



Annual Report 2009

In 2009, MRF continued operating McGill Bird Observatory, put renewed effort into our ongoing research of Short-eared Owls, and launched a new program in eastern Ontario, Frontenac Bird Studies. This report summarizes highlights of these projects and brief news on other MRF initiatives. Additional details are available on the MRF website at www.migrationresearch.org, updated periodically throughout the year.

McGill Bird Observatory (www.migrationresearch.org/mbo.html)

2009 was the fifth full year of operation for McGill Bird Observatory. As usual, the primary focus was on spring (Mar 28-Jun 5) and fall (Aug 1-Oct 30) migration monitoring. Numbers were somewhat above average in both seasons, with 816 birds of 66 species banded in spring, and 3390 birds of 74 species banded in fall. Tennessee Warblers dominated the spring season, while a trio of sparrows topped the fall list, with White-throated Sparrow leading the way. Owl banding in October and November added 78 more individuals to the fall total, all of them Northern Saw-whet Owls except for two Eastern Screech-Owls. Summer saw the launch of a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) pilot project. Essentially a standardized approach to monitoring breeding bird populations followed by hundreds of participants across North America, it provides a good complement to our existing migration monitoring efforts, and is particularly valuable as there are only a handful of Canadian sites operating. Over seven sessions, 150 birds of 26 species were banded.

With the addition of Carolina Wren in June and Townsend's Solitaire in October, the list of species observed at MBO has grown to 199, 166 of them recorded in 2009 (a new single-year high count). The total number of species banded at MBO remained static this year at 105, with an above-average 86 of them banded at least once in 2009. A report will be prepared in the first half of 2010 summarizing MBO's activities during its first five years of standardized operation. Noteworthy recoveries in 2009 included an American Robin in South Carolina nearly two years after being banded, and one of the Northern Saw-whet Owls banded this fall in Virginia less than three weeks later! Marie-Anne Hudson continued as MBO director this year, with assistance from Marcel Gahbauer, especially during the fall season. Both also served as banders-in-charge, although Simon Duval and Gay Gruner (both graduates of the MBO training program) accounted for the majority of this year's coverage. As always, a diverse team of volunteer assistants provided a critical supporting case, helping as observers, extractors, scribes, and more. Funding this year was provided largely by grants from Environment Canada (Quebec region) and TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, proceeds from our annual Baillie Birdathon, and a donation from Canada Steamship Lines.

Short-eared Owl research (www.migrationresearch.org/research/shortear.html)

It was a busy year for Short-eared Owl research at MRF, under the leadership of McGill University Master's student Kristen Keyes. Over the course of the year, she visited The Canadian Museum of Nature in Gatineau, the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, all to collect data for developing a species-specific base map for stable isotope analysis, which will help to identify approximate origins of future specimens. In the process, she discovered a hybrid Short-eared x Long-eared Owl specimen in the Museum of Nature collection, and co-authoring (with curator Michel Gosselin) an article about it in *Ontario Birds*. This aspect of the study also involves a number of collaborators from across North America, who are collecting feather samples for analysis.

Field work began with a visit to the Owl Institute in Montana to practice capture techniques and study Short-eared Owl courtship, then transferred to Amherst and Wolfe Islands in eastern Ontario, where Kristen and her field assistant Catherine Doucet spent most of the spring and summer documenting nesting habitat and behaviour, and for one month tracking the movements of a juvenile female. Surveys of the islands will continue through the winter, and a second year of nest searching will begin in spring. The aims of the project are to refine knowledge of seasonal habitat use and determine whether individuals are permanent residents, to help guide conservation and management. A full list of project supporters is posted on the website, but deserving special mention are the Ontario Species at Risk Research Fund NSERC for funding, as well as Denver Holt, Mark Peck, Janet Scott, and the Kingston Field Naturalists for field support.

Frontenac Bird Studies (www.migrationresearch.org/fbs.html)

The newest of MRF's projects, Frontenac Bird Studies launched in spring 2009, managed by Dan Derbyshire. It is a multi-faceted program aimed at researching and conserving birds of the Frontenac Arch, a region of eastern Ontario recognized for its ecological significance, yet relatively poorly studied and with only pockets of protected areas. Objectives of FBS are to increase knowledge of local avian populations and ecology, to establish long-term monitoring

programs to track changes in avian communities, to raise awareness through public outreach and community involvement, and to cooperate with other agencies to increase capacity for the protection of biodiversity.

Activities during the first year focused on three initiatives. Two MAPS stations were operated throughout summer, through which 325 birds were banded, laying a solid foundation for monitoring in subsequent years. Throughout June, 164 point counts were surveyed across the study area, with over 2000 individuals of 94 species recorded. Finally, a special effort was made to document the distribution and abundance of species at risk. Dedicated surveys were undertaken to locate the Threatened Whip-poor-will, while incidental observations of Cerulean Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Louisiana Waterthrush were noted for potential follow-up in 2010 and beyond. We gratefully acknowledge our funding supporters for the pilot season: The John Hackney Foundation for the Noosphere, The McLean Foundation, and TD Friends of the Environment Foundation.

Conferences and presentations (www.migrationresearch.org/publications.html)

Communicating MRF's research remains a priority. On the scientific front, Marcel Gahbauer gave a presentation on breeding habitat of urban Peregrine Falcons at the annual meeting of the Cooper Ornithological Society in Tucson, Arizona in April, while Kristen Keyes prepared a poster on Short-eared Owl breeding habitat and local movements for the annual meeting of the Raptor Research Foundation in Pitlochry, Scotland in October. At the community level, Marcel talked about urban wildlife issues to the aboriginal Kainai Studies program in southern Alberta, Kristen and Catherine Doucet presented the results of their work to the local community on Amherst Island, and Marie-Anne Hudson and Barbara Frei provided an overview of MBO's first five years as the final lecture of the year for Bird Protection Quebec in Montreal. Marie-Anne and Marcel also attended the biennial meeting of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network, of which MBO is a member, and presented a brief update on activities in addition to participating in various discussions on how to strengthen migration monitoring and conservation research on a national scale.

Fundraising news

MRF makes the most of a relatively modest annual budget through heavy involvement of volunteers in operating research programs. However, certain expenses are unavoidable, and therefore fundraising is an annual challenge. Traditionally the Baillie Birdathon has been our biggest annual fundraiser, but with the economic climate as it was in early 2009, we campaigned less aggressively for it than usual. Hopefully by next May, things will be better and we can make up for last year's shortfall. The easiest way to improve our success is to recruit more participants – so we encourage all our supporters to register for the 2010 Birdathon (www.bsc-eoc.org/support/birdathon), indicating MRF as your beneficiary. All you need to do is spend a day birding in May (as casually or competitively as you like) and collect pledges in support of your effort. Even if each participant has only a few sponsors, the collective contributions can add up greatly – and as an added incentive, all participants are eligible to win great prizes supplied by Bird Studies Canada. Anyone in the Montreal area is welcome to join in what will be MBO's third annual "green" Birdathon, limited to what can be seen by walking (and/or biking) around MBO and surroundings, tentatively scheduled for May 22, 2010.

MRF website

The MRF website remains the primary means of communicating MRF news, including results from all of our research programs. The MBO photo library continued to grow in 2009, with 60 species now documented, and has become the most visited part of the website. The Short-eared Owl section has also received a significant boost in both content and visitor traffic this year, reflecting the increased work on the project. We thank Milburn Innovations Ltd. for continued excellence in providing technical support and advice regarding the MRF website.

Organizational news

Gay Gruner is taking over from Marie-Anne Hudson as MBO director in 2010, but all other members of the MRF board have agreed to remain in their positions. For the next year we intend to focus primarily on maintaining and strengthening our efforts through McGill Bird Observatory, Frontenac Bird Studies, and our Short-eared Owl research. Recognizing that MBO has established itself as the most geographically stable of our projects, the MRF address has been moved (hopefully permanently) to Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, as listed below.

Donations of any amount are always welcome, whether in support of specific projects (please specify on your cheque), or toward general operations. All donations are eligible for charitable income tax receipts. Please make cheques payable to the Migration Research Foundation, and send to the appropriate address below, or click on the "Paypal donate" button at www.migrationresearch.org to use our secure online donation option using a Paypal account or major credit cards. Thank you for your support!

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