

POINT LEPREAU BIRD OBSERVATORY

Annual Report to the Saint John Naturalists' Club - June 15, 2019

The Point Lepreau Bird Observatory (PLBO) has been a project of the Saint John Naturalists' Club since 1996 and completed its 24th spring season of seabird migration monitoring in 2019.

The following are some highlights since the Club's Annual Meeting a year ago:

- Todd Watts was contracted as Official Observer for spring observations in 2019 (March 27-May 7) and Richard Blacquiere acted as coordinator for visitations by volunteers.
- This spring our Club used the second installment of a three-year funding arrangement from the Canadian Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited Canada to contract Todd as our Official Observer for morning seabird counts for a period of six weeks, from late March to early May.
- We also used the final installment of a three-year funding grant from the federal Environmental Damages Fund to have Todd conduct afternoon counts in addition to the morning sessions this spring. This was the third consecutive spring where we have been able to double the daily observation hours and we will examine the data to see what effect the extra hours of coverage might have on the number of birds counted per hour of observation time.
- UNB Master's candidate James Kelley successfully completed his Master's thesis *Spring Migration of Scoter and Loon Species in the Bay of Fundy; Quantifying Environmental Influences, Estimating Afternoon Migration and Analyzing Trends Between 2000 and 2017*. Four members of our Club attended James's thesis defense on December 19, 2018. Our Club has received a bound copy of the thesis which will be archived with other PLBO materials at the NB Museum.
- On February 15, 2019 four members of the PLBO Committee met with James's advisory committee, Drs. Heather Major, Jeff Houlahan and Remy Rochette, to assess the counting methodology prescribed by the Canadian Wildlife Service and Bird Studies Canada in 1995 and used by PLBO observers consistently for the past 24 years. It was felt the counting protocol remains appropriate for determining population trends of various seabird species and no changes were suggested.
- During August and September of 2018 a number of Club members and other interested volunteers were busy tagging Monarch butterflies. A total of 938 butterflies had a tiny wing tag applied before the Monarch continued on its southward migration to Mexico for the winter. Nearly 200 were tagged at our observatory at the tip of the Point where the butterflies aggregate to nectar on the thousands of natural blooming plants that grow in profusion. Included were 19 Monarchs raised by staff at the nuclear plant, where awareness and interest in Monarchs continues to grow.
- On September 12, 2018 the PLBO was visited by a small group of representatives from the Maliseet First Nation for an afternoon of tagging Monarchs. The group was hosted by NB Power. I gave a presentation on the life cycle of the Monarch that was shared simultaneously with a number of other First Nation representatives online. Later, the group made its way to the observatory where a number of butterflies were tagged and released. There was considerable interest and enthusiasm by all participants.
- Related to the tagging of Monarchs at Point Lepreau, several of our club members joined forces late last fall to package seeds of Swamp Milkweed, which is a plant vital to the breeding success of Monarch butterflies. Swamp and Common milkweeds are the only New Brunswick plants on which Monarchs can lay their eggs and have caterpillars reach adulthood. Nearly 2,000 packets of milkweed seeds were later distributed across the province for planting this spring. In addition about 200 Swamp Milkweed seedlings were grown and distributed for planting.

- Last fall we encountered problems at the observatory with keeping the open shutters over the front windows in place during high winds. There was some wind damage to the shutters and design changes were required. Club members collaborated with maintenance staff at NB Power on a new design and just this week a crank-and-pulley system was installed on new shutters that should make operation easier and safer for volunteers. We thank NB power for doing this work at no cost to our Club.
- We have enjoyed another busy and successful year at the Point Lepreau Bird Observatory. But after 24 years of operation our PLBO Committee realizes the need for a long-term operating plan, rather than running the project on a year-to-year basis. A Committee challenge during the year ahead will be to forge a draft long-term operating plan that will consider aspects such as longer-term funding, operational priorities, improved database access, workload distribution and a succession plan. Work on this will begin after our 2019-20 PLBO Committee is in place at this Annual Meeting.
- There are so many to thank for the continued operation of this project.

The PLBO Committee is responsible to the Club for managing PLBO activities. Current members include Eileen Pike, Bill Gentleman, Hank Scarth, Richard Blacquiere, Todd Watts and President Chuck Perry. Eileen also volunteers as Committee Secretary.

Suzanne Bonnell has been a member of the PLBO Committee for the past several years and served through much of the past 12 months. Her contributions have been many and valuable and we deeply appreciate her help and wise advice. Jan Riddell has offered her name to the Nominating Committee to fill Suzanne's position in the coming year.

We also thank Todd Watts for a job well done as the contracted Official Observer during the peak weeks of migration this spring. Not only is he the principal observer and mentor to volunteers, but he also inputs all migration data into our computerized system and voluntarily prepared a detailed report on spring activity and migration at the conclusion of the season.

Richard Blacquiere coordinated visits to the observatory during the past 12 months, working closely with Jim Elgee who is based at the nuclear plant. Richard's is an extremely important role that ensures we have regular observation coverage by volunteers to assist the Official Observer. Janet Kempster has volunteered to handle this role during the fall of 2019.

NB Power employee Jim Elgee continued as our direct liaison with security officials at Point Lepreau to ensure smooth visitor access.

Bill Gentleman oversees maintenance of the weather monitoring system in the observatory, with periodic help from other club members.

Vital to the PLBO are the hundreds of volunteer hours contributed each year by SJNC members and other New Brunswick naturalists. This involves more than 30 people and hundreds of people-hours in total. We wouldn't be able to continue the project without you.

Collectively, everyone's time, care and insight are invaluable to the project. Thank you so much!!

- Remember, the PLBO has a Facebook page and suggestions from Club members are encouraged. Go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/pointlepreaubirdobservatory/posts/>

Jim Wilson
On Behalf of the Steering Committee