

POINT LEPREAU BIRD OBSERVATORY

Annual Report to the Saint John Naturalists' Club - June 15, 2022

The Point Lepreau Bird Observatory (PLBO) has been a project of the Saint John Naturalists' Club since 1996 and completed its 27th spring season of seabird migration monitoring this year. The last formal report to the Club membership was in mid-June of 2021 at the Club's annual meeting.

- Covid restrictions in New Brunswick were lifted this spring but most citizens took a cautionary approach to returning to "normal". As a result, relatively few volunteers were able to participate in spring seabird monitoring this year. We expect to welcome considerably more volunteers this fall, between mid-September and mid-November.
- Since January of 2021 the SJNC has partnered with the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) to have the Club's seabird database reformatted and securely stored by IT professionals at CWS. Work is nearly finished to allow the 27 years of spring data to be made available online to researchers and other interested parties, hopefully by the end of the current calendar year. A formal agreement has been signed with the CWS to ensure ownership remains with the SJNC. We are very pleased with this development.
- In November of 2021 a sub-committee of the PLBO Committee chaired by Don MacPhail delivered a formal long-term planning report (the Plan) to the PLBO Committee after 18 months of project study. The 29-page report concluded the project is globally important, that it should continue operations, its data is significant, unique and of high quality, and the observatory is a solid and well-funded asset. However it noted that the PLBO Project is not well recognized outside New Brunswick.
- The Plan contains 20 recommendations – some requiring little time or effort and others demanding longer development. Key recommendations include strengthening partnerships with funders, applying for charitable status, reorganizing the PLBO Committee and contracting an Observatory Director to handle the daily affairs of the PLBO Project.
- The Plan was recommended to the SJNC membership and was approved at a special meeting of the Club held online on March 19, 2022. Since then the PLBO Committee has worked on each of the 20 recommendations, including collaborating with the Club Executive on the sourcing of funding and the contracting of Julie Bauer as Observatory Director, effective March 1st. Since then, additional funding has been secured through Nature NB and Julie is currently working full-time as Project Coordinator for all the Club's projects.
- Todd Watts was again contracted as Official Observer for morning observations in 2022 (March 28-May 8) and local naturalist Karen Miller was contracted to observe and record seabird data during afternoons. Funding for both was provided by the CWS through Ducks Unlimited Canada.
- Covid caution prevented most volunteers from participating regularly while the Official Observers were present but a number of people visited on weekends or certain afternoons when no one else was there. A total of 18 volunteer visits were recorded during the eight-week season (March 15-May 9), involving 20 different volunteers.
- Funding from the CWS through Ducks Unlimited Canada was arranged for two years, with \$8,000 available annually for Official Observers and \$7,000 for part of the Project Coordinator. A grant of just under \$10,000 from the NB Wildlife Trust Fund provided additional funds for the Project Coordinator, and with those two sources in hand the Club was able to partner with Nature NB to secure the balance of the Coordinator's annual stipend through a federal wage support program.
- Aside from seasonal seabird migration monitoring in spring and fall, the tagging of migrating Monarch butterflies each fall is another important scientific activity at the observatory. Between mid-August and mid-September of 2021 a total of 460 Monarch butterflies were tagged by SJNC volunteers, most of them at the observatory. In early September the observatory was visited by CBC Radio and TV and the resulting coverage on Monarchs generated considerable interest with the public and our funders at the CWS office.

- Funding of \$5,000 for research on migrating Monarchs (now a Species at Risk in Canada) was received from Nature NB in the fall of 2021 and this was used in part to cover volunteer travel, the cost of Monarch tags and costs associated with the packaging of milkweed seeds later in the year.
- During the winter of 2021-22 a number of Club volunteers joined forces with several non-members to package seeds of Swamp Milkweed, a plant vital to the reproductive success of Monarch butterflies. A total of 3,400 packets of milkweed seeds were 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.
- There are many to thank for the continued success of this project:
 - The PLBO Committee is responsible to the Club for managing PLBO activities. Members this past year were Eileen Pike (Emeritus member), Bill Gentleman, Jim Russell, Vicki Cowan, Todd Watts, Club President Ray Riddell (Ex-officio) and Jim Wilson (Chair).
 - We are greatly indebted to the Planning Sub-committee consisting of Chair Don MacPhail, Vicki Cowan, Jan Riddell, Chuck Perry and Jim Wilson who spent 18 months evaluating the PLBO Project and preparing the Plan. Eleven planning meetings were required to bring the Plan together.
 - We thank Todd Watts and Karen Miller for their important work as the contracted Official Observers during the peak weeks of migration this spring. Todd 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 by CWS. Pattie oversaw the work of the CWS IT staff and plays an ongoing role in coordinating seasonal uploads of new data from the local SJNC system to the database managed by CWS.
 - Bill Gentleman oversaw maintenance of the weather monitoring system in the observatory and Jim Russell assisted with other maintenance, both of them in addition to serving on the PLBO Committee.
 - Julie Bauer as Observatory Director coordinated the spring volunteers, posted daily results online, made big improvements to the PLBO website and handled most of the spring day-to-day affairs of the project.
 - Kathleen Duguay is the Club's official contact person at NB Power and also coordinates volunteer visits and the processing of security clearance applications from potential new volunteers. Kathleen continues to be extremely helpful in many ways.
 - My wife Jean is a strong and ongoing supporter of the PLBO Project behind the scenes. I could not have continued as Chair this long without her encouragement and advice...
 - The 20 volunteers who visited intermittently this spring did so in spite of the lingering Covid threat. We'll not be able to continue the project without the ongoing help of our volunteers.
- The PLBO has a Facebook page. Suggestions from Club members are encouraged at: www.facebook.com/PointLepreauBirdObservatory

The PLBO also has a new Instagram page and a Twitter page.

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/point_lepreau_bird_observatory/

Twitter: @PtLepreauBirdOb

Jim Wilson

On Behalf of the PLBO Committee