



Annual Report 2013

2013 was another very successful year for the Migration Research Foundation. Once again the biggest focus was on McGill Bird Observatory, but there is also news to share about Frontenac Bird Studies, Short-eared Owls, and Snow Buntings. This report summarizes highlights of our work in 2013; 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)

2013 was the ninth full year of operation for McGill Bird Observatory. It was a cold and snowy winter, but Common Redpolls came down from the north in big numbers – we banded 340 of them, roughly one sixth of which were of the large *rostrata* subspecies thought to breed mostly in Greenland. American Goldfinches and House Finches were also banded in record numbers; overall 800 birds were banded in winter, nearly double the previous high for the season. The Spring Migration Monitoring Program (Mar 28-Jun 5) was fairly average, with 790 individuals banded, although the 68 species involved was a record high. A Ross's Goose flying overhead in mid-May was another first for MBO, the 208th species observed from the site. In summer, the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program was in its fifth year; like in spring the number of birds banded (137) was close to average, but the number of species (30) was higher than usual.

As always, the Fall Migration Monitoring Program (Aug 1-Oct 30) was the busiest time of year. Numbers were at record levels for the first half of the season, but below average after that, reflecting a productive breeding season for many of the boreal warblers, but an apparently less successful one for many sparrows. Overall, 3321 birds of 77 species were banded, close to the long-term norms for the season. A Carolina Wren banded in the first week of August became the 113th species banded at MBO, and in mid-September a Greater White-fronted Goose hanging out with a flock of Canada Geese was the 209th addition to the site checklist. The Northern Saw-whet Owl program operated nightly for six weeks (Sep 26-Nov 6), banding 174 individuals, plus an Eastern Screech-Owl and a Long-eared Owl. Most noteworthy though were the 18 recaptures of saw-whets banded elsewhere, plus news about three of MBO's 2013 owls being reported from banding stations in the northeastern states within three weeks of us banding them. A detailed 75-page report of all research at MBO from November 2012 through October 2013 was published on the MBO home page in December, and as usual, MBO results have been shared with the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network and the Eastern Bird Banding Association.

It was also a significant year for MBO organizationally. For a month in early fall, our supporters faithfully voted daily for MBO in the Jamieson Vitamins "Call For The Wild" contest, which brought us over \$31,000, making it the most successful fundraising event in MRF's history. This financial infusion finally gave us the opportunity to hire Simon Duval full-time as MBO Coordinator – a move which we hope will not only help us maintain stability and consistency in our on-site programs, but also allow for more analysis of our data, additional educational outreach, and opportunities to develop long-term funding partnerships to secure MBO's future. Meanwhile, after four years serving as MBO Director and contributing to our success in countless ways, Gay Gruner stepped down from the role in September, although she will remain involved as a bander-in-charge. Barbara Frei, one of MBO's original banders and a recent McGill PhD graduate, assumed the role in October. This year the banding efforts were helped significantly by Lisa Keelty, who took over the MAPS program, and Nicolas Bernier, who became the lead owl bander after serving as an intern last fall. Malcolm Johnson remained a critical member of the MBO team, setting up a new storage shed and as always maintaining the net lanes and associated paths in great condition. Thanks are also due to Bird Protection Quebec and Canada Steamship Lines for maintaining their annual financial support of MBO, to TD Friends of the Environment Foundation for a grant that will cover the purchase of new nets for 2014, and to the many participants and supporters of our Birdathon teams. In addition, we are very grateful to our other loyal donors and of course the 100+ volunteers who spent nearly 5000 hours on site in 2013 contributing to both research and site maintenance. MBO also received a bit of publicity from CBC's "Nature of Things", being featured for the work we have contributed to the study of the movement of bird-borne ticks, in the special "Ticked off: the mystery of Lyme Disease".

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

Frontenac Bird Studies was operated for a fifth year by Dan Derbyshire with the occasional assistance of a couple of local volunteers. FBS focuses on the impressive avian diversity of the Frontenac Arch in eastern Ontario, aiming to improve knowledge of local bird populations and collaborate with other agencies and the public to raise awareness and encourage protection of the region's biodiversity. After review of the results and logistical challenges involved in the MAPS program, the difficult decision was made to scale back from two sites to just the Maplewood Bog location this year; it was a relatively quiet year there, but at least there were several notable returns from previous years. The main focus for 2013 was revisiting the extensive point count network established in 2009. Roughly 180 surveys were repeated, and another 80 sites were

added specifically to target Cerulean Warbler, a species listed as Special Concern under the Species At Risk Act, but which COSEWIC has recommended be adjusted to Endangered. The Frontenac area is one of its few remaining strongholds in Canada, and this year's surveys showed that the population is overwhelmingly concentrated within the protected areas of Frontenac Provincial Park. Other highlights from this year's field work include the discovery of a second Red-headed Woodpecker nest for the region, and a Louisiana Waterthrush singing at a spot that had been unoccupied for the past three years. Funding for this year's work was again provided by the John Hackney Foundation for the Noosphere, as well as supporters of the 2013 Frontenac Avian Atlas Day.

Other research programs

MRF has a long history of research on Peregrine Falcons and Short-eared Owls, but both programs were relatively quiet in 2013, although Marcel Gahbauer edited several manuscripts that will hopefully be published in journals in 2014. The long wait to deploy our satellite transmitter on a Swainson's Hawk continues, as last winter's efforts by our collaborator Bill Clark in Texas did not pan out, but hopefully early 2014 will produce better results. Meanwhile, Marcel co-authored a presentation on Swainson's Hawks given by Kent Russell at the Raptor Research Foundation conference in Bariloche, Argentina, focusing on a previously undocumented concentration of migrants in fall in southern Alberta.

In Quebec, the MBO team again supported the efforts of several banders in the area around Montreal to contribute to the Canadian Snow Bunting Network. Another 217 birds were banded between January and March, and there were two returns from among the 321 individuals banded the previous winter. The winter 2013-2014 season is already off to a good start, with over 200 Snow Buntings banded at Mirabel alone in December. Meanwhile we are beginning to develop plans for satellite tracking of northern raptors overwintering in southern Quebec, with Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Hawk-Owls, Great Gray Owls, and Snowy Owls all potential candidates for study.

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

Sharing the results of MRF research is a priority. Simon Duval presented an update on MBO at the biennial meeting of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network in Port Rowan, Ontario, which was co-chaired by Marcel Gahbauer and former MBO Director Marie-Anne Hudson. Marcel also attended the Raptor Research Foundation conference in Argentina, taking advantage of the opportunity to network with other researchers interested in Short-eared Owls, especially those based in South America. More locally, Simon and Gay gave a number of additional presentations on MBO to groups around Montreal, as well as giving a talk on the new Snow Bunting research program.

MRF website

All MRF programs are described on the website, with McGill Bird Observatory particularly well represented. The website remains very popular, with the MBO photo ID library and our owl research programs drawing the greatest interest. However, after 11 years the site is in need of an overhaul. Richard Gregson has kindly offered his time to develop a new version that will not only improve the experience for visitors, but also make it quicker and easier for us to update, freeing up valuable time for other work. We thank Milburn Innovations Ltd. for continuing to provide great technical support and advising us on the site redesign. Meanwhile, the Facebook page for MBO (under our French alias, Observatoire d'Oiseaux de McGill) continues to grow in popularity, now boasting over 2400 followers, and is a great way for us to share photographic highlights and bits of news on an instant basis throughout the year.

Organizational news

As previously noted, Barbara Frei has taken over from Gay Gruner as Director of MBO, but otherwise the MRF board will remain unchanged in 2014. For the first time in our 11-year history, we are able to offer a modest paid position to our MBO Coordinator, and our hope is that this will be the catalyst to securing stable funding for MBO's future as well as improving our annual research output. Among the many goals for 2014 are the launch of our new website, publication of some of our Peregrine Falcon and Short-eared Owl research, preparation of a comprehensive report summarizing the first ten years of research at MBO, and continuing to advance our understanding of birds in the Frontenac area through FBS. All of our projects continue to operate on a very lean budget, and all donations are always gratefully appreciated.

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 Inc.", 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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