, Adam and Jacob, as well as a number of interns and other volunteers. Their willingness to share, interpret, and interact with the public makes me feel that this station is not only working to create good data but also doing the important and necessary task of disseminating information to a broad audience in the interest of conservation and community.

There are additionally many ongoing projects beyond banding: among them, Emelie is monitoring Least Flycatcher nests, Jon surveys shorebirds at Beaverhill Lake, Xavier listens for rails at the marsh, and Willow maps breeding bird areas by their songs. Somehow everyone also found time for dishwashing, housekeeping, trips into town to launder bird bags and eat ice cream, and making meals together. Although a number of days during my stay were too rainy or windy for banding and too dark for our solar array to generate any power, we managed to keep busy.

On the whole, I feel that after learning so much in the past weeks I have still only just scratched the surface of what there is to discover about birds and banding, and I am very indebted to the BBO and its lovely community. Many thanks to Jana, Jon, Willow, Xavier, and Emelie for all of their teaching and whimsy, as well as Irene for her conversation and incredible hospitality (and hot shower), Adam and Jacob for sharing the volunteer experience with me, the local volunteers and interns for their contributions to the station, Helen for the opportunity to meet ambassador birds Keith the Red-Tailed Hawk and Nina the Burrowing Owl, and Geoff for the existence of the BBO in the first place.

Soggy Surveys - Marsh Monitoring Program 2026

By: Xavier Quantz



Pied-billed Grebes (*Podilymbus podiceps*) had a dramatic decline in detections in 2026.



Conversely, the Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) had a huge increase in detections this year.



The Lister Lake wetland at the end of an evening survey.

Wetlands are common across Canada, but each year this fact gets less and less true. This is important to keep in mind as wetlands provide numerous benefits, such as being strongholds for biodiversity, naturally filtering our water, and protecting us from floods. Yet, as important as wetlands are, they are equally difficult to access and study. While bird populations can tell us a lot about the quality of a habitat and whether this habitat is improving or worsening, studying these birds is challenging. To solve this issue, the BBO implemented the Marsh Monitoring Program (MMP) four years ago and, seeing its success, expanded it last year.

The focus of the MMP is to detect ten target species of important wetland birds. Due to the secrecy that many wetland birds exhibit, the surveys use recordings of the calls produced by five of the target species, a technique called playback. These species are Yellow Rail, Sora, Virginia Rail, American Bittern, and Pied-billed Grebe. While this can make finding these furtive species easier, it can also cause them stress, so it should only be used regularly in conjunction with scientific methodology. These playback surveys are conducted at two sets of eight points. One set, the near-side, has been used since 2022 and is located along the west shore of Lister Lake. The second set, the far-side (unrelated to the cartoon), was introduced in 2025 and is located on the east shore of the Lake.

Each year, between May 20th and June 30th, four of these playback surveys are conducted at each point. Unfortunately, the importance of wetlands in flood protection became obvious when the intense rains of June caused the water level of Lister Lake and its adjacent wetlands to rise by almost a meter. This made conducting any surveys towards the end of June impossible. As a result, only three surveys were conducted at each near-side point and a mere two at each far-side point.

Despite this act of nature, there was still enough data to learn about the BBO's wetlands in 2026. First of all, eight of the ten target species were detected this year: Yellow Rail, Sora, Virginia Rail, American Bittern, Pied-billed Grebe, Eared Grebe, Horned Grebe, and Nelson's Sparrow. The detection rates for these species largely remained similar to last year. However, Pied-billed Grebes had lower detections in 2026 than in any other year. One possible explanation for this is that Eared Grebes were detected nearly five times as frequently than in previous years on the far-side and nearly 20 times as frequently on the near-side. The cause of that detection increase remains uncertain, however.

The MMP playback surveys can be conducted either just after sunrise or just before sunset. This possibility raises the question of whether these two time periods will result in differing detection rates among the target species. So far, the results show that this is simply not the case for any of the target species, strengthening the justification for the current methods.

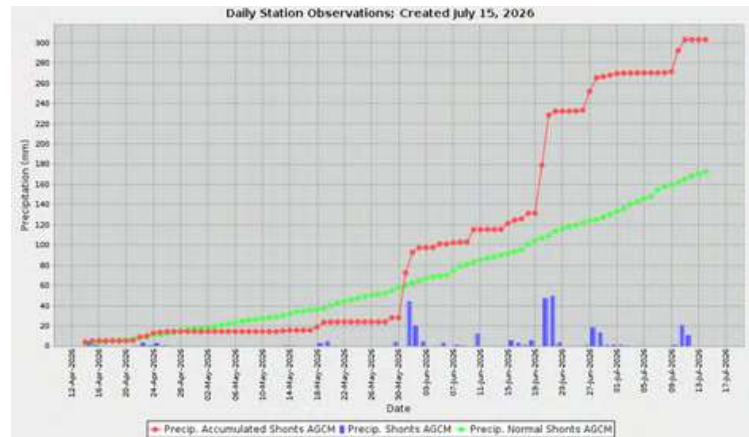
In spite of the rainiest June in our recorded history, the MMP still managed to expand our understanding of our threatened wetlands and secretive birds that call this habitat home.

A Rainy Nesting Season for Least Flycatchers at the BBO

By: Emelie Dykstra

The nesting population of Least Flycatchers at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory were once again plentiful and active this year for the 2026 breeding season. As small, open-cup tree nesting songbirds, it is understood in the literature that their nests are very susceptible to weather conditions, like rain and wind.

The amount of precipitation in the spring and summer of 2026 far surpassed the precipitation of any other year where Least Flycatcher nesting was observed. Consequently, many nests were structurally compromised. In total, thirteen nests were active: three reused from 2025, and ten newly constructed for the 2026 season. Interestingly, all



Daily rain accumulation actual (red) vs average daily accumulation (green)

the failed active nests were new nests, although the opportunity for nest reuse was limited this year, as many nests from previous years were no longer present in trees. Interestingly, one old nest had fallen out of the tree on June 9, but the same nest site was found being reused on July 13.

26 old nests were initially evaluated in May, and only 15 were found remaining within the study area. Fourteen nests were found, six from previous years and eight active new nests. 30 nests totally were surveyed consistently, with four nests (active or inactive) falling from trees or sustaining significant damage following the onset of heavy rain on May 29.



Despite having eleven active nests total, only five nests were successful. Three nests failed due to assumed predation, as the nests were intact, but the eggs or nestlings were missing. Three nests failed due to weather events, classified by whole and damaged eggs on the ground near the nest and the entire nest structure being found on the ground. The amount of rain this season was significantly above normal, as seen by the nearby Alberta Climate Information Service (ACIS) weather station.



The Least Flycatchers at the BBO certainly had a difficult breeding season, but there is hope for a successful second half to the summer. One old nest site was observed being reused on July 13, with three eggs yet

to hatch. Two more nests were found with nestlings in them on July 16, indicating a second wave of nesting. Other individuals in the area were spotted carrying nesting material, a sign that new nests are being established! Despite the extreme weather and rainy summer so far, these little birds are tough and ready to try again.

Surveying the Symphony - 2026's Forest Breeding Bird Census

By: Willow Zilliox

Every year, a familiar symphony of birdsong settles into the Beaverhill Natural Area, composed of the species who breed and raise their young in our forest. For the past decade, student interns and BBO staff have conducted surveys, known as the Forest Breeding Bird Census (FBBC), to decipher the territories of the individuals responsible for the music.

In order to accomplish this, a 500m x 500m grid (0.25km², 25 hectares) has been established in the woods surrounding the lab. Six surveys were conducted this year on fair weather mornings between June 3rd and June 24th. The transects of this grid were walked and the locations where individual birds are singing, calling, or interacting with other birds were noted on a datasheet. A significant interaction is that of “counter-singing”, where two birds of the same species are singing simultaneously in an effort to establish and defend the bounds of their territory. After all the surveys are completed, maps for each commonly-detected species were created by compiling all observations and drawing territories around clusters and between countersinging sites.

Birds frequently documented on this year's surveys, in order of increasing abundance, were Baltimore Orioles, Eastern Warbling Vireos, Northern House Wrens, Northern Yellow Warblers, and Least Flycatchers. Baltimore Orioles had 13 territories established in the survey area, Eastern Warbling Vireos had 14, Northern House Wrens had 17.5, Northern Yellow Warblers had 30.5, and Least Flycatchers had a whopping 74.5! For a grand total of 149.5, this small section of forest hosts an average of 5.98 bird territories per hectare!



Least Flycatchers dominate the natural area, averaging 2.98 territories per hectare!



Baltimore Oriole

Sensational Spring Shorebird Surveys!

By: Jon Van Arragon

Beaverhill Lake is designated as a site of importance by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network and as a Key Biodiversity Area of global importance due to large numbers of Arctic-nesting shorebirds that use the lake as a staging area. Since 2023, the BBO has conducted regular surveys for migratory shorebirds to assess the lake's shorebird abundance. The 2026 shorebird surveys were the most diverse ones yet, with 28 species of shorebirds and over 15,000 individuals documented between April 30 and June 15!

Spotting high numbers of shorebirds requires perfect habitat and conditions. Shorebird surveys this spring took place at Mundare Beach, a bay located on the east side of Beaverhill Lake. The lake as a whole receded significantly in 2025 due to low precipitation and high temperatures, leaving behind large areas of exposed mud. A wet spring including a huge dump of snow in late April was just enough to saturate the ground and turn the majority of Mundare Beach into one massive mudflat, absolutely perfect for viewing shorebirds with no visual obstructions!

Of the 28 species observed, the most abundant were Red-necked Phalarope (4192 individuals), Long-billed Dowitcher (3446 individuals), and Semipalmated Sandpiper (2838 individuals). Some of the rarer species observed were Ruddy Turnstone (11 individuals), Dunlin (7 individuals), Red Knot (1 individual), and Piping Plover (1 individual). The Piping Plover was especially noteworthy, this endangered and declining species hasn't been seen at Beaverhill Lake since 2005!

Of course, all good things in life are fleeting, especially mudflats in shallow prairie lakes! The seemingly endless rainfall in June transformed the mudflats back into the lake that they once were. Survey points that had ankle deep water this spring were now nearly chest deep by the end of June! Shorebird surveys remain paused for now, but hopefully when the water recedes the massive shorebird flocks will make their triumphant return!



An adorable Piping Plover! These birds were once common throughout the prairies but are declining due to habitat loss.



Two Dunlins (middle) forage in the shallow water. Also pictured is a Stilt Sandpiper (left) and two Long-billed Dowitchers (right).



Hundreds of Red-necked Phalaropes are visible out in the water, with a handful of Calidris sandpipers and a Hudsonian Godwit in the foreground!

Chaka, A Red-tailed Hawk from Illinois!

By: Jon Van Arragon

Early this spring, we were contacted by biologist Nicole Richardson from Birds Canada with an interesting request: she asked us to monitor the nest of a GPS-tagged Red-tailed Hawk that had migrated to Alberta! The Red-tailed Hawk Project monitors the species all across North America to better understand its evolutionary and population dynamics.



Chaka on her nest – look along the top of the nest, her little head is sticking up just to the right of the tree trunk!

The hawk we were asked to monitor was named Chaka, she was originally GPS tagged in Illinois this February. After a long northbound migration, she eventually settled in an area southeast of Edmonton. We first set out to find her nest on May 15, and were generously given permission to access the land near her nest by the landowners. Spotting the nest took some time. We peered through branches, over bushes, and around tree trunks looking for the nest. Eventually, we got just the right angle and spotted it! The nest was a large cluster of sticks, and when we viewed it through the spotting scope we saw Chaka herself incubating her eggs!

We checked on Chaka's nest every few weeks after that to gauge her nesting progress. Unfortunately, Chaka did not successfully raise any young this year. The crazy storms and weather this year have made it difficult for all our birds to raise young, Red-tailed Hawks included. There is one sign for optimism, conversations with another local landowner revealed that Red-tailed Hawks have been using the same nest we monitored for over a decade! While it's impossible to confirm whether it was Chaka using this site the whole time, it does suggest there's a good chance she could return to the same location next year to breed again!

Thank you so much to the generous landowners who provided us access to their properties so we could keep an eye on Chaka!



Chaka 's movements
around her nest



Chaka when she was tagged in Illinois. The different generations of feathers in her wing suggest she was an older bird at capture!

Tracking the Migration of Monarch Butterflies from Alberta to Mexico

Geoff Holroyd, with Jasper June

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I saw the millions of Monarch butterflies on oyamel fir trees in the high Sierra Madre montane forests at 3,000 m in Michoacan, Mexico. The branches of the trees were bent over by the weight of butterflies packed so closely that flying Monarchs had to search for landing sites. Many were in the air, softly flitting between trees and to the ground, where they landed on wet soil and at the edge of small puddles to drink before returning to the trees to sleep. This was a bonus side trip about 20 years ago while I was studying Burrowing Owls in central Mexico. Why the tears?



As a teenager in the 1960s at Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario, I had caught many Monarchs in order to attach small paper stickers to the front edge of their wings. Each sticker had a unique number and a message: "Send to Zoology University Toronto Canada," where Dr. Frederick Urquhart was tracking Monarchs to find their wintering grounds. Now I was standing at the site in Mexico that he and, by extension, the volunteers at Long Point, wanted to find 40 years ago. An elderly gentleman was my guide, and I asked him about the Monarchs. According to local legend, the arriving Monarchs are the souls of the dead returning to Mexico for Dia de los Muertos, a celebration in early November to remember and honour friends and family members who have died. Our guide had lived with Monarchs all his life. He knew where they spent the winter but didn't know where they went in the summer. Now the story was more complete.

A Multigenerational Migration

Monarch caterpillars live almost exclusively on milkweed. Considering that most of the 125 species of milkweed occur in Mexico, it is possible that the migration started when milkweed spread north with the retreat of the glaciers.

Monarchs' northward migration takes two or more generations throughout the summer. It begins with over-wintering Monarchs laying eggs in the southern United States. After the eggs hatch, the caterpillars feed on milkweed. Why milkweed? This plant contains toxic compounds, cardenolides, that are stored in the caterpillars' bodies and passed on to the adult butterflies. Birds and other predators that become sick after eating a Monarch will avoid them in the future.

When fully grown, the caterpillars transform into chrysalises. After emerging as adults, they fly north but live only two to six weeks before they lay eggs and die. Another generation hatches and again flies north. In the autumn, the "supergeneration" flies south to the Monarchs' ancestral range to overwinter in central Mexico. After up to six months in the cool mountains, they head north, travelling up to 130 km per day with a following wind and resting at night.

The Monarchs at Long Point that I tagged as a teenager travelled 3,000 km through the eastern forests. Our Alberta Monarchs have to travel at least 4,000 km across the dry Great Plains, or even further if they follow the mixed-grass prairies and forests like many of our songbirds.



Monitoring Monarchs in Alberta

In 2023, Jasper June led a multidisciplinary research project monitoring Monarch butterflies and milkweed in central and southern Alberta as a component of a master's degree at Yorkville University. This study included a time series analysis (a statistical technique used to evaluate data collected chronologically) and butterfly surveys. In addition, Jasper June and Dr. Andrew Fuyarchuk identified milkweed patches, located caterpillars, and tagged butterflies. When they documented the distribution of milkweed and Monarchs in Alberta, they found over 100 records of Monarchs over 12 years (see Map 1).

Noticing a lack of data on migrating Monarchs in Alberta, Jasper June created the Friends of the Pollinators Research Lab, which works with local partners to plant milkweed and engage communities in citizen science through accessible education.

Project Monarch and New Technologies

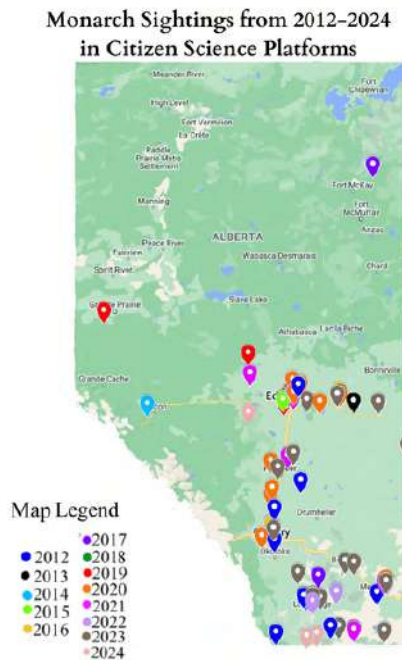
The Project Monarch Collaboration is a consortium of research organizations across North America and the Caribbean that have joined a groundbreaking effort to track Monarch butterfly migration using cutting-edge radio transmitter technology.

Monarchs are large orange and black-and-white butterflies with a wingspan of 10 cm. They weigh less than a paperclip, so how can we track them? Cellular Tracking Technologies (CTT) created a 60 milligram BluMorpho+ tag that is detected by any smartphone within 100 meters that has its Blue Tooth function turned on. Phone owners don't know that they are participating in the research, as the signal is transmitted directly to CTT's computer. The tag has a solar panel but no battery, so it transmits only in the daytime, which is fine. The butterflies don't migrate at night. The 2025 results were spectacular (see Map 2), tracking Monarchs from Ontario to Mexico.

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory and Jasper June will join the new continental project to track Monarchs and make our data freely available (<https://celltracktech.com/pages/project-monarch-collaboration-2025>).

Project Monarch has not yet tagged any butterflies west of Manitoba, and Alberta is at the furthest northwest corner of the species' distribution. As climate warms, the Canadian prairies could become important habitats for Monarchs. This project will document the route and timing of their migration from Alberta to central Mexico and identify possible hazards in areas where their tags are no longer detected. We will deploy 10 BluMorpho+ tags from Cellular Tracking Technologies with glue attachment on Monarchs in the summer of 2026 in southern Alberta, following the protocol from Project Monarch and CTT Technologies.

Map 1. Location of Monarch Butterflies in Alberta from 2012 to 2024, as reported on citizen science sites and compiled by Jasper June.



Map 2. Animation of more than 500 Monarch butterflies tracked by the collaboration this fall from across North America.



Credit: Sean Burcher, Cellular Tracking Technologies and Cape May Science and Arts Centre, adapted from Birds Canada, <https://www.birdscanada.org/tracking-monarch-butterflies-from-long-point-to-mexico-with-new-motus-technology>.

Additional Resources

If you want to read more about the Monarchs' migration, consult *The Monarch Butterfly*, by Frederick Urquhart (University of Toronto Press, 1960) and *The Monarch Butterfly Migration: Its Rise and Fall*, by Monika Maeckle (University of Oklahoma Press, 2024).

Do YOU want to help? The tags with MOTUS registration and monthly cell service cost \$250US each. Members of the Beaverhill Bird Observatory have donated almost enough money to pay for 10 tags, but Jasper June needs travel funds to find the butterflies this summer. You will receive a tax receipt for your contribution, and we will send you updates as we discover more about this amazing insect. Donations may be made to <https://www.beaverhillbirds.com/get-involved/donate/>.

You also can help by planting milkweed to create more Monarch habitat and reporting patches of milkweed and Monarch sightings on www.iNaturalist.org.

BBO's Tracking Monarch Butterfly Project – 6 August 2026 Update

Geoff Holroyd

This is the first update of Beaverhill Bird Observatory's new tracking project, and we have exciting news to share. Two Monarchs are on the move!



Alberta #2 with his slick BluMorpho tag

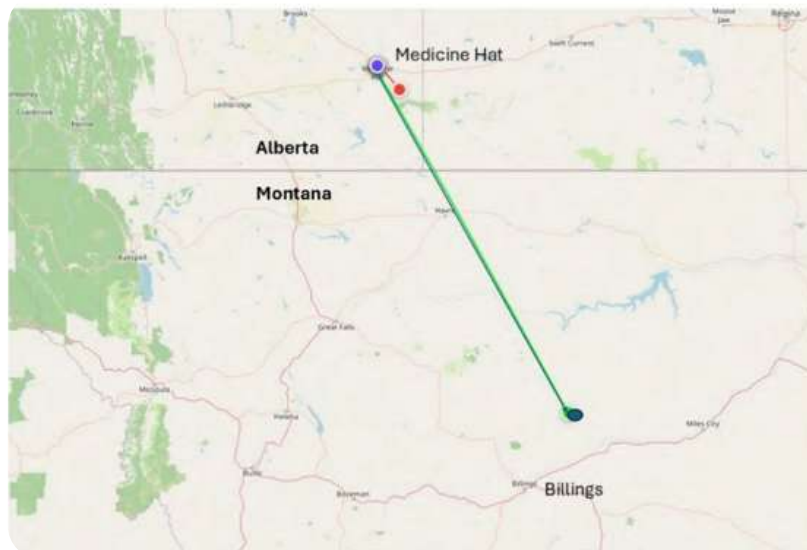
On the August long weekend, Edmonton-based biologist and field researchers, Jasper June (Heber) and Juliana Kaneda, searched in Devon as well as the Milk River area. They found caterpillars but no adults on Friday. On Saturday, they searched sites in Medicine Hat where adult Monarchs had been reported on iNaturalist, and bingo, they caught, tagged, and released two Monarchs! The Monarchs were labeled Alberta #1 and Alberta #2; we want the folks in the US and Mexico to be impressed with our most north-west Monarchs. Were the Monarch migrants of the 4th or 5th generation breeding locally, AND would the tags work as planned?

The next morning, Sunday, August 3rd, Alberta #1 was just north of Cypress Hills! He had flown 37km in 90 minutes, at an average of 27kph. The Cypress Hills weather station recorded a north wind at 10kph. The Monarch had help and wisely used the following wind. The story gets better.

Alberta #2 has us really excited. He is in Montana! On August 4th, he was 30 km north of Havre, Montana, and 150 km southeast of Medicine Hat. The two signals are overnight, 15 hours apart, so we don't really know how quickly he moved, but he definitely moved, and stand by, he moved again. On the morning of August 6th, he was northeast of Billings, Montana, 300km southeast of this location on the 4th, and 450 km southeast of the Medicine Hat release site. He was near the town of Melstone, population 126, and near the site of the Horse Creek XC motocross site where a few smartphones were gathered, ready to detect the signal.

And now we wait. Checking the data website is addictive as we look for the next detection. You might remember the signal for the tags are picked up and relayed using everyone's smartphone with Bluetooth enabled. As the Monarchs fly through Montana and Wyoming with sparse human population, we can expect few detections. If they reach Colorado, where there are more people and phones, we can expect more detections. Stay tuned for the next update!

Would you like to help? Please record any milkweed and Monarchs on iNaturalist or Project Monarch (<https://journeynorth.org/projects/monarch-butterfly>). Jasper and Juliana need travel funds. They are unpaid volunteers, but gasoline and accommodation on their trips to southern Alberta are expensive. Please consider donating \$75 for a tank of gas and to help with accommodations (<https://www.beaverhillbirds.com/get-involved/donate/>). You will receive a receipt for tax credits.



Map of Alberta 1 (in red) and Alberta 2 (in Green)

Lastly, Jasper and Juliana have a website: <https://friendsofthepollinators.ca/> where you can learn more about monarch butterfly conversation in Alberta.

BREAKING NEWS: Alberta 1 just passed Rapid City South Dakota, 870 km from Medicine Hat in 4 days, and 835 km from his location on August 3. More to follow.

Thank You to our Sponsors!



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.



TD Friends of the Environment Foundation



Environment and Climate Change Canada



A Special Thank You

To Jason Pope for preparing BBO's 2025 Audited Financial Statements