

The Warbler



WINTER 2006

Winter Birding

Nanci Langford, Editor

Many of us think of birding as a warm weather pursuit, but as the reports in this newsletter show, winter in the Lesser Slave Lake area this year has been a busy season for birding and bird-related activities. The emergence of the BCBC on the edge of the lake is a visible sign of that busy-ness but also significant are the programs like the Family Winter Birding Series and the new Junior Bird Club, and research such as that done by University of Alberta researchers on the chickadee. Winter birding is popular and what a great winter we've had to enjoy it!

One of the questions I had this winter, as it has been so mild until recently, is how do unusually warm winters in northern Alberta affect the birds? And if this is global warming and likely continues, what impact does that have on the birds? Scientists have been studying this issue for years, and suggest that climate change will bring significant changes in the locations birds will choose for breeding. Many species will be driven from their current ranges by warmer temperatures, due to a different climate producing different plants and insects. And something for us to watch for - Dr. Terry Root found "a striking association" over a thirty year period between the arrival of migrant birds and the thawing of ice lake. She claims the ice-out date is "a very good indicator of the weather itself". This is something we can monitor at our new BCBC to help us understand how warmer winters will affect both winter birds and summer migrants in our area. Enjoy the remaining winter birding before the ice melts!

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Request:

If you have any materials that would help us document the history of the LSLBO: papers, pictures, artifacts, please contact Amy at the LSLBO office (780-849-7117 or birds@lslbo.org) and we can arrange for pick-up if needed.

Chairman's Remarks

Bob Deacon

Well, winter has finally arrived and with a vengeance. We have been out to fill our multiple feeders almost daily since the severe cold and ground covering snow but it is hard to keep up with our avian visitors' appetites. There have been some observations that suggest a lower than normal bird population this year, but not, it seems, north of Slave Lake. The pine siskins are here in the hundreds along with flocks of grosbeaks, black capped chickadees and numerous jays. There has always been enough song to sooth our frozen ears even on the coldest days. I can only hope that your feeders are attracting and serving the same numbers of joyous singers. Lucky us!

Our projects have also been favoured with good luck and, of course, good planning over the last seven months and the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation is rapidly nearing completion. Our latest construction schedule shows a completion date of late April and this includes the exhibits and furniture with occupancy to take place in early May. With the shortage of manpower and material delays this is indeed welcome news. Alberta Infrastructure and Chandos construction have worked small wonders to achieve this result. So much so that the BCBC governance board (a partnership arrangement between Alberta Community Development and the LSLBO) has decided to proceed to Stage 2 and begin construction of the Eco Lodge just south and west of the main site. This building can house 8 researchers and /or eco-tourists quite comfortably with room for up to 4 more guests on a less private basis. The plans have been approved and are presently being reviewed by Alberta Infrastructure for their

stamp of approval. The overall costs are within our budget and the lodge should be finished in July.

The grand opening plan is near completion as well, and invitations will be sent out in plenty of time to guarantee a good turnout. The opening will coincide with the annual Songbird festival running from June 2 to June 4. This year the second annual Bird Run in support of the LSLBO will be held on Sunday June 4. During the weekend we will also hold a Wine and Cheese Volunteer Appreciation Night for all those people who, over the years, contributed to our cumulative success. You know who you are and no invitation is necessary (bring your stories and pictures to share). Plan on the whole weekend for the best experience, but remember to book ahead for accommodation at both the hotels and camp grounds. See you then and Good Birding.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT A SUCCESS!

Thank you to Martin and Shannon Brilling, Patti Campsall, Arlene, Karina and Tyler Gramiak, Ronda Groom, Colleen, Kimberley and Megan Johnston, Tyler Kilmury, Chad and Neal Knoot, Aaron Lehman, Jeff Manchak, Peter Moore, Kaedann and Pamella Price, Rodney Stephenson, Darrell and Joanne Walde and Amy Wotton for participating. This enthusiastic group recorded 657 birds from 25 different species in just over 28 hours of combined birding time. Thanks everyone for another great Christmas Bird Count. We look forward to everyone participating in the Baillie Bird-athon in May. For complete results from the Christmas Bird Count you can check out <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/download/CBCprairienorth2005.pdf>.

JUNIOR BIRD CLUB TAKES FLIGHT!!

Patti Campsall, Boreal Educator

On February 7, 2006, a small but keen group of families attended the very first official meeting of the Junior Bird Club (JBC). The aim of our Junior Bird Club is to encourage young people from the ages of 7 to 14 to gain experience and knowledge about our local birds and the boreal forest. It is also a chance to team up with other families for fun and educational birding events.

Members will become familiar with birding in the boreal forest by attending indoor events to learn new skills as well as outdoor field-trips to practice those skills. There will be a strong focus on getting children outdoors on birding field trips and mornings at the LSLBO banding lab. Members will also be able to earn JBC participation points that will make them eligible to receive one of the following great prizes:

A pair of Binoculars

A copy of "Birds of Alberta" by John Acorn and Chris Fisher

CD set of "The Birds of Northern and Central Alberta" by Jim and Barb Beck.

During our first meeting, the new JBC members brushed up on their "Birding Basics" which served as an introduction to the cool world of birding. They learned all about the use and care of their binoculars, how to identify a bird, and the information available in their field guides. Did you know that there are 6 S's in bird identification? Sound, site, sight, season, shape, and size can all be used to help name that mystery bird. Then the families finished off with a rousing game of "Bird Jeopardy" for gummy worm prizes.

Every month, there will be at least one fun - filled, educational event planned for the club members. Some of our upcoming events include:

A "Winter Hike" that will take place on March 11, 2006. We will be meeting at the Northshore Day Use Area at hike the trails and spot wintering birds.

Waterfowl Watching – in the spring, we will be heading out to some local ponds to spot returning waterfowl.

Spending mornings at the LSLBO Research Lab for a chance to really see birds up close and personal.

In the fall, we are planning a trip to the Royal Alberta Museum to check out the awesome displays on wildlife and birds.

We are really excited about our new club and upcoming evening and we would love to have more happy birders join!! If you are interested in finding out more about our Junior Bird Club, you can contact Jeff Manchak at (780)849-7101 or Patti Campsall at (780)849-7105 with the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation.



Back Row: Diane Knoot, Iain Johnston, Patti Campsall, Davena Ross, Colin Ross

Front Row: Chad Knoot, Rachel Johnston, Kimberley Johnston, Caitlyn Ross, Jeff Manchak

CANADIAN MIGRATION MONITORING NETWORK MEETS

Amy Wotton



Photo: Amy Wotton

25 October 2005 - The 5th biennial Canadian Migration Monitoring Network (CMMN) meeting was held in Prince Edward County, Ontario on 14-16 October 2005. This meeting, organized and hosted by Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory and Bird Studies Canada, drew 32 participants from across Canada. Sixteen migration monitoring stations provided station updates. Other presentations highlighted collaborative projects involving CMMN stations, including the use of radar and acoustic microphones to monitor migrating birds, DNA "bar coding" of birds, and the breaking of ground for a new Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation at Slave Lake in Alberta.

Letter to the Editor

I read the fall 2005 issue of 'The Warbler' with interest and appreciate being mentioned in your editorial on the front page regarding 'looking back'. There were a great many more worthy people than I involved in those days, Frank Fraser, Stephan Jungkind and Steve Lane were three of the most important. They devoted countless hours, expertise, knowledge, and tremendous enthusiasm towards getting the bird observatory off the ground; and there were many local volunteers who came out and helped construct the first building, assisted with the banding and helped where needed. The idea that maybe one day there would be a 'real' building with first class facilities was a pipe dream back then and it's very gratifying to see it reaching fruition. Congratulations to everyone who has been involved along the way and I look forward to seeing where it all goes from here.

Editor's response:

Thanks for your letter Marion and let me assure you that we are putting together the history of the LSLBO that will document the tremendous contributions of Frank, Stephan, Steve and many others who made the LSLBO viable and the new BCBC possible. It is a history of which we can all be proud. Nanci Langford

Back Yard Birding at Wayne's

Wayne Bowles

Saturday morning March 11, 2006, the morning after the big snow, I have the driveway and sidewalk shoveled so now I can settle in with a cup of coffee and see what birds are around. Working in this area causes us backyard birders a problem; we are seldom home in the daylight. Sometimes I think all the birding I do involves venturing out in the dark, putting seed in feeders, then refilling them a couple of days later in the dark. I try to imagine how many birds have visited by the amount of seed that is consumed. I love Saturdays when we are not traveling, a great opportunity to see for myself who has come calling. This morning I saw a couple of Chickadees and 5 Evening Grosbeaks. I have read that the Redpolls tend to erupt at various locations during the winter months. Well, this is the first time since I have moved into this house that the Redpolls have wintered elsewhere. I have only seen 3 in our yard all winter. I generally have about 30 hanging around feasting on expensive Niger seed and the black-oil sunflower seeds that I put out. I also put out unsalted peanut butter and some suet. The peanut butter and suet is consumed by the Harry and Downy woodpeckers and the Nuthatches (both Red and White-breasted). Magpies have always been a pest around the yard but I guess they were here first. We also have Blue jays, they love the peanuts provided by our neighbors. We had a nice flock of Pine Grosbeaks here earlier this winter but I haven't seen them this morning. I have been writing a few sentences then wandering over to the window to see if I am missing anything. My last trip just moments ago I saw a beautiful mature Bald Eagle flying low over the trees. There is another flock of smaller birds around but I have to use my binoculars to identify the species. This hasn't been a great winter for numbers of birds but I think all the usual species have been represented.

Family Winter Birding Series

Jeff Manchak

After four months of programs, the Family Winter Birding Series has drawn to a close. The Series was successful, with over 50 participants attending the five programs that were offered. Some highlights of the series include:

A fine display of architectural prowess by our bird feeder buildings at *Feeding Winter Birds*.

A rather spirited game of "Name that Winter Bird" during the *Warm-up to Winter Birds*.

A very respectable 12 species of birds counted during our *Family Winter Bird Count*.

The invention of the "Red Light – Green Light Owling Game" during the *Family Owl Excursion*.

The over-consumption of Gummy Bears during *Winter Wonders* (we had to stay warm you know...)

All in all, the Family Winter Birding Series was successful and we'd like to thank everyone for participating and helping us celebrate winter birds. Now bring on the spring!

Bird calls may have meaning

A deep-voiced black-capped chickadee may wonder why other birds ignore it, but there may be a good reason behind the snub, says a University of Alberta study that looked into how the bird responds to calls.

Dr. Isabelle Charier and Dr. Chris Sturdy modified the black-capped chickadee calls, played those sounds back to the bird and observed how they reacted. They found that the chickadee relies on several acoustic features including pitch, order of the notes and rhythm of the call. They also rejected the calls of the control bird, the gray-crowned rosy finch, in favour of their own species. This research is published in the current edition of the journal, "Behavioural Processes."



The chickadees two most well-known vocalizations are the "chick-a-dee" call and the "fee-bee" song. The song is produced mainly by males and is used to attract a mate and to defend a territory during the breeding season. The learned call is produced by both sexes throughout the year and is believed to serve a variety of functions such as raising mild alarm, maintaining contact between mates and coordinating flock activities. They even go through stages of learning this "language," which explains

why juvenile birds can be heard frantically practicing to perfect the call.

In this study, the team—Charrier was a post-doctoral fellow in Sturdy's lab but has since returned to France—discovered that if they raise the pitch, the bird would still respond, but if they lowered it, the chickadee stopped answering. "We speculate that this happens because the pitch may be related to size, so the chickadee thinks, 'wow, that bird sounds big,' and they stay away from it," says Sturdy, from the Faculty of Science. "The first thing birds use to identify vocalizations is the frequency range. Different birds use different acoustic ranges as a filter, so if it is too high or too low, they ignore it."

When the scientists switched around the order of the notes in the sound, the birds didn't respond to those calls. When the space between the sounds increased—there was no difference when they decreased—the chickadees stopped responding. "These changes are so slight to our ears that we wouldn't be able to tell the difference, but a chickadee can," said Sturdy, who adds that the way chickadees learn vocalizations is parallel to the way humans learn language. "This research shows that there is a functional aspect to these calls. Some note types may be tied to food gathering or trying to get birds around a feeder and this is laying the foundation for decoding these sounds on a fine scale."

Sturdy said this research will help learn in which social context black-capped chickadees will be more sensitive to a particular type of calls.

New System to Help Birders



A new version of the online program by Cornell Lab of Ornithology has been developed. The interactive website gathers observations by birders into a central database so that birders and scientists in Canada, the United States and Mexico can use it. It allows us to "monitor birds at a scale that's never before been attempted," project leader Brian Sullivan claims.

The second version makes it easier to enter data and to generate information that birders can use. Sullivan said, "We want data from *everyone*." That includes students just beginning to learn about birds to experts who've focused on avian behavior for more than 20 years.

The new eBird generates lists--such as life, province and country--within the My eBird section of the site. It also allows users to generate maps and frequency bar charts about a specific species as well as frequency bar charts for a location. And you can see your life list automatically generated and updated.

When an eBird user enters data into the program, Sullivan said, "You're feeding data into Avian Knowledge Network. The idea is to break down boundaries," whether they're national/political or institutional, Sullivan said. "It's time to pull together data and look at the big picture." On eBird you can see how the combined observations of thousands of ebirders across North America paint a picture of bird distribution, migration and abundance. To participate all you have to do is register (it's free), then start submitting observations.

Why don't you peek at [eBird](http://www.ebird.org) now and see what it looks like? www.ebird.org

Upcoming Events

June 2: Grand opening of the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation

June 2: Volunteer Appreciation Evening

June 3&4: Songbird Festival at the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation

June 4: 2nd Annual Bird Run/Walk

July 6 - 9: Annual Nature Canada Conference, Black Knight Inn, Red Deer. For full details go to: www.rdrn.fanweb.ca and follow links to conference pages

8th Annual Swan Festival Saskatoon Island Provincial Park , AB April 22 & 23

Saturday April 22: Wine and Cheese Social, Silent Auction and special presentation by Candace Savage (author) 7:30 p.m. at Centre 2000

Sunday April 23: 12:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saskatoon Island Provincial Park Bus tours (\$3/person, \$10/family), wetland wonders tent, face-painting, nature activities, chili lunch, displays, and more!

Contact Margot Hervieux for more info at margot.hervieux@gov.ab.ca

Feature Bird

Jeff Manchak

Waxwing family (*Bombycillidae*)**BOHEMIAN WAXWING*****Bombycilla garrulus***

Length: 21 cm (8¼")

Wingspan: 37 cm (14½")

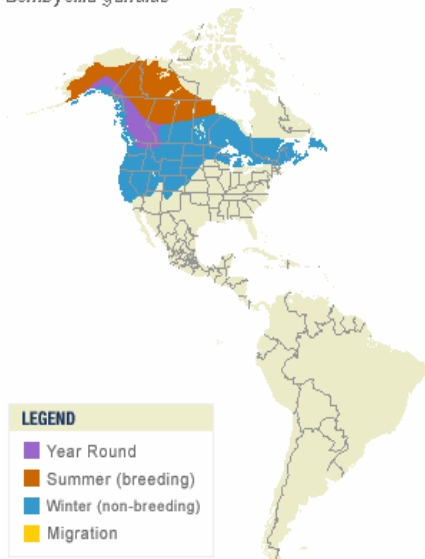
Weight: 56 g (2 oz.)

If there is a more prevalent winter bird this year in the Slave Lake area, we've missed it. Bohemian waxwings have been around the town of Slave Lake since the late part of October and are still winging around as this is written (February 15th).

This beautifully crested songbird, has a cinnamon-coloured body with a prominent black eyeline and mask, and a tail tipped in yellow. If you look closely, you'll find a red spot on the birds' wings. This "waxy" extension to the feather is how waxwings got their name. The Cedar waxwing, a close relative of the Bohemian, is seen quite regularly around these parts in the summer. To distinguish the two, look at the undertail coverts (under their tail): the Bohemian has a deep rusty colour there, while the Cedar sports an off-white colour.

When in flight, feeding or just relaxing, Bohemian waxwings are almost constantly making noise. Their high-pitched, quavering whistle can be heard from a long distance away. A tree full of Bohemians is deafening!

Bohemian Waxwing
Bombycilla garrulus



Map by Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Range data by NatureServe



Pair of Bohemian Waxwings

John Acorn and Chris Fisher in Birds of Alberta describe the movement of flocks of these birds as something similar to a "great, flying amoeba." Numbering in the hundreds, huge flocks can be seen flying about in search of their favourite winter food... mountain ash berries. When feeding on the berries, the birds can sometimes be approached quite closely. Watch out though, don't park your car beneath a mountain ash tree in the winter, otherwise you're bound to have some new "decorations" on your hood and roof when you return.

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