Proposed Discussion Topics - RPBO 20 Year Vision

Here are two possible futures for RPBO:

1. Continue with the present core activities funded by the familiar combination of donations, fundraising activities, government support, and volunteer effort. Add from time to time special projects as opportunities and volunteer enthusiasm permit. Obtain more funding from grant giving organizations primarily for educational programs. We could call this the “status quo plus”.

2. Become much more aggressive with fundraising using the social enterprise approach. Additional funds raised would be used for expansion of the core programs and new programs related to our mission. These could include educational programs for many age groups, migration research using miniaturization and related technologies, and more comprehensive population monitoring. To raise significant additional funds using a social enterprise model RPBO would require more paid staff who would offer a variety of programs for a price. We could call this the “social enterprise”.

We propose to divide the discussion into two components.

First we propose to discuss which of these two futures we wish to pursue.

Second we propose to discuss the type of programming we would like to develop within the preferred future.

Difficulty is that the two discussions are interconnected and dependent. As we all have slightly different visions of what programming we personally would like participate in (and why we care about the future of RPBO) we would ask that we try reserve those thoughts until the second discussion.
1. **RPBO as a Social Enterprise**

“Social enterprises are businesses owned by nonprofit organizations, that are directly involved in the production and/or selling of goods and services for the blended purpose of generating income and achieving social, cultural, and/or environmental aims. Social enterprises are one more tool for non-profits to use to meet their mission to contribute to healthy communities.” - [Social Enterprise Council of Canada](http://www.social-enterprise.ca)

RPBO has been slowly moving in this direction. We have offered courses for a number of years for which participants pay, most significantly the annual Banding Workshop. We have raised small amounts through sales of clothing and we have conducted a raffle for the last three years. For the most part the work of producing these goods and services has been done by volunteers. The proposal is that we move to a much higher level of activity with paid staff running the activities assisted by volunteers. Running RPBO as a social enterprise would involve product identification and development, advertising, financial administration, dedicated full time and/or part time staff and some financial risk.

Pro: If we are to take advantage of the many exciting research opportunities now possible and continue our core activities, we need more money. We need to expand the number and amount of donations and at the same time raise more money from profitable activities. While we have an extraordinary number of dedicated volunteers most of us are more interested in participating in bird related field research, monitoring and education than in fund raising. While many of us are prepared to support fund raising activities as volunteers, to reliably offer a variety and quality of goods and services to raise significant amounts of money, we will need more paid staff.

Con: We should not be too ambitious. While the array of technologies now available and promised in the next few years is tempting, we can and should only take on only so many projects. We should focus on our core activities rather than look at significant expansion.
2. Future Monitoring and Research Programming:

2.1. Monitoring: Should migration monitoring continue in the same manner for the next 20 years as it has for the last 20 years?

Pro: Longitudinal bird population studies are incredibly valuable in environmental assessments, conservation and planning. Study comprises both collection and analyses. For the last 20 years we have collected standardized migration data at Rocky Point and more recently at Pedder Bay. The data has been provided to the CMMN and CWS and has been analysed to contribute to their reports. There are many potential research topics just waiting to be analysed and written up based on our data. The longer the time period for which data is available the more meaningful will be the possible analyses.

Con: Although longitudinal studies are valuable advances in technology are potentially much more useful for monitoring migration. For example Acadia University and Bird Studies Canada are collaborating on a project to fit miniature transponders on songbirds in Eastern Canada and track them using specialized strategically located radar. We could do the same. Mist nets only capture a small proportion of all migratory species, regular census is more efficient for monitoring more species. We should expand our census routes and monitor in more seasons. To better understand migration we should be using miniaturization technology which can be used on more species than those captured by mist nets.

2.2. Some thought-provoking recent quotes related to migration monitoring

Migration tracking
“A new era of bird migration research has been launched with the use of miniaturized geolocators. The newest geolocators are small enough (0.5gm) in theory, to be deployed safely on large warblers so the taxonomic scope of migration data is broadening each year .... geolocators have already changed major assumptions about migratory connectivity, migration routes, non-breeding sites and migration timing.... six geolocator returns for the Common Swift revealed more information about migration and non-breeding sites than 100 years of bird banding” Auk, April 2013

eBird: Crowd sourcing

![Maps of bird migration](image-url)
“eBird’s daily view of bird movements has yielded a vast increase in data — and a revelation for scientists. The most informative product is what scientists call a heat map: a striking image of bird sightings represented in various shades of orange according to their density, moving through space and time across black maps. Now, more than 300 species have a heat map of their own. As soon as the heat maps began to come out, everybody recognized this is a game changer in how we look at animal populations and their movement,” said John W. Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab. “Really captivating imagery teaches us more effectively.”

2.3. Local Species Specific Research: There are a number of local research initiatives designed to better understand the life cycle of bird populations. RPBO is responsible for monitoring a number of western species and has projects set up for a few specific species: Fox Sparrows, Hummingbirds, and Northern Saw-whet Owls. Other species studied locally include: Purple Martins, Cooper’s Hawks, and Song Sparrows. The better we understand life cycles the more likely we are to be able to intervene at critical stages to conserve species at risk. We need to be more active in specific species research whether it is initiating life cycle studies ourselves or supporting and collaborating with other organizations and individuals.

Pro: This is part of our core mission. If we do not continually improve our knowledge of our local species we are failing the single most important role we have set for ourselves. Monitoring populations of both residents and migrants is a key component. We need to understand fluctuations in population numbers and composition and be aware of both increases and decreases in populations. We need to include year round residents, migrants that spend either the breeding season here, or winter here, and migrants in passage for which certain habitats maybe critical. Fall migration monitoring is a crucial component but does not completely discharge this responsibility. Species specific research, such as the three species noted above, is also important. While our second fall migration site is helping us fulfill our responsibilities (as the population is different) we still y are failing to monitor many western species. We need to rely much more on periodic censuses of all species, including sea birds, birds of prey, shorebirds and other species that are never, or only exceptionally, trapped in mist nets.

Con: Fall migration monitoring is our core mission. It alone is the reason that RPBO exists. Sure it is focused on song birds, and a certain sub set of songbirds, but so is the entire CMMN. Migrants are monitored across Canada giving us a significant national bird monitoring scheme, complimenting the Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Surveys. By maintaining this long term profile of a significant number of songbird species, RPBO provides a unique record of west coast trends not just of numbers but also changes in migration patterns, weight, age and sex ratios. It has also been used for research on bird parasites and related human disease. And it is the only long-term west coast record of migrant song birds. We should maintain and protect our core monitoring mission as our first priority.
3. **Future Education Programming:** In the last year we have begun an education program targeting grade 7 students in local schools. Should it be expanded to include other age groups, including adults? If it is continued should we employ an activity coordinator to plan, implement and raise funds? Could educational programming be developed in such a way that it could fund monitoring and research.

Proposition: RPBO continues educational programming focused only on grade 7 students

**Pro:** The future is with our youth. Successfully raising awareness, creating enthusiasm for the environment and commitment for a life time of caring is the best contribution we could make to society. Grade 7 is the ideal time in a student’s life to do so. It is very difficult to educate (re-educate) older people.

**Con:** Education is also a method of raising money so it has the double benefit of satisfying a latent appetite for information about birds in people of all ages as well as being a means of raising money to assist in funding all other RPBO activities. A great variety of courses could be developed (as submitted to the social enterprise competition of the Victoria Foundation). It is possible we could offer a large number of programs to all age groups to the extent we could financially support other projects.

4. **Expand the Mandate to include Environmental and Habitat Protection:** Initiatives are currently in progress that may protect and improve bird habitats such as Panama and Maber Flats. Another CRD initiative is designed to reduce the environmental and economic damage caused by resident, non-migratory Canada Geese. A Bluebird reintroduction program is taking place. A longer term initiative to identify and protect wildlife trees used for Bald Eagle nesting continues. All these activities were initiated by other organizations - we need to consider how we relate to other conservation groups, in particular those that are centered on birds, with a focus on habitat enhancement and protection.

It should be noted that our mission, as stated in our constitution, does not include environmental and habitat protection. Should it? Would it help us secure more funding?

**Pro:** The most lasting contribution we can make to bird conservation, either as individuals or as an organization, is to protect significant habitat in perpetuity. This can be done by ownership or by irrevocable legal designation e.g. as a National Park. RPBO through our intimate local knowledge of our area is uniquely placed to identify and initiate action to protect habitat. We have a responsibility to do so. This responsibility should be added to our mission. Other organizations are often better placed than RPBO to acquire, manage and conserve land and we should where appropriate collaborate with such organizations. We should also be lobbying governments of all types to
conserve habitat through acquisition and management or by legislation and regulation. Further we should be ensuring that environmental regulations of all types and at all levels of government are enforced including release of chemicals and biological agents, protection of vegetation, and prevention or suppression of invasive species. We should also be alert to the appropriate location of physical developments of all types to ensure that they do not degrade or destroy significant habitat.

Con: We will only be effective if we focus our energy. The present mandate of conservation through research, monitoring and education is already more than RPBO can manage. There are many other organizations dedicated to dealing with acquiring or managing significant habitat. We should support them and we should identify threats to habitat or the environment when we learn about them but we should only do so to encourage other organizations to take action or support those actions through our current mission. Recent examples of decisions taken by RPBO are:

a. The RPBO Board supported the year-long census of Panama Flats organized by Ian Cruikshank after the land was acquired by Saanich. The census was designed to inform decision making as Saanich Parks prepared a management plan.

b. The RPBO Board decided in 2013 NOT to take on running the Wildlife Tree Stewardship program, which would have consumed significant resources and diverted attention away from our core programs.

c. The RPBO Board decided NOT to take a position on the Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy but to stay in touch through one of our Board members and monitor the program as it develops. Various members did participate in a volunteer year long survey of numbers and locations of Canada Geese, not as representatives of RPBO but rather as individuals.