

Bird Wing Report May 2020

Text by Renee Levesque; photos as indicated

Because our first outing of the season was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions accordingly put in place, I had suggested that for the May Bird Wing outing, we individually take a walk in Laurier Woods at any time of the day on May 26 and report sightings to me for May's Bird Wing report. I suggested Laurier Woods because in normal times, it is where we would hold our first outing of the season to see the lovely wood warblers.

Bird Wing Outing:

Lori Anderson arrived first. I ran into her. Then Dick Tafel arrived and we ran into him, and all three of us continued along more or less together, but basically keeping our social distance. We also ran into Gary and Luanne Chowns. Kaye Edmonds was there too, but we did not run into her, although she saw us. Grant McKercher did his walk the next day and saw many of the same species as we did on May 26.

I had expected to see many, many warblers because the day before when I was there, as were Dick and Corinne Urrutia – amazing the people you know that you run into on the one trail that remained open throughout the pandemic crisis – there were so many warblers, one could barely keep up. However, by the next day, many had moved on. The migrants were late this year and until recently with a southerly wind and no rain, they left during the night, anxious to get to their nesting grounds.

Still on May 26, we all saw our fair share of warblers and more. Until some days before Tuesday's walk, the warbler that dominated Laurier Woods was the Yellow-rumped Warbler, seen so very well because the leaves were late arriving on the trees. Other early warblers were the Pine, the Palm and the Cape May.

In sheer numbers the Yellow-rumped has now been replaced by the very busy American Redstart, male and female. There were so many of them that Lori and I stopped counting. Same with the Chestnut-sided. They were *pleased, pleased, pleased, pleased* to meet us, no doubt about that! The Ovenbird, a warbler of the forest floor, was competing throughout the woods with his *teacher, teacher, teacher*. The lovely bright Yellow Warblers were also around in a few numbers, as were the masked Common Yellow-throats, reminiscent of the Lone Ranger.



Canada Warbler, Stephen O'Donnell

There were at least three Black-throated Green singing their buzzy *zoo zee zoo zoo zee*; a pair of Black-throated Blue of which some of us got a good look at the olive-brown female with her white wing spot, looking so completely different from the male with his deep blue back; the handsome Canada (see previous page) with its black necklace; the Pine singing where else but in a pine tree; the beautiful black and yellow Magnolia; a few Black and Whites acting more like creepers and nuthatches than warblers; a Wilson's (at right), the male with his distinguished black cap; and a Northern Waterthrush, looking like a thrush, walking like an Ovenbird and teetering like a Spotted Sandpiper, but a wood warbler, nevertheless.

So we did quite well even though we did not see what some of us saw the day before – a Blackpoll, looking somewhat like a chickadee; a Tennessee which often at a glance we mistake for a vireo; the male and female Bay-breasted, the male with his chestnut crown, throat and flanks; the very active but nondescript Orange-crowned; the striking Blackburnian; and the elusive Mourning (below) with its gray hood and face. The Nashville, with its bright yellow underparts and prominent white eyering had been seen on a few outings.



Lisa Hackett



Stephen O'Donnell

In the flycatcher family, the Least and the Great Crested were seen. We often hear the Great Crested with its demanding *wheep* more than we see it, but this time, and the day before, it offered us good views.

Lots of species of sparrows – Swamp (top of next page), Song, White-throated, Savannah and Chipping, but no Lincoln's. (The day before I saw a White-crowned. It somehow got left behind when the rest migrated north.)

In the vireo family, the Red-eye had returned with a vengeance and there were so many, we gave up counting.

The Warbling Vireo, not always seen but always heard with its sweet, melodious warble sounding somewhat like Purple Finch, had also returned. And some of us saw the Philadelphia Vireo. A couple of them, hanging upside down from tree branches, provided good views of their pale yellow throats and breasts.

In the thrush family, American Robins were everywhere, with the Veery calling throughout the woods, sometimes offering us its spiralling downward ethereal song instead of its harsh *phew*. We also saw a Swainson's Thrush and heard the haunting song of the Hermit Thrush (below), announced by one long-held lovely note.



Swamp Sparrow, Stephen O'Donnell



Buddy Myles

Two Tree Swallows were around, but many had seen them elsewhere in much larger numbers, and others had also seen elsewhere Barn, Bank and Cliff Swallows.

A walk in Laurier Woods is not complete without seeing or hearing those mimic birds, the Brown Thrasher (below) with its yellow eyes, curved bill and long tail, and the Gray Catbird with its black cap and chestnut undertail coverts.

There were all the usual birds one might expect in Laurier Woods, as well as Cedar Waxwings, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and the

bird everyone waits for in the spring and most had now seen, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

What was somewhat unexpected was the Indigo Bunting the Chowns saw and the Scarlet Tanager Dick had seen the day before but was not around for us to see the next day – or it was but we didn't see it. Dick and Mary Young also saw, and I heard, the Eastern Wood Pewee prior to the "outing", and Dick saw the Marsh Wren – also seen by Grant, but in Callander Bay, not at Laurier.

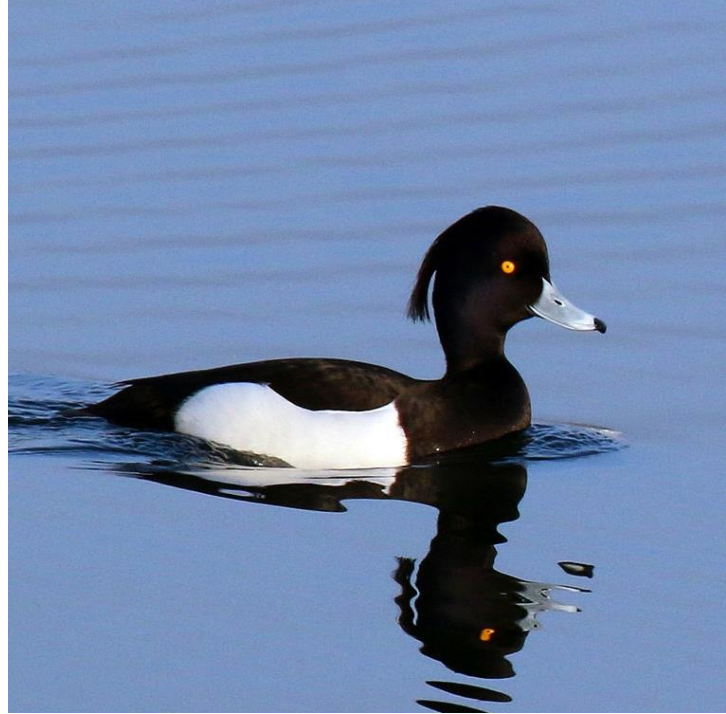


Gary Chowns

Rare Sighting:

The big news this May was the arrival of a Tufted Duck (at right) at Powassan Lagoon. It drew a bit of a crowd from other areas, but I believe everyone kept their social distance. You might think it's a Ring-necked Duck until you notice its entirely white side, or a scaup until you notice its black back.

Distinguishing it from both is its wispy crest that you might not notice at all if the duck is not close by. It is a diving duck from Eurasia, but does wander to North America from time to time and often one is seen in Canada annually, usually in Newfoundland/Labrador and the Pacific Coast. As far as I am aware, the one seen at Powassan Lagoon is the first seen this year in Ontario. (Thanks to Craig Evans for bringing this rare duck to our attention.)



Charles J. Sharp, Wikipedia

A rare sighting in our area, again found by Craig, is the Blue-winged Warbler seen on Whalley Lake Road West near Magnetewan. Some have made the trip to see it, including Stephen O'Donnell whose photo of it is at left.



Other Sightings:

Without the benefit of a full outing or a meeting, I am relying only on those who reported sightings to me by email, and even at that, there might be some sightings outside the usual that I have missed.

Birds were slow to arrive and when they did, they arrived in dribs and drabs until very recently.

The hawk we welcomed back after its winter absence was the Broad-winged Hawk (below), seen well on Hwy. 17 West.

A few have seen Pied-billed Grebes (Cache Bay), Red-necked Grebes (Jocko Point); Red-breasted Mergansers (Jocko Point); Wilson's Phalaropes (Verner Lagoon); and the Red-necked Phalarope (Warren Lagoon).



Renee Levesque



Renee Levesque

Shorebirds seen were Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs (at left), Least Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Black-bellied Plover, Killdeer and Semipalmated Plover. Most were seen at the lagoons, primarily Verner Lagoon, but the Black-bellied Plovers were seen in a field on Veuve River Road in West Nipissing.

Rather unusually, a pair of Tundra Swans were seen at Verner Lagoon, still there as of May 30 and perhaps beyond. I thought when I first saw them earlier in May that they were Trumpeter Swans, as did others, but when I looked closely at my photos, I saw a yellow basal spot on the bill, indicating Tundra Swans. Unusual to see one in a lagoon, let alone in May.

Stephen has the advantage of seeing the scoters arrive on Lake Bernard to rest before heading north. This spring he saw all three scoters – the Surf (below),

the White-winged and the Black. He also recently saw a Long-tailed Duck on Lake Bernard.

Other ducks seen by many included all the regular ducks one expects to see, although it seemed many Northern Pintails stayed longer than usual before heading to their nesting grounds.

Some saw the Green Heron (Cache Bay and the Old Callander Road) and a couple of us saw the Common Gallinule (Cache Bay).

Two gulls of note were seen in May: a Glaucous Gull in Verner Lagoon and a Lesser Black-backed on Lake Nipissing at the end of Tenth Street. Terns seen were the



Stephen O'Donnell

Caspian (Cache Bay and elsewhere), Common (Cache Bay) and Black (Cache Bay).

All woodpeckers had been seen, including a male Red-headed Woodpecker recently seen by Stephen in his yard.

A few had seen the Baltimore Oriole (right) and the American Pipit at various locations and some had seen the lovely Eastern Bluebird. Stephen saw the rarer Golden-winged Warbler in the Sundridge area. .



Buddy Myles

Dick and I saw a Field Sparrow first on Cranberry Road and then at Callander Lagoon, a sparrow no longer often seen.

Kevan Cowcill reported seeing a Purple Martin flying in the Strathcona area in West Ferris. He followed it on his bike over the overpass and then it disappeared heading downtown or perhaps to the waterfront. He also saw a Common Nighthawk flying and calling in the Gertrude Street area, also in West Ferris, and I saw and heard one recently in downtown North Bay.

Chimney Swifts have returned to Main Street West, although so far not in the numbers usually seen. They were late in arriving, so perhaps by the time I finish this report, more and more will have arrived.

Other May birds included a House Wren the Chowns were fortunate to have recently seen in their yard, and Bobolinks and Eastern Meadowlarks seen in farmers' fields, with some Bobolinks seen at Verner and Powassan Lagoons.

Profile: Barry Kent MacKay:

I knew Barry Kent MacKay (see next page) was a bird artist because of his striking bird illustrations on the covers of *Ontario Birds*, the OFO magazine. But then I got to know a bit more about him from emailing him when I was doing an article on Miles Hearn for *The Woodland Observer*, March 2019 issue. (Miles conducts nature walks in the Toronto area and is the grandson of Murray Speirs, famed ornithologist, and Doris Speirs, painter, poet and ornithologist, both of whom were friends of Louise de Kiriline Lawrence.)

Doris could not be a member of the Toronto Ornithological Club because she was a woman. It was thanks to Barry's mother, Phyllis MacKay, a pioneer in bird and small animal rescue and rehabilitation, that the club finally opened its doors to women – but not until 1980! I emailed Barry to ask him about this and since then, Barry has sent me (and others) emails of paintings and illustrations he has done, along with write-ups on each.

I learned from Barry that he has painted birds from all over the world, capturing in them their very essence, their innate beauty. "I am enchanted by the form of birds... the curves, the counter-curves. Nature provides an infinite amount of abstract forms from the shape and look of a galaxy to a grain of sand."



Courtesy of Barry Kent MacKay

Barry, who lives in Markham, has written and/or illustrated many books on birds: *Birds of Toronto*; *A Field Guide to the Birds of the Galapagos*; *Bird Sounds*; *The Bird Watcher's Companion*; *Wrens, Dippers and Thrashers*; *Eighty More Land Birds to Know*; *Songbirds: Celebrating Nature's Voices*; and *Birds of the Oshawa-Lake Scugog Region of Ontario*. Over a 25-year period, he also wrote a nature column and feature articles for the *Toronto Sunday Star*.

I eventually discovered that in addition to being a bird artist and writer, Barry is a well-known international conservationist and political advocate.

Irene Fedun in the Fall 1998 FLAP newsletter writes that Barry and his mother "were among the first to recognize that the tall buildings being constructed in Toronto would pose a major threat to migratory birds." It was in the late 50s that they became aware of night-migrating birds hitting structures, but it was not until the early 60s that they learned just how many of these migratory birds died or were injured as a result. It was then that Phyllis began focusing on the rehabilitation of injured birds. In 1967 when the Toronto Dominion Centre was built, she and Barry began their nightly forays downtown to rescue injured birds and pick up the many that

died. From that time, Barry has successfully advocated to prevent bird collisions in Toronto and since FLAP began in 1993, he has written and illustrated for FLAP's newsletter.

Bird rescuing gave Barry an intimate knowledge of birds, a knowledge he felt he needed to be a bird artist. But not only that. He became aware of the bird as an individual, "as something warm and real and alive."

So it is no wonder that Barry is an advocate on behalf of animals. He co-founded Cormorant Defenders International and Animal Alliance of Canada. He is also a director of Zoocheck Canada. Since the early 80s, he has worked with the Sacramento-based Animal Protection Institute, now joined to the Born Free USA foundation.

Lately Barry has challenged wildlife management policies, policies like the proposed killing of Double-crested Cormorants. He believes that often in the development of these policies "the science employed is faulty and leads to illogical conclusions that are predetermined by political, not ecological, considerations."

For more information on Barry, see his website: <http://www.barrykentmackay.ca/>.

(Of all the illustrations Barry sent to me and others by email, I decided to show his oil painting of the Eastern Bluebird because who doesn't love to see these adorable birds arrive and take up residence in their various nest boxes each spring. Janet and Lloyd Sparks waited for theirs to finally make their home in the nest box which Lloyd built for them years ago. Some have seen them on Maple Road near Lori's farm, and I am hoping a couple will once again want to reside in my nest box which Lori put up on her property on Wasing Road last year.

In his painting, Barry shows the female gathering nesting materials. Writes Barry, "She does most of the nest construction, forming a cup of soft grasses and other vegetative material, feathers, tufts of hair and other such material. She normally does the incubation, but the male remains attentive and assists in feeding the babies, who leave the nest at about two to three weeks of age. While the summer diet and that of the young is almost exclusively small invertebrates, in fall and winter, berries and other fruits are consumed.")



Courtesy of Barry Kent MacKay

Stories from the Field:

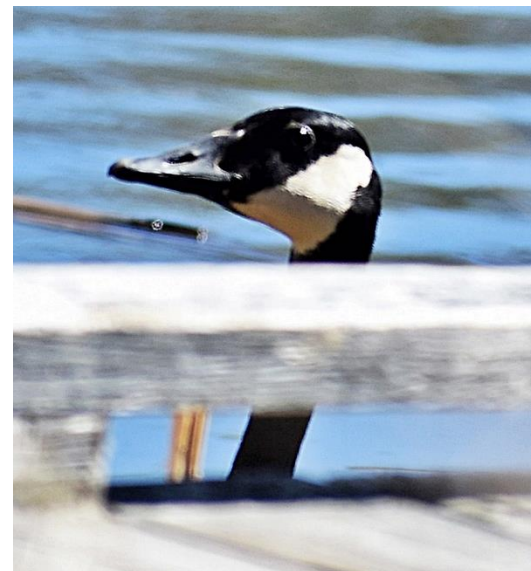
You may recall from April's report that *Steve Pitt* moved the American Robin's nest from inside his carport to a sheltered spot outside the carport and even put up a sign letting the robin know that just because the nest got moved, it was, nevertheless, still for rent. Steve is pleased to inform us that the robin took up residence in the new location.



Steve Pitt

Reports Steve: “My first clue that the nest was occupied was when the For Rent sign got pitched to the ground. The occupants appear to be newlyweds intent on starting a family as soon as possible. Although the nest is not at a great angle for getting a good photo, it is a perfect spot for the robins – dry, private, well-protected from the sun and nearly impregnable from predators. Heck, I should have charged higher rent!”

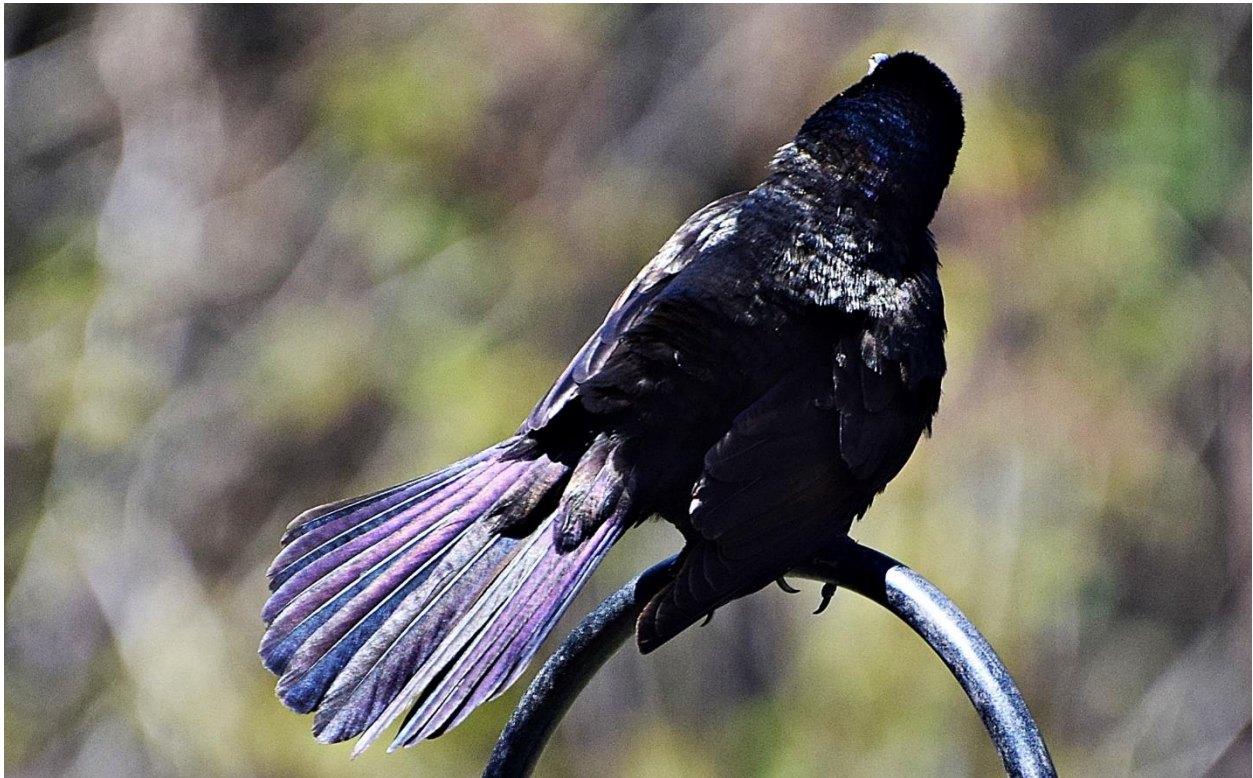
Kaye Edmonds was in Laurier Woods one day when she noticed a Canada Goose (male I presume, at right) peeping over the viewing platform. Kaye wondered what it was up to, but when she saw the female in the pond with her goslings, she knew what he was doing. He was peeping over the ledge waiting for people to walk on past so he could alert the mom when it was safe to for her and the goslings to cross.



Kaye Edmonds

Some of us can't bird all the time and sometimes it is not a bird that excites but another animal. *Lori Anderson* was out on her tractor plowing one of her fields when she saw a fox family near their den beside the field she was plowing. Reports Lori, "I had such a great time watching the kits at play, interacting with the adults, and watching the mom catch mice nearby."

One day when the sun was shining brightly and the Common Grackle was sitting on top of the feeder pole with his tail fanned, I noticed how iridescent its tail was. I had always marvelled at its iridescent head glistening purplish in the sun, but had not before noticed that its tail rivals its head.



Renee Levesque

Bird Links:

Dick sent me a video, well worth watching, about a man and his stork:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXMfbY8CawY>.

Dick also sent me a video on hummingbirds seen in ultra-slow motion, and with the Ruby-throated now in our midst, a good video to watch:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/FPRswRWZ23Q>.

American Woodcock:

Most have probably heard, if not seen, that twilight *peenter* by now, the American Woodcock (at right), also known by its nickname, Timber-doodle. It is a land relative of the shorebird and that perhaps explains its rather odd and unique appearance – plump with short legs, a large head, almost no neck, a long straight bill and a short tail. Its colouring is such that it is well-camouflaged on the forest floor.

The woodcock begins its display at the first sign of spring just after sunset – and also before sunrise – in clearings between open fields and young forests with low brush. This type of habitat is diminishing because of human development, as well as nature development, the maturation of young forests. The decline in the number of woodcocks in Ontario as a whole is significant.

Its display begins with on and off *peent* calls that come from vibrating muscles in its throat. It shuffles its feet after each *peent* so as to change direction to let as many females as possible know it is ready, willing and able! Eventually with each shuffle, it comes full circle. Then suddenly, it takes off into the air with a *twitter-twitter-twitter* sound that comes from its wings cutting through the air at high speed. It spirals upwards in gradually larger circles until it falls in an arc-like motion back to the ground to where it took off. It then repeats its ritual. Sometimes other males join in and I was fortunate one night just at sunset before it got really dark to see two take off into the air.



Renee Levesque

Although the American Woodcock Singing-Ground Survey was cancelled by Birds Canada due to the pandemic crisis, on May 13 Gary and Connie Sturge still counted the number of woodcocks they heard along Hwy. 534 (Survey Route 020) near their home – 6 woodcocks, 5 official and 1 unofficial. Based on this number, Gary reports the good news that the woodcocks on Survey Route 020 seem to be holding their own.

Global Big Day:

Global Big day on May 9 set a world record for the number of participants in a single day of birding – 50,072! These 50,000-plus participants submitted 120,000 checklists comprising of 2.1 million observations of birds in a single day, with 6,479 species observed.

Canada came in second in the world with the number of checklists submitted, 11,588, but saw only 381 species, the lowest number since May's Global Big Day began in 2015. Ontario

participants submitted the most checklists in Canada, 4,010, but came in third in the number of species seen, 240.

In Nipissing, 20 checklists were submitted and 50 species observed. Not bad considering the weather! (This does not include those who live in the District of Parry Sound and who submitted lists in that district –28 checklists and 86 species.)

In these Covid-19 times, most birded individually and close to home, reminding us how important birds are in our own backyards.

Bird Bash:

Bird Bash dates for the summer are as follows:

June 20 -21
July 26-26
August 29-30
September 12-13

Reminders will be sent, but mark the dates in your calendars.

Bird Wing Outings:

At this time, it looks as if all Bird Wing outings will be cancelled for the summer. If this changes, I will let you know.

100 years later: from the Roaring 20s to the Covid 20s



Renee Levesque



Courtesy of Wikipedia and Ken Gowing