

Issue 67-2  
December 2024



Winter Issue  
The Joys of Winter Birding

News for Members



The  
**SONG SPARROW**

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## 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.

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Evening Grosbeak  
*Photo: Joe McGill*

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Oiled Canada Goose  
*Photo courtesy of Le Nichoir*

# A Word FROM THE EDITORS

Winter may bring frosty mornings and shorter days, but it's no reason to shelve your binoculars! This issue celebrates the joys of winter birding and reminds us that there's plenty to discover, even when the landscape is blanketed in snow.

Winter birding offers a unique charm. With fewer species around, each sighting becomes more meaningful, and bird calls resonate beautifully against the quiet, snowy backdrop. Seasonal visitors like Dark-eyed Juncos, American Tree Sparrows, and Evening Grosbeaks make the colder months all the more rewarding. And citizen science projects that take place throughout the season, including the Christmas Bird Count, Project Feederwatch and the Great Backyard Bird Count, are all perfect ways to dive into winter birding while also making an important contribution to scientific research.

To begin, we sadly share the news that we lost two long-time BPQers in the last few months. Sylvia Wees passed away in September, and Mabel McIntosh left us in October. Bob Barnhurst shares his memories of Mabel, a fixture in BPQ for over 60 years and his companion for a good part of that time, with us in this issue.

In our first feature article, *Winter brrrding*, Marcel Gahbauer highlights the perks of the season, from spotting "northern birds" like Bohemian Waxwings, Crossbills, Pine Grosbeaks, and Redpolls, to enjoying resilient favourites like Black-capped Chickadees.

For those seeking warmer climes, don't miss *Birding Adventures: On the High Seas*, where Harle Thomas and Minda Bernstein recount their journey through Florida's Dry Tortugas. Rare sightings of Black Noddies and pelagic species make this story a must-read.

Our regular features are back, plus an exciting new addition—Marcel Gahbauer's *Birds with Quirks*. Every bird species is special, but some stand out with truly unique traits. Each issue, this new column will highlight a different species that has some notable quirks. Up first: a look at the Chimney Swift's unique body structure, peculiar habitat preferences, and unusual behaviours.

Our *Monthly Lecture Series* continues with three engaging speakers, while the Field Trip Committee shares an enticing slate of upcoming outings. *Birding Basics* offers essential tips for winter birding, Jeff Harrison explores *Early Canadian Ornithology*, and *Focus on Grants* highlights Le Nichoir's innovative OARS project—a major step forward in rehabilitation for oiled wild birds.

So bundle up, grab your gear, and embrace the magic of winter birding!

Happy Holidays,

Darlene & Rina



# A Message from THE PRESIDENT

# Message DE LA PRÉSIDENTE

Hard to believe that we're nearing the end of the year already. While I'm sure many of you are tempted to put your binoculars away for the winter, there's plenty of winter birding to be enjoyed in the coming months!

Now is the time of year to see lots of neat winter birds that can't be seen in our area in summer. Despite a relatively poor finch forecast for this year, there are still lots of winter birds to be seen. I think Montreal is a great place to see wintering ducks. Now is also a great time of year to redevelop an appreciation for our resident birds; it's always nice to see a bright red cardinal after a snowfall. Personally, I find winter birding (with a nice warm beverage) a nice way to enjoy the winter and also a good way to get out and see birding friends.

If you're not already signed up for a Christmas Bird Count (Montreal's will have taken place by publication, but Hudson's is being held on December 28), contributing to citizen science is a great excuse to get out birding in the winter, with great people to boot. As we've learned from one of our recent monthly lectures, Christmas Bird Counts are a terrific way to gain a better understanding of our resident and winter bird populations, so we hope that you take part in BPQ's Christmas Bird Counts, if not this year then next!

Wishing you all a very happy holiday season and a happy New Year,

*Kristen*

Il est difficile de croire que la fin de l'année s'approche déjà. Je suis sûre que beaucoup d'entre vous sont tentés de ranger vos jumelles pour l'hiver, mais il y a encore beaucoup d'oiseaux à observer dans les mois à venir !

C'est le moment de l'année où l'on peut observer de nombreux oiseaux d'hiver qui ne peuvent pas être vus dans notre région en été. Malgré des prévisions relativement faibles pour les fringillidés cette année, il y a encore beaucoup d'oiseaux d'hiver à voir. Selon moi, Montréal est un endroit idéal pour observer les canards hivernants. C'est aussi le moment idéal pour réapprendre à apprécier nos oiseaux résidents ; il est toujours agréable de voir un cardinal rouge vif après une chute de neige. Personnellement, je trouve que l'observation des oiseaux en hiver (accompagnée d'une bonne boisson chaude) est une façon agréable de profiter de l'hiver et aussi une bonne façon de sortir et de voir des amis ornithologues.

Si vous n'êtes pas déjà inscrit à un comptage d'oiseaux de Noël (celle de Montréal a déjà eu lieu, mais celle de Hudson se tiendra le 28 décembre), la contribution à la science citoyenne est une excellente excuse pour sortir observer les oiseaux en hiver, avec des gens formidables en plus. Comme nous l'avons appris lors d'une de nos récentes conférences mensuelles, les dénombrements d'oiseaux de Noël sont une excellente façon de mieux comprendre nos populations d'oiseaux résidents et hivernaux. Nous espérons que vous participerez au recensement des oiseaux de Noël du POQ, si ce n'est pas cette année, ce sera la prochaine !

Nous vous souhaitons à tous une très bonne période des fêtes et une bonne année,

*Kristen*

Focus on

# OUR MEMBERS



## To all our members

We would like to extend a warm welcome to new members:

*James Mourani, Joanna Lemon, Amélie Beaudroit, Lucie Lamy, Omar Morsy, and Cory Ruchlin.*

We look forward to meeting 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 to join our iO Song Sparrow [e-list group](#) to connect with fellow members.

We would also like to thank those of you who have renewed your membership for 2024/2025 for believing in our mission and continuing to support BPQ year after year!

## Last call!

Do you enjoy reading *The Song Sparrow*? Sadly, this will be your last issue if you haven't renewed your membership for 2024/25 by the end of the year.

Remember, all annual memberships expired on September 30, 2024, regardless of the date you joined (**unless** it was after March 1, 2024) or last renewed.

So don't wait! [Click here](#) now to go to our website and quickly renew online with a credit card (no Paypal account needed, use the Guest feature).

## À tous nos membres

Nous souhaitons la bienvenue à nos nouveaux membres :

*James Mourani, Joanna Lemon, Amélie Beaudroit, Lucie Lamy, Omar Morsy, et Cory Ruchlin.*

Nous sommes impatients de vous rencontrer, que ce soit par Zoom lors d'une réunion mensuelle ou lors de l'une de nos excursions ! Continuez à lire ce numéro pour plus de détails sur les activités prévues, et n'oubliez pas de nous suivre sur Facebook et de rejoindre notre [groupe de liste électronique](#) « Songsparrow » pour vous connecter avec d'autres membres.

Nous tenons également à remercier ceux d'entre vous qui ont renouvelé leur adhésion pour l'année 2024/2025, de croire en notre mission et de continuer à soutenir le POQ année après année !

## Dernier appel !

Appréciez-vous « The Song Sparrow » ? Malheureusement, ce *numéro sera le dernier* si vous n'avez pas renouvelé votre adhésion 2024/25 avant la fin de l'année!

N'oubliez pas que toutes les adhésions annuelles ont expiré le 30 septembre 2024, quelle que soit la date d'adhésion (**sauf si** elle est postérieure au 1er mars 2024) ou de dernier renouvellement.

Alors n'attendez pas ! [Cliquez ici](#) pour accéder à notre site web et renouveler rapidement votre abonnement en ligne avec une carte de crédit (pas besoin de compte Paypal, utilisez la fonction « Guest »).

## In memoriam – Sylvia Wees

We were very sad to learn that long-time BPQ member Sylvia Wees passed away on September 28, 2024.

Sylvia became a Life Member many years ago and, although no longer active, she was a well-known presence within BPQ in her earlier days with the club. A keen volunteer in several areas, she served as membership secretary from 2000 - 2005.

Sylvia will be fondly remembered by many in the BPQ family. We extend our deepest sympathies to her husband Bill and their three sons, and to all of her family and friends.



Photo: Calvin Fong



## In memoriam Mabel McIntosh

It was with sorrow that we learned of Mabel's passing on October 18, 2024, at the age of 102.

Mabel was one of the best known amateur ornithologists in Quebec, and her history with BPQ, or more accurately with the Province of Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds (PQSPB), the legal name by which we were known until 2005, goes back to 1961, when she first joined.

Almost immediately upon joining, Mabel became active in "the Society," and remained so in one capacity or another throughout her 60+ years of membership. She served on the BPQ Board of Directors for 30 years, and edited our *The Song Sparrow* newsletter for 15 of those years. She co-chaired the Hawk Watch committee from its inception until her passing. In 2002, Mabel was appointed Honorary Vice-President, in recognition of her many contributions to the organization, which of course also included her contribution to scientific studies.

On that front, Mabel was instrumental, along with George Montgomery, Michael Spencer and other "star" PQSPB birders, in introducing the first Breeding Bird Survey routes in the Montreal area in 1966, and ran two routes herself for well over two decades. She participated in both the Montreal and Hudson Christmas Bird Counts every year from 1966, apparently only ever missing one, was a Project Feederwatcher, and was part of a four-year research project monitoring the impact of habitat destruction on Saw-whet Owls in suburban Montreal.

Mabel's true calling, though, began in 1974. Considered one of the PQSPB's most experienced birders, Mabel was sponsored to attend the very first North American Hawk Migration Conference, held in Syracuse, New York that year, which aimed to standardize hawk watching reporting across the continent. On her return, Mabel started counting hawks - on her own at first and soon joined by her friend and fellow hawk fanatic, Bob Barnhurst - and she (and Bob) never stopped. Mabel and Bob have faithfully visited their sites daily during both spring and fall migration and logging approximately 600 hours a year, every year for nearly 50 years, compiling invaluable statistics for the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). This sense of dedication was one of Mabel's most admired traits.

Thanks to the efforts of BPQ director Helen Meredith, Mabel received the prestigious Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers in 1991, which honours volunteers who have made a significant, sustained contribution to their community. At the time, Jane Ferreyra, Executive Director of the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) sent this message: "The Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) extends warm kudos and congratulations to Mabel McIntosh for both the Regroupement Quebec Oiseaux volunteer award and the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers. Dedicated volunteers like Mabel are priceless and her work on behalf of birds in Quebec is truly extraordinary!" She was also awarded QuebecOiseaux's Volunteer Award that year.

Mabel was a tour-de-force in Montreal birding and will be sadly missed and fondly remembered by all who crossed her path during the past 60+ years, but by none more than her long-time companion, Bob Barnhurst. Bob shares his "Personal Perspective" on page 10. Our deepest sympathies go out to Mabel's family and dearest friends.



*Peter Mitchell (shown) and Bob Carswell presented the Sovereign's Award to Mabel at a BPQ event held in December 2019.*



*Jean-Sébastien Guénette presented QO's award at the same event.*

*Photos this page: Darlene Harvey*

## BPQ volunteers at work

BPQ's outreach committee was happy to be included in McGill University's second annual Biodiversity Festival that took place on September 24 and celebrated the one-year anniversary of the introduction of McGill's [Biodiversity Plan](#). When it launched in 2023, McGill became one of the first universities in Canada to create an institutionalized, multi-departmental plan to protect and promote biodiversity.

Bird and nature walks were organized at both the downtown and Macdonald campuses, as the festival was also the first day of a week-long McGill BioBlitz.

Our information booth, and those of 15 other conservation and environmental protection groups, attracted the interest of many very engaged students and passers-by, and interesting conversations were had throughout the day.



Photo: Darlene Harvey

Festival events took place at both the downtown campus and the Macdonald campus in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue. *Les activités du festival se sont déroulées à la fois sur le campus du centre-ville et sur le campus Macdonald à Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue.*

## Bénévoles sur le terrain

Le comité de sensibilisation du POQ a été heureux de participer au deuxième festival annuel de la biodiversité de l'Université McGill, qui s'est déroulé le 24 septembre et a célébré le premier anniversaire de l'introduction du [plan de biodiversité](#) de McGill. Lors de son lancement en 2023, McGill est devenue l'une des premières universités au Canada à créer un plan institutionnalisé et multidépartemental pour protéger et promouvoir la biodiversité.

Des promenades ornithologiques et naturalistes ont été organisées sur les campus du centre-ville et de Macdonald, car le festival était aussi le premier jour d'un BioBlitz McGill d'une durée d'une semaine.

Notre kiosque, ainsi que ceux de 15 autres groupes de conservation et de protection de l'environnement, a suscité l'intérêt de nombreux étudiants et passants très engagés, et des conversations intéressantes ont eu lieu tout au long de la journée.



Photo: Julie Tremblay

Outreach committee members Darlene Harvey and Sheldon Harvey, explaining BPQ's mission to an interested student. *Darlene Harvey et Sheldon Harvey, membres du comité de sensibilisation, expliquent la mission du POQ à un étudiant intéressé.*



Photo: Darlene Harvey

TechnoparcOiseaux, represented by Julie Tremblay and Jim Harris (both BPQ members as well), was our booth-neighbour for the day. *TechnoparcOiseaux, représenté par Julie Tremblay et Jim Harris (tous deux membres du POQ), était notre voisin pour la journée.*

## BPQ volunteers at work

### Friends of the George H. Montgomery sanctuary

BPQ's George H. Montgomery sanctuary is a vast area of natural land located in southeastern Quebec, near the U.S. border, that is open to the public, and a well-known birding spot. Its location at the southern limit of Quebec allows for interesting sightings, and it's the last known breeding grounds of the Cerulean warbler. It is part of a much larger federal migratory bird sanctuary, the Philipsburg Bird Migratory Sanctuary, owned by several other landowners. This federal sanctuary overlaps with the crucial habitat of the Cerulean warbler, officially designated in 2022.

Since March 2024, local regular visitors to the sanctuary have formed a group of Friends of the Sanctuary. The idea stemmed from Virginia Rasch's observations during her frequent walks with her grandkids, when she would wish to have a contact person at BPQ to talk about issues and interesting sightings. She discussed her idea with her neighbour Sandy Montgomery, grandson of George H. Montgomery, and it's with enthusiasm that he inquired with BPQ about the possibility of forming such a group aimed at the stewardship of the sanctuary. BPQ's project coordinator Jules Delisle contacted local people who volunteered or collaborated in projects at the sanctuary and met with the group in March. The group is formed of Daniel Boulet, Jean-Guy Papineau, Roland Raymond, Sandy Montgomery, Valérie Deschênes and Virginia Rasch. Daniel Boulet is a member of the Municipal council. Jean-Guy Papineau is a long time birder in the area. Roland Raymond has been volunteering with BPQ since 2022, bringing his chainsaw on a skateboard to clear the trails of fallen trees. Sandy Montgomery is a landowner of part of the sanctuary. Valérie Deschênes is from the CIME organization, which has been working to control invasive plants and protect indigenous ones on the property since 2016. Virginia Rasch is an environmentalist and birder.

The aim of the group is to work together with BPQ to protect one of the most beautiful properties in southern Quebec. As they visit the sanctuary, they pass on their observations and they keep BPQ informed of any action needed or that they offer to undertake. Already, many detailed reports have been shared with BPQ to enable us to manage the property to the best of our knowledge of what's happening on the field. Thank you to the Friends of the George H. Montgomery Sanctuary!



## Bénévoles sur le terrain

### Les amis du sanctuaire George H. Montgomery

Le sanctuaire George H. Montgomery appartenant à Protection des oiseaux du Québec est un vaste territoire naturel situé dans le sud-est du Québec, près de la frontière américaine. Il est ouvert au public et constitue un site ornithologique reconnu. Sa situation à la limite sud du Québec permet des observations intéressantes, et c'est le dernier lieu de reproduction connu de la Paruline azurée. Les terres appartenant à POQ font partie d'un refuge fédéral d'oiseaux migrateurs beaucoup plus vaste, appartenant à plusieurs propriétaires fonciers, le Refuge d'oiseaux migrateurs de Philipsburg. Ce sanctuaire fédéral chevauche l'habitat essentiel de la Paruline azurée, officiellement désigné en 2022.

Depuis mars 2024, des visiteurs locaux réguliers du sanctuaire ont formé un groupe d'amis du sanctuaire. L'idée est née des observations de Virginia Rasch lors de ses fréquentes promenades avec ses petits-enfants, lorsqu'elle souhaitait avoir une personne de contact à POQ pour discuter des problèmes rencontrés et des observations intéressantes. Elle a discuté de son idée avec son voisin Sandy Montgomery, petit-fils de George H. Montgomery, et c'est avec enthousiasme qu'il a demandé à POQ s'il était possible de former un tel groupe chargé de l'intendance du sanctuaire. Jules Delisle, coordonnateur-ice de projet à POQ, a contacté des personnes de la région qui ont travaillé bénévolement ou collaboré à des projets au sanctuaire et a rencontré le groupe d'intéressés en mars. Le groupe est composé de Daniel Boulet, Jean-Guy Papineau, Roland Raymond, Sandy Montgomery, Valérie Deschênes et Virginia Rasch. Daniel Boulet est membre du conseil municipal. Jean-Guy Papineau est ornithologue de longue date. Roland Raymond est bénévole à POQ depuis 2022, apportant sa tronçonneuse sur une planche à roulettes pour débarrasser les sentiers des arbres tombés. Sandy Montgomery est propriétaire d'une partie du sanctuaire. Valérie Deschênes de l'organisation CIME travaille à contrôler les plantes envahissantes et à protéger les plantes indigènes sur la propriété depuis 2016. Virginia Rasch est écologiste et ornithologue.

L'objectif du groupe est de collaborer avec POQ pour protéger l'une des plus belles propriétés du sud du Québec. En visitant le sanctuaire, ils transmettent leurs observations et informent POQ de toute action nécessaire ou qu'ils se proposent d'entreprendre. Déjà, de nombreux rapports détaillés ont été partagés avec POQ pour nous permettre de gérer la propriété au meilleur de nos connaissances de ce qui se passe sur le terrain. Merci aux amis du sanctuaire George H. Montgomery!

*Roland Raymond's creation at work with two BPQ volunteers clearing the trails.*

*La création de Roland Raymond à l'oeuvre avec deux bénévoles de POQ nettoyant les sentiers.*

*Photo: Jules Delisle | BPQ*

# Mabel McIntosh: A personal perspective

Story & photos by Bob Barnhurst



*Mabel leading a CBC team at the airport circa 1990*

Freshly arrived from England I first met Mabel on a Hudson field trip in 1976. Her very good friend, Jo Wright, was leading the trip. I was struck by how enthusiastic they both were.

Pretty soon I got to do a lot of birding with them both, plus Marg Hendrick, who was also one of Mabel's best friends. Suffice it to say that I got to know Mabel the best. I offered to drive her on birding trips after I got my first car in Canada. We birded far and wide, with and without Jo and Marg, including a fabulous trip to Texas, New Mexico and Arizona in 1977. We travelled in a brand new, rented yellow Ford LTD estate wagon. During the trip, Mabel decided to change the lines of the Beatles song, "Yellow Submarine," into our own anthem, as in ...."we all live in a yellow LTD, a yellow LTD, a yellow LTD, we all live in a yellow LTD ..." We loved it.

It was about this time that I became a keen bird lister and laridophile. Mabel was even keener on listing and was one of the leading lights in Quebec and Canada. She lived for birds. Not long separated from her husband, Mabel finally had some time on her hands. On a field trip to Oka Park in 1968, she witnessed a flight of Broad-winged Hawks, with several kettles visible. She was hooked, and the rest, as they say, is history.

At that point Mabel decided, on the spot, that she would go birding across Canada on her own. She packed a bag, grabbed her binoculars, and took a bus, heading for Vancouver. On one of her side trips she lugged all her gear, which included a duffle bag, a handbag, a small tent and her scope, to a campground inside Manning National Park. After putting up her tent, early the next day she set off on her famous hike up Mt. Frosty. She did this to try to see the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch, which is only found above the treeline. The climb was 5400' over 7 miles, all uphill. She birded a little on the way and found herself at mid-afternoon about halfway up. She had been told that there was a hiker's shelter but had already long passed it. Finding herself all alone as evening drew on, she had to decide if she should descend before nightfall and, consequently, miss the Rosy Finch. Anyone that knew Mabel knows she would not have missed the bird. So, she settled down in a hollow and spent a near sleepless night waiting for dawn. It was chilly and she was cold most of the time. Plus, the mountain is known for its bears and mountain lions. At dawn, Mabel got up, had a breakfast of cheese and crackers, and finished the hike. She was deservedly rewarded by seeing the finches. She hiked back down the mountain, crawled into her sleeping bag and slept for 24 hours. She had planned to go later to Tofino on Vancouver Island, but the bus driver warned her it was no place for a woman so, reluctantly, she changed her plans and headed south to Los Angeles. Arriving there in early July 1969, she tried to get someone to take her birding. Unfortunately, she had arrived on the day of the moon landing and everyone was glued to their television. Still, Jim Lane, of bird-finding book fame, took pity on her and picked her up later in the day and took her birding.

Both being listers and keen to see all the rare birds that turned up in Quebec, we often found ourselves chasing some bird or other in the province. During that time Mabel was in competition with Normand (David) and Michel (Gosselin) for the top spot. Then, one fateful day, Mabel introduced me to hawkwatching. Little did I know then that my life was to change forever. Our search for hawks took us to many places, including Texas and Middle and South America.

At home, Mabel and I discussed starting our own hawkwatch. She had earlier attended the first meeting of the Hawk Migration Association of North America with the help of funding by the BPQ (then PQSPB) and, in 1980, we decided to quit "birding" and concentrate on manning the hawk sites - for seven months of every year, no less.

It was very hard for both of us but particularly so for Mabel. Still a lister at heart, she often had to agonize over whether to chase a bird or man the hawk site. One day, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher turned up near Quebec City, in September, just as the Broad-winged Hawks were coming through. For the first time Mabel had to choose. She desperately wanted to do both. The choice was so traumatic for her that tears flowed. I knew then that this woman needed help! We resolved her conflict by my offering to take her for the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher on the weekend, which was a day away. Reluctantly, she agreed, because birds fly – and often disappear – soon after being found. (By the way, we did not find that particular Scissor-tailed, despite trying on two different days.)

After missing the Scissor-tailed, I decided that I had to quit listing in order to stay sane (but with the proviso that I could chase a new gull if one turned up). For Mabel, the urge to “tick” continued on for years, nay decades. (She may not have admitted it, but she still missed the thrill of the chase.)

During the 1980s and up to the late 1990s, Mabel devoted herself to solo hawkwatching during the week, when I couldn't be there. She didn't have a car and so she endured the idiosyncrasies of the bus service. For the spring watch, she travelled two and a half hours each way to Valleyfield, every day except weekends, by bus (two different services) and WALKED the last kilometre or two to the site, carrying a backpack and her scope. Then she would stand, all day, come rain or shine, light wind or gale, hot days or cold, counting hawks. Sometimes she had to shelter under the seaway bridge when it showered. Some days no hawks at all appeared, but she persisted, rising at 4:30 a.m. each day, Monday to Friday, getting back home at 7:30 p.m., and then doing the same thing all over again the next day. Needless to say, she slept a lot on the bus - both ways; luckily, all the bus drivers got to know her and would make sure she got off at the correct stop! Added to this, she would occasionally hike along Highway 30 if the wind became strong from the west, sometimes walking 2-3 kilometres to keep up with the flight line. She would often stand against the fence to stay warm. Very few people would even consider doing something like that. In 1988, even though she had never driven before, she acquired a motor scooter, which I trained her to drive safely, making her independent of public transport for the first time. However, a small scooter is not allowed on major highways so she had to drive on secondary roads most of the way and it still took her two and a half hours! I worried about her driving on her own, but she quickly became an expert. It did at least save her the walk, apart from the times that the scooter decided to stop working or had a puncture, when I would get an urgent call at work from Mabel needing help! Luckily, I could turn my hand to just about anything and quickly got her moving again. This was also at a time when there were no cell phones, unless you count the “brick,” which weighed over 2 lbs. We eventually got her one, but it ran out of power infuriatingly often. In 1999, I began taking her out to the site every day, thus saving her the busing, the scootering and the walking.



*Fall hawkwatching in 2005 - in the glamorous MDA parking lot!*



*A happy birder, thanks to a find on Fief Road - winter 2009*

It was about this time that I anointed her the “Countess.” (I, naturally, became the “Count.”) We did not always agree on things. For example, I had one theory about hawk migration and she another. In recent times, Mabel found it increasingly difficult to spot the hawks and identify them. Still, she continued to come out every day to hawkwatch with me. I loved her company. She never missed a day, unless she had the flu (even then), a doctor's or dentist's appointment or had a family do that she had to attend. In the summer we went “orchiding” - for native orchids, that is - which was a conservation effort that she had taken to heart and which reminded her of her first days of birding, when discovering a new species was a thrill in of itself.

I mentioned Jo Wright earlier. Sadly, in 1982, Jo died while on a birding trip to the Himalayas. I had the heart-breaking job of giving the bad news to Mabel on her return from a trip to the UK (where her parents were born). She missed Jo a lot, as did I. Then, Marg Hendick moved to Ontario with her husband in the early 1990s, but did join us on a trip to Hawaii in 1995. She died in 2009.

In 2006, Mabel went into hospital for a hip operation and promptly caught *C. difficile*. She got quite sick and took fully two months to recover, suffering the after-effects for a long time. Even so, Mabel was not one to complain and just got on with life. She was a joy to be with, always smiling, and always thinking of others first. I was lucky enough to share BPQ's first Conservation Award with her. More recently, she was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award, which she richly deserved.

A remarkable woman in many ways, she felt that she had achieved little. The awarding of her life achievement award from BPQ, plus awards for volunteerism from both QuebecOiseaux and the Governor-General of Canada, proved otherwise.

One last thing. In her prime Mabel could outwalk anyone. She could have walked for Canada. More recently, she was reduced to using a rollator. Still, even then, she could have "rollated" for Canada. She could no longer join me on hikes to look for orchids but would happily sit in the car and read until I returned. I had promised her that if I were ever to find an orchid that she hadn't seen, I would move heaven and earth to show it to her. In 2015 and 2018, we travelled north of Ottawa to see two of the most beautiful of North American orchids, first Calypso and then Striped Coralroot, which were new for both of us.

Mabel became ill late in the summer and went into the hospital in mid-September. With various ailments afflicting her, she said one time that she thought she would never make it back home. Whether it was a premonition is hard to tell, but she was right. One day, though, when I was visiting her, her confusion disappeared as if by magic and we embraced and said that we loved each other, tears filling our eyes. She lived another two weeks, never making a recovery, and died peacefully on October 18. She will be missed, very much, by all. She no longer shares the house with me and has left a big hole in my life.

I will finish this perspective with a warm, uplifting story. We often had several thousand Broad-winged Hawks turn up during the spring and fall migrations. Broad-winged Hawks were Mabel's favourite and, in recent years, the number we counted had fallen below 2,000 per season. Then came 2022 and the continuing COVID 19 epidemic. On April 25, we had gone out to the spring site early in case we had a good flight that day. The weather was almost ideal - warm with light east winds. However, we saw very little early on and so returned to our favourite lakeside site on Hungry Bay at just past noon. Just fifteen minutes later we started to see kettles of Broad-winged Hawks. The count quickly climbed to 2,000 and then 3,000 birds. Still, the hawks came in kettle after kettle, a hundred plus at a time. They were moving inland from over the lake and flying right over our heads at just a couple of 100 feet up. We had great looks at them, by now joined by many other species of hawk. Two hours later the flight halted as Broad-winged after Broad-winged came down to land in the trees, even those around nearby houses. (Broad-winged Hawks often go to roost earlier than other species.) When we tallied up the numbers we found that we had surpassed 8,000 Broad-wings, with another 2,000 other hawks of many species mixed in, including Turkey Vultures, Ospreys, eagles, harriers, buteos, accipiters and falcons. We even had a Sandhill Crane. It reminded us of the flights that they get at places like Derby Hill (bird observatory in New York), which we had both visited in previous years. But, the most wonderful thing about *this* flight, by far our best ever, was that Mabel and I got to see it together. She smiled the whole time and I was much happier for her than for myself. The drive home felt like we were floating on air. Only a large unexpected two-day flight of 47 Golden Eagles (plus 5 Bald Eagles) we saw in March 2016 came even close by comparison. A treasured memory, indeed.



*Mabel, at the young age of 90, gleefully holding a Saw-whet Owl banded by Bob one chilly November night in 2012*



*Birding and orchiding, another passion Mabel shared with Bob, in 2021 - binoculars still in hand at the age of 99*



# Focus on FIELD OBSERVATIONS

## Upcoming Field Trips

After our usual break through the holiday and Christmas Count seasons, we're looking forward to seeing everyone back in the field –snow covered as it may be—in January. Weekly trips resume January 11, with our usual winter-season opener at the Botanical Gardens. Weather being notoriously uncertain, and although we *rarely* cancel a trip, be sure to check our Facebook page the night before and morning of, if the forecast is looking iffy. See you soon! —BPQ Field Trip Committee

**NB:** Final details with driving instructions will be communicated before each week's event through our eNews emails, and postings in the iO group and on Facebook, allowing us the flexibility to adapt to weather, closures, etc. if necessary.

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**NOTE UNUSUAL DAYS OR TIMES IN BLUE / LES HEURES DE DÉPART ET JOURS INHABITUELLES SONT INDIQUÉES EN BLEU.**

**Saturday January 11 / samedi 11 janvier**

**MONTREAL BOTANICAL GARDENS / JARDIN BOTANIQUE**

Guide(s): Sheldon Harvey

**9:00 am** - half-day walking trip

**9h00** - demi-journée, excursion à pied

**Saturday January 18 / samedi 18 janvier**

**PARC-NATURE DU BOIS-DE-LIESSE**

Guide(s): Sue Denoncourt

**8:30 am** - half-day walking trip

**8h30** - demi-journée, excursion à pied

**Saturday January 25 / samedi 25 janvier**

**RÉCRÉ-O-PARC (SAINTE-CATHERINE)**

Guide(s): Tom Long

8:00 am - half-day walking trip

8h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

**Saturday February 1 / samedi 1er février**

**MOUNT ROYAL CEMETERY / CIMETIÈRE MONT-ROYAL**

Guide(s): George Levtchouk

**8:30 am** - half-day walking trip

**8h30** - demi-journée, excursion à pied

**Saturday February 8 / samedi 8 février**

**PARC ANGRIGNON**

Guide(s): Virginia Elliott

8:00 am - half day walking and driving trip

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

**Saturday February 15 & Sunday February 16**  
**Samedi 15 février & dimanche 16 février**

This joint Cornell/Audubon/Blrds Canada annual event has been held since 1998 and runs for 4 days from February 14-17. Although we encourage participation all 4 days, the "BPQ GBBC" will concentrate its efforts on the weekend. Go out birding, alone or with friends, to your favourite spots. Submit your checklists to eBird, then share them to BPQ's account to help us create a snapshot of Montreal and its surrounding areas. More details will follow in February through eNews.

**Saturday February 22 / samedi 22 février**

**Saturday March 1 / samedi 1er mars**

**Saturday March 8 / samedi 8 mars**

**Saturday March 15 / samedi 15 mars**

**Saturday March 22 / samedi 22 mars**

**BPQ'S 2025 GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT WEEKEND**  
**LE GRAND DÉNOMBREMENT DES OISEAUX DE FÉVRIER 2025**

Cet événement annuel conjoint Cornell/Audubon/Blrds Canada existe depuis 1998 et se déroule sur 4 jours, du 14 au 17 février. Bien que nous encourageons la participation tout au long des 4 jours, le « POQ GDOF » concentrera ses efforts sur la fin de semaine. Sortez observer les oiseaux, seul ou avec des amis, pour visiter vos endroits préférés. Soumettez vos listes d'observations à eBird, puis partagez-les sur le compte du POQ et aidez-nous à créer un instantané de Montréal et de ses environs. Plus de détails suivront en février dans le bulletin « eNews ».

**SOUTH SHORE SURPRISE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS**

Guide(s): Sheldon Harvey  
8:00 am - half day driving trip  
08h00 - demi-journée, excursion en voiture

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

Exact locations and itinerary will be decided based on conditions  
Guide(s): Wayne Grubert  
8:00 am - half day driving trip  
08h00 - demi-journée, excursion en voiture

**LATE WINTER SURPRISE / SURPRISE FIN DE L'HIVER**

The destination for this trip will be chosen based on various factors such as weather, bird activity, and rare sightings, and will be announced only a few days before.

La destination de cette excursion sera choisie en fonction de divers facteurs tels que la météo, l'activité des oiseaux et les observations rares, et ne sera annoncée que quelques jours à l'avance.

**PARC DE LA FRAYÈRE, BOUCHERVILLE**

Guide(s): Sheldon Harvey  
8:00 am - half day walking trip  
08h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied

**POINTE-DU-MOULIN & L'ÎLE PERROT**

Guide(s): Ron Rind  
8:00 am - half day walking and driving trip  
08h00 - demi-journée, excursion à pied et en voiture

Happy Holidays!  
Joyeuses fêtes!



Photo: Darlene Harvey

From the field trip committee  
and our dedicated field trippers



**Focus on**

## **FIELD OBSERVATIONS**

### **Past field trips**

This fall we hosted a wide variety of trips that took advantage of fall migration, and led us into winter birding and the annual Christmas Bird Counts that will take place in December. From warm, sunny days to cold winds, rain, and even a touch of snow, the unpredictable autumn weather brought its challenges. But despite the elements, most outings had great turnouts and all had great camaraderie. Thank you to our amazing guides and everyone who joined us and made these trips so memorable!—BPQ Field Trip Committee

#### **31/08/24—Cooper Marsh, South Lancaster, ON**

**Guide: Ron Rind**

Weather: Cloudy

Number of participants: 6; Number of Species: 41

Birds of Note: Green Heron, Osprey, Common Loon, American Bittern; Swamp Sparrow; 5 warbler species

eBird checklists: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S193597119> and <https://ebird.org/checklist/S193839865>

#### **02/09/24—Mt. Royal Cemetery, Montreal, QC**

**Guides: Sheldon and Darlene Harvey**

Weather: Mild and sunny

Number of Participants: 19; Number of Species: 28

Birds of Note: Turkey Vultures, Sharp-shinned Hawk, several Cooper's Hawks, American Kestrel, Red-tailed Hawk, 7 warbler species, and Eastern Bluebirds

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S193719846>

#### **07/09/24—Parc Nature Bois-de-Liesse, St. Laurent, QC**

**Guide: Sue Denoncourt**

Weather: Overcast and lots of mosquitoes

Number of Participants: 27; Number of Species: 30

Birds of Note: 3 warbler species (Nashville, American Redstart and Magnolia), a Red-tailed Hawk, Cedar Waxwings

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S194390843>

#### **15/09/24—PN du Bois-de-l'île-Bizard, Ile-Bizard, QC**

**Guide: Emile Brisson-Curadeau**

Weather: Sunny and warm

Number of Participants: 20; Number of Species: 50

Birds of Note: Wilson's Snipe, Hooded Mergansers, Green Heron, 6 species of raptors

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S195475895>



Eastern Bluebirds—Mt. Royal Cemetery  
Photo: Tom Long

#### **21/09/24—Refuge, Marguerite d'Youville, Ile-St-Bernard, Chateauguay, QC**

**Guide: Tom Long**

Weather: Warm, partly cloudy

Number of Participants: 23; Number of Species: 49

Birds of Note: Green-wing Teal, Greater Yellowlegs, 25 Great Egrets, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin, Tufted Titmouse, Yellow-rumped Warbler

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S195968910>

#### **28/09/24—Parc de la Frayère, Boucherville, QC**

**Guide: Sheldon Harvey**

Weather: Fog early, then sunny

Number of Participants: 27; Number of species: 44

Birds of Note: Wood Ducks, Green-winged Teal, Am. Black Ducks, Am. Wigeon, Pied-billed Grebe, Common Gallinule, a surprising Horned Grebe, Greater Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper and Killdeer

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S196781680>

**06/10/24—Marché Finnegan and surrounding areas, Hudson, QC**

**Guide: Wayne Grubert**

Weather: Foggy and breezy early, giving way to sunny skies and 15 C.

Number of Participants: 25; Number of Species: 43

Birds of Note: 9 species of waterfowl, Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, 10 Eastern

Bluebirds, White-crowned Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Rusty Blackbird

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S197871362>

**12/10/24—Réserve nationale de faune du Lac-Saint-Francois, Dundee, QC**

**Guides: Wayne Grubert & Sheldon Harvey**

Weather: Strong winds, sunny

Number of Participants: 27; Number of Species: 39

Birds of Note: 51 Sandhill Cranes, Northern Harriers, 6 species of waterfowl, Tufted Titmouse, Ruby-

crowned Kinglet, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Gray Catbird, Rusty Blackbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler

eBird checklists: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S198579109>

and <https://ebird.org/checklist/S198579243>

**19/10/24—Technoparc, St-Laurent (Montreal), QC**

**Guides: Katherine Collin, Julie Tremblay & Jim Harris**

Weather: Sunny

Number of Participants: 29; Number of Species: 26

Birds of Note: Wood Duck, Wild Turkey, Red-tailed Hawk, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, Fox Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-rumped Warbler

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S199485103>

**26/10/24—Angrignon Park, Verdun/LaSalle, QC**

**Guide: Virginia Elliott**

Weather: Sunny, breezy and cool

Number of Participants: 18; Number of Species: 12

Birds of Note: Mallards, Hooded Merganser, Pileated Woodpecker, Common Raven, White-throated Sparrow

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S200358913>

**02/11/24—Beauharnois, Maple Grove, Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague, QC**

**Guides: Wayne Grubert and Sheldon Harvey**

Weather: Overcast, moderate winds

Number of Participants: 18; Number of Species: 38

Birds of Note: Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcons, Brant, Common Loon, Cooper's Hawk, Snow Geese,

10 duck species, Wilson's Snipe, Double-crested Cormorants

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/289568>



Great Egrets—Hudson, QC  
Photo: Wayne Grubert

**09/11/24—Parc des Rapides; Verdun and Lasalle riverbanks, LaSalle/Verdun, QC**

**Guide: Diane Demers**

Weather: Warm and sunny

Number of Participants: 28; Number of Species: 32

Birds of Note: 14 species of waterfowl, Common Loon, 3 Bald Eagles, Merlin, Winter Wren, Mallard/American Black Duck Hybrid

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/291244>

**16/11/24—Parc National d'Oka, Oka, QC**

**Guide: Frédéric Hareau**

Weather: Sunny and mild

Number of Participants: 18; Number of Species: 27

Birds of Note: 12 species of waterfowl, including Surf Scoter & White-winged Scoter, 4 Bald Eagles,

American Tree Sparrow

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S202797005>

**23/11/24—Morgan Arboretum, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, QC**

**Guide: Ron Rind**

Weather: Overcast, 6 C.

Number of Participants: 14; Number of Species: 22

Birds of Note: Red-tailed Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Northern

Shrike, Pine Siskin

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S203379319>

**30/11/24—Parc Nature du Cap-St-Jacques, Pierrefonds, QC**

**Guide: Wayne Grubert**

Weather: light snow; overcast; sunny breaks

Number of Participants: 26

Number of Species: 18

Birds of Note: Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Common Loons,

Red-bellied Woodpecker, Brown Creeper, White-throated Sparrow

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S204081117>



Common Loons—  
Cap-Saint-Jacques  
Photo: Omar Morsy



# 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 reach a broader audience.

## Monday, January 6, 2025

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

### All of Your Eggs in one Basket: The Bird Eggs of Canada Website

Ryan Fisher, Curator of Vertebrate Zoology, Royal Saskatchewan Museum

In 2021, the Royal Saskatchewan Museum started to photograph museum egg collections with the goal of developing a website showing the eggs of all regularly breeding birds in Canada. To date, the Museum has assembled photographs of eggs of over 370 species which are displayed at [www.birdeggs canada.ca](http://www.birdeggs canada.ca). Ryan Fisher will talk a little bit about the process of gathering information on egg collections in Canada, the photography process, some anecdotes about various eggs, and future plans for the website.



A clutch of Rose-breasted Grosbeak eggs, from the website

#### About our Speaker

Dr. Ryan Fisher is the Curator of Vertebrate Zoology at the Royal Saskatchewan museum and adjunct professor at the University of Regina. Ryan, conceived the idea of the egg database. He anticipates that a comprehensive collection of images will assist researchers, field biologists, and amateur ornithologists with nest and egg identification when adult birds are not observed. Ryan has over 20 years of research experience on grassland bird species at risk, including: Burrowing Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Sprague's Pipit and a host of other species.

## Monday, February 3, 2025

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

### Wings Below Water: A Deep Dive into the Natural History of Diving Birds

Kyle Elliott, Associate Professor, Macdonald College, McGill University

While we usually marvel at birds soaring through the skies, some have mastered the depths of the water with remarkable skill. From the dramatic plunge-dives of gannets to the agile underwater flight of penguins and puffins, these birds have evolved fascinating adaptations that make them exceptional swimmers. Kyle will explore how these diving birds navigate their unique habitats and the incredible features that allow them to thrive below the surface.



#### About our Speaker

Kyle Elliott is a long-time Board member of BPQ. He is a world expert on diving energetics with a speciality in auks. He has conducted research on four continents, from the Amazon to the Arctic, but specializes in the Canadian Arctic, where he has studied birds on 14 islands of the Canadian Archipelago over the past 20 years. In his spare time, he enjoys practising his penguin abilities as a SCUBA diver, but has yet to achieve anything close to their grace, and, after 20 years, has still never encountered a bird underwater. (As seen in the photo, unlike a puffin, Kyle needs a floater suit to venture out into cold oceans!)

**Monday, March 3, 2025**

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

## **Return to the Sky: The Story of the Comeback of the Bald Eagle**

Tina Morris, Naturalist and Science Educator, Bald Eagle Restoration Project

Alone in a vast wildlife refuge with little direction and no experience, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology student Tina Morris found herself responsible for a project of historical importance—to bring the Bald Eagle back from near extinction. In the spring of 1975, on the eve of the US Bicentennial, Tina was selected to reintroduce Bald Eagles into New York State in the hope that the species could eventually repopulate eastern North America. Young and female in a male-dominated field, Tina's assignment was to rehabilitate a population devastated by the effects of DDT. The challenges were prodigious—there was no model to emulate for a bird of the eagle's size, for one—but Tina soon found that her own path to self-discovery and confidence-building was deeply connected with the survival of the species she was chosen to protect. Ultimately, Tina spent two years playing “mother” to seven eaglets at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, where she achieved resounding success.



### **About our Speaker**

Raised in a large family and surrounded by myriad orphaned creatures both domestic and wild, Tina Morris was imbued with a lifelong love of animals. Tina earned her undergraduate degree from Oberlin College and her graduate degree in ornithology and wildlife biology from Cornell University, where she helped develop the first techniques for releasing introduced Bald Eagles. Her field research ultimately became the instruction manual for eagle restoration programs throughout the Northeastern U.S. Retired from a long career as an English and biology teacher, Tina writes about environmental issues, particularly those that affect wildlife conservation. She will discuss her recently published book about her Bald Eagle project entitled *Return to the Sky: the Story of the Comeback of the Bald Eagle*.

*Photo: Tina with a young eaglet under wraps*

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**REMINDER:** As BPQ is a member of QuébecOiseaux (QO), a non-profit umbrella organization that brings together birding clubs in Quebec, our members are invited to participate in the free talks on subjects of interest to birders that QO offers. All BPQ members are welcome to attend but **must** register using the Zoom links in the *Programme de webconférences* available [here](#) (note that these talks are offered in French). Do not try to register on their website (unless you also have an individual or family membership with QO; if you have a QuébecOiseaux magazine subscription only you **cannot** register on their site).

Please do not share these links outside of BPQ as the free conferences are restricted to members of QO and QO-affiliated clubs.



**RAPPEL :** Comme le POQ est membre de QuébecOiseaux (QO), un organisme sans but lucratif qui regroupe les clubs d'ornithologie du Québec, nos membres peuvent participer à la série de conférences gratuites sur des sujets d'intérêt pour les ornithologues qu'ils offrent. Tous les membres du POQ sont les bienvenus, mais doivent s'inscrire en utilisant les liens Zoom dans le Programme de webconférences disponible [ici](#) (notez que ces conférences sont offertes en français). N'essayez pas de vous inscrire sur leur site Web (à moins que vous ne soyez également membre individuel ou familial de QO ; si vous êtes seulement abonné à la revue QuébecOiseaux, vous ne pouvez pas vous inscrire sur leur site).

Veillez ne pas partager ces liens à l'extérieur du POQ, car les conférences gratuites sont réservées aux membres de QO et des clubs affiliés à QO.

by Zofia Laubitz and Sarah Marshall

## How Do Wind Turbines and Oil and Gas Infrastructure Affect Birds? Empirical Evidence Based on Citizen-Science Data Presented by Erik Katovich - October 7, 2024

by Zofia Laubitz

The subject our October speaker, Erik Katovich, presented could hardly have been more topical: how energy infrastructures affect birds. We've all heard stories of ducks floundering in oil sands tailing ponds, dead birds, bats and even insects littering the ground below wind turbines, and similar disasters. Erik is an assistant professor in Environmental and Natural Resource Economics at the University of Connecticut, whose research focuses on understanding how we can best govern natural resources and extractive industries to achieve sustainability. He's also a lifelong birder who has capitalized on data from citizen science – specifically, the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) – to investigate bird population trends in the vicinity of wind turbines and hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) for shale gas in the United States. Note that word “population”: it’s an important one!



**CBCs have been carried out for a century and a quarter** and cover the continent. Erik realized that these counts, carried out in the same locations year after year, would provide an outstanding dataset on changes in bird populations over time. He chose to study the effects of wind power and shale gas fracking because both technologies have expanded rapidly, as the USA shifts away from coal and toward natural gas and renewable energies. Specifically, Erik measured the effects of wind turbines and fracking installations on bird populations in the lower 48 states from 2000 to 2020, using advanced statistical methods and CBC data.

There has been much media coverage of how wind turbines kill birds; interestingly, there has been far less discussion of the effects of oil and gas exploration, including fracking. Wind turbines have been estimated to kill from 140,000 to 670,000 birds each year in the USA; these numbers are based on the collection of bodies under turbines, which are then extrapolated to the whole country. For purposes of comparison, building strikes kill some 600 million birds per year, while cats kill 1 billion or more.

**The effects of fracking** include air, water, noise and light pollution; road traffic and dust; diversity declines and avoidance behaviors; and landscape fragmentation. Flares from big fracking sites are extraordinarily bright. Erik showed us a satellite photograph of the USA at night, which revealed that some sites emit more light – way more light – than large cities like New York and Los Angeles!

Erik used the difference-in-differences statistical method to compare treated CBC count circles (those that contain fracking wells or wind turbines) with control circles (those that contain no wells or turbines). The number of count circles affected by energy infrastructures has grown since 2000. He controlled for other factors that might influence count results, such as weather and number of counters in a circle. Because he was using data from counts that take place in December, the impacts he found affect birds that are present at that time of year – not the peak period for bird numbers!

**Erik's results** were illustrated with some of the most eloquent, easily interpretable graphs it has been my pleasure to behold. And the results were equally clear. For fracking, there was a mean overall 15% decline in bird populations following construction of a shale gas well in or near a count circle. The impact was greatest on grassland, non-urban and long-distance migratory birds, as well as raptors. For wind turbines, on the other hand, there were NO significant effects on subsequent CBC results in nearby circles! As Erik emphasized, this does not mean that wind turbines don't kill birds –

they do. But the effects aren't significant at the population level. Moreover, as the number of fracking wells in an area increases, the decline in bird populations becomes even greater. This is not true of turbines; larger wind farms don't have larger impacts. As for changes over time, effects at shale gas sites appear immediately during construction and continue for years thereafter. But wind turbines have no significant impact even during construction, when activity at the site is greatest.

Erik focused more closely on sensitive bird habitats such as migratory stopovers, breeding grounds, biodiversity hot spots – in other words, Important Bird Areas (IBAs). When shale gas wells are drilled inside IBAs, the negative effects are even greater than they are elsewhere: bird populations and diversity are significantly reduced. On the other hand, even when wind turbines are planted right inside an IBA, there are no significant negative impacts on bird populations. As Erik stressed, we should strive to minimize the effects of all energy infrastructures on wildlife. In particular, we should avoid drilling shale gas wells in IBAs. And even though wind turbines are demonstrably less harmful, we should seek out ways to make them less dangerous to wildlife; various methods are being tested, such as painting the blades different colours.

This fascinating talk dispelled some widespread myths about an important renewable energy source. Not only that but it relied on a citizen science initiative that many of us have participated in – the Christmas Bird Count – reminding us that our volunteer efforts each year can contribute to important scientific findings and, hopefully, to greener technologies.

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## Sandhill Cranes on the Rise in Quebec

### Presented by Christine Lepage - November 4, 2024

by Sarah Marshall

Our November speaker, Christine Lepage, has been a waterfowl biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service since 1994. Her work mainly focuses on the conservation of sea duck populations in Quebec, through aerial surveys, banding and telemetry monitoring. More recently, however, the situation of Sandhill Cranes (SACR) in the province has piqued her curiosity. About 20 years ago, Christine was in a helicopter doing an aerial survey of waterfowl, and saw her first SACR! That was very special, and since then the Sandhill Crane has become one of her favourite species. Christine has published over 42 peer-reviewed publications and is the co-author of many others. You can read more about the SACR and Christine's work in the Fall 2024 issue of Quebec Oiseaux.



**The numbers of breeding SACR** has increased significantly over the past 30 years in Quebec and the presentation provided an overview of the population trend and described the field work that surrounded a telemetry study of SACR, carried out between 2019 and 2022, by the CWS.

**An introduction to SACR:** They live a long time, for a bird. It is not unusual to find birds that are more than 20 years old. In one case, one was caught and had been banded 40 years prior! The pair stays together for life, and they return to the same nest year after year. They usually lay two eggs, on an open scrape-like nest in peatland and boggy areas. Since the 1990s, each month of May, the CWS has been conducting aerial waterfowl (American Black Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Common Merganser, Common Goldeneye, Canada Goose and Green-winged Teal) surveys by helicopter in Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces. Helicopter surveys involve hovering over habitats, manually counting species. Since SACR live in the same habitats as the waterfowl intended for survey, they also have been spotted. The number of breeding pairs has been noted since the 1990s, so trends and the progression of occupancy of the SACR in the province can be evaluated over time. The occupancy within the territory is plotted on a map in a grid with each dot representing a set 10 x 10 metre area. In the past 30 years, there has been an increase of breeding numbers, density and territory of SACR in Quebec. For example, in 2002 there were only five 'dots' occupied; in 2010 there were 21 'dots' occupied and in 2020 there were 43 'dots' occupied! Through ground observations, it is confirmed that several of the 'dots' have more than one breeding pair. Last spring, there were 7,400 breeding pairs of SACR in Quebec, which represents a 9% increase per year in the province, specifically in the western half of Quebec.

No one is left indifferent to these birds and their increase in numbers. Birdwatchers are delighted, since it's a magnificent bird to view. The bird morphology, their behaviour and their call are distinctive. But not everyone is happy. Farmers complain about crop damage, especially in the Abitibi region. A flock of 150 cranes can eat a lot of a barley crop prior to harvest! There is a third group that we as birdwatchers don't necessarily like to discuss: hunters are happy to see the cranes. They are a big bird whose meat is good for eating. The hunting of migratory game birds is managed by population assessments, and is shared with our neighbours to the south, the Americans. Population estimates are based on counts in the migration corridor and their wintering area. Hunting requests started in the 1990s to scare the birds from crops, mostly in the Abitibi region, but have since spread to an ask for open hunting season on SACR. Generally, the SACR hunt would be in the fall in Canada, and then later in the US.

There are two main populations of SACR: the Eastern population and the Mid-continental population. The Eastern population mainly breeds as far north as James Bay, and then migrates toward the Great Lakes to winter as far south as Florida. Their population is estimated at 102K birds. The Mid-continental population breeds farther west, in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and then migrates south, to winter in Texas, New Mexico and Mexico. Their population is estimated at 910K birds.

**Three big questions** that Christine and CWS were tasked with answering were: to which population do the SACR in Quebec belong, exactly where is the migratory flyway of the SACR, and in what direction is the population trending?

Christine's project required cell tracking via GPS transmitters. Transmitters and bands were affixed to the legs of female SACR. Since the pairs mate for life, it was important to collect information from one of the pair only, to reduce the chance of redundant data. For this study, it was decided that transmitters would be attached only to female birds. As it is difficult to sex SACR, in error some transmitters and bands were attached to the legs of male birds.

Attaching the transmitters to these big, evasive and intelligent birds was a huge challenge. Christine led us through the complex and tricky task of netting the birds and affixing the transmitters and bands. None of the 120 successfully tagged birds were injured during this project. Once successfully attached, the box (weighing a mere 65 g or about 1% of the weight of the bird on average) records the bird's position every 30 minutes, transmitted daily to a nearby cell tower. If and when there are no cell towers nearby, the transmitter stores the positioning data until proximity to a tower permits upload.

**Results:** Christine shared a map of the movements of the SACR. The population of SACR in Ontario and Quebec is confirmed to be the Eastern population which at no point overlapped with the Mid-continental SACR population. The fall migratory flyway of the Eastern population of SACR begins as far north as James Bay (even Ungava Bay in one case), passes south and west through the Outaouais to Lake Ontario, splits on either side of Lake Michigan, and ends up wintering as close as southern Indiana or as far as Florida (and many places in between).

As noted earlier in this summary, the population of SACR in Quebec is trending up. This may be in part due to the absence of predation, as well as a high reproductive rate in Quebec. This year's proportion of young in the fall flock was 20%, which is considered very good.

From a hunting perspective, both populations of SACR are in good health. It is estimated that altogether if a hunt is not more than 10% of the population, the population would remain stable. The proposal is to allow 500 to 1,000 permits in each of Ontario and Quebec. The maximum daily hunt per permit would be one SACR per day, the season would be 14 days long, and limited to two districts in the north. As difficult as it is to catch SACR to band them, the hunter success rate is only 20%. These target goals would represent 1% of the population, which would pose no threat to the SACR. Of note, there will be a public consultation in the future, with the possible first hunting season in the fall of 2026.

Christine finished the talk with a fascinating Q & A session, and added some individual anecdotes of irregular bird trips, including the longest trip, by bird SJ855, and the shortest trip (by an accidentally banded male), bird AB343-M. She ended with a teaser to encourage us to read her article in the recent QO issue and find the answer to this question: *Some SACR do not winter in the USA. Where do they winter?*



# FOCUS ON GRANTS LES SUBVENTIONS

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 information about funding initiatives, and reports from our grant recipients.

Chaque année, le POQ est fier d'accorder des subventions pour financer des projets de recherche, de conservation et d'éducation jugés utiles à l'avancement de notre mission de protection des oiseaux et de leur habitat. Ces subventions représentent notre plus grande dépense financière annuelle.

Dans cette rubrique, nous partageons des informations sur les initiatives de financement et les rapports de nos bénéficiaires de subventions.

Most local bird lovers are familiar with Le Nichoir, the wild bird rehabilitation centre located in Hudson that cares for thousands of injured birds each year. In addition to caring for injured birds, Le Nichoir also offers educational and outreach programs on bird conservation, and works with various partners to support birds threatened by environment emergencies.

This past October, the BPQ board heard about a project being launched by Le Nichoir to train professionals across the province in proper handling of birds exposed to oil spills, and got in touch with them to learn more. After learning the full scope of the project, backed by and funded in large part by the Government of Canada's Environmental Damages Fund, agreement was quickly reached by the entire board that this was an important initiative that aligns closely with BPQ's mission. The directors decided that, since they had made the overture to Le Nichoir, a grant application was not required and funding was provided by way of a donation.

Susan Wylie, Director of Operations at Le Nichoir, shares the details of this proactive project in the article that follows.

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La plupart des amoureux des oiseaux de la région connaissent Le Nichoir, le centre de réhabilitation des oiseaux sauvages situé à Hudson, qui s'occupe chaque année de milliers d'oiseaux blessés. En plus de soigner les oiseaux blessés, Le Nichoir offre également des programmes d'éducation et de sensibilisation à la conservation des oiseaux et travaille avec divers partenaires pour soutenir les oiseaux menacés par des urgences environnementales.

En octobre dernier, le conseil d'administration du POQ a entendu parler d'un projet lancé par Le Nichoir pour former des professionnels à travers la province à la bonne manipulation des oiseaux exposés aux déversements d'hydrocarbures, et a pris contact avec eux pour en savoir plus. Après avoir pris connaissance de toute la portée du projet, soutenu et financé en grande partie par le Fonds pour dommages à l'environnement du gouvernement du Canada, le conseil d'administration a rapidement convenu qu'il s'agissait d'un projet important qui s'inscrivait dans la mission du POQ. Étant donné qu'ils avaient approché Le Nichoir, les administrateurs ont décidé qu'une demande de subvention n'était pas nécessaire et que le financement était fourni sous forme de don.

Susan Wylie, directrice des opérations au Nichoir, partage les détails de cette initiative proactive dans l'article qui suit (en anglais).



Photo: Le Nichoir

## **OIL SPILL AVIAN RESPONSE SYSTEM**

*by Susan Wylie*

*Director, Operations - Le Nichoir*

Le Nichoir recently launched OARS, an oil-spill avian response system, to build a network of 40 professionals across Quebec, trained in safely treating wild birds exposed to an oil spill.

The Gulf of St. Lawrence and Saint Lawrence River have been identified as one of four Canadian regions with the highest probability of a large oil spill with alarming potential for serious environmental impact. And yet, there are very few trained individuals and organizations in Canada with the skill set to provide emergency care to oiled birds. OARS will contribute to Quebec's oil spill preparedness and response, while improving outcomes for oiled wild birds that are rehabilitated.

OARS was conceived by Le Nichoir after years of treating and rehabilitating oiled birds from accidental spills throughout Quebec. It will be taught over three sessions in conjunction with International Bird Rescue, an experienced California-based non-profit organization that has responded to over 250 oil spills and other wildlife emergencies on six continents.

Le Nichoir's biologists will first deliver an online, bilingual opening session, focused on native aquatic birds in Quebec. The remaining two sessions will be at Le Nichoir's Hudson site. Course content for these sessions, which is to be delivered by International Bird Rescue experts and simultaneously translated, will be hands-on and focused on skill development.

## Do you want to help?

Donate to the OARS project at: <https://lenichoir.org/oars/>

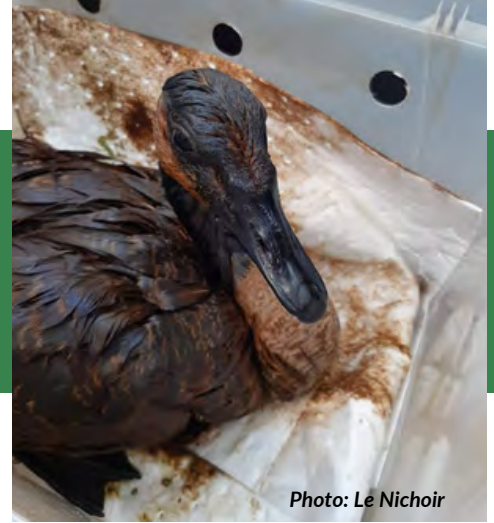


Photo: Le Nichoir

The OARS project also includes the construction of a model aquatic aviary to the latest standards for this training. Cold temperatures and heavy snow loads will be taken into account, adding additional constraints on its design and making this aviary unique.


The new aviary will allow for the year-round treatment of aquatic birds outdoors, especially those that require access to pools, and it will meet the increasing demand for temporary captive housing for birds such as mergansers, grebes, loons, and the occasional misplaced migrant such as a Razorbill or Northern Gannet.

Construction of the model aviary is scheduled to begin in early spring next year with the training sessions thereafter. After OARS, the new aviary will serve as a long-term site for aquatic bird rehabilitation in Hudson.

The Environmental Damages Fund (Environment and Climate Change Canada) is contributing \$117,700 in support of the \$250,000 project. Le Nichoir is responsible for raising the remaining \$133,000 over the next three years. As of the date of writing, over \$90,000 has been raised including a \$7,500 contribution from Bird Protection Quebec.

## Aquatic Aviary





# Winter brrrrding

## More enjoyable than you might think!

by Marcel Gahbauer

December can feel like a bleak time as a birder. The last of the fall migrants have generally moved on, species diversity has dwindled over the course of fall, it's getting noticeably colder to handle binoculars and cameras, and for those who keep "year lists," the prospect of any remaining new additions is getting ever slimmer. Sure, there's still some fun ahead on the calendar with Christmas Bird Counts (as long as the weather isn't miserable), but after that it's a loooong wait until things get interesting again...

...or is it?

Maybe it's a question of perspective. The thought of birding in winter might trigger an involuntary shiver but it has become quite a tradition in different parts of Canada. In the mid-1990s, Nova Scotia birder Blake Maybank started a “winter listing” competition, with the goal of finding as many species as possible from December 1 through the end of February (the meteorological definition of winter). It soon became apparent that not only could individual birders achieve some impressive totals over the course of the season, but that their collective efforts yielded surprisingly high numbers. In Nova Scotia, the provincial list has averaged just under 200 species per winter since the idea was launched in 1996/97, and Ontario has reached an average total of 208 species since starting to track numbers in 2007/08, with a cumulative total of more than 300 species to date ([Ontario Winter Bird List](#)). It doesn't appear that Quebec has joined in yet – but maybe there's someone who wants to coordinate such a list?

Of course, you don't have to commit to a season-long effort, or even be competitive at all. One of the best entry points to winter birding is the Audubon/Birds Canada Christmas Bird Count (CBC) – an event that BPQ coordinates annually in both Montreal and Hudson, and which also takes place in dozens of other locations in Quebec (and beyond – there are over 2,000 active counts, mostly in Canada and the United States, but spanning 20 countries in total). One of the great things about the CBC is that it's open to participants at all levels of experience. Sure, knowledgeable birders need to have a strong presence - but it's a perfect opportunity for newcomers to tag along with them, gaining experience, meeting other birders, and contributing by spotting birds, even if they can't identify them all.

The CBC is notable in other ways too. It's the only widespread event that consistently gets birders out to provide thorough coverage of an area on a single day. And by virtue of its standardized design (all CBCs are done within circles 24 km in diameter), birders tend to check out a lot of places they otherwise wouldn't consider. Much of the time that means wandering (or driving) through residential, industrial, and commercial areas where species diversity is low – but almost always, someone will stumble across a surprise in an unlikely place. Some recent examples from the Montreal CBC include first-time reports of two Turkey Vultures in 2023, a Green Heron in 2021, and a first-ever Count Week (3 days before or after Count Day) Cape May Warbler in 2022!

Many of the CBCs with the highest species counts are in urban areas – Montreal, for example, has averaged 72 species over the past five years, which seems like a lot at a time of year when getting to around 20 species usually feels like a really productive outing. To some extent the high species counts probably reflect a greater number of participants in urban counts, which in turn improves coverage and the likelihood of discovering rare birds. But the other important factor is that cities serve as “heat islands” in winter that make it at least slightly easier for birds to withstand the cold. There's more likely to be patches of open water for waterfowl and gulls, and some species like crows that largely forage in surrounding agricultural areas during the day come into the city by the thousands at night to roost where it's slightly warmer. There's also no doubt that backyard bird feeders provide a much more substantial and consistent food source than most natural landscapes. The upshot of this is that the “best” birding in winter, at least as measured by diversity and abundance, tends to be close to home (for those of us who live in cities).

**“In Nova Scotia, the provincial list has averaged just under 200 species per winter...and Ontario has reached an average total of 208 species since starting to track numbers in 2007/08.**



Photo: Darlene Harvey

Although the CBC is the focal point for organized winter birding, don't put your binoculars away when the counts are over! Winter is, after all, the only time of year when many of us have relatively easy access to a variety of "northern birds" that would require long trips to see in summer (and even then, might not be as easy to observe).

Perhaps the best example of this is the Bohemian Waxwing. Although small numbers breed in Quebec's northern boreal and taiga, the species is much easier to observe when moderate to large flocks show up to feed on fruit trees, often peaking in mid- to late winter. Other good examples include Red- and White-winged Crossbill, Pine and Evening Grosbeak, and the newly 'simplified' Redpoll (no longer split into Common and Hoary). And for those who have been birding for a while, the tremendous influx of Great Gray Owls into Montreal and other parts of southern Quebec in the winter of 2004/05 remains an incredible memory for any season.



*Fruit-bearing trees attract Bohemian Waxwings in winter (as well as lingering American Robins and occasionally Pine Grosbeaks).*



*The proliferation of buckthorn is generally considered undesirable, but Bohemian Waxwings might disagree – buckthorn stands (as well as apple and mountain-ash) are a great place to find them in winter.*

Even in years when those northern visitors are scarce, there are still other hardy birds to enjoy. At minimum, there are almost always some Black-capped Chickadees around to liven up an outing. And it's impossible not to be impressed by the hardiness of tiny Golden-crowned Kinglets and Brown Creepers that somehow manage to overwinter in southern Quebec in small numbers. If these tiny birds weighing 10 grams or less can withstand our winters, surely we can bundle up enough to get out and appreciate them!

Perhaps there's also something to be said for having lower expectations in winter. During migration there's always the potential for rarities, and the anticipation of big days, so it can be easy to be disappointed (or at least not particularly impressed) by an average outing. However, with fewer species around in winter, it seems easier to focus on and more deeply appreciate the encounters one does have. Another sensory consideration is that against the backdrop of a snow-buffered landscape, the few bird vocalizations that occur stand out all the more clearly.

Weather is an important consideration for birding in any season, and especially so in winter. You might be inclined to favour just the milder days, but bear in mind that in winter those tend to be cloudy and dreary. The sunniest days are often the coldest, and are worth braving at least occasionally. If nothing else, the deep blue skies of winter provide a spectacular contrast with the snowy landscape. As a bonus, especially once the days start to get a bit longer in late January and February, some birds like chickadees and cardinals will already begin practicing their songs, providing an encouraging hint of spring on the horizon.

Last but not necessarily least, winter is also the best time of year for observing a number of mammals. Otters, weasels, mink, porcupines, and snowshoe hares are among the species that are present year-round but can be largely secretive and most easily detected through their tracks in the snow. Finding an otter slide, spotting beady-eyed porcupines in trees, or successfully finding a weasel after following its tracks all make it easy to have a memorable outing even if bird activity is low.



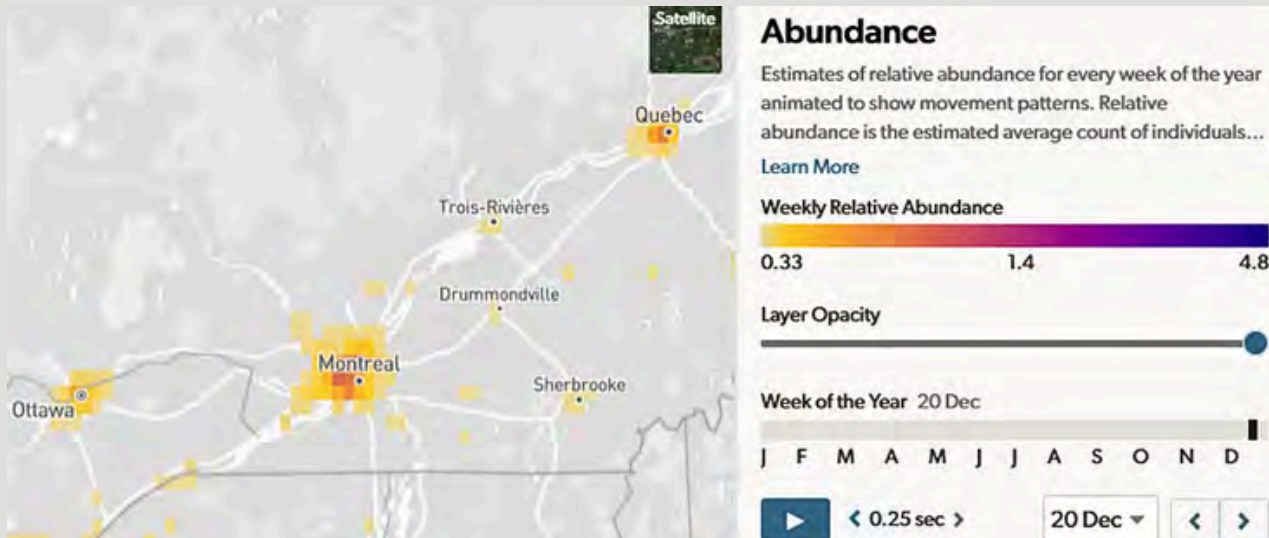
“  
Following tracks in winter can yield memorable encounters, like this one I had with a mink.  
”

Actually one more final thought ... I may not have convinced you of the virtues of getting outside for winter birding, and that's okay – it's not for everyone! But even if you prefer to hibernate as much as possible in winter, you can still enjoy the birds visible just outside your windows. Backyard observations are welcome for Christmas Bird Counts, and for a more ongoing contribution, consider participating in Project Feederwatch (<https://feederwatch.org/>), which targets observations every other weekend throughout the season.

To whatever extent you engage, be sure to enjoy some winter birding!

### Are you familiar with all the data available to you through your eBird account?

*A map of relative abundance for White-throated Sparrow around mid-December, showing that here at the northern limits of its wintering range, there's a strong affinity for urban centres, whether because of bird feeders, the heat island effect, or both.*



# Birding Adventures: On the High Seas

Story and photos by Harle Thomas and Minda Bernstein

At the end of April 2024, Minda and I signed on for the “de-lu-u-u-xe” three-day “bucket list” boat trip from Key West into the Gulf Stream of the Gulf of Mexico and up to the Dry Tortugas and Fort Jefferson. Our boat tour provided gourmet food, expert bird guiding, gobs of natural and social history and high seas adventure - it was well worth the price for us. Our three-day tour experience allowed us to go birding the afternoon of our arrival, all the next day and again in the morning on the day of our departure (as well as affording us plenty of time to actually explore the fort). For the most part our group of nine birders represented the only visitors in and around the fort, giving us the opportunity to see rare Black Noddies on two separate occasions; and, of course, while at sea we could stop any time for good looks and photos of pelagics before continuing on our way.

## At sea in the Gulf of Mexico - the Dry Tortugas - Fort Jefferson

We boarded the ship along with six other birding adventurers, one guide and four crew the night before; we would cast off at 5:30 a.m. the next day and be motoring into the middle of the Gulf Stream by the time breakfast had been enjoyed.

With a sunny sky above and smooth sailing ahead, we stood watch on deck. First up for viewing was a pair of **Bridled Terns** (*Onychoprion anaethetus*) casually floating by on a piece of flotsam in the current as they are known to do. Living a pelagic lifestyle in all tropical oceans around the world, they can be distinguished by a small white-grey band across the lower nape of the neck. Typically, they are the only tern species to land on objects on the water's surface while out at sea.

Zippering low with rapid wingbeats across the sea-meets-sky horizon were dozens of Audubon's Shearwaters (*Puffinus herminieri*), and we could see their signature dark undertails that distinguish them from white-undertailed Manx Shearwaters (*Puffinus puffinus*), which we didn't happen to encounter.



Bridled Terns  
Photo: Minda Bernstein



Roseate Terns  
Photo: Minda Bernstein



Frigatebird harassing Masked Booby  
 Photo: Minda Bernstein

And so, we set off to the Dry Tortugas, a small chain of sandy islands that lay about 70 miles (90km) west of Key West, sitting atop the third-largest coral reef system in the world—the only tropical reef system in the continental US.

In 1513 Ponce de Leon became the first European marauder and conquistador to discover these islands, naming them “Las Islas de Tortugas,” and then proceeded to capture 160 turtles, 14 seals and 5,000 birds. Sadly, the slaughter never ceased after that; leading to the extinction of the endemic Caribbean Monk Seal. Thankfully, today all wildlife within this national park is fully protected. The qualifier, “Dry,” was later added to the name to signify the lack of underground sources of fresh water, which must be imported and collected in rain cisterns.

The easternmost key of the Dry Tortugas is logically named, East Key—just sand, with no birds, trees or shrubbery. The same was true of the next islet, Middle Key, which from time to time is completely underwater. Next in line is Hospital Key, once home to a Yellow Fever quarantine hospital and cemetery in the late-1800s, which have since slipped beneath the waves as over the years the island slowly drifted to a new location.

Last year, park research divers discovered underwater artifacts from the original Hospital Key site. But today, this sandy key is covered with scores of breeding Masked Boobies (*Sula dactylatra*). The islet also supports a small group of Brown Boobies (*Sula leucogaster*). We slowly approached as close as a marine vessel is allowed to and watched as several of them flew right over our ship. We beheld a true spectacle of nature unfold before us as a Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) harassed a Masked Booby with brutal tenacity to persuade it to cough up a fish.



Photo: National Park Planner

### Shifting Sands Connect Islands

Not long ago, Garden Key, Bush Key and Long Key were once separate islands unto themselves. Now, in this part of the sea vs. sand drift cycle, they are all connected. During the nesting season visitors are allowed only on Garden Key (site of Fort Jefferson) because Bush Key, covered in sea-grape and mangrove shrubbery, is home to thousands of Brown Noddies (*Anous stolidus*) and Sooty Terns (*Onychoprion fuscata*) and Long Key supports a small rookery of Magnificent Frigatebirds (*Fregata magnificens*), where, from our zodiac dinghy, we also scoured the landscape looking for a recently seen errant visitor, the Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*)—alas, to no avail.

Passing Hospital Key, we steered toward the channel through the reef system that would take us to our mooring area in the lee of Fort Jefferson. And, there at the beginning of the channel on one of the large red marker buoys were sitting six **Roseate Terns** (*Sterna dougallii*) with their thin black bills, extra-long, deeply forked white tails and a hint of pink on their breasts. It was magical to idle the boat near the buoy and watch as a few of them flew with quick wingbeats in easy circles around the channel marker. Additionally, we saw Sandwich Terns (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) and Royal Terns (*Thalasseus maximus*) present around the islands.

“We beheld a true spectacle of nature unfold before us as a Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) harassed a Masked Booby with brutal tenacity to persuade it to cough up a fish.

- Harle

So, at last here we were at the unique and amazing six-sided Fort Jefferson on Garden Key. “Unique” in that the fort is the largest all-masonry building in the Western Hemisphere; made of an astounding number of bricks—16 million! The fort was under construction for a good 30 years (1846-77) but was never actually completed. And “amazing” in that the fort represents so much natural and political history in a singular and seemingly insignificant point of fresh water-less wasteland in the middle of nowhere. Why go to all the trouble? The answer to that question requires a bit of history. [SEE SIDEBAR]

“**The Dry Tortugas have for millennia acted as a central rest stop and pivot point for migrating passerines and raptors.**

- Harle

Of course, all of this political history is interesting but not as important to birders as the natural history fact that, in addition to being a breeding place for many pelagic birds, the Dry Tortugas have for millennia acted as a central rest stop and pivot point for migrating passerines and raptors in spring and fall on their flyways over the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. Plus, the fort now boasts a permanent small water fountain and bathing pool that is a magnet for songbirds (and the raptors that chase them).

We were pleased to observe 15 different species of warblers, 3 species of falcons, along with a large assortment of plovers, sandpipers, waders, doves and other songbirds and raptors. Missing for us this time around were two occasional visitors to the fort, the Antillean Nighthawk (*Chordeiles gundlachi*) and the “Arawak” or Antillean subspecies of the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus domiguensis/portoricensis*)—it sure would have been wonderful.



Our special bird-finding treat arrived in the mid-morning of our full day at the fort when our guide focused the scope on two Black Noddies (*Anous minutus*) sitting on one of the piers of the North Coaling Station ruins in among its numerous Brown Noddy compatriots on neighbouring posts. This avian juxtaposition made it less difficult for us to distinguish the Black Noddy’s smaller size, distinct white forehead and cap on a more uniform black body and a thinner bill. We were lucky enough to scope the Black Noddies from a different vantage point later that morning to confirm our sighting. Such a splendid adventure!



## Pirates, Shipwrecks, and the Rise of Fort Jefferson

Go back past 300 million years and there was no Gulf of Mexico; it was solid land from Texas to Florida. Then, through a period of climate change and tectonics the land sank into a geological depression and the Gulf of Mexico was formed; it is considered one of the shallower large bodies of water in the world, particularly around the coast of Florida.

This phenomenon is important because shoals and reefs and shallow water continue from Key West all the way to the Dry Tortugas before it’s less dangerous for a large vessel to turn north and head for the port of New Orleans. That said, the area surrounding the Dry Tortugas is famous for having at least 250 historical shipwrecks!

Go back 300 years or so and this area was teeming with pirates — Spanish, French, English and (soon to be) Americans whose countries were all vying for control of the Gulf Stream trade routes. And, close by to Garden Key was something even more valuable than the island itself — a large deep water basin that could act as a safe harbour for sailing ships to ride out storms and gales.

Then, in 1803 Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon, which included all of the trade produced in the Mississippi River Basin and shipped out to the world from New Orleans — and the matter was plain to see: the US needed an imposing military presence at the focal point of these trade routes. And so the plan for an aptly named Fort Jefferson was conceived and the fort was eventually constructed to become the “Gibraltar of the Gulf of Mexico.”



# How Social Media Threatens Our Rarest Wildlife

by Richard Gregson

Sadly, but not surprisingly, birders and nature photographers persist in disturbing birds during the breeding season, driven by the allure of a prestigious birding spot or photograph.

In 2022, 17 people were caught on camera at a Scottish Capercaillie “lek,” where a birder flushed six capercaillie from the breeding site. Although arrested (the charge later reduced to a warning), the damage they may have caused had already been done. Even brief disruptions stress birds and reduce their chances of returning to the area to breed. More recently someone shared their anger at having driven some hours to see a rare shorebird among a flock of more common ones. Just as the bird was spotted in the scope, a group of earlier arrivals, having seen it, began whooping and jumping in the air only to scatter the flock to the four corners of the wind.

## Striking the right balance

Striking a balance is challenging: social media attracts attention but requires discretion. It’s not only birds; online attention has, for example, similarly harmed endemic orchids as well as rare birds. A single post can draw hundreds of visitors, risking damage or loss. Inevitably, asking people to avoid vulnerable species faces resistance, with the argument that everyone has a right to see them. Even when a single person could inadvertently push a species toward extinction.

Admittedly, the impact on vulnerable species may be minor compared to wider habitat loss and introduction of invasive species, but social media perpetuates the problem by fuelling demand and highlighting the conflict between conservation aims and those seeking rare species just for a tick on their list. Social media draws attention, but discretion is crucial.

Attempts to harness its power have sometimes saved vulnerable species by discouraging specific bird searches and the posting of photographs online—for instance, many members of the birding world adhere to the general attitude that photos of owls and nests of any species should not be shared. Elsewhere, not so much.

## Keeping sighting details private

Birders almost always support such campaigns, but photographers are too often less responsive, driven by their desire for that perfect shot. There has to be a way to develop a widely accepted social norm of leaving vulnerable species in peace. Sharing details of sightings with date and location should be avoided in open social media forums where just anybody can see and respond. By all means post “I have seen X” and a photo but with no further information. Location is best shared on eBird and quietly, perhaps, among trusted friends.



Sharing details of sightings with date and location should be avoided in open social media forums.

**Watch those feeders for  
returning winter friends –  
and maybe a surprise or two!**

**Surveillez les mangeoires  
pour le retour de nos  
visiteurs hivernaux –  
et peut-être une surprise !**



Compare to this Slate-coloured form  
Photo: Darlene Harvey

Not the usual Dark-eyed Junco! Pas l'habituel Junco ardoisé!  
This is the Oregon subspecies; the Slate-colored form is  
usually found in Quebec.  
Photo: Mathias Mutzl



Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Pic à ventre rouge  
Photo: Darlene Harvey



Redpoll / Sizerin  
Photo: Darlene Harvey



American Tree Sparrow / Bruant hudsonien  
Photo: Bill Thompson



Evening Grosbeaks / Gros bec errant  
Photo: Joe McGill

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.



Welcome to *Birds with Quirks*. The focus of this new column will be on birds found in Quebec, but sometimes also with reference to related species elsewhere. That means no ostriches, penguins, or flamingos, as remarkable as they are, but rest assured there are more than enough local species with interesting features and habits to keep us busy for a while!

## The Flying Cigar

Let's kick things off with the **Chimney Swift** - a species with a distinctive body structure, peculiar habitat preferences, and a number of unusual behaviours.

To begin with, a swift's silhouette in flight is unlike any other bird. With their short necks, tiny bills, and stubby tails, they have been aptly described as "flying cigars." Others liken their shape to a bow-and-arrow configuration, with their arced wings spanning roughly double their body length.

As for a swift's shape while perched ... wait, have you ever seen one *not* flying? Swifts are famous for how much time they spend on the wing: research using tiny data-loggers has shown that Common Swifts can spend as long as 10 months straight in the air! Yes, that means they even sleep while flying, albeit just for seconds at a time.

They do, of course, have to perch for nesting - as remarkable as they are, swifts have not figured out how to incubate while flying! And, in the case of Chimney Swifts, it seems that they also tend to rest overnight. It has been found that the easiest way to count them during the breeding season is to watch them gather and descend into communal roosts around dusk. If you haven't yet witnessed this spectacle, consider checking out some candidate sites next summer, either independently or as part of SwiftWatch, a citizen science project by Birds Canada that monitors Chimney Swift roosts (<https://www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/swiftwatch>). Although it appears that the program does not yet formally operate in Quebec, maybe with enough volunteer interest it would be expanded!



Evening flight of Alpine Swifts over Luzern, Switzerland, showing a range of silhouettes including the classic bow-and-arrow and flying-cigar silhouettes



Photographing roosting Chimney Swifts is challenging because of access and lighting limitations, so here's a view of Common Swifts clinging in a similar manner to the outside of a building in Switzerland.



Swifts enter and leave chimney roosts in an amazing aerial display (stock photo)

Those roosts, of course, tend to be chimneys, which in itself is most peculiar and is obviously a preference the species has adopted quite recently. Historically, most were presumably “Tree Hollow Swifts” (literally meaning they nested and roosted in hollow trees) but whereas rotting trees may become less suitable over time as they continue to decay, can be easily accessed by predators, and can typically support only a small number of swifts, chimneys offer greater capacity, stability, and protection.

Of course chimneys come with their own risks, not the least of which is that with the modernization of cities, many buildings with old chimneys are being slated for demolition – a rare case where changes to urban habitat can have implications for a species at risk. (Chimney Swift has been listed as *Threatened* under the Species at Risk Act (SARA) since 2009, based on persistent declines averaging more than 30% per decade.) In fact, permits are now required under SARA for any chimney maintenance during the breeding season that could disturb resident swifts, or for demolition or other structural changes at any time of year (<https://tinyurl.com/yrr87pp7>).

Unsurprisingly, there are also times when Chimney Swifts become trapped or injured, and end up at Le Nichoir or other rehabilitation centres. McGill Bird Observatory staff have banded a number of Chimney Swifts prior to their release back to the wild, and it’s quite a different experience than handling other birds. Aside from their unusual body shape, it’s notable that while most birds have to be captured by net, swifts can generally just be lifted off their artificial chimney and then “hung up” again at the end, as if by Velcro! This is because swifts have pamprodactyl feet, an unusual arrangement in which all four toes face forward - or upward, in the context of how they typically perch. The only other birds with a foot structure like this are the acrobatic mousebirds of sub-Saharan Africa.

One last peculiarity, related to reproduction. Most small birds are sexually mature the year after they hatch, but Chimney Swifts usually begin breeding only at two years of age. This is also the case for the Alpine Swift and Common Swift in Europe, while the Pallid Swift of the Mediterranean region appears to begin at three years, and age at first breeding for the Black Swift in western Canada is thought to range from three to five years. Why this delay? There are no obvious explanations, highlighting how much remains to be learned about Chimney Swifts and their relatives.



**Do you have a favourite quirky bird that you’d like to see featured? We already have a few ideas for future issues, but welcome your input! Send your suggestions to: [songsparrow@birdprotectionquebec.org](mailto:songsparrow@birdprotectionquebec.org)**

# Birding Basics



Tips for Winter Birding:

## Embrace the Chill and the Thrill!



Photo: Tom Long

Winter birding has its own unique magic, with crisp air, striking landscapes, and a host of cold-weather avian visitors. Here are some tips to make the most of your birding outings this season:

### Gear Up for Comfort

Layer up with moisture-wicking, insulated, and windproof clothing. Add gloves, a hat, and sturdy boots to stay warm.

### Time It Right

Birds are most active near sunrise. With shorter daylight hours, plan your trips to maximize time in the field.

### Scout Food Sources

In winter, food is scarce, so birds gather near feeders, berry bushes, and unfrozen water. Look for food hotspots like conifers and weedy fields.

### Stay Quiet and Observant

Winter landscapes amplify sound, so tread lightly and speak softly. Winter birds are quieter, requiring extra patience to spot—watch for tracks in snow.

### Know Your Winter Birds

Brush up on species like finches, snow buntings, woodpeckers, and raptors. Seasonal visitors like snowy owls or juncos might also appear.

### Be Weather-Wise

Keep an eye on forecasts and avoid extreme weather. Overcast days can offer better lighting for photography, while sunny days make birds more active.

### Bring Warm Refreshments

Pack a thermos of hot tea or cocoa for quick warm-ups. Birding can be a marathon, not a sprint!

### Attract Winter Birds to Your Backyard

- Plant native shrubs like dogwood or viburnum for shelter and berries.
- Leave leaves under shrubs to attract insects for feeding.
- Build brush piles for shelter or let parts of your yard grow wild for seed-eaters.

### Engage and Record

Join programs like the Christmas Bird Count or the Great Backyard Bird Count, or log your sightings using a birding app like eBird to support conservation efforts.

#### For more tips:



<https://www.birdsCanada.org/four-ways-to-attract-backyard-birds-this-winter>



<https://www.audubon.org/news/how-welcome-winter-birds>

Embrace the quiet beauty of winter birding—it's a chance to connect with nature in its most serene state! Happy birding!



# Spotting Owls Without Spooking Them



(Stock photo)

For many bird lovers, spotting an owl like a Snowy Owl or Northern Saw-whet Owl is unforgettable. These magical encounters can inspire a lifelong connection to nature, but they also risk harming the owls if we're not careful. Winter brings many owl species south, and while this is an exciting time to observe them, it's crucial to minimize disturbances that could impact their survival.

## Tips to Observe and Photograph Owls Responsibly:

- Watch quietly from a distance; move farther away if the owl notices you.
- Limit your time near roosting owls and never disturb them.
- Never follow a flushed owl or go off trail.
- Avoid baiting owls or altering their natural behaviours. Baiting can make owls accustomed to human presence, leading to dangerous situations like collisions with vehicles. Always photograph owls hunting naturally, without interference.
- When photographing owl nests, arrive early, stay hidden, and avoid disturbing the birds. Always prioritize their well-being over getting the perfect shot.
- Avoid flash photography. A flash can startle owls, so it's best to avoid it, especially with nocturnal species. If you must use it, be sure to illuminate the owl gradually.
- Maintain a safe distance. Be aware of an owl's stress signals. If an owl opens its eyes during the day or raises its body off its legs, you're too close. Stay far enough to avoid disturbing their natural behaviour.
- Be cautious about sharing owl locations; review eBird's sensitive species guidelines at [https://ebird.org/news/sensitive\\_species](https://ebird.org/news/sensitive_species)

By respecting these guidelines, you help protect these incredible birds and ensure they continue to thrive in the wild. Thank you for appreciating owls responsibly!

## For more tips:



<https://www.birdscanada.org/owl-observation-tips-for-birders-and-photographers>



<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/winter-2016/let-proteach-you-how-to-take-great-owl-photos>

# LES B.A.-BA DE L'OBSERVATION



## Conseils pour l'observation des oiseaux en hiver : **Profitez du froid et de frisson !**



Photo: Tom Long

L'observation des oiseaux en hiver a sa propre magie, avec un air vivifiant, des paysages saisissants et une foule de visiteurs aviaires par temps froid. Voici quelques conseils pour tirer le meilleur parti de vos sorties ornithologiques cette saison :

### **S'équiper pour être à l'aise**

Portez des vêtements qui évacuent l'humidité, qui sont isolés et qui résistent au vent. Ajoutez des gants, un chapeau et des bottes solides pour rester au chaud.

### **Choisissez le bon moment**

Les oiseaux sont plus actifs au lever du soleil. Les heures de clarté étant plus courtes, planifiez vos déplacements pour maximiser le temps passé sur le terrain.

### **Recherchez les sources de nourriture**

En hiver, la nourriture est rare. Les oiseaux se rassemblent donc près des mangeoires, des buissons de baies et de l'eau non gelée. Recherchez les points chauds comme les conifères et les champs envahis par les mauvaises herbes.

### **Restez silencieux et observateur**

Les paysages hivernaux amplifient les bruits, il faut donc marcher légèrement et parler doucement. Les oiseaux d'hiver sont plus silencieux, et il faut redoubler de patience pour repérer les traces dans la neige.

### **Connaître les oiseaux d'hiver**

Renseignez-vous sur les espèces comme les pinsons, les bruants des neiges, les mésanges et les rapaces. Des visiteurs saisonniers comme le harfang des neiges ou le junco peuvent également apparaître.

### **Soyez attentif aux conditions météorologiques**

Gardez un œil sur les prévisions et évitez les conditions météorologiques extrêmes. Les jours couverts peuvent offrir un meilleur éclairage pour la photographie, tandis que les jours ensoleillés rendent les oiseaux plus actifs.

### **Apportez des rafraîchissements chauds**

Emportez un thermos de thé chaud ou de cacao pour vous réchauffer rapidement. L'observation des oiseaux peut être un marathon, pas un sprint !

### **Attirez les oiseaux d'hiver dans votre jardin**

- Plantez des arbustes indigènes comme le cornouiller ou la viorne pour qu'ils offrent un abri et des baies.
- Laissez des feuilles sous les arbustes pour attirer les insectes.
- Construisez des tas de broussailles pour vous faire un abri ou laissez certaines parties de votre jardin pousser à l'état sauvage pour les mangeurs de graines.

### **S'engager et enregistrer**

Participez à des programmes comme le *Recensement de Noël* ou *Le Grand dénombrement des oiseaux de février*, ou enregistrez vos observations à l'aide d'une application ornithologique pour soutenir les efforts de conservation.

### **Pour plus de conseils :**



<https://www.oiseauxcanada.org/les-chouettes-et-les-hiboux-conseils-aux-observateurs-et-photographes>



<https://www.audubon.org/news/how-welcome-winter-birds>

Profitez de la beauté tranquille de l'observation des oiseaux en hiver—c'est l'occasion d'entrer en contact avec la nature dans son état le plus serein ! Bonne observation !



# Observer les hiboux sans les effrayer



(Photo d'archives)

Pour de nombreux ornithologues amateurs, l'observation d'un hibou, comme le Harfang des neiges ou la Petite nyctale, est inoubliable. Ces rencontres magiques peuvent inspirer un lien à vie avec la nature, mais elles risquent aussi de nuire aux hiboux si l'on n'y prend pas garde. L'hiver amène de nombreuses espèces de chouettes et de hiboux vers le sud, et bien que ce soit une période passionnante pour les observer, il est crucial de minimiser les perturbations qui pourraient avoir un impact sur leur survie.

## Conseils pour observer et photographier les hiboux de manière responsable :

- Observez tranquillement à distance ; éloignez-vous si la chouette vous remarque.
- Limitez votre temps à proximité des hiboux perchés et ne les dérangez jamais.
- Ne suivez jamais une chouette en fuite et ne sortez jamais du sentier.
- Évitez d'appâter les chouettes ou de modifier leur comportement naturel. L'appâtage peut habituer les chouettes à la présence humaine, ce qui peut entraîner des situations dangereuses telles que des collisions avec des véhicules. Photographiez toujours les chouettes en train de chasser naturellement, sans interférence.
- Lorsque vous photographiez des nids de chouettes, arrivez tôt, restez cachés et évitez de déranger les oiseaux. Privilégiez toujours leur bien-être à la prise de vue parfaite.
- Évitez de prendre des photos au flash. Le flash peut faire sursauter les chouettes, il est donc préférable de l'éviter, surtout avec les espèces nocturnes. Si vous devez l'utiliser, veillez à éclairer la chouette progressivement.
- Maintenez une distance de sécurité. Soyez attentif aux signaux de stress d'une chouette ou d'un hibou. Si un hibou ouvre les yeux pendant la journée ou soulève son corps de ses pattes, c'est que vous êtes trop près. Restez à une distance suffisante pour ne pas perturber leur comportement naturel.
- Soyez prudent lorsque vous partagez les localisations de chouettes et de hiboux ; consultez les directives de eBird sur les espèces sensibles à [https://ebird.org/news/sensitive\\_species](https://ebird.org/news/sensitive_species)

## Pour plus de conseils :



<https://www.oiseauxcanada.org/les-chouettes-et-les-hiboux-conseils-aux-observateurs-et-photographes>



<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/winter-2016/let-proteach-you-how-to-photograph-great-owl-photos>

En respectant ces lignes directrices, vous contribuez à la protection de ces oiseaux incroyables et vous assurez qu'ils continuent à prospérer dans la nature. Merci d'apprécier les hiboux de manière responsable !

# Exploring Early Canadian Ornithology

with Jeff Harrison

Henry George Vennor:

## Montreal's Pioneering Naturalist and Early Chronicler of Canadian Birds

**Vennor's *Our Birds of Prey* is an impressive work combining the best of American behavioural research with a serious attempt to include observational and range material from the writings of all the known ornithologists working in Canada.**

Henry George Vennor Junior (1840-1884) was born in Montreal, the son of Henry Vennor and Marion Peterson. His father was a prominent Montreal businessman, but details of Vennor family history are scant. A letter from Henry Senior to his wife in the McGill Archives, dated October 1866 reveals that they had three other children (BW MSS 012-11).

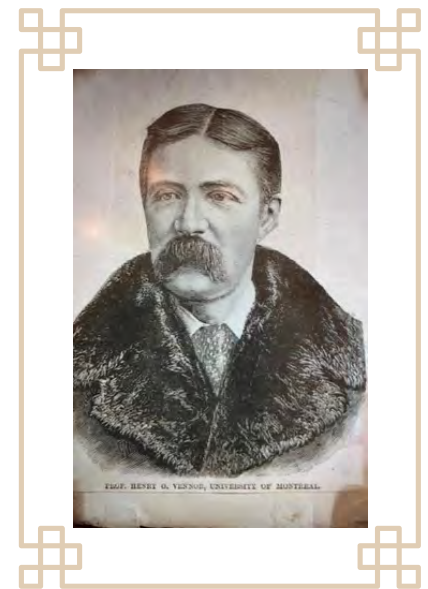
Henry Vennor, the naturalist, received his primary education at Philips School in Montreal, likely a small private school for the well-to-do (Muir 1981). He then attended a leading institution of the day, the High School of Montreal, founded in 1843. In 1846 the High School absorbed the Royal Grammar School (O'Donnell). The Grammar School was run for many years by the educator Alexander Skakel, one of the founders of the Montreal Natural History Society.

By 1853 the young Vennor was making extensive notes on geology in his journal. This interest led to his eventual career choice, employment with the Geological Survey of Canada. Vennor's 1859 notebook, "Notes on Natural History" also showed an early interest in birds, and included a few pages on bird classification and a sketch of a Northern Flicker (BW MSS 012-14).

Vennor entered McGill College in 1858 where he took a two-year course in applied sciences, a program initiated and taught by the prominent geologist Sir William Dawson. He graduated with an honours degree in Civil Engineering in 1860. While taking classes at the Feller Institute in the hamlet of Grand Ligne (near Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu) in July 1859, he wrote some observations on Passenger Pigeons in a "Field Notebook" (BW MSS 012-5).

*Flocks of the Passenger Pigeons (*Ectopistes Migratoria*) have been passing for some days. Number in flock varying (from those I have seen) from 4 to 10 in the morning from 4 to 5 o'clock. They fly in flocks, during the day I have not seen them at all, although they must rest in the woods, during the heat of the day. In the evening they collect to eat the raspberries. When they rest for a time in the flights, they generally choose very high dead trees, or on the dead branches of large living trees.*

*In the mornings their cry is a sharp but mournful cry when flying, but when eating they utter the same note in a quick sharp manner. The pigeons were here much earlier last year, the cool protracted weather seems to have kept them back. Young pigeons are making their appearance.*



Sketch of Henry Vennor. *Notebook on natural history, Island of Montreal and vicinity 1858-1864* (BW MSS 012-9)



Vennor, H. G. 1859. Sketch of Passenger Pigeon and Wood Thrush (BW MSS 012-5)

Vennor's "Notebook on natural history, Island of Montreal and vicinity 1858-1864" (BW MSS 012-9) was his main journal for entering his local field observations. His first entry on August 9, 1858 described a field trip to the Mile End quarries. His last entry was April 1864. Vennor's favourite haunts, largely in search of birds for his growing collection, were Mount Royal, Nun's Island and walking along the Lachine railway track (opened in 1847).

On graduating in 1860 Vennor accepted a position with the Montreal merchant company Fotheringham and Workman where he worked for the next five years. It is evident in reading his 1858-64 "Notebook" that his field trips were largely on weekends. Vennor invariably took to the field with his gun, occasionally a telescope, and a companion, often William Hunter, the curator of the Montreal Natural History Society, or one of his brothers. As a result, he spent more time on bird research, rekindled an interest in studying the weather, and expanded his collections of fossils and birds. He also relied much more heavily on Hunter to find new birds for his collection as well as his network of contacts, and bird specimens purchased at the Bonsecours Market in Old Montreal. He also patronized the multi-vendor fur market at Lachine.

On April 14, 1860 Vennor, the dedicated field-naturalist, wrote in his *Notebook*:

***My collection of stuffed birds increases very fast. My whole attention & study time in that way. The taste I have always had for natural history was general but it now points to the feathered tribe solely. I am entering upon the study the vastness of which does not prevent me too much, just the threshold but something added to the history of our Birds. However little will never be amiss. We can boast of a powerful, noble if not the most beautiful feathered inhabitants as any other part of the globe...***

From 1860 to 1864 Vennor also wrote three articles about birds, two of which were published in the *Canadian Naturalist and Geologist* (CNG) and one in the *British American Magazine*. (See Bibliography.) His article on the Night-heron (CNG: 1865) is of particular interest. It was a detailed examination of this species covering most aspects of its ecology. He also mentions the European and Indian species and briefly discusses whether the experts think these geographically diverse birds are the same species. Of local interest is his observation that the Montreal colony consisted of 80 to 100 pairs and was located at the west end of Nun's Island.



(Stock photo)

In 1865 Vennor left his employment with Fotheringham and Workman to take up a temporary position as assistant to Sir William Logan, the founder of the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC), on a survey of Manitoulin Island and Lake Huron. The following year he was appointed to a permanent position with the Survey, where he remained until 1881 when he resigned to pursue other interests, including the founding of a weather almanac.

He may have married in 1870 but his marital status is unclear. Some accounts suggest he never married, though others record a marriage to Mary Smith Wilkins (1845-1920) (Archives of Montreal BM 35). He may have had three children (Eakins DCB).

Throughout his years of employment, Vennor never lost his interest in birds. Blacker Wood MSS 012-6 - *Ornithological Newspaper Clippings* - includes a note by Vennor in the *Montreal Witness*, likely in 1865, entitled "The Birds of Canada" and suggests Vennor was assembling his bird research and records for publication.

**We have been favored with some advance sheets of a pamphlet, to be published late this summer, entitled "Contributions to Canadian Natural History, containing lists of the animals and birds of Canada, with instructions for their collection and preservation," by H. G. Vennor. Also the plants of Canada, with practical instructions for their preservation, by John Bell, M.A., M.D.**

**The lists of birds will prove very valuable to Canadian Students of Natural History, as they will be the most perfect yet published. The information from which they are compiled has been obtained from all parts of Canada; and, before completing them, the author intends to add the results of another year of another season's rambles in the wooded districts of Canada.**

This work was never published. The surviving Vennor unpublished bird notes and published bird articles provide evidence that Vennor was laying the groundwork for a Birds of Canada. There is evidence in the final twenty pages of the 1859 "Notebook," where Vennor lists 133 North American species, that he was assembling bird records. With Confederation in 1867, the idea of writing a Birds of Canada would have been a daunting task for any ornithologist. In the end he settled on a detailed study of Canadian raptors published in 1876 as *Our birds of prey, or the eagles, hawks and owls of Canada*, with photographs of all species by the renowned Montreal photographer William Notman. This work is by far his most important published work. He notes in his introduction:

**The Natural History of Canada has received a very fair share of attention from Naturalists both at home and abroad, but in no one department of this fascinating study can the ground yet be said to be well trodden. In commencing work in this field some thirteen years ago, I chose as a special object of investigation our Birds of Prey, as affording a field perhaps less trodden than others.**

The text is a thoroughly researched account of what was known of each species of raptor, and is firmly in the tradition of Canada's most important 19th-century published ornithological work, British naturalist John Richardson's *Fauna Boreali Americana*, Vol 2: *The Birds*, published in 1831. Vennor's *Our Birds of Prey* is an impressive work combining the best of American behavioural research with a serious attempt to include observational and range material from the writings of all the known ornithologists working in Canada. Given the complete absence of important ornithological books written by Canadians and published in Canada up to 1876, *Our Birds of Prey* belongs on the bookshelf of all Canadian ornithologists.

Vennor's ornithological writings are an important early source of information about the places he visited in mid-19th century Montreal. This is particularly the case with his records of the earliest bird and breeding records for Mount Royal and Nun's Island. His writings mention other Montreal naturalists of the period, including a close working relationship with another important mid-19th century Quebec naturalist-ornithologist, William Couper. Vennor's writings reveal a bird collection of 145 species. The Redpath Museum has a small collection by early Montreal naturalist, Michael McCulloch (c1797-1854), but the fate of the Vennor collection is unknown at this time.



(Stock photo)

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Henry Vennor Collection

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