

# In the Beginning: LPBO's Origins and Early Days

by David Hussell

I was asked: Who were the founders of LPBO?

My answer: Long Point Bird Observatory was founded by the Ontario Bird Banding Association in the spring of 1960. There were no individual founders – it just seemed to happen.

I suppose you could say the main driving force was the LPBO committee of OBBA. I am not sure exactly when this committee was formed, but according to a report written in November 1961, it consisted of myself (D.J.T. Hussell, Director), D.H. Baldwin, M.H. Field, W.J.R. Wasserfall, and J.K. Woodford.

I am sure that these five people were the main instigators of LPBO because Don Baldwin, Bill Wasserfall, Jim Woodford, and I were the owners and donors of the Jeep that made trips to the Point possible. Marshall Field was active mainly at the base of Long Point, where he later initiated a duck banding program. (Later still he founded Hawk Cliff Raptor Banding Station.)

Prior to 1960, OBBA designated several people to operate cooperative banding stations along the Great Lakes. Marshall Field was assigned to Long Point, and he (and others) banded a total of 304 birds at the base of Long Point in 1956-58. At that time, the most active of these banding stations was at Point Pelee, run by Bill Wasserfall, who was also the Secretary-Treasurer of OBBA and the leading “founder” of OBBA.

In 1959, Don and Maureen Baldwin and I became interested in finding a banding site closer to Toronto. We investigated locations at the base of Long Point on several weekends, and walked out along the beach to Breakwater and camped there on the Victoria Day (May 16-18) and the Civic



David Hussell and supervisors working on the Tip cabin.

Holiday (August 1-3) three-day weekends. (This entailed getting permission from Norm Ferris, the Long Point Company keeper.) We banded 132 and 59 birds, respectively, on those two weekends.

Those successes challenged us to figure out how we could get out to the Tip of the Point. Walking that far for a weekend (carrying tents, nets, poles, and banding equipment) was out of the question. Sometime in September, Don and I decided to buy a four-wheel drive Jeep. That decision was made by us in Don and Maureen's apartment on Yonge Street in Toronto.

Others may see it differently, but to my mind that was the key moment in the founding of LPBO, because it represented a commitment (financial and otherwise) to do more than casual and intermittent banding at or near the base of Long Point. Don and I had discussed the possibility of a permanent banding station/bird observatory on Long Point all year, and that was certainly what we had in mind on those early exploratory trips, but purchase

of the Jeep was the transition from dreams to reality, conception to birth.

We had the example and experience of the Point Pelee Banding Station to guide us, as well as my experience at British bird observatories. All of this had been reported to the monthly meetings of the Ontario Bird Banding Association, and Bill Wasserfall and Jim Woodford enthusiastically came on board and contributed to purchase of the Jeep. (It was a genuine used WWII surplus 1947 Jeep which cost us \$600, according to my recollection).

Don, Maureen, Jim, Pat Woodford, and I made our first trip to the Tip of the Point on Thanksgiving weekend, 1959. It was an extremely windy weekend, and two of our three tents blew down, but we enjoyed an excellent Thanksgiving dinner at the invitation of light-keeper Bill Ansley and his wife Margaret, who took pity on us. Three more trips were made to the Tip between then and November 22, with Marshall Field and Bill Wasserfall among those taking part. In all, 566 birds of 62 species were banded at Long Point in 1959.



**Don Baldwin banding a Redhead.**

In the winter of 1959-60, I wrote a proposal (Long Point Banding Station, January 1960) on behalf of OBBA to expand operations. This outlined plans for buildings and traps at Breakwater and the Tip of the Point. The key was to get permission to build the structures, so we sent letters and the proposal to the Long Point Company (Robert Winthrop) and to the District Marine Agent (J.S. Barrick) of the Department of Transport in Prescott, as well as other interested parties, including the Canadian Banding Office and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. Amazingly, both the Long Point Company and the DOT agreed to our proposal, so we were able to get construction underway early in the spring of 1960.

Some time between January and April 1960, the decision was made to adopt the name Long Point Bird Observatory, and the observatory was launched under that name in April 1960.

By the beginning of May, we had built a small cabin (only 10 feet x 12 feet) at the Tip of the Point that served as a combined bunkhouse, banding lab, kitchen, and living space. By mid-May we had a Heligoland Trap in operation. ("Heligoland" Traps were invented on the German island of Heligoland in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and were widely used in Europe and the British Isles for trapping migrants prior to the advent of mist nets in the 1950s. The only other one in North America was at Point Pelee, also built by OBBA.)

The Federation of Ontario Naturalists provided \$250 of the \$980 expended in

the first two years. Individuals donated \$488.05 (in addition to the cost of the Jeep) and paid \$153 in accommodation fees. Materials for the cabins at the Tip of the Point and Breakwater (built in 1961) cost \$298.76 and \$398.70, respectively. Heligoland Traps cost \$202.44. LPBO had no paid staff until 1965 when the first "warden" (seasonal station manager) was hired. Everything was done by volunteers for the first five years.

There are many additional names in the logs for 1960. Some of them were friends or family of the main players. Early participants, all members of OBBA (or spouses of members), included:

Pat Woodford and Maureen Baldwin. Their names appear repeatedly in the logs throughout 1960, along with their husbands. Pat Woodford banded the first bird in the LPBO database, a Song Sparrow, at the Tip of the Point on April 2, 1960. Both Pat and Maureen were involved in the exploratory expeditions in 1959, and participated at several of the key moments both in 1959 and 1960.

George Fairfield was present on April 2-3 when construction of the cabin started. He recruited his friend Fred Burgener, a carpenter, to help build the cabin. George's wife, Jean Fairfield, made it out to the Point in July 1960, and was a regular visitor later.

William A. Martin (Bill) helped design and build the first small cabin at the Tip of Long Point, as well as others later. He was present on April 2-3 when materials were hauled out for the cabin and construction started, and twice in the fall. Later he

became Treasurer of OBBA and LPBO, and he designed the LPBO and OBBA logos that are still in use today.

Bruce Westcott and his wife Dot. Bruce was out to the Point twice in the spring and once in the fall, and Dot was with him once. They became regular participants later.

John Lunn participated in our activities at Long Point in May and October 1960, as well as later.

Robert R. Taylor (Bob) was a student enrolled in a photography course at the Ryerson Institute of Technology in Toronto (now Ryerson University). He was present on April 2-3 when work was started on the cabin, and took the first week of migration coverage after the cabin was built (with the unshingled roof leaking), April 16-24.

Robert W. Stamp (Bob) took the second and third weeks of coverage, May 1-13, and complained about having to sleep on a "hard, damp floor." He was also a student who had just completed his first year in biology at McMaster University.

Both Bobs put in a lot of time in the next few years, often providing coverage during spring migration, after school ended.

Leslie A. Gray first visited for a week of migration coverage in September 1960, and became a regular participant later. He was the first editor of Ontario Bird Banding.

That year we banded 5460 birds of 118 species, thus establishing LPBO as a major migration and banding station. More importantly, we laid the foundations for the long-term migration monitoring, research, and educational programs that continue to this day. There were many other steps along that path, and hundreds of other people who contributed along the way to what LPBO has become.

I was 26 years old in 1960. Don Baldwin, Maureen Baldwin, and Pat Woodford were about the same age. Jim Woodford would have been 30. Our "mentors" were in their 30s. George Fairfield was 34. Bill Wasserfall would have been 37. He, Marshall Field, Bill Martin, and Bruce Westcott were all about the same age; they all served in the British or Canadian forces in WWII. The Bills and Marshall were experienced builders who taught the rest of us a lot about construction. Bob Taylor and Bob Stamp were the youngsters; they turned 20 and 21, respectively, in 1960. Both were already experienced bird banders.

These "founders" of LPBO were mainly from Toronto and Hamilton. They came from a variety of backgrounds. Bill

Wasserfall was an electrical contractor, running his own business. Bill Martin was an architect. Bruce Westcott was an assistant manager at TD Bank; he became interested in birds and banding through meeting his Toronto neighbour, Harold Richards. Marshall Field worked for the City of St. Thomas, Parks Department. Les Grey was a Sales Engineer with Stelco. John Lunn was an archaeologist at the Royal Ontario Museum. George Fairfield worked for Ontario Hydro.

At that time, Jim Woodford was working in the Bird Department at the Royal Ontario Museum. Later he became Executive Director of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. Pat was a high school science teacher in Toronto. Don Baldwin trained as a tool maker in the UK and was a Royal Marines Commando during the Suez misadventure. In 1960 he was working for the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests (now Ministry of Natural Resources), prior to becoming a technician in the Bird Department at the Museum. Maureen was a secretary working in Toronto. I was a civil engineer with the Ontario Department of Highways (now Ministry of Transportation).

The varied talents of these people were tremendous assets to LPBO in its formative years.

The children of some of these families were frequently brought along to Long Point in the following years, including the four Wasserfall girls, the three Westcott girls, and the two Fairfield girls, as well as the Woodfords' two daughters, born later. Some of them became competent banders at an early age. Jim Anderson brought his kids later, and they all enjoyed playing with Bill and Margaret Ansley's four children, who were much the same age in the 1960s.

In those early years, we all felt lucky and hugely privileged to have the opportunity to enjoy the birds and remote beauty of Long Point, while taking part in developing LPBO's research and migration monitoring programs. Our fond memories of those times linger. An enduring pleasure, however, is the knowledge that our pioneering has afforded those same opportunities and privileges to many others in the 50 years of LPBO's existence, and will continue to do so in the years to come.

Anyone with a vision, particularly young people (to whom the future belongs), should remember these words that were amply borne out by our experiences launching LPBO:



Jim Woodford at the Heligoland Trap.

*“Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets:*

*Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.*

*Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.”* – W.H. Murray, quoted in “Everest, The West Ridge” by T.F. Hornbein, Sierra Club, 1966.

We began it. And Providence moved too.

(Thanks to Maureen Baldwin, Bob Stamp, Bob Taylor, Jim Woodford, and Pat Woodford for providing some facts and checking my memory of others; and Erica

Dunn for commenting on drafts of this article.)

David Hussell was Long Point Bird Observatory's Executive Director from 1974-82, and served as the Chair of LPBO's Board from 1990-92.

David is regarded as a founding father of migration monitoring in North America, and has made many important contributions to this field. He also originated the Baillie Birdathon in 1976, has been a champion of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network since its inception, and played a major role in developing Thunder Cape Bird Observatory.

David was one of the founders of Long Point Bird Observatory. He was instrumental in developing LPBO and its programs, in which he has retained involvement (whether in the field of migration monitoring or research on breeding Tree Swallows) over the last 50 years. Recently he has started research on Northern Wheatears at Iqaluit on Baffin Island, Nunavut.



LPBO vehicles stuck on the beach in 1960.

## Les origines et les débuts de l'Observatoire d'oiseaux de Long Point

L'Ontario Bird Banding Association (association de baguage des oiseaux de l'Ontario) (OBBA) a créé l'Observatoire d'oiseaux de Long Point (OOLP) au printemps de 1960. C'est le comité de l'OOLP de l'OBBA, composé de D.J.T. Hussell (directeur), D.H. Baldwin, M.H. Field, W.J.R. Wasserfall et J.K. Woodford, qui en a été l'instigateur.

Avant 1960, l'OBBA a confié le fonctionnement des stations de baguage en bordure des Grands Lacs à diverses personnes. C'est à la station de la pointe Pelée, dont s'occupait Bill Wasserfall qui était également le secrétaire-trésorier de l'OBBA et le principal « fondateur » de l'association, que le plus grand nombre d'oiseaux a été bagué. Marshall Field a été chargé de la station de Long Point. De 1956 à 1958, 304 oiseaux ont été bagués au début de la péninsule de cette péninsule.

En 1959, David Hussell ainsi que Don et Maureen Baldwin souhaitaient trouver un endroit propice au baguage plus près de Toronto. Ils ont examiné les lieux au début de la péninsule Long Point et ont marché sur la plage jusqu'à Breakwater où ils ont fait du camping les fins de semaine de la fête de la Reine et du Congé civique. Au cours de l'automne de cette même année, David et Don ont décidé de faire l'achat d'une Jeep à quatre roues motrices pour se rendre à l'extrémité de la péninsule. Enthousiasmés par l'achat, Bill Wasserfall et Jim Woodford y ont contribué.

David, Don, Maureen, Jim et Pat se sont rendus pour la première fois à l'extrémité de la péninsule la fin de semaine de l'Action de grâce de 1959. Entre autres, Marshall Field et Bill Wasserfall y sont allés à trois autres reprises entre cette fin de semaine et le 22 novembre. Au total, 566 oiseaux de 62 espèces ont été bagués à Long Point en 1959.

Au nom de l'OBBA, David a élaboré une proposition en vue de l'ajout de stations pendant l'hiver de 1959-1960. Dans ce document, David exposait les grandes lignes des plans de construction de bâtiments et de pièges à Breakwater et à l'extrémité de la péninsule. La



Construit un puits d'eau en 1960.



Marshall Field avec une Sarcelle à ailes bleues.

Long Point Company et le ministère des Transports ont accepté la proposition, et les travaux ont commencé au début du printemps. L'Observatoire d'oiseaux de Long Point a ouvert ses portes en avril 1960.

Les registres de 1960 renferment les noms de nombreux autres particuliers. Certaines personnes étaient des amis ou des membres de la famille des principaux acteurs et toutes étaient membres de l'OBBA (ou les conjoints de membres). Parmi les premiers collaborateurs, mentionnons Pat Woodford, Maureen Baldwin, George et Jean Fairfield, Fred Burgener, William A. (Bill) Martin, Bruce et Dot Westcott, John Lunn, Robert R. (Bob) Taylor, Robert W. (Bob) Stamp et Leslie A. Gray.

En 1960, 5 460 oiseaux de 118 espèces ont été bagués, ce qui a porté l'OOLP au rang d'importante station de baguage et de surveillance des migrations. C'est ainsi que les jalons des programmes de surveillance

à long terme des migrations, de recherche et d'éducation qui se poursuivent à ce jour ont été posés.

Les « fondateurs » de l'OOLP habitaient principalement Toronto et Hamilton. Les talents variés de ces personnes de milieux professionnels divers ont constitué des atouts considérables pour l'observatoire à ses débuts.

« Au cours des premières années, tous s'estimaient chanceux et énormément privilégiés d'œuvrer à la mise au point des programmes de recherche et de surveillance des migrations de l'OOLP tout en profitant de l'avifaune de la splendeur naturelle de Long Point » a précisé David. « Nous gardons de bons souvenirs de cette époque. De plus, le fait que nos innovations ont permis à de nombreuses autres personnes de bénéficier des mêmes occasions et privilèges au cours des 50 ans d'existence de l'OOLP et qu'elles continueront ainsi de profiter à bon nombre dans les années à venir nous procure une satisfaction durable ».

*Reconnu comme l'un des pères de la surveillance des migrations des oiseaux en Amérique du Nord, David Hussell est l'un des fondateurs de l'Observatoire d'oiseaux de Long Point. Il a occupé le poste de directeur général de l'OOLP de 1974 à 1982 et a siégé à son conseil d'administration à titre de président de 1990 à 1992.*