
THE OWL FILES

ALBERTA NOCTURNAL OWL SURVEY, BEAVERHILL BIRD OBSERVATORY

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November 2004



Central Alberta Owl Survey

For the first time ever, I participated in an official owl survey, and had a great time doing so! My husband, Barry, reluctantly agreed to accompany me. We did the first survey on Thursday night, April 8, 2004. Barry told a good friend, Dave, what we were up to and Dave asked if he could join; owls fascinate him. So, the three of us went on our survey, bundled up for the "3-hour tour" which started at 5° C, and dropped to 2° C by survey's end. We enjoyed the sounds of the night in the Lindbrook-Tofield area. The great horned owls and the northern saw-whets called back to us, grouse drummed and coyotes howled and the northern lights put on quite the show. The evening was wonderful and exciting. And we were already talking about "next time."

On May 5, the three of us went out again.

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'Owl'berta Results 2004

The Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey continued to expand in 2004, with an increase in the number of survey routes and the number of volunteers. There were 86 routes (843 stations) surveyed this year with 43 of these routes being surveyed twice. There were 7 species found (plus five unknown owls). The number of Northern Saw-whet Owls and Great Horned Owls detected was very high this year, most probably due to high prey densities (voles, mice, snowshoe hares).



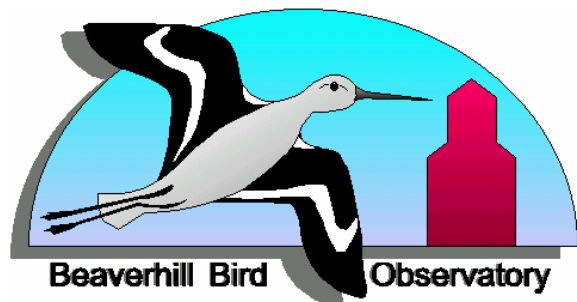
Photo by
Dan Farr

The most exciting new route for owl numbers and diversity was in southwestern Alberta near Black Diamond Alberta. The Flynn's detected an amazing six species (Boreal, Great Gray, Great Horned, Northern Pygmy, Northern Saw-whet, and Long-eared Owl) and 16 individuals!! Only two routes had no owls detected on them. Heather Wheeliker and Glenn Hvenegaard submitted articles on their owl surveys, which are included left and on pages 2 and 3.

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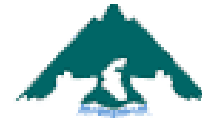
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Thanks to our 2004
Funding and In Kind
Supporters:



Federation of
Alberta Naturalists



Alberta
Conservation
Association



Jim and Barb Beck

Central Alberta Owl Survey (Con't.)

This time, the air was warm at 20° C at the start, dropping to just 16° above by the end of the night. It was warmer than some *days* we had in summer! On this survey, we faintly heard one saw whet, but the great horned owls were *very* exciting and the wood frogs and boreal chorus frogs were loud! We recalled the Northern saw whets from the first survey, how we were confused by their call – was it calling from the southwest? Or was it the northeast? Was it one owl or two? In conversation with a cousin sometime after, he told us about a northern saw-whet he and his Dad tracked one night in Cape Breton that seemed to "throw" its voice in the woods, making them "chase" this unknown sound for three hours! They weren't doing an official survey, but curiosity got the best of them at their cabin one night.

But our second survey night wasn't a big one for saw whets. On this second survey, we were treated to great horned owls up close. On our third stop of the night, we were ready to get back in our vehicle when we heard it loud and clear – the great horned we heard earlier was now high in a tree in a single row of old poplar that lined the edge of the field on the little gravel road. While listening and watching it, another called from a distance. Stop three was just a warm-up of things to come...

The remaining stations went on with some calling, but not much excitement, except that our CD player was skipping badly (we were thankful to have brought a back-up player!), and we all forgot our flashlights. As we approached our last stop, we recalled how we got lost looking for "stop 10" but were rewarded with seeing a young moose that had bedded down in a roadside ditch for the night. This time, we found our "official" last stop, looked at our watches, and thought about work the next day. It was 11:45 pm. One more call, and we can go home...or so we thought.

During the two minutes of silence, a great-horned called from a long ways away, to the SE – coming from the direction of Tofield. In fact, we could see the lights of Tofield several kilometers away. We listened. And then it came closer. Then one called back from the NW, but nearby. And then another called from the SE, followed by close calling to the NW. By now there were two in the SE, calling and getting closer, and one responding from the NW. And then an unidentified squawking started from very close by, also to the SE. The "squawk" was interrupted only by the 2 great-horneds that seemed close to "the squawk" and close to us, and the nearby NW owl responding. It was fantastic! We stayed at the last stop for about half an hour, simply listening to the back-and-forth calling and wondering what the squawk was – a young owl? a magpie? We were amazed at how, even so long after the great horned had played on the tape, the owls were able to follow the sound and appear so close to us. We could have stayed at that stop well into the wee hours of morning, but 5:30 am ...and work...comes early...

All in all, the owl survey was a wonderful experience, and we all *enthusiastically* plan to participate again next year.

Heather Wheeliker, Lindbrook, AB

Owl Surveying at Miquelon

University students have joined me to survey owls for the past 3 years at Miquelon Provincial Park. Each year has produced at least one night with a high number of owls recorded. The highest in 2002 was 16 owls (6 saw-whet and 10 great-horned), and the highest number in 2003 was 13 owls (8 and 5). I was not prepared for the even better results in 2004. On April Fool's Day at our first station, I gave the students an overview of Alberta's owls and survey procedures to the students, being careful to not raise their expectations too high. On some nights in the past, I have recorded only a single owl. However, we immediately heard a saw-whet and a great-horned, and then added a new species for the survey, a barred owl calling very clearly. At our very next stop, we heard 2 saw-whets, a great-horned, and a long-eared owl as well. Four species in two stations impressed the students greatly! The evening carried on much the same, with owls recorded at all stations except two. Even at the last station, which had never produced an owl before (mostly ploughed field around it), we heard a great-horned. For the night, we recorded a total of 18 individual owls. We were also enjoyed a variety of other animal life, including Canada Geese, coyotes, red squirrels, a porcupine munching on bark, and some noisy cows and dogs. My goal is to create in my students a keen interest in wildlife and concern for conservation. Owling is a great way to start.

Glen Hvenegaard, Miquelon Lake South (Route 31)

Word Search – Owls Are Not the Only Birds of Prey

Find the hidden words, they can be vertical, horizontal, or backward. Circle all the words, then you'll have a number of letters left over that spell the secret phrase.

B	O	K	E	M	G	S	S	T	K	T	P	R	P
U	R	D	W	O	E	R	O	W	S	R	H	E	F
S	I	O	L	A	E	R	A	A	E	E	R	I	A
H	E	D	A	P	H	H	L	Y	R	E	N	R	L
R	E	C	O	D	E	S	E	I	G	G	A	R	C
N	P	O	A	E	W	T	O	R	N	R	C	A	O
D	C	R	R	T	U	I	I	G	A	O	C	H	N
E	P	T	T	C	C	N	N	O	R	U	I	S	F
E	L	A	A	R	E	H	E	G	I	N	P	H	L
P	M	G	G	L	I	D	E	P	E	D	I	U	I
S	O	H	A	B	I	T	A	T	R	D	T	N	G
E	V	I	D	E	T	B	A	L	D	A	E	T	H
E	Y	E	S	N	S	N	O	L	A	T	R	T	T
E	R	U	T	L	U	V	C	A	L	L	R	Y	G

ACCIPITER
ACUTE
BALD
BROADWINGED
BUSH
CALL
CATCH
COOPERS
DIVE
EAGLE
EYES
FALCON
FLIGHT
GLIDE
GOLDEN
GOSHAWK
GROUND
GYR
HABITAT
HARRIER
HAWK
HIDE
HUNT
MERLIN
NEST
PEREGRINE
PREY
SOAR
SPEED
TALONS
TREE
VULTURE

**Last Issue Answer – Names are Different!

Table 1. Data (submitted to date) from Alberta Volunteer Owl Survey in 2003 and 2004.

Species	2003		2004	
	Number	Owls/10 stops	Number	Owls/10 stops
Barred Owl	22	0.359	27	0.320
Boreal Owl	36	0.588	45	0.534
Great Gray Owl	8	0.131	19	0.225
Great Horned Owl	137	2.239	273	3.238
Long-eared Owl	9	0.147	28	0.332
Northern Pygmy Owl	2	0.033	4	0.047
Northern Saw-whet Owl	111	1.814	269	3.191
Short-eared Owl	2	0.033	0	0.000
Unknown Owl sp.	2	0.033	5	0.059
TOTAL	329	5.376	670	7.948
Number of Routes	62		86	
Number of Volunteers	116		163	

SPOTLIGHT ON ALBERTA PHOTOGRAPHER'S



Martina Frey took this photo near Opal, Alberta. Thanks to Harvey Kuszmaniuk for passing along the photo of this Northern Hawk-Owl tried to steal his grandson Mitchell's hat.

Thanks to the 2004 Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey Team!!!!!!!

Surveyors		Surveyors		Assistants	
Esther	Allarie	Mike	Rosendal	Sarah	Holmes
Elizabeth	Anderson	Kent	Russell	Jack & Dot	Howell
Keith	Anderson	Karen	Scott	Nathan	Hudson
Annette	Baker	Hugh	Seaton	Art	Hughes
Jim	Bell	Martin	Sharp	Kathy	Hunter
Suzanne	Benoit	Jessica	Snedden	Dave	Jens
Andra	Bismanis	Bryn	Spence	Todd	Kemper
Judy	Boyd	Alan	Spiller	Richard	Klauke
Rita	Braga	Vincent	Szabo	Rich	Krikun
Dave	Brennan	Erin	Tessier	Crystal	Legault
John	Cartwright	Dragomir	Vujnovic	Joe	Litke
Linda	Charest	Heather	Wheeliker	Barry	Magee
Al	DeGroot	Pres	Winter	Steve	Maker
Marc	Demers	Kevin	Wirtanen	Jason	Miller
Ross	Dickson	Henry & Barbara	Wyatt	Carolyn	Miller
Nicki & Aaron	Dublenko	The	Bartley's	John	Moore
David	Duncan	Assistants		Ashley	Moore
Douglas	Faulder	Nicki	Albus	Juanita	Mumby
Lenora & Dick	Flynn	Norm	Allarie	Neill	Murphy
John & Peggy	Folinsbee	Michelle	Allarie	Sandra	Opdenkamp
Martina	Frey	Robert	Anderson	Carey & Dave	Organ
Ed	Fuller	Judy	Anderson	D.	Palsat
Cam	Gillies	Morten	Asfeldt	Myrna	Pearman
Glen	Gustafson	Annette	Baker	Karl	Peck
Matt	Hanneman	Maureen	Bell	Rider	Petch
Dorothy	Hazlett	A.	Bradley	Judy	Petersen
Ted	Hindmarch	Glenna	Brennan	Sharon	Ranson
Velma	Hudson	Vivian	Brissette	Bill	Richards
Mary	Huston	Tawnya	Brown	Zoe and Tiffany	Rockey
Glen	Hvenegaard	Bruce & Dan	Burns	Mike	Rosendal
Joan	Kerr	Nadia	Cantant	Lawrence & Barbara	Roth
Wayne	Kinsella	Shari	Clare	Thom	Rypien
Stephen	Kull	Steve	Cooney	Patricia	Sharp
Harvey	Kuszmaniuk	Ray	Cromie	Brenda	Shaughnessy
Karla	Langlois	Peter	Demulder	I.	Simons
Laurie	Lemmon	Martha	Doxsey	Kirk	Smith
Joseph	Litke	Karin & Stephen	Eldred	Micheal	Smook
Pat	Long	Mick	Ellenwood	Lucille	Spiller
Janine	Maker	Wes	English	Coleen	Stevens
Mike	Maximchuk	Patti	Faulder	Trevor	Tessier
Shonna	McLeod	Richard	Faulder	Lori	Thorsen
Stephanie	Morin	Heidi	Fett	Jonathan	Tsetso
Dean	Morin	Mario	Flecha	Paul	Vink
Derek	Murray	Tyler	Flockhart	Ksenija	Vujnovic
George	Newton	Renee	Franken	Teresa	Winter
Sean	Nicoll	Phil & Bev	French	Joy	Wirtanen
Kelly	Ostermann	Jason	Gerber	W.	Zurfluh
Jack	Park	Karen	Graham		Ashbee
Chantal & Rick	Pattenden	B.	Hafner		Dylan
Douglas	Petersen	Dustin	Haigh		Genevieve
Cindy	Platt	Anita	Hanneman		Ingram
Chuck	Priestley	Lucille	Harrison		James
Lisa	Priestley	Gwynne	Hayward		
Tyler	Ray	S.	Helbert		
Charlie	Raymond	Heather	Henson		
John	Rockey	Kyle & Patti	Hodsin		

"To be a strong voice for the greater appreciation and conservation of Alberta's natural environment:"



The Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) was founded in 1970 when six regional naturalist clubs came together for the good of both their collective membership and Alberta's natural history. Since the charter clubs federated, some dating back to the turn of the last century (Red Deer River Naturalists - 1906; Edmonton Natural History Club - 1907) FAN has grown to include 27 clubs, representing over 3,500 members, from all corners of the Province.

The strength of FAN is its volunteer members, who, in a variety of ways work toward FAN's vision for the Province: Alberta's natural heritage is widely enjoyed, deeply appreciated, and thoroughly protected. Along the way to achieving its vision FAN has received the Premiers Award of Excellence (1998), the Emerald Award (1992), the Bighorn Award (1990), and the ESSO Volunteer Recognition Award.

Volunteers can participate in many types of Citizen Science projects throughout Alberta.

- [Alberta Bird Atlas Update Project \(FAN\)](#)
- [Alberta Birdlist Program \(FAN\)](#)
- [Alberta May Species Counts](#)
- [Christmas Bird Count](#)
- [Important Bird Areas Program \(FAN\)](#)
- [Living By Water Project \(FAN\)](#)
- [Nocturnal Owl Monitoring](#)
- [North American Breeding Bird Surveys](#)
- [Opportunities for Birders](#)
- [Prairie Nest Records Scheme](#)
- [Provincial Bird Species List \(FAN\)](#)

Websites of Interest

<http://www.beaverhillbirds.com>

<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/bscmain.html>

<http://owling.com/>

<http://www.owlinstitute.org/ori.html>

<http://www.fanweb.ca>

<http://www.owlpages.com>

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: How do I choose a route?

A: All new Alberta survey routes are being set randomly. We will try to assign routes that are near your residence, so let us know where you would like to run your survey route. All previous routes from 2001 and before can be maintained if the volunteers prefer to stay with their routes.

Q: There is someone I know who would like to conduct an owl survey, who should they contact?

A: Have them contact us at Beaverhill Bird Observatory, Ph: (780) 918-4804 or E-mail: lisa@beaverhillbirds.com

Publications of Interest/Reference Books

THE BARRED OWL (*Strix varia*) IN ALBERTA: DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS

LISA TAKATS PRIESTLEY

Barred Owl distribution and status in Alberta was investigated using over 300 individual records (1912 through 1999) that were collected from literature, museum/zoo specimens, nest cards, bird surveys, volunteer raptor banders, and naturalists. Barred Owls were distributed throughout much of the boreal forest, aspen parkland, foothill, and mountain ecoregions of Alberta. Fifty-four breeding records (46 nests) were found. There is no evidence that Barred Owls have expanded their range in Alberta in the last 100 years, rather they have maintained their distribution.

(In Press, Canadian Field Naturalist)

Would you like to submit an article?? We welcome submissions from anyone interested in owls. Articles can be about experiences, studies, observations, poems, stories, etc. We also welcome photos. To submit please send a copy to:

Lisa Priestley, Beaverhill Bird Observatory
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Edmonton, Alberta T6H 4P2
Phone: (780) 918-4804
E-mail: lisa@beaverhillbirds.com

