

BPBO Beakon

Bruce Peninsula Bird Observatory
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Bruce Peninsula
Bird Observatory

Message From the Chair

2006 has proven to be a very pivotal time for the Bruce Peninsula Bird Observatory. The Board of Directors has experienced a larger than usual turnover in its personnel. In this hectic world where even birding time is at a premium, several of our outgoing Board members, before having to move on to other priorities, have been able to make large contributions over an extended period of time.

I would like to extend my deep appreciation to Lorraine Brown, Deb Diebel, and Doug Van Hemessen for all the invaluable contributions to BPBO they have made in the past five years. Lorraine as Recording Secretary, fundraiser, and events planner, Deb as newsletter editor, fundraiser, and events planner, and Doug as Membership Secretary put in many, many hours “getting things done” for the organization. Ted Cheskey, a founding member of BPBO and the President for three years, has recently moved to Ottawa to pursue a new career. While no longer on the Board, he remains the immediate Past President and is keeping in touch by e-mail. I would also like to thank both Lionel Gould and Dian Wood, who served part terms on the Board during the past year. Maybe in the future we will see one or both of these talented people back in some capacity.

While for many organizations, this amount of change might be a crippling blow, BPBO has been very fortunate to be able to draw on some excellent local talent. Peter Coo, a longstanding naturalist and member of BPBO, has agreed to take over the newsletter (which I think you’ll agree looks great!). John Haselmayer, whom many of you will recognize from local birding and the Bruce Peninsula National Park, has agreed to stand as Vice-President, and to be a liaison with the National Park. Steve Patterson, who you knew as the web-master of BPBO’s excellent site, will continue in that capacity as well as having agreed to take care of publicity and information technology. Anne Range, who recently moved into the Kemble/Big Bay area, will take care of special events, such as the Open House at the Cabot Head Research Station on August 20, and the fundraising dinner coming in November.

Bob Gray, while already on the Board, will become the new secretary. We are also very thankful that Rob Kearns will continue to be our Treasurer,
(Continued on page 2)

----- News Flash -----

Open House at Cabot Head has Returned!

You’re all invited to come out for the Bruce Peninsula Bird Observatory Open House, coming up on Saturday, August 26. It’s a golden opportunity for you, the members, to learn more about the Observatory (and for us to meet you!). Activities begin at 9 a.m. and continue until 1 p.m. – there will be site tours, guided birding walks, and banding demonstrations. All of this followed by a barbeque lunch, served up by your BPBO board from noon until one o’clock (donations to cover the cost of supplies gratefully accepted). Come join us August 26 at Cabot Head, and find out what’s cooking at BPBO!

(Please park outside the Cabot Head gates; shuttles will run from 9-1 to get you to and from the banding station).

In this Issue:

Message from the chair.....	1
Spring 2006 Summary	2
Red-necked Grebe Report	2
A Volunteer’s-eye View	3
Grebe Lodge Workshops.....	4-5
Recovery Report.....	5
The New Board.....	6

an indispensable position, but not a thankless one! Yours truly will carry on as President, Chair of the Fundraising and the Education & Outreach committees, and the organizer of the annual spring Red-necked Grebe surveys. Norah Toth remains our Ontario Parks Liaison and Noreen Steinacher will continue as the volunteer Workshop Coordinator and active on the fundraising committee.

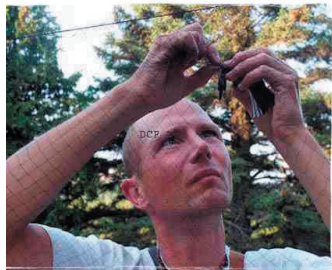
As I have emphasized in every address to the BPBO membership I have ever made, it is the tireless work of the volunteers on the Board that make the Bruce Peninsula Observatory run. It is gratifying to see people step up to take on these responsibilities. The BPBO Board is a strong and active group again this year!

-Rod Steinacher



Spring Migration Summary

(Before our intrepid station scientist and Bander-in-charge, Stéphane Menu, dashed off into the far north this spring, he wrote us this summary of how the season had unfolded at BPBO's Cabot Head Banding Station. Keep your eyes peeled for a full report in the next Beakon. -ed.)



Stéphane Menu extracts a Black-throated Green Warbler from a mist net.

Photo: Doug Van Hemessen

Amazingly, it's already the end of the season: the spring banding will officially close on Monday, June 12!

After the frantic weeks of April, things slowed down considerably in May. In fact, the first three weeks of May were the worst ever recorded at the station,

both in terms of banding and visual observation.

You may recall the weather during this time: cold, rainy and windy. Indeed, there was a huge and stationary low system that brought bad weather for more than 2 weeks. Centered on the lower Great lakes, it didn't move for all this time, bringing lots of rain and wind and low temperatures. Being just north of it, Cabot Head was not as affected as other parts of the province, but the migration was blocked nonetheless.

After the system finally moved away, it was as if the floodgates had been opened: the last week of May saw one of the highest weekly banding total and certainly the highest by far for this particular week. With 448

birds banded during this week, it was more than the previous 3 weeks combined!!

The rest of the season (i.e. June) was less busy, but migration was still underway, with the late species (mostly flycatchers, gray-cheeked Thrush, American Redstart and Red-eyed Vireo, to name a few).

Despite the bad weather in May, spring 2006 is now the second best spring since 2002, with a little over 1500 birds banded (spring 2002, with close to 2500, seems unbeatable...). It was an interesting season, again. There is always discoveries, new birds (like the Snowy Owl and the Lark Sparrow), exciting recaptures (like the Red-eyed Vireo that was banded at the Cabot Head Lighthouse, just across the Basin, in... 1998. Banded as an After-second-year, it means that this particular bird is at least 10 years old!).

I hope you enjoyed spring and its migration as much as I did; see you in fall!

-Stéphane Menu



2006 Red-necked Grebe Survey Results

2006 marked the **seventh** annual spring Red-necked Grebe survey. In that time, volunteers have completed over 80 surveys and have observed 4002 Red-necked Grebes (RNGR)! While not nearly in the same league as the Christmas Bird Counts, it still represents a strong commitment by local birders to gather important data on a little studied and understood bird species.

Thanks go out to Scott Parker, John Haselmayer, Joe Johnson, Dian Wood, Lorraine Brown and Andy Armitage, Bill Hansen, Bob Gray, and myself for completing one or more grebe surveys this spring. 11 of the 14 planned surveys, running from March 29 to May 13, were completed this year. The award for most effort needed to complete a survey goes to Scott Parker and John Haselmayer. When their attempt to complete their survey on March 29, they were stopped after Station #2 (just onto the Lighthouse Road) by snow drifts on the unplowed road. They returned the next day with ATVs and were able to make it all the way to the lighthouse and the final stop at Station #5! Two days later on April 1st, I was able to drive my car on the freshly plowed road all the way up to the lighthouse, no problem. I guess timing is everything.

For the last few years, the usual resting waters for the RNGR in Dyers Bay were completely covered with ice for the first few surveys. As the waters opened up, the RNGRs moved northwestward in a strong surge. If you were there on those few days it was possible to see large numbers of RNGRs. This year, however, Georgian Bay was not significantly ice-covered at the beginning of April. Some local residents reported seeing RNGRs on Dyers Bay a couple of weeks before the survey period began. It is quite likely that the 212 Red-necked Grebes observed this spring on surveys do not accurately reflect the number of grebes that actually moved through the area, if past patterns were maintained. Unknown numbers of RNGRs, and other waterfowl probably moved through the area before the survey period. The variability of ice and weather conditions can be seen to have a profound effect on the movement of these birds and the results we record. I guess timing is everything!



Dyer's Bay

Photo: Ethan Meleg

For example, in 2006, 1370 waterfowl were observed; or 52% of 2005's total of 2627. 212 of these birds were RNGRs; only 54% of last year's total! 103 of them (~49% of the season total) were observed by Dian Wood on April 29, the traditional mid-peak for RNGR movement through the Dyers Bay area. Another star attraction of the surveys are always the Longtailed Ducks (formerly called Oldsquaws), which can sometimes be seen in huge "rafts" out on the lake, diving for food, resting, or busily chatting with each other. This year only 592 were observed, representing just 36% of the 1627 counted in 2005! Numbers of observed birds were definitely down across the board this spring.

What will next year hold? Volunteer to be a part of the 8th Annual Red-necked Grebe Survey next April and May and find out first hand.

-Rod Steinacher

A "Volunteer's-eye" View

(The following was passed along to us by BPBO volunteer Anita Cunningham, who relates her experience helping out at Cabot Head. -ed.)

Most of my life I have been exposed to birds. Living winters in the Caledon Hills north of Toronto and summers on the Bruce at Lion's Head has given me an ample supply of birds to watch. My parents were both birders so at an early age I was dragged off to look for spring birds at Pelee Island or The Pinery. Now it is my turn to drag someone else off to the birds.

My husband of 40 years has just retired from years of working in the corporate jungle of downtown Toronto. His first weeks of retirement exposed him to a very different lifestyle. Instead of getting up at 6:00 a.m., he was dragged out of bed at 4:15.

Instead of an hour drive on a Go Bus he now drove an hour through potholes, rivers and a beaver dam to get to work. Instead of a pay cheque were words of appreciation. Did I mention that I volunteered to work banding birds at the Bruce Peninsula Bird Observatory (BPBO). And yes, I dragged him along too.

Believe it or not, we both enjoyed working from sunrise to noon for the next two weeks. Even on a bitterly cold, windy and rainy morning it was amazing to see flocks of migrating birds, sometimes 80 - 90 at a time, flying overhead. These included robins, blue jays, chickadees, warblers, blackbirds, flickers and hawks.

We helped to put up the mist nets each morning and checked them every half hour for birds. Then it was back to the station to band, record, sex, measure and weigh each bird before releasing it. I even managed some spectacular close-up photographs of a few species during the process.

Between the half hour net-checking trips there were usually a few minutes left over to just scan the skies, observe and record sightings.

During our two weeks of volunteer work we even managed to break two BPBO records. The first was for the most birds caught in one day, 145! The second record was for the least number caught in one day and one that will never be beat, 0!!!

The early mornings were made bearable - even

(Continued on Page 4)

Workshops at Grebe Lodge a Success in Spring 2006!

This spring BPBO hosted three different weekend workshops including nature and landscape photography, 'peak' spring birding and nature watercolour. Each program provided participants with an in-depth experience, developing new skills and environmental appreciation. There was a lot of good food and fun as well. In addition, BPBO hosted a Bruce Peninsula birding outing & overnight stay at Grebe Lodge as part of the Huron Fringe Birding Festival. In all, 21 people stayed at the Lodge and all had a great opportunity to connect with the work of BPBO and see first hand the banding and migration monitoring activities. BPBO wishes to thank leaders Rob Cotton, Ted Cheskey, Lynn Souliere, Rod Steinacher, Bob Gray, Lorraine Brown and Ann Bard of Cape Chin Country Connection who catered our delicious home prepared meals and snacks.

The best news is there are more weekend workshops planned for this Fall. Check out the BPBO website at bpbo.ca for details. Members, friends and associates should not miss the opportunity to join Lorraine Brown for a weekend of 'Hunting and Cooking Wild Mushrooms on the Bruce' (evening of September 29 to October 1).

'Birding in Fall Migration' with Ted is planned for September 22 – 24 and 'Light and Composition: Photographing Nature - Part II' with Rob Cotton is planned for October 14 -16.

Workshop revenue is important to support the work of BPBO. We have spaces available and also encourage residents of the upper Bruce to take advantage of the day rates. As one participant wrote us –

"My weekend retreat at the lodge was truly amazing for many reasons. I was able to revisit an old hobby in a non-threatening environment. The location and scenery was stunning and the ability to observe (and participate) in an active banding program was a wonderful experience! I definitely want to try more workshops and would highly recommend it.

Deb B. (Waterloo)"

- **Noreen Steinacher**

Foreign Recovery Report

(This is the sort of thing that banders - and for that matter, banding stations - live for. They're called 'encounters' - trapping (or otherwise observing) a bird that is already banded. Encounters can yield really useful information about the lives of birds that could not be obtained any other way.

Most often, encounters involve a bird that has been banded locally, either in the current season, or in a previous year. These are commonly called "recaptures", and they are relatively frequent, since many migratory birds use the same routes and stop-over sites year after year. (In fact, banding operations like the one operated by BPBO out of Cabot Head are one of the main reasons that we now know this about birds). So, making a recapture is a worthwhile thing - but not nearly so exciting as when we make what is called a 'foreign recovery' from another station, i.e., we catch something they've banded. This is like finding a message in a bottle, or getting a postcard from Tuvalu (and you don't know anybody in Tuvalu). It's kind of exciting, you never know where that bird might be from!

As well as giving us information about migration routes, these encounters can tell us other things, such as a bird's (minimum) age, as in this letter which recently arrived from an ornithologist in Michigan. -ed.)

Hi, folks,

I have received a report to bander regarding a White-throated Sparrow banded here at the Rouge River Bird Observatory as an adult bird on 6 Oct 1999 that you captured on 16 Apr 2006. Great news! I just wanted to touch base with you and provide you with a link to our web site (below) so you can see where the banding originated.

Our last international bird exchange was recapturing a Ruby-crowned Kinglet originally banded by Toronto Bird Observatory, which I wrote up here: http://www.umd.umich.edu/dept/rouge_river/rcki_re.html

Best of luck for your upcoming fall season, and may we exchange birds once again in the future!

Julie A. Craves
Rouge River Bird Observatory
University of Michigan-Dearborn
Dearborn, MI 48128

People at BPBO



Board Members, as of June, 2006
 Back Row: Anne Range, Rob Kearns, Rod Steinacher, John Haselmayer, Steve Patterson
 Front Row: Rob Gray, Peter Coo. Missing: Gord Cottrill

Board of Directors

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| * Rod Steinacher | President & BoD Chair; Fundraising Committee Chair |
| * John Hasermayer | Vice President; Membership Committee |
| * Rob Kearns | Treasurer; Membership Committee Chair |
| * Peter Coo | Newsletter |
| * Bob Gray | Secretary |
| * Anne Range | Event Planning; Fundraising Committee |
| * Steve Patterson | Marketing, Publicity, Webmaster; Information Technology,
Fundraising & Membership Committees |
| * Gord Cottrill | Director at Large |

Staff

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| * Ron Baker | Administrator |
| * Dr. Stéphane Menu | Cabot Head Research Station Scientist |

Non-Board Volunteers

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| * Noreen Steinacher | Workshop Coordinator; Fundraising Committee |
| * Ted Cheskey | Research Station Volunteer Program |
| * Lorraine Brown | Fundraising Dinner |
| * Deb Diebel | Education Committee |
| * Norah Toth | Ontario Parks Liaison |