

Issue 68-4
June 2026

Summer Issue:
In the family way

News for Members



The SONG SPARROW

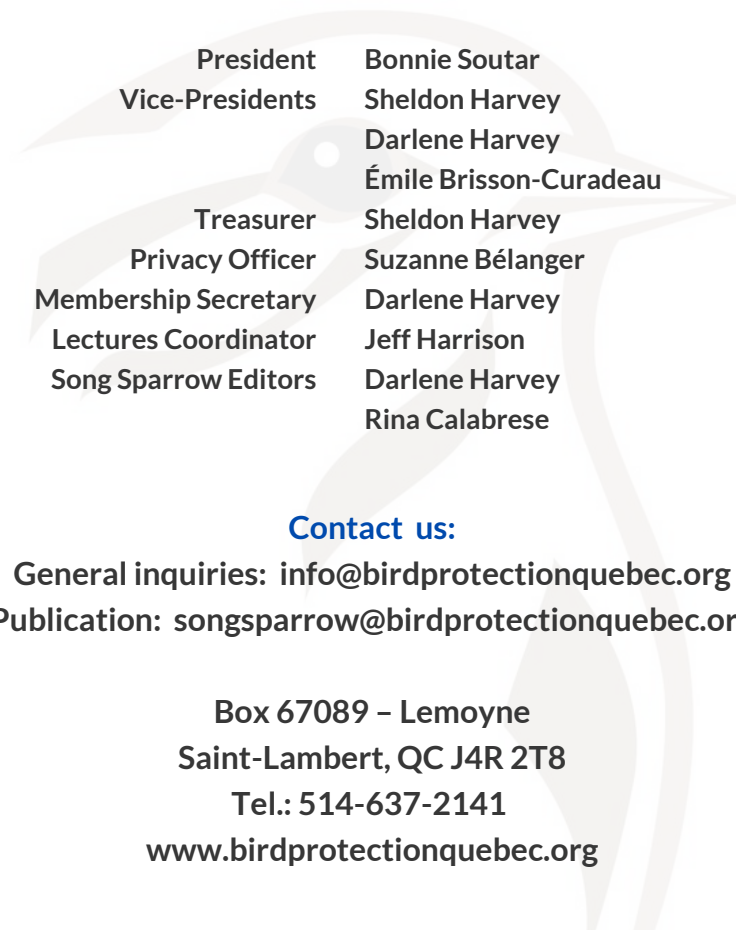
Bird Protection Quebec - Mission Statement

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	Bonnie Soutar
Vice-Presidents	Sheldon Harvey Darlene Harvey Émile Brisson-Curadeau
Treasurer	Sheldon Harvey
Privacy Officer	Suzanne Bélanger
Membership Secretary	Darlene Harvey
Lectures Coordinator	Jeff Harrison
Song Sparrow Editors	Darlene Harvey Rina Calabrese

Contact us:

General inquiries: info@birdprotectionquebec.org
Publication: songsparrow@birdprotectionquebec.org

Box 67089 – Lemoyne
Saint-Lambert, QC J4R 2T8
Tel.: 514-637-2141
www.birdprotectionquebec.org

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Early Canadian Ornithology

ON THE COVER

American Robin nest

Photo: Wayne Grubert

This Page

Photo: Marie-Claude Martin

A Word FROM THE EDITORS

As we go to “press,” summer has officially arrived and warmer days seem, finally, to be here to stay. But the *best* part of this time of year are the sounds coming from outside, as baby birds leave the nest and learn how to fend for themselves—although the most common sound from these rather demanding offspring, regardless of size, seems to be a loud squawking of “feed me!” to mom and dad.

To honour the complicated and sometimes unusual processes involved in raising an avian family, the subject of this issue is “In the Family Way.” In feature articles, Ana Morales reveals the surprising habits of “Some of Quebec’s Most Unusual Nesters,” while Wayne Grubert delivers his trademark mix of odd facts and well-researched insights in “Model Parents, Deadbeat Dads, and Promiscuous Moms.” And, with a picture being worth a thousand words, or so the saying goes, our third feature is a photo essay compiled from submissions by our generous BPQ photographers that beautifully captures the issue’s theme.

We hope you enjoy a new regular column we are debuting this issue—“Word on the Wing...”—in which self-confessed word nerd Nico Demers will have some fun exploring the origins of avian-related words and sayings. In other columns, Zofia Laubitz and *Cheep Sheets* wraps up this season’s monthly lecture series with an excellent summary of Oliver Love’s April talk on the environmental challenges facing Snow Buntings. (For those wanting to revisit the year’s lectures, you can find a downloadable document containing all six of Zofia’s and Sarah’s recaps in *Focus on Education*.) Marcel Gahbauer discusses the Killdeer’s special talents in *Birds with Quirks*, and Jeff Harrison introduces us to Archibald Hall, a pioneer in Montreal ornithology, in *Early Canadian Ornithology*.

Also inside, a summary of another successful season of field trips, a report on a student-driven project to use cameras to monitor American Kestrel nest boxes that was supported by a BPQ grant, and a guide on how to guard against the ticks that are becoming more pervasive every year.

Have a great summer, we’ll see you in the fall!

Darlene & Rina



A Message from THE PRESIDENT

As I watch my little grandson building with his blocks, a newly acquired skill, I am filled with hope for the future as he grows up. Children are the Earth's future citizens and key to protecting its bees, birds, trees and water. I am also heartened when I look out my window or sit on the deck as our local Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Blue Jays, White-breasted Nuthatches and Chickadees bring their young to our Yellow Birch tree and teach them how to get fresh peanuts and sunflower seeds from our feeders. Their juvenile squawking and begging are a joy to hear, and I feel that providing them with nourishing food, and planting bird-friendly native shrubs has contributed somewhat to their breeding success.

So much more is needed for at-risk birds that rely on flying insects, or uncut grasslands and we see so little habitat left for them as we travel around our province. Of course growing our food is essential, but can we also protect forest corridors from being razed for more corn and soy fields, or leave some hayfields uncut until after young Bobolinks, Meadowlarks and Upland Sandpipers have fledged? We can support farmers who truly steward their land and the wildlife that share it, and we can write to the federal health minister to protest allowing economic considerations to override protection on toxic pesticide registration, without an evaluation of scientific studies.

Our local municipality rates conservation and environmental concerns at the top of its priorities and it seems that many regions of the Laurentians are limiting all-engulfing development and road incursion into every wild corner and protecting forests and watersheds within their boundaries. Can more of this will to increase biodiversity be championed by decision-makers in our southern agricultural zones?

So that we and generations to come can ensure that birds have the habitat, food and shelter they need to reproduce, land must be protected and BPQ, along with other conservation partners and your support, are working to build awareness around this crucial goal. By speaking out, staying informed and holding our elected officials to high environmental standards, we can all act to protect our remaining natural areas. Our children and grandchildren need us to succeed.

Bonnie

A Message from the Elections & Nominations Committee

New Board Elected by the Members at the Annual General Meeting - May 25, 2026

At our recent AGM, three new directors were elected and seven sitting directors were re-elected to the Board of Directors to serve with five others who were elected last year for a two-year term.

In accordance with the by-laws, a call for nominations was put forward earlier this year. Three new nominations were received, and seven of the nine directors whose terms were ending this year all agreed to stand for re-election. One director, Kyle Elliott, chose not to seek re-election due to personal commitments. Kyle had already served for eight years and the president and board expressed their thanks for his many contributions during that time; his expertise will be missed but we are grateful he will continue to co-chair the Grants Committee. The second person not returning, Jeff Harrison, was not eligible to stand again as he had reached the maximum 10-year period on the board permitted under our by-laws. This was actually the end of Jeff's second stint of 10 years. His deep knowledge of BPQ gained in those many years was greatly valued and will be hard to replace.

Since the number of nominations was equal to the number of vacancies, it was motioned and seconded that the slate of 10 people presented be elected to the board for a two-year term, and the motion passed unanimously.

Board of Directors - 2026/2027

Suzanne Bélanger	Zofia Laubitz *
* Émile Brisson-Curadeau	Sarah Marshall *
Claude Cloutier	Helen Meredith *
* Katherine Collin	Megan Phillips **
** Virginia Elliott	Ron Rind
Darlene Harvey	Patricia Seifert **
* Sheldon Harvey	Bonnie Soutar
* Kristen Lalla	

* re-elected
** new

At a special meeting following the AGM, the board reappointed Sheldon Harvey as vice-president, administration and treasurer, Émile Brisson-Curadeau as vice-president, conservation, and Suzanne Bélanger as secretary, for a further two years. (Other officers were appointed to a two-year term last year.)

Officers - Elected by the Board

President	Bonnie Soutar
Vice-President, Administration	Sheldon Harvey
Vice-President, Conservation	Émile Brisson-Curadeau
Vice-President, Outreach	Darlene Harvey
Treasurer	Sheldon Harvey
Secretary	Suzanne Bélanger

The Executive Committee, as appointed by the board for the coming year, will be comprised of the president, the three V-Ps, and the secretary.

Message du comité des élections et des nominations

Nouveau conseil d'administration élu par les membres lors de l'assemblée générale annuelle - 25 mai 2026

Lors de notre récente assemblée générale annuelle, trois nouveaux administrateurs ont été élus et sept administrateurs sortants ont été réélus au conseil d'administration, où ils siégeront aux côtés des cinq autres membres élus l'année dernière pour un mandat de deux ans.

Conformément aux statuts, un appel à candidatures a été lancé en début d'année. Trois nouvelles candidatures ont été reçues, et sept des neuf administrateurs dont le mandat arrivait à échéance cette année ont tous accepté de se présenter à la réélection. Un administrateur, Kyle Elliott, a choisi de ne pas se représenter en raison d'engagements personnels. Kyle avait déjà siégé pendant huit ans et le président ainsi que le conseil d'administration lui ont exprimé leur gratitude pour sa contribution durant cette période ; son expertise nous manquera, mais nous sommes reconnaissants qu'il continue à occuper le poste de coprésident du comité des subventions. Le deuxième administrateur à ne pas se représenter, Jeff Harrison, ne pouvait se présenter à nouveau car il avait atteint la durée maximale de 10 ans au sein du conseil d'administration autorisée par nos statuts. Il s'agissait en fait de la fin du deuxième mandat de dix ans de Jeff. Sa connaissance approfondie de POQ, acquise au fil de ces nombreuses années, a été très appréciée et sera difficile à remplacer.

Le nombre de candidatures étant égal au nombre de postes vacants, il a été proposé et appuyé que la liste des dix personnes présentées soit élue au conseil d'administration pour un mandat de deux ans, et la motion a été adoptée à l'unanimité.

Conseil d'administration - 2026/2027

Suzanne Bélanger	Zofia Laubitz *
* Émile Brisson-Curadeau	Sarah Marshall *
Claude Cloutier	Helen Meredith *
* Katherine Collin	Megan Phillips **
** Virginia Elliott	Ron Rind
Darlene Harvey	Patricia Seifert **
* Sheldon Harvey	Bonnie Soutar
* Kristen Lalla	

* réélu

** premier mandat

Lors d'une réunion extraordinaire tenue à la suite de l'assemblée générale annuelle, le conseil d'administration a reconduit Sheldon Harvey dans ses fonctions de vice-président chargé de l'administration et de trésorier, Émile Brisson-Curadeau dans celles de vice-président chargé de la conservation, et Suzanne Bélanger dans celles de secrétaire, pour un nouveau mandat de deux ans (les autres membres du bureau avaient été nommés pour un mandat de deux ans l'année dernière).

Membres de la direction - élus par le conseil

Présidente	Bonnie Soutar
Vice-président, administration	Sheldon Harvey
Vice-président, conservation	Émile Brisson-Curadeau
Vice-présidente, sensibilisation	Darlene Harvey
Trésorier	Sheldon Harvey
Secrétaire	Suzanne Bélanger

Le comité exécutif, nommé par le conseil pour l'année à venir, est constitué de la présidente, des trois vice-président.e.s. et de la secrétaire.

Focus on

OUR MEMBERS



To all our members

Please join us in extending a warm welcome to our new and returning members:

Keith Hogan, Valérie Beauchemin and Patrick Senez, Hélène Le Bel, Frédéric Senez, Dominique Fleurant, Karen Mitchell, Eva Schorer, Orson Butz, Linda Hougan, Lise Bernier, David Myburgh, Bernadette Genin, and Matthew McLaughlan

We are grateful to you for joining our mission to protect Quebec's birds, and look forward to meeting all of you, either at a monthly meeting on Zoom, or on a field trip!

Keep reading this issue for details of our planned activities, and be sure to follow us on Facebook and Instagram, and to join our iO Song Sparrow [e-list group](#) to connect with fellow members.

A unique way to donate to the birds

Are you looking to dispose of an old vehicle, and trying to figure out how to go about junking it or selling it without any hassle? Consider *donating* it, using the free service of Donate a Car Canada.

This all-in service turns your unwanted vehicle - running or not - into a valuable donation to BPQ that will support our work to protect birds and their habitat in Quebec. And you get a charitable donation receipt!

All the details of how this works, and a FAQ that should answer all your questions, are available at donatecar.ca. Basically, you go to their website, choose BPQ as your charity of choice, fill in the form, and they handle the rest, including towing and processing of all necessary paperwork.

À tous nos membres

Veuillez vous joindre à nous pour souhaiter la bienvenue à nos nouveaux membres et à ceux qui reviennent :

Keith Hogan, Valérie Beauchemin et Patrick Senez, Hélène Le Bel, Frédéric Senez, Dominique Fleurant, Karen Mitchell, Eva Schorer, Orson Butz, Linda Hougan, Lise Bernier, David Myburgh, Bernadette Genin, et Matthew McLaughlan

Nous vous sommes reconnaissants de vous joindre à notre mission visant à protéger les oiseaux et leur habitat, et nous avons hâte de vous rencontrer tous, soit lors d'une réunion mensuelle sur Zoom, soit lors d'une excursion sur le terrain !

Continuez à lire ce numéro pour plus de détails sur les activités prévues, et n'oubliez pas de nous suivre sur Facebook et sur Instagram, et de rejoindre notre [groupe de liste électronique](#) « Songsparrow » pour vous connecter avec d'autres membres.

Une façon unique de faire un don aux oiseaux

Vous souhaitez vous débarrasser d'un vieux véhicule et vous vous demandez comment le mettre à la casse ou le vendre sans tracas ? Pensez à *en faire don* grâce au service gratuit de Donate a Car Canada.

Ce service tout-en-un transforme votre véhicule dont vous ne voulez plus – qu'il soit en état de marche ou non – en un don précieux à POQ qui soutiendra notre travail de protection des oiseaux et de leur habitat au Québec. Et vous recevrez un reçu fiscal pour don de bienfaisance !

Vous trouverez tous les détails sur le fonctionnement de ce service, ainsi qu'une FAQ qui devrait répondre à toutes vos questions, sur le site donatecar.ca. En résumé, il vous suffit de vous rendre sur leur site web, de choisir POQ comme organisme de bienfaisance, de remplir le formulaire, et ils s'occupent du reste, y compris du remorquage et des démarches administratives nécessaires.

BPQ volunteers at work

On **April 18**, Outreach Committee members Darlene Harvey and Sheldon Harvey participated in the Earth Day FORUM in Ormstown for the third year in a row.

This amazing community-driven event welcomed over 400 people who came to celebrate the 2026 Earth Day theme "Our Power, Our Planet". To support its emphasis on conscious consumption, reducing waste, and empowering citizens to drive systemic change through community efforts, the Earth Day Forum offered recycling services, workshops on upcycling crafts and clothing mending, and even gave out free trees!

Congratulations to Lorelei Mueller, event organizer (and BPQ member!) for another successful day. We had a great time meeting people from the region and, since a number of them signed up to receive our weekly *eNews*, hope to see them again!

—Outreach Committee

Bénévoles sur le terrain

Le **18 avril dernier**, les membres du comité de sensibilisation Darlene Harvey et Sheldon Harvey ont participé au FORUM du Jour de la Terre à Ormstown pour la troisième année.

Cet événement communautaire exceptionnel a accueilli plus de 400 personnes venues célébrer le thème du Jour de la Terre 2026 : « Notre pouvoir, notre planète ». Afin de mettre en avant la consommation responsable, la réduction des déchets et l'autonomisation des citoyens pour susciter un changement systémique grâce à des initiatives communautaires, le Forum du Jour de la Terre a proposé des services de recyclage, des ateliers sur le surcyclage et la réparation de vêtements, et a même distribué des arbres gratuits !

Félicitations à l'organisatrice de l'événement (et membre du POQ !), Lorelei Mueller, pour cette nouvelle journée réussie. Nous avons passé un excellent moment à rencontrer des gens de la région et, comme bon nombre d'entre eux se sont inscrits pour recevoir notre *eNews* hebdomadaire, nous espérons les revoir bientôt !

—Comité de la sensibilisation



Spring cleaning continued!

On May 9, BPO and Centre d'interprétation du milieu écologique Haut-Richelieu (CIME) partnered for our annual garlic mustard removal event at the George H. Montgomery Sanctuary, where this invasive non-native plant threatens local habitats. The day began with a short birdwatching walk, followed by a removal session that lasted into the early afternoon. CIME was on site to guide a group of volunteers throughout the activity.

Although garlic mustard is becoming less abundant at the sanctuary, its distribution remains widespread, making annual monitoring essential to prevent it from spreading again.

A big thank you to everyone who joined us — the sanctuary's birds are grateful for your help!

—Anne-Marie Cousineau, Project Coordinator

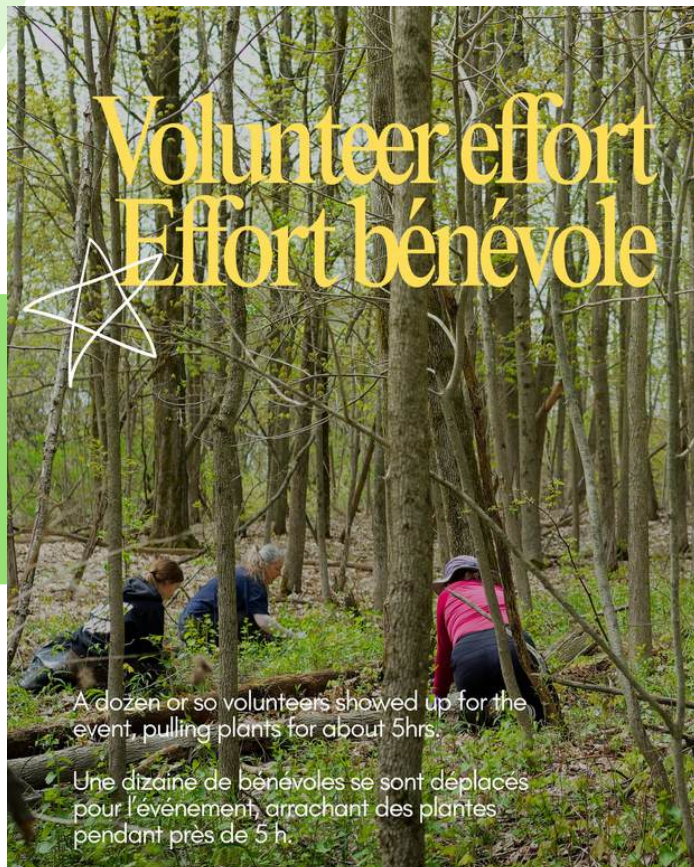
Le grand ménage de printemps se poursuit !

Le 9 mai dernier, POQ et le Centre d'interprétation du milieu écologique Haut-Richelieu (CIME) ont participé à la corvée annuelle d'arrachage d'alliaire officinale, une plante exotique envahissante présente au Sanctuaire George H. Montgomery. La journée a débuté par une courte marche d'observation des oiseaux, suivie d'une séance d'arrachage qui s'est poursuivie jusqu'en début d'après-midi. CIME Haut-Richelieu était présent pour accompagner une dizaine de bénévoles tout au long de la corvée.

Même si la quantité d'alliaire officinale diminue au sanctuaire, sa répartition demeure étendue, ce qui rend le suivi annuel essentiel afin d'éviter une reprise de la propagation de cette plante.

Un grand merci à toutes les personnes présentes — les oiseaux du sanctuaire vous en sont reconnaissants!

—Anne-Marie Cousineau, Coordonnatrice de projets



Interested in getting involved and helping out with this type of activity?
Write to us at



volunteering@birdprotectionquebec.org



Vous aimeriez vous impliquer et participer à ce type d'événement ?
Écrivez-nous !



Focus on FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Upcoming Field Trips

As usual, our regular-season field trips have ended with the popular Southwestern Quebec Early Solstice Trip, which took place on June 20 this year. We hope you took full advantage and had an amazing spring migration—we're confident we did our part to get you out in the field, with 25 walks held since mid-March, 11 of them in May alone!

Starting Saturday, June 27, we will move into our popular "Summer Series of Birding" outings, back for the 23rd season and organized once again by Sheldon Harvey. When the summer trips were first added to our schedule, none of us were sure they would take off but here we are over 20 years later, and they are more popular than ever. (For those still a little skeptical about what can be found once the migrants have moved on and we are settling into the summer heat, last year we logged our 201st species observed since the inception of the Series!)

As is always the case for the Summer Series, each weekend's destination will be announced only a few days before, which allows Sheldon to take advantage of any special sightings or scout new locations, while also taking the weather into account. Details with driving instructions will be communicated before each week's trip through our eNews bulletin, the BPQ Facebook pages and the iO Song Sparrow email group.

Hope to see you in the field this summer—you never know what we might find. Be sure to bring the sunscreen!

—BPQ Field Trip Committee



Summer birding at Ste-Martine | Photo: Nico Demers



Focus on FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Past field trips

Our spring birding season began with snowy trails and chilly temperatures, but the weather gradually gave way to sunshine, warmer days, and a surge of migrating birds. Once again, our Birding for Beginners outings at the Morgan Arboretum and Warbler Walks at Mount Royal Cemetery proved popular, helping birders of all experience levels connect with nature and sharpen their identification skills. Highlights from the season included Harlequin Duck, Great Horned Owl, Sandhill Crane, Least Bittern, Blackburnian Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, and Black-backed Woodpecker. A huge thank you to our guides and to everyone who joined us in the field. Whether you came to learn your first warbler or add a rarity to your life list, we're glad you were there. — *BPQ Field Trip Committee*

08/03/26 – Morgan Arboretum, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue,

Guide: Ron Rind

Weather: Cold and icy

Number of Participants: 22; Number of Species: 13

Birds of Note: Pileated Woodpecker, Common Raven, Northern Flicker

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S307718646>

14/03/26 – Parc nature de l'Île-de-la-Visitation, Montreal

Guide: Sheldon Harvey

Weather: Cold and snowy

Number of Participants: 21; Number of Species: 15

Birds of Note: Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Northern Cardinal

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S309075726>

21/03/26 – Refuge faunique Marguerite-D'Youville, Île-Saint-Bernard

Guide: Tom Long

Weather: Mild with light snow

Number of Participants: 24; Number of Species: 33

Birds of Note: 10 duck species, Great Horned Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, American Tree Sparrow

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S311593378>

28/03/26 – Parc de la Frayère, Boucherville

Guide: Sheldon Harvey

Weather: Sunny with light wind

Number of Participants: 26; Number of Species: 31

Birds of Note: 7 species of waterfowl, Wild Turkey, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Bohemian Waxwing

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S313967177>



Tufted Titmouse, Refuge faunique Marguerite-D'Youville, Île-Saint-Bernard
Photo: Darlene Harvey

04/04/26 – Parc des Rapides, LaSalle (Montreal)

Guide: Diane Demers

Weather: Cool with moderate wind

Number of Participants: 37; Number of Species: 39

Birds of Note: Belted Kingfisher, Bald Eagle, Harlequin Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Golden-crowned Kinglet; Golden Eagle

eBird Trip Report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/496339>

11/04/26 – Beauharnois/Valleyfield Area

Guides: Wayne Grubert & Sheldon Harvey

Weather: Cloudy, single digit temperature

Number of Participants: 29; Number of Species: 59

Birds of Note: Common Loon, Barrow's Goldeneye, Green-winged Teal, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Osprey, Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Pied-billed Grebe

eBird Trip Report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/499341>

18/04/26 – Pointe-des-Cascades, QC

Guides: Sarah Marshall & Bill Thompson

Weather: Warm with sun and +22 C.

Number of Participants: 44; Number of Species: 49

Birds of Note: Bald Eagle, Osprey, Broad-winged Hawk, Killdeer, Ruffed Grouse

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S324720655>

21/04/26 – Birding for Beginners, Morgan Arboretum, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue

Guide: Barbara MacDuff

Weather: Cool, but sunny

Number of Participants: 14; Number of Species: 27

Birds of Note: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Brown-headed Cowbird, Eastern Phoebe

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S327772255>

25/04/26 - Parc-Nature du Bois-de-l'Île-Bizard, Ile-Bizard

Guide: Ron Rind

Weather: Sunny, temperatures 4 C climbing to 12 C.

Number of Participants: 37; Number of Species: 47

Birds of Note: Cooper's Hawk, Barred Owl, 4 swallow species, Wood Duck, Pied-billed Grebe

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S327700969>

28/04/26 - Birding for Beginners, Morgan Arboretum, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue

Guide: Barbara MacDuff

Weather: Sunny, light wind

Number of Participants: 12; Number of Species: 34

Birds of Note: Yellow-rumped Warbler, Turkey Vulture, Barred Owl, Broad-winged Hawk

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S329351845>

28/04/26 – Warbler Walk #1 – Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal

Guides: Minda Bernstein & Harle Thomas

Weather: Sunny, warm

Number of Participants: 12; Number of Species: 32

Birds of Note: Eastern Phoebe, Black-throated Green Warbler, Eastern Bluebird, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Merlin

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S329002164>

02/05/26 - Parc De La Frayère – Boucherville

Guides: Darlene Harvey & Glen Chipman

Weather: Rainy & chilly

Number of Participants: 22; Number of Species: 47

Birds of Note: Wild Turkey, Common Gallinule, Palm Warbler, Northern Yellow Warbler

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S331229481>



Baltimore Oriole,
Lac St-Francois National Reserve, Dundee
Photo: Wayne Grubert

05/05/26 – Warbler Walk #2 – Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal

Guide: Karen Sherman

Weather: Rain!

Number of Participants: 18; Number of Species: 29

Birds of Note: Chimney Swift, Cooper's Hawk, (Warblers) Black & White, Nashville, Northern Parula, Yellow-rumped, Common Loon, Chipping Sparrow

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S335866342>

10/05/26 – Lac St-Francois National Reserve, Dundee

Guides: Wayne Grubert & Sheldon Harvey

Weather: Partly cloudy, windy

Number of Participants: 28; Number of Species: 53

Birds of Note: Sandhill Crane, Great Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron, Northern Harrier, Northern Waterthrush, Yellow-throated Vireo, Bald Eagle, Osprey, American Kestrel

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/518524>

12/05/26 – Warbler Walk #3 – Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal

Guide: Nicholas Acheson

Weather: Sunny, but cold

Number of Participants: 14; Number of Species: 27

Birds of Note: Hooded Warbler and 6 other warbler species, Eastern Bluebird, Blue-headed Vireo, Hermit Thrush

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S337717329>

16/05/26 – Hudson Area, Hudson

Guide: Wayne Grubert

Weather: Warm and sunny

Number of Participants: 32; Number of Species: 62

Birds of Note: Blackburnian Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Baltimore Oriole, Northern Waterthrush, Veery, Eastern Bluebird, Philadelphia Vireo, Black-backed Woodpecker, Bald Eagle

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S340238738>

18/05/26 – Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal

Guides: Darlene & Sheldon Harvey

Weather: Rain and cool temperatures; 8 C.

Number of Participants: 22; Number of Species: 22

Birds of Note: Red-tailed Hawk, Merlin, Scarlet Tanager, 11 species of warblers

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S341883535>

19/05/26 – Warbler Walk #4 – Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal

Guide: Nicholas Acheson

Weather: Sunny & mild

Number of Participants: 14; Number of Species: 44

Birds of Note: Scarlet Tanager, 9 warbler species, Cooper's Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Indigo Bunting

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S342307327>

20/05/26 – Hudson Evening Trip, Hudson

Guide: Barbara MacDuff

Weather: Sunny with light winds

Number of Participants: 6; Number of Species: 42

Birds of Note: Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Solitary Sandpiper, Eastern Bluebird, Bobolink

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S343133786>

23/05/26 – Refuge faunique Marguerite-D'Youville, Île Saint-Bernard, Chateauguay

Guide: Tom Long

Weather: Sunny, warm

Number of Participants: 47; Number of Species: 69

Birds of Note: Snow Goose, Least Sandpiper, Least Bittern, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, 13 species of warblers

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S344906070>

26/05/26 – Warbler Walk #5 – Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal

Guide: Karen Sherman

Weather: Sunny & warm

Number of Participants: 8; Number of Species: 36

Birds of Note: Olive-sided Flycatcher, Eastern Bluebird, 9 warbler species, Scarlet Tanager; Indigo Bunting

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S347330909>

Eastern Bluebird, Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal
Photo: Bill Thompson



30/05/26 – Search for the Whip-poor-wills – Ormstown

Guide: Sheldon Harvey

Weather: Comfortable, a little cool after sunset

Number of Participants: 27; Number of Species: 51

Birds of Note: Whip-poor-will, American Woodcock, Indigo Bunting,

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/532250>

06/06/26 – Ruisseau de Feu, Terrebonne

Guide: Michel Beaupré

Weather: Rain, rain, and oh, did we mention? Rain!

Number of Participants: 6; Number of Species: 18

Birds of Note: Sora and Virginia Rail (both heard) Willow Flycatcher, Pied-billed Grebe

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S353445874>

13/06/26 – Parc Angrignon, Verdun/LaSalle

Guide: Virginia Elliott

Weather: Sunny, warm, but buggy!

Number of Participants: 18; Number of Species: 34

Birds of Note: Carolina Wren, Cooper's Hawk, Wood Duck babies

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S356885415>

20/06/26 – Summer Solstice, Ormstown/Hinchinbrook/Huntingdon

Guides: Sheldon Harvey & Wayne Grubert

Weather: Mostly cloudy, brief rain shower

Number of Participants: 16; Number of Species: 74

Birds of Note: Virginia Rail, Eastern Meadowlark, Eastern Towhee, Bobolink

eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/541454>

Least Bittern, Refuge faunique Marguerite-D'Youville, Île-Saint-Bernard
Photo: Frédéric Senez





Focus On Education

BPQ presents a series of monthly lectures from October through April, usually on the first Monday of each month. Events are held via Zoom in order to attract a wider range of speakers and be accessible to a broader audience.

While you wait for our monthly lectures to return in October, here are a few fun ways to keep yourself entertained and in learning mode:

First, if you missed any of the past year's fascinating lineup of lectures, or just want a refresher, you can catch up through Zofia and Sarah's Cheep Sheets column in this and past issues. For those who are new to *The Song Sparrow*, we have collected them into one file for you!



CLICK HERE

Cheep Sheets

with Zofia Laubitz and Sarah Marshall



If listening is your thing, be sure to check out Birds Canada's archived *The Warblers* podcasts that include a host of interesting topics such as "Quebec's river of warblers," "Vultures: Sentinels of the Skies," "Do birds have feelings?" or, as if made for this issue's theme, "The Secrets of Bird Nests with Mark Peck."



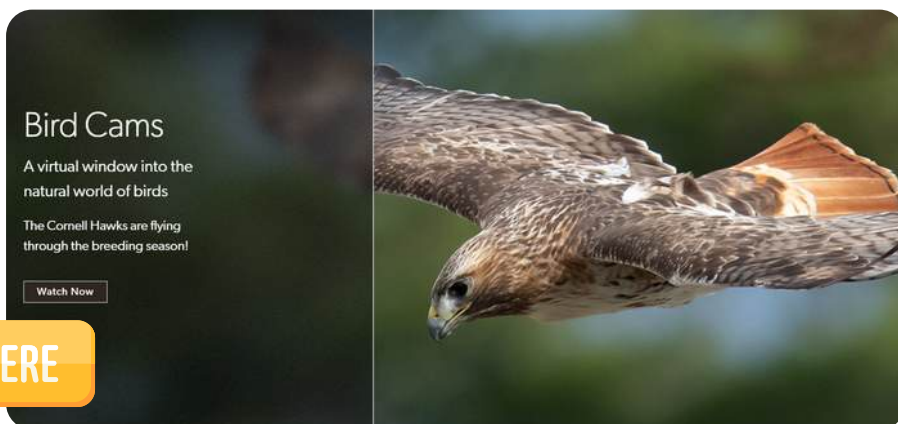
CLICK HERE



For those who prefer a more visual experience, why not spend some time with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Bird Cams from North America and around the world.



CLICK HERE





Lecture: April 7, 2026

Can Snow Buntings Persist in the Face of Rapid Environmental Change?

Oliver Love, University of Windsor

by Zofia Laubitz



Oliver Love grew up on the South Shore of Montreal and received his M.Sc. from McGill; he then went farther afield, earning his Ph.D. from Simon Fraser University. He is now Professor in Integrative Ecology, in the Biology Department[OL1.1] at the University of Windsor. His research team explores birds' behavioural and physiological responses to rapid environmental change, including climate change.

Oliver noted that it's hard to figure out which stages in bird life history (e.g., breeding, migration) are most affected by environmental change. He provided a brief overview of Snow Bunting natural history, mentioning that there's a lot we don't know about them. In our hemisphere, these birds spend much of the year in Canada, summering in the Arctic and wintering in the south. In fact, we host 45% of the world's breeding population. Snow Buntings have cultural significance for many people; in the Arctic, for example, their arrival and their songs herald spring and summer. In 2007, based on Christmas Bird Count data, the Audubon Society revealed that North American Snow Bunting populations had declined by 65% from 1965 to 2005. Recent estimates from the 2024 State of the Birds report by Birds Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada confirm almost 80% declines since the 1970s. Other Arctic songbirds, such as the Horned Lark and Lapland Longspur, are also declining.

There are three life stages where things can go wrong for birds: breeding, migration, and winter. For Snow Buntings, breeding covers two months of the year, migration four, and winter six; thus, they spend most of the year in the cold. The Canadian Snow Bunting Network (CSBN) collects data in the winter. Oliver's lab and their colleagues at the Université du Québec à Rimouski and the University of Manitoba have been working collectively to collect breeding data at three sites in Arctic Canada since 2007: Qikiqtaaluk[ZL2.1][OL2.2], Alert, and Iqaluit. Since the Arctic summer is so short, Snow Buntings have traditionally had just one chance a year to breed; there are usually no second clutches. They nest in crevices under rocks and in cliff cavities.

As we have all heard, the Arctic is warming much faster than the rest of Canada: temperatures are increasing in both summer and winter, and sea ice coverage is declining. How are Snow Buntings responding to this climate change? There could be a direct effect, in the form of overheating: parents may overheat as they work hard to feed their young; if they pause to cool down, then their chicks will get less food. There could also be an indirect effect: elevated temperatures causing a phenological mismatch with the emergence of the invertebrates the buntings feed their young. In other words, the chicks may no longer hatch at the same time as their food emerges.

Snow Buntings are extreme cold specialists; they can thermoregulate at -70°C ! Does this mean that they're likely to overheat in warmer weather? The Snow Bunting teams [OL3.1] have been using RFID tags to measure buntings' activity levels and body temperatures. They found that, at rest, Snow Buntings start to overheat at 32.5°C , which is hotter than Arctic temperatures tend to be. However, parents rearing chicks work four to six times harder than resting birds. The chicks need to grow very fast because of the short summer, and parents forage 20 hours a day. In laboratory conditions, flying birds' body temperatures were found to rise very quickly; active Snow Buntings can overheat at just 11.7°C . They therefore need to slow down, which means they are providing less food. In the field, however, buntings in Qikiqtaaluk were not yet found to be overheating; the temperature can rise above 11.7°C at midday but not for long. In Alert, in the High Arctic, the sun never sets; Snow Buntings' body temperatures were found to remain constant, but they did have to reduce their feeding rates to avoid overheating.

As for phenological mismatches, if invertebrates start emerging earlier due to climate change, can Snow Buntings lay their eggs earlier to keep up? At Qikiqtaaluk, the team found that some buntings actually can lay earlier in warmer springs, which is good news: birds have the potential to respond to environmental conditions. But many birds are still mismatched with invertebrate emergence and the bigger the mismatch the fewer fledged young birds can produce.

Less is known about migration. When do Snow Buntings migrate and where do they go? Research based on close to 70 years of banding data has shown that some Snow Buntings that summer in Greenland migrate through Canada. Oliver's team attached geolocators to some Qikiqtaaluk birds to find out where they're wintering. Based on three years of research, they found that these birds migrate through western Hudson Bay and winter in the prairies. A similar project with Iqaluit birds found that these buntings use the same route as the Qikiqtaaluk ones in fall, but in the spring they fly north along eastern Hudson Bay. Meanwhile, preliminary data from Alert shows that birds are also wintering in the prairies, making a round trip of over 8,000 km. Motus tracking then led to the discovery of another migration route: some Snow Buntings that winter in southern Ontario and Quebec don't travel along the St. Lawrence and Labrador to Greenland but instead head directly north via Hudson Bay. Thus, different wintering populations can share a single migration route. Oliver's team is also working with Birds Canada and communities in Labrador and Nunavut to help expand community-based migration monitoring, and migration knowledge, by helping to train people in small northern communities to band and monitor Snow Buntings.

Winter is the time of year for which we have the most data, thanks to Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) as well as a banding history going back to the 1930s and to the recent work of the CSBN, which brings banders together from Alberta to New Brunswick. Snow Buntings nomadically move across many agricultural landscapes and are attracted to seed sources along the way, making them easy to lure in, trap, and band. Volunteer banders collect lots of information: sex, age, weight, size, fat score, recapture rate, etc. This information sheds light on birds' responses to changing weather conditions, and links between breeding and wintering. Colder, snowier weather means birds need more body fat to keep warm. However, buntings fatten slowly as they migrate north; they try to keep their body fat as low as possible until the last minute, as fat birds find it harder to fly fast and evade predators! Male Snow Buntings winter farther north and east than females; around Windsor Ontario, most buntings are female, whereas most birds around Rimouski are males. (Near Montreal, the mix is about fifty-fifty.) Males want to reach the breeding grounds as fast as they can, but wintering farther north increases their energy costs; as with many factors, there's a trade-off.



Photo: Darlene Harvey

Finally, Oliver presented some recent information on a new project in Nunavut's capital Iqaluit on the benefits of city life for Snow Buntings. With climate change, the North is becoming more accessible, resulting in increases in development and urbanization. Buntings are already nesting in Iqaluit, where there are many good nest sites, and the population is denser than outside the city. The team has already found that Iqaluit birds have a lot of breeding flexibility, meaning they can begin laying eggs earlier and end later in the summer than other populations. Iqaluit is warmer than Qikiqtaaluk, but the buntings seem to be [OL4.1] coping well. In fact, the team recently reported for the first time on record in Canada that two females produced double broods! It turns out that, although the city is relatively warm, there are plenty of spaces where birds may be able to seek coolness and shade; there's little to no shade on the tundra. Town buntings also have access to different prey than tundra buntings, with cities areas producing fewer spiders but more flies.

To sum up, climate change has both direct and indirect effects on Snow Buntings, but in a big surprise and providing positivity moving ahead, northern cities could prove to be refuges for them. Migratory connectivity is vital and community-based monitoring is a crucial tool in helping to fill in these huge gaps. Overall, Oliver gave us a wealth of information about these delightful birds that add joy to our winters.



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.

Le Chapitre Étudiant de la Wildlife Society de l'Université Laval

Project to install cameras in American Kestrel nest boxes

The applicants represent the only student chapter of The Wildlife Society in Quebec.

Original grant abstract:

The project focuses on the conservation of the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) by maintaining a network of about 50 nest boxes around Quebec City, providing a nesting habitat for a species in decline in the St. Lawrence Lowlands. Each year, the nest boxes are maintained and cleaned by the members before the birds arrive from their migration in the spring. Furthermore, this project includes a research component, involving population monitoring through nest box occupancy surveys and banding of chicks.

This year, with the support of Bird Protection Quebec, the students aim to enhance the research aspect by installing cameras in occupied nest boxes to study the Kestrel's breeding behaviours and monitor the development of the chicks.

Decision

The project had a total budget of \$5,825. The students applied to BPQ for a grant of \$2,300 to supplement funds already raised from different student groups and the university, and a planned fundraising event to sell nest boxes. The Grants Committee fully supported this student-initiated project that would expand students' knowledge of local Kestrels, while also training them in field techniques. The board approved the committee's recommendation to award the full amount of \$2,300 requested.

Results

A brief summary of the project results can be found on page 20. The complete report from the Kestrel Project team of the Chapitre étudiant de la Wildlife Society (in French), with photos, can be downloaded [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.

Le Chapitre Étudiant de la Wildlife Society de l'Université Laval

Installation de caméras dans des nichoirs à crécerelle d'Amérique

Le candidat représente la seule chapitre étudiant de la Wildlife Society au Québec.

Résumé :

Le projet porte sur la conservation de la crécerelle d'Amérique (*Falco sparverius*), en maintenant un réseau d'une cinquantaine de nichoirs en périphérie de la ville de Québec qui permet de procurer un habitat de nidification à une espèce en déclin dans les Basses-Terres du Saint-Laurent. Chaque année, les nichoirs du réseau sont entretenus et nettoyés par les membres avant l'arrivée des oiseaux au printemps. De plus, ce projet porte un volet de recherche, consistant à faire un suivi de la population en effectuant des tournées d'occupation des nichoirs et en baguant les oisillons. Cette année, avec l'appui de Protection des oiseaux du Québec, les étudiants souhaitent améliorer ce volet recherche en installant des caméras dans les nichoirs occupés afin d'étudier les comportements de reproduction de la Crécerelle et suivre le développement des oisillons.

Décision

Le budget total du projet s'élevait à 5 825 \$. Les étudiants ont sollicité une subvention de 2 300 \$ auprès du POQ afin de compléter les fonds déjà collectés auprès de différents groupes étudiants et de l'université, ainsi qu'une collecte de fonds prévue pour vendre des nichoirs. Le comité des subventions a soutenu ce projet lancé par les étudiants afin d'approfondir leurs connaissances sur les crécerelles locales, tout en leur permettant de se former aux techniques de terrain. Le conseil d'administration a approuvé la recommandation du comité d'octroyer la totalité du montant demandé, soit 2 300 \$.

Résultats

Vous trouverez un bref résumé des résultats du projet à la page suivante. Le rapport complet de l'équipe du projet Kestrel du Chapitre étudiant de la Wildlife Society, accompagné de photos, peut être téléchargé [ici](#).

Quick summary of the results...

The project began in early 2025, with the Kestrel Project team working with grade 9 students from Collège Mariste de Québec to build 24 nest boxes. Once these were ready, students from Université Laval were invited to help with the installation of the new boxes and the repair and cleaning of the existing network on the outskirts of Quebec City. With the additions, and removal of old and damaged boxes, the network grew to 48 boxes.

A volunteer helped design and construct a prototype camera installation that could be installed inside the box in a spot that would not disturb the birds. The test camera was placed in early May, allowing monitoring throughout the nesting period, and not removed until the end of August, after the birds had left the nest box. The daily photos received allowed them to determine the perfect time to band the chicks at the ideal age. The team learned from the experience what changes were needed to improve the camera performance, such as moving the camera outside the box and the best way to adjust the angle of the lens. Overall, they were very pleased with the results of the test run and are excited for next year, when the project will be expanded with the installation of the additional cameras purchased using the BPQ grant.

[Full report](#)



Bref résumé des résultats...

Le projet a démarré début 2025 : l'équipe du projet Kestrel a collaboré avec des élèves de 3e du Collège Mariste de Québec, qui ont construit 24 nichoirs. Une fois ceux-ci prêts, des étudiants de l'Université Laval ont été invités à participer à l'installation des nouveaux nichoirs ainsi qu'à la réparation et au nettoyage du réseau existant dans la périphérie de Québec. Grâce à ces ajouts et au retrait des nichoirs anciens et endommagés, le réseau est passé à 48 nichoirs.

Un bénévole a aidé à mettre au point un prototype de caméra pouvant être installé à l'intérieur du nichoir sans déranger les oiseaux. La caméra d'essai a été mise en place début mai, ce qui a permis un suivi tout au long de la période de nidification, et n'a été retirée qu'à la fin du mois d'août, une fois la saison de nidification complètement terminée. Les photos quotidiennes reçues leur ont permis de déterminer le moment idéal pour baguer les oisillons à l'âge optimal. L'équipe a tiré de cette expérience les enseignements nécessaires pour améliorer les performances de la caméra, notamment en la déplaçant à l'extérieur du nichoir, et a découvert la meilleure façon de régler l'angle de l'objectif. Dans l'ensemble, elle s'est montrée très satisfaite des résultats de cet essai et attend avec impatience l'année prochaine, lorsque le projet sera étendu grâce à l'installation de caméras supplémentaires achetées grâce à la subvention du POQ.

[Rapport complet](#)

In the Family Way... in pictures

Special thanks to our contributing photographers: Bill Thompson, Cory Ruchlin, Darlene Harvey, Maurice Gauvin, Nico Demers, Omar Morsy, Susan Kovacs, Tom Long, Wayne Grubert



Eastern Bluebird eggs
© Susan



American Robin eggs
© Wayne



Canada Goose egg
© Bill



Song Sparrow eggs
© Wayne



Wood Ducks © Darlene



Ruby-throated Hummingbird © Tom



Cooper's Hawk © Bill



American Goldfinch © Omar



American Redstart © Tom

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Pileated Woodpeckers © Tom



Common Gallinules © Cory



Northern Flickers © Darlene



Eastern Bluebird bringing home the bacon © Maurice



Northern Yellow Warblers © Wayne



European Starlings © Omar



Purple Martins © Cory



Wood Ducks © Wayne

The kids



Kingbirds © Tom



Eastern Phoebe © Darlene



Killdeer © Darlene



Spotted Sandpiper © Wayne



Great Horned Owlets © Cory



A bit of a cheat - this is an Austrian Mute Swan chick (but who could resist sharing it?!)
© Nico



Barred Owlet © Wayne



Pied-billed Grebes © Darlene



Canada Goose Goslings © Wayne

Some of Quebec's Most Unusual Nesters

by Ana Morales, MSc

Ana is a wildlife biologist specializing in avian ecology. She has a long association with BPQ: a life member, she served on the board from 2018 to 2024, was vice-president of conservation, and also chaired the Sanctuaries Committee. For fun, she has been volunteering at the McGill Bird Observatory for over 12 years, during three of which she was bander-in-charge of the MAPS programs, including one conducted at BPQ's Montée Biggar property. She appreciates birds of all species and finds it difficult to choose a favourite, although she admits having a soft spot for hummingbirds.

When most people think of a bird's nest, they picture a cup of twigs tucked into a tree branch. Before I got into birding, that's what I imagined too.

Then one day I learned: Ducks can nest in trees?!

It was on one of my first birding outings that I spotted a duck perched high in a tree. At first I thought it looked completely out of place. I was confused. I always thought ducks belonged on ponds and lakes, not sitting on branches. When someone explained that it was a Wood Duck and that the species actually nests in tree cavities, I was fascinated.

Even now, birds continue to surprise me. I am still learning about the incredible variety of bird nesting strategies, many of which can be observed right here in Quebec.

Here are a few of my personal favourites among the many fascinating nest types and nesting strategies found in our province.

The base-jumping ducklings

Thankfully, I've now learned a thing or two since that first confusing encounter with a duck in a tree. I now know that the aptly named Wood Duck is one of Quebec's most distinctive cavity nesters. As surprising as it may seem to find a duck perched in a tree, Wood Ducks are perfectly adapted for it. Their strong feet and sharp claws help them grip bark and perch comfortably on branches, allowing them to easily access nesting cavities high above the ground. Females seek out natural cavities in mature trees, often taking advantage of old Pileated Woodpecker holes. They are also happy to use man-made nest boxes when installed near suitable wetland habitat. Once a site is chosen, the female creates a soft nest lined with down feathers plucked from her own breast. She then lays a clutch of 10 to 15 eggs and incubates them for approximately 30 days.



Wood Duck pair | Photo: Bill Thompson

However, things get quite interesting, and somehow even a little dramatic, once the ducklings hatch. Within a day, the mom leaves the nest cavity and starts calling the ducklings from the ground or water below. The ducklings climb to the cavity entrance and take a literal "leap of faith", surviving falls of up to 20 metres. They aren't able to fly yet, but their small bodies are light enough to survive the fall unharmed. They then follow their mother to nearby water, where she continues caring for them until they are capable of flight.

Wood Ducks are not Quebec's only cavity-nesting ducks. Common Goldeneyes and Hooded Mergansers also rely on tree cavities and nest boxes, often nesting surprisingly high above the ground.

The underground nurseries

I was also surprised when I learned where Belted Kingfishers build their nests. I associated kingfishers with water and thus I expected them to nest among reeds or branches overhanging a river. Instead, I learned that their sturdy bills are not only made for fishing but also for digging through muddy riverbanks and lakeshores to create long tunnels where they will raise their young. Both male and female kingfishers participate in digging, using their strong claws and bill, creating a tunnel that may extend more than a metre into the bank. The end of the tunnel consists of a chamber where the female typically lays five to eight eggs. Once hatched, chicks remain underground for several weeks before emerging from the tunnel.

Other Quebec birds also nest underground. Atlantic Puffins excavate burrows on coastal islands, while Bank Swallows create large colonies of nesting tunnels in sandy riverbanks. These tiny swallows dig these deep burrows themselves, using their feet, wings, and bill!



Bank Swallow colony (Stock photo)



Atlantic Puffin burrow

Photo: Doug Fisher

The forest floor ghosts

American Woodcocks don't bother with a complicated nest. Instead, they nest directly on the forest floor, creating only a small depression among dead leaves and relying on their amazing camouflage to avoid detection. The female usually lays four eggs on the ground, and her mottled plumage blends perfectly with the surrounding leaf litter, making her nearly impossible to detect. After hatching, the fluffy chicks leave the nest within hours and begin following their mother while learning to forage.

If threatened, the female often flushes and performs a distraction display to lure predators away from her young. The chicks, on the other hand, freeze completely in place. Combined with their cryptic coloration, this behaviour is one of their most effective defenses against predators. Their camouflage is so effective that they can completely disappear into the forest floor.

Other ground nesters also rely on camouflage strategies. Killdeer lay their eggs in bare patches of gravel and protect them with their famous dramatic broken-wing display to lure predators away from the nest. Common Nighthawks also often lay speckled eggs directly on gravel rooftops, open rocky areas, or patches of bare ground. Their eggs and plumage blend so well with the surrounding substrate that they can be remarkably difficult to spot.

The tiny architects

The first time someone pointed out a Ruby-throated Hummingbird nest to me, I could barely see it. No larger than a walnut, it blended so perfectly into the branch that it looked just like a lichen-covered bump on the tree.

Female hummingbirds do all the work of building the nest and raising the young by themselves. They construct a miniature cup-shaped nest using soft plant down, such as thistle or dandelion fluff, moss, and spider silk. They then decorate the exterior with small lichens to help camouflage it against the branch. The spider silk not only helps to hold the nest together, it also acts like an elastic, allowing the walls of the nest to stretch and expand as the chicks grow!



The female lays two tiny eggs, each about the size of a Tic Tac.



The female lays two tiny eggs, each about the size of a Tic Tac, and cares for the chicks on her own until they fledge. Despite its tiny size, I think the hummingbird nest may be one of the most remarkable structures built by any bird in Quebec. A beautiful piece of art hidden among the branches! Although I may be a little biased when it comes to these beautiful tiny creatures.



Photos 1 & 2: Woodcock babies ©Darlene Harvey;
Photos 3 & 4: Hummingbird on the nest © Tom Long

The giants

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the hummingbird sits the Bald Eagle. Bald Eagles construct enormous stick nests high in large trees near lakes, rivers, and the coastline. Pairs mate for life and often return to the same nest year after year. Like many home owners, they are big fans of renovations, adding new branches and nesting material to their nest every single year. As a result, older nests can become massive, growing larger with each breeding season. A typical bald eagle nest may exceed two metres in diameter, weighing hundreds of kilograms, making it one of the largest bird nests in North America. For this reason, eagles typically choose large, sturdy trees capable of supporting the weight of their nests. The female usually lays one to three eggs in early spring, and both parents take part in incubation and chick rearing. Young eagles remain in the nest for roughly 10 to 14 weeks before taking their first flights, although they often continue relying on their parents for food and guidance for several more weeks afterward.



Floating nest builders

Wetlands can present unique challenges for nesting birds. Water levels constantly rise and fall, and different predators may approach from land, water, or air.

Pied-billed Grebes overcome some of these challenges by building floating nests. Constructed from fresh and decaying aquatic vegetation and anchored to cattails or reeds, the nest rises and falls with changing water levels, helping protect eggs from flooding. By nesting over water and within dense marsh vegetation, grebes can also reduce the risk of encounters with many terrestrial predators.



When adults leave the nest, they often cover the eggs with vegetation, concealing them from aerial predators and making the nest look like just another patch of floating plant material. After hatching, the zebra-striped chicks often climb onto their parents' backs, where they stay warm, dry, and protected from predators while the adult swims through the marsh or dives for food.

Other wetland species have adopted similar strategies. American Coots also build bulky floating platforms from reeds and aquatic vegetation, while Black Terns nest on floating mats of vegetation scattered throughout marshes.

Living on the edge

Peregrine Falcons have nested on cliffs for thousands of years. Rather than building an elaborate nest, they lay their eggs and raise their young on bare surfaces of high rocky ledges. The location offers a prime view of the surrounding landscape while helping protect the nest from many ground predators.

What is particularly interesting, however, is how well Peregrine Falcons have adapted to urban environments. Across the urbanized landscapes of southern Quebec, high-rise buildings, bridges, and industrial structures often serve as substitutes for natural cliffs, while abundant pigeon populations provide a convenient buffet. As a result, some of the best places to observe nesting Peregrines today are in the middle of major cities.

These urban nesting sites have also given us a unique opportunity to observe Peregrine Falcons and their nesting behaviour more closely. One of the best-known local examples is the nesting pair at the Université de Montréal, where [live-cams](#) allow thousands of people to follow the dramatic lives of these falcons, from courtship and egg-laying to hatching, first flights, and the occasional unexpected challenge that comes with raising young in the city.



Observing nests responsibly

With summer now underway, birds across Quebec are busy nesting and raising young. It is one of the best times of year to get outside and learn more about their fascinating breeding behaviours. However, it is also one of the most vulnerable periods in a bird's life cycle and disturbances can sometimes have consequences for both adults and their young. If you are lucky enough to discover a nest, remember to observe responsibly: give birds space, stay on designated trails, keep dogs on leash and cats indoors, and avoid sharing the locations of sensitive species. Small actions like these can make a big difference during the breeding season. By doing so, we can help ensure they successfully raise the next generation and that future birders can continue to discover these fascinating nesting behaviours, or, you know, simply be surprised by a tree-nesting duck!



Model Parents, Deadbeat Dads and Promiscuous Moms

The Spectrum of Family Relationships in the Avian World

Story & photos by **Wayne Grubert**

A male Canada Goose swims languidly across a small pond keeping one eye on his mate as she incubates her clutch of eggs in a down-lined depression atop a muskrat house. The other eye is on the lookout for threats. When the goslings hatch, the female shepherds them as they taste-test their way along a shoreline or through nearby grassy meadows. The gander continues his stretch-necked vigilance. Possibly mated for life, the pair may even keep their family together until the following spring when the young are encouraged to leave as the parents prepare to repeat the reproductive cycle.

But just how common is this “prototypical” family relationship in the avian world? It turns out there is a large variance in how different species approach mate selection, division of labour in nest building, and parental care of young. Here we present just a few examples of the range of reproductive lifestyles found in some of our favourite feathered friends.

Deadbeat dads

The ubiquitous **Mallard** falls under the general category of waterfowl just like the Canada Goose but shows little resemblance in lifestyle. Pairs may form on the wintering grounds, with the drake following the hen back to her natal area in a flight pattern known as abmigration. The term “seasonally monogamous” may be stretching reality here as males show a proclivity for promiscuity, often mating with neighbouring females when opportunity arises, sometimes forcibly. For her part, the female begins incubating her clutch once the last egg is laid in order to achieve synchronous hatching. Her new priorities lead to a weakening of the pair bond until the male finally abandons his mate completely. He has no role in raising the ducklings. He may even fly back to his own hatching area.

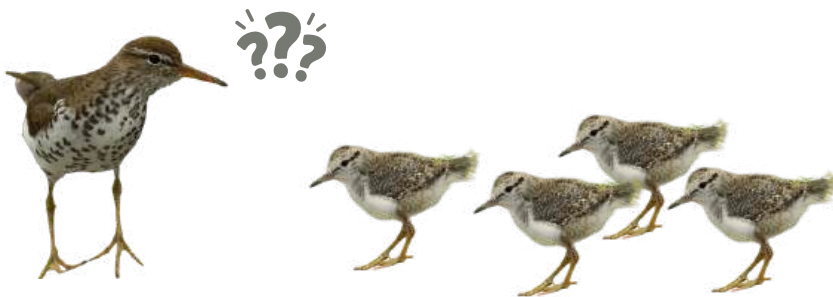
A deep thumping sound that seems to be viscerally felt rather than heard permeates a spring forest and gains tempo until it is the audio version of a blur. A male **Ruffed Grouse** is announcing his presence to all prospective females in the area. He will mate with as many of them as find his display intriguing. Females take on all responsibility for nest building, incubating and caring of the young. Males simply try to entice other females until hormone levels begin to decline and he returns to a mainly solitary lifestyle.



“He will mate with as many of them as find his display intriguing.”

Promiscuous moms

Phalaropes are well known for their reversed sexually dimorphic plumage with females being more colourful than males. Less obvious to us in southern Québec, where only one of the three species can rarely be found breeding, is the existence of a parental role reversal. Fear not, a better-known shorebird breeding in our part of the province also shows a reversal of traditional parental responsibility. Female **Spotted Sandpipers** are polyandrous, meaning they may have several mates (as many as four). They arrive first on the breeding grounds, initiate courtship and leave the males to incubate and supervise the precocial young. (The female may at times incubate the last clutch.) Because plumage differences in Spotted Sandpipers are not as evident as in phalaropes, these behavioral role reversals often go unnoticed to the casual observer.



“Female Spotted Sandpipers... leave the males to incubate and supervise the precocial young.”

Trad families

Let's close the circle and end with two species that display a more traditional family structure. Corvids are known for their intelligence. This superior mental ability may explain the more complicated family lifestyle of **American Crows**. Like Canada Geese, parents may mate for life. Deviating slightly from the goose division of labour, both crow parents help build the nest although there is some question as to whether the male shares incubation duties. Where American Crows really show an advanced family structure is in the conscription of the previous year's young (sometimes two years' worth) in raising the current season's brood. So that flock of cawing creatures harassing the neighbour's feline may be a form of multigenerational family.



It comes as a great surprise to new birders that **Northern Cardinals** have only been breeding in Québec since 1964. Males singing in late winter from conspicuous perches have become so commonplace that even non-birders not only observe but recognize this brilliantly-clad songbird. Less obvious is that his more subtly but just as beautifully plumaged mate also sings during the onset of the breeding season, most probably to strengthen their pair bond. Essentially monogamous, each will chase intraspecific interlopers of the same sex away from their territory. Females build the nest and do much of the incubating, although dad will spell her at times. Several days after the young have fledged the male may take over caring for the young as the female prepares another nest in anticipation of a new brood. This cycle may be repeated several times during the season, accounting for observations of young birds still being attended by adults well into the autumnal months. These multiple nestings over many months may partly explain why, once established, the population of these popular birds has exploded.



There are probably as many variances in family structure and behavior as there are species of birds. Discovering subtle differences for oneself is what makes birding so enjoyable, even for advanced birders who are no longer adding “lifers” on a regular basis. There is always something new to learn and always another avian mystery to be parsed. We hope this small sample of breeding behaviours has sparked your interest in observing more closely the dynamics of avian family living.

REFERENCE: Much of the information presented here is gleaned from the *Breeding Birds of Québec*, edited by Jean Gauthier and Yves Aubry, otherwise known as the first Atlas of Breeding Birds of Southern Quebec.

CAUTION: Note that at approximately 6 kg (13 lb) this book is not recommended for “light” bedtime reading!



Word on the wing...

by Nico Demers, Word Nerd

Ever wonder where expressions like “a bird in the hand” came from? In this column, we have some fun exploring the origins of words and sayings related to our favourite feathered friends.

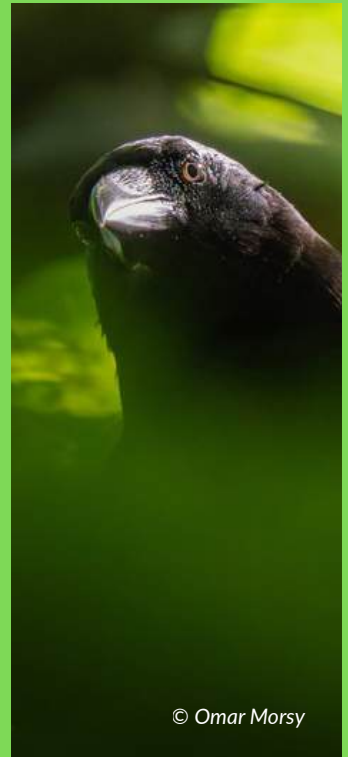


“Bird”: from Old English bridd, which used to refer only to fledglings or chicks. At some point in the 1400s, it expanded to birds of all ages. The origins of the word are uncertain and, curiously, it has no cognates (equivalent words in other languages that come from the same root) in any other language!

Some derivatives: “bird’s-eye view” (attested from 1762), “bird-watching” (from 1884), “for the birds” (as in “something undesirable”, from 1944).

The phrase “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” was first recorded in the 1530s, originally phrased as “...better than three in the wood”. I guess two modern birds are equivalent to three medieval ones... The earliest known mention of this saying, though, is found in an ancient Aramaic proverb from the 7th century BC, in which a father tells his son that “... a sparrow in thy hand is better than a thousand sparrows flying”.

International variants of the latter include “Better a sparrow in the hand than a pigeon on the roof” (German), “Better a grouse in the palm than ten on the branch” (Finnish), and “Better a tit in the hand than a crane in the sky” (Ukrainian).



Marcel Gahbauer's

Birds with Quirks

By definition, each species is unique. However, some have more distinct characteristics or behaviours than others. This column features species with notable quirks, focusing on those found in Quebec but sometimes referencing related species elsewhere.



Killdeer - Thespian of the avian world

At a time when the *Bird Names for Birds* movement (<https://birdnamesforbirds.wordpress.com/>) is calling for many species to be renamed, perhaps it's worth also considering a gentler moniker for the Killdeer? Granted, the initiative is aimed at replacing eponymous names but surely something like Double-banded Plover or Cinnamon-rumped Plover would sound nicer and distinguish it clearly from Semipalmated Plover and other shorebird relatives. To be fair, its current English name derives logically from its strident call of "kill-deer" that is also reflected in the French name (Pluvier kildir), and more generally in its scientific name of *Charadrius vociferus* (the noisy plover). They're even vocal at night, especially under a full moon or around street lights—indeed, Killdeer are often heard before they're seen—but beware of European Starlings (e.g., <https://www.lauraerickson.com/sound-recording/13310/>) and Northern Mockingbirds (e.g., <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/558274681>): both offer convincing imitations of the Killdeer's call.

Anyone who has ever been near a Killdeer nest will know that they also produce a variety of other high-pitched peeps and shrieks—which generally accompany a dramatic broken-wing display. As Forbush and May (1959) described it, when a potential predator approaches a nest, the incubating adult will intercept it, "floundering along the ground, shrieking and beating the earth with her wings as if in terrible agony" (note that at the time, they appear to have assumed this to be female behaviour but it's now recognized that both sexes incubate and respond in this way). Of course, once the predator has been suitably led astray, the avian actor suddenly experiences a miraculous recovery and flies off, usually giving a few loud "kill-deer" calls for good measure.

...floundering along
the ground,
shrieking and
beating the earth
with her wings as if
in terrible agony.

-Forbush and May

Another renaming option would be to resurrect one of its older colloquial identities, Meadow Plover (Forbush and May 1959), based on its general association with upland habitat rather than shorelines. That being said, the species is quite adaptable, nesting everywhere from heavily grazed pastures and cultivated fields to school yards, golf courses, and gravel-covered roofs. The latter are understandably attractive with respect to providing a good substrate for eggs and safety from terrestrial predators, but much more problematic from the perspective of the nestlings. Like other shorebirds, they are precocial, meaning that they are mobile within hours of hatching and expected to begin foraging for themselves. The adults usually try to lead their offspring to suitable feeding areas, but the jump from rooftop to ground can be perilous, with survival greatly influenced by the height of the drop and the landing surface below.



Although Killdeer spend less of their time near water than other shorebirds, they can still be found along shorelines, especially during migration. This group was resting on a small rocky island in the Rideau River in August 2025 – how many can you spot?

A Killdeer demonstrating how easily it can blend in with rocky surroundings.



The willingness of Killdeer to nest in disturbed sites sometimes leads to bigger concerns. Most famously, a pair nested on the grounds of Ottawa's Bluesfest in 2018, a story which ended up reaching an international audience. The eggs were discovered well-camouflaged among the cobblestones in June, as preparations were being made to set up the main stage. Because the species is protected under the Migratory Birds Convention Act, it was illegal to interfere with the nest – and the issue was especially sensitive as it was on federal land. But postponing or moving the week-long event would have been a logistical nightmare. Fortunately, the National Capital Commission came up with a clever plan to move the nest, and was able to acquire a fast-tracked “damage or danger” permit from Environment and Climate Change Canada. Two biologists built a thin artificial platform covered with soil, grass, and pebbles, similar to the existing nest (Tremblay 2018). They then transferred the eggs to the new ‘nest’ and placed it on top of the original one. After a nerve-wracking wait, they saw an adult return to resume incubation. Over the remaining three hours of daylight, the biologists slid the platform a total of 7 metres toward safety. With another 13 incremental moves the next morning, they finally got the nest far enough out of harm's way. Three days later, three of the four eggs hatched, and the adults led them away; the remaining chick hatched and was transferred to the Ottawa Valley Wild Bird Care Centre.



The Bluesfest Killdeer was a rare positive note in recent news about shorebirds. In Europe, Slender-billed Curlew was declared extinct last year (Buchanan et al. 2025), and the adorable but critically imperilled Spoon-billed Sandpiper of eastern Asia is just hanging on (BirdLife International 2021). Here in Canada, three shorebird species—Hudsonian Godwit, Lesser Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitcher—have been newly assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) within the past decade as being threatened or endangered and another 20 (!) species—Marbled Godwit, plus a “bundle” comprising 19 Arctic-breeding species—are currently under review. On top of that, COSEWIC is preparing to vote on an updated Eskimo Curlew assessment report, with the expectation that it will echo the Slender-billed Curlew analysis. The trouble is that many shorebirds face multiple threats. They tend to like the same habitat as people, namely marine coasts where large parts of historical staging or wintering habitat have been affected or lost outright to urbanization, ports and other industrial development, recreation, fisheries, and shoreline stabilization. Arctic-nesting species are additionally experiencing effects of climate change (e.g., shrubification of the tundra) and, in some areas, excessive browsing by geese. On top of that, many long-distance migrants that reach the Caribbean or South America are exposed to ongoing hunting pressure.

With a breeding range that's substantially larger than any other North American shorebird (extending from southern Yukon and Northwest Territories all the way to Mexico), some degree of presence in human-altered landscapes, and a shorter migration distance than most others, one might expect Killdeer to be faring better than most shorebirds. Alas, the opposite is true. The best source of information on the population status of Killdeer is the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). Because Killdeer nest in open areas and vocalize regularly during the breeding season, they are readily detected by the BBS, which samples a large portion of the breeding range, and has highly precise trends. The national BBS data show a large long-term decrease in abundance, with the steepest decline occurring from the early 1980s to the early 1990s, and alarmingly the pace has accelerated again in recent years (Figure 1-next page). The population is currently 75% lower than in the early 1970s (an average decline of nearly 2.7% per year). Long-term declines of over 70% have occurred in all Canadian Bird Conservation Regions where reliability of the BBS is at least medium, except in the Prairies, where the population decrease relative to 1970 is 46%. These declines are reflected in the International Union for Conservation of Nature designating Killdeer as “Near Threatened” globally in 2024 (BirdLife International 2024) – and may warrant it being added to COSEWIC's list of candidate species for assessment (COSEWIC 2026). At a regional scale, most state, provinces, and territories still consider Killdeer to be apparently secure or secure, largely on the basis of broad distribution and relatively large populations, but note that the status is more precarious in Quebec, Atlantic Canada, and Maine (Figure 2-next page).

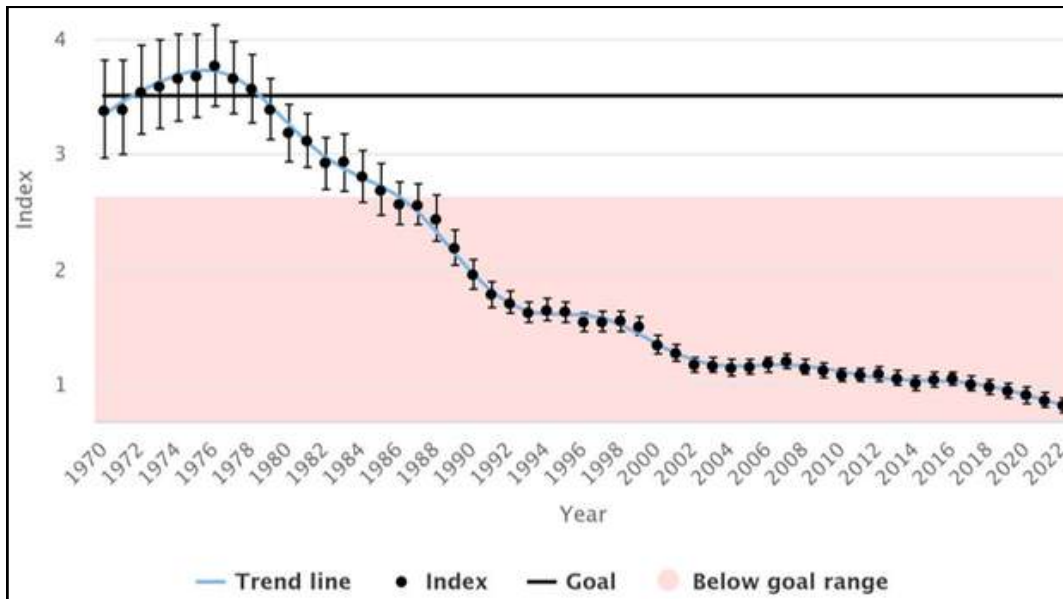
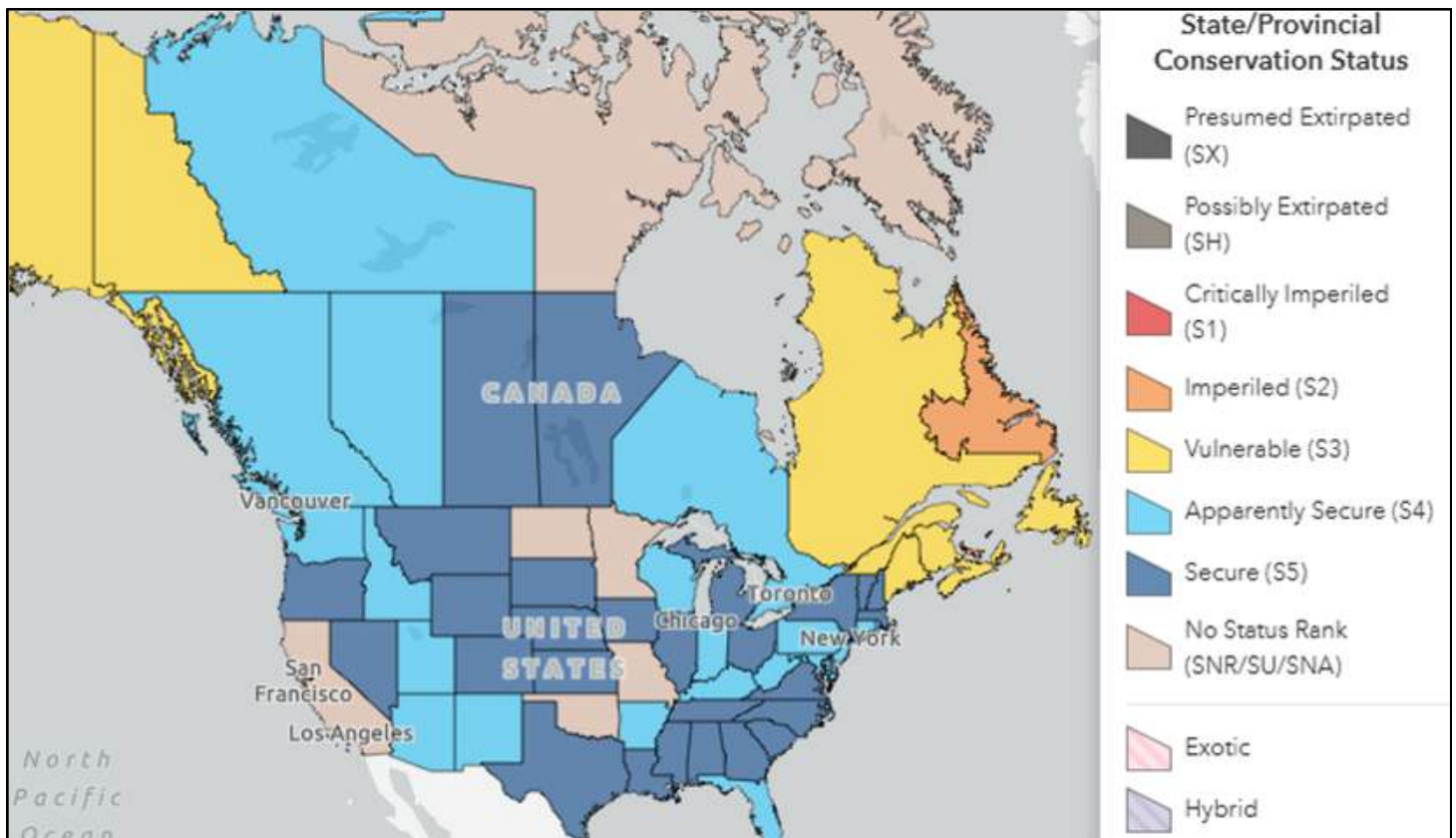


Figure 1: Long-term population trend for Killdeer from the State of Canada's Birds (ECCC and Birds Canada 2024), based on Breeding Bird Studies across Canada. The thick black horizontal bar indicates the population goal, equivalent to its average index of abundance in the early 1970s, while the top of the pink shaded area corresponds to 25% less than the goal. The population has been below that level since 1987, and as of 2022 had declined 75% since 1970. Note the tight uncertainty bounds around the annual estimates, especially over the past three decades, which suggest considerable confidence in the decline.

Figure 2: Conservation status of Killdeer at the provincial/territorial/state level (NatureServe 2026)



The Killdeer has long been recognized as a friend of farmers, given that it “feeds voraciously upon worms, grubs, and bugs of various kinds” (Pearson 1936) and, despite its population decline, it remains the most accessible shorebird for most Canadians to observe during the breeding season. Hopefully increasing awareness of its status and further efforts to protect nests in urban and agricultural settings will allow the cry of the Killdeer to keep ringing in our ears.

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Photo: Darlene Harvey

Birding Basics



Keeping Ticks and Mosquitoes Away



Birding often takes us into some beautiful places, from wooded trails to marshes and tall grass fields. While those habitats are great for birds, they can also be prime territory for ticks and mosquitoes, so it's important to be prepared before heading out.

Dress for protection

Lightweight long sleeves, long pants, and taller socks can make a big difference when birding in buggy areas. Tucking your pants into your socks may not be the height of fashion, but it helps prevent ticks from reaching your skin. Light-coloured clothing also makes it easier to spot ticks before they hitch a ride home.

Use insect repellent properly

A good insect repellent can help keep both mosquitoes and ticks away. Products containing DEET or icaridin are effective options for outdoor activities. Apply it to exposed skin and clothing according to the label directions, especially if you'll be spending time near wetlands, forests, or shaded trails.

Stick to the trail when possible

Ticks tend to wait on tall grasses and low vegetation for passing hosts. Staying in

the centre of trails and avoiding brushing against plants can help reduce your chances of picking them up. It also helps protect sensitive habitat while you're out enjoying nature.

Do a quick tick check afterward

After your birding outing, take a few minutes to check yourself, your clothing, and your gear for ticks. Pay close attention to areas like socks, waistbands, behind the knees, and under arms. Showering soon after coming home can also help wash away any ticks that haven't attached yet.

Protect your gear, too

Ticks don't just hitch rides on people. They can also cling to backpacks, camera straps, binocular harnesses, and clothing left on the ground. After your outing, give your gear a quick

inspection before bringing it indoors. Storing clothing in a hot dryer for 10–15 minutes can also help kill any ticks that may have come home with you.

Time your outings strategically

Mosquitoes are often most active around dawn and dusk, especially in humid areas. If bugs tend to bother you, consider birding later in the morning or on breezier days when mosquitoes are less active. A little planning can make your outing much more comfortable.

With a bit of preparation, you can stay focused on the birds instead of the bugs and enjoy your time outdoors more comfortably.



Se protéger contre les tiques et les moustiques



L'observation des oiseaux nous emmène souvent dans des endroits magnifiques, des sentiers boisés aux marais en passant par les champs d'herbes hautes. Si ces habitats sont parfaits pour les oiseaux, ils constituent également un terrain de prédilection pour les tiques et les moustiques ; il est donc important de bien se préparer avant de partir.

Habillez-vous pour vous protéger

Des vêtements légers à manches longues, un pantalon long et des chaussettes hautes peuvent faire toute la différence lorsque vous observez les oiseaux dans des zones infestées d'insectes. Rentrer votre pantalon dans vos chaussettes n'est peut-être pas très tendance, mais cela aide à empêcher les tiques d'atteindre votre peau. Les vêtements de couleur claire permettent également de repérer plus facilement les tiques avant qu'elles ne se glissent dans vos vêtements pour rentrer avec vous.

Utilisez correctement un répulsif anti-insectes

Un bon répulsif anti-insectes peut aider à éloigner à la fois les moustiques et les tiques. Les produits contenant du DEET ou de l'icaridine sont des choix courants pour les activités de plein air. Appliquez-le sur la peau exposée et les vêtements en suivant les instructions sur l'étiquette, surtout si vous passez du temps près de zones humides, de forêts ou de sentiers ombragés.

Restez sur le sentier autant que possible

Les tiques ont tendance à attendre leurs hôtes sur les hautes herbes et la végétation

basse. Rester au centre des sentiers et éviter de frôler les plantes peut aider à réduire vos risques d'en attraper. Cela contribue également à protéger les habitats sensibles pendant que vous profitez de la nature.

Vérifiez rapidement la présence de tiques après votre sortie

Une fois votre sortie ornithologique terminée, prenez quelques minutes pour vérifier que vous, vos vêtements et votre équipement ne comportent pas de tiques. Inspectez particulièrement les zones telles que les chaussettes, la ceinture, l'arrière des genoux et les aisselles. Prendre une douche dès votre retour à la maison peut également aider à éliminer les tiques qui ne se sont pas encore accrochées.

Pensez aussi à protéger votre équipement

Les tiques ne se contentent pas de s'accrocher aux personnes. Elles peuvent également se fixer sur les sacs à dos, les sangles d'appareils photo, les harnais de jumelles et les vêtements laissés par terre. Après votre sortie, inspectez rapidement votre équipement avant de le rentrer chez vous. Mettre vos vêtements dans un sèche-

linge à haute température pendant 10 à 15 minutes peut également aider à éliminer les tiques qui auraient pu vous suivre jusqu'à la maison.

Choisissez stratégiquement le moment de vos sorties

Les moustiques sont souvent plus actifs à l'aube et au crépuscule, en particulier dans les zones humides. Si les insectes ont tendance à vous déranger, envisagez de faire de l'observation des oiseaux plus tard dans la matinée ou lors de journées plus venteuses, lorsque les moustiques sont moins actifs. Un peu de planification peut rendre votre sortie bien plus agréable.

Avec un peu de préparation, vous pourrez rester concentré sur les oiseaux plutôt que sur les insectes et profiter plus confortablement de votre temps en plein air.

Exploring Early Canadian Ornithology

with Jeff Harrison

Archibald Hall: A Pioneer of Montreal Ornithology

Archibald Hall (1812-1868) was the son of Montreal hatter Jacob Hall (1777-1819) and his wife Rebecca Ferguson (1789-1861). Jacob Hall was one of four brothers, all skilled tradespeople, who emigrated to Montreal from Andover, Massachusetts, about 1797.

Archibald Hall received his formal schooling at the Royal Grammar School under the direction of Alexander Shakel, a founding member of the Natural History Society of Montreal (NHSM). Hall went on to study medicine at McGill University and completed his studies at the University of Edinburgh in 1834. He returned to Montreal in 1835 and spent the rest of his life as a practising physician in the city. He also taught Medicine at McGill and co-founded the *British American Journal of Medical and Physical Science* in 1845.

Hall had a passionate interest in nature, which may well have been nurtured by Shakel, and was enhanced during his studies at the well-known scientific hot-bed for naturalists, the Medical School at University of Edinburgh. His interest in birds dates to at least 1831, when he saw a specimen of a Mourning Dove shot on Île Jésus (*Canadian Naturalist and Geologist* 7:352).

In addition to his friendship with Shakel, Hall had a life-long association with the Natural History Society of Montreal, founded in 1827. The Society inherited some bird specimens from its first members, and from its founding prioritized the creation and expansion of its research collections. In 1828 this initiative included soliciting specimens from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). Questionnaires "for a preliminary inventory" were distributed to employees and valuable written reports duly received, but the specimens intended for the society were instead ordered home by the HBC London Committee (Levere, 1993:192).

Hall recognized that while many ornithological books had been produced in the United States, very few had been published in the settled parts of Upper and Lower Canada and the Maritimes. It seems likely that the loss of the bird collections from the vast HBC territories and the publishing of Swainson and Richardson's *Fauna Boreali Americana Vol II The Birds* in 1831 may have inclined Hall to confine his work to the Natural History Society's Quebec collection, with the intention of providing a solid baseline of ornithological data for the Montreal District. For his purposes, Hall's Montreal District comprised a large area roughly bounded by the border of Upper Canada in the west, the American border on the south, Sherbrooke, Drummondville and the St-Maurice River in the east, and in the north roughly by the southern extremity of the Laurentians.

Hall's 1839 Manuscript

In 1839, Hall completed and presented to the Society his "Sketch of the Zoology of the vicinity of Montreal, Canada". Other than Charles Fothergill's unpublished work in Upper Canada, this was the first manuscript devoted to Canadian ornithology written by a resident. Using the extensive mammal and ornithological collections of the Society, Hall's massive work, which originally ran to 153 manuscript pages, was completed over a nine-month period. Hall received the Society's Silver Medal in 1839 for his achievement. Unfortunately for Canadian ornithology, in its early years the NHSM did not publish its transactions. As a result, his manuscript remained unpublished.

The 1839 manuscript on birds contained descriptions of 197 of the 199 species listed. Two birds #76 Chimney Swift (*Cypselus pelasgius*) and #149 Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax dilop[hus]*) were not described. This omission appears to have been an oversight.



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Notes on the 1839 Collection

How many genuine species did Hall describe? Hall's descriptions are brief but for the most part sufficiently detailed in most cases to identify the species. Today a number of these "species" are now recognized as varieties, juveniles or plumage differences based on gender. Even in the early 1860s this sort of error was still occurring in ornithological literature. There are twenty-five species descriptions in the Table that Hall lists as "dc," i.e. descriptions compiled from more than one source. Michel Gosselin has pointed out that some of these descriptions are suspect:

One of the problems I'm faced with is that under a single species heading Hall may quote descriptions from a book (Nuttall, Baird, etc.) and then add a description from a NHSM museum specimen, and in some cases, I think they don't belong to the same species!

Four are suspect, but most, if not all of the remaining twenty-one remaining species have probably been properly identified by Hall.

There are a number of other issues that affect the total number of genuine species. Hall sometimes includes European species:

One important issue with Hall is that he relied mostly on NHSM specimens "presumably" from Montreal. However, given the fact that many NHSM members were British immigrants and the fact that specimen documentation appears to be inconsistent (to say the least), I strongly suspect that foreign specimens were innocently mixed with local ones. His accounts of *Podiceps cristatus* [#161 Great Crested Grebe] and *P. minor* [#162 Little Grebe] clearly refer to European species, and were based, I'm sure, on British specimens that were confused with local species. The same is certainly true also for the Lesser Black-backed Gull [#171], the Mew Gull [#170] and the Barnacle Goose [#176]. (Gosselin, personal communication).

Hall lists Little Grebe as rare and Great-crested and Mew Gull as common migrants with arrival and departure dates. As Gosselin suggests, Hall may have misidentified these species. In addition, given the information Hall provides, there is enough uncertainty that five North American species may well remain unidentifiable. Eight numbered species are clearly duplicates. There are three species not in the collection or recorded that Hall included as "expected." Finally, there are three species not in the Society's collection, but which Hall included based on unsubstantiated sight records.

The review of Hall's 1839 bird list yields a revised total of 178 genuine species. It is highly likely that the 1839 collection was larger since the totals do not include males and females of the same species or gender duplicates.

The vast majority of Hall's 1839 text provides detailed descriptions of the birds in the collection, but rarely does he provide collection details such as date and location. A few interesting exceptions are included here:

Falco Sancti Johannis (Rough-legged Hawk) CNG 7:62

The only specimen of this species that has fallen under my notice is a young bird shot this spring (1838) at the Priests' Farm [near Sherbrooke and Atwater Streets], Montreal, of which the following is a description.

Colymbus Septentrionalis (Red-throated Loon) CNG 7:405

A female shot in the Lachine rapids in the spring of 1837 and in my possession ...

Rallus Noveboracensis (Yellow Rail) CNG 7: 375

This rail is very scarce indeed, having only been met with in the extensive swamps on the southern shore of the St. Lawrence in the neighbourhood of Sorel.

Two key collection locations in Hall's "Montreal District" were Mount Royal and the Lachine Rapids. There is a very interesting record of *Caprimulgus americanus* from Mount Royal:

This is a Mexican species, which in its wandering contrived to reach this neighbourhood. It was shot on the mountain [Mount Royal] by the late Mr. Broome, who held for many years the situation of taxidermist to the Natural History Society. It was identified by Mr. Cassin; of Philadelphia, as a Mexican species, under the designation. (CNG 7:295)

Michel Gosselin notes that Norman David addressed the case of the *Caprimulgus americanus* (Common Pauraque) in his "Liste commentée des oiseaux du Québec" (1996 p. 50), and Gosselin thinks it may well be a genuine vagrant, but there is also a possibility that the stated Montreal origin was in error.

The 1862 Manuscript

Hall made revisions to the original work on birds, which was finally published in Volume 7 of the *Canadian Naturalist and Geologist* (CNG) in 1861-1862. In his discussion of the record of *Buteo insignatus*, Hall acknowledged the involvement of American ornithologists who

likely encouraged the publication of the manuscript:

Frequently after having examined this bird, the late Dr. McCulloch and myself considered it new, but we had no means of verifying our opinion, until the visit of Prof. Cassin, of Philadelphia, in 1854 ... the following spring it was forwarded to Mr. Cassin in Philadelphia who identified it as a new species ... Mr. Cassin has attached to it the name of "Canada Buzzard". The bird was shot by a farmer near Terrebonne and given to Dr. McCulloch. (CNG 7:66-67)¹

Cassin had visited Montreal in 1854 to view the NHSM collection. At the time he was looking for Canadian bird records for his *Illustrations of the Birds of California, Texas, Oregon, British and Russian America*, issued in 10 parts between 1853 and 1855. During his visit he learned of Hall's manuscript, and cited four of Hall's records (Swainson's Hawk, Great Gray, Snowy and Boreal Owls) in his *Illustrations*. Cassin returned the manuscript to Hall after *Illustrations* was published, which Elliott Coues confirmed in his review of Hall's work in *Birds of the Colorado Valley* published in 1873:

It [Hall's manuscript] was subsequently entrusted to Mr. Cassin, to be used in the preparation of a work of his, and only returned [to Hall] by him a short time before its publication. (E. Coues, "Bibliographical Appendix": 664-5)

Hall's revised work was published under the title "On the Mammals and Birds of the Montreal District," Mammals in CNG 6 (1861) and Birds in CNG 7 (1862). Hall had contemplated a considerably larger work:

It was the intention of the author at the commencement of this task, to have given a general outline of the habits of the species [in addition to the scientific description] which would come under notice. It was found, however, that such a step would render the essay far too voluminous; and as nothing could be said beyond what is contained in an ordinary work on the subject, it was deemed a superfluous repetition, and moreover foreign to the real object he had in view. (CNG 7:287)

For the new publication, Hall re-ordered the 199 species of birds in a four-page summary table (CNG 7:50-53). The Table contained the following details for each bird:

- scientific name;
- relative commonness;
- extreme northern range by latitude;
- migratory or resident status;
- known winter quarters;
- the months of arrival and departure of migrants.

Scientific name and known winter quarters were derived from published works of Wilson, Bonaparte, Cassin, and Baird. Hall noted that he relied heavily on *Fauna Boreali Americana* for his extreme northern range estimates. Details on relative commonness, migratory or resident status, and arrival and departure dates were likely supplied by Hall with the assistance of members of the Society. In addition to describing specimens from the NHSM collection, Hall prepared additional descriptions from his field notes. He also used Nuttall's *A Manual on the Ornithology of the United States and Canada* (1832-34) as his main reference source. Despite the title, Nuttall's work was largely devoid of Canadian bird records.

Hall presented a second table, which showed the number and colour of the eggs of breeding species, covering six pages (CNG 7:44-49). It seems likely that for missing egg details he relied heavily on the work of Thomas Brewer, who published the first important work on North American birds' eggs, *North American Oology*, in 1857.

Hall included in his Tables ten new species added to the museum collection since 1839. Except for the Tables little other new material was added. It seems likely that his busy medical and publishing career probably limited his ability to research and make substantive changes.

Of the ten additional records, five were new:

- Labrador Duck (*Anas labradorica*)
- Gyrfalcon (*Falco dawsonis*)
- American Three-toed Woodpecker (*Picus hirsutus*)
- Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Sylvia canadensis*)
- Summer Tanager (*Tanagra aestiva*)

The remaining five specimens are now known to be plumage variations of existing numbered species.

¹ Cassin was a dedicated amateur ornithologist, but he had failed to identify this bird correctly. It was eventually confirmed as a Swainson's Hawk in *The Distribution of Birds in California* (Grinnell and Miller 1944:102).

Hall commented on the new species:

Anas labradorica (Labrador Duck)

A specimen of this beautiful duck, the first that I have seen, was shot in the bay of Laprairie this spring (1862) by a habitant, and was purchased by Mr. Thompson of this city, who has kindly placed it at my disposal for examination. I believe it to be one of the rarest of our visitants of this species, and to demonstrate that an acquaintance with our Fauna must be a work of many years. (CNG 7:427)



Labrador Duck. Photo from the Field Museum, Chicago. Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labrador_duck#/media/File:Camptorhynchus_labradorius_\(Labrador_duck\)_8365390008.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labrador_duck#/media/File:Camptorhynchus_labradorius_(Labrador_duck)_8365390008.jpg)

Picus hirsutus (American Three-toed Woodpecker)

This bird before me was shot last autumn (1861) on St. Helen's Island, opposite the city, and presented to Mr. Hunter of the Natural History Society. Its sex was verified by Mr. Hunter, and it is therefore in almost every respect resembles the adult female. It must have been a bird hatched last summer. I cannot but regard this species as extremely rare visitants. (CNG 7:346)

Tanagra aestiva (Summer Tanager)

It is a beautiful bird but very rare. In all my rambles I have never met with it. The specimen, before me, and which I have described, is a young bird, shot by Mr. Hunter, taxidermist to the Natural History Society, on the mountain. He was accompanied by an associate which Mr. Hunter could not succeed in obtaining. The old bird differs from the young one in having, according to Audubon "the tips and inner webs of the quills tinged with brown". (CNG 7:290)

Conclusion

Elliot Coues in his scientific assessment of Hall's paper, wrote:

The whole of the series quoted [Vol. 7] relates to the birds; it is elaborate and painstaking, and by far the most important Canadian contribution to ornithology extant; notwithstanding it is seldom referred to. The matter is descriptive, biographical, and briefly synonymatic...199 spp are treated.

The relative commonness of many species in 1862 varies significantly from their status today. Even anticipating that some records may have a margin for error, a selection of the more obvious changes in status over 160+ years appear to be:

Species	1862 Status	2026 Status
Passenger Pigeon	Common	Extinct
Mourning Dove	Rare	Common
Double-crested Cormorant	Scarce	Common
American Herring Gull	Scarce	Common
Killdeer	Scarce	Common
Red-headed Woodpecker	Common	Rare
White-breasted Nuthatch	Scarce	Common
Eastern Warbling-Vireo	Rare	Common
Vesper Sparrow	Common	Uncommon
Brown-headed Cowbird	Scarce	Common

The reasons for these changes are various. Most relate to habitat changes brought about by human settlement, farming practices, excessive shooting, or gradual range extensions due to continental warming and/or population dynamics and ecological factors associated with specific species.

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