

The Warbler



Summer 2015

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Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation Education Team:
 Right: (l to r): Back row Susie vanderVaart, Laura Windsor, Maddie Faubert, Sydney Haney, Alex Beatty
 Front row: Ceiridwen Robbins, Jonathan Kobewka, Patti Campsall

Avian Monitoring Team at the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory:
 Bottom: (l to r) Richard Krikun, Nicole Linfoot,

**By Patti Campsall
 Executive Director**

Every summer has a theme and this year it was **"many hands make light work"**! The Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory (LSLBO), Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation (BCBC) and Alberta Parks successfully delivered another exciting season of education, monitoring and research programs and it was all thanks to the hard work of one of our biggest and most enthusiastic teams ever!



Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory's favourite banders Richard Krikun and Nicole Linfoot were back to start up the station for another season. We are very lucky to have such dedicated and experienced staff at the LSLBO. They enables us to run high quality monitoring programs which provide good scientific data on the status of our beautiful boreal birds. And of course, they are wonderful at sharing their love for their work with our visitors. This year we had a new face at the Banding Lab. Jacob Lachapelle joined us to help support our collaborative research projects this

summer. It was a chance for our team to pass on their skills and knowledge to a new bander, and Jacob took full advantage of the opportunity to learn from the "masters". If you have been following the weekly banding reports on the LSLBO website, you will already know that it was great summer at the station, and we are on track for one of our busiest Fall Migration seasons ever! We have already passed the 2000 bird banded mark: well above our average of 1815 birds banded during fall. As a member of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network, we are one of over 25 stations across Canada that are working together to monitor migratory

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bird population trends. So at the end of the season, our results will be sent to various agencies including Bird Studies Canada for analysis.

We had a busy season with our other monitoring programs at the LSLBO as well. Because it happens away from the public eye, the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program isn't as famous as our migration monitoring program. But MAPS lets us know how the birds breeding in our area are doing, and this year, they did great! (see page 4) Our banders also provided their field expertise for a University of Manitoba collaborative research project that is using geolocators to study fall migration and wintering grounds of the Canada Warbler (see page 5). And of course when you think things are starting to slow down, we have just started up our Northern Saw-whet Owl Fall Migration Monitoring Program!

Finally, there will be some changes at the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory soon as we are working on a brand new lab building! Our current one is over 20 years old, and starting to show its age, so thanks to the generous support of Northern Lakes College Carpentry program, donations from local forest industry and other sponsors, we are hoping to complete the construction of our new lab building for next spring. You won't notice too many radical changes, the old one has served us very well! But we will be making it a little more functional for our banders and visitors.

At the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation, we had our biggest summer education team ever! Five experienced educators hit the ground running (literally) for the start of our spring fieldtrip season. Why were we so lucky? Ceiridwen Robbins with Alberta Parks had two seasonal interpreters this summer: Alex Beatty and Jonathan Kobewka. Plus the LSLBO with our education partner, the Lesser Slave Forest Education Society (LSFES) had three educators to help deliver a diverse education program: Susie vander Vaart, Laura Windsor, and Maddie Faubert. It was wonderful to have so many keen and skilled educators this season and we needed them! Our education team delivered over 250 programs to over 6500 kids and adults this season including school field trips, summer interpretive programs at the campground, banding lab tours, summer camp programs, and special events. Wow!! And of course we had Sydney Haney ready to greet visitors to the Boreal Centre with her big enthusiastic smile. This summer, we had 3500 people through our

doors from literally all over the world...but to be honest, mostly Edmonton!

With so many staff, it was no wonder that we had lots of successful programs and lots of fun! So, we hope you enjoy reading all about our summer at the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory and the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation. Thank you to everyone who contributed to making this another successful summer.

All of this exciting work doesn't just "happen", we are able to deliver a solid long term avian monitoring programs due to the support and commitment of our funders. So we would like to send out a special thank you to the Alberta Conservation Association, Vanderwell Contractors (1971) Ltd, West Fraser Timber Ltd., Environment Canada and Stephen Partington for your commitment to our monitoring programs. Also, we would not be able to provide the exciting year-round education programs at the centre without the funding and in-kind support we receive from the Lesser Slave Forest Education Society, Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta, Lesser Slave Region FireSmart Committee, and Alberta Parks.

But, most important, our non-profit society values the support of the many enthusiastic people from our community and across the country love nature and love what we do! Your support is instrumental in the success of our society and we hope you will take the time to renew your membership with the LSLBO or join us if you are learning about us for the first time! Visit LSLBO.org to sign up for a on-line membership or call us!



Banding lab building at the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory

2015 Spring Migration Monitoring

By Richard Krikun
LSLBO Bander in Charge

I have had the pleasure of running the migration monitoring program at the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory for 12 years and this was one of the more interesting springs I have seen in several ways. First was the weather. Weather can make or break a season. We usually see a nice mix of conditions throughout the spring; with some brisk cold mornings, some hot days, some rainy days, and windy days.

We can't band when it is rainy or too cold, but rain and cold can ground migrants which leads to good banding when the rain ends or it warms up. Not too much happens when it is too hot because birds hunker down to avoid overheating. Wind is the worst weather condition because it blows the mist



Townsend's Solitaire

nets out, greatly reducing their effectiveness, and makes it extremely difficult to detect any birds moving through the sky or through the forest. The general daytime conditions this spring were too hot, too windy, with too little rain. We hardly saw any active migration because of these unfavourable conditions. There were only a couple days that we could say there was "decent migration of songbirds observed". This doesn't necessarily mean there were fewer birds around, we just could not detect them. A big part of it was also the nighttime conditions. They were perfect for migration, being warm, calm, and clear. We figure that the birds were taking full advantage of these conditions flying long-distances at high altitudes.

Bird banding is an important part of our migration monitoring program and is often used as a simple way to gauge the success of a season. Unfortunately, our banding was not all that great this spring. As mentioned above, we had a lot of windy days that reduced our banding effectiveness and few poor weather events that grounded birds. We banded 650 birds through the spring, which is well below the average of 930 birds, and represents the fourth lowest spring banding total in 22 years. The interesting part about the banding was despite the low banding totals, species diversity was the fourth highest it has ever been at 48 species. Swainson's thrush, white-throated sparrow, black-and-white warbler, ovenbird, and clay-colored sparrow were the top banded species. Highlight species included Nashville warbler, Connecticut warbler, and a Townsend's solitaire. The Townsend's solitaire was caught on the opening day of spring migration; a good way to start the season. The second highlight was an evening grosbeak. I have been waiting 12 years to catch an evening grosbeak. An extremely gorgeous bird.



Evening Grosbeak

Nicole Linfoot and myself have been working at the LSLBO for several years now. This year we were joined by our summer field assistant Jacob Lachapelle. Jacob has been an amazing addition to our summer crew, he's a hard worker, quick learner, and an excellent birder. Jacob also brings a touch of class to the LSLBO with his "Tuxedo-shirt Tuesdays."

Check out the LSLBO.org website for weekly updates on our Fall Migration Monitoring Program or follow our Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation Facebook page!

MAPS– It's more than just trudging through swamps of mosquitos.

By Nicole Linfoot
LSLBO Assistant Bander

MAPS is, without a doubt, the least glamorous of our 3 core monitoring programs. It doesn't get showcased in tours and school programs like migration monitoring and it certainly doesn't hold the allure of northern saw-whet owl banding. It is like the weird sibling that no one really talks about... if that weird sibling was infested with mosquitos and had trails cluttered with giant downed logs and branches all perfectly positioned to smack you in the face! Yet, despite its status as *that other* core program, MAPS is a very important part of our summer and provides some excellent data and insight into the breeding lives of birds.

MAPS stands for **Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship** and is a program coordinated by the Institute of Bird Population in California. It has two components – banding and observations. The banding seeks to determine the productivity and survivorship (as the name implies) of nesting bird species in specific habitats. Productivity is based on the ratio of young birds to adult birds captured of each specific species. Survivorship, on the other hand, is based on the number of



Bay-breasted Warbler

banded adult birds returning to the same nesting area year after year. The observation side of MAPS is a little different than the observations conducted at the Migration station. During MAPS we are simply recording if a bird species is present and what level of breeding activity it is engaged in. For example, we record if the bird is singing (evidence of defending a territory – intention to

breed), if the bird is just flying over (very little evidence of actual breeding activity), or if the bird is observed carrying food (confirmation of breeding success as it must be feeding young).



Lincoln's Sparrow

Another thing about MAPS that is different from the migration station is that it is not run every day. Because we are working with actively breeding birds, it is important to cause as little disturbance to the birds as possible. Female birds can't be kept away from their eggs or young chicks too often or for too long. Fledglings are particularly prone to stress and can't be separated from their parents for too long. Even catching the male too often limits his ability to successfully defend the territory and keep his mate and brood safe.

We have four MAPS site, three are located near the banding lab and one is located near the Boreal Centre. We run each of the sites 6 times in ten day intervals. So, the first round of MAPS starts June 10th, the second June 20th and so on until the last round starting on July 30th. Interestingly, our four MAPS sites are some of the only ones located in the boreal forest – this gives us the ability to provide some unique insight into many species of bird that breed exclusively in the boreal.

This year, we had excellent banding success during MAPS. It was, in fact, the second best year ever - beat only by 2003 which caught 423 birds. This year we captured 396 birds of 30 species, thoroughly besting the average of 215 of 24 species. The top five banded species were: White-throated sparrow (banded – 94, yearly

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average – 28), Ovenbird (40, average – 23), Lincoln's sparrow (35, average – 1.5), Mourning warbler (29, average 9.5), and Tennessee warbler (27, average – 23).

You likely noticed that most of the species that made the top five this year doubled, tripled, or in the case of the Lincoln's sparrow twentythreedupled their average. We think this has a lot to do with the forest tent caterpillar infestation that happened during the last couple of summers. All five of those species are ground nesting birds that require very heavy shrub cover. Because the tent caterpillars did such a great job destroying the canopy, the shrub layers in all our MAPS sites were extremely thick, providing superb breeding habitat.

Not only did we catch a great quantity of species, but we also caught a couple quality species. We caught not one but two bay-breasted warblers in breeding plumage (In the 12 years Richard has been banding here, this was the second and third breeding male bay-breasted warblers he has caught). We also caught the first, and so far only, winter wrens of the year. A great MAPS season!



Winter Wren

A Great Target Banding Day

By Jacob Lachapelle
Field Assistant

It's 4 am. I hear my alarm, and with regret, I decide that I have to get out of bed and get ready for work. At least I'm getting out of bed for something that I know will be fun. I'm going to deploy geolocators on Canada warblers today! I remember when I learned I was going to deploy geolocators this summer. What in heaven's name is a geocator??? Then it was explained to me; it's a device that's secured on a male bird that records the amount of light in a day. This allows us to determine where this bird was and when he was there. But of course, to get that information back, the deployed geolocators must be recovered in the following years, which is why deployment is done on male birds only. The males are more likely to come to the same territory in consecutive years, which makes it much easier than over females.

I get out of bed, make a lunch, eat breakfast and I'm out the door as Richard and Nicole arrive to pick me up. I get in the car, and a few minutes

later, we're at our destination. We park the car, get all of our equipment, and we start walking.

There's a few Canada warblers singing, but some of them, we already caught them in the days before. Finally, we hear one that we haven't caught yet. We step off of the trail and into the forest, closely listening for this bird. We're sure



Canada Warbler

that we're in his territory, so we find a suitable area to place the net. Once that's done and the net is set up, one of us starts playing a call, places it under the net, and then we sit down and wait for this bird to show up. Not thirty seconds later, I spot this little Canada warbler flying around the net, going from branch to branch,

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looking for the intruder in his territory. After 5 minutes of going just over the net, the Canada warbler finally flies right in the net. We extract it, and head back to the trail where Nicole and I begin processing it. In the meantime, Richard decides to go set up on another Canada warbler. Nicole puts on the normal aluminum band and takes a few



Nicole placing a geolocator onto a Canada Warbler

measurements, and then the tricky part begins. I grab a hold of the bird and Nicole works on getting the geolocator onto his back. It's a tricky process, that takes two people, but Nicole and I figure out a very efficient way of doing so. After that geolocator is finally on tightly, we release it and it goes about its own business.

As we are finishing up, Richard comes back on the trail with a bird in a bag. We caught another one! We run this Canada warbler through the same process as the other one, and once we are done with him, we start walking again. The only thing is that it doesn't sound like there are any Canada warblers singing anymore. We have to catch at least seven to keep on track. Are we even going to get seven? I honestly don't think we will. But we keep walking nonetheless. After walking for what seemed an endless amount of time, we finally come to an area where Canada warblers can be heard singing. And there's actually quite a few! So we get off the trail and catch a bird, and while Nicole and I process, Richard goes out to catch another bird. He comes back empty-handed, so we then all go together in the bush to find a bird. We know we're in his territory, but he has stopped singing. So we decide to do a blind setup. We set up the net, without knowing if the bird is around.

Sadly, we don't end up catching it, and we head back to the trail.

That's when we hear a Canada warbler singing in a thin line of trees right between a road near the trail, and a small pond. We know that this bird is there, but we can't see anywhere that we can set up the net. So, we decide to try something, out of curiosity. Nicole and I grab a hold of the poles, we put the net on it and we pull apart so the net is just tight enough. Then, we decide to stand right beside the trees onto the road, and while Nicole and I are holding the net, Richard turns the call on. We stand stiller than mountains, but as we expected, we don't catch the bird.

So we go on, catching a bird here and there, but there's nothing too spectacular. That's when we encounter a small bridge. Oh, bridges! The greatest place to catch Canada warblers as they love riparian areas. So we do as usual; we set up on the first bird we hear and catch it. Then, as Nicole and I process the bird, Richard sets up on another one. We process that next bird, and Richard goes out again. We keep processing birds, but they just keep coming! The only reason we stop catching them, is due to the fact that we use up all of the geolocators.

We looked back at our numbers today, and we caught a whopping 14 birds!!! And I was afraid that we wouldn't catch 7. It turns out that this is the best day ever for target banding Canada warblers at the LSLBO! It was definitely my favorite day target banding.



Finishing up with the geolocator

A “Monster” of the Marsh

By: Madeline Faubert
Boreal Interpreter

As the Boreal Interpreter, one of my favourite stations to lead during field trip season was “Marsh Monsters” for the Grade 3 Lifecycles fieldtrip. Pulling on a pair of rubber boots, trudging through mud and tall grasses, and jumping into a swampy marsh to search for all sorts of creepy crawlies makes me feel like a kid again. But now, with a different appreciation for all of the things I discover: how much is unknown about the things living beneath the water, and how important all these plants, animals, insects, and invertebrates are to the ecology of the Boreal Forest.

Marshes alone play a key role in maintaining a watershed by acting as a giant, spongy, water filter and providing nutrients and habitat to innumerable living things. Scientists know a lot about wetlands, but there is also a lot of science that is yet to be discovered. Despite this vast unknown, scientists nevertheless recognize and



Students exploring Devonshire marsh

appreciate the importance of these ecosystems which is probably why, among other reasons, we at the BCBC and the Lesser Slave Forest Education Society take hundreds of students to explore them each year.

During a busy Lifecycles fieldtrip week in June, the water at the Devonshire marsh was too low for the kids to explore. Wanting to ensure that they

saw some cool stuff, I collected Marsh Monsters near the Boreal Centre before hand and brought them to the fieldtrip. And oh my, *did I ever catch a monster.*

Before the students arrived I was sorting through my bucket to separate the creatures into bigger containers to show the kids. The first thing I did was scoop some of the grasses and weeds off the top and into another bucket, revealing the water below. I saw some pretty neat things: Backswimmers, Water Mites, Damselfly Nymphs, and much more. Suddenly, I heard from the bucket behind me with the grasses and weeds, something *or someone*, flopping around like a fish out of water.

Afraid of what I might find, I took a peek and saw something I had never seen before: a

giant Water Tiger! Water Tiger is the

name given to the Predacious Diving Beetle’s larva. It gets the name Tiger from being an aggressive predator eating tadpoles and even small fish! Okay, maybe my Water Tiger was only about 5cm long, but this monster sure was cool and I got to talk it up all day with each group of students. Some kids squealed like I did and others thought it was pretty awesome. Even the teachers and parents were fascinated by this extra-terrestrial looking larva.



A Predacious Diving Beetle Larva or “Water Tiger”

Marsh Monsters were also featured at this year’s Songbird Festival, many times at the Buggin’ Out campground program, and even had their own display with a mini aquarium when the theme of insects took over the BCBC’s multi-purpose room for the summer. I really enjoyed exploring marshes with the kids and learning new things. Wetlands are remarkable ecosystems for all ages to discover!

Conversations with Visitors

**By Sydney Haney
Information Officer**

During my time as the Information Officer at the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation, I've had the chance to meet many different people from all over the world. Okay, so most were from the Edmonton area, but I still met some cool people! Many of the visitors were first timers, stopping by either because they heard about the place through friends or family, or because they were heading elsewhere, saw our sign and decided to come check it out.

Every once in a while I'd have very long talks with visitors, and were they entertaining! Some of them started as soon as someone walked through the door, like the conversation I had with an elderly couple from the Strathmore area. They straightaway asked about the forest tent caterpillars that had invaded the area earlier this summer. Our friendly conversation then led on to bird identification questions, bird sightings, stories about their home area, different wildlife we've seen, and then somehow onto traffic and how horrible it can be!



Forest Tent Caterpillar

Some other long talks involved species identification via voice description or photo. While it may not sound like much, the enthusiasm the visitor had was awesome! One gentleman came in with his camera for some help identifying birds. I'd tell him what I thought it was, and then look it up in a field guide and google the image for extra clarification. During this time, he would tell me how a certain warbler would taunt him while he tried to

take its picture, or he'd show me some other pictures he'd taken on his camera. Two days later, he came back with his wife, heading straight for the front desk, camera at the ready. He had wanted confirmation on a picture he had taken of a bird (a gray jay to be precise) and once I told him he was right, he showed me another photo he had taken of the jay while it was in flight. It was quite a neat photo! We continued to discuss different types of birds he had taken photos of, and I even had to call upon Ceiridwen for some help identifying a plant he snapped a picture of. On both occasions, he was very upbeat and excited to tell me the background of each picture.

While the conversations I've mentioned were merely a few of the memorable ones I've had, the most amusing had to be with a couple that came from the United States. We'd been discussing the northern lights when they innocently asked me about the roads in the winter. It appeared that they were under the assumption that we were snowed in during the winter months! When I told them that, yes indeed, the highway from Edmonton to Slave Lake was plowed in the winter, their surprised facial expressions were priceless!

The one issue I've been having this summer is when people come in asking what bird is singing a particular song. Every time the answer has been the White-throated Sparrow. **Every. Single. Time.** No joke. The question has been asked so often that I have to refrain myself from blurting out the bird's name before they even get part way through the question!



White-Throated Sparrow

Howdy Neighbour!

By Susie Vandervart
Firesmart Educator

As a resident of Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park, my neighbours are a little unusual. They all live off the land, have little concept of time and speak through growls, grunts and chortles. But having such interesting characters right next door helps to keep life interesting.

Heart-attack Herb



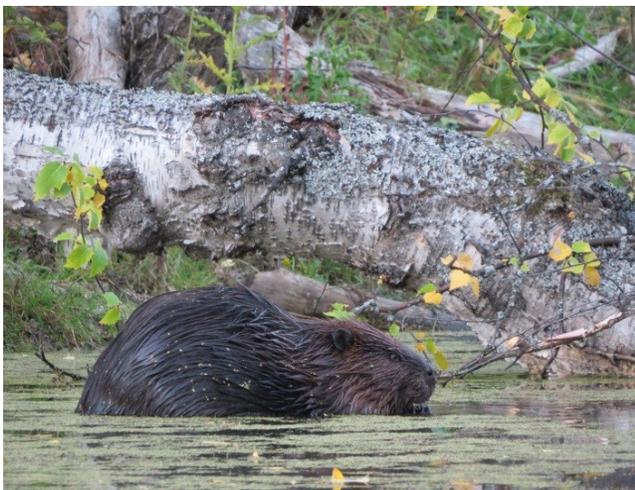
Heart-attack Herb
 (Ruffed Grouse)

Heart-attack Herb lives in a small portion of spruce trees along the Trans Canada Trail. Herb loves to eat bugs and leaves and spruce buds.

Unfortunately for me, Herb has a quite sensitive Fight or Flight response and a seemingly horrible sense of hearing. It seems that every time I round the corner near his place, I scare

Herb so badly that those instincts take over

and Herb flies off in what I imagine to be, and what sounds like, a burst of feathers. This in turn gives



Bertie the Beaver

me a mini heart attack. And no matter how much I prepare myself or how much noise I think I am making, we always seem to surprise each other.



The Bertie Family Residence

The Bertie's

From their humble lodge to their impressive dam hand built with local lumber, the Bertie's have quite the property. I love swinging by "The Pond" to see



Ducky (Mallard Duck)

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what improvements have been made and watch the Bertie's at work. On occasion their friends Ducky and Muskies pop by for a swim.



Muskies (Muskrat)

Patriotic Percival

Of all my neighbours, Percival the territorial White Throated Sparrow claims top spot as the most patriotic. From his arrival in May right through to migration in the fall, he consistently calls "O Sweet Canada, Canada, Canada". This patriotic phrasing is continued morning, noon and night with a brief break from 3 until 4am. He sure does love this place.



The Coy's (Coyotes)

The Coy's

After the tourists have left the park, this family of singers makes their presence known with weekly renditions of "I found food" and "howling at the moon." I've encountered individual members of this singing group on my journeys. And I once was fortunate enough to meet the entire family. I love sitting on the deck and listening to their songs.

Flurry the Snowshoe Hare

Flurry lives right next door, but I have only ever seen her in the Spring and Summer. The really neat things about Flurry is how her coat changes colour from brown to white in the fall and back to brown in the spring so that she is camouflaged no matter what the season. I can recognise her easily by the white patch of fur in the middle of her forehead. Flurry is a car fanatic. She loves Whinny, my car. Sometimes as I pull into my parking space, Flurry is sitting there waiting for Whinny to return.

The Stots

The Stots are seen quite often traveling around the park. They "deerly" love to spend lunch at the centre and quite often sleep in the field nearby.

Sometimes I may feel like I live in an isolated location but I really do live in quite a populous neighbourhood. From the spring and summer rush filled with flighty feathered migrants, humming insectoids, and noisy amphibians to the quieter fall and winter months when the "full-timers" become more boisterous and visible, my neighbourhood is a busy, beautiful and wonderful place to be.



Member of the Stots

Enviro-quest Camp: Tools of the Trade

**By Laura Windsor
Boreal Educator**

From July 14th to 16th, 15 campers enjoyed the third annual Enviro-Quest camp that was put on by the Lesser Slave Forest Education Society (LSFES) and the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory (LSLBO). This day camp for youth aged 12-15, was designed to provide campers with unique experiences within the boreal forest. They had the opportunity to experience first hand the special aspects of this ecosystem and how industry, government, and tourism work together to manage and sustain our environment. This year's "Tools of the Trade" theme focused on a variety of tools and technology used in the boreal forest through fun and informative hands-on activities.

Throughout the camp there were many hands-on presentations from local professionals. Day one started off with demonstrations from Brian Webster, a Wildlife Technician and Mark Tessier, a Park Conservation Officer. They talked about their careers and some of the different techniques used in managing wildlife. The campers then had the

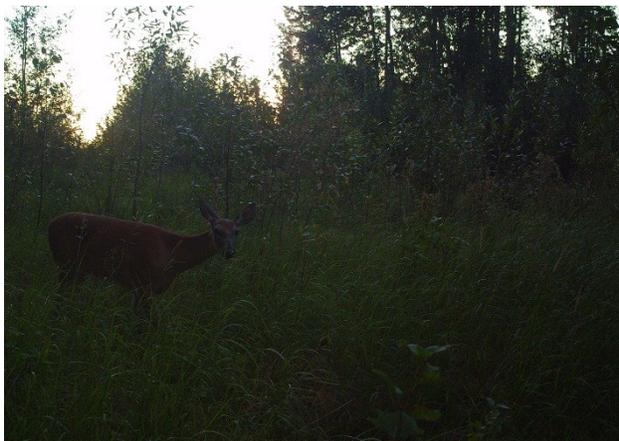


Mark Tessier helping set up wildlife cameras



Vanderwell Mill Tour

opportunity to set up two motion-sensing wildlife cameras to discover who else might be sharing the boreal forest with them. In the afternoon Rob Irwin and Larry Booth took them on a fascinating tour of the Vanderwell Mill, featuring the many pieces of technology used in the harvest and processing of timber. Inspired by the creativity used in the design of all the different components of the mill, the campers finished off the day with a building challenge at Devonshire Beach. Campers designed and built an amphibious vehicle that could roll down a ramp and float in the water.



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Deer caught on camera

The second day of camp started at the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation where local Fisheries Biologist, Kristy Wakeling



Some eager Enviro-Quest participants

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introduced them to some of the native vs. non-native fish species found in Alberta and safe fish handling techniques. Campers put their new awareness to use on a fishing trip at Lily Lake and learned more about plant species and the importance of wildfires in the boreal forest while hiking to the lake.

The last day of camp featured a tour of the local government forestry office from Wildfire Information Officer, Leah Lovequist. Campers were updated on the wildfires burning across the province and watched radio dispatchers organize the many different crews and aircraft fighting these fires. They also checked out some of the pieces of technology used to map and track fires, and had a demonstration from a local Wildland Firefighting Crew. Campers even got to try out a few pieces of their equipment in a relay race. The afternoon was spent retrieving the motion cameras and viewing photos of the wildlife captured, games, crafts, and a special bark carving session from Patti Campsall of the LSLBO. A special thanks to Andre Boraks from Work Wild who helped us out for the three days of camp and Leila Kozar for driving the school bus. We would also like to thank the following organizations: Northern Lakes College, Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park, and Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. And a special thank you to the Town of Slave Lake and the M.D of Lesser Slave River for providing funding to help keep this camp affordable for the kids. Thank you everyone!



Lily Lake Fishing Trip



Wildlife Management Presentation



Wildland Fire Crew Demo



Fishing at Lily Lake

Expanding Your Birding Horizons

By Ceiridwen Robbins
Visitor Services Coordinator, Alberta Parks

Expanding your birding horizons – part 1

Note: If parts of this article seem familiar, you must have read the 2015 Explore Alberta Parks Magazine! This will be the first part in a three-summer series of birding trips you can do in northwestern Alberta.

Since you signed up to receive the LSLBO/Nature Club Newsletter, I'm going to assume that most of you love birds. We at Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park are blessed to have records of over 250 bird species in this area – and the number keeps growing. But did you know that many other provincial parks in northwestern Alberta also have amazing birding opportunities?

Fall migration is on for the birds, but summer is not yet over for us humans. Here is one idea for a birding road trip close to home (if your home is in Slave Lake). I hope you'll try visiting some of these places before the migrants are all gone!

Winged Friends at the West End of Lesser Slave Lake

Are you looking for a day trip? Then here's an itinerary for you! Total driving time will be about five hours for this birding tour of the Slave Lake area, not counting the time you spend walking and watching for our feathered friends! Small communities dot the route but you might want to pack a picnic lunch as you may not find a restaurant without taking a large detour.

From the town of Slave Lake, head west on Highway 2 towards High Prairie. About 99 km from Slave Lake, turn off onto Highway 750 towards Grouard. Just as you reach Grouard, turn off onto Mission Road and follow it until you reach *Police Point Natural Area*. This is a great place to look for common goldeneye, mallards, killdeer, spotted sandpipers, red-necked grebes, black terns, soras and marsh wrens. Hunting is allowed in this

natural area, so make sure you are dressed for visibility if you visit in the fall.

Once you've had your fill of fowling at Police Point, head back down Mission Road. It's just a short jaunt to *Hilliard's Bay Provincial Park* from here. At the intersection with Highway 750, turn left, then continue on until you see the now-defunct Coyote gas station. You'll want to turn right here onto Township Road 753a to get to the provincial park. Hike the short Boreal Forest Trail loop trail to increase your chances of seeing and hearing some tiny songbird beauties. Check out the beach at the day use area for shorebirds and waterfowl.

When you've seen all there is to see at Hilliard's Bay, continue on to *Winagami Lake Provincial Park*. To reach it, head back out to Highway 750 and turn right. Follow the highway north for just over 12 km and turn left onto Highway 679. Continue along Highway 679 for nearly 50 km, and you will see the sign for Winagami Lake Provincial Park. Turn off here onto Range Road 181A and follow it for about 3 km to reach the park. It and the lake it is named after are home to nesting colonies of grebes, sandpipers, gulls and ducks. You may also spot a merlin or a northern goshawk. Hike the Window on the Lake Trail and spend some time at the waterfowl viewing platforms overlooking Winagami Lake.



'Window on the Lake Trail' at Winagami Lake Provincial Park

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Finished with Winagami Lake? Then follow Range Road 181A back out to Highway 679 and turn right. Your next stop, and a fitting end to a day of birding, will be the *Kimiwan Bird Walk*. To reach it, follow Highway 679 west for 9.6 km, then turn right onto Highway 2. Follow it north to McLennan, about 14 km – the bird walk is just off the highway on your left, inside town. Even if the Kimiwan Bird Walk's interpretive centre is closed, the bird walk itself never is. This short trail system has boardwalks that jut out into a marsh. While there, you may see migrating pectoral sandpipers and long-billed dowitchers, as well as a colony of purple martins.

After touring the bird walk, you can head back to Slave Lake along Highway 2 via High Prairie. Stop

for supper or refreshments after your long day of birding – you deserve it!

An optional side trip between Hilliard's Bay and Winagami Lake provincial parks would be to take the turnoff for *Heart River Dam Provincial Recreation Area* off Highway 679. Many ducks, geese, and other waterfowl can be seen on the reservoir.

For more information about these and other Northwest Alberta Provincial Parks, Provincial Recreation Areas, and Natural Areas, visit www.albertaparks.ca. Information about facilities, services, activities as well as downloadable maps are available on this official Alberta Parks website.

My Ever Elusive Bear

By Alex Beatty
Alberta Parks Interpreter

Living and working within Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park, I expected to see a variety of wildlife. And in fact I have! This summer I saw countless deer, often with some trepidation, as they are in the ditch along the highway. I grip the steering wheel as I drive by hoping they won't suddenly dart across the road. I spotted more coyotes this summer than I have seen in my entire life. At the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory, I stood closer to wild birds than ever before. And of course, in a park I encounter little critters daily such as, red squirrels and three-striped chipmunks that scurry across their tree branch highways. I have had many amazing experiences with animals in the Park, this is true.

But, I am longing to see a bear. Don't misunderstand me. I have seen many bears before. But I expect that when living within bear country in the boreal forest, I would see bears so often it would become mundane. In part, my desire

to encounter my first bear of the summer may stem from jealousy. Jonathan, my partner in interpretation, while also awaiting his first bear sighting of the season, has had a close encounter with a lynx. Jacob, a bird banding assistant, watched a bear walk right past the windows next to my office one morning. Ceiridwen, the Visitor Services Coordinator, has seen not one, not two, but *five* bears and counting this summer.



Evidence of the bear checking out the garage

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To be fair, once my wish became known around the office, people tried to aid me in my mission. While coming back to the Boreal Centre after a program and putting our supplies away, Ceiridwen appeared shouting my name. She was trying to get me back outside to where she had just seen a black bear mosey by the building. I missed that bear by seconds! But it wasn't the only one.

We had a visitor this summer at our staff house by the centre. It wasn't until the next morning that we discovered evidence of that visit. A bear tried to enter the house via a downstairs window. There must have been something that smelt good coming from Mark's (Park Ranger) room because the bear had ripped off the screen and stuck his head in the blinds, and scratched his muddy paws on the inside of the windowsill. Thank goodness it appeared as if the bear must have been disinterested in what was in the house, or just got bored because that was as far as he went.

What we know for sure is the bear was extremely clever and systematically walked to every basement window, just as they do in the spring when searching for elk calves hidden in the grass, leaving behind a trail of muddy tracks. He then turned his attentions to the garage. Two tall muddy paw prints on the door, as if he knew he might be able to push it open with his weight. Then he walked to the sliding garage door. He stood on his back legs to peer into the garage door window, to check if there was anything in there he wanted.

Lastly, the bear set his sights on the vehicles. Muddy prints were left behind on the hood of Mark's car where the bear lumbered up on all fours to peek inside. Similarly, other vehicles were scratched or marked with mud. Obvious to us, the bear knew what he was looking for, but wasn't successful in finding it. Some may have been annoyed at the mud or damage this bear caused. All of us in the house were enthralled that this bear had come to visit.

After much deliberation and talk about our neighbour, it was determined that Jonathan had been in the house when the bear came knocking. Mark had been at work. And me...I was in town. Mine was the sole car with no tracks anywhere on the body of the car. I had missed possibly the coolest, albeit somewhat frightening encounter with a bear ever. And still have yet to locate one. I hope that by the time summer comes to an end, this story will no longer be true, and I will have seen my fill of bears. But until then, I will keep driving slowly around the loop outside the Boreal Centre at night in desperate hopes of a short glimpse of my elusive bear.



Part of the bears' paw print

Parks as a Child, Parks as an Adult

By Jonathan Kobewka
Alberta Parks Interpreter

The 6 year old version of me is elated to be working for Alberta Parks this summer at the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation. As a child my family explored Alberta and B.C. by tent and I was always keen to learn from interpreters. This young version of me marveled at the natural history of the landscapes around me and was curious about their past. I am honoured to be doing this work

whether it is in the campground delivering a program for campers or at the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory delivering a program to school groups.

One of the important parts of a tour of the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory is sharing why it is there in the first place. As we tell the kids who come here for tours; "if you were a bird would you rather swim across a giant lake, way way way up over Marten Mountain, or here along the shore?"

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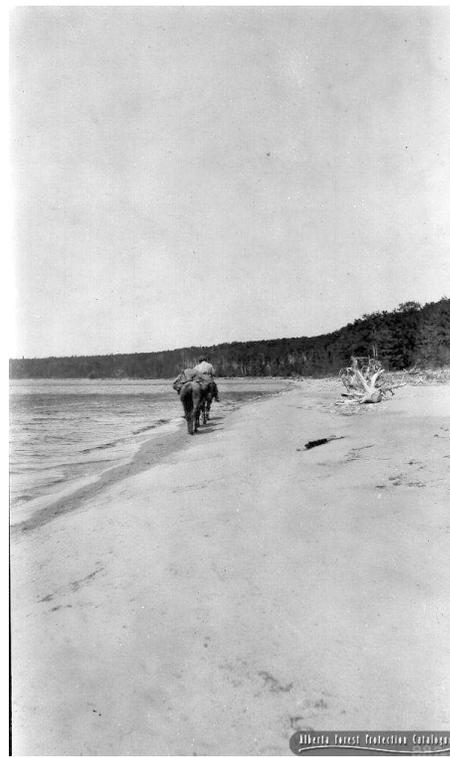
"The shore" they answer. What has come as a surprise to me is that this area is not only an obvious place for bird migration but also an ideal area for human migration.

As Geoff Sawyer writes in [A History of Lesser Slave Lake](#): "...because of its location along one of the continent's natural corridors, it has been speculated that the ancestors of virtually all of the native peoples of both Americas at some point passed somewhere in the vicinity of the lake. Such a migration, originating in Asia across the Bering Straits, is thought to have begun 40,000 years ago." Of course it is important to say that the Bering Strait theory for the populating of the Americas is widely contested and as I write this, there has been a story in the news about new evidence that shows the indigenous peoples of South America and of Australia share a common ancestor. None the less, the notion of this region being a route for beings both avian and sapiens fills me with wonder. The annual migration of RVs, trailers and tents continue the tradition of humans moving through this area. Most archaeological sites in Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park can be found near the shore. Though the context has changed, humans still want to camp near the water.

Many historical routes passed through the area. The popular romantic notion about travel by canoe is a bit of a misconception as this mode of transportation was not common until the fur trade era as this technology comes from eastern parts of the continent. According to an archeologist I have spoken with, many of our highways today in the boreal region often follow traditional travel routes. Indigenous peoples have lived in this area for tens of thousands of years. When you look at some of the early European maps of the area you can see many marked routes that trail off in various directions. The information that I have been able to glean pertains to more recent historical uses of the trail, the prime example being how the Freighter Lake Shore Trail was used during the gold rush as a path to the north. Like the canoe, the idea of gold rush trails has high cultural capital though the truth may be more nuanced than we are often told. During a conversation with a First Nations woman in the area, I learned that

there are many sad and dark stories of how the gold rush folks treated the aboriginal people they encountered.

I think often about how history of the land was taught to me as a child with an emphasis on Europeans coming to North America and a very limited perspective of indigenous peoples. In some cases, I was told that we live in a place with no history, which ignores the people who have lived here for many millennia. In light of the recent Truth and Reconciliation report about residential



1915 Freighter Trail near Marten River

schools and a growing understanding of how the Canadian Government has treated indigenous peoples in our name I feel it is critically important to speak of indigenous peoples when we tell the history of the land. There is more here than I can write about at this moment and if residential schools are something you need to explore more I encourage further reading.

As for me I hope that my work as an interpreter in this park will not add to the erasure of indigenous peoples. I think of the child version of me, how exciting it is to learn and be curious about the world. I know that there is a lot for me to learn still. I do not know as much about the First Nations who live in Alberta as I feel I should, both as a citizen and as a Interpreter, but the child who was curious and excited to learn is still there. I feel so fortunate to be able to do the work I am doing.

Highlights from the Summer!



Summer Splash Camp kids building beaver dams



Building Birdhouses at the 20th Annual Songbird Festival



Community FireSmart BBQ



Learning about tree rings with Laura



A Day at the LSLBO: Migration Game!



Returning volunteers Bill and Sue Walsh posing with their "Golden Pine Cone Award" for excellence in volunteering and being such awesome people!

At the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory



What's That Bird?

Top (l to r)

Pileated Woodpecker
Brown Creeper
Western Tanager

Bottom (l to r)

Blue-headed Vireo
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Jacob banding his 375th bird at the LSLBO!

Thanks to...



Sara Scobie
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Lesser Slave Lake FireSmart Committee

**Canada Summer Jobs Program
University of Manitoba**



Environment
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Canada

To become a member of the LSLBO, please fill out the information below and send this form, along with a cheque or money order to the address below.

Name: _____ Telephone: (____) _____
First Last

Address: _____
Street City Province/State Postal Code/Zip

Email : _____

Membership Categories (please circle one):

- One year Individual \$30
- One Year Family \$60
- Three year Individual \$90
- Three year Family \$180

Thank you for supporting the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory!



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