

## Linking Communities- A Saskatchewan Education Exchange

Lacey Weekes Conservation & Education Manager Nature Saskatchewan.

The Linking Communities Project is the collaborative efforts of Nature Canada, Chaplin Tourism Association and Nature Saskatchewan to protect populations of shared bird species through education, outreach, research, monitoring and applied conservation. This year it was our turn to host the Linking Communities education exchange in Saskatchewan. The group consisted of environmental educators



from Canada, USA, and Mexico. We began the tour in Swift Current on June 6<sup>th</sup>. After spending the morning getting to know each other we headed to Central School to spend the afternoon with the grade 3 class. We were split into groups where we talked about migration, habitat conservation and shorebird adaptations. All the students participated in a

simulated migration across North America. They got a real sense of what migratory birds go through to reach their destination from their breeding grounds in the North to their wintering grounds in the South. The next morning we heard many great presentations. Ted Cheskey and I spoke on Nature Canada and Nature Saskatchewan's involvement with the Linking Communities program.



Merci Rapolti a University of Saskatchewan MSEMS Student spoke on her project: Creating a Successful Shorebird Monitoring Program at Chaplin Lake: A Citizen Science



Approach. Yae Bryner and Don Paul updated us on the Utah Linking program and Abel Castillo spoke about the new programs they are conducting in their schools in Mexico. In the afternoon we headed to the Southland Hutterite Colony where we had a tour of their school. We spent time with the children viewing the wetland, a wonderful teaching resource right in their back yard. That night we

attended the Chaplin Nature Centre annual fundraiser supper and auction. We all had a lot of fun raising money for such a great cause. Somehow, after all the excitement and good food we mustered up enough energy to assist Dr. Christie Morrissey and her students with banding shorebirds on Chaplin Lake. Dr. Christie Morrissey is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Biology/School of Environment and Sustainability at the University of Saskatchewan. Her research



is looking at contaminants in shorebirds across North and South America. We were lucky to see two Semipalmated Sandpipers banded, weighed, measured and a small blood sample taken. They were both released unharmed. Our last day of the exchange was spent touring the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network and Important Bird Area sites of Reed and Chaplin Lake. We saw tones of birds

including the White-faced Ibis. We had a chance to hike some native prairie trails along the South Saskatchewan River where we saw many beautiful prairie plants and some not so beautiful wood ticks. After we checked each other for ticks we sat down for a farewell supper at the Mainstay Inn at Palliser Park. It was a fantastic tour lead by the wonderful Lori Wilson with Chaplin Tourism Association. Everyone on the tour had great passion for environmental education and wetland conservation. We learned a lot from each other and were



reenergized to continue the important work each of us does for shorebird conservation. On our last day of the tour we came across an Eared Grebe hung up on a barbed-wire fence. We were able to free the grebe and transport it back to Regina. The vet was able to examine it to determine there were no fractures. It was then taken to the Salthaven Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Centre West in Regina where it could rest and be released back into the wild. What a great way to end the tour! Check out the global news report: <http://globalnews.ca/news/1395470/local-couple-helps-save-wildlife-with-new-centre/>

