



Vancouver Avian Research Centre

Research - Conservation - Education

VIP Field Trip – Vancouver Avian Research Centre’s Bird Monitoring and Banding Station

Information about VARC

The Vancouver Avian Research Centre (VARC) was formally established by Derek & Carol Matthews in 2009. VARC is a Registered Canadian Charity and focuses on conducting year-round bird monitoring, banding and research. In addition to research activities, VARC provides extensive public outreach and education programs to raise awareness of environmental issues particularly as they relate to breeding and migratory birds. VARC also offers Schools & Youth Programs, Family Days, Bird Identification Courses, Bird Monitoring and Banding Workshops and provides speakers and experts for public events and media appearances.



VARC conducts its bird monitoring, banding and its public outreach in Colony Farm Regional Park (Park). Situated at the confluence of the Coquitlam and Fraser Rivers, the Park protects some of the most ecologically diverse lands in the Greater Vancouver area. The extensive old-field and riparian habitats within the Park represent high-value ecosystem features for resident and migrating birds. VARC operates up to 40 nets and traps and bands four days each week during the main season (spring and fall migration and the breeding season). More information on VARC and its operations can be found online at:

www.birdvancouver.com



VARC VIP site visit

VARC hosts VIP site visits on weekends (Saturdays and Sundays) for small groups who would like the banding station exclusively to themselves for a morning during the main banding season (April 1st – October 31st). This is a wonderful opportunity to see our resident and migratory birds up close and personal, to observe the bird banding, take photographs and to hold and release birds under supervision. It is a unique experience which no one ever forgets!

The Park is an important breeding area and stopover site for migratory birds with amazing diversity as can be seen from the table below of birds banded at the station and you can expect to see any of the following species during your visit:

Species	Species	Species	Species
American Goldfinch	Common Yellowthroat	Mountain Bluebird	Swamp Sparrow
American Redstart	Cooper's Hawk	Mourning Dove	Swainson's Thrush
American Robin	Dark-eyed Junco	Nashville Warbler	Townsend's Warbler
American Tree Sparrow	Downy Woodpecker	Northern Harrier	Trill's (willow) Flycatcher
Anna's Hummingbird	Dusky Flycatcher	Northern Rough-wg. Swallow	Tree Swallow
Band-tailed Pigeon	Eastern Kingbird	Northern Saw-whet Owl	Varied Thrush
Bank Swallow	European Starling	Northern Shrike	Violet-green Swallow
Barn Swallow	Evening Grosbeak	Northern Waterthrush	Warbling Vireo
Belted Kingfisher	Fox Sparrow	Olive-sided Flycatcher	Western Kingbird
Bewick's Wren	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Orange-crowned Warbler	Western Meadowlark
Black-capped Chickadee	Golden-crowned Sparrow	Pacific slope Flycatcher	Western Palm Warbler
Black-headed Grosbeak	Gray Catbird	Pacific Wren	Western Tanager
Black-throated Gray Warbler	Hairy Woodpecker	Pine Siskin	Western Wood-pewee
Brewer's Sparrow	Hammond's Flycatcher	Purple Finch	White-crowned Sparrow
Brown Creeper	Hermit Thrush	Red-breasted Nuthatch	White-throated Sparrow
Brown Thrasher	House Finch	Red-breasted Sapsucker	Wilson's Snipe
Brown-headed Cowbird	House Wren	Red-eyed Vireo	Wilson's Warbler
Bullock's Oriole	Hutton's Vireo	Red-shafted Flicker	Yellow Warbler
Bushtit	Indigo Bunting	Red-winged Blackbird	Yellow-breasted Chat
Calliope Hummingbird	Lazuli Bunting	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Cassin's vireo	Least Flycatcher	Rufous Hummingbird	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Cedar Waxwing	Lincoln's Sparrow	Savannah Sparrow	
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	Long-eared Owl	Sharp-shinned Hawk	
Chipping Sparrow	MacGillivray's Warbler	Song Sparrow	
Clay-colored Sparrow	Marsh Wren	Spotted Towhee	
Cliff Swallow	Merlin	Steller's Jay	

What can I expect at the station?

The main focus of VIP visits is, of course, the birds and the program will be flexible to ensure you get maximum exposure to the birds and banding operation but the general structure of the morning will be: -



Arrival at the VARC Banding Station in Colony Farm Regional Park – Bird banding is a very early morning activity – we start at dawn and continue until mid-morning depending on capture rates. Bird activity is highest in the period immediately following dawn and then dies down as the morning progresses. We therefore suggest arrival at the banding station 1-hour following local sunrise and will confirm the exact time with you prior to your visit.

Breakfast – Continental breakfast including coffee and tea will be provided at the station while listening to a 15-minute introductory presentation about VARC, its mandate and operations.

Banding Operations – VIP visitors will be able to participate in the following activities:

- accompany out Net Extractors on net rounds, observe net extraction and get an overview of station layout and operations.
- observe the banding and processing of birds (including ageing and sexing)
- receive our bird 'show and tell' on each species
- hold and release birds under supervision

Wrap-up – a short wrap-up presentation will be given at the end of the session focusing on birds and the environment.

What size group and what ages are appropriate?

Because of the environment and to ensure the safety and welfare of birds this event is more suitable for adults and children over the age of 8 and for VIP visits the group size is kept to a maximum of 10 people.

What are the facilities at the banding station?

We have a very visitor friendly set up with banding pagoda, picnic tables, coat and backpack racks and a wilderness eco-friendly washroom at the station

What should we bring?

- Warm layered clothing – Colony Farm is a low-lying area and can be cold even in the summer months and especially early in the morning
- Rubber boots or waterproof shoes – The banding station is in the old field habitat and the grass can be quite wet especially in the early morning
- Binoculars and cameras
- Water and coffee mug

Should we schedule a back-up date in case it is raining that day?

This is always a good idea. We band both Saturday and Sunday each week from April 1st to October 31st (weather permitting) so we suggest scheduling the visit for a Saturday with the idea that it can be moved to the Sunday if the weather doesn't cooperate.

We are not able to band in steady rain as birds can quickly become hypothermic so we check the weather network each evening prior to banding to ensure rain is not forecast and will communicate with you to confirm banding for your event.



The birds of Colony Farm

In addition to the banding activities, VIP field trip participants will be able to enjoy the avian highlights in areas of the park normally off-limits to the general public.

The old-fields and hedgerows provide habitat for Barn, Barred, Northern Saw-whet, Long-eared and Short-eared Owls, Great Blue Herons, American Bitterns and a wide variety of passerine and non-passerine bird species including locally rare species, such as Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*), Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*), Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*), and Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*). The agricultural fields are ideal habitat for a range of western North American sparrows including American Tree (*Spizella arborea*), Brewer's (*Spizella breweri*), Chipping (*Spizella passerina*), Clay-colored (*Spizella pallida*), Swamp (*Melospiza georgiana*), Vesper (*Poocetes gramineus*), Savannah (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), Grasshopper (*Ammodramus savannarum*), Fox (*Passerella iliaca*), Song (*Melospiza melodia*), Lincoln's (*Melospiza lincolni*), White-crowned (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*), Golden-crowned (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) and White-throated (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) all of which have been banded in the park. Other rarities banded include Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma bendirei*), Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*), Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) and Palm Warbler (*Setophaga palmarum*). 7 of the 8 species of North American swallows are also found in the park often in high numbers.

What is the cost?

VIP visits are \$50 per person with a minimum of \$500 irrespective of the number of people and with a maximum attendance of 10 people. As VARC is a Registered Canadian charity, the \$50 per person is not deductible but the balance is treated as a donation and is tax deductible.

We look forward to welcoming you at the station!

