

Bird Wing Report

March 2024



Frank Fein
PHOTOGRAPHY



Birding Events

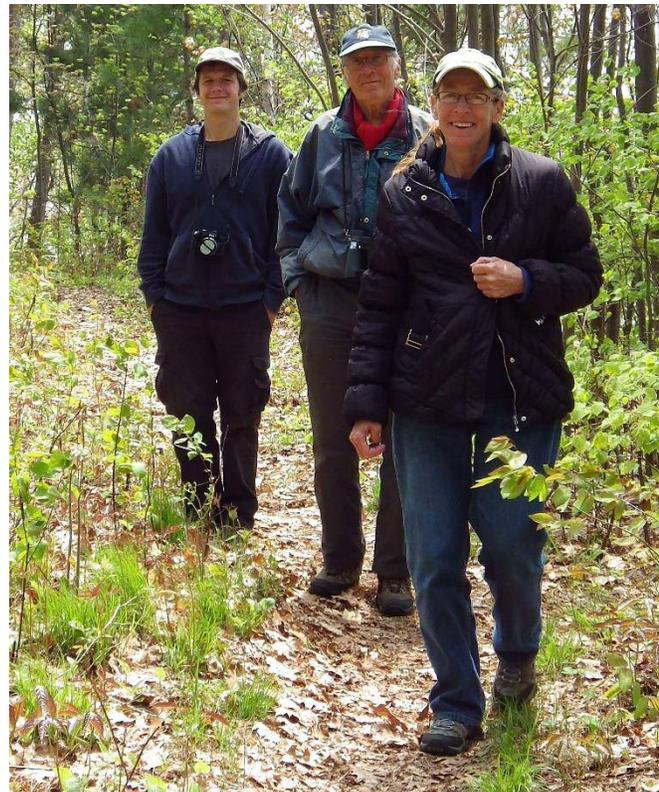
Bird Wing: April's Bird Wing meeting is an indoor meeting. It will be great to see and talk to members in person! The meeting will take place on **Tuesday, April 23, starting at 7:00 pm, and will be held at coworking176.space, 176 Lakeshore Drive, Room 7, at the corner of Lakeshore and Gertrude Street East.** Our speaker will be **Garry Waldram who will be talking about the birds he saw in Costa Rica** during his two trips there, in November and again recently in March. Members April McCrum and Katharine MacLeod were also there in March, so they will find Garry's presentation particularly interesting.

Bird Bash: April's Bird Bash takes place the weekend of **April 27-28.** Should be exciting because there will be many new birds by then! If the beginning of April is any indication of how exciting late April might be, I received an email from Ed Rowley and Katherine Byers telling me about the day at their farm on Birchgrove Road West: "Ruffed Grouse drumming all day. Five Sandhill Cranes flying over making lots of noise. At the end of the day, American Woodcocks at the back ditch and in the front field, at least four of them calling and doing their sky dance. Two of them landed close to us, one about 10 feet away! Topped off with Barred Owls calling out back and forth amongst themselves." Now that is an April day to remember!

Ontario Breeding Bird Survey Atlas-3: Grant McKercher will be holding a refresher course for all those who wish to continue to take part in the five-year Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3 – we are in our 4th year – and for those who haven't yet participated but would like to take part. "The goal of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas is to map the distribution and relative abundance of the approximately 300 species of breeding birds in the province." This year we are thinking of meeting at **Black Forest Park** located off Hwy 11 North, just north of Roy Drive and Cook Mills Road. We could hike part of the trail system afterwards. **A date in late April or early May will be determined later.**

May bird walks in Laurier Woods: Once again this year, Dick Tafel will be leading bird walks **every Saturday morning during the month of May** in Laurier Woods. These walks are open to the general public but attract many Bird Wing members. They give us a chance to see and listen to the wood warblers as they arrive in real time! Walks start at 10 am and finish by noon.

Bird Wing Outings: Bird Wing **outings begin on May 28.** Usually the first walk is in Laurier Woods in the morning. Stay tuned for confirmation of this and further information.



Seeds and Cones

New members: Welcome to new members – Steve Taylor, Pat Stack and Barbara and Nate Lee. I met Steve in Burrows buying bird seed and we struck up a conversation because who can resist talking to a local bird watcher. I told Steve about Bird Wing and he immediately joined. He read February’s Bird Wing report thoroughly and, as a result, went on a bird hunt for some of the birds mentioned in that report. Steve plans to join Oriana Pokorny on one of the Nocturnal Owl Survey routes.

In February, Linda Stoner introduced Pat Stack to the club and she has since taken part in the last two Bird Wing meetings and the last two Bird Bashes with some great Bird Bash results!

And this March, Faye Oei introduced Barbara and Nate Lee, Sundridge residents, to the club and they too immediately took part in March’s Bird Bash and Bird Wing meeting. I subsequently received an email from Barbara telling me how much she enjoyed the meeting.

Always nice to have such keen bird watchers!

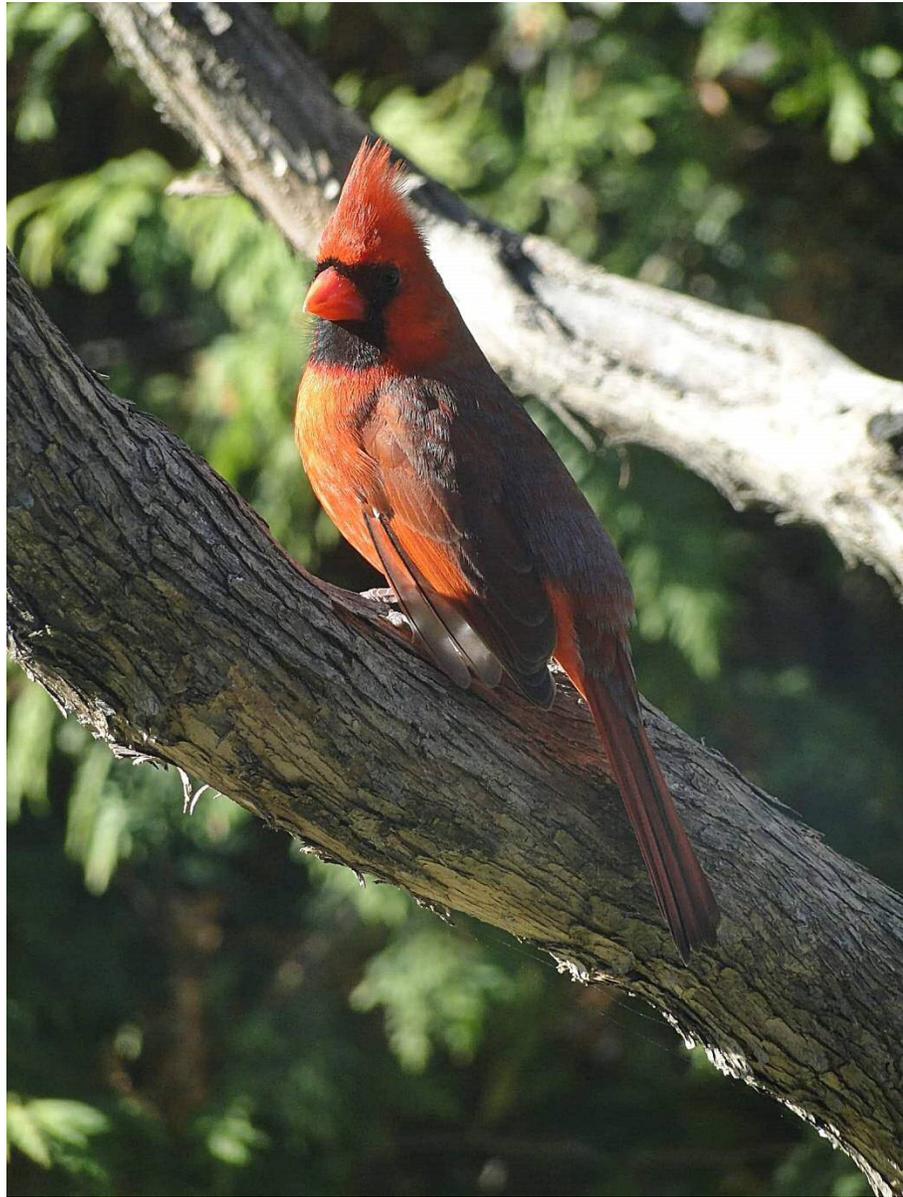
Pileated Woodpecker: Lori Anderson sent me a photo (at right) of what has been deemed the Tasty Pileated Tree.

Stable isotopes from feathers: In February’s report, I wrote about the Road to Recovery for the Evening Grosbeak and made mention of Kevin Hannah who was in our area a few years ago taking feather samples of finches as part of a winter finch study. I said in the article that I didn’t know if this method of using stable isotopes from feathers to determine where these irruptive species had been was still being used, and so I emailed Kevin to find out. His response: “The science of using stable isotopes from



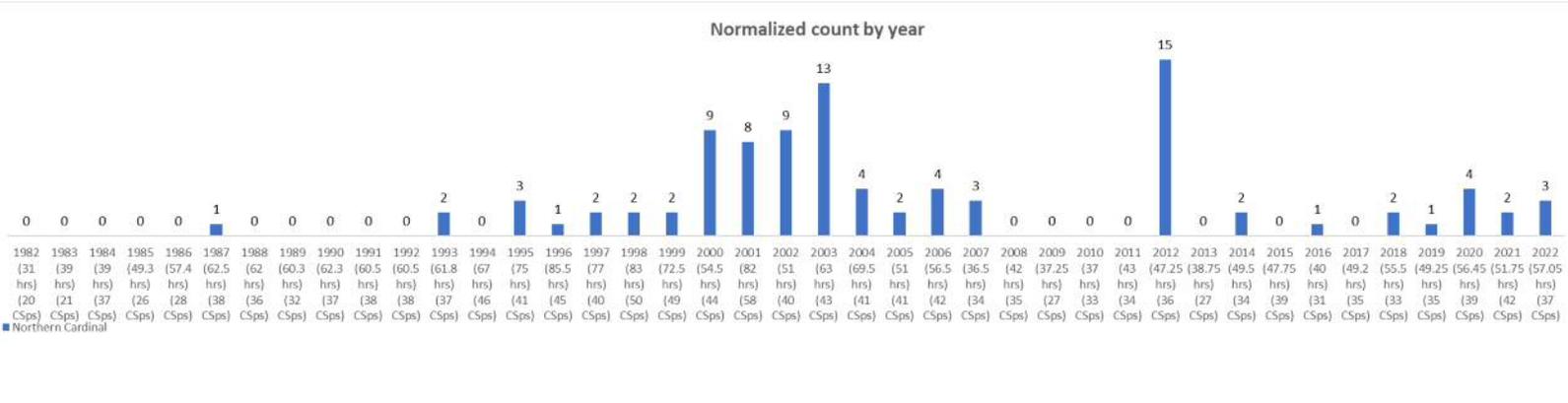
feathers is still fairly common. I've continued using this method on additional species, like Grasshopper Sparrows and American Tree Sparrows."

Northern Cardinal: Further to Rick Tripp's Northern Cardinal article in February's Bird Wing report, I am catching up on old birding magazines and recently read *Ontario Birds, August 2021*. (Why I didn't have time to do so during the pandemic, I really don't know!) In it was an interesting article by Brian Ratcliff, Carter Dorscht and Roxane Filion entitled "Northern Cardinal irruption into northern Ontario, November 2020". At the end of their article is an Appendix showing the number of observations in Rainy River, Kenora, Thunder Bay, Algoma, Cochrane, Sudbury, Temiskaming and North Bay in November 2020. Other than Rainy River in which one Northern Cardinal was seen, North Bay had the next lowest count of three. One was seen on November 4 and two were seen on November 7. (The highest count was in Algoma with 81, followed by Thunder Bay with 46 and Sudbury with 45.) I am wondering if the cardinal that was in my yard on October 22 was the same one seen in North Bay on November 4.



Dorothy Williams

Angela Mills sent me a screen shot of our dashboard showing the normalized count of Northern Cardinals (below) seen here during our 2020 Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Four were seen then, in keeping with the number seen in November 2020. What was surprising, however, was that during the CBC in 2012, 15 cardinals were seen, and between 2000 and 2003, 9 to 13 were seen.



Courtesy of Angela Mills

February’s Great Backyard Bird Count: Many Bird Wing members took part in February’s Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), although I am hoping even more will next year. In addition to me (18 species), there was Garry Waldram (20 species), Denise Desmarais (10 species), Dick Tafel (9 species), Pat Stack (7 species), Diane Deagle (7 species), Jeremie Corbeil (3 species) and Grant McKercher who took part from Portugal! Canada identified 262 species, with Ontario second after British Columbia with 157 species. Nipissing District saw a total of 42 species but some of those were from Algonquin Park and not our immediate area. (7,920 species were identified worldwide.)

Bird Bash, weekend of March 25, 2011: I happened to find in one of my many bird books, Martin Parker’s “Blue Sky Birding” column that was in the North Bay *Nugget* on April 1, 2011. The headline was “Chilly March bird bash”, with Martin reporting the temperatures were below seasonal. Sound familiar?

There were 42 species found by 24 participants some of whom were Dick Tafel and Fred Pinto, the Turcottes, the Chowns, me, Frank Peirce, Gary Sturge, Keith Thornborrow, Chris Sukha, Gary and Angela Martin, Helen McCombie, and, of course, Martin.

Some highlights, some the same as we saw this March: an American Kestrel, a Northern Harrier, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, a Merlin, Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, four Great Blue Herons!, three found by Dick and Fred in Restoule, only one American Robin found by Brent and only one Common Grackle found by Gary Sturge. Interestingly, Pine Siskins were found for the first time during that Bird Bash, and American Trees were seen by only two parties. All the ducks we saw on our Bird Bash this year were seen then. (Back then, I didn't know any of the birders mentioned above – with the exception of Dick, whom I hadn't seen or spoken to since the 1970s – but I was interested in birding then and took part in some of the Bird Bashes, so was in email contact with Dick as a result.)

Blue Jays: Steve Pitt is quite the humorous birder, evident not only in his writing and by the many humorous cartoons and videos he sends me, but also in his photography, especially of the Blue Jays at his feeder. He could do a whole series on *Blue Jays at My Feeder*. Below is one of these photos, the upside down flyer. You have to wonder what the other Blue Jay is thinking as he watches this acrobatic feat. **Any ideas of what the watcher might be thinking of the upside down flyer? Let me know.**

- Renee Levesque



Steve Pitt

Birds seen in March

By Renee Levesque; photos as indicated

Once again this month, Bird Bash took place immediately prior to the Bird Wing Zoom meeting and by now you have all read Dick Tafel's report in which he lists all the birds seen during the March Bird Bash. Nevertheless, our Bird Wing Zoom meeting on March 26 was not without its highlights.



Renee Levesque

One of the highlights was having Garry Waldram Zoom in from Costa Rica, as Sue Gratton did last month from Florida.

Sue presented an excellent overview of her birding trip last November to Honduras. Her article on the trip should be in April's Bird Wing Report. For February's Zoom Bird Wing meeting, Sheldon McGregor also did an excellent presentation on the birds he saw last November in Brazil, and I am hoping he will write a report on the few recently-discovered species he saw there.



Rick Tripp

Another highlight was Rick's Tripp Carolina Wren (photo at left) that has been visiting his feeders within the last month. The Carolina Wren is more a southern and eastern Ontario bird than one seen here, but it occasionally shows up. I recall the first time I saw one in North Bay – in January 2013 at Kaye Edmond's house where it stayed for most of the winter, and then one in November 2018 on Besserer Road off Hwy. 11 North. I have not seen one here since.

Rick heard the wren singing its loud *teakettle-teakettle* song, although some hear it as *germany-germany*, as I do. The bird stopped singing for the next three days when Dick and I and I separately parked at Rick's house hoping to hear it – and Dick hoping to hear and see the Northern Cardinal.

However, Dick **finally** – and I can't emphasize finally enough - saw a Northern Cardinal, not at Rick's place, but on Agnes Street in North Bay! And another remarkable sighting for Dick, and maybe Dick alone, was when he saw another bird he has been pursuing since January, the Wild Turkey. He saw 7 or 8 of them on Hazel Glen Road, the male colourfully displaying his wares!

Yet another highlight was Greg Jaski telling us about the Eurasian Tree Sparrow he saw in Beaverton. Yes, Dick, I know it wasn't here, but a rare Ontario bird is a rare Ontario bird. Greg's photo of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow (left) and a photo of a House Sparrow (right) are below. You will notice from the photos that the Eurasian Tree bears a resemblance to the House Sparrow and not so much to our American Tree Sparrow. Both the House and Eurasian Tree Sparrows are chunky sparrows, but the House Sparrow lacks the dark ear patch of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow, and has a grey crown, not a rusty crown.



Greg Jaski



Rhododendrites, Wikipedia

The Carolina Wren wasn't the only rare bird in our district. Along with Dick, I saw on March 17 a Greater White-fronted Goose on the Ottawa River, seen from Mattawa but on the Quebec side of the river. It wasn't easy to spot and a scope was definitely required. It is a brown goose with bright orange legs and an obvious orange bill, a bill surrounded by white feathers, almost like a white muff keeping its face warm. It was the bright orange legs I first noticed when it was feeding with a few Canada Geese, its head poked in the water, its legs up, and then once the goose raised its head from the water, I saw its orange bill and bingo, I knew it was definitely the Greater White-fronted! (Photo at right)



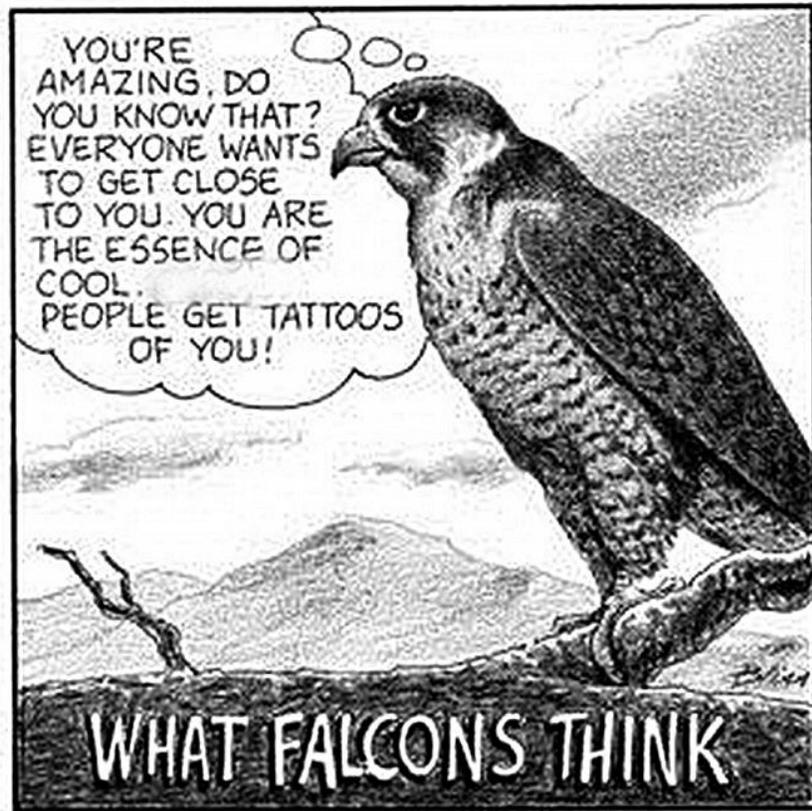
Ryan Askren, Wikimedia

The Greater White-fronted very occasionally visits here on its way to the high Arctic tundra where it breeds. I have seen it here three times, twice in Warren when I saw two on May 6, 2019, in the field opposite Warren Lagoon and then when I saw one on April 29, 2019, in the actual lagoon. The most memorable time I saw two in our area was one snowy day on March 24, 2017, when Gary Sturge alerted us to them in a field on Maple Hill Road. Every time I go past that field I think of that snowy spring day and the two geese. Judging by these sightings, the occasional one or two are seen here in the spring and not in the fall. (March 17 is the earliest I have seen one here and May 6, the latest.)

Where there is a Greater, there is always, I assume, a Lesser and the Lesser is found in Northern Asia and Europe.

Other birds seen:

Lori Anderson: The Peregrine Falcon. Lori and Ken Gowing saw one during March's Bird Bash at St. Vincent de Paul Church on Wyld Street in North Bay. In years past, it was frequently seen at the Pro-Cathedral. Well, at least it hasn't changed its religion! Chris Sukha also saw one during March's Bird Bash, but at the Co-op Feed Store in Verner, although in keeping with this falcon's need to visit churches, it has been seen in years past at St. Jean Baptiste Roman Catholic Church in Verner and St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church in Mattawa until its steeple was removed. In lieu of a photo of the Peregrine, above is a New York Times cartoon sent to me some time ago by Steve Pitt.



Lori and Ken also saw a Red-tailed Hawk. The Red-tailed and the Rough-legged Hawks are coming through our area on their way north. The first Rough-legged I saw this March was on Purdon Line, where Dick and I watched it hunt. We were with Frank Peirce while he was taking some great photographs of it. **One of Frank's photos is on the cover of this month's Bird Wing Report.** Frank is a well-known photographer from our area and I am pleased he gave me permission to use his photo. Others like Pat Stack, Linda Stoner, Steve Taylor and Stephen O'Donnell saw the Rough-legged on Purdon Line and it was still there on March 31 when I was out that way. Purdon Line never disappoints!

Cindy Lafleur: The American Robin. It is the one bird (photo at the top of the article) more than any other that is a harbinger of spring to come, if not of spring itself. The robin in my yard returned earlier than ever this year, on March 11 during the mild March temperatures before the cold snap and some snow arrived again. Normally it shows up in my yard in late March.

Faye Oei: Red-winged Blackbird. Another harbinger of spring is the Red-winged blackbird with its *conk-la-ree* song, a classic song of our wetlands! Honouring both harbingers of spring is Stephen O'Donnell's photo below. (I am not sure it was meant to be a harbinger of spring for both birds, but it has since become so.)



Brittany Tartaglia: White-winged Crossbill. Although Brittany saw it in Algonquin Park, there were a few still around in our area in early to mid-March, most notably in the Songis Road area.

Garry Waldram: Wood Ducks. It was an early sighting of this bird (photo below) that Garry got on the Kaibuskong River in Bonfield, and I subsequently saw two there a couple of days later. Lori and Ken saw some in Restoule during March's Bird Bash and Dick and I subsequently saw the colourful male in Lavigne. At the



same time as Garry saw the Wood Ducks, he saw a pair of Green-winged Teal. I believe he is the only Bird Wing member so far to have seen them.

Denise Desmarais: Black-backed Woodpecker. It is a sighting that is the envy of many of us, especially Sue, Faye and Dick, all who have come to believe sightings of this woodpecker on Peacock Road are but a myth! Denise saw it in the Cache Lake area north of Verner.

Speaking of the infamous Peacock Road, while Faye and Sue were peacefully driving slowly around the Peacock Road area on a Saturday afternoon looking for birds for March's Bird Bash, and hopefully at last finding the elusive Black-backed, they were stopped by the R.I.D.E. program. Faye, as the driver, was given a breathalyzer - which she passed with flying colours because she had not been drinking – nor had Sue, her passenger. Even peaceful bird watchers driving along back roads can't be too careful. It was probably the slow driving that made the cop suspicious!

Fred Pinto: Merlin. Fred reports there is a Merlin (photo at right) on the university/college campus. It seems that one tends to nest in that area most years, an area in which I live. I haven't seen it in the area so far this year, but some years when it nests very close to my house, I hear its shrill *klee-klee-klee* call too frequently. Sometimes I ask it to tone it down so I can hear or see other birds!



Renee Levesque

From Connie Sturge: “Last week the dogs wanted out and when I opened the door, I saw a Merlin on the ground just off my front stairs. He had a Red-winged Blackbird. He must have just caught it because he hadn't started eating it and I could clearly see its wing. He flew off carrying the bird. He couldn't have flown far because there was total silence in my front yard for an hour.”

Oriana Pokorny: Brown Creeper. Always a nice bird to see, but Oriana with her excellent hearing, also heard its lovely song. Garry saw one in Bonfield.

Barbara Lee: Hairy Woodpecker. Barbara reports the Hairy in her yard practically lives at the feeder by her window. It along with all the other birds she sees in her yard absolutely delight her and her husband, Nate, both new members.

Angela Mills: Canada Geese. They have arrived by the hundreds. Dick and I saw about 800 or 900 in a field in West Nipissing.

Greg Jaski: Bohemians Waxwings. Greg saw them on Premier Road in mid-March. We thought the Bohemians had all left in the early part of March, but some were obviously lingering, although with the hundreds seen in North Bay this winter, it is a wonder there were any berries left for the lingerers!

Grant McKercher: Trumpeter Swans. Grant, and some other members like June and Kevin Telford, saw two Trumpeter Swans in Callander Bay (photo below). What is always special about seeing them here is that this is where Bev Kingdon, Swan Lady herself, released two sets of Trumpeter Swans – 12 in 2002 and 14 in 2003. Many current members will recall this event well because many were there to watch this momentous occasion, part of the Trumpeter Swan restoration program. For Bev, who grew up in Callander and learned to swim in Callander Bay, this was, she says, “The most exciting time of my life!” When at one point there were no Trumpeters seen migrating north, now there are many. Grant and his wife, Shirley, and I believe Linda Stoner, witnessed the release of the swans in Callander Bay, and I am sure other Bird Wing members did too. So it's even more fitting that Grant got to see them 12 years later in the bay in which they were released.



Grant McKercher

Just prior to Grant's sighting, Dick and I saw three at Lavigne and subsequently, Gary saw one in Kaibuskong River in Bonfield and Dick and I four in Cache Bay.

Therez Violette: Dark-eyed Junco. I have had one at my feeder on and off over the past month and three have since arrived.

Sue Gratton: Hooded Merganser. They have now arrived in all their handsome glory (photo below). I think it is one of our most outstanding ducks in terms of appearance. Well, all mergansers are.



Stephen O'Donnell

Pat Stack: American Kestrel. This kestrel was seen where one can usually be seen, Purdon Line! Pat reported it, along with Linda Stoner, on the March Bird Bash. Dick and I subsequently saw one on Hwy. 17 West, and new member Steve



Steve Taylor

Taylor managed to get a photo of one of the two he saw on Purdon Line (at left). I subsequently saw three on Purdon Line. I believe they were all males vying for the kestrel house Stephen erected a few years back more or less on the corner of Purdon Line and Maple Hill Road.

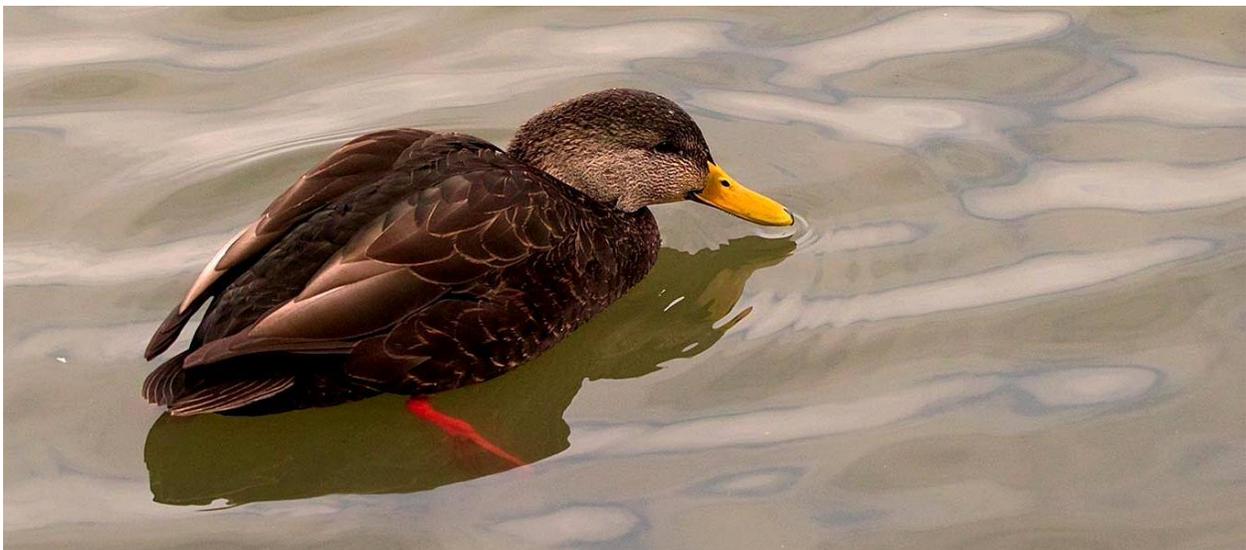
Pat also saw a Northern Harrier, as did Dick and I, and since the Bird Bash I am sure even

Lori has seen one by now, because there are many males around. Normally Lori is the first one to report a harrier, but up until the Bird Bash she hadn't seen one.

Katherine MacLeod: Mourning Dove. There haven't been many Mourning Doves reported so far this year. I often hear their peaceful cooing in movies. It seems to be the most prominent bird sound used in movies.

Renee Levesque: It was a pleasant surprise to see five Sandhill Cranes in the middle of the hundreds of Canada Geese seen in a field off Levac Road, West Nipissing, during March's Bird Bash. It was also a surprise to see an early Double-crested Cormorant flying south along the Sturgeon River on March 11. It may have been flying out to the mouth of the river to check out the ice situation that day on Lake Nipissing. And I can't forget the Turkey Vulture, a few of which have now been seen since March's Bird Bash. They are usually seen in flight, but I particularly like seeing them sitting and recently Dick and I saw two sitting on the side of the Rainville Road looking rather haggard.

Other March birds (for the record): Common Goldeneye, Common Mergansers, American Black Duck (pictured below), Pine Siskin, Common Redpoll, Red Crossbill, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Finch, Downy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Bald Eagle – Faye saw for the first time an immature at the South River landfill site, Belted Kingfisher (seen by Garry in Bonfield), Ruffed Grouse, American Goldfinch, Evening Grosbeak, Canada Jay, Common Raven, Northern Shrike, Common Grackle, Ring-billed and Herring Gulls, Rock Pigeon, Snow Buntings, a lone Lapland Longspur seen on March 11 at the side of the road near Verner's Co-op Feed Store.



Stephen O'Donnell

Birding in the Land of Fire

By Renee Levesque; except as indicated, photos by a teammate of Fred's, Len Baumgardt

Just as Fred Pinto had a short birding holiday in northern Patagonia (see February's Bird Wing Report) before he boarded the *Hondius*, the ship that took him and his fellow passengers on an Antarctic journey in November 2022, he had another birding holiday after it docked in Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego.

Ushuaia is the world's most southern city with a population of about 82,000 and the capital of Tierra del Fuego. Ushuaia looked, as Fred remarked, somewhat like it could be a city on our west coast, being situated on the shores of the Beagle Channel on the Pacific Ocean and surrounded by the Martial mountain range. (Photo below.)



Wikipedia

Tierra del Fuego, Land of Fire in translation, so named by passing Spanish explorers who observed bonfires lit by the local native inhabitants, is an archipelago that consists of the main island, Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego, as well as a group of many other islands. It is divided between Chile and Argentina, basically with Argentina controlling the eastern half and Chile, the western half.

During Fred's presentations of his Antarctic adventure and his Patagonia birding adventures at our Bird Wing meetings, I was struck by Fred's comment both times on the very strong winds he experienced in Tierra del Fuego. I believe he said he never felt such winds before, not even on

his Antarctic journey. I checked out the wind situation in Tierra del Fuego and after doing minimal research decided that Tierra del Fuego might be more appropriately called Tierra de Viento, Land of Wind. Westerly winds dominate here, unhindered by large land masses. The average velocity is 33 km/h, reaching a maximum of over 100 km/h in October.

With local guide, Esteban Daniels, arranged by Naturalist Journeys, Fred saw on the shores of the Beagle Channel Speckled Teal, Dolphin Gulls, Magellanic Oystercatchers and Chilean Skua.

Speckled Teal has been taxonomically divided into two species, the Yellow-billed Teal and the Andean Teal. (The Andean is restricted to the Andean Highlands of Columbia, Ecuador and Venezuela.) The Yellow-billed is common along the eastern coast of South American and into Tierra del Fuego. True to its name, it has a yellow bill with a black tip.

The **Dolphin Gull** is native to southern Argentina and Chile and the Falkland Islands. It is a dark gull with a thick red bill and red legs (photo at right).



The Magellanic Oystercatcher is also found in Argentina, Chile and the Falkland Islands. It is very similar in appearance to the American Oystercatcher except for the yellow ring of bare skin around its yellow eye and its white secondary feathers seen mainly in flight. “At the water’s edge, oystercatchers were needling for shellfish in piles of ruby-coloured seaweed”, wrote Bruce Chatwin in his best-selling 1977 book, *In Patagonia*. Not sure if that is how Fred saw the oystercatchers, but, if so, quite a lovely sight.

The Chilean Skua, a seabird similar in appearance to the Brown Skua, breeds in Argentina and Chile, but can be found further north in Brazil and Peru when not breeding. What makes it distinctive is its cinnamon lower face and throat, contrasting nicely with its dark cap. It also has white wing patches that are seen in flight. (Skuas, looking somewhat like large dark gulls, are acrobatic flyers and aggressive predatory seabirds. They have long bills with a hooked tip, webbed feet and sharp claws.)

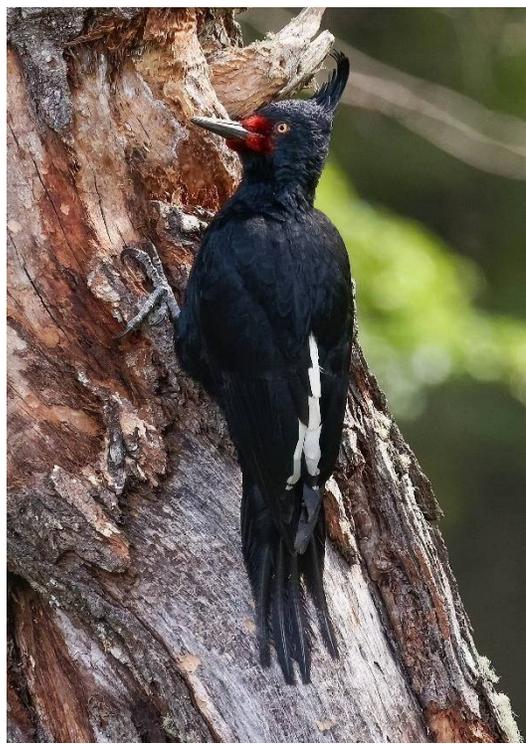
And what birder of note doesn’t visit the landfill site even in the southernmost city in the world? Here Fred saw the Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, a huge eagle-like hawk, and the Crested Caracara. The Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle is quite the handsome bird with its dark grey chest showing a blackish-bluish hue and its ash grey and white wing feathers looking silvery white from a distance.

Although the Crested Caracara (photo at right) is classified as a falcon, it couldn't be more different from the falcons with which we are familiar – the Peregrine, the Merlin and the American Kestrel. Unlike our falcons, it has broad wings, is slow-flying, regularly walks on the ground and often competes with vultures for carcasses and road kill. It stands tall with long yellow legs and a long white neck. It has a black body, a flat black head, white cheeks and bare orange skin around its face.



From Ushuaia, Fred travelled to Tierra del Fuego National Park, 11 km away. This park, with its dramatic scenery, has everything one could wish for in a national park – mountains, glaciers, waterfalls and forests. To get there one can either drive, as Fred did, or take the *End of the World Train*. This train originally began in the early 1900s to transport materials to the penal colony of Ushuaia. (Ushuaia developed as a penal colony, with the first prisoners arriving in 1884. It was closed in 1947 and replaced with a naval base.) Over the years, the railway expanded until it closed in 1952. However, in 1994, it was rebuilt from a narrow gauge to track gauge railway and now serves as a heritage and tourist train, taking passengers from the station outside Ushuaia to Tierra del Fuego National Park.

In the National Park, Fred saw the beautiful male and female Magellanic Woodpeckers, considered to probably be the largest living species of the genus *Campephilus*, a genus that included the Ivory-billed, although as large as our Pileated which belongs to the genus *Dryocopus*. The male and female have pure black bodies with white wing patches. The male has a brilliant red head, the female a black head with red by the base of her bill. Both sport the woodpecker crests. (Photos of both below.)



Other birds seen were the Tufted Tit-tyrant (photo at right), a member of the tyrant flycatcher family, and the Black-chinned Siskin, a common member of the finch family, *Fringillidae*, like our Pine Siskin. The male, with its yellow-olive colour overall, sports a black cap and, as expected from its name, has a black chin patch.



The second owl seen during Fred's Patagonia adventure - the first being the Magellanic Horned Owl while Fred was in Northern Patagonia - was the Austral Pygmy-Owl, an abundant and common owl found in Argentina and Chile, but common and abundant or not, any owl excites birders, and especially one that can be seen only in Argentina and Chile. It usually nests in tree cavities and although it hunts primarily during the day, it will also hunt at night. As its name implies, it is a small owl, about the size of our Northern Saw-whet Owl. (Photo at left.)

Three species of geese were seen by Fred, the Ashy-headed Goose and the Upland Goose with their young. The Ashy-headed Goose is another very handsome bird with its distinctive chestnut upper back and breast (photo below). It often associates with the Upland Goose, the male with a predominately white plumage and the female with a reddish-brown head and breast.

Another goose that was once prevalent in Tierra del Fuego was the Ruddy-headed Goose and although this goose has a robust population on the Falkland Islands, it is on the point of extinction in Tierra del Fuego and mainland South America, in part because of predation by the South American Gray Fox that was introduced in the 1950s to control the introduced rabbit population. (Recent studies now show that the Ruddy-headed in the Falklands is a different species than those in Tierra del Fuego.)



One of the Tierra del Fuego highlights for Fred with his guide, Esteban, and the other birders was a climb of 2,300 m up the Andes between Ushuaia and Rio Grande. It was very windy and there was some snow. It must have been some climb and I am sure a good break, a snack and a drink were required when the team reached their destination. At the heading of this article is a photo of Fred and the team resting above the tree-line.

It was worth the climb, as arduous as it may have been, not just for the spectacular scenery, but for the two birds Fred saw – a White-bellied Seedsnipe that had a call similar to a Ruffed Grouse and an Andean Condor that flew overhead.

Not only does the White-bellied Seedsnipe sound like our Ruffed Grouse, as you can see in the photo at right, it also looks like it. It breeds in elevations of 650 to 2,000 m, moving to lower elevations in the austral winter, from June to mid-September.

To see the Andean Condor (photo below), a magnificent bird and one of the largest flying birds in the world, must have been especially exciting! I am not sure what characteristics Fred could see of the condor as it flew overhead, but definitely its massive black body and large white wing patches, and perhaps the ruff of white feathers around its neck.



Its head and neck, as is the case in most vultures, are nearly featherless. This prevents bacteria from gathering and enables vultures to more easily keep themselves clean when eating. The male of the Andean Condor has a wattle on his neck and a dark red comb on his head. The female is smaller than the male, unusual in birds of prey, although I don't know if this is unusual in all vultures. (From *In Patagonia*: "The sky was a hard thin blue and the two circling black dots were condors.")

The Andean Condor, the only accepted living species of its genus, *Vultur*, is considered vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), threatened by habitat loss, persecution and secondary poisoning from lead in carcasses killed by hunters. There are various strategies in place to help increase its population.



There are only three living bird species that exceed the Andean Condor in average and maximal wingspan and they are the Great Albatross and the two largest species of pelican, the Dalmation and Great White Pelicans.

Fred also spent some time in Rio Grande, 212 km northeast of Ushuaia. Settlement there began in the late 19th century with sheep farming. Today, with its population of approximately 100,000, it is the industrial capital of Tierra del Fuego – manufacturing and petroleum extraction, but with sheep farming still a profitable industry.

On the way to Rio Grande, Fred saw the Thorn-tailed Rayadito, with its distinctive golden/orange plumage, and its thorny-tipped tail. There is a watercolour of the bird, painted in 1774 by George Foster who accompanied James Cook on his second voyage to the Pacific Ocean, which is now at the Natural History Museum in London.

Along the sandy seacoast at Rio Grande, Fred saw many shorebirds we see here – Baird's Sandpiper, Whimbrel and White-rumped Sandpiper, those shorebirds we so admire because they make that long migration journey from Southern Argentina to our Arctic and back again. And here before Fred's eyes were some that made it! I would think that had to be almost as awesome as seeing an Andean Condor!



The country around Rio Grande is suitable sheep-farming country and because Esteban was from a sheep family who lived in the area, he took the group to see a sheep ranch where sheep were being sheared. (Sheep shearers move from ranch to ranch). While in the area, Fred captured a photo of sheep rancher with his two sheep herding dogs. (I think they are the lovely black and white border collies.)

It is also an area of many Guanaco, the smaller wild cousin of the domesticated llama, to the point where there are *Watch for Guanaco* road signs, only with pictures of reindeer on the signs instead. Because there were no guanaco road signs made in Argentina, reindeer road signs were

purchased from Finland. No matter, I doubt anyone took them for actual reindeer.

Taking into account northern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, Fred saw 65 species. Great planning, Fred, to be able to get in these two Patagonia adventures on both ends of your odyssey to the Antarctic!

Avian ambassador

Birds Canada has chosen the Olive-sided Flycatcher with its very recognizable song, *Quick, three beers*, as its Avian Ambassador to highlight the issues facing our millions of boreal birds in Canada's vast boreal habitat, and to highlight the fastest declining group of birds in Canada, the aerial insectivores. One of the main reasons for their decline is the loss of insects.



Renee Levesque

The Olive-sided has a crested-shaped head, long wings, a slightly-forked short tail, dark olive-grey above, a greyish streaked vest, white patches on the sides of its rump, a dark bill with an orange lower mandible, and, as a distinctive field mark, greyish streaked sides framing its white underparts. (Photo at left.)

It is one of my favourite flycatchers, one I spend time every spring looking for in wetland areas, sometimes without success. The last two years I have been fortunate to have seen it in my home area during its spring migration to its preferred habitat, a mature forest next to open wetland areas. There it can be found perched atop a tall marsh/bog

tree where there is plenty of open space for foraging for insects. The number of times I have ventured into blackfly and mosquito-ridden boggy areas to find one has not been terribly fun, so I am always thankful if I see an Olive-sided before I have to make those sojourns on foot.

In addition to its *Quick, three beers* song and its greyish sides, a giveaway that you are looking at an Olive-sided is its upright posture at the top of a tree. With its perfect posture, it will sit there for some time before suddenly sallying forth to catch a flying insect. It then returns to its perch to eat its meal, perhaps its favourite meal, a bee!