



Birdwatching Backpacks

Project Update Report 2022




Bienvenue dans ton Sac à Oiseaux!
 À l'intérieur, tu trouveras:

- Cette notice d'information qui comprend des instructions pour les jumelles, des conseils pour l'observation des oiseaux et des endroits recommandés pour l'observation des oiseaux et des
- Des jumelles recommandées pour l'observation des oiseaux


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 DU QUÉBEC

Birdwatching Backpacks

Project Update Report 2022

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Nature Newfoundland and Labrador thanks all the organizations and volunteers that made this project possible. This project was conducted in collaboration with the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries with funding support from Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, and in-kind support from the Outfitters Adventure Gear and Apparel.





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Background

Birdwatching is a fun and non-intimidating way to engage youth and adults in an outdoor activity that helps familiarize them with their natural environment and local biodiversity. While birdwatching does not require many supplies, lack of access to quality binoculars and local birdwatching information may be a barrier to starting this activity. To encourage youth and adults to try birdwatching, Nature Newfoundland and Labrador (Nature NL) developed birdwatching backpack kits for distribution through the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries. This project was conducted in collaboration with the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries with funding support from Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro (NL Hydro), and in-kind support from the Outfitters Adventure Gear and Apparel.

The project began in 2020 with the development of adult and children's backpack kits for distribution in the St. John's area. The kits comprise lightweight backpacks that include binoculars and a bird field guide, as well as additional information on suggested birdwatching locations, likely species found at these locations, tips for beginners, and take-home resources (i.e., a checklist of Newfoundland and Labrador birds, birdwatching safety tips from NL Hydro). Youth backpacks also include activities for children and a bird-themed picture book. In 2021, Nature NL expanded the birdwatching backpack program across the province. In addition to expanding the geographic scope, Nature NL developed family backpack kits, which include adult and children's binoculars, and French backpack kits, which include books, activities, and resources all in French. The kits were distributed to the Eastern, Central and Western library regions in June 2021. Within these regions, the backpacks were made available for loan from the following branches: Conception-Bay-South, Mount Pearl, Carbonear, Clarenville, Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor, Corner Brook, Pasadena, Stephenville, Wabush, and Labrador City (**Figure 2**). The backpacks made available for loan in Labrador include additional one-page identification guides with bird names in Innu courtesy of Environment and Climate Change Canada. All backpack kits include disinfectant wipes to allow users to clean equipment prior to use as a safety precaution during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report summarizes the backpack program since the last report (March 2021 – January 2022) and provides an overview of feedback received from birdwatcher backpack kit users.

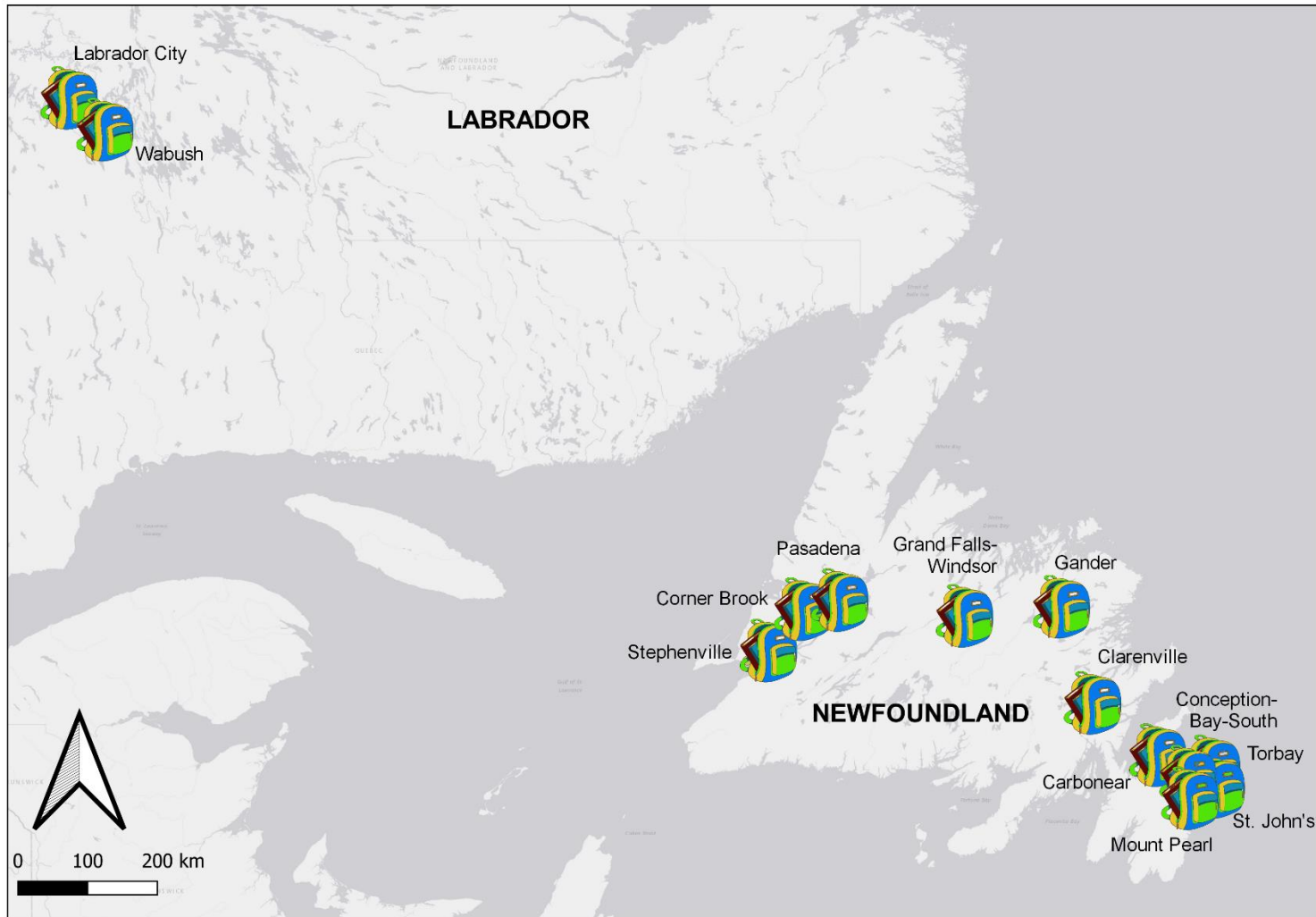


Figure 1 Map of birdwatching backpack locations in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Advertisement

Nature NL and the NL Public Libraries have advertised the backpack kits through social media, public events, and local media. This has included:

- **In-Library Promotion** – Bird-themed displays and a birdwatching backpack corner showcase the kits (**Figure 2**)
- **Social Media** – Eight posts on Facebook with a reach of over 20,000 people, seven posts on Twitter with a reach of over 5,000 people, and seven Instagram posts with a reach of over 2,300 people
- **Public Events** – Guided birdwatching hikes in Gander, Corner Brook, and St. John’s with 47 participants, Monthly Nature NL Bird Learning Nights (online)
- **Media** – CBC’s Labrador Morning Interview (August 20th, 2020), CBC’s Newfoundland Morning (July 8th, 2021)



Figure 2 Birdwatching Backpack display at the AC Hunter Public Library in St John's.

Circulation

A total of 65 birdwatching backpacks kits were distributed to the public libraries: ten adult and ten youth backpacks in the St John’s region and five adult, five youth, and five family backpacks in each the Eastern, Central, and Western (including Labrador) regions. Unfortunately, two backpacks in the St. John’s region and three backpacks in the Eastern region were lost due to unforeseen and unavoidable



incidents, leaving a total of 60 backpack kits currently in circulation. As of the end of January 2022, the kits had been circulated 105 times (**Table 1**). The circulation has continued to be strong in the St. John's region in the second year of availability. The kits circulated less in other regions, but this was a great start to the program across the province, particularly when considering the continued restrictions in place due to COVID-19. The French backpack kits circulated less than the English kits, which was not unexpected. Nature NL put out multiple promotions in French but will explore additional avenues to continue to promote the French birdwatching backpack kits.

We expect to see an increase in circulation in all backpacks during the upcoming spring and summer, which are the peak birdwatching months with more mild weather conditions, the return of migratory birds, and breeding bird activity. Library patronage continues to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. We expect to see users increase when the pandemic and associated restrictions come to an end. Nature NL will continue to promote the backpacks throughout the spring and summer to raise awareness and generate interest in the program.

Table 1 Circulation (number of times loaned out) of Birdwatching Backpack kits in each region between March 2021 and January 2022. Backpack kits became available in July in Western, Labrador, Central and Eastern regions. A dash (-) indicates that type of backpack kit was not available in that region.

Regions	English			French		
	Adult	Family	Kids	Adult	Family	Kids
Central (Gander & Harmsworth)	9	11	10	0	1	0
St. John's	16	-	30	-	-	-
Western (Corner Brook)	6	3	4	0	0	0
Labrador (Lab City & Wabush)	1	2	1	-	-	-
Eastern	3	4	3	0	0	1

Patron Feedback

Since the last report, Nature NL has received 19 feedback forms returned to the library by patrons who borrowed the backpack kits across the province. Responses to all multiple-choice questions from the feedback forms are summarized in Appendix A. The feedback this year revealed similar trends to last year: participants learned about birds and birdwatching, spent more time in nature, and would go birdwatching again in the future. This shows that the backpack kits continued to educate users about local birds and biodiversity, encourage users to spend more time outside, and inspire regular birdwatchers. Half of participants also reported that they would increase their support of bird conservation initiatives in the future, suggesting the backpacks kits are encouraging users to take action for bird conservation.

The backpacks kits continue to provide social benefits as well as providing an educational resource. Two-thirds of backpack users reported spending quality time with friends and family and having fun while using the backpacks. More than a quarter of participants reported feeling more calm, relaxed or energized after birdwatching. This suggests that the benefits of birdwatching extend beyond the time spent actively birdwatching.

A third of users reported learning more about library services and half said they would borrow more materials from the library. One user report being becoming a new library member. This demonstrates that the backpacks have increased engagement with the library. Some users also reported learning more about Nature NL and said they would attend future Nature NL events. Future participation in Nature NL events will continue to educate the participants about the environment and conservation in our province.

One thing that would make the backpacks better...

“More activities for kids”

One thing I really liked about the backpack is...

“All the bird pictures and reading with my grandmother”

“It encourages you to get out in nature”

“Everything in one place”

Most backpack users said they would borrow a Birdwatching Backpack again and they would recommend the backpacks to family or friends. In particular, users really appreciated that the backpacks were well-equipped with useful resources and included good quality binoculars. Users liked that the backpacks were the complete package with everything needed for birdwatching. While the response to the backpack kits was positive, users indicated that more activities for kids of various ages would be appreciated.

Future Plans

Nature NL will stay in contact with library branches to resupply the take home material for the kits as the backpacks continue to circulate. In expanding the program across the province, the library regions outside of the St. John's area identified the logistical challenges of distributing backpacks to all branches in each region. Now that these regions have experience circulating the backpacks at a limited number of branches, Nature NL would like to reopen the discussion about the possibility of making these backpacks available for loan at more branches, however we recognize that this may not be possible in all cases. Nature NL is also working with the library branches that lost backpack kits on options to replace the lost kits.

While there are no current plans to expand the birdwatching backpacks project, Nature NL is considering the development of additional activities for children's backpack kits and exploring the possibility of other nature-based activity kits to encourage people to get outdoors, explore their natural surroundings, and learn more about biodiversity.

Appendix A: Summary of Feedback Survey Responses



Table A-2 Summary of responses to question one on the feedback survey ("Because of the Birdwatching Backpacks, I..."). Total number of respondents: 19.

Answer	Number of Responses
Had fun!	17
Spent more time in nature	12
Spent quality time with friends or family	12
Tried birdwatching for the first time	9
Felt more calm, relaxed or energized	5
Tried Binoculars for the first time	4
Became a new library member	1
Became a new Nature NL member	1
Other: paid more attention to animals in general	1

Table A-3 Summary of responses to question two on the feedback survey ("I learned something new about..."). Total number of respondents: 19.

Answer	Number of Responses
Birds and birdwatching	19
Library services	7
Plant and animal variety in my area	7
Nature NL	4

Table A-4 Summary of responses to question three on the feedback survey ("I will..."). Total number of respondents: 19.

Answer	Number of Responses
Go birdwatching again in the future	15
Recommend Birdwatching Backpacks to family or friends	13
Borrow a Birdwatching Backpack again in the future	11
Borrow more materials from the library	9
Support local bird conservation initiatives	9
Attend future Nature NL events	3