



Vancouver Avian Research Centre

Research - Conservation - Education

VIP Itinerary & Information



**Above all else,
the well being of *every* bird
is the top priority at *all* times!**

VIP Visits

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 list below of birds banded at the station and you can expect to see any of the following species during your visit:

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 (*Pooecetes 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 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.

- accompany our 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 6 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.

If you would like to inquire about booking a VIP visit, please fill out registration form on previous page and we look forward to seeing you!