



# Bird Wing Report

February 2023

## Upcoming Events

**Bird Bash:** The next Bird Bash takes place the last weekend of March, a time when we can certainly expect to see more species than we did in February, although we didn't do too badly this February. But March is when the excitement starts to build with the arrival of some migrants. A reminder will be sent with instructions for those who are new to the Bird Bashes, a monthly birding event now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year!



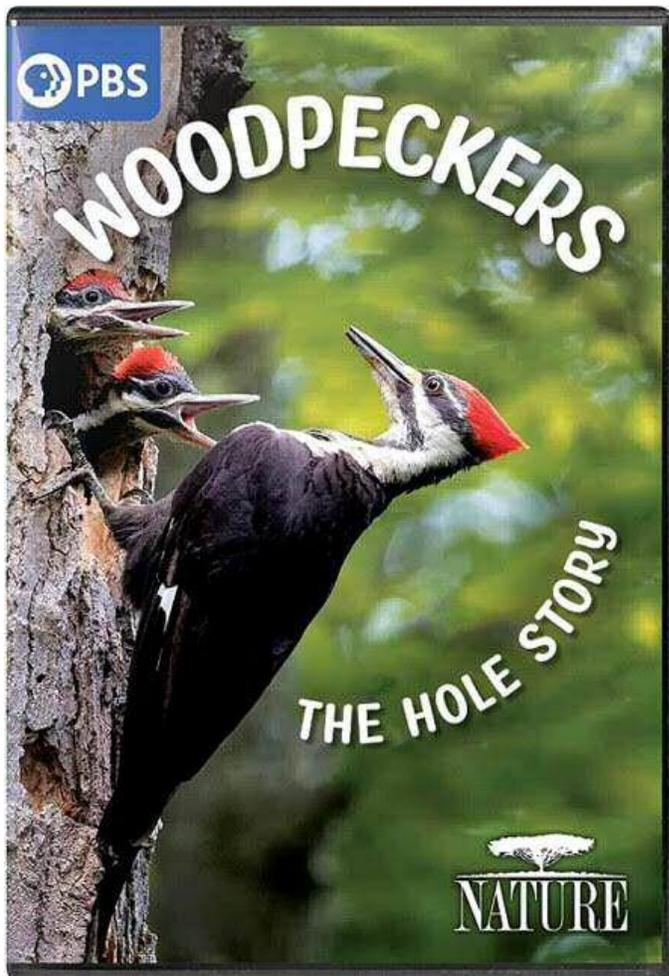
**Bird Wing:** The next Bird Wing meeting will take place by Zoom until we once again meet in person for our April meeting, the last meeting of the season before

outings get underway. Bird Wing purchased the documentary, *Woodpeckers: The Hole Story*, first aired on PBS in November 2022, and it will be shown during March's Zoom meeting. It is "an intimate look at what makes woodpeckers so special." There are 239 species of woodpeckers that live on every continent except Antarctica and Australia. But no matter where they live, "every woodpecker makes a hole for a home."

And so Gary Waldram's cover photo of the Pileated is a good choice, to say nothing of the fact that for months now we have been saying that come March, it's time to begin our search for what Faye Oei calls "the mythical black bird of Peacock Road", the Black-backed Woodpecker.

**World Sparrow Day:** World Sparrow Day occurs on the first day of spring, **March 20<sup>th</sup>**.

Since at least 2017, we used to look for any type of sparrow during that day, although because of our location, we expanded the



one day to a week because sparrows are not a dime a dozen here in late March. (We stopped during Covid years, 2020 to 2022.) We won't be officially returning to this event this year, but if any birders see a sparrow on March 20, you can let me know. We already know there are House Sparrows and American Tree Sparrows around, but in our best year to date, in 2018, 15 birders saw, despite the cold and snow, 93 sparrows over sparrow week, comprised of 6 species, House, American Tree, Dark-eye Junco, Chipping, White-throat and Harris's. I remember that year well because I had the Chipping with a damaged mandible all winter and Gary and Luanne Chowns had the rare Harris's visit their feeders. The Song was not around that year but was seen during the 2017 survey.

**Nocturnal Owl Survey:** It is amazing how quickly a year can come around despite what seemed like a long enough winter. It seems to me I just finished editing the Nocturnal Owl Reports for 2022 and Oriana Pokorny awarded the annual owl trophy to Dick Tafel. But here we are again, approaching April when the Nocturnal Owl Survey takes place once more. Dick has given up his route on McConnell Lake Road, so it is a route that is open and one Dick has been doing for 25 years.

It is always good to have newcomers participate in the survey to continue on when others might leave. If you are interested in participating, read about the survey at: [https://www.birdscanada.org/on\\_owls?\\_ga=2.77883987.618599999.1678474884-721170287.1665492965](https://www.birdscanada.org/on_owls?_ga=2.77883987.618599999.1678474884-721170287.1665492965). We are in Ontario Central.

Please let me know if you are planning to participate again this year or if you would like to participate if you haven't done so before. Fred Pinto is willing to be a mentor if this is your first time.

At March's meeting, ask any questions you might have. At that time, the rules for winning our coveted local annual trophy will be explained. However, in the meantime, you can read our entertaining past reports at: <https://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/reports-and-bird-counts/>. (Scroll down to Owl Surveys that follow Year End Reports.)

- *Renee Levesque*

# A trip of a lifetime

## Part 1: From Argentina to the Falkland islands

*By Renee Levesque*

### **Introduction:**

I have a wonderful image in my mind of Fred Pinto standing on Salisbury Plain in South Georgia among 100,000 pairs of King Penguins and their fluffy brown chicks, with snow-covered peaks and blue sky as his backdrop and thinking what an amazing place to be. And if that isn't enough, there is also an image of him on snowshoes taking his first official steps on the Antarctic continent at Portal Point on Reclus Peninsula, with its Gentoo Penguins and its stunning views of glaciers and icebergs. (Photo of Fred and his fellow passengers at Portal Point below). But first he has to get there and for this report I will begin by retelling his journey from Argentina to the Falkland Islands based on his presentation at February's meeting, the ship's itinerary and some of my online research. (Some of the birds Fred saw are highlighted the first time they are mentioned.)



### **Leaving Argentina en route to the Falkland Islands:**

On November 2, 2022, Fred began an incredible voyage from Puerto Madryn, an Argentine city on the coast of northern Patagonia, to the Antarctic continent, aboard the M/V Hondius, a small Polar Class 6 vessel, holding a maximum of 170 passengers and sailing under the flag of the

Netherlands. The ship was no sooner into the Atlantic Ocean when a **Black-browed Albatross** appeared. It is a long-living (some for 50 to 70 years) common member of the albatross family, although hardly common from where most of us sit, and also one of the smallest members. It is listed as Near Threatened, many killed as a result of longline fishing vessels

I have always wanted to see an albatross, a seabird that captured my imagination in grade 9 when our English class studied Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". *Why look'st thou so? – With my cross-bow/ I shot the ALBATROSS.* I don't know what type of albatross it was the sailor shot – there are just over 20 species. But I know it was considered a good omen and because he shot it, he had to wear it around his neck as punishment.



Lon Baurngardt

As the Hondius headed towards the Falkland Islands, another albatross was spotted, this time the magnificent **Southern Royal Albatross**, (photo at left) and as its name implies, one of the largest species of albatross. It nests on tussock grassland, plateaus or ridges and lays one egg every two years. After the chicks are hatched, it takes 240 days before they are fledged. Also spotted was a **White-headed Petrel**, a seabird with a pale white head and black eye patch. It has long, narrow wings, a pointed tail and a stout black bill with a hook at the end to enable it to hold onto slippery food.

When on a ship at sea in the Atlantic Ocean, one does not expect to see a passerine, but lo and behold, one decided to rest a while on board! It was a **White-banded Mockingbird**, staying long enough for everyone to get a good photo. It breeds primarily in central Argentina and is found in non-breeding season in

Chile, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay – although also known to breed in the latter three countries.

Fred and the crew were now headed to the Falkland Islands, made up of two main islands, East Falkland and West Falkland, and about 776 smaller islands. The Falklands are an overseas territory of the United Kingdom, but are also claimed by Argentina. Of the smaller islands, Fred

visited Steeple Jason Island, Carcass Island and Saunders Island, and of the larger islands, he spent a morning on East Falkland.

Enroute to Steeple Jason Island, seen was the **Wilson's Storm Petrel**, a small wide-ranging seabird and one of the most abundant bird species in the world. But despite being abundant, this bird is strictly pelagic except during its remote breeding season and so it is difficult to spot from land and, therefore, rarely seen unless you are on a voyage like Fred's. It is dark brown except for its white rump and flanks. Another petrel seen was the **Southern Giant Petrel**, a large seabird in contrast to the Wilson's's. It is an aggressive petrel and will kill other seabirds, usually penguin chicks, sick or injured penguins and chicks of other seabirds.

I can imagine myself, like Fred, standing on deck trying hard to identify all these sea birds as they fly around and behind the ship. It is not easy unless you are familiar with these seabirds. I ran into the same difficulty on a ship I once took to the Arctic's Grimsey Island, part of Iceland, and, unlike Fred, I was the only bird watcher on board, so no one with whom I could consult or compare notes. I surely missed identifying some.

After getting to Steeple Jason Island by Zodiac, Fred and his fellow passengers were greeted by a colony of **Gentoo Penguins**, the third largest of the penguins and ones that breed only in areas free of ice and snow. They use stones, moss and feathers to build their simple nests and are known to steal stones from each other, sometimes resulting in noisy skirmishes.

They were also greeted by a Black-browed Albatross colony, the largest colony in the world! The Falkland Islands hold 85% of the population of Black-browed Albatross, estimated at 680,000 pairs. They nest on top of tussock grass cliffs or steep slopes and lay a single egg in a nest made of mud and guano – one can be seen in the photo below - in which they lay one egg between late September and early November. There is a long incubation period of 68 to 71 days, and once hatched, it takes 120 to 130 days before the chicks are fledged. Juveniles return to the breeding area after 2 or 3 years, but only to practise courtship rituals as they don't start breeding until around their 10<sup>th</sup> year.



*Fred Pinto*

Steeple Jason is part of the Jason Islands, none of which have ever been properly inhabited. It was once owned privately until it was donated to the Bronx Zoo-based Wildlife Conservation Society.

Then it was on to Carcass Island and Dyke Bay where Fred and fellow birders spotted their first endemic bird, the **Cobb's Wren**, formerly classified as a subspecies of the House Wren. Always a special feeling to see an endemic species not seen anywhere else! It inhabits dense stands of tussock grass near the coast and it is thanks to the eradication of rats that it is alive and well today. The **Grass Wren**, looking quite similar to our Sedge Wren, was also seen on Carcass Island, although it is widely distributed throughout Central and South America.

A short walk away at Leopard's Beach, there were nesting Gentoo and **Magellanic Penguins**, (seen nesting in the photo below) medium-sized penguins named after the Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Magellan, and looking similar to the only penguin I have seen, the African or Cape Penguin, a colony of which I saw at Boulder's Beach near Cape Town, South Africa, playfully having fun in the ocean or along the sandy beach or sunning on the rocks.



*Fred Pinto*

Carcass Island is privately owned by Robert and Lorraine McGill and is managed as a sheep farm. The McGills also operate a lodge that was once their farmhouse, so if you are ever in the neighbourhood and want to stay for a couple of days on this beautiful island, you can do so. It is an island that attracts a wide variety of birdlife, like the **Striated Caracara and the Tussacbird**, the latter a sooty brown coastal bird native to the southern tip of South America and the Falkland Islands. Listed as Near Threatened, it is found on many of the islands that are free of cats and

rats. It likes rocky beaches with adjacent shoreline and favours tussock grass clumps, hence its name.

The Striated Caracara, (at right) a bird of prey, also listed as Near Threatened, is primarily a scavenger, feeding on dead seabirds, sheep and invertebrates, including the kelp fly larvae. But it also preys on weak or injured animals like young seabirds and newborn lambs. For many years, it was persecuted by sheep farmers until a law passed in 1999 prevented that.



*Fred Pinto*



*Fred Pinto*

From there it was on to Saunders Island, also privately owned and run as a sheep farm. It is home to the four main species of Falkland penguins – **King, Rockhopper** (seen at left), Gentoo and Magellanic. The King, the second largest of the penguins after the Emperor Penguin, but looking similar to the Emperor, dominated the beach, while the Rockhopper dominated the cliff side of one of the three large upland areas on the island. As its name implies, these penguins don't slide like other penguins, but hop. They are a small penguin with red eyes, orange beaks and yellow and black spiky feathers on top of their heads, as you can see from the photo.

But if four species of penguins isn't enough, the island is also home to another large

nesting colony of Black-browed Albatross. Their colonies are very nosy with harsh cackling and with braying to mark their territory.

Other birds seen on the islands Fred visited were the **Dolphin Gull** (at right), a dark gull with a distinctive thick red bill and red feet; the **Kelp Goose**, the male all white with a black bill and yellow feet and legs, and the female with a pale brown crown and a darker brown body with a pink bill; the **Magellanic Oystercatcher**, looking very much like our American Oystercatcher but with some different color patterns on its body and an eye that is yellow – red in the American Oystercatcher; and the **Snowy Sheathbill**, a friendly stocky scavenger, omnivore and kleptoparasite which also sometimes decides to spend time on the bow of the ship, perhaps looking for food to scavenge. Because it does not have webbed feet, it finds its food on land. It is entirely white with a pink warty face and a colourful bill of green, orange and yellow.



*Fred Pinto*

Then onto the capital of the Falkland Islands, Stanley or Port Stanley (below), located on the island of East Falkland. It is a small capital of only 2,500 residents, but it is where the great majority of the 3,000 people who live in the Falklands make their home. It was granted city status in 2022 and if you take a walk along Thatcher Drive, you will see a bronze memorial bust



*Fred Pinto*

commemorating Margaret Thatcher.

New birds seen in the harbour were **Sooty Shearwaters and Southern Fulmars**. The Sooty Shearwater is a medium-large brown pelagic bird and the most widespread and numerous of all the shearwaters. (It inspired, in part, Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Birds*, but that's another story.) The Southern Fulmar is a medium silvery-grey petrel, with a distinctive white patch on its black-tipped wings. Its bill is pink with a black tip at the end and a bluish tubenose.

Tubenoses are truly pelagic. They are birds with a tube-like structure that enclose their nostrils and run partway down their bill. They are the fulmars, the shearwaters and the storm-petrels, wandering the oceans in search for food, finding it thanks to their tubenoses which provide them with a keen sense of smell. Tubenoses also aid in expelling concentrated salt water. These are long-lived birds that breed on remote islands. Some after they are fledged do not touch land again for up to 10 years, living and eating on the ocean until sexually mature. No wonder these pelagic birds are so fascinating. I would get too seasick on a pelagic tour, although I did see many Fulmars on the ship to the Arctic's Grimsey Island, and from a headland in Northern Ireland also saw some nesting on the rocky north coast.

Passengers could explore the lovely city of Port Stanley with its colourful-roofed homes and its small photogenic Anglican cathedral made from local stone and brick. Or they could stroll along the beach where they could see the **Falklands Steamer Duck** (photo at right), one of only two endemic birds of the Falklands, the other being the Cobb's Wren as previously mentioned. It is a large flightless duck that gets its name because it swims like one of those old paddle steamers. It is closely related to the Flying Steamer Duck, also found in the Falkland Islands.



*Fred Pinto*

Around noon, with strong winds picking up, passengers hurried aboard, to set sail in heavy swells, leaving the continental shelf and entering the deep waters of the South Atlantic Ocean.

**Next month, I will write about Fred's travels in the South Atlantic Ocean and South Georgia.**



*Stephen O'Donnell*

## **Birds seen in February**

*Text by Renee Levesque, photos as indicated*

### **Woodpeckers**

The Pileated Woodpecker that graces the cover of February's Bird Wing Report was taken by Garry Waldram. He saw two in Calvin Township near his home and was able to get quite a good photo of one! Others who mentioned seeing the Pileated were Linda Stoner, Rick Tripp and Dick Tafel, who had three near his place in Corbeil.

The Red-bellied Woodpecker was also seen by Dick at Mary Young's Corbeil feeder, a woodpecker that has been at Mary's since the Christmas Bird Count, if not before. Rachel Sturge has one coming to her southern Ontario feeder.

Other woodpeckers were the Hairy, seen by Fred Pinto and most others, and the Downy, seen by Jérémie Corbeil and most others.

### **Grosbeaks**

Jérémie had Pine Grosbeaks coming to his feeders, as had Gary and Connie Sturge and Renee. Lori Anderson, along with Garry Waldram and Renee, also had

Evening Grosbeaks (photo at right). It is a bird that newcomer Angela Mills would like to see. She moved here from Barrie, not necessarily because she thought she might have a better chance of seeing an Evening Grosbeak, but a good enough reason to move here anyway. While in the Barrie area, Angela took part in a couple of bird surveys.



*Renee Levesque*

### **Northern Cardinal**

The Northern Cardinal is not a common bird in our area, but one that seems to be growing in numbers, with sightings throughout the city and elsewhere. This month, one was seen by Brittany Tartaglia on Princess Street and one was seen by Faye Oei on Bunker Hill, off Old Muskoka Road. Brittany, currently on the Board of Nipissing Naturalists Club, recently joined Bird Wing. She is also one of our few area eBirders and it was through eBird I initially “met” her.

### **Chickadees**

Brent Turcotte saw our ever-faithful Black-capped Chickadee as did most, if not all, of us and Faye reports the Boreal Chickadee deserted Sue Gratton’s feeder – it’s what happens when time is spent away from one’s second home – and came to hers at least up until mid-February. At the time of our Bird Wing meeting, Faye hadn’t seen the Boreal for a few days.

## **Nuthatches**

Rick had the handsome White-breasted Nuthatch coming to his feeders and Faye was regularly getting the Red-breasted, as were Renee and Dick and no doubt others.

## **Goldfinch, Redpolls and Siskins**

Despite not yet seeing an Evening Grosbeak, Angela saw American Goldfinch, as did others.

A few were getting dozens of Common Redpolls coming to their feeders, but no one reported a Hoary yet; and Dick alone seems to be getting Pine Siskins (photo at right). Every day when my 30 or so redpolls arrive, I scrutinize each one with my binoculars to make sure it is not a siskin. So far no luck!



*Renee Levesque*

## **Sparrows**

Lori continues to have many House Sparrows at her farm in Chisholm Township, much to her dismay. She reports they have begun to nest, hopefully not taking all the Tree Swallow nest boxes. I continue to have two well-behaved, shy American Tree Sparrows come to my yard and I believe Gary and Connie are still getting one or two.

## **Shrikes**

Garry W. saw – for the very first time – a Northern Shrike in his Calvin Township neighbourhood. Always special to get a lifer! Dick and Renee saw one at Verner

Lagoon going from tree top and shrub top to tree top and shrub top, probably after the many Snow Buntings that were also there.

### **Doves and Grouse and Turkeys**

Wild Turkeys seem to be everywhere these days. Connie saw a few rafters of them in the Powassan area. Two are often at the Student Union Centre, Nipissing University, and a week after the Bird Wing meeting one showed up in my yard for an hour or so over two days.

Ruffed Grouse (photo at right) were seen by some, usually along wooded roads, although some were seen sitting on top of birch trees

Therez Violette had a Mourning Dove and Connie and Gary still have a lament of them, one of the many names for a flock of Mourning Doves, so named because of their sad song sung over and over again. Dick and I saw a bevy (another name for a flock) of 19 on Veuve River Road, West Nipissing.



*Renee Levesque*

### **Jays**

No one reported seeing a Canada Jay and few even seeing a Blue Jay, but Sue, Jérémie and Fay saw at least one each. I must live in good Blue Jay country and

although I don't get as many this winter as normal, usually these days no more than 4 at a time, I recently had 9 show up.

### **Ravens and Crows**

Stephen O'Donnell, Faye and Lori reported signs of spring with Common Ravens (photo at right) seen carrying sticks to build their nests. About a week after the meeting, Dick and I saw 24 ravens feeding on a dead deer in the Field area. When we arrived, the ravens took off and that allowed two chickadees to feed from it.

Lori also reported that crows have arrived in her area and some of us have recently seen crows move into country areas. March is the transition month in my area – the crows come in and the ravens move on further up my road and into the deeper woods to nest.



*Stephen O'Donnell*

### **Raptors**

Rachel reported a Red-tailed Hawk, albeit in the Toronto area. However, one was seen recently by Dick and me on Proudfoot Road near the Powassan landfill site.

Linda saw Bald Eagles (photo at heading) at East Ferris Landfill Site and some of us have seen them at other landfill sites and elsewhere. I understand that despite construction, eagles have returned to their nesting area near the Callander municipal dock.

Although she didn't see it, Denise was awakened by her husband one night to the calls of the Great Horned Owl at their cottage on Cache Lake. These owls are nesting now.

## **Horned Larks and Snow Buntings**

I saw three Horned Larks (photo at right) in Verner, as did Dick and Denise. Denise was the first to spot them and let me know they were around. Because she has a cottage in the Verner area, one she comes to frequently from her home in Hanmer, she makes a good Verner scout for us!

Lori has had 35 to 100 Snow Buntings coming to her farm. Garry W. saw them in Calvin Township and Dick and I and Stephen saw drifts of them in the Powassan area, on Chiswick Line and Memorial Park Drive.



*Renee Levesque*

## **Ducks**

A beautiful Hooded Merganser was spotted behind the Green Store on Trout Lake Road by Dick and me during the February Bird Bash. Three Common Mergansers were seen by Garry W. on the Ottawa River in Mattawa. Common Goldeneye (photo below) were also spotted by Garry W. in the open waters at Bonfield.



*Garry Waldrum*

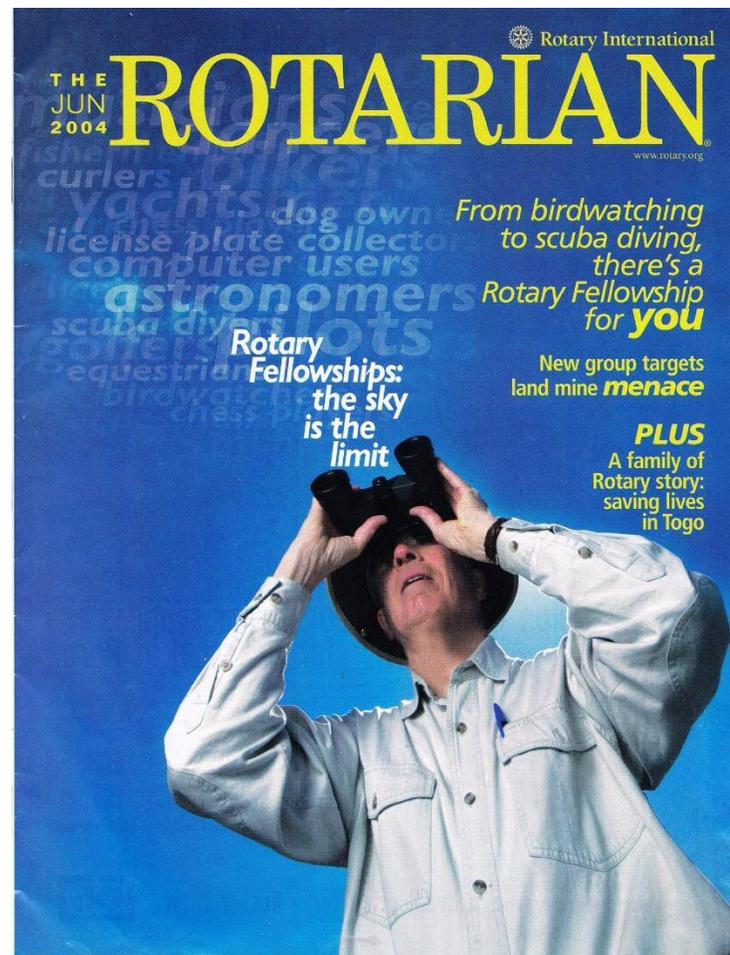
## Links to the world of birds

**Birds of Egypt:** The YouTube link below, sent to me by Dick Tafel, is of a Zoom meeting in December 2022 of the International Fellowship of Birdwatching Rotarians. The speaker is Georgina Cole from the Rotary Club of the Red Sea who talks about the birds of Egypt, a country very slow in embracing bird watching, with only one guide in the Red Sea area. And yet, 482 species have been documented in Egypt, 2/3 of these being migratory and 1/3 resident and breeding birds. Egypt has also the second largest migratory bird path in the world!

Here is the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgYW0yDUySA>. (There will be times during the video when the sound gives out, but not to despair, it lasts for only a couple of seconds.)

Start watching this video after the introduction of members at around the 11 minute mark when Georgina begins her talk which ends around the 42 minute mark, after which there are questions. At around the 40-minute mark, you will see, if you peer closely at the small lettering, Dick Tafel's name as the initiator of the International Fellowship of Birdwatching Rotarians, and beside Dick's name, North Bay. Dick initiated this Fellowship of Birdwatchers sometime back in the 1990s and it continues to meet annually during the International Convention of Rotarians, to be held this year in Australia. Nice place for birds!

It was a particularly interesting link for me because in the fall of 2018, I was in Egypt, not on a birding trip, but naturally looking for birds when I was not engrossed in the beauty of the ancient temples and pyramids. I was also in the Red Sea area and attempted – because we had down time in this area – to find a birding guide. I was unsuccessful at even finding one then, so to compensate we hired a taxi driver at a cost of \$100 US to take us to an area where there might be some birds. (I did not see one along the shores of





Renee Levesque

the Red Sea at that time, probably because the area where we stayed was very built-up.) The driver took us to a reservoir where I saw two birds I hadn't yet seen during our trip, the Kestrel (photo of adult female at left) and the White Wagtail. (The Eurasian Kestrel or Common Kestrel is the same as the American Kestrel only somewhat larger.) I also recall seeing a dozen or so Spur-winged Lapwings, one of which I had seen previously on the Nile, but it was great to see a flock of them. Few birds at a high cost, but I didn't regret it.

**Mental Health:** According to a British study, from a link sent to me by Steve Pitt, "people living in neighbourhoods with more birds, shrubs and trees are less likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and stress." See:

<https://naturecanada.ca/discover-nature/lifestyle/watching-birds-near-your-home-is-good-for-your-mental-health/>.

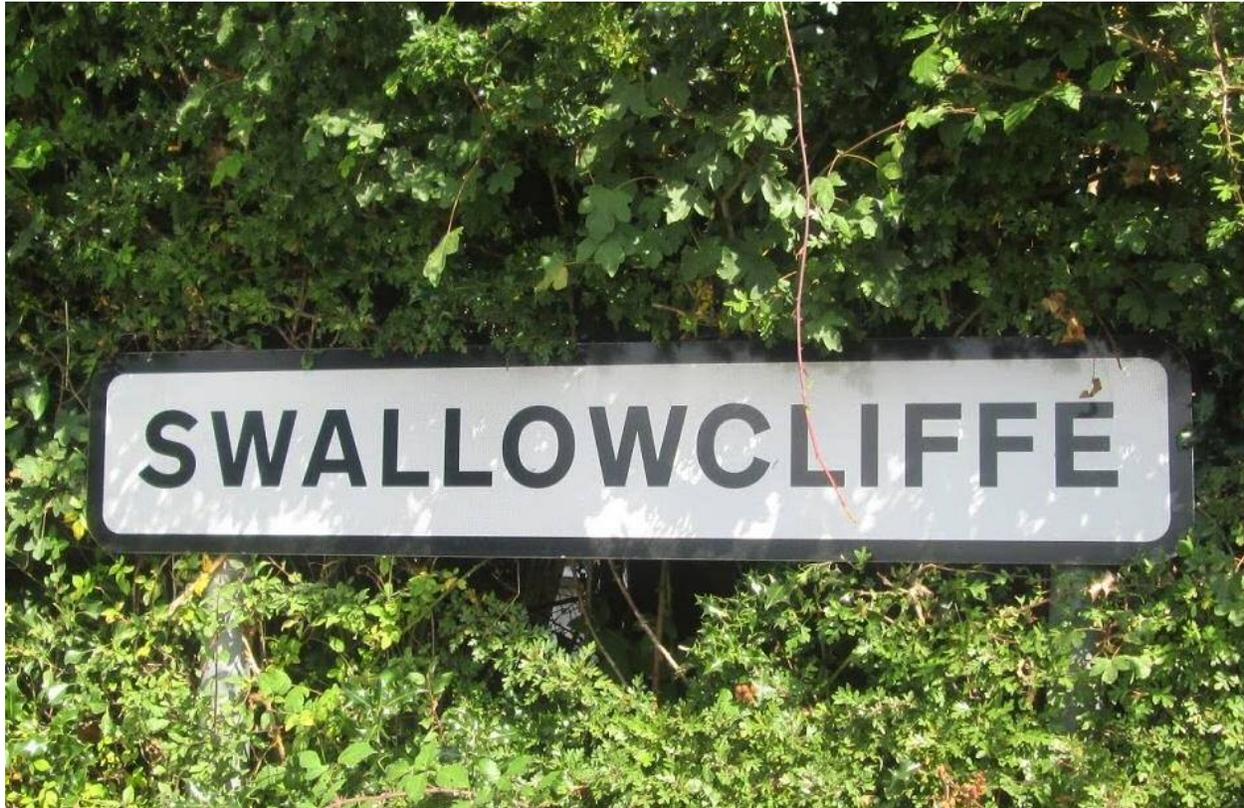
It is interesting that seeing birds in the afternoon, a time of day when there are usually fewer birds than in the morning, helps the most. But then, spirits tend to sag more in the afternoon.

**Owl Attack:** I read in the news that this past January some ski trails had to be closed near Kamloops, British Columbia, because of an owl attack:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/overland-ski-club-owl-attack-closure-1.6713589>.

**English Place Names:** Back in the early days of Britain, the geography of the natural world was of great importance in naming places. Although many places

were named after animals (and also plants), more places were named after birds than any other wild animal. Some you wouldn't know were named after birds because the names are from old English and very obscure today, but others with modern spelling are immediately obvious.



In pre-modern Britain, birds were “visible and audible at most times of day; occupying all the domains of land, sea and air; and in an abundance and diversity we can only dream of today.” No wonder places were named after birds and bird song!

The link to this interesting article, <https://aeon.co/essays/british-place-names-resonate-with-the-song-of-missing-birds> was sent to me by Grant McKercher. It may not be an easy read, but it is a thoughtful reminder of how things have changed and of how we have moved away from a personal connection to nature.