



2023 YEAR END REPORT

Ellis Bird Farm Ltd.

November 1, 2022 – October 31, 2023

Carolyn Ross
March 2024

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Board, Staff and Volunteers	2
Board Members	2
Staff and Contractors	2
Volunteers	3
Board Governance & Strategic Planning	4
Policy Review	4
Fundraising	5
Grants	5
Donations	5
Raffle	6
Adopt A Nest, Bluebird Banding and Owl Photography Exclusive Tours	6
Operational Objectives	6
Farm	6
Wildlife Research	8
Education Programs	9
School Programs, Knee High Naturalists and Extension	9
Outreach Activities	9
Events	9
Blue Feather Award	13
High School Scholarship	13
Advertising	13
Website	13
Social Media	13
Onsite Projects	14
Café	14
Gift Shop	14
Visitor Centre Exhibits	15
Infrastructure	16
Site Work	16
Partners and Supporters	17
Appendix 1 Vision and Mission	18

Board, Staff and Volunteers

Board Members

Board meetings were held at the site as a combination of in person and online. Maintaining an online Zoom option, for members not able to attend on site, improved board attendance. Board meetings were held monthly, transitioning from afternoon to evening meetings during the summer open season. The Human Resources Committee, comprised of the Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, met as required in the year. The Farm Committee comprised of Calvin Ireland, Bob Winchell (retired board member), Tony Blake, Victor Zuidhof, Charlie Ball, and the site manager. In March 2023, Calvin Ireland stepped down from the board and the Farm Committee and was replaced with Terry Young. The committee met as required throughout the year to plan and discuss farm management. The Research Committee met again in Fall 2023 including: Ron Bjorge, Tony Blake, Carolyn Ross, John Bontje, and researchers Natalia Lifshitz, Delano Lewis. See Table 1 for a list of board members.

Table 1 Names and information of Ellis Bird Farm board members in 2023.

Name	Position	Representing
Howard Oudman	Chair	Member at Large
Ron Bjorge	Vice Chair	Red Deer River Naturalists
Sheila Sayers	Secretary	Member at Large
Cam Baldwin	Treasurer	Member at Large
Barb Shepherd	Member	Lacombe County
Scott Maetche	Member	MEGlobal Canada ULC.
Tony Blake	Member	Nature Alberta
John Bontje	Member	Member at Large
Dani Ducross	Member	Member at Large
Terry Young	Member	Member at Large

Calvin Ireland retired from the board and was replaced by Terry Young in March 2023.

Staff and Contractors

Carolyn Ross was the Site Manager and Biologist for her second year. Linda Sommers returned for her fourth year, and Charlie Ball returned for his third year. Amy Jin, full-time Administration/Education Coordinator was on reduced hours and Worker's Compensation Board leave due to a workplace injury from April 2023 to October 2023. Carter McLenahan returned for his fifth season; Madison Asante, Research student; Emma Fulton, Nature Interpreter; and Jessie Thompson, Farm Assistant returned for their second seasons. New in 2023 were Ella Damberger, Nature Interpreter and Claire Stange, who took over the Education Coordinator role. Claire Stange was also responsible for many of the gift shop and social media roles and continued to work part-time throughout the off-season. Administration Assistant role was filled by Wendy Lapinis from April to June and then by Kaleigh McLean and volunteers for the remainder of the season. Gail Zimmerman was the bookkeeper for Ellis Bird Farm for the eighth year. See Table 2 for a complete list of staff and contractors.

Table 2 Names and positions of Ellis Bird Farm staff and contractors in 2022.

Name	Position	Type
Carolyn Ross	Site Manager and Biologist	Full Time
Amy Jin	Education Coordinator and Administrative Assistant	Full Time until October 2023
Linda Sommers	Gardener	Full Time, Seasonal
Charlie Ball	Site Maintenance	Full Time, Seasonal
Carter McLenahan	Grounds Assistant	Summer Student
Madisen Asante	Biology Research Assistant	Summer Student
Jessie Thompson	Farm Research Assistant	Summer Student
Ella Damberger	Nature Interpreter	Summer Student
Emma Fulton	Nature Interpreter	Summer Student
Claire Stange	Education Coordinator	Summer Student/part-time off-season
Eve Stange	Admin Assistant	Part-time in June
Kaleigh McLean	Admin Assistant	Part time July-October
Natalia Lifshitz	Scientific Advisor	Contractor
Gail Zimmerman	Bookkeeper, Books by Jan	Contractor
Victor Zuidhof	Farm Tenant	Five Year Contract

Volunteers

Volunteers that spent more than 10 volunteer hours at Ellis Bird Farm are recognized in this report and appreciated for their contribution. Ulla Bruhn-Crouch, John Bontje, Del McKinnon, and Logan Calihoo all helped extensively with purple martins and conducted nest checks through the breeding season. Denise Orr and Eve Stange helped in the Visitor Centre, special events and with bat counts. Judy Schwartz and Maureen Carey assisted with the front desk, special events and Visitor Centre displays. Maureen also spent one day a week through the nesting season driving Madisen to difficult to access nest boxes; contributed photography and video for social media and displays. Delano Lewis, Naia Holtom, Elaine Ford, and Maureen Carey helped with research collecting butterfly data and plant inventory. Phil Mueller cut wood for bird house kits and built bird houses to sell in the gift shop. Brian Metzger helped with farm operations and bluebird nestbox trail replacement project. Jake Dahl volunteered in the garden and removed large tree branches and pruned around the Café and Ellis Centre. Rachael Firminger conducted breeding bird surveys and Jessie Campbell assisted with bat counts, front desk, and special events. Bob Winchell volunteered to be on the farm committee and spent hours in meetings to push forward Ellis Bird Farm’s farm initiatives. David Gregory helped with pest control on the farm.

All board members volunteer their time and deserve to be recognized for their efforts. Board members attended monthly meetings, spent time preparing for meetings, reviewed policies, and responded to email inquiries from the Site Manager throughout the year. Tony Blake volunteered many hours to maintain fences and build more gates for easier management of cattle on site. Barb Shepherd helped at the Canada Day event, in the Visitor Centre, and transferring board financial role to Cam Baldwin. Cam Baldwin worked with the bookkeeper to ensure that Ellis Bird Farm remained in good financial position and with the board’s financial and professional documents. Howard Oudman participated in board and HR meetings throughout the year and worked with the development and planning of the Modular Agriculture honey bee education project. Sheila Sayers helped set up

displays and the Visitor Centre for events. John Bjonte contributed to the purple martin monitoring and demonstrations, bluebird trail nestbox replacements, and participated in the research committee. Ron Bjorge reviewed and revised a draft of the original board documents “Articles of Association” and participated in the research committee. Terry Young participated in the farm committee, Scott Maetche coordinated discussions and meetings with MEGlobal, and Dani Ducross facilitated a fundraising discussion with the board. All board members contributed their time and ideas to advance Ellis Bird Farm operations and initiatives as well.

Board Governance & Strategic Planning

Following the change in 2021, the Board continues to operate under a governance focus. In 2021 these four strategic planning goals were established:

1. Transition the Board from operational to governance focused.
2. Balance our engagement with education, research, and agriculture for enhanced overall environmental stewardship and healthy biodiversity.
3. Strengthen Financial Sustainability (stewarding resources).
4. Enhance connection with stakeholders.

The Board continues to work with these goals. The transition to governance is complete with the Site Manager taking on responsibility of discontinued committees. The Board continues to have Human Resources, Farm, and Financial Committees. Due to increasing research projects, the Research Committee re-formed and met on October 3, 2023. 2023 saw a continued focus on agriculture while continuing with engagement in education and research (see Farm section on page 6 for more details). Continued sourcing of funds from other organizations and grants is shifting EBF toward strengthening financial sustainability. Fundraisers including Adopt a Nest, BlueBird Banding, and Bat Night were also steps towards financial sustainability. Relationships with current stakeholders were maintained including MEGlobal Canada ULC (MEGlobal), Dow Canada and Lacombe County, and relationships with new stakeholders including Federated Co-operatives Ltd. (FCL), Central Alberta Co-op, Alternative Land Use Services ALUS, Grey Wooded Forage Association were established. Relationships with community groups such as Red Deer River Watershed Association, Junior Forest Wardens, 4H, Red Deer and Lacombe Art Guilds and Urban Aboriginal Voices furthered our exposure in the local communities.

The Board met in September to discuss potential rebranding with Austin Weaver from Lacombe Tourism. Name options and variations were proposed, and a visitor survey and stakeholder session planned for late summer and fall. The Board also met in October to discuss fundraising options and planning. Several initiatives were selected to address in the upcoming year including applying for a casino license, a long table dinner event, a calendar, partnerships with local businesses and a “Friend of Ellis” membership group.

Policy Review

As part of the board’s initiative to transition to governance, and because the Site Manager is directly involved in site operations, Carolyn Ross reviewed and edited operational policies throughout the year. The board discussed and approved the final version.

Policies reviewed included:

- Emergency Chain of Command Policy

- Fire and Medical Emergency Policies
- Electrical Emergency Policies
- Lightning Emergency Policies
- DOW/MEGlobal (Off-Site) Emergency Policies
- Shelter in Place Policy
- Extreme Weather Emergency Policies

Fundraising

Grants

Three grants were obtained to cover the costs of summer student wages this year. The Canada Summer Jobs grant partially covered the wages of grounds summer student and agriculture summer student for a total of \$9,428. Eco Canada funded \$15,000 to cover the cost of three positions: Biological Research Technician, and 2 Nature Interpreter positions. Red Deer and District Community Foundation provided \$5000 from the Ellis Bird Farm Student Employment Fund for student funding this year.

MEGlobal contributed a large operational grant as they do every year. We greatly appreciate their contributions each and every year, and we are pleased to have such a generous partner.

Alberta Culture provided \$4000 for the two day “Connections” event in September which explored Indigenous connections to the land and nature.

Alberta EcoTrust Springboard grant for \$9,288 provided funding for technology upgrades and included iPads for research data collection, infrared camera, and other technology updates. This grant was given a 6 month extension until May 2024.

Co-op Community Spaces contributed \$85,000 towards the Modular Agriculture Classroom project. Eco-Tree Generations applied for this grant in partnership with EBF and will be designing and building modular classrooms from seacans for honey bee and chickens.

ALUS provided \$6200 towards the grazing projects in 2023. Please read more in the farming section.

Donations

Ellis Bird Farm is fortunate to have a supportive community that contributes each and every year to ensure the Ellis Bird Farm vision and mission can be carried out. Ellis Bird Farm is grateful for the support of the community and recognizes contributions of donors in this report.

Donations online and in donation boxes on site amounted to \$59,082.25 over the year. The largest donation received was from Keyera Energy for \$23,000 and \$5000 from Federated Cooperatives Ltd. (FCL) and Central Alberta Co-op for farming initiatives. On-site donations totaled \$13,904.00.

There were some **in-kind donations** during the year. Phil Mueller donated labour to build bird houses and bird house kits for sale in the gift shop. Sheila Sayers donated gift shop items.

Thank you to every single individual and organization who donated to Ellis Bird Farm in the 2022-2023 year.

Raffle

Three gift baskets were raffled off in September 2023. The baskets were themed and held items related to “Beginner Birdwatcher”, “Bird Photography” and a “Children’s Nature” basket. Items in the baskets were purchased or sourced from local businesses as donations. Tickets were priced at \$4.00 each and baskets were valued at \$450-\$600. A total of \$1632.00 was raised through the raffles.

Adopt A Nest, Bluebird Banding and Owl Photography Exclusive Tours

The adopt a nest fundraiser was continued in 2023 but had low uptake. Donors were given the choice to adopt a mountain bluebird, tree swallow, purple martin, house wren or barn swallow nest. For a \$100 donation, three letters with photos were sent updating the donor on the status of their adopted nest, and for a \$300 donation, letters were sent, and the donor was given an in-person tour of their adopted nest. The other fundraiser, an exclusive bluebird tour, with a total of 3 people, was conducted with Dr Lifshitz which provided donors with an opportunity to observe banding bluebird nestlings. Exclusive photography sessions were offered during the later portion of the Owl Nesting season at \$100 per person. This was extremely popular as the great horned owl nest is active prior to our public season, we allowed small groups access to the site for photography. A total of \$1,200 was raised through these initiatives.

Operational Objectives

Farm

With the renewed focus of farming in 2023, Grey Wooded Forage Association and Alternative Land Use Services ALUS partnered with EBF on a second Adaptive Multi-Paddock (AMP) grazing project. In early 2023 we were seeing low precipitation levels and decided to only run one herd of cows on the property. Fields 1 saw an expansion of its AMP grazing and was further subdivided into 7 grazing cells. Electric fencing, gates and an alley way were established as part of the adaptive grazing plan. A water pipeline was extended to Field 1 and water troughs provided water to the cattle. Charlie Ball and Jessie worked to get the paddocks set up, rotated cattle, and maintained the water troughs. Cattle, 62 cow/calf pairs, were rotated every 2-4 days. Jessie Thompson conducted pasture health assessments throughout the summer.

Fields 5 was not grazed in 2023 due to poor forage and dry conditions.

Fields 6 and 7 were skim grazed with 62 cow/calf pairs for short duration in July. The marsh in Field 7 was included in this light graze.

Reserve areas Field 2 and 11, were included in the grazing rotation and grazed once in 2023 after July 31st.

Following the full renovation of Field 8 in 2021, Victor Zuidhof seeded this field to barley in 2022. The field was disced again in spring 2023 and planted again to barley.

The Field 3 and 4 seeding trial in 2021 was successful and the seed took despite dry field conditions in fall 2021. Two full cuts of silage were taken off the fields in 2023. A third cut was taken in Field 4. The species composition of this field is still heavily weighted to alfalfa (>75%).

Additional native trees and shrub species were planted into the spruce trees in Fields 8 & 9 in 2023 to create small areas of forest cover to increase biodiversity and improve shade for the cattle. The newly planted trees will be fenced from cattle during the grazing season. Additionally, willow stakes were planted in Fields 9 and 7 and around the main wetland on site. Agro-forestry Woodlot Extension Society held a planting day on Opening Day

and we planted an additional 400 tree plugs (dogwood, balsam poplar, willow, spruce) in the riparian area in Field 9.



Figure 1 Fields at Ellis Bird Farm are numbered for record keeping.

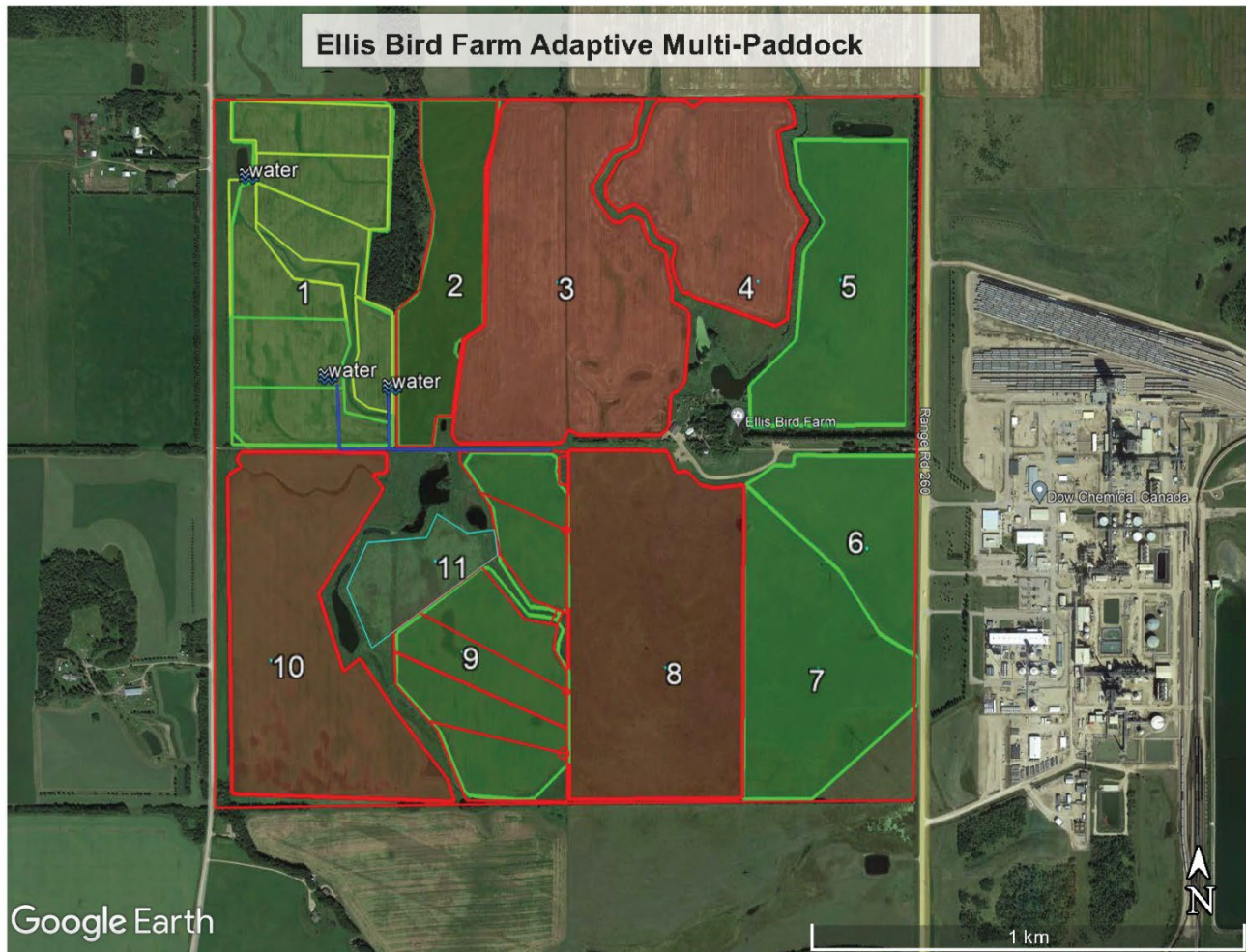


Figure 2 Ellis Bird Farm’s adaptive management grazing plan in Field 1 & 9.

Wildlife Research

Madisen Asante monitored the bluebird trail weekly (an effort of three days per week), assisted with bat roost surveys, assisted with banded mountain bluebirds, and entered data from the bluebird trail.

Dr. Natalia Lifshitz applied for a banding permit, participated in research planning meetings, assisted with the RDDCF grant application, oversaw all banding activities and continued grant applications for the research project on bluebirds, insects, and pesticides with Dr. Delano Lewis. Their grant application received funding from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Council (NSERC) for 5 years. In addition to the research project, Delano conducted and led a Citizen Science Butterfly Count project.

Carolyn Ross applied for the provincial research permit, planned the upcoming research season for bluebird camera nest box study, the bluebird trail and site research activities. Carolyn Ross transferred federal educational permits into her name as these permits cannot be held by the organization, in February 2023. Carolyn coordinated and led the bat roost surveys, assisted with bird banding, and managed the bluebird trial with Natalia Lifshitz.

Due to the aging nestboxes on the bluebird trail, we utilized grant money to build 430 new nestboxes. Nestboxes were replaced on half the trail in October 2023 with the other half (Burbank and south block and the EBF farm site) to be replaced in August 2024 after breeding season. Thanks to Jake Dahl, Brian Metzger, Jessie Thompson and John Bontje and the Junior Forest Wardens Red Deer Woodchucks for their work on this project. This initiative will also allow us to standardize the type of nestbox on the trail. Fall cleaning of bluebird nestboxes in the Burbank area was done by Maureen and Carolyn and the farm boxes were cleaned by Jessie Thompson.

Seven purple martin houses were raised in spring 2023. Four houses remained at the water garden, and three Jim Boyd houses were used. Nine gourds on the spider rack were raised. See the 2023 Wildlife Report for a full report on purple martin breeding in 2022. All houses were wrapped for the winter and the gourds were taken down in October by John Bontje and Ulla Bruhn-Crouch.

A complete update of research activities can be found in Ellis Bird Farm's 2023 Wildlife Report.

Education Programs

School Programs, Knee High Naturalists and Extension

Our school programs ran from mid-May to end of June with over 33 schools and 1168 students from the Central Alberta region partaking. Students participated in a variety of activities such as pond dipping, gardening, wetland exploration, owl pellet discovery, Alberta Species education, and feather and wing lessons. Schools also had the option to add bird feeder building to their program, which 9 groups did.

The Knee High Naturalists programs had consistent demand over this summer with a total of 137 children attending. The hour long program was geared toward children from 3 to 7 years old. The outdoor program consisted of an informative information on bees, butterflies, frogs, owls, bats, foxes, and songbirds. Incorporated into each session was a craft and activity. Claire conducted the Knee High Naturalist programs from July to August with the help of Ella Damberger and Emma Fulton. The program was \$8 per child.

Summer programming was also offered in July and August to youth groups including the Boys&Girls clubs, Youth Headquarters, homeschools and other youth groups. A total of 6 groups participated with 150 children. Activities varied according to age but were based on the spring education programs.

Fall school programs were offered on a smaller scale led by Carolyn Ross and Kaleigh McLean. Themes were geared to Grades 5 & 6 forest trees and wetlands curriculum. Four groups attended with a total of 122 children.

Outreach Activities

Events

Events at Ellis Bird Farm were well attended in 2023, attendance is listed for special event days and workshops in Table 3. Weather, as always, was a factor in both general attendance and for special events. May was an especially hot and smokey month, with smoke from wildfires continuing throughout the summer affecting air quality in Central Alberta. Ellis Bird Farm opened for the season on Victoria Day, May 22. Opening Day saw 200 visitors participating in Dr Lewis's butterfly citizen science presentation, tree planting event and general site activities.

On May 28, Rob Wapple, Kingbird Environmental, led a bird tour in the West Woods. This tour cost \$10 for participants and 12 people participated. Rob provided excellent information on identification keys and tips as

well as bird song, field marks and bird behaviour. Lori Seilski, Kingbird Environmental led a “What’s Blooming Plant Walk” on the afternoon of May 28th with 6 people in attendance.

Dr. Lewis led two sessions in June on learning to identify butterflies for the Citizen Science Butterfly Count project with a total of 36 trained participants. Brochures and field forms were provided by Dr Lewis and available at the Visitor Centre for participants all summer long.

The Hummingbird Planter Workshops on June 3 was led by Heather from Parkland Nurseries and Garden Centre. She provided materials including a pot, soil, and pollinator plants. The cost of the workshop was \$60, and 21 participants in 2 sessions, made their own flowerpots with plants to attract hummingbirds.

Carolyn Ross led beginner bird walks every Sunday beginning during June and July depending on demand and weather. These walks focused on identifying and telling the public about the life history of several species of birds that can be found at Ellis Bird Farm. Madisen Asante led Bluebird Trail Tours on Sundays. She had attendees follow her in their cars to bluebird boxes on Ellis Bird Farm’s bluebird trail to get a chance to view and photograph mountain bluebirds. She also spoke about the life history of the birds.

On June 10th we hosted two birding events: an early morning bird walk with Gavin McKinnon from Meadowlark Tours and a presentation by Chris Fisher titled “Birds: a Prescription of happiness”. 52 people attended Chris’ talk and had the opportunity to get a signed copy of Birds of Alberta field book.

We held a family games themed Canada Day on July 1st. There were old fashioned games and activities such as egg race, sack race, birdsong activity, wildlife themed children’s games with crafts and facepainting. Butterfly Wishes N Wings provided an informational display with live animals including native frogs, insects, and snakes. A Metis-bead themed art workshop was led by Pam Howard and attended by 6 people.

The annual Bluebird Festival occurred on July 8. Events included a Bluebird Trail tour led by Natalia Lifshitz, presentation of the purple martin nest boxes by John Bontje and a banding and mist net demo by Chuck Priestley of Strix Ecological. Chuck was on site to set up mist nets and display props such as different sizes of bird leg bands for the public. Linda Long, an artist and consigner, set up a demonstration painting table and children participated in painting with her. Veronica Reist led a photography workshop attended by 11 people. Children activities including owl pellets, build a nestbox and bird adaptation beaks and food were led by staff. Jazz Explosion set up outdoors and played for a large crowd in the afternoon. The Blue Feather Award was presented during the event (see Blue Feather Award, page 13 for more details). Total visitors for the day was estimated at 220.

Cory Olson of the Alberta Community Bat Program was the presenter for Bat n Beers Night on July 22. He gave an indoor presentation about bats followed by outdoor interactive session as the bats emerged from their boxes. He had many props to entertain, including a live rescued bat named Batsby that due to injury was permanently unable to fly. In the outdoor session, Cory provided acoustic devices that transmitted bat echolocations into frequencies people could hear, so the bats could be “heard” as they flew by. A fee of \$10 per adult was charged to cover the event. The café was open during the evening and sold beers/wine and non-alcoholic drinks. This popular event was capped at 75 people.

Ellis Bird Farm education staff attended Westerner Days July 19-23rd. The booth was in the Children's Pavilion and interactive displays and crafts related to birds, owls, and bats. Staff estimated over 400 people stopped by the booth.

Two farm field tours occurred in July: Dr Kris Nichols with Regenerative Living Labs and Grey Wood Forage held a soil health workshop on July 18th. 48 people attended the morning learning session and afternoon outdoor soil pit demonstration. ALUS Canada included our grazing project as part of their provincial grazing tour on July 20th, which was attended by regional and national ALUS coordinators and major sponsors including Cargill and A&W. 23 people attended the field walk and lunch was provided by the café. Carolyn Ross led the field walk and discussion of our grazing projects and research.

The annual Bug Jamboree took place on August 12th with an estimated 250 people attending. John Acorn started the event off with a presentation on Learning to Love (At Least Some) Bugs, Benjamin Acorn led a butterfly walk, and Dr. Charley Bird set up a display of mushrooms but could not lead a mushroom walk since there were so few mushrooms due to the hot weather. Dr. Ken Fry from Olds College had displays of pest insects. Michaela Seal from Alberta Environment set up a "Don't let it Loose" Aquatic invasive species booth next to the Wetland Centre. Staff manned the Dipping Pond and aquatic invertebrates station. Ilan Domnich returned for his second year at Bug Jam with a bug hunt on site. Charity Briere of the Alberta Native Bee Council led a native pollinator walk and talk, where she presented on native bees of Alberta. Staff led bug related crafts and face painting.

Sunflower Valley Farms and Ellis Bird Farm partnered for a "Prentiss Road Day" and offered sunflower themed crafts and activities. Sunflower Valley Farms generously donated a portion of their admissions for the day to Ellis Bird Farm.

The Weaselhead Preservation Society in Calgary presented their Dark Skies talk at EBF on August 20th. 12 people attended this talk on nighttime light pollution and its impacts on migrating birds. Gavin McKinnon led a Warbler Walk on August 27 focused on migrating warbler species in central Alberta. 17 people attended the walk.

EBF hosted a 2 day Alberta Culture Days event on September 9&10th. The theme this year was on Connections to the Land and special presenters included Elders Charlene and Russel Burns, Beverly Keeshig-Soonias, workshops on horse teachings by Rainy Creek Ranches, Indigenous medicinal plant use, and Teepee teachings by Clare Butterfly. Also present were the Lacombe Museum with a display of local Indigenous artifacts and sites, Sharon Whiskeyjack with Indigenous art, beading and Pam Howard with her art and paintings. The occasion was well attended with over 450 people attending the 2 day event.

September and October saw fewer events but included an art workshop by Sally Towers-Syblis, a presentation on Kestrels by Chuck Priestly with Strix Ecological and small group tour bookings on the weekends.

Facility rentals for the season included the Lakeside Ladies 100th year anniversary lunch on June 14th, 5 family reunion/birthday events, and a bridal shower. Tours and large groups including the Calgary Camera Club, seniors homes, Nova Chemicals, and the local Red Hat Ladies booked tours throughout the summer. One outdoor wedding photo session occurred at EBF in August. The Visitor Centre facility was booked by Dow for a Team Building event in November.

Table 3 Attendance of Ellis Bird Farm events in 2023.

Date	Event	Presenter	Number of Attendees
25-Mar	Build a Bumblebee Nest box	Charity Briere	20
15-Apr	Purple Martin Houses	John Bontje	21
May 22	EBF Opening Day	staff	200
May 28	Beginner Birding with Rob	Rob Wapple	10
May 28	What's Blooming? Plant Walk	Lori Seilski	4
June 3	Hummingbird Planters	Heather Auburn	21
June 4	Butterfly Citizen Science	Dr. Lewis	17
June 10	Gavin's Early Morning Birding	Gavin McKinnon	18
June 10	Chris Fisher Special Guest Speaker	Chris Fisher	52
June 18	Butterfly Citizen Science	Dr. Lewis	14
July 1	Canada Day!	staff	200
July 8	Blue Bird Festival	staff, Dr Lifshitz	180
July 8	Bird Photography Workshop	V. Reist	8
July 9	Flower Photography Workshop	V. Reist	4
Jul 13	Morning with the Martins	John Bontje	8
July 15	En Plein Air Watercolour Event	Lacombe Art Guild	11
July 16	Dr Lewis Let's Talk Insects!	Dr Lewis	18
Jul 16	Invasive Species Weed Pull	staff	4
July 18	Soil Health Field School	Dr K Nichols	45
July 22	Bat 'N Beers Night	Cory Olson	75
July 29	Eco-Printing Workshop	S.Towers-Sybblis	10
Aug 12	Bug Jamboree	staff, Dr.Acorn, Dr. Lawrie	300
Aug 19	Invasive Species Weed Pull	staff	4
Aug 20	Dark Sky Presentation	Weaselhead Preservation Society	12
Aug 27	Gavin's Warbler Walk	Gavin McKinnon	14
Sept 9&10	Alberta Culture Days	C.Butterfly, Rainy Creek Ranch, Urban Aboriginal Voices	350
12-Oct	Kestrels	Chuck Priestly	12

A total of 14,810 visitors attended Ellis Bird Farm throughout the year. July and August were the highest attendance months with over 3000 visitors each month. As there is no admission and multiple entry points, an accurate visitor count is difficult. Visitors who entered the main Visitor Centre building were counted by front reception staff, however many visitors remain outside and may not access the main centre building. The total visitation number was estimated by assuming only 70% of visitors enter the main centre.

Blue Feather Award

Karl Nemeth was selected as the winner of the 2023 Blue Feather Award. Karl was nominated by his granddaughters, Norah and Emma Stockley. Karl maintains over 28 nestboxes on a trail near his summer residence in Sunbreaker Cove at Sylvan Lake. He has instilled a love for birds and stewardship in his grand daughters as he teaches them to build and maintain nestboxes.

High School Scholarship

Brayden Lubach was selected as the winner of the 2023 High School Scholarship. Brayden graduated from Ponoka Secondary Campus and is attending the University of Saskatchewan in Fall 2023. He has been deeply interested in the environment and agriculture and plans on taking over the family farm after graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture.

Advertising

Advertising occurred through many different outlets and luckily, there were some opportunities for free advertising.

Sunny 94 contacted EBF to do interviews throughout the year, including segments on Opening Day, the Bluebird Festival, and the Bug Jamboree. Sunny 94 also set up an information booth and pop-up with on Bluebird Festival Day.

Advertisements were also included in publications such as the Parkland Garden Centre's Garden Guide, Don't Hibernate Summer Issue, Insider's Guide to Red Deer and Beyond, Lacombe County News.

Carolyn submitted articles to the Lacombe County News including a summary of the seasons events in September. Lacombe County News combined the two articles and published in under the County Spotlight feature. Red Deer Advocate had a short story on our opening day on May 27 and often promoted our events including bat night and goat walks.

Ellis Bird Farm subscribed to Lacombe Tourism and Red Deer Tourism and received advertising on social media through their accounts and on their websites as well. Events were added to the Alberta Tourism website for the public to view.

Website

The website continues to be an important source of information for the public on our events and happenings. Staff, particularly Claire Stange, updated the website and posted events and registrations.

Social Media

Social media was given plenty of focus this year. During the summer staff focused on creating shareable content, creating video content, using more features such as reels and stories, keeping a pleasing aesthetic and being consistent. More stories were posted, event posters looked more professional and there was a focus on posting to Facebook and Instagram, where most of Ellis Bird Farm's followers exist.

The Facebook following increased from 5070 to 5833 people. Instagram increased from 1830 to 2100 followers. Posts to Facebook and Instagram were usually the same throughout the year. Facebook had the largest reach and we received the most engagement through Facebook. People used the messaging feature to ask general questions

and comment on photos and posts. Staff attempted to respond to inquiries as soon as possible within business hours. Staff worked to build trust and clarity by responding to or liking all comments on our posts.

The YouTube channel gained 396 followers in 2023 with most new followers joining during the owl nest season February to May. 833 total subscribers primarily viewing from Canada (40%), United States (23%) watch the live stream and highlights created by Volunteer Cathy Perry. These highlights are short video clips of the live stream video showcasing parental activity, owl hatching, feeding or fledging events. Some highlight shorts have been watched over 4000 times.

Onsite Projects

Café

The Café opened for the 2023 season continuing under the management of Sheraz Khan. Sheraz is a trained Red Seal chef with a cultural background of Trinidadian food. She developed a lunch menu consisting of hot and cold lunches, pies, soups, and ice cream. She also obtained a liquor license for the season. Sheraz handled all reservations, staff, and operations of the café.

The cafe utilized patio and indoor seating throughout the season. Additional café patio tables and chairs were purchased in 2023 to replace the aging wicker style tables and to increase seating. The café provided onsite catering to several events and groups throughout the summer. The café hours continued operations with our fall open hours in though to October 15, 2023.

Gift Shop

The gift shop continued to operate on a consignment basis in 2023. With a focus on local (from Alberta) handmade items only the gift shop has developed a niche as a place for unique handmade gifts and bird houses, bird feed and books. Various art paintings by Dustine Kinsella were displayed in the café during the summer. Table 4 shows a list of vendors and the types of goods they sold in 2023.

Table 4 Information of the businesses that provided goods for the Ellis Bird Farm gift shop in 2023.

Business Name	Owner Name	Location	Type of Goods
Card Construction	Linnea Vendittelli	Red Deer	Cards, wooden signs
Prairie Pottery	Carrie Knight	Tees	Pottery - dishes, cups, ornaments
Eleri Creations	Geff Blenkinsopp	Sherwood Park	Copper jewelry, decor
Angela's Art & Feeders	Angela Maclean	Red Deer	Rock art, glass feeders
Gordon Heibert Photography	Gordon Heibert	Red Deer	Photographs
Sweet Apitherapy	Stephen Moreau	Blackfalds	Honey
Sunflower Valley Farms	Kole Lundie	Lacombe County	Sunflower seeds
Sally Towers-Sybbilis	Sally Towers-Sybbilis	Red Deer	Watercolours, cards
KWoodcarve	Ken	Red Deer	Wood art
Puzzle Art	Brian Munro	Red Deer	Wooden puzzles

Deborah Hughes Gahr Pottery	Deborah Hughes Gahr	Red Deer	pottery
Birdie Adobes	Alan MacLeod	Innisfail	Custom bird houses
DV	Denise Van Nieuwkerk	Lacombe County	Art, wooden signs, crafts
Linda Long Studio	Linda Long	Wainwright	Art cards
Wayne Smith	Wayne Smith	Lacombe	Bird Houses, art
Creations WoodWorking	Laura Shultz	Red Deer	Woodburning spoons, decor
DNA Gardens	Arden Delidais	Elnora	Jams, fruit syrups, drinks
Simply Stones and Such	Jane Jacobson	Red Deer	Art cards, garden decor
Eliza Jane Soap & Pottery	Sue Neilsen	Delburne	soap
Wolfwillow Felt	Carolyn Ross	Red Deer	Felt apparel
Claudia Tiefisher Photography	Claudia Tiefisher	Calgary	Calendar, photography
Sheri Skocdopole photography	Sheri Skocdopole	Red Deer	photography
Deep Roots Farm	Mark Visscher	Lacombe County	Garlic mustard spreads.
Dustine Kinsella Art	Dustine Kinsella	Innisfail	paintings
With Grace	Candace Hunter		Multimedia pictures
Prairie Creations	Walter Krebs	Beaumont	Bird houses, wooden products

Most consignors were signed up with stock present at Ellis Bird Farm prior to the opening date of May 22, 2023. Consignors were able to sign on throughout the summer. Consignment rates were 75% to artist and 25% to Ellis in 2023. Monthly sales reports and restocking needs were communicated with the consignors. Sunflower Valley Farms did not sign consignment agreements, and instead, their inventory was purchased at a wholesale price and marked up for retail. Consignors were encouraged to keep stock at EBF through the fall open season.

Top sales (over \$1000) were for KCarve's wooden animal art, DNA Gardens fruit preserves, Eliza Jane's soaps, Wayne Smith's birdhouses and Prairie Creations birdhouses. Other top seller (over \$750 in sales) included Sally-Tower Sybblis, Denise Van Nieuwkerk, Wolfwillow Felt, Linda Long and Gordon Hiebert Photography.

Purchased bird feeders including hummingbird feeders, bird seed and Ellis Bird house kits, built bird houses, and built and painted bird houses in chickadee and bluebird sizes were also sold in the gift shop. Three bat houses and 41 mountain bluebird and 47 chickadee nest box kits were sold this season. Donated items with all proceeds going to EBF included, "Happy House" décor, cribbage boards, hummingbird note cards and teacup candles with total sales of over \$1330. These items were displayed separately from the consignment items with signage indicating that all proceeds go to EBF operations.

Visitor Centre Exhibits

Visitor Centre Exhibits continue to showcase plants, birds and butterflies observed on site, photography and displays by Maureen Carey. Bird research on purple martin and bluebird geolocation studies and a new poster "Birds n Bugs" was designed to demonstrate the link between insectivorous bird focused research and the Bug Jamboree event. We maintained an interactive sensory box activity and seasonal themed displays.

Infrastructure

In December a chlorination system was installed in the café basement to treat all drinking water on site. This has reduced the need for continual potable water analysis. Charlie Ball monitors and adjusts chlorination as needed throughout the year.

Using the owl camera, a live-stream feed of the nesting Great Horned owls was maintained throughout Spring 2023. The owl pairs started nesting early March and had a clutch of 3 owlets born in April. The general public was able to purchase a \$100 special access in late April/early May to get a chance to observe and photograph the owlets up close. Only small groups of 2-4 people were allowed at a time and care was taken to reduce disturbance and noise near the nest. Over \$900 was raised with this “experiential” tourism opportunity.

Netsetter continues to be our internet provider and has maintained internet coverage to the main buildings (Visitor Centre, Ellis Centre, and Café) including improvements to the WIFI to provide the Café with service for their point-of-sale terminal.

During March and April, Carolyn Ross and volunteers renovated and painted the Ellis Centre and Café interiors. The old sponge painted floor in the Ellis Centre was showing a lot of wear and with the help of Charlie Ball, Linda Sommers, and volunteers from Dow Chemical the old paint was stripped and sanded and the floor in the public area of the Ellis Centre was painted. Carolyn and volunteers also painted the walls and trim. The displays were also rearranged with excess or old worn displays retired from display. The nook area was returned to a quiet learning room. Summer students dusted and organized the taxidermy specimen displays. In the Café, the interior walls in the dining room were painted, light fixture bulbs replaced with antique style bulbs and the TV was removed from the walls on request from Sheraz Khan. The newly painted walls were filled with local art for sale from one of this year’s consignors.

Site Work

The West Woods Trail and the Sandpiper Pond Loop were maintained with minor vegetation clearing in the spring and regular mowing. Areas along the trails which remain wet during the spring or heavy rain events are planned for boardwalks. Due to issues with permits, the boardwalk construction was postponed to 2024.

The community garden with 6 plots opened to the public in the spring. The plots were rototilled in the spring and will need rototilling in future years to improve the friability of the soil. All plots were rented to community groups or individuals.

The school garden was created in an old overgrown garden area behind the seacan storage. Charlie Ball, Linda Sommers and Jessie Thompson cleared and built this new feature. Straw bales were purchased and stacked to create walls. Chicken wire and rebar reinforced the straw walls. An entrance arch and gate were planned but was not constructed for the 2023 season. This area was part of the educational programming in 2023.

Stephen Schultz, teacher of EcoVision program at Ecole Secondaire Lacombe Composite Highschool, supplied four young goats for the season. The goats were present from mid-June until mid-September. Goat feed and hay were supplemented with grass in the paddock and occasional compost scraps from the café. Willow branches were collected by staff and provided to visitors to feed the goats. The young goats were trained to walk on leash by the high school program, and goat walks were offered to the public as a fundraiser to offset the goat feed and rental costs. A total of \$1200 was raised which offset the rental and feed costs of \$600.

Linda Sommers oversaw the gardens, while Carter McLenahan mowed lawns and assisted Linda. The gardens have been improving over the last few years under Linda's care and attention. Mulch was provided again by Lacombe County and added to new and existing beds and the playground areas. The new garden areas created near the new Dow gazebo, were planted with shrubs and perennials. Work was done to remove invasive species including caragana and sea buckthorn in the gardens. The old rose shrubs in the café garden bed were removed after several years of combatting disease. This work exposed older nestbox poles from Charlie Ellis' time. During the summer storms numerous large limbs and trees broke in the gardens and site paths. These were primarily Manitoba maple trees, but also a green ash and balsam poplar. In the fall, we proactively trimmed and removed additional overhanging branches near the café garden, butterfly garden and old beaver pond. The willow and ash trees overhanging the café and Ellis Centre were also pruned back.

Lacombe County provided gravel and mulch to EBF at a much reduced cost. They also graded the driveway in May which improved many potholes and washboard. In the fall, Lacombe County paved a short section of gravel trail and old driveway to create a paved surface loop around the beaver pond. This work was conducted at a discounted rate by the County.

Partners and Supporters

Ellis Bird Farms continues to have support from our four core partners MEGlobal, Red Deer River Naturalists, Lacombe County, Nature Alberta. Other partners include Burman University, Red Deer District & Community Foundation, Red Deer River Watershed, Alberta Native Bee Council, Federated Coop, Lacombe Regional Tourism, Dow Chemical, Keyera Energy, Inside Education, Alternative Land Use Services and Grey Wooded Forage Association.

Appendix 1 Vision and Mission



Vision: People know the place of Charlie & Winnie Ellis and are both educated and inspired to engage in stewardship that continues the Ellis legacy (*their farm and their passion for mountain bluebirds, purple martins and other native wildlife*).

Mission: Through education, research, and land management (with an emphasis on native cavity nesting birds) Ellis Bird Farm is a model of environmental stewardship for the co-existence of wildlife, agriculture and industry. Ellis Bird Farm offers:

- programs which, by example and through education, conserve and enhance wildlife and wildlife habitat, and encourage public environmental awareness, appreciation and stewardship;
- data collection and research on mountain bluebirds, purple martins and other wildlife species, through collaborative work with others in the conservation and research community;
- a demonstration farm that increases public awareness of conservation agriculture; a creative, sustainable and viable agricultural operation which maximizes biodiversity; and,
- a serene and engaging public destination.

Values:

Nature: people experiencing nature first hand are more likely to care about the environment and become more ecologically literate.

Collaboration: forming and maintaining mutually beneficial partnerships with industry, agriculture, conservation, academia, government, and the neighboring community.

Biodiversity: exemplifying land management practices that conserve and enhance on-farm habitats, watersheds and native biodiversity.

Operational Objectives:

Education: informing and inspiring the public about the importance of nature, habitat protection and conservation.

Research: offering credible, science-based and trusted information through relevant research.

Agriculture: demonstrating profitable, sustainable and environmentally responsible farm management practices.

Strategic Goals (2021 – 2024):

1. Transition Board from operational to Governance focussed.
2. Balance our engagement with education, research and agriculture for enhanced overall environmental stewardship and healthy biodiversity.
3. Strengthen Financial Sustainability (stewarding resources).
4. Enhance connection with stakeholders.

Ensuring Charlie and Winnie Ellis' legacy lives on!