



# Point Lepreau Bird Observatory Annual Report to SJNC Membership

To the Saint John Naturalists' Club – Summer 2023 to Fall 2024

The Point Lepreau Bird Observatory (PLBO) has been a project of the Saint John Naturalists' Club (SJNC) since 1995 and completed its 29<sup>th</sup> year of seabird migration monitoring in November of this year and its 19<sup>th</sup> summer of Monarch butterfly research. This report covers activities from early summer 2023 to the fall of 2024.

## Seabird and Sea Duck Migration Monitoring

- In early January, 2024 PLBO Committee member Eileen Pike and Official Counter Todd Watts attended the 7<sup>th</sup> International Sea Duck Conference which for the first time was held as a virtual online gathering over four days. Participants from 12 countries simultaneously viewed the proceedings that included pre-recorded presentations, live discussions, panel and round table discussions, networking opportunities, multimedia posters, and an art and a photography competition. The PLBO participated in the Poster Session which was open for comments in an online 'chat' and several participants contacted Eileen during and following the conference.
- Early in 2021 our Club partnered with Environment and Climate Change Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) to have the Club's seabird database reformatted and securely stored by CWS IT professionals. In December of 2023 CWS was able to add the first 27 years of our spring migration data (1996-2022) to its *Government of Canada's Open Data Portal*, which can now be accessed by bird researchers worldwide. This was a major milestone in the evolution of the PLBO Project. In April of 2024 the spring data for 2023 was entered and 2024 spring numbers were added in June. The complete data can be found online at:

<https://data-donnees.az.ec.gc.ca/data/species/assess/point-lepreau-bird-observatory-database/?lang=en>

A formal agreement is in place with CWS to ensure data ownership remains with the SJNC and both parties are pleased with this arrangement.

- Volunteer participation in 2024 for spring migration monitoring at the Point Lepreau Bird Observatory (PLBO) was as busy as it's ever been during our three decades of operation. Thanks to excellent online promotion by our Acting Program Coordinators, public awareness and volunteer interest is greatly improved. Our daily spring visitor calendar was nearly full.
- The spring migration monitoring season (March 15–May 9) is 55 days and data was collected on 50 of those days, for daily coverage of 91%. We were delighted to welcome a number of new volunteers who worked with our contracted Official Counters on weekdays or assisted our more experienced volunteers on weekends.
- We were pleased to welcome back our two Official Counters in spring 2024; Todd Watts covered weekday mornings while Erin Brown led afternoon counts. Both have expertise in detecting, identifying, counting and documenting the hundreds and sometimes thousands of sea ducks and seabirds as they stream past the observatory, bound for more northern nesting areas.

- Funding from the CWS again enabled the Club to contract Todd and Erin as Official Counters this spring. Morning and afternoon coverage was not always possible in the past because of financial limitations so increased financial support from CWS in 2024 and a similar option for funding in 2025 is vital to the continued success of the project.
- For the first time our spring migration monitoring was extended to the end of May thanks to extra funding provided by CWS, adding three weeks to our data collection potential. Todd Watts identified a previously unrecognized passage of loons (Red-throated and Common) during late April and particularly during the second half of May. By season's end more than 10,000 loons, mostly Red-throated, had been counted!
- The additional three weeks also revealed the presence of a significant number of sub-adult Black and Surf scoters migrating past and also congregating in flocks near the tip of the Point. Many of these non-breeding birds appeared to be in no hurry to leave the area, prompting speculation that the waters adjacent Point Lepreau could be a significant staging area for these young sea ducks during late May.
- Thanks to the efforts of Eileen Pike and Suzanne Bonnell, some of PLBO's count data from spring 2024 was added for the first time to the online Trektellen database. Trektellen is a public database that allows users to log and share migration and sea watch counts in near real-time. The system is widely used, particularly in Europe, and annually accumulates data from more than 100,000 hours of observation time. It's hoped the PLBO can continue to contribute to this well-recognized source of research data in addition to publishing data on the *Government of Canada's Open Data Portal*.
- The New Brunswick Museum's Natural History Department continues to archive hard copies of all raw data from PLBO's seabird counts and steps are underway for the SJNC to eventually scan digital copies of all historical data sheets.
- Julie Bauer's social media skills as Program Coordinator raised the Club's public profile significantly until her maternity leave began in November of 2023. Emily Haynes-MacDonald, Emily Kenny and Michael Abercrombie took over from Julie and did a fine job of maintaining and coordinating the Club's several projects until Julie returned in late October. Emily, Michael and Emily were employees of Nature NB and we thank Nature NB for making them available to our Club during Julie's absence.

### Monarch Butterfly Research

- The summer of 2023 was a very poor one for Monarch butterfly reproduction in the Maritimes, apparently due to cool wet weather, but summer 2024 saw a rebound in numbers. Volunteers tagged only 97 migrating Monarch butterflies at Point Lepreau in 2023 but were able to tag 341 in summer 2024, most of them at the Point. Point Lepreau appears to host the highest annual aggregations of migrating Monarchs known in New Brunswick.
- Nature NB, the Province's umbrella organization for naturalist groups, provided financial assistance to the SJNC for Monarch research, education and awareness and in winter 2023-24 volunteers packaged 4,000 packets of Swamp Milkweed seeds for distribution across the province by Nature NB staff. This effort will continue in winter 2024-25.
- In addition to funding provided by CWS for spring Official Counters and by Nature NB for Monarch public education, the PLBO Project is also supported by funding from the NB Wildlife Trust Fund and the NB Environmental Trust Fund for a portion of the Project Coordinator's salary and we are extremely grateful for this ongoing support.

There are many to thank for the continued success of this project:

- The **PLBO Committee**, responsible to the SJNC for managing PLBO activities. Voting Members Jim Russell, Dr. Donald McAlpine, Richard Blacquiére, Don MacPhail and Jim Wilson, Club President Vicki Cowan (Ex-officio), Eileen Pike (Emeritus Member), and Dr. Tony Diamond and Dr. Heather Major (Advisory Members).
- **Todd Watts** and **Erin Brown**, our contracted Official Counters.
- **Volunteers (21)** who assisted the Official Counters counting seabirds in 2024.
- **Pattie McKerral** is vital to programming for data entry and the IT work done by CWS.
- **Julie Bauer, Emily Haynes-MacDonald and Emily Kenny**, Project Coordinators.
- **Michael Abercrombie** at Nature NB also covered part of the Project Coordinator duties.
- **Janet Kempster** co-led the Club's Monarch butterfly tagging and milkweed seed efforts.
- **Volunteers (35)** assisted with netting, tagging and data capture of migrating Monarchs and packaging of milkweed seeds during the past year.
- **Jim Russell, Chuck Perry and Mark Rodaway** assisted with general building maintenance.
- **Vanessa Roy-MacDougall**, Executive Director at Nature NB provided consistent support of all our Club's projects and other activities.
- **Kathleen Duguay** at NB Power, the Club's official contact person at the nuclear facility.
- **My wife Jean**, a strong and ongoing supporter of my involvement with the Project.

Thanks to everyone, and we hope to see you at the Point again in the coming year.

The PLBO has a Facebook page. Suggestions from Club members are encouraged at:

[www.facebook.com/PointLepreauBirdObservatory](http://www.facebook.com/PointLepreauBirdObservatory)

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

Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/point\\_lepreau\\_bird\\_observatory/](https://www.instagram.com/point_lepreau_bird_observatory/)

Twitter: @PtLepreauBirdOb

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Jim Wilson  
On Behalf of the PLBO Committee  
November 20, 2024