

POINT LEPREAU BIRD OBSERVATORY

Annual Report to the Saint John Naturalists' Club - October 17, 2020

The Point Lepreau Bird Observatory (PLBO) has been a project of the Saint John Naturalists' Club since 1996 and completed its milestone 25th spring season of seabird migration monitoring in 2020.

- In June of 2019 the President and Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission visited the observatory, along with senior NB Power management from Point Lepreau and Fredericton. Also attending were my wife Jean and three members of the Maliseet First Nation. The purpose was to discuss and appreciate Point Lepreau's importance to migrating wildlife.
- During the summer and fall of 2019 the Point Lepreau Committee began steps toward development of a long-term plan for the Point Lepreau Project.
- On March 14 of 2020 Todd Watts led a successful workshop on seabird identification and migration monitoring at the Lily Lake Interpretation Centre. The workshop was held just days before the province was shut down by Covid 19.
- Todd Watts was again contracted as Official Observer for spring observations in 2020 (March 27-May 7) and Janet Kempster and Richard Blacquiere coordinated visitations by volunteers.
- Our Club used the final installment of a three-year funding arrangement from the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) and Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) to contract Todd for morning seabird counts. A funding arrangement for future years is being worked on.
- Unfortunately, Covid 19 prevented volunteers from joining Todd this spring but Todd was able to work daily because NB Power provided him a Visitor Access Card that allows him to enter the main gate without interacting with any NB Power staff.
- At the end of March, 2020 a new licence was signed between the SJNC and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) granting the SJNC the right to have its observatory building on DFO land at the tip of the Point. The new licence is for five years, expiring at the end of March, 2025 but extendable to 2030.
- During August and September of 2019 and 2020 a number of Club members and other interested volunteers were busy tagging Monarch butterflies at the observatory. The butterflies had a tiny wing tag applied before continuing on their southward journey to Mexico for the winter. Nearly 500 were tagged in the summer of 2019 and about half that number in 2020. Strict Covid safety procedures were in place this summer, with help from NB Power.
- Related to the tagging of Monarchs at Point Lepreau, several of our club members joined forces late in 2019 to package seeds of Swamp Milkweed, a plant vital to the breeding success of Monarch butterflies. More than 2,000 packets of milkweed seeds were later distributed across the province with the help of Nature NB in Fredericton.
- During September of this year the observatory has hosted several important guests:

On September 9th our Club was pleased to have the Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, the Honourable Brenda Murphy come to tag a Monarch and learn about its life cycle. Her Honor was accompanied by her Spouse, her Chief of Staff at Government House and her Head of Special Events. Twenty-two members of the SJNC attended as well as Kathleen Duguay from NB Power and two representatives from the Maliseet First Nation, bringing the total attendance to 31.

On September 16th long-time seabird researcher Dr. Tony Diamond and wife Dorothy visited the PLBO for the first time. Tony and Dorothy provided several suggestions for our long-term planning process and this visit was an extension of that interest.

On September 30th Al Hanson, Head of the CWS office in Sackville and Nic McLellan, Research Biologist with DUC traveled to the observatory, also for the first time. CWS and DUC have partnered to provide our annual funding for Todd for the past several years. NB Power made special arrangements for the Diamonds, Al and Nic to visit without security clearance.

- During the spring and summer of 2020 a Planning-Subcommittee of the Point Lepreau Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Don MacPhail. The Sub-Committee has worked diligently and has held five meetings since June 29th, with a sixth scheduled for October 21st. Good progress has been made and a number of recommendations for the future of the PLBO Project are expected.
- There are many to thank for the continued success of this project:

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

We thank Todd Watts for a job well done again as the contracted Official Observer during the peak weeks of migration this spring. Todd is the principal observer and mentor to volunteers, and also inputs all migration data into our computerized system and voluntarily prepares a detailed report on spring activity and migration at the conclusion of the season.

Richard Blacquiere and Janet Kempster coordinated visits to the observatory during the past 16 months, working closely with Jim Elgee and Kathleen Duguay at the nuclear plant. This is a vital role and Janet has assumed the ongoing responsibility from Richard during the past year.

NB Power employee Jim Elgee retired at the end of January, 2020 after many years of volunteering as our direct liaison with security officials at Point Lepreau to ensure smooth visitor access. Kathleen Duguay at NB Power volunteered to take on Jim's role upon his retirement. Kathleen has been extremely helpful in many other ways in recent years.

Pattie McKerral has continued to work to improve the custom software used to enter and extract PLBO data. She is currently working to make the sorting and retrieval of data quicker and easier.

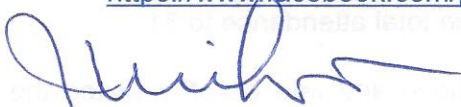
Bill Gentleman oversees maintenance of the weather monitoring system in the observatory, with periodic help from other club members.

My wife Jean has been a strong and ongoing supporter of the PLBO Project since its creation and continues to be involved in almost everything that goes on, working quietly behind the scenes. I could not have done this for 25 years without her support.

Vital to the PLBO are the hundreds of volunteer hours contributed each year by SJNC members and other New Brunswick naturalists. Before Covid, this involved more than 30 people and hundreds of people-hours in total. We wouldn't be able to continue the project without our volunteers.

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

- After 25 consecutive years Eileen Pike has decided to step down from our PLBO Committee and will not reoffer for the coming year. Eileen, we can't thank you enough for your wisdom and expert advice. The PLBO Project would not be the success it is without your guidance! We will miss you.
- Remember, the PLBO has a Facebook page. Suggestions from Club members are encouraged at: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/pointlepreaubirdobservatory/posts/>



Jim Wilson
On Behalf of the Steering Committee