

Issue 66-2
December 2023

Marsh Monitoring Program

Photo: Tim Arthur



Embrace the
WINTER.
Count Feeder Birds for
SCIENCE!

Join, Renew or Donate

A photograph of two birds perched on a tree branch. On the left is a vibrant red cardinal, and on the right is a brown sparrow. In the background, a white house with a blue roof is visible under a clear sky.

**Citizen
Science
issue**

A stylized illustration of two colorful birds, one green and one red with blue and purple wings, perched on a green pine branch. The background is dark green with a starburst pattern of lighter green lines.

Christmas Bird Count



**GREAT
BACKYARD
BIRD COUNT**

Tufted Titmouse Photo: Deborah Bifulco

News for Members



The **SONG SPARROW**



The SONG SPARROW

Bird Protection Quebec - Mission Statement

VISION

We envision a world in which people appreciate the intrinsic benefits of birds and act to protect our planet and its wildlife.

MISSION

Our mission is to protect birds and bird habitat while fostering an appreciation of them through conservation, observation, research, and education.

President	Kristen Lalla
Vice-Presidents	Sheldon Harvey Darlene Harvey Ana Morales
Treasurer	Sheldon Harvey
Membership Secretary	Darlene Harvey
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A Word FROM THE EDITORS

Well, before we knew it, snow was falling and it was time to get going on the winter issue of The Song Sparrow, although looking out the window at the now-green lawns makes it hard to believe!

Winter is the season when citizen science projects really start to ramp up - beginning in November with Project Feederwatch, a winter's long exercise in counting the birds around you, and moving right into the Christmas Bird Count season. This issue is devoted to highlighting the importance of birders getting involved in these and other projects. In our first feature article, "Stalking Cardinals", Anne-Marie Cousineau explains a local research project she is conducting that you can help with, and how the data collected will be used to benefit urban birds. Betsy McFarlane tells "A Tale of Two Breeding Bird Survey Routes" and takes you along the routes she first began surveying in 2006, in the hopes of encouraging new volunteers. And, Barbara MacDuff talks about her experiences participating in Marsh Monitoring, a program that only requires a few hours of time each year but provides important data to help protect wetlands.

We hope that their stories will encourage you to either get involved with citizen science for the first time, or to step up your game a notch by adding a new program (or why not two while you are at it!) in 2024. We've put together a calendar of prominent citizen science programs, so no excuses - go make those resolutions happen in the New Year!

In regular columns, the Field Trip Committee announces weekly trips lined up all the way to the end of March, the upcoming monthly lectures are presented, and Zofia summarizes the past lectures for those who missed out. In Early Canadian Ornithology, Jeff tells the story of an important but little known Canadian ornithologist, William Patrick Smith, and, in their second feature column, Jules Delisle takes you on a visit to another BPQ sanctuary.

We suggest you sit back with a cup of eggnog or a nice hot toddy, and delve in!

With wishes for a very happy holiday season, we look forward to seeing you in 2024,

Connie & Darlene



A Message from THE PRESIDENT

Message DE LA PRÉSIDENTE

Hard to believe that it is time for another Song Sparrow issue already! The theme of citizen (or community) science is fitting since we are in the midst of the Christmas Bird Count season. In the bird world, citizen science, referring to the collection of scientific data by non-scientists, goes back decades with initiatives like the Breeding Bird Survey, Breeding Bird Atlas, and Christmas Bird Counts. Contributing to citizen science really does have an impact on conservation; as a biologist, I see a lot of really interesting work resulting from citizen science data. For example, population estimates and trends resulting from citizen science data are often used in assessments for Species at Risk.

It's becoming easier and easier to participate in citizen science. Many of you already use and/or know about initiatives like eBird and iNaturalist, which allow us to contribute our daily observations to science more easily than ever. With eBird, observations can be directly entered in the app – no need to keep paper lists! Taking the time to enter your observations properly is important to help with the quality and standardization of data. Scientists use a lot of the attributes you submit along with your observations, like distance and time, to standardize the data. This allows for more reliable estimates such as population size and trends to be produced.

I just wanted to take a brief moment to acknowledge the importance of the announcement of Bird Names for Birds by the American Ornithological Society. BPQ has made a statement in favour of this commitment to changing eponymous bird names – or birds named after people – to names that reflect the birds themselves. This commitment is one step towards helping people in communities that are underrepresented in the birding community feel more comfortable, and the more birders we have, the more we can contribute to citizen science.

Happy holidays,

Kristen

Il est difficile de croire qu'un nouveau numéro de Song Sparrow est déjà arrivé ! Le thème de ce numéro, la science citoyenne, est pertinent étant donné que le temps du Recensement des oiseaux de Noël est arrivé. Dans le monde ornithologique, la science citoyenne, qui veut dire le processus de la collecte des données par des gens non scientifiques, remonte à des décennies avec des initiatives comme le Relevé des oiseaux nicheurs, les Atlases des oiseaux nicheurs et le Recensement des oiseaux de Noël. Les contributions ont un vrai impact de conservation. Comme biologiste, je vois beaucoup de travaux intéressants qui utilisent des données provenant de la science citoyenne. Par exemple, des estimations démographiques basées sur les données provenant de la science citoyenne sont souvent utilisées dans les évaluations des espèces en péril.

Il est de plus en plus facile de participer aux initiatives de science citoyenne. Plusieurs entre vous connaissent ou utilisent déjà des plateformes comme eBird et iNaturalist qui nous permettent de contribuer nos observations quotidiennes à la science plus facilement que jamais. Avec eBird, on peut écrire nos observations directement dans l'appli – plus besoin des listes en papier ! Il est important de prendre le temps de bien entrer vos observations pour améliorer la qualité et la standardisation des données. Les scientifiques utilisent beaucoup des attributs qui accompagnent vos observations comme le temps et la distance qui leurs permettent de produire des estimations plus fiables, comme la taille des populations et des tendances.

Je voulais prendre un moment de reconnaître l'importance de l'annonce de « Bird Names for Birds » par la *American Ornithological Society*. La POQ a fait une annonce en faveur de cet engagement de changer des noms éponymes des oiseaux, qui veut dire des oiseaux nommés d'après des personnes, pour des noms qui reflètent les oiseaux eux-mêmes. Cet engagement est une étape pour aider les personnes des communautés sous-représentées dans la communauté des ornithologues amateurs à se sentir plus à l'aise, et plus on aura d'ornithologues amateurs, plus on pourra contribuer à la science citoyenne.

Joyeuses fêtes,

Kristen



Focus on

OUR MEMBERS



A big welcome to our new members

Please join us in welcoming the following new and returning members:

Caroline St-Onge, Jule Larsen, Suzanne Dutoy, Jean-Luc Dutoy, Megan Phillips, Elizabeth Cowan, Peter Patrick, and David Millar.

We look forward to meeting you, either on Zoom at a monthly meeting or on a field trip!

Last call: don't forget to renew your membership

Are you enjoying *The Song Sparrow*? Unfortunately *this will be your last issue of our members-only magazine* if you haven't renewed your membership for 2023/24 by the end of the year.

Remember, no matter what date you renewed last year, all annual memberships (with the exception of new members who joined after March 1, 2023) expired on **September 30**.

So, if it has slipped through the cracks, click [here](#) now to go to our website, where it is easy to renew online with your credit card or to find information on how to renew by mail.

PLEASE NOTE: YOU DO NOT NEED A PAYPAL ACCOUNT TO PAY ONLINE.

To the many of you who have already renewed, thank you!

Bienvenue aux nouveaux membres

Veillez vous joindre à nous pour accueillir les nouveaux membres et anciens membres qui ont renouvelé leur adhésion qui suivent:

Caroline St-Onge, Jule Larsen, Suzanne Dutoy, Jean-Luc Dutoy, Megan Phillips, Elizabeth Cowan, Peter Patrick, et David Millar.

Nous sommes impatients de vous rencontrer, que ce soit par Zoom lors d'une réunion mensuelle ou lors de l'une de nos excursions !

Dernier appel : n'oubliez pas de renouveler votre adhésion

Appréciez-vous « *The Song Sparrow* » ? Malheureusement, *ce numéro de notre bulletin réservé aux membres sera le dernier* si vous n'avez pas renouvelé votre adhésion 2023/24 avant la fin de l'année !

N'oubliez pas que, quelle que soit la date à laquelle vous avez renouvelé l'année dernière, toutes les adhésions annuelles (à l'exception des nouveaux membres qui ont adhéré après le 1er mars 2023) ont expiré **le 30 septembre**.

Donc, si vous n'avez pas eu l'occasion de renouveler votre adhésion, [cliquez ici](#) pour accéder à notre site Web, où il est facile de renouveler en ligne avec votre carte de crédit, ou de trouver des informations sur la façon de renouveler par courrier.

PRENEZ NOTE : VOUS N'AVEZ PAS BESOIN D'UN COMPTE PAYPAL POUR PAYER EN LIGNE.

Merci à tous ceux qui ont déjà renouvelé leur adhésion !

BPQ volunteers at work

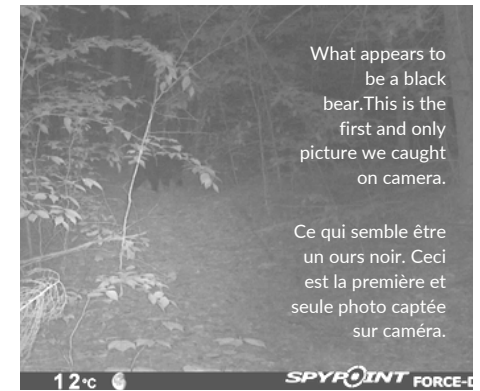
At the end of the summer, BPQ project coordinator Jules Delisle and a team of volunteers went out to retrieve the camera traps and autonomous recording units that were installed on our Lucas property in the Outaouais in February, as their part in our data collection project had come to an end. New images of passing animals were taken, as well as sound tracks which will be analyzed over the coming weeks to identify the bird species present during the nesting period. This time around, a total of 11 species could be seen, including three new species since spring!

The information gathered by the audio recorders and camera traps will help shape our management plan for the conservation of the varied habitats on the property.



The team of dedicated volunteers that retrieved the camera traps and audio recorders. Jules extended a special thanks to Daniel Néron, who has become familiar enough with the sanctuary that the volunteers were able to split into two groups and cover ground more efficiently.

L'équipe de bénévoles dédiés qui a récupéré les pièges photographiques et les enregistreurs audio. Jules remercie tout particulièrement Daniel Néron, qui s'est suffisamment familiarisé avec le sanctuaire pour qu'ils puissent se diviser en deux groupes et couvrir le territoire plus efficacement.



Interested in volunteering?

Contact us to find out how you can help with our projects:
volunteering@birdprotectionquebec.org

Le bénévolat vous intéresse ?

Contactez-nous pour savoir comment vous pouvez nous aider : volunteering@birdprotectionquebec.org



Focus on FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Upcoming Field Trips

Ahhh! Is there anything like winter birding? Freezing our fingers and toes off as we wander along snow-covered trails, looking for those elusive birds that only make an appearance (and we thought birds were smart!) in the winter. After a pause in December, our regular weekly trips will resume in January as we begin the annual search for Snowies, winter finches, ducks, and those hardy residents who stick around. And, in keeping with the theme of this issue, remember that by joining a trip, you are actually participating in citizen science since we submit our trip reports to eBird. So, see you soon, and don't forget our winter dress code: layers, layers, layers! -BPQ Field Trip Committee

NB: dates and destinations of trips are listed here so you can be sure to put the ones of interest in your calendar. Full details with driving instructions will be communicated before each week's event through our eNews bulletin, Facebook page and the iO Song Sparrow email group, allowing us the flexibility to make last-minute changes. **NOTE UNUSUAL START TIMES ARE IN RED / LES HEURES DE DÉPART INHABITUELLES SONT INDIQUÉES EN ROUGE.**

Saturday January 13 / samedi 13 janvier

Guides: Sheldon and Darlene Harvey

9:00 am - half day walking trip

09h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

MONTREAL BOTANICAL GARDENS JARDIN BOTANIQUE DE MONTRÉAL

<https://goo.gl/maps/FOQNe>

Saturday January 20 / samedi 20 janvier

Guide: Sue Denoncourt

8:30 am - half day walking trip

8h30 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

PARC-NATURE DU BOIS-DE-LIESSE

<https://goo.gl/maps/Z7gh3>

Saturday January 27 / samedi 27 janvier

Guide: Tom Long

8:00 am - half day walking trip

8h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

RÉCRÉOPARC SAINTE-CATHERINE

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/sb129u6EvPWKLiYs9>

Saturday February 3 / samedi 3 février

Guide: George Levtchouk

8:00 am - half day walking trip

8h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

MOUNT ROYAL CEMETERY CIMETIÈRE MONT-ROYAL

<https://goo.gl/maps/sJBezqt2fTs>

Saturday February 10 / samedi 10 février

Guide: Sheldon Harvey

8:00 am - half day walking trip

8h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

BOISÉ TREMBLAY, LONGUEUIL

(*new destination / nouvelle destination)

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/DHTFtcbvqY2skb48>

Saturday February 17 / samedi 17 février

Guide: Frédéric Hareau

8:00 am - half day walking and driving trip

08h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied et en voiture

L'ÎLE NOTRE-DAME / L'ÎLE SAINTE-HÉLÈNE

<https://goo.gl/maps/mLY52uaqHJHyQZqp7>

Saturday February 24 / samedi 24 février

Guide: Virginia Elliot

8:00 am - half day walking trip

08h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

Saturday March 2 / samedi 2 mars

Guide: Wayne Grubert

8:00 am - half day walking OR driving

08h00 - demi-journée, à pied OU en voiture

Saturday March 9 / samedi 9 mars

Guides: Katherine Collin, Julie Tremblay

8:00 am - half day walking trip

08h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

Saturday March 16 / samedi 16 mars

Guides: Sheldon & Darlene Harvey

8:00 am - half day walking trip

08h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

Saturday March 23 / samedi 23 mars

Guide: Ron Rind

8:00 am - half day walking trip

08h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

Saturday March 30 / samedi 30 mars

Guides: Sheldon & Darlene Harvey

8:00 am - half day driving trip

08h00 - demi-journée, excursion en voiture

PARC ANGRIGNON

<https://tinyurl.com/mr3w9w5c>

BEYOND THE WEST ISLAND / AU-DELÀ DE L'OUEST DE L'ÎLE

Itinerary will be determined based on road conditions and sightings leading up to the date. / L'itinéraire sera déterminé en fonction de l'état des routes et des rapports des oiseaux observés avant la date prévue.

MONTREAL TECHNOPARC

<https://tinyurl.com/yc7n7yb8>

PARC DE LA FRAYÈRE, BOUCHERVILLE

<https://goo.gl/maps/ktQvfi2tt9n>

POINTE-DU-MOULIN, ÎLE PERROT

<https://goo.gl/maps/Khx9NnsPUkw>

LACOLLE/ST-PAUL-DE-L'ÎLE-AUX-NOIX/ST-BLAIS-SUR-RICHELIEU/ST-JEAN-SUR-RICHELIEU

<https://goo.gl/maps/Nk5n7MUSDVRqG6um6>

A few things to know about our field trips

- Trips are open to all, members and non-members alike, so feel free to bring a friend. (Maybe they'll decide to join!) No reservations required.
- Our trips are learning and sharing experiences - beginner birders are always welcome and our experienced guides are eager to share their knowledge. Sometimes this means we take our time on the trails, often discussing the details of what is being seen.
- Please arrive on time. It's unfair to ask those who do to hang around when they could be looking for birds! Our guides won't wait more than a few minutes past the start time to head out.
- Trips are very rarely cancelled because of weather, and cancellations are at the discretion of the guide. Check the forecast the morning of the trip and bring appropriate shoes, raingear, etc. In extreme conditions (i.e. a blizzard!), check the BPQ Facebook page for a cancellation notice and use your own judgement if you don't see one.
- Ticks are a problem. We stick to trails but they are persistent. It is strongly recommended not to wear shorts or sandals.
- We love our dogs too! But not everyone is comfortable around them, and many of the sites we visit have eco-sensitive areas, so please leave pets at home.
- Although guides will try to build in comfort breaks when possible, be aware that there are not always facilities at the locations we visit.
- Many of our guides graciously provide their email addresses with their trip descriptions. If an instruction is unclear or you have a trip-related question, you can contact them directly.

Fun in the field!

S'amuser sur le terrain !



...or should we say freeze?
...ou se geler ?



What's a bird in the hand worth?
Qui ne veut pas d'un oiseau dans la main ?



Best tripod ever!
Mieux que le trépied !



Rest time...who knew birding was such hard work?

L'observation des oiseaux est un travail si difficile que les pauses sont de rigueur !



Focus on FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Past field trips

We fit in 13 fall trips before taking our usual winter break to prepare for the Christmas Bird Counts in December. Visiting some of our favourite fall spots, we encountered the usual unpredictable weather conditions that ranged from beautiful sunny early fall days to cold, wind and rain as the season wore on. This resulted in a couple of sparsely-attended trips but overall we had good size groups and great company. Thanks to everyone who came out! - *BPQ Field Trip Committee*

02/09/23 - Tribute to Felix Hilton - Parc-Nature du Bois-de-l'Île-Bizard

Guide: Field Trip Committee (Wayne Grubert, Sheldon Harvey, Darlene Harvey)

Weather: Clear skies, warm

Number of Participants: 35; Number of Species: 47

Birds of Note: Virginia Rail, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Merlin, Marsh Wren, Magnolia Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Palm Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S148813009>

09/09/23 - St-Paul-de-l'Île-aux-noix and Saint-Blaise-sur-Richelieu, Haut-Richelieu region along the Richelieu River

Guides: Sheldon & Darlene Harvey

Weather: Mix of clouds and sun; mild

Number of Participants: 19; Number of Species: 41

Birds of Note: Green Heron, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Philadelphia Vireo, Bay-breasted Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler

eBird Trip Report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/156487>

16/09/23 - Refuge Faunique Marguerite-D'Youville, Île Saint-Bernard, Chateaugay

Guide: Tom Long

Weather: Mostly overcast

Number of Participants: 23; Number of Species: 57

Birds of Note: Blue-winged Teal, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue-headed Vireo, Tufted Titmouse, Swainson's Thrush, Warblers: Black and White, Tennessee, Nashville, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/qc/checklist/S150046503>

23/09/23 - Réserve Nationale de Faune du Lac Saint-François, Dundee, QC

Guides: Wayne Grubert & Sheldon Harvey

Weather: Early morning fog, then mainly sunny & warm

Number of Participants: 15; Number of Species: 55

Birds of Note: Blue-winged & Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Ruffed Grouse, Sandhill Cranes (19), Wilson's Snipe, American Bittern, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, Lincoln's Sparrow, Rusty Blackbird; Warblers: Black and white, Tennessee, Nashville, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S150565190>

30/09/23 - Parc-nature de la Pointe-aux-Prairies, Montreal

Guide: Claude Cloutier

Weather: Mild, mix of sun and cloud

Number of participants: 15; Number of Species: 42

Birds of Note: Wood Duck, Common Gallinule, Great Egret, Pileated Woodpecker, House Wren, Pine Siskin, Dark-eyed Junco, Warblers: Yellow, Blackpoll, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S151280409>

7/10/23 - Finnegan's Market and surroundings, Hudson

Guide: Wayne Grubert

Weather: Rain, heavy at times!

Number of Participants: 4; Number of Species: 24

Birds of Note: Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, Wild Turkey, Pied-billed Grebe, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwing

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S151631412>



Sandhill Cranes
Photo: Darlene Harvey

14/10/23 - RécréoParc, Sainte-Catherine

Guides: Sheldon & Darlene Harvey
Weather: Mix of sun and cloud; mild
Number of participants: 20; Number of Species: 35
Birds of Note: Common Merganser, Bonaparte's Gull, Common Loon, Turkey Vulture, American Kestrel, Swainson's Thrush, Dark-eyed Junco,
eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S152184862>

21/10/23 - Technoparc, Montreal (St-Laurent)

Guides: Katherine Collin, Julie Tremblay & Jim Harris
Weather: 13 C, rain, light breeze
Number of participants: 7; Number of Species: 31
Birds of Note: Wild Turkey, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Merlin, Hermit Thrush, Fox Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler
eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S152779435>

28/10/23 - Parc national d'Oka, Oka

Guide: Frédéric Hareau
Weather: Strong winds; squalls
Number of participants: 20; Number of Species: 37
Birds of Note: Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, Greater Scaup, White-winged Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Wild Turkey, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-tailed Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Fox Sparrow
eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S153254373>

04/11/23 - Parc des Rapides, LaSalle (Montreal)

Guide: Diane Demers
Weather: Partly cloudy with light breeze
Number of participants: 15; Number of Species: 43
Birds of Note: American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Black Scoter, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Loon, Black-crowned Night Heron, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Winter Wren
eBird checklists: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S153840968>
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S153842168>

11/11/23 - Morgan Arboretum, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue

Guide: Ron Rind
Weather: Temperature around the freezing mark
Number of participants: 35; Number of Species: 18
Birds of Note: Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Purple Finch
eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154324475>

18/11/23 - Hungry Bay, St-Louis-de-Gonzague, St-Timothée regions

Guides: Wayne Grubert & Sheldon Harvey
Weather: Mix of sun and cloud; windy, temperature near freezing mark
Number of Participants: 17; Number of Species: 31
Birds of Note: Snow Goose, American Wigeon, Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Loon, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Great Blue Heron, Snow Bunting, American Tree Sparrow

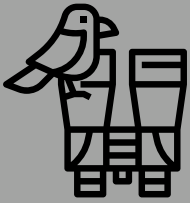
eBird checklists:
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154745486>
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154745483>
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154745779>

25/11/23 - Cap-St-Jacques Nature Park, Pierrefonds

Guide: Wayne Grubert
Weather: Cold with sunny skies
Number of Participants: 19; Number of Species: 20
Birds of Note: Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Herring Gull, Common Raven, American Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow
eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S155229729>

Brave birders at Hungry Bay
Photo: Sheldon Harvey





Pierre Bannon's **BIRD VIEWS**

A summary of interesting bird sightings in Montreal and around the province

The editors have come to the conclusion that *Pierre Bannon's Bird Views*, like a star hockey player's jersey number, should be retired in tribute to its author, who has himself retired his keyboard.

The seasonal data that Pierre was providing in his long-running column was a reprint of a more complete version he co-authored for the *North American Birds - Quebec Regional Report* and for *QuebecOiseaux* magazine's column "Observations Saisonnières", both of which will continue with new authors. Those interested can find the NAB current and past reports online at <https://www.aba.org/quebec-2/>.

The editors again extend their thanks to Pierre for his amazing work on these rare bird reports over the years, and, in particular, for having contributed them to *The Song Sparrow* for our readers.



Pierre Bannon **PARLONS D'OISEAUX**

Un bilan des observations intéressantes à Montréal et à travers la province

Les éditrices sont arrivées à la conclusion que *Parlons d'oiseaux* par Pierre Bannon, comme le numéro de chandail d'un joueur de hockey vedette, devraient être retirées en hommage à leur auteur, qui a lui-même mis son clavier à la retraite

Les données saisonnières que Pierre fournissait dans sa chronique de longue date étaient une réimpression d'une version plus détaillée qu'il avait coécrite pour le *North American Birds - Quebec Regional Report* et pour la chronique *Observations Saisonnières* du magazine *QuebecOiseaux*, qui continueront tous les deux avec de nouveaux auteurs. Les personnes intéressées peuvent consulter les rapports actuels et passés du NAB en ligne à l'adresse suivante : <https://www.aba.org/quebec-2/>.

Les rédacteurs remercient à nouveau Pierre pour le travail remarquable qu'il a accompli au fil des ans sur ces rapports d'oiseaux rares et, en particulier, pour avoir contribué à *The Song Sparrow* à l'intention de nos lecteurs.



Focus On Education

BPQ presents a series of monthly lectures from October through April, usually on the first Monday of each month. Events are for the most part held via Zoom in order to reach a broader audience.

Monday, January 8, 2024

7 PM - Via Zoom - [Register here](#)

Song Learning and Perception in an Australian Songbird, the Zebra Finch

Speaker: Sarah Woolley, Associate Professor, Department of Biology, McGill University



Vocal communication is a key component of social interactions across a diversity of species, including humans. Professor Woolley's lab studies songbirds, vocal communicators that learn their songs from a parent or tutor, then, after a period of practice, use those songs to communicate. In the species that she studies, the zebra finch, only males learn to sing. However, females pay close attention to male songs and use them in individual recognition, mate choice, and the formation of long-lasting social bonds. Sarah is interested in the dynamics of social interactions among birds and how different experiences affect social interactions and the learning and perception of song.



About our Speaker

Sarah Woolley was first introduced to neuroethology, the study of the neural circuits for natural behaviours, as an undergraduate student at Duke University where she received her BSc in Biology. She went on to complete a PhD with Dr. David Crews at the University of Texas at Austin studying the role of dopamine in social and sexual behaviour in whiptail lizards. As a postdoctoral fellow, she worked with Dr. Allison Doupe at the University of California, San Francisco, studying the role of the basal ganglia [groups of closely-related brain cells] in song production in zebra finches. In 2010 she joined the Department of Biology at McGill University. Professor Woolley is also a member of McGill's Center for Research on Brain, Language, and Music.

Monday, February 5, 2024

7 PM - Via Zoom - [Register here](#)

A bird's-eye view of BPQ's active sanctuaries with a focus on the conservation projects at the Alec Lucas Sanctuary

Speaker: Jules Delisle (iel/they), Project Coordinator

Over the years BPQ has accumulated, through purchase and donation, new properties such as Alfred Kelly Sanctuary, an addition to our property at Covey Hill, Montée Biggar in Godmanchester and, most recently, the Alec Lucas property near Plaisance. In recognition of our responsibility to manage our growing acreage of sanctuaries, the Board in 2022 hired Jules Delisle as a project coordinator. Jules has allowed us to make not only our immediate management priorities possible, but also continue important conservation projects and start new ones. Among these, Jules will give a closer look at those taking place at the Alec Lucas Sanctuary.



About our Speaker

Jules Delisle is a conservation biologist with a background in biological agriculture. Jules did their bachelors in ecology at UQAR (Rimouski), and after completing a MSc in plant biology in the entomology lab of IRBV (UdeM), they worked as part of the conservation team of Mount Royal Park where they worked with teams of volunteers for 8 years. Jules is currently acting as project coordinator for BPQ. Jules is in the process of completing their second year doing what they love most.

Monday, March 4, 2024

7 PM - Via Zoom - [Register here](#)

Taking the Pulse of our Northern Birds

Speaker: Dr. Jean-François (JF) Therrien, Scientific Director - Tadoussac Bird Observatory and Senior Scientist - Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

The presentation will review recent findings from Tadoussac Bird Observatory's research program, with an emphasis on migration monitoring of boreal and arctic species. The audience will witness how we manage to monitor a diverse suite of species over consecutive years via a slide show depicting field work situations and current results.



About our Speaker

Dr. Therrien received his Bachelor degree in biology (Université de Sherbrooke, 2003), Master degree in biology (Université Laval, 2006) and Ph.D. degree in biology (Université Laval, 2011), studying birds from the Arctic to the tropics. He currently acts as Senior Scientist at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary (Pennsylvania) and Scientific Director of Tadoussac Bird Observatory since 2022. He studies bird ecology in a conservation science context.

Enjoy a good educational *and* interesting podcast? Then check out The Warblers, a Birds Canada “Canadian podcast about all things birds”. The many available episodes cover a large range of topics and share information and insights on the world of birds and bird conservation.

Subscribe for free wherever you get your podcasts, or go to <https://thewarblers.buzzsprout.com/> to listen on a computer.



by Zofia Laubitz

Missed out on one of our lectures? Here are some cheep...er...
cheat...sheets created from our speakers' presentations

Big Risks for Tiny Seabirds in the North Atlantic: Risks and Conservation Strategies for the Leach's Storm-Petrel, by Sydney Collins - October 2, 2023

Our October speaker, Sydney Collins, is a Ph.D. candidate at Memorial University in St. John's, NL. She has a passion for seabirds, and the current focus of her research is Leach's Storm-Petrel, which she studies on Gull Island, in Witless Bay, Newfoundland's second-largest colony.



Leach's Storm-Petrel is the smallest breeding seabird in Atlantic Canada; adults weigh only about 45 grams. But although small, this storm-petrel can live as long as 30 years. These birds have a large range, including both Atlantic and Pacific oceans. There are a few colonies of Leach's Storm-Petrel in Quebec but the vast majority of them nest in Newfoundland and Labrador. Colonies, such as the huge one on Baccalieu Island, can contain millions of birds. The storm-petrels nest underground in burrows, which protect them from predators and weather; in fact, being burrow-nesters helps protect these birds from the heatwaves associated with climate change. Pairs usually return to the same burrow each year. How does a Leach's Storm-Petrel find its burrow from among the millions in the colony? By scent. These birds have a distinctive musky smell, easily detectable by humans, and apparently each individual's scent is unique.

The storm-petrels also use smell to find food—as far as 1,000 kilometres away! Like the King Penguins we learned about last December, Leach's Storm-Petrels feed primarily on myctophids (lanternfish), which they convert to a lipid-rich oil in their stomachs. The plankton the myctophids eat forms a gas (dimethyl sulphide) at the surface of the ocean, which the storm-petrels are able to detect. The storm-petrels' sense of smell is particularly useful to them since they're nocturnal creatures, unlike their predators, most of which are diurnal.

Leach's Storm-Petrels are the most abundant seabirds in the North Atlantic; nevertheless, their population has declined by 54% in the last three generations (about 40 years). The main reasons are believed to be pollution, climate change, habitat change, predation, and light attraction. The last factor has been a particular concern for Sydney and her fellow researchers, due to the increasing number of brightly lit oil platforms studding the ocean. Leach's Storm-Petrels tend to move toward light and can get caught in the "light catchment basin" (LCB), becoming unable to escape. They can't see well in the light so they become disoriented and may crash into buildings, be predated or, if the light comes from an oil platform, be incinerated by a gas flare. Storm-petrels seem to find even natural light, such as a full moon, to be potentially hazardous: adults are less active on full-moon nights, to avoid predators. On the other hand, chicks do not appear to be less likely to fledge at that time, contrary to what was predicted based on the reduced adult activity and there being fewer cases of stranding due to light pollution, suggesting that the moon itself may be a counter-attractant to the artificial light.

As Sydney pointed out, it's not easy to know when a nocturnal, burrow-nesting bird is fledging, particularly because young storm-petrels explore outside their burrow before they leave it for good. The solution is passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags—lightweight, non-invasive tags attached to the chicks—that are read by an antenna each time a chick moves through its burrow entrance; the last read the antenna picks up is considered to indicate fledging. Chicks fledge from mid-September to mid-October, on average two hours after sunset.

Light-caused stranding is a widespread phenomenon; it occurs all over Newfoundland and probably throughout the birds' range. We humans light up the coastlines with our activities, and oil platforms mean that the storm-petrels must contend with light out on the ocean too, on the way to their feeding grounds. Sydney and her colleagues wanted to know whether Leach's Storm-Petrels actually do pass through the oil platforms' LCBs as they fly out to feed. To find out, they applied kernel density analysis, which essentially determines where a given animal is most likely to be, that is, its home range. By deploying tiny GPS devices, they were able to track 121 individual storm-petrels and learn where these birds were travelling and foraging. They found out that, although the oil platforms are in the storm-petrels' home ranges, most of the birds didn't fly particularly close to them; in fact, many adult birds flew over the platforms during the daytime, when artificial light wouldn't pose a risk to them. (These birds may travel 12 to 16 hours to reach their foraging grounds, so they aren't only flying at night.) However, some individual birds did tend to fly inside the platforms' LCBs, putting them at greater risk than others. There is considerable individual variation in risk exposure during migration as well, although since most storm-petrels migrate to the same places every year, each bird's risk exposure tends to remain consistent.

Knowing where Leach's Storm-Petrels go at particular times of day and of year will help with their conservation. For example, it may be possible to turn off lights at critical times or modify them to make them less attractive, perhaps by changing their colour. In addition, volunteers can search for and rescue stranded birds if they know where they're likely to be and when. Sydney's research is leading to government policies to mitigate the impacts of light and stimulating public interest in these fascinating—and very cute!—little seabirds.

Backyard Birds: Beyond the Basics, by David Bird November 6, 2023



Most BPQ members are familiar with Dr. David Bird, Emeritus Professor of Wildlife Biology at McGill, eminent kestrel researcher, former BPQ board member, former columnist for the Gazette and Bird Watcher's Digest, author of numerous popular and scholarly articles and books on birds and birding, leader of birding tours, leader of the campaign to make the Canada Jay our national bird... and the list goes on!

In November, David was back among us, if only virtually, to answer some of the most common questions he has dealt with over the years, as well as some new ones thought up on the spot by the audience. Thus, his talk was structured as a series of questions and answers, organized into a few major areas of interest.

The first general topic was feeding birds. Why do we do it? Should we do it? How should we do it? As for why, as David pointed out, the main reason is that we ourselves find it enjoyable. Most of the time, the birds don't actually need the food we put out. That said, it can be helpful to them in times of shortage. Reassuringly, there's little evidence that feeding birds causes nutritional problems (except in the well-known case of bread fed to waterfowl); in fact, some birds seem to have better breeding success if they're fed. This could potentially have a downside if fed birds outcompete those that don't frequent feeders (competitive exclusion). Another negative aspect is the possibility of diseases spreading among the birds congregating at feeders, so hygiene is crucial, as is removing feeders temporarily if you observe sick birds. Regarding individual foods, white bread isn't a good idea, as mentioned; whole-grain bread may be preferable; bacon's inadvisable but peanut butter's fine. Handfeeding is OK in some circumstances (chickadees and their pals), but not in others (owls, endangered species, or birds that will make pests of themselves and turn your neighbours into bird haters). Interesting fact: although we humans like feeders in every colour of the rainbow, birds seem to favour green ones! David also touched on the vexed questions of capsaicin to deter squirrels (it's not yet known how it may affect birds); raptor deterrence (if you can't stand the carnage, you may just have to take your feeder down for a while); and cats (keep them indoors or get a catio).

The next overarching topic was water and housing. The issue of whether to keep heated bird baths going in winter is controversial; a sudden cold snap can kill birds if they've bathed and aren't dry, but clean drinking water is valuable to them year-round. One suggestion is to put rocks in a bird bath, so birds have room to drink but not to immerse themselves.

Regarding nesting and nestboxes, the question of whether nestboxes should be cleaned out each year is unresolved; some people think it's important to keep parasites down, whereas others feel it's completely unnecessary. On nesting materials, David advised against providing human hair, string, or dryer lint; all of these can be problematic, causing tangling hazards or other issues. And mallards that show signs of nesting in a yard with a pool should be dissuaded with gentle harassment; tiny ducklings that get into a pool can't get out again, so it's best to prevent the situation from arising in the first place.

And David answered numerous questions on a wide range of other issues. For example, windows: birds can be prevented from attacking their reflections by trying to block or conceal reflections during the breeding season. Window collisions can be reduced by judicious feeder placement, placing things in front of windows, and using bird-friendly tape. As for woodpeckers attacking the house, there's no magic solution, but covering the siding with bird netting can help. (And you might want to check to make sure you haven't got an insect infestation.)

Baby birds found on the ground should be left outside but placed above ground level, where they're safer. Injured birds should be taken to a rehabilitation centre, if you feel compelled to do so, but you could just let nature take its course. And speaking of injuries, if you have a small pet and you mistrust the intentions of your local Red-tailed Hawk or Great Horned Owl, you might want to buy a protective dog vest or jacket; there's a surprising number of styles available, some of which look pretty hardcore!

David also addressed such topics as albinistic and leucistic birds; bald birds (catastrophic moult); how birds stay warm in the winter (fluffing their feathers, huddling together, torpor, etc.); why birds eat wood ash, mortar and the like (possibly to obtain key minerals or to detoxify tannins); whether birds can smell (yes, some have a very good sense of smell); and much, much more.

An audience member asked about the effects of the summer's disastrous wildfires. David noted that adult birds, of course, are able to fly away from fires, but smoke can still damage their air sacs and harm their health. In addition, there may have been drastic effects on reproduction if eggs and/or chicks were destroyed; population studies should be done. Another audience question concerned the likelihood of "Stella," the celebrated Steller's Sea Eagle, mating with a Bald Eagle and producing hybrid offspring; David opined that this was not impossible but was highly unlikely.



FOCUS ON GRANTS

Every year BPQ is proud to award grants to fund research, conservation and education projects that are deemed to advance our mission to protect birds and their habitat. These grants represent our largest annual financial outlay.

In this column we share progress reports from our grant recipients.

**Applicant: Rose Lacombe, MSc Candidate
Department of Natural Resource Sciences, McGill University**

Northern Gannets (*Morus bassanus*) as monitors of mercury distribution in the Gulf of Saint-Lawrence

Abstract: Methylmercury (MeHg) is a widespread contaminant in marine environments and a toxin of special concern to wildlife and humans. Understanding the distribution of MeHg in the abiotic environment and marine species is important to understanding health risks posed to consumers. Seabirds are excellent monitors of contaminants in the environment, as they feed high up in the food chain, and exploit many commercially harvested fish species, thus, they can represent contamination exposure of humans as well. Northern Gannets are excellent monitors of MeHg in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence (GSL) because they travel far distances to forage and feed on commercially fished species. As their preferred prey has become limited in recent years, a switch to a higher diversity of prey may be changing the exposure of gannets to MeHg. Analyses of stable isotopes and MeHg in gannets and their prey will help better understand MeHg distribution in the GSL.

Objectives:

1. Use Northern Gannets as a sampling platform for fish to map out the spatial patterns of stable isotope and MeHg distribution in the GSL.
2. Assess how gannet MeHg loads are impacted by greater diversity in foraged prey between the 2017 and 2019 breeding seasons.

Decision:

On the recommendation of the Grants Committee, the board approved the awarding of a grant of \$4,000 for this project.

A report on the status of the project and some preliminary findings can be found [here](#).



POINT DE MIRE SUR LES SUBVENTIONS

Chaque année, POQ est fier d'accorder des subventions pour financer des projets de recherche, de conservation et d'éducation qui sont considérés comme faisant avancer notre mission de protection des oiseaux et de leur habitat. Ces subventions représentent notre plus grande dépense financière annuelle.

Dans cette rubrique, nous vous présenterons les rapports d'activité de nos bénéficiaires de subventions.

Demandeur : Rose Lacombe, Candidate, M. Sc.
Département des sciences des ressources naturelles, Université McGill

Les Fous de Bassan (*Morus bassanus*) comme observateurs de la distribution du mercure dans le golfe du Saint-Laurent

Résumé : Le méthylmercure (MeHg) est un contaminant largement répandu dans les milieux marins, qui peut avoir des effets négatifs et importants sur la santé de la faune et des humains. Il est important de comprendre comment le MeHg varie dans l'environnement marin, et dans les espèces qui y vivent. Les oiseaux marins sont d'excellents moniteurs de contaminants dans l'environnement, car ils se nourrissent en haut de la chaîne alimentaire et exploitent de nombreuses espèces pêchées commercialement. Ils peuvent donc servir comme indicateur du degré de l'exposition au MeHg chez les humains. Les Fous de Bassan sont d'excellents moniteurs de contaminants dans le golfe du Saint-Laurent (GSL) parce qu'ils parcourent de longues distances pour se nourrir d'espèces pêchées commercialement. Comme leurs proies préférées deviennent limitées ces dernières années, le passage à une plus grande diversité de proies pourrait modifier l'exposition des Fous de Bassan au MeHg. Les analyses d'isotopes stables et du MeHg chez les Fous de Bassan et leurs proies aideront à mieux comprendre la distribution du MeHg dans le GSL.

Objectifs :

1. Utiliser les fous de Bassan comme plate-forme d'échantillonnage des poissons pour cartographier les schémas spatiaux de distribution des isotopes stables et des MeHg dans le GSL.
2. Évaluer comment les charges de MeHg des fous de Bassan sont influencées par une plus grande diversité des proies fourragères entre les saisons de reproduction 2017 et 2019.

Décision :

Conformément à la recommandation du comité des subventions, le conseil d'administration a approuvé l'octroi d'une subvention de 4 000 \$ pour ce projet.

Un rapport (en anglais) sur l'état d'avancement du projet et quelques conclusions préliminaires est disponible [ici](#).

Wonderful winter visitors!

Les oiseaux d'hiver magnifique!



American Tree Sparrow
Bruant hudsonien
Photo: Tom Long



Pine Grosbeak
Durbec des sapins
Photo: Wayne Grubert



Common Redpoll
Sizerin flammé
Photo: Darlene Harvey



Snowy Owl
Harfang des neiges
Photo: Darlene Harvey



Bohemian Waxwing
Jaseur boréal
Photo: Darlene Harvey



Stalking Cardinals

A research project bringing people and cardinals together for better urban green space management

by
**Anne-Marie
Cousineau**

My name is Anne-Marie. I am a Master's student in Natural Resource Sciences at McGill University and I'm having the pleasure of spending the winter season studying how the Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) is moving across urban green spaces on the island of Montreal. Through this article, you'll discover not only how such a project is brought to life, but also how you (yes, you!) can help collect data for this research.

Photo: Ana Morales



If you live on the island of Montreal, you probably have noticed that urbanized areas just keep expanding year after year. And you're not wrong. Between 1966 and 2010 there was a steep decline in the surface of land that was considered a "connected" green space, going from 46% to a mere 6.5% in the Montreal Metropolitan Region. This decline in urban green space connectivity, and the often-associated biodiversity decline, calls for better nature management in large cities. And that raises the following question: how can we create, protect, and restore urban green spaces in a way that benefits both the people and the fauna living in or around them?

To find answers to this question I decided to team up with an iconic and easy to identify bird in the Montreal area, the Northern Cardinal. Birds are extremely relevant for this kind of study as they're excellent bioindicators for the health of the environment or ecological changes that are happening. By following the Northern Cardinals in the city during the winter season and by looking at which areas they prefer, we'll learn what makes an urban green space "good" for the birds that spend the winter with us. The results of this study could help guide future nature management policies so that urban green spaces are planned in a way that benefits not only the people living around them but also the birds living in them.

Here's how the Northern Cardinals are helping us. They have been equipped with two very important pieces of gear, the first one being a radio tag from the Motus Wildlife Tracking System and the second one being a unique colour combination of plastic bands on their legs. With the help of the banders at the McGill Bird Observatory, cardinals were caught using mist nets and then translocated to three distinct study sites. The first, near Concordia University's Loyola campus, serves as a heavily urbanized area. The second location is in Baie d'Urfe, a residential sector with a fair amount of greenery. The final site is the more natural area of the McGill Bird Observatory itself. Once the birds were released in these locations, my fieldwork assistant Mackenzie Guest and I began basically running around trying to find where they are hanging out. We're doing this using a hand-held receiver and antenna combo, which, let's be honest, gives us a certain "alien hunter" look! We began tracking the cardinals in October 2023 and will continue all the way to April 2024, to have a collection of GPS points giving us insights on the whereabouts of our dear coworkers through different urban green spaces.

What is the Motus System?

In broad terms, it's an international collaborative network to track not only birds, but also bats and insects. It uses automated radio telemetry to track very small organisms at very large scales (tracking the migration of the monarch butterfly for example). Automated receiver towers are deployed by researchers, individuals or organizations and can detect if an animal equipped with a tag passes by. The first Motus station on the island of Montreal was funded by a BPQ grant in 2016, and now we have six! What's amazing with this technology is that all the data is shared and available to the public, making it useful for present and future projects!

If you want to learn more about it or explore the available data, here's the link to the Motus Web page: <https://motus.org>

Since a major part of this study is taking place in urban areas and residential sectors, I thought it would be an incredible opportunity to include the community in data collection. I think participatory science can bring highly valuable information to any research project into which it can fit. While Mackenzie and I are tracking the birds two or three days per week, and we always try to cover as much ground as possible, these flying fellows are often quite hard to find. This is where participatory science can come to the rescue!



Anne-Marie the Alien Hunter
Photo: Patricia Blanchard



Antenna
Photo: Barbara Frei
Mast
Photo: Ana Morales



Photo: Barbara Frei

You might be wondering how you can help collect the data if you don't have a receiver and antenna to track the cardinals. Well, the colour bands I mentioned earlier are specially designed to enable identification of individuals without any equipment other than your eyes!

Each bird has two bands on each leg. On the right leg, you'll be able to see a metal band and a plastic band. The metal band is a unique identification number to help track the bird's movements if it's recaptured any time throughout its lifespan. The plastic band is either blue (for the males) or red (for the females). On the left leg, you'll notice two plastic bands with a colour combination that's unique for every bird in this project. The order of the bands on both legs is important and the way to record this kind of data is "this colour over that colour". For example, for the bird in this picture, you would take note that on the right leg, the cardinal has metal over red, and on the left leg it has blue over red. And that's it, with this information I will be able to identify which individual you have seen!

To allow you to share your observations with me, I'm using the iNaturalist platform, which is available on a computer, or as a smartphone application. On iNaturalist, you can create a free account (there are no fees at all to use it), and you'll be able to log "observations". You won't need to add a picture of the cardinal you saw; however,

it's *very important* to note the order of the coloured bands you saw as this is what allows me to track which individuals are where. When uploading an observation, there's no need to specify the project and you don't need to select anything, you just have to publish the observation and it will automatically be added to the project, it's that simple! You can also join the project as a member (again, completely free) and keep track of what's happening as I hope to post regular updates in the "Project Journal" section.

More on iNaturalist:

If you want to see the project on iNaturalist's website, it can be found at: <https://inaturalist.org/projects/urban-cardinals-project>.

Anne-Marie has also created a step-by-step guide, available in PDF, on how to install and use iNaturalist, either on a phone or on a computer. You'll be logging observations in no time!

[English version](#)

[Version français](#)

With your help, the findings of this project have the potential to generate guidelines and advice on ways to manage our urban green spaces that benefit not only us as a community, but also all the birds that use those green spaces to survive.

Winter can be a rather dull season to go through for a lot of people, yet we tend to forget that birding doesn't stop after the fall migration and going out to observe our resident bird species during the cold season can be fun and exciting. Not that many bird species are tough enough to withstand our winter's harsh conditions, so we must appreciate those that stick with us - I like to think that spotting a bright red cardinal while everything around us seems to be some variation of grey can bring a bit of joy to someone's day. And if going out when the temperature goes below zero isn't your thing, don't worry! These birds love to visit backyards, especially if you have bird feeders, giving you a spectacle to watch from the comfort of your home.

So, if you live close to one of the three study sites and you'd like to give us a hand, use iNaturalist to send us your observations and, if you see me walking around in your neighbourhood, don't hesitate to come say hi or ask questions, I'm always happy to have bird-related conversations!

I wish all the Bird Protection Quebec readers a very happy holiday season and a winter full of our charismatic Northern Cardinals!



Photo: Barbara Frei



Locations of the three study sites to which the Cardinals were translocated after banding



A tale of two BBS routes

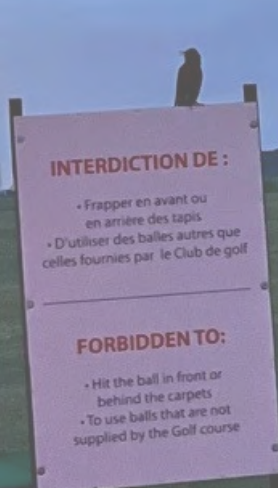
Story and photos: Betsy McFarlane

Dawn

You are standing in the parking lot of a driving range, Stop 1 on your Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) route, waiting for the 4:38 am start time.

It's pitch black, chilly (only 12 C), and you are barely awake, despite two cups of coffee. Not a sound yet, aside from the faint hum of a ventilation system and a dog barking. It's that liminal time between the dead of night and first light. However, the robins aren't fooled. They are primed and ready. At first, one robin starts singing, and then another, in hurried triplets.

You notice it's getting lighter, and glance at your phone. It's finally time!



INTERDICTION DE :

- Frapper en avant ou en arrière des tapis
- D'utiliser des balles autres que celles fournies par le Club de golf

FORBIDDEN TO:

- Hit the ball in front or behind the carpets
- To use balls that are not supplied by the Golf course

You set your timer for three minutes. A wall of sound from the carolling robins engulfs you in all directions. But how many robins are there, really? You turn around, listening intently, and note the birds on your clipboard in the direction that you think they are singing from. A Song Sparrow starts up its relentlessly chipper song and a Killdeer and an Eastern Phoebe join in, providing the rhythm section. Finally, you hear the faint fizzy wisp of a Savannah Sparrow. You tally up the robins on your clipboard and see that you have six. Is that too many or too few? Your timer goes off. Too late. No time to ponder.

You get in your car, set the trip odometer to 0 and drive 0.8 kilometres give or take to Stop 2. On your list of stop descriptions, it is described in typical fashion as “three telephone poles before number 768, a yellow brick house.” You pull over as far as you can, put on your emergency flashers, get out of the car, set your timer for three minutes, and start the process again. The habitat, and the birds, are much the same as at the first stop.

Stop 3 is beside a small woodlot and stream. A Wood Thrush and several American Redstarts are singing, like last year. According to the BBS data, the Wood Thrush has experienced a vertiginous drop of 90% in the province since 1970. However, Redstart numbers are stable and, indeed, they are the second most common warbler species on the route, behind Yellow Warbler.

By Stop 5, the sun has fully risen, and you pause beside a cow pasture. The cows mosey slowly over as you are counting—they are always curious, especially the calves. Bobolinks and Vesper and Savannah Sparrows are singing, crows are flying in the background, and you can hear Canada Geese. You had Eastern Meadowlarks here in the first years of doing the route, but they have now disappeared. According to the BBS data from 1970 to 2014, meadowlark populations decreased by 70% in Quebec, while Vesper Sparrows decreased by 90% and the trend for Savannah Sparrow is unclear.

From suburbia to farm country

Next, you have about 15 stops along the suburban streets of Coteau-du-Lac, paralleling the St. Lawrence River. In the newer sections, the streets are mainly peopled with Common Grackles, House Sparrows (very common along this route), European Starlings and yet more American Robins. According to the 1990-2014 BBS data, robins increased by 16% in Bird Conservation Region (BCR) 13 (Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Plain). However, in older sections with mature trees, species like Great-crested Flycatcher and Baltimore Oriole are fairly common. Tree Swallows fly above many stops and Cedar Waxwing and American Goldfinch are also omnipresent.

Then, during a very short stint in downtown Les Coteaux, which is busy even at 7:00 am, you pick up Chimney Swifts. You cross the highway and start the portion of the route that parallels Rivière Delisle, a slow flowing river that meanders through cropland. Along a shrub-lined riverbank, you find a little colony of “fitzbewing” Willow Flycatchers and a bit later, two families of Spotted Sandpipers, although they are out of your line of sight and you can only hear them. The Willow Flycatchers are present

A continental endeavour

In the heart of the breeding season—in Canada, typically in June—3,000 or so BBS volunteers across North America are also deciphering the dawn chorus. They are running 3,000 BBS routes from Utqigvik, Alaska (route 03132; 71 N latitude), on the Arctic Ocean, to Division Del Norte (route 28032; 22 N latitude) in the State of Tamaulipas, Mexico. Approximately 1,000 of these routes are in Canada.

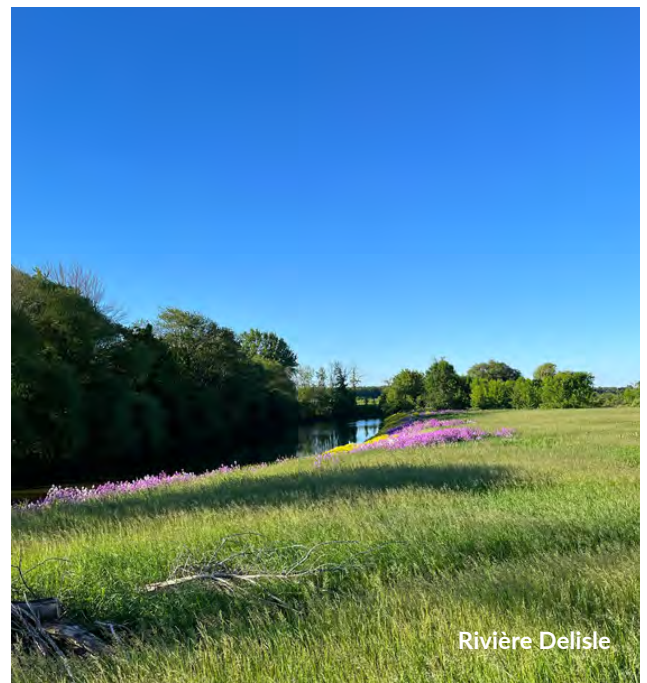
Some examples of dawn choruses that might be heard by BBSers can be heard at the following links:

Dawn chorus on Victoria island, Nunavut (first example):

<https://soundapproach.co.uk/ten-fabulous-dawn-choruses-to-celebrate-international-dawn-chorus-day-2-may-2021/>

Dawn chorus in Veracruz, Mexico:

http://www.mirror-pole.com/natr_rec/090101/f_gonzalez.htm



some years and absent in others on this route. Oddly, Alder Flycatchers seem—anecdotally at least—to have become less common, and I wonder if the Willow Flycatchers perhaps do better in slightly older shrubby habitat. According to the 1970-2014 BBS data, the Willow Flycatcher has increased strongly in Quebec, as it has in neighbouring U.S. states with second atlas projects, perhaps due to climate warming.

After a few stops in the town of Saint-Polycarpe, you reach a hayfield that reliably produces several pairs of Bobolinks. You are deeper into farm country now and Barn Swallows and Killdeer have become more numerous. At two stops, you even spot a few Chimney Swifts high in the sky, which may be nesting in chimneys in the older farmhouses. Finally, towards the end, you come to a section of fallow crop fields stretching to the horizon. In this unprepossessing habitat, birds are few and far between but, if you strain your ears, you can pick up the faint high pitched song of a Horned Lark. I used to have this species on several stops on this route, but this is now their last stand. According to the overall BBS data, Horned Lark numbers plummeted by 75% from 1990 to 2014 in southern Quebec and Canada as a whole.

Landscape and bird changes

Although the habitat along the Les Cèdres route (#76107) appears to have been fairly stable over the past dozen years, no doubt more subtle changes were occurring in the background, such as the emerald ash borer invasion and the impacts of climate change. In contrast, landscape changes were glaringly obvious on the Van Bruyssel (#76136) route, north of La Tuque, which I did for seven years. The first part of the route went through logging clearcuts. The first few years, low shrubs and herbs sprouted up among the logging slash but then, due to natural vegetation succession, taller shrubs and then small trees took over. As this happened, the Lincoln's Sparrows and Mourning Warblers disappeared and were replaced by Alder Flycatchers and then American Redstarts.

Chandler Robbins

The BBS formula is simple and remains basically the same as it was when the survey began in 1966: a 40 km (39.4 km to be exact) route with 50 stops, 0.8 km apart, at each of which you count all the birds heard and seen in 3 minutes. This simplicity and uniformity over time no doubt represent some of the BBS's main strengths.

The BBS protocol was devised in the first half of the 1960s by Chandler Robbins, a US Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, prominent Mid-Atlantic birder (co-author of the Golden field guide) and another birder with a bird name. Initially, Robbins planned to use the BBS to study the effects of pesticides on bird populations, drawing on his experience developing roadside surveys for American Woodcock, Mourning Dove and Wilson's Snipe. But the BBS soon turned into something much bigger, a continent-wide survey of bird populations.

That first year, Robbins contacted Anthony Erskine in Canada to see if the Canadian government would be interested in joining the effort. The answer was an enthusiastic yes. They set up a network of state and provincial coordinators to recruit local birders, a network that still stands today. The first routes were run in the U.S. and Canada in 1966.

You may ask, why a roadside survey instead of surveying blocks of territory, like in a breeding bird atlas? Basically, these surveys cover a great deal of ground in a fairly short time and are very cost effective.

In addition, Robbins wanted to avoid the bias that comes when surveyors are allowed to pick their own survey plots, and inevitably choose the birdiest ones in parks and protected areas. However, the greatest human disturbance usually occurs in less attractive habitats. Therefore, the start of the routes and the direction they run in were selected randomly.

Aside from bird numbers, a variety of other information is collected, including weather conditions, ambient noise, and the number of cars passing by at each stop. These metadata are used to refine the count data and determine the level of uncertainty associated with it. Since the routes remain the same (aside from some necessary adjustments), they also reflect the habitat changes and urbanization that are occurring across North America, although the habitat-related aspects of the survey data are just beginning to be explored.

From the beginning, the BBS has had its detractors. Differences in observers' skills and detection rates can result in unhelpful apples-to-oranges comparisons and bias the data. In addition, surveying bird populations along roadsides may leave out more remote habitats, such as wetlands and forest interior. For obvious reasons, the BBS does not do a good job covering waterbirds, nor raptors, which are not very active in the early morning hours when it takes place. In addition, colony nesting birds, which breed in very specific locations, will often be missed in the random sample of stops. For example, my Les Cèdres route takes me past extensive marshes near Hydro-Quebec's Les Cèdres generating station. Even though I can see this habitat from my stop, it is so far away that I can only identify birds flying above the marsh, undoubtedly missing many marsh bird species.

Similarly, shifts in distribution due to climate change have continued since I first began doing my surveys, although this was more noticeable on the Van Bruyssel route. This route was an intriguing mixture of boreal forest, and urban and agricultural habitats. More southern species like Gray Catbird, Eastern Phoebe and Indigo Bunting seemed to become more common in the later years, particularly in the agricultural parts of the route.

The 50-year BBS retrospective, published in 2017 and co-authored by past BPQ board member Marie-Anne Hudson, revealed declines in grassland birds and aerial insectivores, trends I have seen anecdotally on both my routes. Bobolinks don't seem quite as common on the Les Cèdres route as when I first took it over, and meadowlarks have completely disappeared. In the early years on the Van Bruyssel route, Bank Swallows were plentiful in one borrow pit by the side of the road, but had vanished by the last year I ran the route. Bank Swallows have declined by 99% in Quebec between 1970 and 2014, likely due in part to changes in the availability of this kind of human-created habitat.

A long-distance sprint

In BBS parlance, routes are run and this is an apt use of the verb. In the early years, I found the pace grueling, requiring lots of concentration and mental energy. I also found it hard to complete all the stops within the 5 ½ hours' allotted time. However, doing the exact same route year after year makes it go faster, since you get to know the stops by memory and you also know what birds to expect.

Surveyors are usually accompanied by an assistant for safety and logistical reasons. For example, while the surveyor is counting and recording birds, the assistant can record passing cars and keep track of the time. Although the assistant is free to bird during the point counts, only the birds that the surveyor has seen and/or heard can be counted in order to ensure data standardization (the higher species or number totals that might result would bias the data).

Safety is a major issue because you are stopping multiple times on the side of the road in the early hours of the morning, often with no shoulder to pull over in. Visibility—using your car's emergency flashers and wearing the safety vest provided—is key, as is keeping an eye out for approaching cars. (The orange vest can also give you a certain amount of legitimacy in the eyes of construction workers and the like, as [BBS assistants] Gay and Averill and I found out). Keeping track of distant traffic was particularly important on the La Tuque route because our last few stops were on a road heavily used by logging trucks. These trucks travelled at a terrifying speed, lurching around corners with their loads tipping precariously and stirring up huge clouds of dust, making you and your vehicle invisible to the next cars. In 2013, to avoid the logging trucks, we pulled off the road right into a patch of shrubs, opened the window, and a Canada Warbler nearly flew into our car.

BBS Assistant Averill Craig scanning the fields for Horned Larks in Sainte-Justine-de-Newton



Navigating your route

Another way assistants can help is by memorizing the stops and by developing and refining the stop descriptions. To navigate, participants are given a map of the stops, written stop descriptions, and the GPS points. We had to prepare the stop descriptions for both our routes. This is not as cut-and-dried as it may seem since houses (and house numbers) are often few and far between. Sometimes you are lucky and the description is obvious: e.g., the parking lot of a funeral home, an unusual turquoise house and highway signs (BBSers have a fondness for specific highway signs like snowmobile crossings).

Averill was particularly gifted in doing these descriptions and would add comments like “friendly farmer” (we spent 10 minutes chatting with him) and “manure slurry pond” (no explanation needed). When visible landmarks were lacking, we had to rely on nebulous infrastructure like guardrails. When really desperate, we resorted to things like “big willow in corner of field”—very ephemeral since trees can fall or be cut down--or “small gravel opening to farm field,” no doubt eliciting an eyeroll from the coordinator. I never mastered navigating by using the GPS coordinates but, since then, I have discovered that creating eBird locations for the stops is the best way to go (you can actually cruise slowly to your stop and watch the distance in metres decrease to 0, signifying that you are right on top of it). These technologies weren’t available, of course, when I started doing my BBS route.

Be prepared

Scouting your route when you first take it on, and then every year before you run it, is extremely important. Part of your route may be rendered impassible by construction, flooding, fallen rocks or other contingencies and you will need a Plan B (contact the coordinator if in doubt). Scouting is also a chance to get reacquainted with the stops. You also need to determine the best day of the week to run the route. Doing my Les Cèdres route would be impossible on a weekday because there is far too much commuter traffic. The best time is the morning after the Saint-Jean Baptiste holiday when I figure much of the population is still asleep.

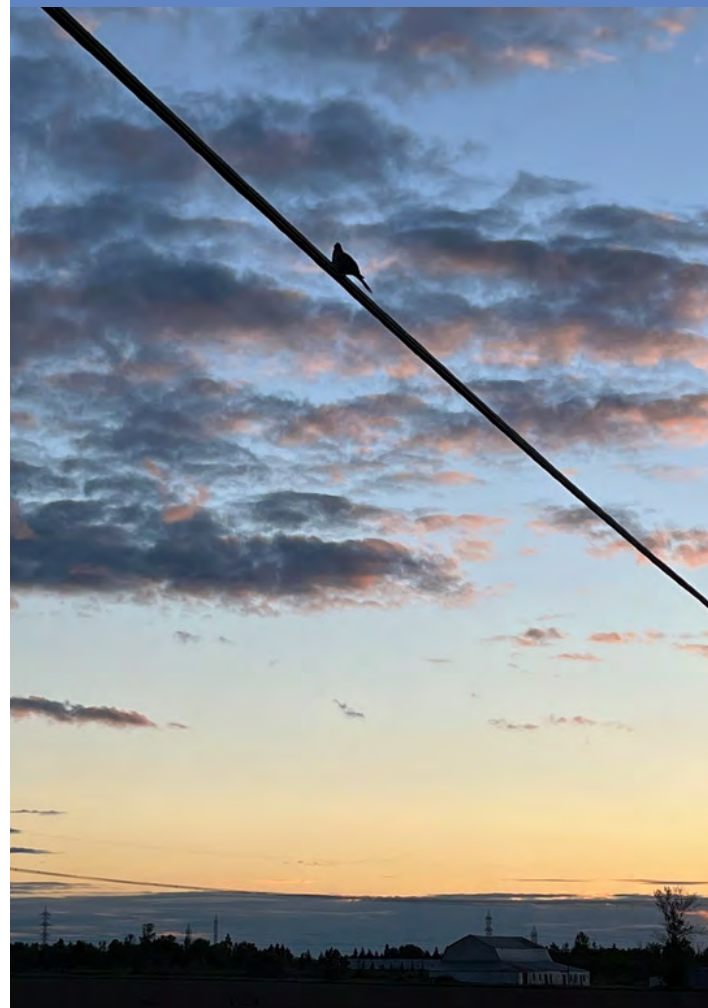
Scouting is also a good opportunity to scope out potential bathroom and coffee stops. I do have a Tim Horton’s on my route, which is a godsend, but most BBSers with rural routes have to bring along a thermos of coffee and snacks and find a handy bush. Snacks are also eaten on the run, so small-bite items are the best. You will be finished by 9:30 or 10 at the latest, so you can stop for breakfast afterward.

Who can participate?

In 2006, I jumped at the chance to take on my first route north of La Tuque (Van Bruyssel) after attending a BPQ talk on the BBS given by then Quebec coordinator Gilles Falardeau. I enjoy birding by ear and the BBS seemed like an intriguing challenge and an excellent way to contribute to citizen science. I took on my second route in 2012 (initially the old Hudson route but because of the amount of traffic it was modified and renamed Les Cèdres).

To be a BBS surveyor you need good hearing and eyesight, a thorough knowledge of the songs, calls and visual identification of all the breeding species along your route, access to suitable transportation and the intention to participate in the survey for at least two years. The birding-by-ear aspect is particularly important because, given the strict three minute window at each stop, most birds will be identified by their vocalizations. With the 50 stops and the recommended five-and-a-half hour time limit, there isn’t any time to visually confirm the identification of a bird whose vocalization you are not sure of. The ability to quickly and accurately identify all birds in the area by sight and by sound is therefore critical.

A Mourning Dove at an early morning stop



The weather requirements for running the route are very specific (from the instructions):

*Good visibility, little or no precipitation, light winds. Occasional light drizzle or a very brief shower may not affect bird activity but fog, steady drizzle, or prolonged rain should be avoided. ... Counts should preferably be made on mornings when the wind is less than 13 km/h (8 mph) and not done if the wind exceeds 19 km/h (12 mph). **If you can walk faster than the wind is blowing, wind conditions are very satisfactory.***

This can drastically reduce the number of days in June when it is possible to do the survey.

The end

So, 49 more stops, and about five and a half hours later, you reach Stop 50, in Sainte-Justine-de-Newton near the Ontario border, where the provincial highway intersects with a quaint country road overhung with trees. The sun has been up for five hours, it's getting warm and the birds have mainly gone quiet. An Eastern Wood-Pewee is singing languidly in the small woodlot where you heard a Scarlet Tanager last year and the horses up the road are munching their hay.

But you are not finished yet. Aside from the scouting day and the day of the survey itself, plan for data entry afterward, an equally important and necessary part of citizen science. Data are entered via the US Fish and Wildlife website, a reminder that this is officially the North American Breeding Bird Survey. This site is also accessible to the public and you can find all sorts of interesting data on it.

So, why do it?

Well, for one thing, it's a fun challenge. And, for patch birders like me, I think BBS routes are a kind of a glorified expanded patch. Every year, you get to see your old friends in the same places. Every year, I look forward to counting the Willow Flycatchers along the river and wonder if the Horned Larks have made it back to breed for another year. I worry if I will see the Chimney Swifts in Les Coteaux or the Purple Martins along the waterfront. Your BBS route takes you to places where you wouldn't ordinarily think to bird, and makes you slow down and find out what is really there. You also get an intimate view of the habitat and inhabitants and a sense of stewardship. I was thrilled to find out that Rivière Delisle, with its heavily agricultural watershed, contains at least one fish species at risk. In a way, it's like Christmas, every year it's the same but different and gives a sense of the span of time as you look back and look ahead. I also hadn't realized how few routes there were near Montreal (Les Cèdres is only one of two), which makes it doubly important as a snapshot of how urbanization and intensive agriculture are affecting birds here.

But more importantly, over the last 50 years, the mainly volunteer BBS force has collected invaluable data on the populations of close to 600 bird species. These data are unmatched in their degree of standardization, breadth of time (from 1966 to the present) and geographical scope. Population biologists and conservation managers often turn to this information when studying changes in populations of bird species and making conservation decisions, for example, to identify species of conservation concern and candidates for listing under the Species at Risk Act (Canada) and the Endangered Species Act (United States) or to assess species' recoveries. In the decade beginning in 2010, 400 scientific publications relied extensively on BBS data. In addition, the BBS data collected in Quebec played a significant role in Quebec's second breeding bird atlas.

Since we aging boomers are slowly losing our hearing, younger, sharper ears are always needed for the BBS. If you're interested and meet the requirements outlined on the previous page, contact the regional coordinator in your province. Information on who to contact and the routes needing surveyors can be found in the links on the next page.

Links:

[Routes needing a surveyor](#) (the Van Bruyssel route appears to be open this year!)

[Regional coordinator contact information](#)

[ECCC, information for BBS participants](#)

[ECCC, information on population trends by species, as well as reliability of BBS data](#)

[US Fish and Wildlife Service BBS site](#)

[50-year retrospective on the BBS](#)

[Strategic plan for the BBS](#)

It's worth participating just for the sunrises!

MARSH MONITORING

By Barbara MacDuff

A close-up photograph of a Sora duck standing in a marshy area. The duck is positioned in the center-right of the frame, facing left. It has a dark brown back with white spots, a greyish-blue body, and a bright yellow beak. The duck is surrounded by tall, thin grasses and reeds, some of which are in the foreground, partially obscuring the duck. The background shows a body of water with some lily pads. The overall scene is a natural, marshy environment.

Are you dreaming of warm summer days and early mornings filled with delightful bird song? The Marsh Monitoring Program (MMP) is looking for volunteers to carry out bird surveys on two different days in June and/or July for an hour each day. It's fun and easy to participate in the program, which is conducted at a time of year when bird watching is at its peak.

Sora
Photo: Yousif Attia

The MMP began in 2004, following recommendations in Quebec's Waterbird Conservation Plan and offers participants an opportunity to contribute toward conserving wetlands, one of North America's most threatened ecosystems. Wetlands provide vital services such as filtering and purifying water, protecting shorelines, reducing erosion, storing carbon, and providing rich habitat for a diverse range of plants and animals. These important ecosystems are facing declines in number, size and quality and are threatened by rising sea level, pollution, filling and draining.

The goal of the program is to contribute to the conservation and management of wetlands in Canada through the collection of statistically reliable monitoring information on marsh birds and habitat. It also seeks to increase public awareness about the importance of wetland and marsh bird species conservation. The survey is supported through funds from Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Marsh birds, like the American Bittern and Sora, are sensitive to bioaccumulation of pollutants and changes to their habitats. These more secretive species are not adequately surveyed through other large scale national surveys like the Breeding Bird Surveys and Christmas Counts.

Methodology and Commitment

The surveys, which include using recorded playback, may be conducted in the morning or evening, but once a time of day has been chosen, it should remain constant between visits and for all subsequent years. The official survey window is May 27th to July 12th. A survey route may have from one to eight stations, ideally separated by a straight-line distance of at least 350 metres. Each route is surveyed twice per year, for 15 minutes, and visits are separated by a period of at least 10 days.

Because of the use of recorded calls, it is important to ensure that only one participant is assigned to a given site. (A helper is welcome and appreciated!)

The focal species are Least Bittern, American Bittern, Common Gallinule, American Coot, Sora, Virginia Rail, Yellow Rail, and Pied-billed Grebe. Focal species rely on marsh habitats for one or more stages of their life cycle.

Information on other bird species, as well as plants and amphibians, is also collected during the survey.



At each survey station participants broadcast a 15-minute soundtrack. This starts with a five-minute silent listening period divided into five one-minute periods. Activity of focal species is recorded minute by minute per individual. Data for non-focal species are grouped for the five-minute period. This is followed by a second five-minute period during which calls of a number of focal species are broadcast for 20 seconds followed by a listening period. The survey ends with a second five-minute silent listening period. Survey results can be submitted on paper or electronically.

The process is simple and educational, and, while standing quietly, you may even encounter a mammal like a deer, a skunk or a red fox.

Virginia Rail
Photo: Chuck Kling

Survey Locations

I have been participating in Marsh Monitoring for over ten years. My first experience, with help from Chris Murphy and Gay McDougall Gruner, was at Parc-Nature de la Pointe-aux-Prairies located on the Eastern tip of Montreal. A challenge here is that vegetation like phragmites and cattails have grown to heights of 6-10 feet, making observations difficult. Yet the marshes are rich with many birds like Northern Harrier and Black-crowned Night Heron. One of the survey highlights, however, was an adult Virginia rail with 6 young at the marsh's edge.

The second marsh I survey, with help from Alison Hackney and Gay McDougall Gruner, is a small marsh off Chemin de l'Anse a l'Orme. When we began surveying there it was difficult to access as we had to cross two streams via a shaky, fallen log and slippery rocks, and so on many days we came home with wet feet! While the phragmites and cattails are almost 10 feet tall here, making observations difficult, the delightful birdsong we heard from the woods behind us included Black-and-White Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Hermit Thrush.

We survey for an hour in the morning and sometimes find evidence of "party" activities, such as bonfires and paintball competitions, that have taken place the previous evening. As a result, we often felt the need to do a clean up after the bird survey.

My most recent survey has been conducted, with the help of Gay McDougall Gruner, at a marsh at the McGill Bird Observatory. This small marsh has two survey stations where we have heard Virginia and Sora rails as well as American Bittern. It is always a pleasure to hear the beautiful songs of Baltimore Oriole, Yellow warbler and Scarlet Tanager from the surrounding woods here. As with the the previous two marshes, the cattails and phragmites have grown to heights over six feet tall which makes observations on open water difficult. We hear many Red-winged Blackbirds but the birds and their nesting sites are difficult to see.

Thinking about the visits to these marshes brings back great memories and is worth the effort despite the challenge of mosquitoes (but lots of insect repellent and mosquito netting helps!) Hopefully, the problem of spreading phragmites and cattails in these marshes can be dealt with in the near future.

The Marsh Monitoring Program couldn't exist without volunteers so thank you to Bird Protection Quebec members who participate. I hope that you will consider signing up for a marsh monitoring survey in the spring as volunteers are desperately needed.

To get involved, contact the Quebec Program Coordinator, Andrew Coughlan, at acoughlan@oiseauxcanada.org
You can also find more information here: <https://www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/marsh-monitoring-program>



EYE ON OUR SANCTUARIES

This feature column introduces our readers to the wildlife reserves that BPQ owns and manages as part of its efforts to actively protect bird habitat

Alderbrooke Marsh Sutton, Quebec

by Jules Delisle

October 28, 2022 - 9 am I have arranged to meet Isabelle René, project coordinator for the Nature Conservancy of Canada, on Macey road in Sutton for a first visit to this half-forest, half-marsh sanctuary. We leave our cars at the edge of the road and head out on foot, crossing two neighbouring properties in order to reach the boundary of the sanctuary about one kilometre in from the road. A mixed forest with large mature trees and many conifers greets us, before opening out into the wetland. The origin of the site's name makes perfect sense, as we walk between the dense alders bordering the wetland. Two stray grosbeaks pass overhead as we reach the end of what is possible to cross on foot, given the increasingly soggy ground in the alder grove. From here we have an excellent view over the whole marsh; I take note of this point as interesting for a possible ornithological inventory.

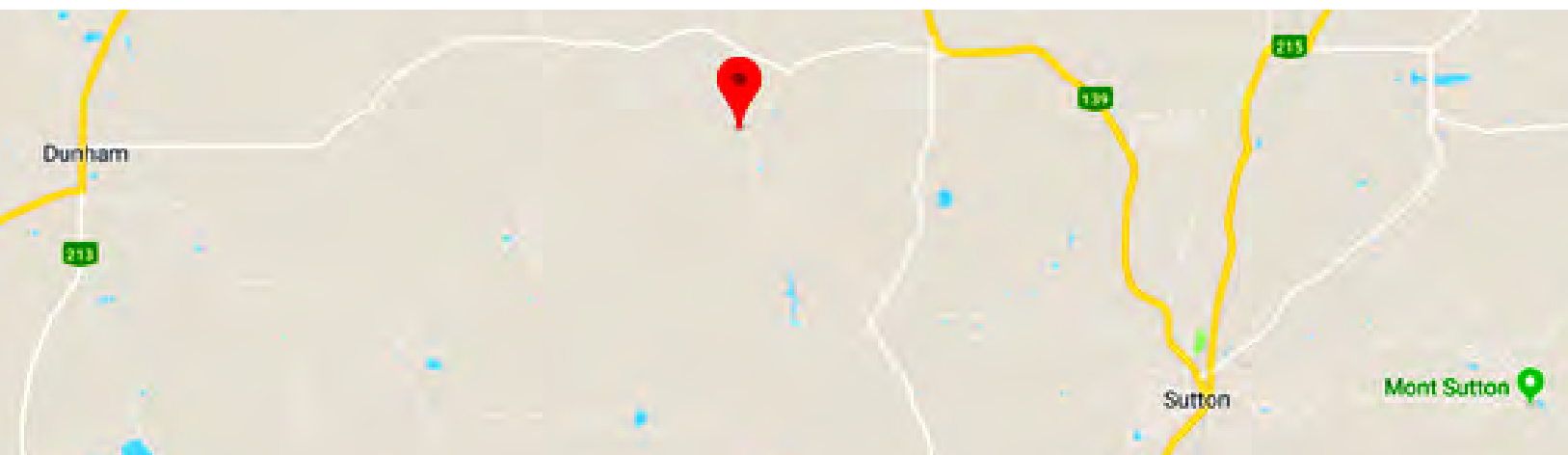


History of the property

This sanctuary was acquired by Bird Protection Quebec in 1995. In this local agro-forestry landscape, Alderbrooke is one of the few marshes to have been preserved from the intensive farming practices of the last 200 years. The property is currently part of a close to 60-hectare assemblage of acquisitions and easements managed by the Alderbrooke Marsh Land Trust until 2035 under a 40-year lease granted by BPQ for a token amount. The Alderbrooke Marsh Sanctuary is under easement from the Nature Conservancy of Canada, which is an active partner in monitoring the property.

Transition between the forest and the Alderbrooke marsh - October 28, 2022

Photo: Jules Delisle | BPQ



Location and description

This two-parcel sanctuary is located in the Eastern Townships, northwest of the town of Sutton, near the intersection of Macey road and de North-Sutton road. It covers 21 hectares - or 52 acres - of mainly wetland habitat, bordered to the west by a maple grove and to the east by a mixed forest. Alder Creek crosses the sanctuary from southeast to northwest, bordered by a dense alder grove. Electricity pylons at its eastern boundary create a clearing in the otherwise compact forest canopy. The wetlands, made up of marshes created by beavers along the stream at the bottom of the valley, are of great ecological value. Several rare plants have been identified during inventories, as well as the Wood Turtle, Four-toed Salamander and Green Frog. The list of birds identified by the Club ornithologique de Brome-Missisquoi (COBM) is also impressive. Its proximity to the Montagnes Vertes reserve makes it an important ecosystem in the region's natural mosaic.



View of Alder Creek
Photo: Jules Delisle | BPQ

Property tagging and participatory science

Since that first visit in October 2022, several visits have been made. In February 2023, I had the chance to accompany NCC on the property tagging; we took advantage of the winter to cross the otherwise impassable wetlands. This visit quickly turned into a day of tracking. In a low-branched stand of conifers where hares come and go, a bobcat track passed discreetly beneath the trees. Deer resting beds were found further on, near alder groves and wild turkey highways. Ruffed Grouse, fishers and numerous mustelids and rodents also left a few stories for us to read in the snow.



**Bobcat trail (left)
and
deer resting bed
(right)**

March 2023



Shortly afterward, I contacted the COBM to see if a group of local people would be interested in participating in an inventory effort at the Alderbrooke Marsh sanctuary. Bertrand Hamel, club member and eBird reviewer for the Brome-Missisquoi regional county municipality, signalled his interest. He had been out on the site in the 1990s as a member of the board of directors of the Alderbrooke Marsh Trust. He enthusiastically agreed to conduct a breeding bird survey and to participate in Bird Canada's Marsh Monitoring Program (MMP). An MMP listening station (QC006-B) is already defined within the property boundaries, in a group of five listening stations along Alder Creek. This point corresponds exactly to the one I identified on my first visit. Given the difficulty of access, all the stations on the site have not been surveyed for several years. Here's a map of the MMP stations in this sector of Alder Creek, with BPQ's property boundary in red.

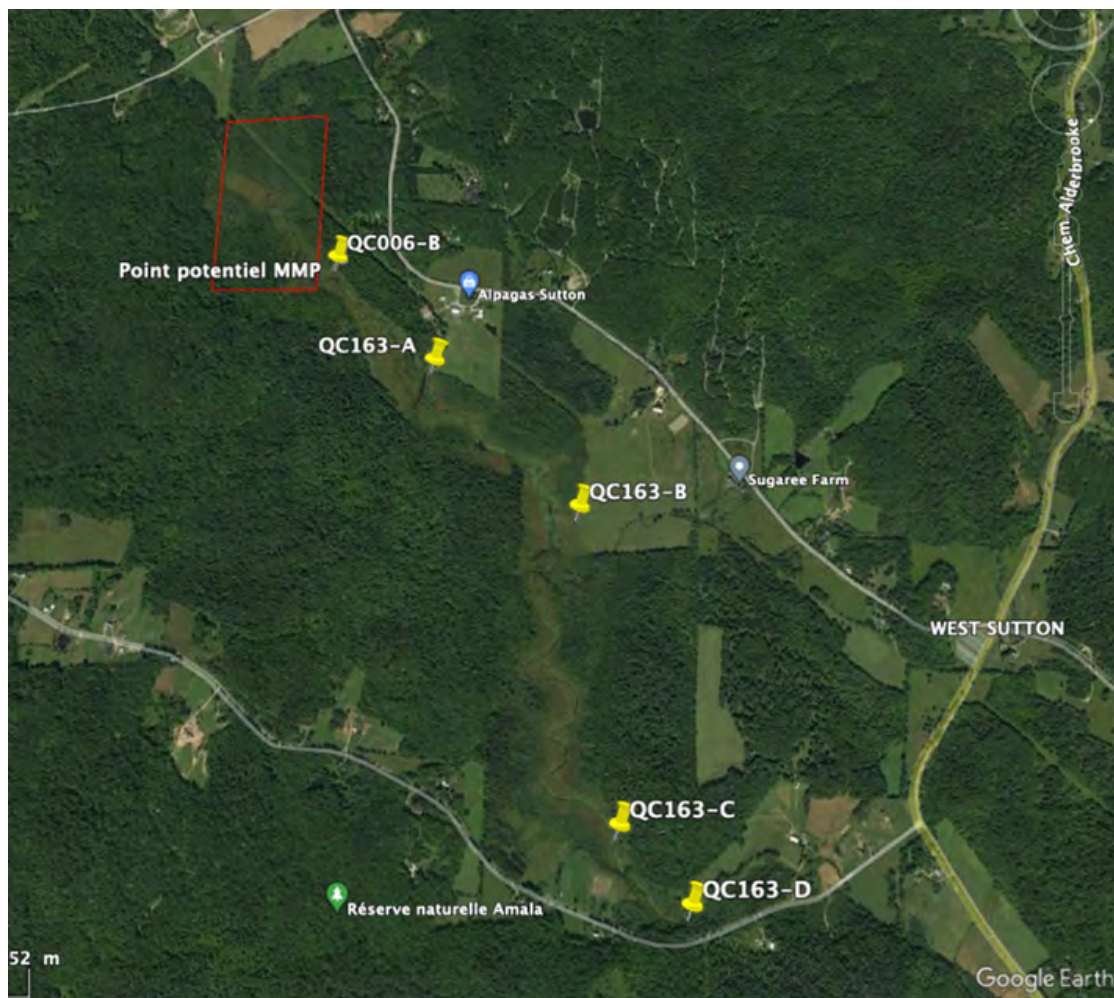


Figure 1: Map of the Alderbrooke Marsh area with the Marsh Monitoring Program listening stations and BPQ's property delineation.

Between May 23 and June 4 2022, four visits were completed by Bertrand Hamel and his colleagues from the COBM for the breeding bird survey and as part of the MMP. Nesting was confirmed for five species, including Cliff Swallow, Tree Swallow and Eastern Bluebird. Nesting was assessed as probable for seven species, including Canada Warbler. During MMP surveys, 21 wetland-associated species were detected. None of the target species were detected, although a Virginia Rail was heard outside the listening station boundaries (more than 100 metres from the observer). In addition to enriching the Birds Canada MMP database and monitoring priority bird populations associated with wetlands, the data provides a better understanding of the species present and the conservation actions required to protect their habitat.

COUP D'OEIL SUR NOS SANCTUAIRES

Cette rubrique présente à nos lecteurs les réserves fauniques que la POQ détient et gère dans le cadre des efforts déployés pour protéger activement l'habitat des oiseaux.

Marais Alderbrooke Sutton, Québec

par Jules Delisle

28 octobre 2022, 9h. Je rejoins Isabelle René, coordonnatrice de projets pour Conservation de la Nature Canada, sur le Chemin Macey à Sutton pour une première visite de ce sanctuaire mi-forêt mi-marais. Nous laissons les voitures en bordure du chemin et traversons à pied deux propriétés voisines pour arriver à sa limite environ 1 kilomètre plus loin. Une forêt mixte avec de grands arbres matures et bon nombre de conifères nous accueillent, pour ensuite s'ouvrir sur le milieu humide. L'origine du nom du site prend tout son sens, alors que nous marchons entre les aulnes denses qui bordent le marécage. Deux gros-bec errants passent au-dessus de nous alors que nous arrivons au bout de ce qui est possible de traverser à pied, compte-tenu du sol de l'aulnaie plus en plus submergé. De là nous avons une excellente vue sur tout le marais; je note ce point comme intéressant pour un éventuel inventaire ornithologique.

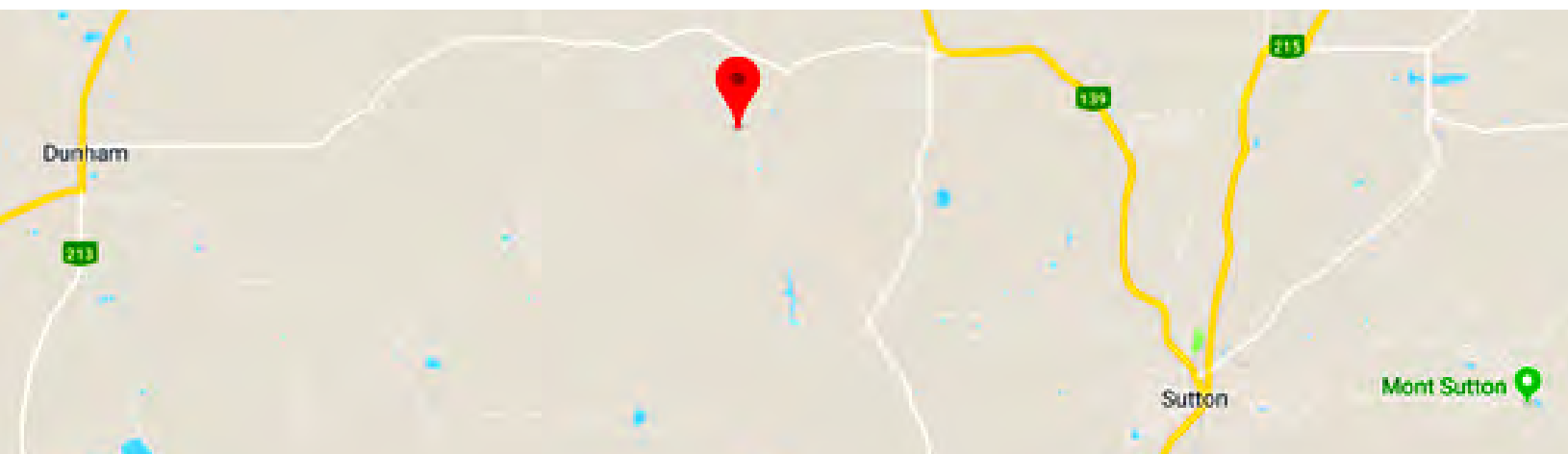


L'histoire de la propriété

Ce sanctuaire a été acquis en 1995 par Protection des oiseaux du Québec. Dans ce paysage local agro-forestier, Alderbrooke est l'un des rares marais à avoir été préservés depuis les pratiques d'agriculture intensive des quelques 200 dernières années. La propriété fait actuellement partie d'un assemblage de 60 hectares d'acquisitions et de servitudes gérées par la Fiducie Foncière du Marais Alderbrooke Inc., et ce jusqu'en 2035 selon un bail d'une durée de 40 ans octroyé par POQ pour un montant symbolique. Le sanctuaire du Marais Alderbrooke est sous servitude de Conservation de la Nature Canada, qui est une partenaire actif pour le suivi de la propriété.

Bordure entre la forêt et le marais Alderbrooke en date du 28 octobre 2022

Photo : Jules Delisle | BPQ



Localisation et description

Ce sanctuaire constitué de deux parcelles est situé dans l'Estrie au nord-ouest de la ville de Sutton, logé près de l'intersection du chemin Macey et le chemin de North-Sutton. Il couvre 21 hectares – ou 52 acres d'habitat principalement constitué de milieux humides, bordés à l'ouest d'une érablière et à l'est d'une forêt mixte. Le ruisseau Alder traverse le sanctuaire du sud-est au nord-ouest, avec en lisière une aulnaie dense. Des pylônes électriques à sa limite est créent une éclaircie dans le couvert forestier autrement compact. Les milieux humides, constitués de marais créés par des castors le long du ruisseau au fond de la vallée, ont une grande valeur écologique. Plusieurs plantes rares ont pu y être identifiées lors d'inventaires, ainsi que la Tortue des bois, la Salamandre à quatre doigts et la Grenouille verte. De plus, la liste des oiseaux identifiés par le Club Ornithologique de Brome-Missisquoi (COBM) y est impressionnante. Sa proximité avec la réserve des Montagnes Vertes en fait un écosystème important dans la mosaïque naturelle de la région.



Vue sur le ruisseau Alder

Photo : Jules Delisle | BPQ

Balisage et science participative

Depuis cette première visite en octobre 2022, j'ai eu la chance d'accompagner CNC lors du balisage de la propriété en février 2023; nous avons profité de l'hiver pour traverser les milieux humides autrement impraticables. Cette visite s'est rapidement transformée en journée de pistage. Dans un peuplement de conifères aux branches basses où les lièvres vont et viennent, une piste de Lynx roux passe discrètement sous les arbres. Des lits de repos de chevreuil ont été trouvés plus loin, près des aulnaies et des autoroutes de dindons sauvages. Des gélinottes huppés, pékans et de nombreux mustélidés et rongeurs nous ont aussi laissé quelques histoires à lire dans la neige.



**Traces de Lynx roux
(à gauche)
et
lit de repos de chevreuil
(à droite)**

mars 2023



Peu de temps après, j'ai contacté le COBM pour voir si un groupe de personnes locales serait intéressé à participer à un effort d'inventaire au sanctuaire du Marais Alderbrooke. Bertrand Hamel, membre du club et réviseur eBird pour la municipalité régionale de comté Brome-Missisquoi, signale son intérêt. Il a fait des sorties sur le site dans les années 1990 comme membre du conseil d'administration de la fiducie du Marais Alderbrooke. Il accepte avec enthousiasme de faire un inventaire des oiseaux nicheurs ainsi que de participer au Programme de surveillance des marais d'Oiseaux Canada. Une station d'écoute du PSM (QC006-B) est déjà définie dans les limites de la propriété, dans un groupe de cinq stations d'écoutes longeant le ruisseau Alder. Ce point correspond exactement au point que j'avais relevé lors de ma première visite. Étant donné la difficulté d'accès, l'ensemble des stations du site n'ont pas été inventorié depuis plusieurs années. Voici une carte des stations du PSM de ce secteur du ruisseau Alder, avec en rouge la délimitation de la propriété de POQ.



Figure 1. Carte du secteur du Marais Alderbrooke avec les stations d'écoute du Programme de surveillance des marais et la délimitation de la propriété de POQ.

Entre le 23 mai et 4 juin 2022, 4 visites ont été réalisées par Bertrand Hamel et ses acolytes du COBM pour l'inventaire des oiseaux nicheurs et dans le cadre du PSM. La nidification a été confirmée pour 5 espèces dont l'hirondelle à front blanc, l'hirondelle bicolor et le merlebleu de l'est. La nidification a été évaluée comme probable pour 7 espèces, dont la paruline du Canada. Lors des relevés du PSM, 21 espèces associées aux milieux humides ont été détectées. Aucune des espèces cibles n'a été détectée, quoiqu'un râle de Virginie ait été entendu à l'extérieur des limites de la station d'écoute (à plus de 100 mètres de l'observateur). Ces données, en plus d'alimenter la base de données du PSM d'Oiseaux Canada et d'assurer le suivi des populations d'oiseaux prioritaires associés aux milieux humides, permettent d'avoir une meilleure compréhension des espèces présentes et des actions de conservation à mettre en place pour protéger leur habitat.

Citizen Science Calendar

2024

PROGRAM NAME AND WEBSITE LINK	DETAILS	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
2024 Checklist-a-day Challenge	Submit an average of one checklist a day to eBird for the entire year for prizes.												
Great Backyard Bird Count	Count birds to help create a real-time snapshot of avian life around the world (Feb. 16–19 2024)												
Nocturnal Owl Survey	Volunteers count owls along rural roads to document population trends and breeding range limits.												
Schoolyard Bird Blitz	Count birds any day in May or participate several times throughout the month.												
Marsh Monitoring Program	Tracks bird and amphibian population trends to guide marsh conservation.												
Global Big Day	Share the birds you find with eBird. Check the website for 2024 event date.												
The Canadian Nightjar Survey	Volunteers conduct a survey at dusk, once between June 15 and July 15 to help conserve these unique species.												
Canadian Lakes Loon Survey	Visit a lake once in June and July to see if loon chicks hatch, and once in August to see if chicks survive to fledge.												
North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)	Skilled observers survey pre-determined BBS routes one day per year (May 28 - July 7). Click here for available BBS routes												
Project Feederwatch	Survey of birds that visit backyards community centers, etc. from November to April each year.												
Birds Canada Christmas Bird Count	For BPQ sponsored Montreal & Hudson counts see BPQ website starting in November 2024.												
Birds Canada CBC4Kids	Events based on the traditional Christmas Bird Count organized for kids throughout December and January.												

Exploring Early Canadian Ornithology

with Jeff Harrison

William Patrick Smith (c1805-c1860)

William Patrick Smith was an early Canadian ornithologist who lived primarily in Lower Canada during the 1820s and 1830s. In Canada, where so little has been written about our early ornithological history, Smith is an extreme example of an important early 19th-century ornithologist who is completely unknown. This article is a brief summary of his life and work.

The first evidence that Smith resided in Quebec, and that he was a serious ornithologist, is found in the writings of Ontario ornithologist Charles Fothergill (1782-1840). Fothergill mentioned Smith in a few entries in his unpublished Natural History Notes from the 1838-1840 period. The first note includes a reference to Smith and the Bohemian Waxwing:

"William P. Smith, Ornithologist, has killed this bird [Bohemian Chatterer] in the neighbourhood of Quebec. A few also are occasionally seen in the Upper Province but is more rare here than lower down or more towards the north-east."

A second note relates to Fothergill's doubting Audubon's assertion that the Cowbird laid its eggs in another bird's nest. Fothergill wrote that he changed his mind by reading Wilson, and confirmed this in a communication from Smith:

"...as Wilson makes the same assertion [as Audubon], I suppose we are bound to admit its truth so far as related to the southern States. This assertion is also fully confirmed by William Patrick Smith the ornithologist."

Michel Gosselin, Quebec ornithological historian and curator at the Canadian Museum of Nature, had never heard of Smith until I requested his help. He found a number of important documents that reveal considerable details of Smith's residence in Canada, and his involvement with North American ornithology.

Smith appears to have been born in Sunderland, England around 1805. His father was a soldier serving in the British army who died in 1812 while fighting in the Napoleonic Wars. Smith joined the 66th Regiment in Ireland and came to Canada with the Regiment in the summer of 1827. During this posting, elements of the Regiment were stationed at various times in Montreal, Kingston, Fort George (Niagara), Fort York (Toronto), and Quebec, as well as in 15 villages in Upper and Lower Canada. Smith served in Canada for eleven years, the final seven with the rank of Sergeant.

While in Canada, Smith joined the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, founded in 1824 in Quebec City (Ville de Québec). In 1834 he was offered and accepted a position as Librarian to the Regiment at Quebec. Given these details, and the inferences in the Fothergill material, Smith may have spent a considerable part of his military service at Quebec.

Given his strong interest in birds, Smith would likely have begun collecting ornithological specimens on the new frontier of Canada from the time he arrived in 1827 until 1837 when he left the Regiment.

The image to the right is of the Bohemian Waxwing, Plate 358 from Audubon's Birds of America. This species was first discovered in Alberta in 1826 by Thomas Drummond, a member of the Second Franklin Expedition.



Smith resigned from the Regiment in 1837 when he was offered a position as Ornithologist and Assistant Geologist with the State of Michigan at an annual salary of \$1,500. Official government documents show that he was working and drawing income in Michigan by August 1837. Smith was also commissioned by the State University (likely the University of Michigan founded in 1817) and fifteen of its branches "to collect ornithological specimens and make up museums" for which he would be paid separately.

Smith's appointment to this significant position suggests important connections. It also suggests that he must have had considerable prior experience as an ornithologist researching and collecting in Upper and Lower Canada. In 1837 no government naturalist position existed anywhere in Canada.

Unfortunately Smith's career was short-lived. In that same year the Rebellions broke out in Upper and Lower Canada. Smith, newly arrived in Detroit, watched with alarm as Americans openly discussed aiding the rebels. American plans included assisting rebels in the attack on the border town of Amherstberg at the west end of Lake Erie. Smith did everything he could to dissuade American involvement. He openly advocated non-American involvement with Governor Mason and his direct employer, Dr Houghton, Head of the Michigan Geological Survey. Smith's efforts may have contributed to the successful defence of Amherstberg in January 1838, but unfortunately, he was denounced in Michigan and fired from his position.

Smith's life from this time forward was fraught with hardship. His published pamphlet *Naturalist's Chapter of Difficulties* (1855), recounts in detail his more than 15 years of unsuccessful efforts to seek adequate compensation from various colonial administrations and institutions. Seeking restitution from the government of Upper Canada, Smith moved to Toronto in 1838, where it is probable he met Charles Fothergill. Smith made three trips to London to lobby politicians and the Colonial Office. The government of Upper Canada made inquiries about Smith's claims with Mason and Houghton, who described Smith in correspondence as "still a young man."

Unable to find work in the Canadas, Smith sought work in England. He notes: "having settled my wife and family in Upper Canada, I came to London in September 1838, and endeavoured to find employment in some of its various scientific institutions. In this, unfortunately, I did not succeed...."

He did secure a small amount of money, some of which he used to travel to the United States to find employment. He laments that after four months job-seeking in various states, "I could not get employment in my profession throughout the whole of the United States". This four-month period may account for Fothergill's references to Smith's cowbird experiences in the southern United States.

In 1840, back in England, Smith tried again to plead his case for government assistance. In his writings he reveals his frustrations with his professional situation and, for the first time, speaks of the existence and loss of his ornithological collection:

"The best, the most ample, and the most profitable field finds my professional exertions, has, by reason of the services which I rendered in Canada, been closed against me. It would be far more congenial to my feelings to follow up my professional pursuits than to solicit a Ministry. These pursuits were to me a passion in the indulgence of which I enjoyed the highest delight, and to be precluded from them forms not the least portion of the loss which I have sustained. I have now no remnant left of the large ornithological collection which I had made, and which when perfected would of itself, to say nothing of the engagements which I have lost, have been a handsome source of income. Six hundred splendid specimens I have been compelled to dispose of from time to time, to make remittances to my wife and family from whom I have been so long separated, as well as for my own maintenance whilst following up my suit with Government."

In the 1840s Smith appears to have been collecting in the southern United States. Trying to piece together a chronological history of Smith's residence during the 1840s until about 1855 is difficult. Given the fact that Americans would not employ Smith, it appears that Smith pursued his collecting natural history specimens in the southern states for private collectors and the British Museum. In *Naturalist* he indicates he had secured funding "to proceed to Texas, to travel that country as naturalist for my Lord Darby". This early connection with Darby may account for his initial presence in the southern States. There is a reference in Audubon's discussion of the Collared Peccary in *Quadrupeds I*; 238-239 (initially published in 1845) :

"The only recent account we have thus far received, that contains original and authentic information about this singular wild hog, was furnished us by Mr. William P. Smith. He had been sent to this country by our ever kind friend, the Right Honorable the Earl of Derby, for the purpose of procuring living animals to enrich his collection at Knowsley, near Liverpool. We engaged him also to obtain for us any rare species he could meet with in Texas, and to send description of their habits, and any other informations likely to be of interest to the readers of this work. Mr. Smith went to Texas, and shortly afterwards sent us the following account of the Peccary."

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