

Long-term Data Invaluable - Long Migration Incredible!

More Than Two Decades of Funding Support from the FWCP

The Mackenzie Nature Observatory is a non-profit group collecting information on migratory birds at its bird banding station at Mugaha Marsh in the Rocky Mountain Trench, east of the Parsnip Reach of the Williston Reservoir. The FWCP has been helping to fund the bird-banding station since it started 21 years ago.

Collecting data in a systematic manner over many years is extremely valuable in order to gauge population trends over the long-term, especially since birds can be significantly impacted by short-term variables such as weather.

(White-winged Crossbill, Serena Johnston)



For the FWCP, the project is a strong community-based initiative that provides stewardship and education opportunities, has support from many other organizations and attracts a significant amount of volunteer support each summer. In the bigger picture, the bird banding station at Mugaha Marsh, is one of 25 banding stations across the country that make up the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network.



For 2015, it was the flycatchers at the Marsh that had a banner year, likely because of the very warm and dry spring in May and June. Hammond's, Least, and Dusky Flycatchers all broke previous records. The other three birds breaking records were the Brewer's Sparrow, Purple Finch and the Ruby-crowned Kinglet. The Kinglet also topped the list in 2015 for the most banded bird during the fall migration with 851 banded out of a total of 3,686 birds. One new bird for the Society's books this year is the Cassin's Finch.

(Ruby-crowned Kinglet – most banded bird during the 2015 fall migration)

Doing less well in 2015 compared with previous years were the American Redstarts and Yellow Warbler.

“Over the longer term it is the Swainson's Thrush that continues to do well, along with the Tennessee Warbler, especially in the last three years,” says Vi Lambie, the society's Banding Station Coordinator. “In addition to the banding we also record bird observations, and one bird that is showing a noticeable decline is the Bank Swallow.”

The long-term trends at the Mackenzie Nature Observatory will be looked at very carefully over the next few years as two pipelines, one on either side of the Marsh, are planned to be constructed, with work beginning this year.

(Continued...)



Bird banders Kim Wetten, Serena Johnston and Lena Ware with Northern Saw-whet Owls.

For all the information, and to see pictures of the wide variety of bird species using Mugaha Marsh, see the [full report here](#).

Encounter of a Far-Away Kind: Sparrow Makes Epic Journey

While the long-term data provides invaluable information, it is often the individual bird stories that provide the seasonal highlights. And in 2015 it was an “encounter” with a little brown bird – a Lincoln’s Sparrow. An encounter is when the Mackenzie Nature Observatory receives a report that one of its banded birds is found elsewhere. This particular sparrow was recaptured 4,229 kilometres away in southern Mexico!

“This was extremely exciting news to receive because it was our very first encounter reported from outside the United States or Canada,” added Lambie. “Most encounter reports we receive usually concern birds found deceased after flying into windows or hit by traffic, but this was a live recapture from a bird bander in Mexico, so it made it all the more rewarding.”

Lincoln’s Sparrow, caught by Raul Said Quintero Felix in Mexico

