



Annual Report 2010

2010 was another busy year for the Migration Research Foundation, with activities again focused largely on McGill Bird Observatory, Frontenac Bird Studies, and Short-eared Owl research. This report summarizes highlights of these projects and brief news on other MRF initiatives. Additional details on current and past projects are available on the MRF website at www.migrationresearch.org, which is updated frequently throughout the year.

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

2010 was the sixth full year of operation for McGill Bird Observatory. An unusually mild March allowed many early migrants to sneak through before our standard Spring Migration Monitoring Program (Mar 28-Jun 5), and probably accounts in part for the record low totals of 628 birds of 59 species banded. Despite below-average numbers for the season, in mid-May we had a very successful banding workshop with Peter Pyle, co-hosted by Vanier College. In summer we operated our MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) program for the second time, banding another 125 birds of 25 species, and documenting a number of other local breeders through recapture. During the breeding season, operations also branched out to include banding of nestling Peregrine Falcons in Montreal, and a variety of species being rehabilitated for release at Le Nichoir, in Hudson, Quebec.

As usual, our Fall Migration Monitoring Program covered 13 weeks (Aug 1-Oct 30), but the results were anything but typical. We banded 6808 birds of 74 species – more than any other observatory in Canada during the same period, more than double our total from 2009, and a full 33% above our previous record season of 5101 birds in 2008! As in 2008, the total was greatly influenced by an impressive movement of Yellow-rumped Warblers, this year 2359 of them. However, we also banded record numbers of 23 other species, 11 of which were warblers, suggesting that breeding conditions in the boreal forest were excellent this summer. In the second half of fall, we operated our Northern Saw-whet Owl research program again, also achieving record results with a total of 122 saw-whets and 2 Eastern Screech-Owls banded.

In May we had a Great Egret visit our pond one morning, becoming the 200th species observed at MBO, and in August we added Common Tern and Red-bellied Woodpecker to the checklist as well. A Pine Warbler in September became the 106th species banded at MBO. Once the unusually busy fall season was over, we put the finishing touches on *McGill Bird Observatory Five-Year Report #1: 2005-2009*. This 146-page report (available from the MBO home page) provides a detailed summary of all programs and results during MBO's first five years of operation, including a comprehensive appendix covering the occurrence of all 199 species observed during that period.

Early in the year, leadership of MBO transitioned from Marie-Anne Hudson to Gay Gruner (Director) and Simon Duval (Coordinator). Simon was the primary bander-in-charge for 2010, aided at times by Marie-Anne and Gay, as well as Marcel Gahbauer, Lance Laviolette, and Barbara Frei. Meanwhile, Kristen Keyes was the lead owl bander, assisted by Simon, Marcel, and Bob Barnhurst. Malcolm Johnson again provided tremendous service taking care of all our maintenance needs. As always, the banders were supported by a large team of terrific volunteers, without whose help the year could not have been such a success. Bird Protection Quebec funded this year's owl program and part of our migration monitoring program, which was also supported by Environment Canada, proceeds from our Baillie Birdathon, and donations from Canada Steamship Lines and many individual donors. Seeds for our winter program were generously provided by CCFA (Centre de Conservation de la Faune Ailée).

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

Kristen Keyes continued her Short-eared Owl research throughout 2010. From winter through early summer, she tested out a systematic survey protocol with the assistance of many volunteers from the Kingston Field Naturalists. By late March, Kristen's efforts were turning to locating nesting Short-eared Owls on Amherst and Wolfe Islands, and she ended up monitoring three active territories clustered fairly close together on Amherst Island with the assistance of McGill undergraduate student Chantal Cloutier. Unfortunately the owls again proved elusive during attempts to capture them for telemetry monitoring, but at least some of the juveniles were banded while younger, and we hope to eventually get some data from future recoveries. Field work for this phase of the Short-eared owl project wrapped up in mid-summer, but the local volunteers are resuming the weekly monitoring surveys throughout the winter of 2010-11, and there remains potential for much more research on this population.

Kristen's attention has now turned to analyzing her results and writing up her thesis. Her first chapter describes the development of a species-specific reference map for stable isotope analysis, and its application to determining the

geographic origins of individual Short-eared Owls. The second describes patterns of occupancy, detectability, and habitat use by Short-eared Owls on Amherst and Wolfe Islands, across seasons, and includes a discussion of the survey protocol. The third assesses nest site selection and success of the same population, based on two years of monitoring. She plans to submit her thesis in February, and hopes to present as part of the Short-eared Owl symposium proposed for the 2011 Raptor Research Foundation meeting, which MRF has offered to help organize. We are grateful to the Ontario Species at Risk Research Fund, NSERC, the Kingston Field Naturalists, Kurt Hennige, Jim Johnson, Steve Pitt, Janet Scott, the many researchers across North America who provided feather samples for the isotope analysis, and the landowners and residents of Amherst and Wolfe Islands who kindly provided access and support for the project.

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

A new program in 2009, Frontenac Bird Studies continued this year, again managed by Dan Derbyshire and a small team of dedicated volunteers. It focuses on an ecologically diverse yet relatively poorly studied area of eastern Ontario, with the objectives of increasing knowledge of local bird populations, establishing long-term monitoring programs, and working together with other agencies and the public to raise awareness and encourage protection of the region's biodiversity. Two of the MAPS stations from 2009 were operated again, and a third was added in 2010 to provide more representative coverage of the Frontenac area's key habitats. Although results indicated that productivity in the region was particularly low this year, another 286 birds were banded, and 12% of the individuals banded in 2009 were recaptured, including a Veery estimated to have traveled ~14,000 km to and from its wintering grounds in Brazil, only to be recaptured in the very same net as last year. Other work in 2010 included an inventory of nesting territories for Prairie Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush, two species with very limited distribution in Canada, and for which the Frontenac area represents an important stronghold. We gratefully acknowledge the John Hackney Foundation for the Noosphere, the McLean Foundation, and TD Friends of the Environment Foundation for financial support of FBS, as well as the participants and donors to the 2010 Frontenac Biothon – a new event we launched this year to combine fundraising with a thorough blitz to inventory the flora and fauna of part of the FBS study area.

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

Every year, MRF researchers make an effort to communicate results to the public and network with others in the scientific community. This year Kristen Keyes gave 11 presentations on her Short-eared Owl research to a variety of audiences in eastern Ontario and southern Quebec, ranging from the local community on Amherst Island at the Neilson Store Museum and Cultural Centre to the annual meeting of the Société Québécoise pour l'Étude Biologique du Comportement. Simon Duval gave two presentations on MBO to Montreal area birding groups, which resulted in the recruitment of several new volunteers. Marcel Gahbauer gave a presentation on raptor identification and research to Bird Protection Quebec, gained insights into the evaluation of species status in Canada as a guest at the COSEWIC birds subcommittee meeting, and also attended conferences by the Association of Field Ornithologists and Raptor Research Foundation.

MRF website

The MRF website remains very popular, providing regular updates on all our research. We have also continued to expand our photo ID library, which continues to receive praise as a valuable reference from banders and birders. Thanks to Milburn Innovations Ltd. for continued excellence in providing technical support and advice regarding the MRF website. We have also developed a considerable following on Facebook under our French alias (Observatoire d'Oiseaux de McGill), with over 1000 friends to date – please feel free to look us up and join the crowd!

Organizational news

This was the first year for Gay Gruner as MBO director; she and the remainder of the board are remaining in their positions for 2011. The top priorities for MRF in 2011 will be continued operation and strengthening of organizational support for McGill Bird Observatory and Frontenac Bird Studies, and on the Short-eared Owl front, publication of Kristen's results and participation in the international symposium in fall. With Kristen set to graduate, we are open to partnering with a new student on a migration-related project. Although MRF's annual budget remains modest, largely because we continue to operate without any paid full-time staff, finding sufficient funding to maintain our research programs is a challenge every year. In addition to our annual "green" Birdathon in support of MBO and plans to hold another Biothon for FBS, we are hoping to expand our network of corporate sponsors – please contact us if you have any suggestions.

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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