

Owl Banding at Lady Flower Gardens



For six weeks, we had incredible owl banding adventures at Lady Flower Gardens. With a total of 30 owls captured at this study site, and 72 visitors joining us on our weekly adventures, we can consider the project a great success. A massive thank you to everyone involved! Here is a brief overview of how the days panned out:

Week 1: We opened the nets for the first time on the 16th of September, only for a short while though, as thunderstorms chased us home. On the following evening, conditions were much better for banding, and we kept two nets open for four hours. Although we captured only one second-year owl, it was an interesting night as we saw and heard

hundreds of migrating Canada Geese, heard two Great Horned owls hooting back and forth, and we were entertained by several yipping coyotes.

Week 2: On Sept. 22nd, our evening began with a successful release of a rehabilitated Long-eared owl from WILDNorth - Northern Alberta Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation. Through the night, we captured and banded three Northern Saw-whet owls (two hatch-year and one second-year). On Friday the 23rd, we were joined by two members from the Edmonton Nature Club! Unfortunately, it was a less eventful night - we didn't catch anything, but ironically, as we were rolling up the nets to go home, a Saw-whet started calling. Maybe next time! Despite no captures, it was still a nice night with great weather, and we were amused by two Great Horned owls calling back and forth once again.

Week 3: September 29th - 30th were two very different nights for owl migration. On Thursday, we welcomed volunteers of Lady Flower Gardens, young biologists, and some of our members! We made ourselves comfortable in the forest covered by low-hanging clouds and waited patiently for the owls to show up, but the nets remained empty. It is possible that the unstable weather throughout the region made the owls stay put that evening. On Friday, the skies cleared up, and by midnight the temperature dropped to 6°C. Right from the start it looked like a promising evening, as a Northern Saw-whet Owl visited the banding site even before we opened the nets. We captured and banded nine owls in four hours! Again, we heard Great Horned owls and hundreds of migrating Canada Geese. A big thank you to all the visitors and volunteers for joining us in the woods, and to those who came back Friday after a blank Thursday!

Week 4: Unfortunately, last week's owling events were cancelled, but we were back at Lady Flower Gardens this past Thursday and Friday (October 13th and 14th) and it was an excellent two days! We had Lady Flower Gardens members join us on Thursday, and Edmonton Nature Club members came along on Friday. Thursday night we captured and banded two saw-whet owls, and Friday we were lucky enough to catch another one, despite the windy conditions. Apart from the new owls, we recaptured a young owl that we banded two weeks ago! In addition to the nice weather we've been having, this must mean that there is enough food in the woods to allow this bird to spend a little time at the LFG forest.

Week 5: A successful two days! On Thursday evening we were joined by Edmonton Nature Club members and we caught and banded six Saw-whet owls. ENC members came along with us on Friday too - the weather was a little cooler, but the chill was worth it because we captured six once again! Each owl we catch is banded, weighed, and measured. Additionally, feather molt is documented on each owl, which allows us to determine their age. We had one extra special capture - a Saw-whet owl that was banded in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan as a HY (hatch year) bird in November 2021.

These recoveries of previously banded birds provide us with valuable information on the timing and migration of these owls. A great time was had by all!

Week 6: Our final Fall Owl Banding night for the season! On Thursday we discovered that one of our nets was damaged, likely by a northern flying squirrel. We were only able to use one of our nets, and despite waiting outdoors in the strong winds which subsided by nine o'clock, we didn't catch any owls. This was unfortunate, as we were lucky enough to be joined by Edmonton Nature Club members once again. Friday was our last banding day for this migration season, and we managed to catch two owls under starry skies - a lovely finale!

Date	Net Hours	Northern Saw-whet Owls
Sept. 16 th , 2022	1	0
Sept. 17 th , 2022	8	1
Sept. 22 nd , 2022	8	3
Sept. 23 rd , 2022	8	0
Sept. 29 th , 2022	8	0
Sept. 30 th , 2022	8	9
Oct. 13 th , 2022	4	2
Oct. 14 th , 2022	8	1
Oct. 20 th , 2022	8	6
Oct. 21 st , 2022	8	6
Oct. 27 th , 2022	4	0
Oct. 28 th , 2022	8	2
TOTAL	81	30

