



Annual Report 2014

The Migration Research Foundation had a busy year in 2014, celebrating the tenth anniversary of McGill Bird Observatory, and embracing a new partnership with Environment Canada to advance bird identification, as well as pursuing ongoing research through our Frontenac Bird Studies program, and species-specific studies of Peregrine Falcons, Short-eared Owls, and Snow Buntings. This report summarizes highlights of our 2014 efforts; 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)

2014 was the tenth full year of operation for McGill Bird Observatory. It was by far the coldest winter ever at MBO, severely limiting effort and resulting in just 162 birds of 13 species banded. Conversely, the Spring Migration Monitoring Program (Mar 28-Jun 5) set new record highs for number of species (69) and individuals (1356) banded, with the latter total strongly influenced by an unprecedented count of 232 Cedar Waxwings. American Kestrel and Olive-sided Flycatcher were both banded for the first time at MBO. In summer, the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program was in its sixth year, also with a record number of species banded (33), but a close to average number of individuals (143).

As always, the Fall Migration Monitoring Program (Aug 1-Oct 30) was the busiest of the programs at MBO. The number of species (77) and individuals (3814) banded were above average, as was the count of species observed (150). However, instead of a big peak, numbers remained elevated later into the season, probably influenced by unusually mild October temperatures, to the extent that we experimented with extending the fall program by one full week to November 6. This extension proved very successful, and we expect to make it a permanent change to the protocol beginning in 2015, to more consistently capture the end of migration for some of the later migrants. Highlights of the regular fall season in 2014 included MBO's first ever banding of a Broad-winged Hawk (increasing the site total to 116 species), and record numbers banded of 15 species. Meanwhile, the Northern Saw-whet Owl program operated nightly for six weeks (Sep 26-Nov 6) for the fifth year in a row, banding 157 individuals, plus an Eastern Screech-Owl, and recapturing four foreign-banded owls. A detailed report of all research at MBO from November 2013 through October 2014 will be published on the MBO home page in early 2015, and as usual, MBO results have been shared with the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network.

This was our first full year with Simon Duval as our full-time MBO coordinator, which not only was a boost to programs on site, but also freed up some time for MRF directors to focus on other matters. However, MBO is far more than a one-person operation, and we are grateful to Gay Gruner for continuing to contribute as a bander-in-charge throughout the year, as well as to Lisa Keelty for managing the MAPS program, and Nicolas Bernier for being our lead owl bander for a second year. As usual, Malcolm Johnson did an excellent job of keeping net lanes, storage areas, and all other facilities in top condition throughout the year. On the financial side, MBO's 2014 programs were made possible through grants from Bird Protection Quebec and TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, donations from the John Hackney Foundation for the Noosphere and Canada Steamship Lines, the many participants and supporters of our Birdathon teams, and our other loyal individual donors. And we are of course very grateful to the 100+ volunteers who spent nearly 5000 hours on site in 2014!

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

Frontenac Bird Studies was operated for a sixth year by Dan Derbyshire with the occasional assistance of a couple of local volunteers. Back in the first year of FBS, 164 roadside and offroad point count stations were established to provide a baseline index of the distribution and relative abundance of breeding birds within the study area. These were revisited in 2013 and will continue to be surveyed every four years. However, to improve monitoring efforts, a subset of 43 points has been selected for annual coverage, beginning this year. The 2014 results highlighted that there can be considerable inter-annual variability for some species, and supports the value of a focused annual survey of selected points to complement the larger geographic scale of the four-year program. Among the 55 species observed this year, highlights included a record count of Black-throated Blue Warbler along Canoe Lake Road, a rebound in numbers of Wood Thrush (a species at risk), and just the second Mourning Warbler recorded for FBS, but a decline in abundance for the endangered Cerulean Warbler. Dedicated Cerulean Warbler point counts were also conducted again this year, at 183 locations; 88 male Cerulean Warblers were detected, 92% of them within Frontenac Provincial Park even though only 28% of point counts were within the park. These results are quite similar to those from 2013, suggesting a stable population for now. Some of the Cerulean Warbler point counts occurred near where Prairie Warbler research focused from 2010 to 2012, and 5 Prairie Warblers were detected, including a colour-marked male that was banded as a second-year breeder in June 2011 and observed this year at a new site roughly 300 m to the east. Louisiana Waterthrush monitoring was limited to 10 locations this year, and only one male was found, reflecting an ongoing regional decline for this species. Finally, a new Red-headed Woodpecker nesting territory was discovered for the third year in a row, a significant results for this regionally rare species.

Meanwhile, the MAPS program was operated again at Maplewood Bog, for the sixth consecutive year. Results were poor early in the season, but productivity was unusually high in July suggesting a good breeding season locally, and the total of 127 individuals and 26 species captured were both the highest since 2010. Across all six years, 41 species have now been banded at this site, with the addition of Eastern Wood-Pewee this summer. The most notable recapture of the year was a male Red-eyed Vireo banded in the first year (2009) and encountered again in 2010, 2013, and 2014. Funding for this year's work was again provided by the John Hackney Foundation for the Noosphere, Swish Maintenance Limited, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, the McLean Foundation, and supporters of the 2014 Frontenac Avian Atlas Day.

Other research programs

MRF's efforts this year focused overwhelmingly on McGill Bird Observatory and Frontenac Bird Studies. However, the MBO team again fanned out to sites around Montreal in winter to participate in the Canadian Snow Bunting Network, and banded a total of 2587 Snow Buntings, plus smaller numbers of Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs. Also in the same region, Simon Duval banded another 3 juvenile Peregrine Falcons at their nests. Meanwhile, after many years of waiting, MRF collaborator Bill Clark was finally able to deploy a satellite transmitter on an overwintering female Swainson's Hawk in southern Texas in late January. Rather than staying at a defined winter territory, she moved around daily, often shifting at least 20-30 km from one day to the next. Most notably, she flew over 100 km straight south in just two hours on February 2, coinciding with the passage of a sharp cold front with strong north winds. Unfortunately, the transmitter went silent shortly thereafter, so what was promising to develop into a detailed and interesting travelogue ended prematurely.

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

Sharing MRF results and engaging with other researchers is always a priority. Perhaps this year's most notable contribution was an article in the Journal of Wildlife Management that included two MRF authors (Marcel Gahbauer and Kristen Keyes) collaborating with nine colleagues from Canada, the United States, and Sweden. Entitled *Assessing the status and conservation priorities of the Short-eared Owl in North America*, it provides a comprehensive review of current conditions and presents practical recommendations for monitoring and management, in part based on Kristen's M.Sc. research. Marcel Gahbauer and Barbara Frei also attended the joint meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, Cooper Ornithological Society, and Society of Canadian Ornithologists in Colorado. More locally, Simon Duval and Gay Gruner continued to provide presentations on McGill Bird Observatory research to a number of Montreal-area audiences.

MRF website

The MRF website provides an overview of all programs, with McGill Bird Observatory particularly well represented. As reported last year, one of the projects for 2014 was development of an independent and fully bilingual website for McGill Bird Observatory. Richard Gregson and Geneviève Gélinas have put great effort into design and development, but due to the volume of content requiring updating and then translation, the site is not yet quite ready for launch. Milburn Innovations Ltd. has provided great support as we prepare for this transition. Over on Facebook, the MBO page (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

MRF experienced a couple of significant changes in 2014. One of our founding directors, Linda Boutwell, retired from the board after 11 years. Her contributions were fundamental to MRF's early success, and we sincerely thank Linda for her many years of dedicated service, first as Executive Director, and then for many years as Treasurer. Project Director Leslie Hunt has agreed to take on the Treasurer role going forward. Meanwhile, Linda's departure left MRF without a board member in the USA; since MRF has not been actively pursuing projects there but has incurred annual costs for maintaining charitable status and bank accounts, the board decided to let that branch lapse and focus on Canadian operations.

Regarding MRF in Canada, the remainder of the board of directors remained unchanged this year, and McGill Bird Observatory's growth continued under the expanded joint guidance of our MBO Director and MBO Site Coordinator. Looking ahead to 2015, we expect the full MRF team to be involved in preparing a comprehensive report on the first ten years of McGill Bird Observatory, and will continue to pursue research opportunities related to Peregrine Falcons and Short-eared Owls, as well as continuing our Frontenac Bird Studies program. As always, MRF will continue to operate all projects on a modest budget, with the support of many volunteers, and all donations are always gratefully appreciated.

Donations of any amount are always welcome, whether for specific projects (please specify), 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 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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