LESSER SLAVE LAKE BIRD OBSERVATORY

The Warbler

LSLBO NO. 3

SUMMER 2003

Chairman's Remarks

Robert W. Deacon

For those of you who regard birding as a relaxing walk in the woods or an hour observing your feeders on a sunny day, be glad for the interlude in a busy life. For those of you associated with the LSLBO, rest and relaxation are not words that describe our activities. So much has happened in 2003 that I will be hard pressed to cover it all.

Beginning with new elections to our board we are privileged to announce that Dr. Richard Knapton has accepted the position of Director of Research while Stefan Junkind has remained as Director of Field Operations. At the same general meeting Amy Wotton accepted the position of Secretary. Amy brings with her a degree in Forestry to add to our level of expertise. This leaves vacancies for Treasure and Maintenance to be filled.

The big news for this or any year to date is the announcement of the Alberta Government Centennial grant for the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation (BCBC). The 1.6 million dollars was placed into Alberta Infrastructure and the process for design has begun. This long awaited news has required the reassignment of Frank Fraser from HA Team Leader to BCBC Planner for a period of two years. Frank will remain closely associated with the LSLBO but not on the Board of Directors. With the resignation of Frank from the position of fundraiser – Ronda Groom has been elected to Director of Fundraising.
Our many thanks must go to Peter Moore (Vice – Chair), June Markwart (Alberta Community Development) and the board of the LSLBO for the many hours spent developing a steering committee to draft and re-draft the center concept plan. The project is scheduled for completion in 2005.

This season we have enjoyed the extraordinary input and insight of two volunteers from Pittsburgh, Penn., U.S.A. Moshe Marvit and Danielle Skoncey have contributed widely to our operation for 4 months, as evidenced by the articles in this newsletter. Due to their efforts we have begun an educational collaboration with PennState University. Dr. Josh Marvit has visited our observatory and has initiated plans to bring students to study the boreal forest with a focus on neo- tropical songbirds. The first arrivals could be as early as next spring or early summer.

The Songbird Festival in June and the Important Bird Area Day went extremely well this year largely due to the efforts of Bryn Jonzon our Conservation Educator. With donations of equipment and supplies from Cat the Rental Store, Pat Potvin and The Slave Lake Rotary we managed to generate a profit in excess of $1000. In addition to these events Bryn has continued the Lesser Slave Lake Stewardship program along with the Western Grebe and Tundra Swan studies.

It should never go without saying so I wish to convey my deepest gratitude to our staff for their professional and expert monitoring of our special feathered guests. The efforts of Jul Wojnowski (Bander in Charge) and Tyler Flockhart (Field Assistant) have once again proved to be without equal in our 10 year history. Jul has garnered respect for and confidence in our data collection that is so important to our continued success and Tyler has initiated a study of the much ignored Canada Warbler that could led to a Masters degree for him and a research partnership for the LSLBO.

NESTED IN THIS ISSUE:

For those of you who can't get enough of birds and birdwatching, we've compiled a list of books and movies that will feed your fixation long after the birds have hightailed it South. Turn to page 6.

Banded Tennessee Warbler

Last but never least, I wish to acknowledge the countless hours of volunteer time and effort that has enabled the LSLBO to take the next step into the future with the building of the BCBC in the Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park. This will make our site a visitor destination for hundreds if not thousands of birders as well as serious researchers. It is not all done by any means but with your continued support it will happen.

In closing, the combined efforts of volunteers and staff has resulted in one of the very best newsletters yet.

The Count Goes On

Bryn Jonzon, Conservation Educator

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS OF CANADA

LES ZONES IMPORTANTES POUR LA CONSERVATION DES OISEAUX AU CANADA

A female Western Grebe sits on her nest.

This year marks the second year of the Lesser Slave Lake Stewardship Program. Through a partnership between the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory (LSLBO) and the Canadian Important Bird Areas (IBA), the Lesser Slave Lake Stewardship Program was started. Broadly, its goal was to create a framework that allowed those that used the lake to preserve the lake. In its first season, fifteen people who care about bird habitat on Lesser Slave Lake joined the program.

"Broadly, its goal was to create a framework that allowed those that used the lake to preserve the lake."

Anyone from the Lesser Slave Lake vicinity interested in stewardship may come on board. As this year's IBA Educator, I enjoyed meeting area residents who share a passion for bird conservation and discussing lifestyles that protect and enhance bird habitat.

"Stewardship?" one might ask. Indeed, this word has a broad and variable definition and often leaves me tongue-tied in trying to explain it. Luckily, I have found a definition that is suitable to the mandate of the Lesser Slave Lake Stewardship Program: **A land ethic in which people care for our land, water, and air as part of a natural system, and in a way that sustains and enhances it for generations to come.** Or, more specifically: **The practice of carefully managing land usage to ensure the maintenance or enhancement of natural systems for future generations.** This definition focuses on the important aspect of the *enhancement of natural systems* and *future generations*. This focus is important because, essentially, stewardship involves living in a way that lets natural systems function (or restores their function if necessary) over the long-term, leaving a natural heritage legacy for posterity. Examples include such simple actions as promoting native vegetation along the shoreline and composting to fertilize soil. Benefits of these seemingly minor actions are enormous. If one promotes native vegetation along the shoreline, either by planting or leaving preexisting plants in place, one preserves breeding and feeding grounds for waterbirds. If one composts organic material in order to fertilize, instead of using chemicals, one ensures that no harmful chemical runoff enters the lake and upsets the chemical balance of the lake ecosystem. Specifically, the Lesser Slave Lake Stewardship Program focuses on birds, but bird conservation must involve the entire ecosystem in order to last over the long-term.

Continued on page 4

Studying the Unstudied

Tyler Flockhart, Field Assistant

The Canada Warbler (*Wilsonia canadensis*) is one of the least studied warblers in North America. No major studies have focused on its breeding biology because it is a difficult species to study. The Canada Warbler has very specific habitat requirements; a short breeding period (it is one of the last warblers to arrive on the breeding grounds and one of the first to begin its migration south in fall); and it has a rather localized abundance. In order to breed, the Canada Warbler requires mature stands of deciduous dominated forest with a dense understory (shrub) layer, abundant mosses, and fallen trees. It usually nests in recessed areas within moss hummocks or upturned tree-root masses. Normally, this dense understory layer is found on sandy soils where trees grow with canopy gaps that allow light to reach shrubs growing near the forest floor, particularly along large waterways such as lakes.

Some research suggests that populations have declined steadily for 30 years. Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data suggests a negative population trend across North America and trends derived from the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network (CMMN) suggest overall a slow decline. These noted population declines are perhaps in response to significant loss of forested wetlands, making this a species of interest for management and monitoring. It is even classified as a species of interest in Alberta due to lack of information.

The Canada Warbler is a rather common migrant to Lesser Slave Lake. Locally breeding pairs around the LSLBO field station have prompted a pilot study this summer in order to better understand the breeding ecology of this species. This study will attempt to determine breeding territory size, breeding density, nesting success, nest site requirements, habitat associations while on the breeding territories, and many other aspects of the natural history of this species.

Female and Male Canada Warblers Photo: Powdermill

Boreal Forest

A 13-hectare study plot (200m x 650m) was staked adjacent to the lab, encompassing the three nearby MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) stations. The vegetation of this site is predominately mature deciduous and coniferous trees (approx. 60 years old), with a dense shrub layer of mostly red osier dogwood and beaked hazelnut, and large numbers of snags and fallen woody debris with moss accumulations.

After acquiring necessary permits to colour-band Canada Warbler, we proceeded to individually colour-mark birds arriving at the migration station from their South American winter residence.

We continued to colour-band birds throughout the breeding season at our MAPS stations and by mid July we had captured about 50 different individuals. We searched areas where adults spent time for possible nests, and closely watched parents delivering food to young or fledglings. Supplementing this information that we actively recorded in the field, we also derived locations of birds that were captured in the MAPS nets we operate during the summer breeding period.

Preliminary results from the summer of 2003 are promising and suggest that a long-term project on this species can be undertaken. After a rigorous analysis of the results we will better be able to determine what study techniques will work best and how to carry out the collection of the data in a fast, efficient, and as minimally invasive a method as possible. Secure funding is needed for materials and man-hours to continue the project as it takes a dedicated effort separate from our normal activities. With these considerations and challenges in mind, the LSLBO hopes to further the understanding of this least studied of all warblers.

Continued from page 1

Tundra Swans *Photo: Herbert Clarke*

The Lesser Slave Lake Stewardship Program came about because the Lesser Slave Lake watershed was designated as an Important Bird Area. The IBA program has the goal of establishing local conservation initiatives at all designated sites. Anyone living in the vicinity of the lake may become a steward, but all are invited to participate in the program.
Shoreline residents have the unique opportunity to play a vital and beneficial role in the conservation of the Lesser Slave Lake IBA. Anyone who does not live in the vicinity of the lake, but who would like to learn "stewardly" ways to live at home or at the cottage, may contact us for information.

While the Lesser Slave Lake Stewardship Program involves a general commitment of living in ways that sustain and enhance natural systems, it also involves specific projects unique to this lake. The Lesser Slave Lake Important Bird Area has two bird species of special concern, Western Grebes and Tundra Swans. Western Grebes have a nesting colony on the lake that numbered an estimated 1,600 nests in last year's count. Because such a large number of Western Grebes breed on the lake and because Alberta Sustainable Resource Development lists them as a "sensitive" species, they deserve long-term monitoring in order to identify declines in the population as soon as possible and then mitigate the factors causing the decline. Western Grebe monitoring involves counting the colony of floating nests. A team of six to nine people walk through the cattails and bulrushes in chest waders and count. On July 11, we conducted this year's count and found that the Western Grebes had largely abandoned their nests; thus, the count did not disturb the colony during its critical breeding period. Lake stewards or other volunteers can participate in this nest count, which should appeal to anyone who loves birds, the outdoors, and the potential of getting a bit wet.

The other local Important Bird Area species, the Tundra Swan, uses Lesser Slave Lake not as a breeding habitat but as a migration stopover habitat. In the spring, usually in April, Tundra Swans stop at the lake to refuel before beginning the last leg of their journey to the Arctic breeding grounds. Their fall stopover on Lesser Slave Lake is especially critical. In October, adult Tundra Swans, along with their newborn cygnets, stop for a longer period of time than in the spring at Lesser Slave Lake, feeding on submerged aquatic vegetation. The cygnets need the extra food to fuel their growth as well as their first migratory flight. The adults also depend on Lesser Slave Lake because reproduction and moult of their flight feather depletes vital nutrients, which leaves them in desperate need of nutritious vegetation during the fall migration. Lake stewards who enjoy birdwatching are encouraged to monitor Tundra Swans during the two migration periods and submit their data to the LSLBO. Monitoring is important and provides a good first defense against declines in the population. An estimated two percent of North America's Tundra Swans use Lesser Slave Lake as a migration stopover point, which constitutes a significant proportion of the population, considering how many lakes and puddles dot the boreal forest.

Then again, Lesser Slave Lake constitutes far more than a puddle, which accounts for one of the reasons why birds love it and depend on it as much as they do. While the Lesser Slave Lake Stewardship Program involves specific activities, such as monitoring Important Bird Area species, stewardship actually represents a way of life that helps to harmonize human living with the rest of the natural world. Stewards act as stewards by living in a way that allows natural systems to function on their property, by Lesser Slave Lake, and essentially in all the places they live, visit, and play. Concerned citizens may contact us for information, free materials and guidance at (780) 849-7117 or Education@lslbo.org.

Western Grebe Photo: Lac La Biche Birding Society

LSLBO Spring 2003 Migration Monitoring Update

Jul Wojnowski, Bander-In-Charge

Tennessee Warbler *Photo: Kevin Karlson*

The spring migration of 2003 at LSLBO was similar to that of many monitoring stations across Canada. Weather conspired to make migration almost a non-event. It was a very cold spring with morning temperatures consistently below 0°C until the fourth week of May, which coincided with the departure of the ice off the eastern basin of Lesser Slave Lake. Several days of precipitation, often in the form of snow, hampered netting efforts. The last snowfall was recorded on May 17. The station opened up on April 21 and migration monitoring ran through to June 10 for a total of 50 days of coverage. The pace of migration as usual was dictated by weather events and in general the passage for most species was a week to 10 days later than usual.

Migration monitoring began on April 21, a calm and pleasant day. The most visible migrants were Tundra Swan flying north in small flocks totalling almost 200 birds. Other
waterbirds seen on the narrow stretch of open water along the shore included small numbers of Mallard and American Wigeon. Most abundant were Common Goldeneye. Apart from resident Bald Eagle and Merlin, a Northern Harrier and two Sharp-shinned Hawk were seen. Passerine migration was virtually non-existent with very small numbers of the usual early migrants, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, American Pipit, Song Sparrow and blackbirds. Small numbers of Dark-eyed Junco suggested that migration of this species through the area was near completion.

As expected, new arrivals were recorded almost daily during the fourth week of April with Sandhill Crane, Franklin's Gull, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Hermit Thrush. But this week was quieter than normal for several species. Northern Harrier, which normally have a peak day of 20 - 30 birds, only reached a season high of six birds on April 22. This day also produced the maximum number of American Robin(146) and Yellow-rumped Warbler (11) for the week and the season peak day-total of American Tree Sparrow (7). The fourth week of April also generated peak day-totals for American Green-winged Teal (35), Bufflehead (4), and Dark-eyed Junco (75). The Junco peak took form in a last push on April 25, preceding the arrival of a front which brought cold, unsettled weather with sleet and snow over the next two days. The last few days of April saw the first arrival of

The first week of May was a washout as far as banding was concerned. Only two birds were banded on May 1 and foul weather did not allow banding again until May 8. However, despite the poor weather, migration occurred albeit at a slower than normal pace. Common Loon, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Orange-crowned and Palm Warblers, Lincoln's, Swamp, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows and Brown-headed Cowbird all made first appearances at the station during the first week of May. A hundred or more Greater White-fronted Geese were seen flying in skeins overhead almost daily. Peak day-totals were recorded for several early migrants this week including; Sandhill Crane (290), Greater Yellowlegs (16), Hermit Thrush (16), American Robin (294), American Pipit (66), Orange-crowned Warbler (17), Lincoln's (6), and White-crowned (22) Sparrows, Lapland Longspur (13) and Snow Bunting (13). The appearance of four Varied Thrushes on May 3 was a good sighting but perhaps more impressive were the 24 Fox Sparrows observed on May 4.

The pace of migration picked up during the second week of May as weather improved. The number of species recorded daily jumped considerably with the arrival of many neotropical species overlapping with the presence of many temperate species still moving through. As many as 66 - 71 species were seen most days. Banding was still relatively slow with a peak of 13 birds banded on May 9, 12, & 14. Only 75 birds were banded the entire week. On May 9 and 10 thousands of White-fronted Geese moved through the area along with small numbers of Snow Geese, an uncommon migrant through the area in the spring. Several other waterbirds made first appearances during the first few days of the second week of May including Red-necked Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Gadwall, Canvasback, Surf and White-winged Scoters, Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Common and Forster's Tern. Almost like clockwork, the Mew Gull passage began on May 9. Other migrants arriving this week included Least Flycatcher, Say's Phoebe, Blue-headed Vireo, Winter Wren, Gray-cheeked and Swainson's Thrushes, Yellow, Black-throated Green, and Black-and-white Warblers, American Restart, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Chipping, Clay-colored, Vesper, and Le Conte's Sparrows, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

American Redstart Family *Photo: Powdermill*

Species reaching their season peak day-totals during the second week of May included; Canada Geese (184), Blue-winged Teal (15), Northern Shoveler (13), American Wigeon (33), Lesser Scaup (13), Surf Scoter (121), Lesser Yellowlegs (12), Solitary Sandpiper (4), Bonaparte's (43), Franklin's (1273), and Mew (25) Gulls, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (8), Northern Flicker (15), Blue Jay (14), American Crow (55), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (10), Yellow-rumped Warbler (799), White-throated Sparrow (20), Red-winged (222) and Yellow-headed Blackbird (13), and Brown-headed Cowbird (40).

Cold weather for much of the first half of the third week of May seemed to stall migration. Cool northwesterly breezes blew and it snowed heavily on May 17. Only 27 species were observed this day, but most other days this week had 40 - 50 species recorded. Banding was only marginally better than the previous week but still quite low at 125 birds. The only new arrivals this week were Bank and Barn Swallow and Western Tanager. Peak day-totals were observed for Sharp-shinned Hawk (4), Ring-billed Gull (16), Tree (36) and Bank (202) Swallows. Last sightings of the spring were recorded for several migrants this week included Red-tailed Hawk, Sandhill Crane, Solitary Sandpiper, Mew Gull, Say's Phoebe, American Pipit, Savannah and Le Conte's Sparrows.

The fourth week of May was by far the busiest of the spring. The ice finally broke up and left the eastern basin. Shortly after the ice left American White Pelicans and Long-tailed Ducks were seen on the lake. Other new arrivals this week included Great Blue Heron, Least Sandpiper, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Western Wood-Pewee, Alder

Myrtle Warbler

The LSLBO banding lab

Several other new arrivals were noted on this day including Black Terns, Magnolia, Mourning, Wilson's, and Canada Warblers. The spring's only Gray Catbird was seen on this day. May 25 also saw peak day-totals for several species such as Spotted Sandpiper (8), Least Flycatcher (50), Barn Swallow (6), Swainson's Thrush (39), Yellow Warbler (13), Black-and-white Warbler (6), American Redstart (76), Ovenbird (15), Common Yellowthroat (5), Rose-breasted Grosbeak (16), and Baltimore Oriole (8), Chipping (930), and Clay-colored (19) Sparrows. On May 27, peak totals of Common Loon (80) were recorded as large rafts of loons were seen on the lake as well as several birds flying through the area. On this day four Red-throated Loon were seen about 400 metres offshore. This represented the first sighting of this species for the area.

By early June migration was winding down for most species and many were already establishing territories. Both males and females of several songbird species caught were showing physical evidence of breeding. In the first 10 days of June only 82 birds were banded. Thirty to fifty species of birds were being observed daily.
Typically late arriving species such as Alder Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, Cedar Waxwing, Canada Warbler and American Goldfinch were later than usual. Birds of many of these species started arriving in late May and increased in June but probably did not reach their migratory peak or completed migration by the end of the season. Banding totals for some such as Alder Flycatcher and Canada Warbler were similar or lower than in 2002–another cold and late spring--attesting to the lateness of their migration.

In 39 days of banding 692 birds of 46 species and forms were banded during the spring season representing the lowest spring total since 1998. Banding effort was somewhat lower than the last few years due to the number of days lost due to poor weather. Also, two net-lanes were flooded out and inoperative for most of the spring. The top ten species banded are listed on page 7.

Top 10 most commonly banded birds in spring 2003 at LSLBO with previous spring totals.

Species	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1993	Total
Swainson's Thrush	99	93	**102**	54	69	41	34	14	45	32	3	586
Least Flycatcher	78	72	80	94	92	34	47	26	**166**	128	17	834
American Redstart	70	63	**202**	103	113	87	58	59	118	142	30	1045
White-throated Sparrow	53	68	89	50	60	**94**	71	32	93	35	2	647
"Myrtle" Warbler	49	44	389	**559**	142	39	132	34	40	5	3	1436
Canada Warbler	27	24	**57**	51	48	36	30	25	25	25	19	367
Black-and-white Warbler	23	28	33	32	33	**36**	19	8	13	4	1	230
Ovenbird	23	19	**26**	8	18	17	7	7	3	4	1	133
Clay-colored Sparrow	22	36	76	**174**	72	26	16	9	21	11	7	470
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	**20**	9	5	5	4	1	2	1	3		1	51

Black and White Warbler *Photo: Robert Royse*

Books:

Raven's End by Ben Gadd – a new novel highly acclaimed by both children and adults.
Jonathan Livingstone Seagull by Richard Bach – a 1970s classic.
Flute's Journey: *The Life of a Wood Thrush* by Lynne Cherry – a thoughtful and beautifully illustrated children's book.
Everything You Never Knew About Birds by Rebecca Rupp - full of facts and activities that will interest bird-loving children and adults alike.
Robert Bateman Birds by Robert Bateman – paintings that speak more than a thousand words.
Make Way for Ducklings by Robert McCloskey - the LSLBO conservation educator's top pick for a bird-based children's book.

Books Continued...

The Birder's Handbook: A field guide to the natural history of North American birds by Ehrlich, Dobkin, and Wheye – a field guide that takes your birding knowledge to new heights.
Owls in the Family by Farley Mowat – a must-read for anyone who didn't encounter it as a Grade Six novel study.

Movies:

Winged Migration – very deserving of all the hype it's been given lately.
Chicken Run – they may not be wild birds, but they're very charming plasticene characters.
Fly Away Home – An inspirational and true story starring many cute goslings.

White-throated Sparrow and chicks *Photo: Fernbank Science Center*

Finding the LSLBO

Moshe Zvi Marvit, Long-Term Volunteer

The words "three months" echoed in my head for a few minutes. I converted it into days: 90 days if there are 30 days in each month; more likely one month will have 31 days; and February is not included; so about 91 days. 91 days to really explore Romania simply did not seem long enough. But the consulate said "three months" with the air of surety that only come when the rules have just changed, but, no worries, he remained on top of them. So I began to look around at other options for the end of my three-month stint in Romania.

I first set out to find out what I already knew. And then I listed them.

1) I knew I didn't want to earn money. Trying to make money would be more of a distraction than a benefit and I wasn't sure that there was anybody out there that would pay me to use what I learned to get my degree in philosophy.
2) I knew that I wanted to do what I would do outside of Pittsburgh. It's a great town, but the nice thing about it is that it will remain exactly as you leave it.
3) I knew that I wanted to work with animals. I know very little about most animals, but was pretty sure that I would pick up the basics quickly. And the more advanced stuff I'm still working on.
4) I knew that I had to find a place that would be suitable for Danielle Skoncey (my fiancé and a current long term volunteer) and Greta (our dog).

With these general criteria in place, I looked at the globe and then on the Internet and then back at the globe. There was Thailand with elephants, Greece with turtles, Antarctica with penguins, Costa Rica with birds, Costa Rica with plants, Costa Rica with monkeys, Costa Rica with wildlife rehabilitation, Scotland with potatoes, Israel with hawks, Siberia with Cranes, and Italy with fish. So I contacted each of the organizations in order to find out more information and if volunteering for them was feasible. I received a response from all the organizations, some positive, some apologetic, and one that asked me if I was related to a Peter Marvit in Poland. I looked further into the positive responses, told the woman from Siberia that I wasn't related to Peter, and waited to see what happened.

As the series of correspondences grew, the list thinned itself out. Some organizations were not what I was looking for, some were looking for more experienced volunteers, some were a bit liberal with the word "organization," and some supplied me with further leads. I followed the leads and, I didn't know much about birds and I knew even less about bird monitoring. I pictured stilts on the building, butterfly nets in each hand, monocles on some, iron magnifying glasses, and heaps of scrolled data charts. And although I live only a few hours from the border with Ontario, I knew even less what to expect from Canada. From some you hear that it's pretty much the same as America and from others you hear that it's a vast wilderness. So, with no other template available, I pictured New Jersey.

The more I looked into bird banding in Canada the more it appeared as the logical choice. We set things up with the LSLBO, committed ourselves to spending our summer and some in Canada, and left for our 3-month trip to Romania.

Two weeks into our time in Romania, Danielle and I learned something that one can only learn when one begins to pick up the nuances of a culture: Romania says three months, but they don't mean three months. If one wishes to stay longer than three months in Romania, one simply hops on a train to the nearest border-there are either 5 or 6 of them, depending on when one is there-crosses over and then returns. Upon return one is reissued a new three month visa; there are no restrictions on how many times one may do this. We did it once and stayed in Romania for about six months. When we returned to the U.S., we loaded up a semi-reliable car, and headed northwest.

We have now been with the LSLBO for almost three months and still are learning and experiencing new things every day. Whether it's learning specific ways to age a bird or sitting in the thick of the boreal forest with a bug jacket and a bowl of guacamole, no two days here are alike. Looking back, I should have put that down high on my list of criteria, but it seems to have found its way on there somehow.

The Shore of Lesser Slave Lake

Eggstraordinary Eggs

Danielle Skoncey, Long Term Volunteer

The ordinary egg is something that many people take for granted. We think that eggs are a tasty Sunday morning breakfast and nothing else. But in nature, eggs are actually a unique container, perfect for protecting growing embryos that will eventually turn into baby birds.

Bird eggs have several parts to them. These parts consist of the yolk, germinal disc, the chalazae, albumen, and the shell. The germinal disc is the part of the egg that turns into the baby chick. The yolk is the part of the egg that feeds the growing chick; it is full of nutrious protein, fat, sugar, vitamins, and antibodies. The chalazae are the globs of white stuff that you see when you break an egg open. These are strings of protein used to keep the growing chick in place while development occurs. The egg whites, or albumen, consist mostly of water and protein. It also has a very important enzyme in it, called lysozyme, which protects the baby from bacteria that may make it into the eggshell. Now, the shell is the protective device. It is used to keep the embryo safe while it grows and develops inside. The shell is made up of mostly calcium. Half of the total composition of the shell is calcium, which means that the female must have a lot of calcium in her system before she can lay an egg. For years scientists have wondered just how female birds can possibly eat that much calcium in their diet. But as it turns out, they don't really eat that much to make several whole eggs. Instead, they use calcium from the bones in their own bodies.

If you are interested in examining the strengths of an egg a bit further, try this experiment: Crack 2 eggs open and empty them of their contents. Try to get 4 fairly equal halves when you crack them open. Now place them cracked-side down on a table and space them out in a square. Now try to guess how many books you think the eggs can hold before they break. Once you have a guess, place as many books on the eggs as you can until they begin to break. Once the eggs are broken take the books that you used on the eggs and weigh them. That way you know just how much weight the eggs were able to handle. Eggs are pretty cool, huh?

Since eggshells are made mostly of calcium they are really strong. Here's something to try: take a regular chicken egg and hold it top to bottom. Now squeeze. Nothing should happen. The reason is that eggs are not only made of strong materials but their design is made for strength as well. If you look at the top and bottom of the egg you will notice that the egg is dome-shaped. The shape of a dome is especially designed to handle a large amount of pressure by dispersing the weight of pressure over a larger surface area, verses allowing the weight to focus on one particular part of the egg. This way when the mother bird sits of her eggs she will not crush them! Now everyone says eggshells are fragile, and they are, but only on the sides, not the top and bottom. Now try crushing the egg by holding the sides. Eww! You should get a gooey mess when you squeeze it that way!

Fun Facts About Eggs:

-The largest egg ever laid was by the now extinct Elephant Bird. Its egg was close to the size of a beach ball and weighed about 27 pounds. That's equal to about 100 chicken eggs!

-Most people think that all eggs are oval like chicken eggs, but owls actually lay eggs that are as round as ping-pong balls.

-An old superstition says that a person who finds an egg with two yolks should make a wish while eating it.

-The ancient Greeks used to brush their teeth with eggshells and wine.

-The Northern Flicker's eggs have brown scribbles all over their shells. This is why the Flicker is nicknamed the writing master.

Western Grebe eggs on Lesser Slave Lake

For more cool facts like these, check out:
Everything You Never Learned About Birds,
by Rebecca Rupp

An Important Day for an Important Bird Area

The First Annual Important Bird Area (IBA) Day at Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory flew with the highest success that a pilot project can have. On August 3, as early as 8:15, we had a non-stop crowd at the bird observatory until about two o'clock. Bird banding demonstrations, waterbird viewing through spotting scopes, a birdfeeder craft, and LSLBO merchandise sales kept the eighty-two visitors intrigued, and kept us staff and volunteers on our toes. The rain tried to scare us away briefly in the morning, but the generally sunny and hot day contributed to the festive summer mood. After an afternoon siesta, we hosted a campfire at the Marten River Campground in Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park. The participants learned through a variety of games all about the Canadian IBA program and why Lesser Slave Lake constitutes an IBA. IBA Day brought in over two-hundred dollars that will go straight into boreal bird conservation. The Second Annual IBA Day will take place on Sunday, August 1, 2004. Mark your calendars!

Hatch-year male Western Tanager

Upcoming Special Events:

-Between December 14, 2003 to January 5, 2004, you can take part in the 104th annual Christmas Bird Count. For more information, please visit the Bird Studies Canada website at: www.bsc-eoc.org/national/cbcmain.html or call at: 1-888-448-BIRD.

-On June 5-6, 2004, the LSLBO will host the 10th annual songbird festival. Stay posted at the LSLBO website for more information as it becomes available.

-During April keep your eyes on the skies for big white birds. The Tundra Swans should be migrating north in April for their annual spring migration. If you would like to participate in a Tundra Swan monitoring program, please contact the LSLBO educator.

Links For the Birds

Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory — www.lslbo.org

American Bird Conservancy — www.abcbirds.com

Bird Studies Canada — www.bsc-eoc.org/bcsmain.html

Centre for Conservation Sciences, Manomet — www.manomet.org/

Point Reyes Bird Observatory — www.prbo.org/

The Nature Conservancy — www.tnc.org/wings

The National Aviary — www.aviary.org

University of Manitoba Field Station — www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/science/delta_marsh/

Thanks to…

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Alberta
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Northern Lakes College

Magnolia Warbler

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