

2025 Speakers for Snow Goose Festival

Saturday 12pm

Speaker: Sandy Van Dijk

Topic: From Grasslands to Canals to Mountaintops: A Year of Birding Adventures

Join me on a journey through a year of birdwatching across diverse landscapes—from the windswept prairies of Grasslands National Park to the rugged Yukon wilderness, the forests of Alberta, and the rich wetlands of Holland. Through personal stories and photographs, I'll share some of my most memorable birding experiences, including encounters with the elusive burrowing owl, the striking red-backed shrike, and the hardy white-tailed ptarmigan. This presentation highlights the beauty and wonder of birdwatching, blending travel, adventure, and the thrill of spotting incredible species in their natural habitats. Whether you're a lifelong birder or just bird-curious, you might find yourself inspired to embark on your own birding adventure.

Sandy has worked in many sectors of the environment, including consulting, non-profit, and government roles. Now a wildlife instructor at Lakeland College, she enjoys educating people about wildlife and nature. Passionate about birds and their habitats, Sandy enjoys exploring diverse landscapes and inspiring others to connect with nature through birdwatching.

Saturday 2pm

Speaker: Wes Olson

Topic: BISON, BUGS & BIRDS: Linking the recovery of endangered species

Not that long ago the plains and forests of North America teemed with wildlife, including more than 30,000,000 plains bison and hundreds of thousands of their northern relative, the wood bison. By the late 1800s both were extirpated from their ancestral lands. This depopulation of a keystone species had significant implications for the other species that depended upon them for their very survival. This presentation takes the viewer from the time when prehistoric species roamed the continent, through to the present, and discusses modern threats to grassland insects and birds that depend on bison and healthy ecosystems today.

Wes Olson combines art, and science with more than 40 years working with bison to help people understand how significant bison were in shaping the ecosystems of North America. This presentation takes the viewer from the time when prehistoric species roamed the continent, through to the present, and discusses modern threats to grassland insects and birds that depend on bison and healthy ecosystems today. With the magical photography of Johane Janelle, this talk brings these keystone connections into brilliant clarity.

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Sunday 12pm

Speaker: Lisa Takats-Priestley

Topic: New Tracking Technology Helps Biologists Understand Raptor Movements

Lisa Takats Priestley from STRIX Ecological Consulting will talk about three projects (two local) studying movement patterns of birds of prey. New technology has allowed biologists to gain new insights into where Northern Saw-whet Owls and American Kestrels migrate and overwinter. It is also helping us understand the year-round movements of our Barred owls, a species of management concern in Alberta.

Lisa has been a biologist in Alberta for over 17 years. She co-owns a consulting company, STRIX Ecological with her husband Chuck based in the Tofield area. She received a MSc. In Wildlife Ecology and Management from the University of Alberta studying the ecology of Barred Owls, which lead to the development of Nocturnal Owl Survey Guidelines for North America.

Sunday 2pm

Speaker: Geoff Holroyd

Topic: Saw-whet Owls: residents, migrants or vagrants; an avian enigma explored with MOTUS and climate change

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory has been banding saw-whets in the autumn every year since 2002. And Geoff banded saw-whets at Long Point in the 1960s. In this presentation we will talk about the first papers describing saw-whets as migrants in eastern North America, then explore the BBO data to learn more about their movements. BBO has banded over 5000 owls. Sara has summarized what we have learned about their migration timing and population fluctuations. Jana and Geoff attached 97 MOTUS tags that show a different migration pattern than that shown by dozens of band recoveries. Myrthe applied complex statistics to analyze changes in migration timing in relation to climate change to compare the timing of eastern populations' migrations to that found out west at the BBO. Everything that you need to know about these adorable little owls but didn't know Whooh to ask.

Authors on this project: Geoff Holroyd, Sara Pearce Meijerink, Myrthe Van Brempt, Jana Teefy–Beaverhill Bird Observatory

Dr. Geoff Holroyd's interest in birds developed as a teenager when he was an active volunteer starting in 1961 and later as chairman of the Long Point Bird Observatory. He earned his MSc and PhD from the University of Toronto for his studies of the foraging strategies and diet of swallows. He retired in 2012 after 36 years with the Canadian Wildlife Service including studies of peregrine falcons and burrowing owls, and chairing their national recovery teams. Among other things he has tracked the results of the Edmonton Christmas Bird Count for 40 years. He is now chair of the Beaverhill Bird Observatory. He coauthored the new book 'Wildlife of the North' in August 2023. His latest research project is to track Northern Saw-whet Owls from BBO to around North America using the MOTUS wildlife tracking system at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory.

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Saturday: Banquet Guest Speaker

Wes Olson

THE ECOLOGICAL BUFFALO – ON THE TRAIL OF A KEYSTONE SPECIES

Once numbering in the tens of millions, these magnificent creatures played a significant role in the varied ecosystems they occupied, and North American Indigenous Peoples depended upon them. With the arrival of Europeans, the buffalo were all but exterminated, along with their millennia-old intricate food webs and inner-species relationships. Despite a brush with extinction, the buffalo survived and are slowly recovering. Alongside this recovery, the relationships once shared with thousands of species are being re-established in a remarkable process of ecological healing. Based on Wes Olson's thirty - five years of working intimately with bison—and featuring Johane Janelle's stunning photography—*The Ecological Buffalo* takes a journey through the myriad connections this keystone species has with the Great Plains.

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