

BIRD STRIKE CANADA

FALL 2015, ISSUE 3



Although this is the fall issue, it is really winter. Most of Canada is gripped with cold temperatures and snow, although not like it used to be. Here on the west coast we are having the warmest December on record. As the climate changes, so do wildlife conditions across Canada. We must all learn to adapt not only to a new climate regime, but to new wildlife conditions and challenges on our airports.

15TH NORTH AMERICAN BIRD STRIKE CONFERENCE



Birdstrike Canada played host to the world as we launched the 15th North American Bird Strike Conference. 345 delegates attended from 22 different countries. The US sent 243 delegates and Canada had 52 which is a very good attendance from both countries. There

were 25 presentations (available on our website) and two panel discussions. 14 vendors also displayed the latest and greatest tools available for wildlife management. Judging from the response sheets from attendees, the conference was extremely well

received and I thought the presentations were above average quality. All this plus the beautiful city of Montreal – if you were not there you missed a very good conference. Thanks to everyone who helped make this the best conference we have hosted.

P2. Birdstrike Canada Workshop. Invitation for 2016

P2-5. Franklin's Gull by Jul Wojnowski

P6. Season's Greetings from the BSAC Steering Committee



2016 Birdstrike Canada Workshop



Advancing wildlife management at Canadian airports

The Bird Strike Association of Canada is pleased to announce that the 3rd Canada-wide Airport Wildlife Management workshop will be sponsored by Edmonton International Airport. We are currently looking for a suitable venue in the City of Edmonton. We plan to hold the Annual Steering Committee Meeting on Monday, 3 October 2016 followed by a 3-day workshop and field trip (4-6 October 2016). More details will be provided as the workshop planning proceeds. The first two workshops have been very well received and were great learning opportunities for everyone participating. We are adding a field trip to this workshop to take in the fall migration of birds through central Alberta (and a quick visit to Edmonton International's wildlife program). Plan of attending. Registration will open in the spring.

Save the date: 4-6 October 2016

Species Profile

The Franklin's gull: A prairie airport challenge.

By Jul Wojnowski

The Franklin's gull (*Larus pipixcan*), is a small gull that measures 32 to 36 cm in length, and weighs about 221 to 335 g. -It features an entirely black head. Its small bill turns bright red during the breeding season. During winter, it loses most of the black on its head and the red on its bill. Named after the famed

explorer Sir John Franklin, its call, small size, and graceful buoyant flight has given it the nickname 'Prairie Dove'.

Franklin's gulls breed on the Canadian prairies and some northern prairie states and winter mainly on the west coast of South America. -They can be seen through much of the western interior of

the United States during migration. With such a long migration, the first individuals arrive later than most other gull species in the spring. -In central Alberta, they begin to arrive around mid-April, with most spring migrants arriving in May. In the fall, most birds are gone by mid-September.

As with most gull species, Franklin's Gulls breed colonially with colonies ranging from 100 - 100,000 pairs in size. Marshes and small lakes are the preferred nesting habitat. Unlike most gulls, the nest is made of floating vegetation, mostly bulrushes and cattail, and is usually anchored to standing vegetation. Colonies can be ephemeral and are very dependent on water depth. As lakes or marshes dry up, the colony will move. Two to four eggs (usually three) are laid and hatch within 23-26 days. Young remain in the nest for at least 20 days and are capable of flight in about 35 days. It takes about 2 years for birds to reach sexual maturity.

The diet of the Franklin's gull is quite varied. Early spring arrivals may feed on seeds before insects emerge.

However, insects (especially [chironomids midges](#) and grasshoppers)



and earthworms, comprise the bulk of its diet which can also include snails, crayfish, small fish, and small mammals. Some reports suggest that Franklin's gulls are much less likely to frequent dumps or scavenge than are other gulls, however, I have observed them in large numbers (3,000+) at [the local the landfill near Leduc, Alberta](#), in the early spring and summer months. They forage by walking or wading on ground, by swimming, or by catching insects in flight. This latter method can be observed at high altitudes when feeding on swarming insects such as flying ants,

but also less than 1 meter above the ground while "hawking" low flying species such as dragonflies, grasshoppers, leafhoppers, moths and other agricultural pests over grasslands and crops.

Franklin's gulls can be a highly hazardous species at airports. While they are relatively small for a gull, they are almost always [in flocksing](#), sometimes with several hundred individuals in a group. Airport attractants can include earthworms and insects such as grasshoppers and other crop pests. Gulls are the most commonly struck group at Edmonton International Airport (EIA), and Franklin's gulls have become the most commonly struck species since 2012. The biggest attractant has usually been earthworms, which emerge on the airfield hard surfaces during a rain event. June and July are typically the

The **Bird Strike Association of Canada** (BSAC aka Bird Strike Canada) is a leader in airport wildlife strike prevention. By fostering dialogue within the industry, the BSAC seeks and advances innovative ideas in aviation safety. Our mandate includes setting standards, addressing industry issues by formulating effective strategies and implementing change through regulatory means.

Bird Strike Canada is a strong advocate for what concerns members from every sector of Canadian aviation. Validating research and the implementation of industry developments that support methods of mitigating bird strike risk are keynotes of the association. An important directive of Bird Strike Canada is developing best practices as well as the standardization of airport wildlife strike prevention data and training. Bird Strike Canada has collected literature on bird strike research from around the world and makes this available online to all of our members. Knowledge of effective strategies, policy and technologies assist wildlife managers achieve the best results possible at their airports.

Credits:

This newsletter is published by the Birdstrike Association of Canada

Editor: Gary F. Searing

We encourage you to submit articles or ideas for articles to make this newsletter a reflection of our bird strike community in Canada.



wettest months and gull activity is highest at this time. -Since 2010, when 270 Franklin's gulls in 15 dispersals were recorded in June and July, numbers have increased dramatically to nearly 6,500 birds in over 600 dispersals during these months in 2015.

The summer of 2015 was quite hot and dry in the western prairies and several airports reported higher than typical

local populations of grasshoppers. -At EIA, Franklin's gulls appeared in large numbers feeding heavily on grasshoppers in late June. -By early July, it was decided that a pesticide application would be required for grasshopper control. In consultation with several colleagues, it was decided that a 200-foot strip along the edges of the runways would be sprayed. -Decis was the product recommended and

used. -A noticeable decrease in grasshoppers was noted in the sprayed area within 24 hours; however, the hawking behaviour of feeding birds still brought them in proximity to the runways and strikes were still reported. A few days after the initial application, a second, broader application was done to the entire infields (the strip between the runways and parallel taxiways). -Within a couple of days of this second



application, birds left the area.

During the period of frenzied activity, several interesting observations were made.

- 1) Falconry and lethal control by shooting can be used quite readily on birds feeding on the ground, but this becomes far more challenging on fast flying gulls hawking insects low over the airfield.
- 2) Pyrotechnics can be helpful in dispersing gulls, but seems less effective on birds hawking grasshoppers. While anecdotal, I observed the green "screamers" seemed to work better than the red "bangers" in dispersing hawking gulls. -This has since been corroborated by personnel at other airports.
- 3) During the peak of grasshopper activity, gulls generally did not arrive on the airfield until around 11 am and would leave somewhere between 5-6 pm. The early departure was somewhat surprising to me as at that time of the year there were still five or more hours of daylight. -However, by driving in the infields after the birds had left, I noticed that the grasshoppers were no longer actively flying and consequently no longer readily available to the birds.

4) While a total kill would have been ideal, the simple reduction in the grasshopper population had the desired effect of dropping the quality of the foraging sufficiently to presumably make birds leave the area in search of higher concentrations of prey.

While several lessons were learned in 2015, there are still a few unanswered questions concerning this [birdspecies](#). -The reason Franklin's gulls have become more numerous in recent years is unclear. -It is suspected that a breeding colony has become established in the area, but this has not yet been verified. Also, while it is welcome, it remains a mystery why Franklin's gulls virtually abandon the airport by the end of July which has been the case for the last 4 years. -Franklin's gulls are relatively early fall migrants, but are still commonly seen at other local sites [in-during](#) August. -It may have to do with the fact that these birds are unique among all gull species around the world in replacing all of their feathers twice a year rather than once. -The fall moult occurs prior to their departure and likely takes place in August.

In 2016, we will closely monitor the grasshopper population in the spring and plan for a pesticide application when most insects have hatched and are at the appropriate instar stage to maximize the effectiveness of the pesticide. -Areas of future research should



On behalf of the Steering Committee for Birdstrike Canada we wish all our members and their families a joyous and happy holiday season and a successful New Year! We thank each and every one of you for supporting us and helping us grow to be a vibrant and valued professional association and the official Bird Strike Committee of Canada.

