

# POINT LEPREAU BIRD OBSERVATORY

## Annual Report to the Saint John Naturalists' Club - June 19, 2021

The Point Lepreau Bird Observatory (PLBO) has been a project of the Saint John Naturalists' Club since 1996 and completed its 26<sup>th</sup> spring season of seabird migration monitoring in 2021. The last formal report to the Club membership was in mid-October of 2020 at the Club's annual meeting.

Since then Covid-19 has played a significant role in limiting what we could do at the observatory. In late November of 2020 the second Covid wave shut things down generally across the province and Covid restrictions continued through the winter and the spring of 2021.

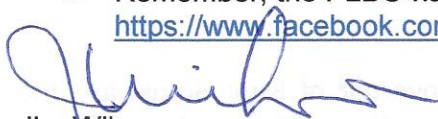
- Just prior to the second wave of Covid, the SJNC celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the observatory project with an illustrated talk about the project's origin, purpose and history at the Club's November meeting.
- Between late January and March of 2021 the SJNC partnered with the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) to have improvements made to the PLBO database by an IT student contracted to do the work at CWS expense. The improvements will make our data available in a more accessible format that is consistent with other databases managed by professional CWS staff, will provide permanent and secure storage of the data long-term, should reduce the annual workload and responsibilities of local IT volunteers and eventually make our data available online to the interested public, worldwide.
- The CWS IT development work was successfully completed before the end of March and work continues to finalize an acceptable formal agreement between the SJNC and CWS and to streamline the process for seasonal data uploads each spring and fall after each migration monitoring season.
- Todd Watts was again contracted as Official Observer for spring observations in 2021 (March 27-May 7). NB Power has provided him a Visitor Access Card that allows him to enter the main gate without interacting with any NB Power staff.
- Unfortunately Covid precautions prevented visits by volunteers again this spring so migration coverage was less than the average for most recent years. Todd was able to work mornings only and Jim Wilson, who also has a Visitor Access Card, was only able to do migration counts on one morning each weekend during that period.
- Our Club was able to negotiate a one-year funding arrangement with the CWS and Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) to contract Todd for the 2021 morning seabird counts. A longer-term funding arrangement for future years is being worked on.
- Aside from seasonal seabird migration monitoring, the tagging of migrating Monarch butterflies each fall has been another important scientific activity at the observatory. Of course there has been no tagging since October, but related to the tagging of Monarchs three of our club members bubbled and then joined forces during the winter of 2021 to package seeds of Swamp Milkweed, a plant vital to the reproductive success of Monarch butterflies. A total of 2,000 packets of milkweed seeds were later delivered to the provincial naturalist organization Nature NB in Fredericton to be distributed free of charge across the province to encourage garden plantings of Swamp Milkweed.
- Eileen Pike, now living in Ottawa, decided to step down from our PLBO Committee last year after serving since the beginning of the project in 1996. In recognition of Eileen's outstanding service and contributions to the project for a quarter-century Eileen was awarded the honorary distinction of Member Emeritus of the PLBO Committee, essentially an advisory role without the burden of regular responsibilities.
- Last September our Club was pleased to have the Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, the Honourable Brenda Murphy, her spouse and senior members of her staff come to the observatory to tag Monarch butterflies and learn about their life cycle. This spring Her Honour established a

milkweed garden at Government House in Fredericton to attract Monarchs as well as a demonstration rearing facility to educate New Brunswick children and adults about the life cycle and the importance of Monarch butterfly conservation. A few of our members were invited to give advice on the set-up and will assist with obtaining Monarch caterpillars for use in the rearing enclosure this summer.

- In early 2020 a Planning-Subcommittee of the Point Lepreau Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Don MacPhail. The five-person Sub-Committee worked diligently throughout most of the year and good progress was made. Covid has slowed things down but a number of recommendations for the future structure of the PLBO project are expected to be presented to the PLBO Committee for its consideration this summer.
- There are so 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, Jim Wilson (Chair) and Club President Chuck Perry.
  - 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 normally a 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.
  - Pattie McKerral was vital to the IT development work this winter by CWS. Pattie oversaw the work of the student contracted by CWS and will play an ongoing role in coordinating seasonal uploads of new data from the local SJNC system to the database now managed by CWS.
  - Bill Gentleman oversees maintenance of the weather monitoring system in the observatory, with periodic help from other club members.
  - Janet Kempster coordinates volunteer visits to the observatory, working closely with Kathleen Duguay at the nuclear plant. This is a role that Janet assumed from Richard Blacquiere but Richard remains willing to cover for Janet if she is unavailable from time to time.
  - Kathleen Duguay at NB Power is not only the Club's official contact person with NB Power but now coordinates volunteer visits and the processing of security clearance applications from potential new volunteers. Kathleen has been extremely helpful in many ways over the years.
  - 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 continued as Chair without her support.
  - The PLBO Project normally requires hundreds of volunteer hours annually 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 have been able to continue the project without our volunteers.

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

- 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