



2021 YEAR END REPORT

Ellis Bird Farm Ltd.

November 1, 2020 – October 31, 2021

Sandy Van Dijk and Amy Jin
November 2021

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Board, Staff and Volunteers

Board Members

Board meetings were held at the site until November and December, then switched to Zoom meetings until July when meetings were held on site again. In September, meetings moved back to Zoom. See Table 1 for a list of board members.

Table 1 Names and information of Ellis Bird Farm board members in 2021.

Name	Position	Representing
Howard Oudman	Chair	Member at Large
Calvin Ireland	Vice Chair	Member at Large
Judy Schwartz	Secretary	Red Deer River Naturalists
Barb Shepherd	Treasurer	Lacombe County
Abey Idicula	Member	MEGlobal Canada ULC.
Tony Blake	Member	Nature Alberta
Maureen Carey	Member	Member at Large
Sheila Sayers	Member	Member at Large
Dani Ducross	Member	Member at Large
David Gregory	Member	Member at Large

Ross Boukall and Kelsey Bourgeois retired from the board early in the fiscal year. Sheila Sayers joined the board in February, and David Gregory and Dani Ducross joined the board in June.

Staff and Contractors

Sandy started as the new Site Manager and Biologist in December 2021. Linda Sommers returned for her third year, and Charlie Ball returned for his second year. Amy Jin stayed on after beginning in July 2020. Carter McLenahan returned for his third season, while Lucas Wessner returned after working at Ellis Bird Farm in 2019. Interviews were held for five candidates for the summer admin assistant in March, and Emma-joy Pocock was hired. Gail Zimmerman was the bookkeeper for Ellis Bird Farm for the sixth 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 2021.

Name	Position	Type
Sandy Van Dijk	Site Manager and Biologist	Full Time
Amy Jin	Education Coordinator and Administrative Assistant	Full Time
Linda Sommers	Gardener	Full Time, Seasonal
Charlie Ball	Site Maintenance	Full Time, Seasonal
Carter McLenahan	Grounds Assistant	Summer Student
Lucas Wessner	Research Coordinator	Summer Student
Emma-joy Pocock	Admin Assistant	Summer Student
Natalia Lifshitz	Scientific Advisor	Contractor
Gail Zimmerman	Bookkeeper, Books by Jan	Contractor
Victor Zuidhof	Farm Tenant	Five Year Contract
Delano Lewis	Research Project Manager	Contractor

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, Jessie Thompson and Logan Calihoo all helped extensively with purple martins and conducted nest checks every five days through the breeding season. They also assisted with purple martin banding. Leah Peters and Mackenzie Epp both volunteered to lead and assist with Knee High Nature Programs. Navya Pandya created videos about plants for social media and Phil Mueller cut wood for bird house kits and built bird houses to sell in the gift shop. A group of volunteers from the Lacombe Dementia Friendly Community led by Alexandra Seefeldt began coming weekly in August until November to help with site tasks such as filling bird feeders, cleaning bird feeders, cleaning bird baths, and putting away tables and chairs at the end of the season. Bob Winchell volunteered to be on the farm committee, and spent hours in meetings to push forward Ellis Bird Farm's farm initiatives

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 inquires from Sandy throughout the year. Judy Schwartz and Maureen Carey spent weeks cleaning and organizing on site in October, and helping with gift shop inventory and Visitor Centre displays through the winter. Maureen also spent one day a week through the nesting season driving Lucas to difficult to access nest boxes. Tony volunteered many hours to maintain fences and build more gates for easier management of cattle on site. Barb spent many hours collaborating with Sandy to create the budget and teaching Sandy the financial aspects of Ellis Bird Farm. Barb also worked with the bookkeeper ensure that Ellis Bird Farm remained in good financial position and participated in HR meetings. Calvin made efforts to research farm initiatives and worked to build relationships with potential donors and contributors farm projects throughout the year. Howard participated in financial and HR meetings throughout the year. Abey, Dani, David and Sheila all contributed their time and ideas to advance Ellis Bird Farm operations and initiatives as well.

Strategic Planning

In January, the Board and Sandy met with Shari Hanson, a Community Development Officer with the Alberta Government to review our strategic plan. The first session focused on the status of Ellis Bird Farm, the second focused on goals, and the third focused on how to achieve the goals. During the sessions, values and objectives were reorganized, four new goals were established, and a draft action plan was developed (see Appendix 1 - 2021 Strategic Plan for more details). A follow up session in March determined whether further changes to the plan were required. These four 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.

To achieve the goal of transitioning the Board from operational to governance, all committees except the Human Resources, Farm, and Financial Committee were discontinued. Sandy took on the responsibility of discontinued committees. To balance the engagement with education, research and agriculture, more focus was placed on the farm through the year (see Farm section on page 7 for more details). A subscription to Grant Advance Solutions that started October 1, 2021 was one step toward strengthening financial sustainability. New fundraisers including Adopt a Nest and Beaver Night 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 and Grey Wooded Forage

Association were established. Relationships were built with other organizations including Phase 3 Security, and Grant Advance Solutions. A focus on social media allowed us to better tell our story to enhance connections through this medium.

Covid-19

Covid-19 remained prevalent through the spring with restrictions almost completely lifting on July 1 (a remaining restriction included people testing positive for Covid-19 were required to isolate for 14 days). Due to restrictions, spring school programs were cancelled. Masks, social distancing and indoor gathering restrictions were abided by until they were lifted on July 1. In September, new restrictions were put in place requiring Ellis Bird Farm to reduce indoor capacity to one third of fire code. New gathering restrictions were implemented as well as mandatory masking in indoor locations and physical distancing which were abided by Ellis Bird Farm. Due to the restrictions, planned events and school programs for fall were cancelled.

Policy Review

As part of the board's initiative to transition to governance, and because the Site Manager is directly involved in site operations, Sandy reviewed and edited operational policies throughout the year. Policies reviewed included:

- Monetary Policies
- Emergency and Risk Management Policies
- Safety Policies
- Staff, Volunteer and Contractor Policies
- Education and Research Policies
- Event Policies

After Sandy reviewed policies, they were sent to the board for edits and approval.

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 Carter and Emma-joy for a total of \$9,168. Eco Canada initially offered to pay \$5000 to cover the cost of Lucas' position of Research Coordinator, but due to Covid-19, they upped their contribution to \$7,500. Red Deer and District Community Foundation provided \$5000 from the Ellis Bird Farm Student Employment Fund for student funding this year.

MEGlobal contributed their 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.

Two grants provided funding for projects. Red Deer and District Community Foundation provided \$6000 funding for a mountain bluebird camera study (see 2021 Wildlife Report) and Alberta Environment and Parks provided \$71,000 over a three-year period beginning in April 2019.

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 \$27,488.89 over the year. The largest donation received was \$5000 from Federated Cooperatives Ltd. (FCL) and Central Alberta Co-op for farming initiatives.

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. Maureen Carey donated a Macbook Pro laptop, and Strongfield Environmental donated labour, a drone, and associated equipment to participate in a seeding trial on the farm.

Thank you to every single individual and organization who donated to Ellis Bird Farm in the 2020-2021 year.

Raffle

Barb Shepherd donated a beautiful quilt with morning glory flowers and birds. Tickets were sold between opening day on May 24, and end of summer hours on September 6. The raffle raised \$994 in tickets sold, and Margaret Loader from Red Deer won the draw on September 6.

Adopt A Nest

The adopt a nest fundraiser was launched in April. 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. Seven donors contributed, raising \$1,500. One donor included Nature Alberta who was funded by TD Friends of the Environment Foundation. Nature Alberta adopted nests on behalf of several Boys and Girls Clubs in Edmonton. The letters and photos were uploaded to a Google Drive folder that was distributed to the clubs.

Absolutely love it, the families loved the updates on the bird nest we adopted, and I hope we can do this again in the future.

— Boys' & Girls' Club program coordinator

Operational Objectives

Farm

An emphasis was placed on farming in 2021 to balance Ellis Bird Farm's research, education and farm goals and engagement. In April, Greg Paranich of Grey Wooded Forage Association and FCL's Grow Team Advisor, Jack Payne, met with the farm committee to discuss increasing production of Field 8 (Figure 1). Greg Paranich also took a tour of the entire farm. As a result of the meeting, Greg Paranich developed a Farm Management Plan (see Appendix 2 – Farm Management Plan), and FCL and Central Alberta Co-op decided to provide a generous \$5000 in funding for Ellis Bird Farm projects.

A full renovation of Field 8 was determined to be the best course of action, and the farm committee met with Victor to discuss logistics. Over the summer, Victor grazed down Field 8, sprayed the field with glyphosate (which was paid for by the FCL grant), and grazed the field again. The field was disced in October.

Field 3 and 4 were the subject of a seeding comparison trial to establish a hay crop. The left half of Field 3 was seeded with a Brillion Seeder, the right half of Field 3 was seeded with a drone (in-kind donation by Strongfield Environmental), and Field 4 was seeded with a float (Figure 2).



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



Figure 2 Ellis Bird Farm’s seed comparison trial to establish a hay crop in Fields 3 and 4. Information includes the size of the field in acres, how the field was fertilized, the rate at which fertilizer was spread, and the blend of vegetation used.

Fields 1, 5, 6, 7, and 9 were used for grazing, and Field 10 was seeded to barley. Reserve areas including Field 2 and the swale between Fields 4 and 5 were grazed heavily for a few days each to facilitate new growth. The reserve areas were grazed at no cost to Victor, because grazing of the areas benefited Ellis Bird Farm as much as Victor.

Throughout the spring and summer, Tony installed new gates to allow for easier management of cattle, and fixed fences where necessary.

Wildlife Research

Lucas monitored the bluebird trail weekly (an effort of three days per week), completed bat roost surveys, breeding bird surveys, set up and monitored wildlife cameras, banded mountain bluebirds and purple martins, 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 co-managed the research project on bluebirds, insects and pesticides with Dr. Delano Lewis. In addition to the research project, Delano conducted butterfly counts.

Sandy applied for the provincial research permit, planned the bluebird camera nest box study, oversaw the bluebird trail and site research activities, and assisted with bird banding.

Of the nine purple martin houses that were wrapped over the winter, seven were raised in June. Two houses were not used because the purple martin population at Ellis Bird Farm has been low enough over the last few years that seven houses was sufficient to house them. Four houses remained at the water garden, and three Jim Boyd houses were used. All houses were painted prior to being raised by Ulla Bruhn-Crouch, and straw was placed in each of them. John Bontje moved the pole of one house closer to two others to make a triangle recommended by Del McKinnon. Eight gourds on the spider rack were raised, and a wooden pole with three gourds was put up as well. See the 2021 Wildlife Report for a full report on purple martin breeding in 2021. All houses were wrapped for the winter and the gourds were taken down in October by Sandy and Amy.

A complete update of research activities can be found in Ellis Bird Farm's 2021 Wildlife Report.

Education Programs

Knee High Naturalists

The Knee High Naturalists programs had consistent demand over this summer with a total of 179 children attending. The program was geared toward children from 3 to 7 years old and the topics covered were owls, badgers, foxes, spiders, beavers, snakes, bees and bats. The program was approximately an hour long with an informative slideshow, crafts, games and activities related to critter of the day. Amy ran all of the Knee High Naturalist programs from June to July while volunteers Leah Peters and Mackenzie Epp helped out during the month of August. The program was \$6 per child.

Junior Naturalists

The Junior Naturalist program was geared toward children from 8 to 13 years old. The program showed attendees how to create their own nature journals, while putting emphasis on observational skills and attention to details, rather than creating perfect drawings. The program began with an introduction to nature journaling, followed by drawing tips, nature walks and activities that allow children to expand their ability to immerse themselves in nature and reveal details that are otherwise easily missed. In addition, the attentiveness and ability to notice and detect details enable effective memorization of their discoveries. The cost of this program was \$25 per person, which included an Ellis Bird Farm notebook. This program was offered Saturdays throughout the summer, and unfortunately, no one signed up for the program. A shortage of targeted advertising and misunderstanding of what the program was about were potential problems causing lack of attendance.

Nature with Amy

Nature with Amy was similar to Junior Naturalists, except geared toward ages 14 years and older. There were differences in difficulty of activities and the length of the program, but the emphasis of the program was the same as Junior Naturalists. The cost of the two-hour program was \$15 per person which included an Ellis Bird Farm notebook. Four children participated through the summer.

Outreach Activities

Events

Ellis Bird Farm opened for the season on Victoria Day, May 24. There were no opening day activities due to Covid-19.

The Hummingbird Planter Workshop on June 12 was led by Heather from Parkland Nurseries and Garden Centre. She provided materials including a pot, soil and different plants. The cost of the workshop was \$60, and participants made their own pots with plants to attract hummingbirds. Attendance is listed in Table 3.

Sandy led a free Bird ID Workshop on June 13 that focused on helping beginners learn how to identify birds. She went through different groups of birds and their features, and clues to identify birds including general impression of shape and size, field marks, behaviour and sound.

Sandy held bird walks every other Sunday beginning June 21 for a total of five bird walks throughout the summer. 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.

On June 26, former Ellis Bird Farm board member, Leo de Groot led a Birds in Flight Photography workshop. He discussed camera settings and techniques to get great shots of birds in flight. The cost of the workshop was \$30 per person.

Lucas led three free Bluebird Trail Tours on Sundays. He had attendees follow him in their cars to bluebird boxes on Ellis Bird Farm's bluebird trail to get a chance to view and photograph mountain bluebirds. He also spoke about the life history of the birds.

Linda gave Garden Tours four times throughout the year. She focused on the types of plants found in gardens, but also included history and information about features of Ellis Bird Farm.

The Riparian Grazing Field School on June 23 was led by Kerri O'Shaugnessy of Cows and Fish, Greg Paranich of Grey Wooded Forage Association, and Bob Winchell, a member of the Ellis Bird Farm farm committee. Bob gave an overview of the riparian areas at Ellis Bird Farm, Kerri talked about riparian health and identifying riparian plants, and Greg discussed grazing techniques to keep riparian areas healthy. The event was attended by 12 people, not including the presenters.

Several experts were on hand for the Canada Day Bioblitz on July 1 including Darcie Thauvette, Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI) lichen technician, Brittney Miller, ABMI bryophyte technician and Doug Macaulay, entomologist with the Alberta Government. Sandy focused on birds and butterflies, Carter identified aquatic invertebrates at the dipping pier, and Lucas identified plants. Areal Huang, MacEwan University student, volunteered to match the public with experts, however, there was little involvement from the public.

The annual Bluebird Festival occurred on July 10. Del McKinnon and John Bontje kicked things off with a presentation of the purple martin nest boxes. They described the effort involved with keeping purple martins, including regular nest checks, mitigating parasites, and why the design of the condo is so important. Lisa Priestley of Strix Ecological was on site to set up mist nets and display props such as different sizes of bird leg bands for the public. She also gave a short presentation on why biologists band birds, but due to the heat, she did not catch any birds in her nets. Amy did bluebird crafts with kids, Jessie Thompson volunteered to face paint, and Lucas did a Bluebird Trail Tour. The Blue Feather Award was presented during the event (see Blue Feather Award, page 13 for more details).

On July 17, Beaver Night took place, with Sandy giving a presentation about beavers and their life history, while Amy stood watch at the Beaver Pond to radio when the beavers were spotted. Two beavers were observed for approximately five minutes by the group. The presentation resumed after the beavers disappeared under water. Amy also did crafts with kids. A donation of \$20 per person was requested to raise funds to pave more trails at Ellis Bird Farm.

Cory Olson of the Alberta Community Bat Program was the presenter for Bat Night on July 24. He gave a presentation about bats prior to sunset when they 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. When the bats emerged, Cory set up acoustic devices

that transmitted bat echolocations into frequencies people could hear, so the bats could be “heard” as they flew by. Over 20 bats were seen by the group. A donation of \$5 per adult was requested to raise funds to pave more trails at Ellis Bird Farm.

Amy attended Lacombe Days on July 24 and built bird feeders and made crafts with kids on behalf of Ellis Bird Farm.

On August 7, Ellis Bird Farm held two events: a Kestrel Workshop by Chuck from Strix Ecological and a Ducks Unlimited Talk by Andrew Thacker and Jill Owen. Chuck talked about the work Strix Ecological has been doing on American kestrels in central Alberta, which involved setting up nest boxes with cameras to document breeding success. Andrew showed the public the best type of duck box to make, followed by a short presentation on the importance of wetlands.

The annual Bug Jamboree took place on August 14. 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, Dr. Heather Proctor and Christine Grams from the University of Alberta showed the public the diversity of aquatic invertebrates that could be found in the Dipping Pond, and Charity Briere of the Alberta Native Bee Council led a Bee Hotel Workshop, where she presented on native bees of Alberta and made a bee hotel with the public. The cost of this workshop was \$30 per person. The Lakeside Social Workers had a bake sale, and Luisana Rodas volunteered to do face painting while Amy made crafts with kids. There was no charge to attend the Bug Jamboree.

A staff and volunteer appreciation potluck was held on August 18 after the site was closed for the day. All staff, board members, and volunteers that had spent more than 10 hours of volunteer time on site were invited. A presentation was created to showcase all staff and volunteers that contributed over the year, and short thank you speeches were given by Sandy and Howard.

To encourage outreach to the public, Ellis Bird Farm attended local farmer’s markets in August. Sandy went to the Lacombe Farmer’s Market on August 6 and 13, and the Lacombe Wednesday Evening Market on August 11. Amy attended the Bentley Farmer’s Market on August 21. These markets were free for non-profit organizations and provided a great opportunity to advertise programs, events and opening in the fall. Amy also attended the Lacombe Active Living Fair on September 8 and the cost to set up a table was \$10.

Lucas led a Warbler Walk on August 22 because warblers are well into migration in central Alberta in late August, so the chances of seeing warblers at Ellis Bird Farm were higher during this time. Some interesting birds sighted during the walk included a female western tanager, an olive-sided flycatcher, and three warbler species including a yellow-rumped warbler, northern waterthrush and ovenbird.

A wedding between Marci McLenahan and Thomas Waddell occurred on August 28. They used the patio area beside the Café for their ceremony. The site remained open to the public, and approximately 50 people were in attendance for the wedding.

In addition to summer events, the Board and Sandy decided to keep the site open to the public for fall hours from Tuesday - Thursday, 10 am - 3 pm after Labour Day until December 16.

Table 3 Attendance of Ellis Bird Farm events in 2021.

Event	Number of People
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Hummingbird Planter Workshop	5
Bird ID Workshop	12
Bluebird Trail Tours	57
Birds in Flight Photography Workshop	12
Riparian Grazing Field School	7
BioBlitz	6
Bluebird Festival	170
Beaver Night	8
Bat Night	36
Kestrel Workshop	20
Ducks Unlimited Talk	10
Bug Jamboree	300
Garden Tours	14
Warbler Walk	12
Bird Walks	50
Knee High Nature Programs	185
August 28 Wedding	50
Total	954

All events were free to the public unless stated otherwise. A grand total of 10,477 visitors attended Ellis Bird Farm throughout the year.

Blue Feather Award

Shonna McLeod was selected as the winner of the 2021 Blue Feather Award. Shonna started her own bluebird trail with approximately 90 boxes in the mid-1990s. She has been monitoring the trail and banding mountain bluebirds and tree swallows since she started her trail in 1996. Shonna is a member of the Calgary Area Nestbox Monitors and the Calgary Bird Banding Society. She is a bander in charge for the Saw Whet Owl Migration Monitoring Project and spends around 30 nights each fall working from sunset to midnight to band owls. Shonna has also spent the time to mentor folks who have become interested in monitoring their own bluebird trail.

High School Scholarship

Rose-Marie Hulleman was selected as the winner of the 2021 High School Scholarship. Rose graduated from Lacombe Composite High School and is attending the Natural Resource Compliance program at Lethbridge College in fall 2021. She plans to be a conservation officer. Rose volunteered for Ducks Unlimited performing tasks such as checking fences and looking for weeds, and she has been deeply interested in wildlife and conservation stemming in part from a visit to Ellis Bird Farm as a schoolkid.

Advertising

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

Sunny 94 contacted Sandy to do four interviews throughout the year, including segments on introduction of Sandy as the new Site Manager and Biologist, Opening Day, the Bluebird Festival and the Bug Jamboree. An article was written to accompany the interview about Sandy as the new Site Manager and Biologist, and all interviews were aired on the Sunny 94 radio station.

Jim Pattison Broadcasting Group (JPBG) reached out to Ellis Bird Farm early in the winter regarding a Spring Auction. They were offering advertising in exchange for items that could be sold in an online auction. Ellis Bird Farm provided eight tickets to bluebird banding tours for \$100 each to receive \$800 worth of advertising. The advertising aired on Big 105.5 promoting our Opening Day the week before May 24.

In May, JPBG reached out to Sandy for a live on-air segment about “No Mow May.” They needed an expert to discuss the benefits of not mowing your lawn for a month. Sandy was on the Big Breakfast Show to talk about how leaving grass to grow naturally creates habitat for insects and native pollinators. Ellis Bird Farm received a shout out at the end of the segment.

CTV News (Edmonton) featured Ellis Bird Farm in a “live on location” piece on August 13. They pre-recorded the footage on July 21 with Sandy for a 2-minute segment about the history of Ellis Bird Farm, what folks can do on site, and upcoming events. This feature was covered by a Travel Alberta grant aimed at promoting local tourism.

Most months, an article was submitted to the Lacombe County News. Table 4 gives more information about the articles.

Table 4 Ellis Bird Farm article topics for the Lacombe County News in 2021.

Month	Topic
November	No submission
December	Introducing Sandy as Site Manager
January	Christmas Bird Count
February	History of Ellis Bird Farm
March	Operating a Bluebird Trail
April	Linking Wildlife, Industry and Agriculture (tribute to MEGlobal and Dow)
May	Opening Day
June	Event Schedule and What to Expect at Ellis Bird Farm
July	Research Projects at Ellis Bird Farm
August	No submission
September	No submission
October	Reflecting on the Summer

Sandy and Calvin participated in an interview with FCL in an article about farming operations and initiatives at Ellis Bird Farm, and FCL’s involvement.

Sandy participated in a radio interview with 840 CFCW radio in Edmonton. They were featuring small farms across Alberta for their Ag Show. Sandy discussed what people can see and do at Ellis Bird Farm and the relationship between farming and wildlife on the farm.

Advertisements were also included in publications such as the Parkland Garden Centre’s Garden Guide, the Red Deer Senior’s Directory, Prairie Living Magazine, Don’t Hibernate Summer Issue, Insider’s Guide to Red Deer and Beyond, Lacombe County News and East Central Alberta Review.

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

Amy undertook website changes in the winter to attempt to make it look more modern. Throughout the summer, Emma-Joy spent time creating registrations and making updates as required. Amy continued making changes in the fall. The website will be a work in progress for some time to come.

Social Media

Social media was given plenty of focus this year. We reached out to Jenn Loran Consulting, who works with businesses to improve their social media presence. She focused on Instagram as this was the most used social media app at the time. Jenn, Sandy and Amy did an initial 2-hour meeting to go over social media, and included in the cost were three social media audits within three months of the initial meeting. Some suggestions by Jenn initially included creating professional looking infographics for information and events, focusing on social media platforms that are used by the majority of people (i.e. Instagram), creating shareable content, creating video content, using more features such as reels and stories, keeping a pleasing aesthetic and being consistent. Over the summer, staff worked on creating more videos, posting consistently using a predetermined schedule, and working on a better aesthetic. 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 3,754 to 4,429 people. Instagram increased from 1,220 followers to 1,483 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.

Onsite Projects

Café

Unfortunately, the Café did not open in 2021. Dustin and Kimberly Barthel of Little Bit of Thyme operated the Café in 2019 (Café was closed in 2020 due to Covid-19). They were approached and initially were willing to operate the Café. Covid restrictions pushed back their planned opening date to July 1. However, Covid restrictions led them to eventually choose to keep the Café closed for the season.

Food trucks were contacted in June after Dustin and Kimberly decided not to open the Café. Most food trucks were already booked for the season. The Traveling Elk food truck managed by Paul Lynn (and operated by The Peppered Elk restaurant at the Ponoka Golf and Country Club) was interested and came out for most Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays in June, as well as July 1. Adverse weather caused them to cancel in a few cases. In early July, they decided to discontinue coming to Ellis Bird Farm as they were unable to generate enough revenue to cover expenses each time they came out.

Other food trucks were contacted but none were available, and there was no food available (except water and ice cream in the Visitor Centre) for the rest of the year.

Gift Shop

In early 2021, the board and Sandy made the decision to operate the gift shop on a consignment basis. This would prevent Ellis Bird Farm from owning any inventory that was sold and prevent a buildup of leftover inventory each year. They also decided to sell local (from Alberta), handmade items only. Table 5 shows a list of vendors and the types of goods they sold in 2021.

Table 5 Information of the businesses that provided goods for the Ellis Bird Farm gift shop in 2021.

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
Holmehus Antiques	Susan Manyluk	Red Deer County	Antiques
Rock N Wood	Michael Oudman	Lacombe	Crib boards, cutting boards
Pachamama Decor	Elizabeth Bolanos	Bentley	Home and yard decor items
Sweet Apitherapy	Stephen Moreau	Blackfalds	Honey
Sunflower Valley Farms	Kole	Lacombe County	Sunflower seeds
Tamarack Soap Works	Richard Williams	Lacombe	Soap and bath salts
DNA Gardens	Judy Reeds	Elnora	Jams, jellies and syrups
Emma's Expressions	Emma Fulton	Gull Lake	Artwork - drawings
Birdie Adobes	Alan MacLeod	Innisfail	Custom bird houses
--	Denise Van Nieuwkerk	Lacombe County	Art, wooden signs, crafts

Most consignors started with Ellis Bird Farm prior to the opening date of May 24, 2021. Consignors that were signed on after the opening date include Tamarack Soap Works, Denise Van Nieuwkerk, Emma's Expressions and Birdie Adobes. In September, Rock N Wood and Holmehus Antiques pulled their stock, while the rest of the consignors continued to sell into the fall. DNA Gardens and Sunflower Valley Farms did not sign consignment agreements, and instead, their inventory was purchased at a wholesale price and marked up for retail.

Most leftover inventory from previous years at Ellis Bird Farm was marked 50% off and sold. Some inventory remained at full price, and by September most Ellis Bird Farm stock had been sold. Bird house kits, built bird houses, and built and painted bird houses in chickadee and bluebird sizes were sold in the gift shop.

Visitor Centre Exhibits

The Visitor Centre bulletin boards were designed by Maureen Carey and Judy Schwartz. One wall with the history of Ellis Bird Farm was updated to include a photo of Myrna Pearman and a description of Myrna's contributions during her 33 year tenure, as well as announce Sandy Van Dijk as the new Site Manager and Biologist. One bulletin board was dedicated to photos of Ellis Bird Farm when it was owned by Charlie and Winnie Ellis. Another bulletin board detailed two research projects conducted by Ellis Bird Farm this year, including an ecological study on the interactions between insects, bluebirds and pollutants, and a nest box camera study on bluebirds and tree swallows. Three boards included photos and names of plants, birds and butterflies of Ellis Bird Farm. Most of the plant and bird photos were taken by Maureen Carey, while the butterfly photos were taken by Benjamin Acorn, former employee of Ellis Bird Farm. Another board was dedicated to Ellis Bird Farm's feature creature, the Richardson's Ground Squirrel. Most boards were set up by Maureen Carey and Judy Schwartz during the winter. A new juvenile bald eagle was displayed,

Infrastructure

The board recommended the cold room in the Café basement be redone. Charlie submitted a quote which was approved and ordered materials to begin the work. Charlie and Carter removed old, peeling stick on ceiling, wall and floor tiles. Fiberglass reinforced panels (FRP) were installed on the ceiling and walls using adhesive and nylon drive in pins by

Charlie, Carter and Rod (Charlie's brother). Charlie installed a new waterproof, foam-backed laminate interlocking floating floor. Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) trim was installed in all corners including wall to floor and all edges of the trim was caulked to adjoining surfaces.

Sandy obtained a water sample from the Café at Ellis Bird Farm and submitted to Alberta Health Services (AHS) for testing in April prior to the planned opening of the Café. The test came back as testing positive for bacteria (not including E. coli). Sandy submitted a second test after letting the Café tap run for a longer period of time. The second test also came back positive for bacteria (not including E. coli). It was suspected that because the Café had not been used the previous year, the water in the tanks became stagnant and allowed for bacteria growth. A health inspector with AHS recommended that the well be shock treated with chlorine to eliminate bacteria. Charlie determined the source of the bacteria was likely the water storage tanks in the crawl space of the Café. Charlie flushed the tanks through the hose on the south side of the Café and vacuumed the tanks out. He mixed water and chlorine and flushed the mixture through the lines twice, then refilled the tanks with clean water and ran the clean water through all onsite lines. Charlie's work was conducted over a few days. A third and final water test was negative for bacteria.

Using the owl camera donations raised in 2020, Sandy worked with Phase 3 Security from Ponoka to purchase a security camera that could be used to livestream the great horned owl nest to YouTube. The camera was set up on January 20 at the owl nest. Later in January, a radio antenna was set up at the top of the Grain Elevator to wirelessly transmit Wi-Fi to the camera. The radio antenna had capability to transmit Wi-Fi up to 15 km. The owls were never spotted at the nest and likely nested about a mile away.

The internet plan purchased from Netsetter at the beginning of the year was 5 megabits per second (mbps) upload and download speed. When the owl camera was installed, the video feed to YouTube cut out almost every day. Internet was determined to be the main issue, so the board decided to upgrade to a plan of 25 mbps upload and download speed. Netsetter also installed a new router and antennas to create a more efficient internet system and provide internet coverage to the main buildings (Visitor Centre, Ellis Centre and Café). Netsetter created an open public network (at a reduced speed) and an admin network which required a password to access.

A group of volunteers including Sherri Harsent and her three daughters, Kelly, Katie and Emily treated the new Dow gazebo with Boracol to prevent mould and insect damage.

Site Work

The West Woods Trail was extended into a loop called the West Woods Loop Trail going across the north boundary of the property to Prentiss Road, then south through the shelterbelt, ending up at the lower parking lot. The trail is about 4 km in length. Another trail, called the Sandpiper Pond Loop was created through the reserve area in the southwest quarter. The trail followed along a watercourse extending south from Sandpiper Pond and was a loop about 2 km in length. Signs with trail maps were created and donated by Budget Signs and Graphics Inc. then placed around the trail system for public use.

The beavers stayed in the lodge in the Beaver Pond through the winter and two adults were observed on trail cameras in April. Medicine River Wildlife Centre attempted to live trap the beavers using Havahart traps. Trapping the beavers was unsuccessful, and at least two kits were seen in the beaver pond in June. During the summer one beaver was observed in Sandpiper Pond. It is unknown whether the beaver was from the Beaver Pond or elsewhere. Carter spent time throughout the summer wire wrapping trees around the site. In August, Charlie and Sandy spent time painting trees with a paint/sand mix to deter beavers from cutting them down. Charlie also wrapped many more trees in the forested area to the west of the Beaver Pond after damage was noticed. Charlie began feeding the beavers in August and continued to feed until the end of September. In October, there was little activity, although the beavers did take a small amount of food from the pile.

The board was concerned about the integrity of the Motus Tower due to heavy wooden cross beams, copper antennas and a wooden ladder. The infrastructure was taken off the tower by iTower Communications in July and the tower remained standing, as it was originally Charlie and Winnie's windmill.

A community garden with several plots was prepared by Linda and Carter in the spring. They overlaid landscape fabric in the area where the garden was to be built to kill the grass so the ground could be worked up the next year.

Marilyn Jones supplied three nanny goats with two kids each. In July, she took one nanny and two kids home. She removed the rest of the goats on August 15 because of a shortage of grass in the paddock due to heat and lack of rain. Darlene Went supplied four chicken hens and took them home the week following Labour Day.

Linda oversaw the gardens, while Carter mowed lawns and assisted Linda. The gardens have been improving over the last few years under Linda's care and attention. Mulch was purchased and added to existing mulched areas, and new mulch areas were created near the Viewing Tower. New gardens were added under the lilacs to the north of the Café patio and on the west side of the butterfly garden. Work was done in the Indigenous garden to remove non-native plants. A natural dye was added to the water garden to prevent algae growth to make cleaning and maintenance easier. There were slug issues in the butterfly garden and ground squirrels ate large portions of the vegetation in the raised bed above the water garden.

Lacombe County removed several spruce trees that had died over the year from the rows along Prentiss Road. The County also graded the driveway in May which improved many potholes and washboard.

Carter repainted the main sign at the entrance that says "Ellis Bird Farm, Linking Agriculture, Industry and Wildlife" with a bluebird. Charlie Ellis' original wagon at the main entrance was replaced by a new wagon on loan from the Sunnybrook Farm Museum. Charlie's wagon was moved across the driveway from the lower parking lot.

Appendix 1 2021 Strategic Plan



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!

Strategic Goals: To move us FROM where we are now, TO where we need to be in 3-5 years:

FROM	draft Strategic Goals	TO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring Budding Stage of Seeds that have been planted • Tendency for 1 to 2 year planning ... what about more long-term? • Uncertainty of roles = need redefining/defining • Lots of Board Committees • Board Meetings • In between operational and governance • 'Aged' Board and needing consider continued building of the Board. • Board Orientation is low and unclear • Budget and financial oversight. • Driven to maximize rental revenues. • Farm profit from rental but not much use of the farm for our Mission. • We are not the farmers ourselves... • Don't monitor effectively for soil composition / inputs / production.... • Acres for students / potential research projects ... potential for more applied degrees / summer projects • Demonstration farm really not communicated / influencing.... • Some Citizen Science and ideas to do more. • Westwards Trail not much used. • Seen/experienced as a tourist attraction • People stick to main site • Good stuff on site! • New Manager! • No in-person gatherings • Cafe in need of cleaning and renos • 2 bins with plants in now filled with weeds... 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transition Board from operational to Governance focussed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase capacity for transitioning to new Board and using healthy "terms" of office. • 2-3 new Board each year / • Ensure organizational structure supports the plan. • Invest in the positions we need to accomplish priorities. • Improve orientation of new people to roles (board, volunteers, staff) 2. Better balance our engagement with education, research and agriculture for enhanced overall environmental stewardship and healthy biodiversity of our resource. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Plant the seed of 'demonstration' for the farm as place of progressive agriculture practices. b. Do more to get the public engaged beyond the tourist attraction. c. Relevant research projects. 3. Validate Financial Sustainability (stewarding resources) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + donating to special projects / initiatives. • More stable income. • Ability to budget beyond next season... • Annually contribute to reserve funds when there is extra at the end of the year. • Using reserves to smooth out costs/income... • + more cost/benefits analysis completed for future projects 4. Better tell our whole story so people fully understand and support us! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensured Responsible Stewardship • More volunteer roles / Volunteer coordinator • Committees of the Board support the Board's work (not operations) • Board Governance Policies are clear. • Vibrant, diverse and committed Board / Governance Focused Board • High capacity for transitioning to new people on the Board. • Performance Evaluations of Manager • Year end goals set with the new Manager • Continued wonderful supportive team! • Sandy solid as Manager • Advisory Committees or teams support operational / management work. • Increased progressive agriculture practices of the demonstration farm. • Create environment for renter of land to take on experimental/leading edge practices. • More experimental farm practices (less emphasis on profit from farm operation). • Farm is becoming more of a demonstration farm for progressive agriculture. • A researcher on the farm side? • Regenerative agriculture model. • Farming committee more engaged with this. • Partnerships with Industry and doing trials. More Partnerships For the Farm (Grey Wooded Forestry, NGO's and Businesses, Olds College, Alberta Woodlot Extension Society) • Right supportive Roles (Staff / Volunteers) to support all of the operational work of the Farm. • Garden Plots • Westwards Trail more accessible and used. double fenced area 'used' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Plants in bloom by the month... for the Westward Trail. • More adults engaged in learning and science of nature. • Families doing things together. • 4-season destination! Used more in the winter Snow Shoeing, Skiing, Biking • Curiosity aroused and people discovering nature is relaxing! • Relationships with Stakeholders and maintaining... enhanced + new (Alberta Food Matters, Alberta Native Bee Council, Alberta Bat Community Program) • Chicken Coop / Pig Sty • Financial Health is maintained • Maintain revenue / grow for new initiatives.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name and impression of farming domestic birds (Hurdle for marketing).• Signage to the site is lacking.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leverage corporate PR that M E Global gains from EBF.
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- CHALLENGE: Doing some of this is during busiest time of the year ...
- NEXT STEPS:
 - Review current activities/programs and do they align with our Vision/Mission
 - Building connections! Sandy reaching out and building relationships with key stakeholder groups.
 - Ensure priorities are set right.

Appendix 2 Farm Management Plan

GREY WOODED FORAGE ASSOCIATION

FARM MANAGEMENT PLAN

ELLIS BIRD FARM

Pasture walk with Grey Wooded Forage Association (GWFA: Greg Paranich) and Farm Committee April 14/21

Conducted pasture walk with Ellis Bird Farm (EBF) farm committee members to assess and make recommendations for management of various areas of the site.

SOUTH PASTURE

- Consensus was for *full renovation* of pasture to restore productivity and diversity in old (?60 year) forage stand which is predominantly bluegrass/fescue and very rough with high Richardson ground squirrel and badger populations.
- Steps towards rejuvenation process
- **2021 termination:**
 - Level site with heavy float or shallow disc and leveling to accommodate future equipment access
 - Allow regrowth to at least 6 “or 6 leaf stage of grass to allow for physiological stage for optimum glyphosate uptake/control
 - Apply 2L equivalent rate (minimum) glyphosate at grass stage achieved (? June 15-25)
 - Allow at least 10 days post application for optimum translocation to root zone
 - Follow with mob graze with cattle to “clean up” surface residue to facilitate easier tillage later.
 - Allow “dead sod” to rot down/decay until late summer or fall for an easier disc operation. This would allow for any expected regrowth of bluegrasses to occur and the tillage in combination with the glyphosate would give as good bluegrass control as could be expected.
- **2022 transition:**
 - Spring tillage for seedbed preparation for 2 options
 - Option 1: transition annual crop to allow for additional season of bluegrass/fescue regrowth control and to provide annual grazing or stored feed option from this field.
 - The 2021 annual crop could be conventional cereal silage/greenfeed/graze
 - annual “cover crop” mixes for graze/soil health benefits
 - a combination of the 2 allowing for fall regrowth graze or cover opportunity (terminated by winter).
 - Option 2: advance directly to seeding new forage stand in spring with a modest cover crop or as an “open crop” without the cover crop component. This would have an expected regrowth of significant bluegrass species from the original stand. Usually not recommended in these circumstances.
- **2023 establishment:**
 - If Option 1 is adopted, then this would be the transition year. Productive grazing species could include high value forages such as meadow brome, tall fescue, timothy, orchard grass, alfalfa, white clover.
 - Additional consideration could include non-bloat legumes such as sainfoin, cicer milkvetch, and Birdsfoot trefoil.
 - This should be harvested as stored feed (hay or silage) the first year to allow for root establishment and stability before being grazed.

Rest and Recovery (R&R) ACRES

- An opportunity was discussed and could be considered for a portion of the pasture’s renovation

- A small acreage (to be determined) could be left alone to allow a full year's rest and recovery of the old stand then be re-enrolled in the grazing plan. This would serve as a side x side comparison to the full renovation process and ***compare the response of the recovered stand vs the renovated stand.***
- If pursued, an area on the south or east side could be selected so that it would not cause inconvenience to the full renovation acres.

RESERVE HABITAT AREAS

- A review of the "reserved habitat" acres revealed that the continuous (4-5 year?) exclusion from grazing resulted in an accumulation of dead grass mat.
- The excessive litter from the ungrazed grass has caused a smothering effect on grass stand health and vigour. This has reduced any biodiversity of other species to enhance the habitat, allow for invasive species to begin establishment, serve as a highly potential fire hazard, and ***not provide very good environmental services.***
- A recommendation would be to ***have these areas grazed early*** in spring of 2021 (before significant green up). This would help to remove the excessive (smother) litter and encourage rejuvenation of the stand via cattle hoof action on the soil surface to incorporate the existing seed bank that would have accumulated over the years.
- Since these areas are already fenced, it would be a relatively easy accommodation for this activity. Portable power fencing could be used in some areas to protect the water bodies immediate bank areas and/or planted trees from any cattle impacts.
- Going forward, these areas could ***be considered for an annual (moderate) grazing (late July/early August)*** to encourage stand vigour and the development of biodiverse species. This would also be timed to have the least environmental and wildlife impact and provide for adequate regrowth for ground cover, new growth establishment, and improved soil microbial (health) development.

RIPARIAN ZONES TO DEVELOP/PROTECT

Areas in pasture and crop also had the continuous water course transecting through those fields without any "riparian" protection.

- An opportunity exists for the EBF to consider a development plan towards providing riparian/habitat protection and improvement within a ***functional forage/grazing landscape.***
- Grey Wooded Forage Association could assist in this planning in the design of a landscape management fields vs "boxed" acres.
- Habitat and wildlife plantings could be included in the designs, as well as pollinator species, to further enhance the bird habitat and supporting environment for their sustainability.

Extension Opportunities

The Ellis Bird Farm and Grey Wooded Forage Association both have similar mandates in public education regarding agriculture and environmental management. The opportunities for partnerships and collaboration for our mutual benefit are many.

- Use of the activities of developing and managing forage and habitat areas in the same landscape as field school opportunities (forage, soil, livestock, and environment) for the agriculture and rural/urban populations alike.
- Establish long term demonstration sites/plots that would be relevant to our joint visions and be used to engage the public in environmental and agricultural messages and learning.
- Promotion of incorporating and Environmental Farm Plan with the relevant Action Plans to enhance the environment and reduce environmental risk.