

# Bird Wing Report

June  
2020



*Virginia Rail, Renee Levesque*

*Text by Renee Levesque; photos as indicated*

In this pandemic summer, our regular Bird Wing outing that would have taken place on June 23 could not go ahead. Instead, at least 15 Bird Wing members Zoomed in on June 23 to hear the interview with David Sibley, a birder, a writer and an illustrator who needs no introduction.

In addition to Bird Wingers, about 250 other bird watchers from across Canada and some from the US and Brazil joined the webinar to listen to Justin Peter, president of the Toronto Ornithological Club, interview David. This well-received interview was made possible by the Toronto Ornithological Club, Point Pelee National Park, Penguin Books USA and Birds Canada.

It was thanks to Bird Wing member Corinne Urrutia that I was made aware of the interview a couple of days before it was scheduled. Unfortunately by then, the webinar was full. However, I contacted Andrés Jiménez, Birds Canada, and he worked hard to get us connected. Maybe because we were late in applying, our club's name did not get a mention by Justin at the beginning of the webinar. But never mind, we managed to get "there"! Below is my summary of the interview and David's book, *What It's Like To Be a Bird*.

## **Where do birds sleep?**

When I was quite young and mistakenly thought I could be a poet, I wrote a little verse that went like this:

*The sun is slowly sinking,  
Sinking in the west,  
And soon the little birdies  
Will be snuggled in their nests.*

Not only was I mistaken that I could be a poet, but I also was mistaken about where birds sleep at night after they are fledged. Until I was much older, I really thought they flew back to their nests, mom, dad and the little ones, for their night's sleep.

It is one of those questions – Where do birds sleep at night? – that David Sibley answers in his book *What It's Like To Be A Bird*, a radical departure for David from his well-known field guides, *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds (of Eastern North America and of Western North America)* and *The Sibley Birds*.

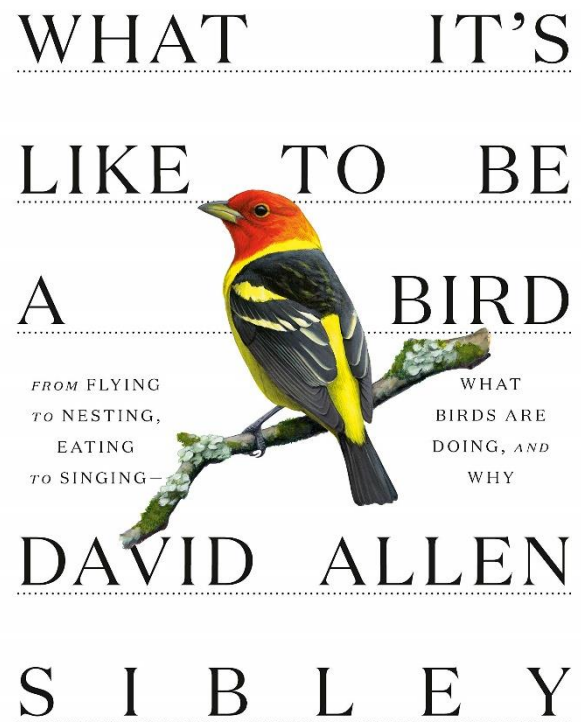
It answers other common questions like, why are some eggs round and others pointed; do birds mate for life; is the robin listening for worms when it tilts its head; do birds have a memory; do birds get out of breath; and countless other questions David answers.

The answers, what birds do and how they do it, becomes the whole book, with David using for the most part familiar backyard birds from across the continent.

It is a book for adults and children alike, a larger format book, sort of sketch-book style, with wonderful large colourful illustrations and charts done, of course, by David himself. You do not need a science background to understand it. It's a book whose content is accessible to anyone.

The preferred way of reading this book, David states, is to open the book to any page and start reading. Every page is an entry point. Topics are random and yet connected.

But as David explains, the book's real purpose is to get people out in nature. Research shows that being outdoors in the woods, in nature, reduces stress and makes us happier.



You can order a signed book at a cost of \$47.00 plus shipping and handling from Friends of Point Pelee by emailing [friendsofpointpelee@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofpointpelee@gmail.com). However, copies are limited, so if you can't get the book using that method, you can order it from Amazon.ca for the same price, but not autographed. See: <https://www.amazon.ca/What-Its-Like-Bird-Singing-What/dp/0307957896>.

## Birds Seen in June

I asked members and bird watchers to send me one or two birds they saw in June and some did and some sent little stories and some sent photos and some told me about birds not normally seen here.

Most of the birds seen in June were mentioned in Dick Tafel's June Bird Bash Report, so here, in no particular order, I will mainly include those who responded to my request:

A Great Crested Flycatcher, at right, was seen by David Rooke and others. It seems to me that this flycatcher has been more visible this year than most years. We certainly hear the Great Crested, but sometimes actually seeing it despite its loud *whee-eeep* can be problematic. Other flycatchers seen or heard were Least, Alder, Eastern Phoebe and Eastern Wood Pewee.

Chris Sukha saw the Ruddy Duck at Warren Lagoon. It is a small, rather chubby duck with a large white cheek patch, a reddish body and a blue bill, often seen with its tail up. Most other ducks one expects to see were seen by some, mostly at the various lagoons. An American Coot was also seen by Chris at Warren Lagoon.

As pictured on the first page, Dick and I, as well as Brent and Laura Turcotte and their daughters, saw a couple of Virginia Rails on Hurtubise/Palangio Road. It was the first time



David Rooke

in my short birding history I was able to get a good photo of one. Laura didn't have her camera with her and regretted it.

Also seen or heard by us in the same area were three Black-billed Cuckoos, seen by others elsewhere, David along the South Shore and Stephen O'Donnell near Sundridge. Stephen's photo is below.



*Stephen O'Donnell*

Earlier in June, Stephen saw a Ruddy Turnstone and Semipalmated Sandpipers at Sundridge Lagoon, as pictured on the next page.

Rose McClelland had Sandhill Cranes and Eastern Bluebirds at her place, nice birds to have on your property. She was fortunate to see the Sandhill Cranes, with their wings outstretched, doing their elegant courtship dance. Although they mate for life, their dance cements their bond to one another. Eastern Bluebirds were seen by many, including Lori Anderson at her place.

All sparrows were seen in June by many, from the little Chipping to the large Song. And if they weren't seen, they were certainly heard, the Song in particular.



*Ruddy Turnstone and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Stephen O'Donnell*

Lately the White-throat is making itself especially heard. Its song has to be the most iconic of all the sparrow songs, at least for me. (More on the White-throat song later in this report.) When I lived in Hamilton for 20 years and heard the White-throat on occasion from my inner city home, it brought back poignant memories of the north. Despite searching for the Vesper Sparrow, I have not seen or heard it, nor has Dick or Stephen.

Seen by Gary and Luanne Chowns in Restoule was an American Bittern (right), also seen elsewhere by Gary and Connie Sturge and Sheldon McGregor.

Almost all warblers that can be seen in our area in June have been seen. The ones most



*Gary Chowns*

commonly heard by almost everyone are the Chestnut-sided and the Common Yellow-throat, pictured at right, as well as the Ovenbird, a warbler often heard but not seen. It is one of the few birds that sings in the heat of the mid-afternoon, and although a ground warbler, when it defends its territory, it sings from tree branches, sometimes high up. Another warbler heard often in June was the Mourning Warbler, a pair of which nested at Ken Gowing's place.

It is good to be able to recognize – and hear – warbler songs, because once the leaves are on the trees, it can be difficult to see them. Singing will soon stop and once that happens, you can perhaps spot them with their young.



*Corinne Urrutia*

There are Eastern Whip-poor-wills at Dreany Lake on Hwy 17 East, heard by Dick. Soon Gary and Connie will be doing the nightjar survey in their Powassan area and once completed, Gary will send me the results which I will put in the next report. I haven't received word on anyone hearing or seeing the Common Nighthawk, although I heard and saw one in May in downtown North Bay one night while I was watching the Chimney Swifts. I do not get reports on the status of the Chimney Swifts, so I'm not sure how many were seen in total and if any were seen at other chimneys other than the usual one on Main Street West.

Dick and I, and no doubt others, saw two colourful birds, the Scarlet Tanager and the Indigo Bunting, a bird that can usually be seen at the top of the hill as you enter Trout Pond Road from Hwy 17 East and at the end of Marsh Drive off Hwy 11 North – and there was one at my place while I was writing this report. We also saw, as did Lori and Ken, Gary and Connie and Therez Violette, the brilliant Baltimore Oriole (seen at right). Lori had a nesting pair at Graham Lake on her property. And for the second year, Therez had one at her oriole feeder. Perhaps because we don't get the extreme colourful birds seen elsewhere in some parts of the world, it is a delight to spot the three mentioned. They certainly draw attention!



*Renee Levesque*

The Wilson's Snipe with its winnowing flight was seen by Sheldon in West Nipissing during June's Bird Bash and by David who recently saw one on Tillicum Bay Road.

Ken seems to be our resident American Woodcock birder. He hears or sees them from spring through to the fall, and this June was no exception.



*Renee Levesque*

The Northern Rough-winged Swallow was seen at its usual place sitting on the wire by the Veuve River bridge, although it was also seen at Powassan and Warren Lagoons. Barn, Cliff and Tree Swallows were nesting at Lori's farm, as were House Sparrows, invasive thieves of some of the Tree Swallows' nesting boxes, much to Lori's dismay. Bank Swallows (left) were seen by Stephen at their nesting colony on Brooks Road, near Sundridge, one of the last

colonies left in that area, and Dick and I just happened to come across a couple of pairs at their small nesting sites off Black Creek Road, also near Sundridge.

Dick and I also saw a few Barn Swallows sitting on a wire on Simpson Hill Road off Stillar Side Road. One had white and not red underparts as shown in the photo at right. That was a surprise to us and I thought at first that maybe it was a European Barn Swallow because I know the ones in Europe are pale underneath. But as Mike Burrell pointed out, “Barn Swallows are quite variable in North America with females



Renee Levesque

usually a fair bit paler than the males. This one (the one Dick and I saw) is probably on the pale extreme, but not totally unusual. As you have noticed, the Barn Swallows in Europe tend to all be on the paler end of the spectrum.” Lori, who has many Barn Swallows on her farm, informed me she had never seen one so pale and planned to watch out for that from now on.



Some have seen, if not heard, the lovely Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Gary Sturge reported that the Rose-breasted hatchlings at his place had fledged.

Dick and I recently saw eight Black Terns at Warren Lagoon. Other terns seen included the Common (left), seen by Fred Pinto during the June Bird Bash and by others earlier in the month. And we can't forget the Caspian, the



largest tern in the world, and found on all continents except the Antarctica.

Raptors seen were a Sharp-shinned Hawk reported by new Bird Wing member Monica Schwalbe. She saw it eating a small bird on top of a street lamp across from her house on Airport Hill.

Two raptors reported being seen by quite a few were Osprey on all their nests, some seen feeding their young and some seen fishing, as well as Bald Eagles, the young spotted by Gary and Connie and by Kaye Edmonds in Callander. Gary was fortunate to get a photo of two of the young, pictured below. Other raptors seen were the Merlin, Northern Harrier and Broad-winged Hawk.

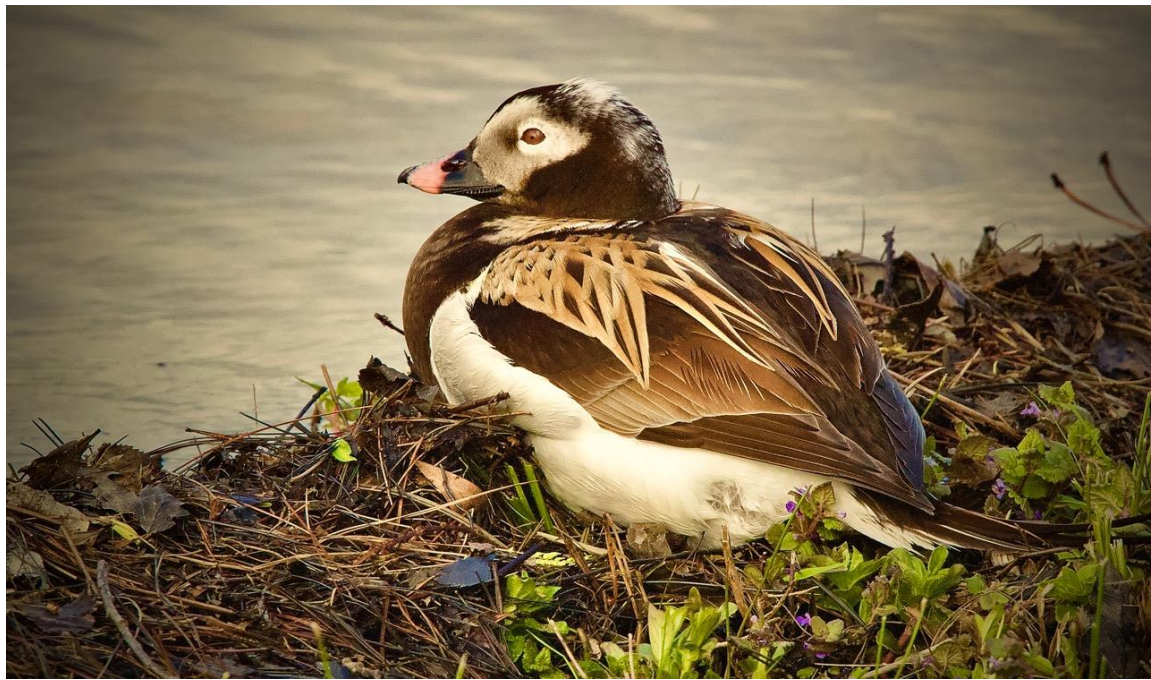


*Gary Sturge*

All wrens had been seen or heard by some, including the Sedge Wren seen by Sheldon during June's Bird Bash. The House Wren was seen by a few, especially by Gary and Luanne Chowns who have a pair nesting behind their property. (More on the House Wren, one at Gary and Connie's property, later in this report.)

## Rarer Birds For Our Area Seen in June

Towards the end of May (almost June), Dave Palangio saw a breeding male Long-tailed Duck (right) by his home on Trout Lake. It was probably resting there before making its journey north. It is a diving sea duck that breeds near Arctic wetlands.



*Dave Palangio*

On June 2, Stephen O'Donnell watched 66 migrating Brant Geese and seven migrating Red-throated Loons on Lake Bernard, briefly resting there before

heading north. Often both these species will use Lake Bernard as a resting place in late May and again in October when they migrate south.



Linda Stoner was delighted to discover a Northern Mockingbird in her Bonfield yard (at left) on June 13. The last time she saw a Northern Mockingbird was in South River during the Great Canadian Birdathon about 15 or so years ago. Reports Linda, "I was one of two others in Dick

*Linda Stoner*

Tafel's car. We got to where Dick knew there might be a mockingbird at about 9 or 9:30 in the evening – and there it was, singing away! It was an experience I will not forget.”

Linda was hoping to hear her Bonfield mockingbird sing, but it didn't. Both the males and females sing, learning new sounds throughout their lives, sounds that mimic other birds and even frogs. Its song is similar to the Brown Thrasher's, only longer with each phrase repeated two to six times before it shifts to another sound.

This is the second mockingbird in our area of which I am aware. Dick and I saw one on Margaret Drive at the end of Beaucage Park Road in late May.

In one of Linda's photos of the Northern Mockingbird (right), the feathers are parted in the middle exposing the bird's skin. It was probably fluffing up her feathers while preening. As Stephen O'Donnell explains, “Females have what is known as a brood patch. This is an area on the belly that is free of down feathers and allows the eggs to have contact with the skin during incubation. The breast feathers are parted, exposing the bare skin (just as in the photo), thus allowing skin contact with the eggs. The breast feathers surround the eggs on the sides, helping to retain heat for incubation.”



*Linda Stoner*



Gary Sturge

Many have seen Bobolinks (left) from West Nipissing to Calvin Township, to Chisholm Township, to the Powassan area and beyond. Eastern Meadowlarks don't seem to be as numerous this year.

The Tundra Swans that were at Verner Lagoon for some time, one of them at least up until the end of May, were not there when I visited the lagoon in mid and late June. After seeing only one still there at the end of May, I emailed Ron Pittaway about my concern – and Buddy Myles' and Dick's concerns – that it was at a lagoon so late in the season. Ron emailed back, “There was a Tundra Swan that summered

many years ago at a lagoon near Lindsay. As I remember, it was a year-old bird. I don't think you need to contact anyone. This might be the best place for it to survive.” And we certainly hope it did.

David Rooke recently heard a Yellow-billed Cuckoo (at right) in the Seguin Beach area on the South Shore of Lake Nipissing. David, who is from Waterloo, spends his summers here and is familiar with both the Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoo songs.

### Bird Stories

You may recall from May's report that the American Robin's nest in **Steve Pitt's** carport was for rent after it was moved by Steve to a semi-hidden ledge outside his carport, and then occupied shortly thereafter. Just in case you are wondering what



Peter Ferris

happened, the couple had a family, hatchlings when Steve took the photo at right. Reports Steve, “Mom and Dad supplied a steady diet of shadflies which were very abundant that week, and then, suddenly, the nest was empty. I had a fleeting glimpse of one fledgling awkwardly hopping along the ground, but then it took off and flew into the woods.”



Steve Pitt

**Rose McClelland** also had a robin couple that nested by her porch. It seems the female was not content with the first nest she built because she built another nest, and another and another, four in total. (The female builds the nest, but the male helps gather materials for it.) She must have chosen the right one because the eggs were hatched and the hatchlings survived.



Gary Sturge

**Gary and Connie Sturge** also have House Wrens nesting at their place. Gary took a picture of one, probably a male (at left), stuffing a nesting box with a stick, but not stuffing it into its nesting box, but rather another nesting box! Gary reports it was using this tactic to prevent other birds from occupying that particular nest box! From Gary: “The other day I was relaxing out front and saw a bird at the stick-stuffed nest box. It seemed interested in gaining access to the box, although I thought it was a little big for it. Turned out it was a Great Crested Flycatcher, a bird that also nests in cavities. It finally gave up trying to gain entry, and after it left, I went to investigate and saw the box was

full of sticks! I promptly removed them and hoped for a return. But alas..."

From the website, *Silias*: Male House Wrens have a habit of filling up available nest boxes with sticks to attract females and to prevent competition. When not used for nesting, these are called "dummy nests."

From *All About Birds*: Great Crested Flycatchers favour natural cavities in dead trees, but will use large, abandoned woodpecker holes, nesting boxes, hollow posts, and even buckets, pipes, cans, and boxes of appropriate size. Both sexes inspect potential nesting cavities anywhere from two to 70 feet from the ground.

**Therez Violette** sent me an email describing her relationship with a Common Grackle. "In the morning, I treat my chipmunks to peanuts. Apparently a grackle has been watching me feeding them and now comes to the patio for a treat. He "quacks" and won't leave until I give him a peanut!"

**Janet Sparks** had hoped to have Eastern Bluebirds, but although they inspected a nest box, the same one they used other years, this year they decided to move elsewhere. Janet thinks it is because a Northern Flicker nested in a nearby tree cavity and made such a fuss when the bluebirds and swallows came near the nest box that the bluebirds decided to look elsewhere. However, Janet's niece, Laurie Wood, who lives near Long Point, had two pair of bluebirds nesting in boxes and she got to hold four hatchlings when Mr. Bluebird himself, Bill Read, president and founder of the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society, paid her a visit. (Photo of the hatchlings below.)



*Courtesy of Laurie Wood*

## Bird Links

Below are links you might be interested in:

From Dick Tafel about a 14-year old boy in England who is an avid bird watcher and bird photographer: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-england-nottinghamshire-53053317/identifying-birds-is-like-a-superpower>

From John Levesque about hummingbirds and seeing colours humans can only imagine: <https://science.ubc.ca/news/hummingbirds-see-colours-humans-can-only-imagine>

From Grant McKercher about a former NASA engineer who designed an elaborate obstacle course in his backyard to prevent squirrels from accessing his feeder, only to find out that “When it comes to battling squirrels, the only way to win is not to play.”, something we birders already knew: <https://gizmodo.com/former-nasa-engineer-builds-a-ninja-warrior-obstacle-co-1843636932>

From my sister about the latest White-throated Sparrow discovery – changing its tune and not being quite so patriotic: <https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/canada-news-pmn/white-throated-sparrows-change-their-tunes-from-a-three-note-to-a-two-note>

## Bird Bash

The next Bird Bash takes place the last weekend of July, **July 25 and 26.**

## Bird Wing

There will probably not be a bird outing in July, an outing that would normally take place **Tuesday, July 28.** I will keep you informed should an alternative event take place.

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A belated Happy Canada Day from our Canada Jay, Canada Warbler, Canada Goose, White-throated Sparrow and iconic Common Loon.



David Rooke