

# Bird Wing Report

April 2020



*Northern Shoveler, Stephen O'Donnell*

*Text by Renee Levesque; photos as indicated*

April is the second month we have not been able to meet in person due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. However, unlike March when we “met” by email, this month we met virtually, thanks to Zoom. It was history in the making for Bird Wing, it being our very first virtual meeting.

There were 18 members, in addition to our speaker, who joined the virtual meeting, with others either phoning or emailing me their April observations. Many of these observations repeat what Dick Tafel indicated in his April Bird Bash Report, but some are different.

April also marks the last indoor meeting of the year until September. By then it is hoped we can once again meet in person, and, if we can, that the North Bay Public Library will be ready to receive us.

We kept the meeting fairly short, naming our two birds, following which James Abbott spoke about his volunteer work with FLAP Canada.

## **Birds Seen in April:**

Members who were able to join us on Zoom but who have not been at meetings previously were Greg Jaski who grew up in North Bay but now lives in Beaverton; Sheldon McGregor who lives

in Ancaster but has a cottage in West Nipissing; and Stephen O'Donnell who lives in far-away Sundridge. Also counted in this group was our speaker, James Abbott, who spoke from Toronto but teaches at Nipissing University.

Fred Pinto was the only one who saw a Northern Waterthrush (at right), a thrush-like warbler he saw recently in Laurier Woods. The other warbler seen was the Yellow-rumped, a pair seen by Stephen O'Donnell and me in our respective yards. The male was also seen by Pam Handley in her yard. In all three cases, this early warbler was eating bird seed and suet. Another early warbler was the Pine Warbler, seen by Grant McKercher and me, again in our respective yards.

The only other warbler mentioned, a Nashville Warbler, was seen by Greg. We graciously allowed the southerners to name birds seen by them in their neck of the woods, and sometime in May we will see the lovely little Nashville with its white eyering and on the male, if we are lucky, its reddish crown patch.

A bird not often seen in our area was the Carolina Wren, seen by Luanne Chowns. Luanne reported it spent about 5 minutes in her yard before taking off, not to be seen again. I believe this is not the first time the Chowns have had a Carolina Wren in their yard.



*Stephen O'Donnell*



*Oriana Pokorny*

Another bird not often seen in our area is the Greater White-fronted Goose, four of which Dick Tafel happened to come upon in a field near Verner Lagoon, where he also recently saw Cackling Geese. No one mentioned Canada Geese, but it is highly unlikely they were not seen by us all.

I saw an American Bittern (at left) in Laurier Woods during April's Bird Bash, and Connie Sturge saw a Sora on Stillaway Line in the swampy area along that road. No secret as to how famous Stillaway has become thanks to Connie and Gary. Now if only the rest of us could see these birds on Stillaway!

Some of us saw the Great Blue Heron, but only Kaye Edmonds saw the Green Heron, again in Laurier Woods, obviously the place to be these days.

Rachel Sturge was also able to join us because she is now at home with her parents, although busy marking exams.

Rachel saw an Eastern Meadowlark, a bird also seen by Lori Anderson and Grant McKercher.

Sparrows seen were the handsome Fox Sparrow (below), seen by Luanne and me, and no doubt by Gary Chowns. I had four in my yard for a few days, but they have now gone, although they stayed long enough to allow me to include them in my April Bird Bash list.

Other sparrows seen included the Savannah Sparrow seen by Rachel, Lori and Dick; the White-throated Sparrow, seen by me and no doubt others – many have arrived in Laurier Woods and elsewhere since our meeting; the American Tree seen by many of us, but most have now headed north; and the Song seen, if not heard, by almost all of us.



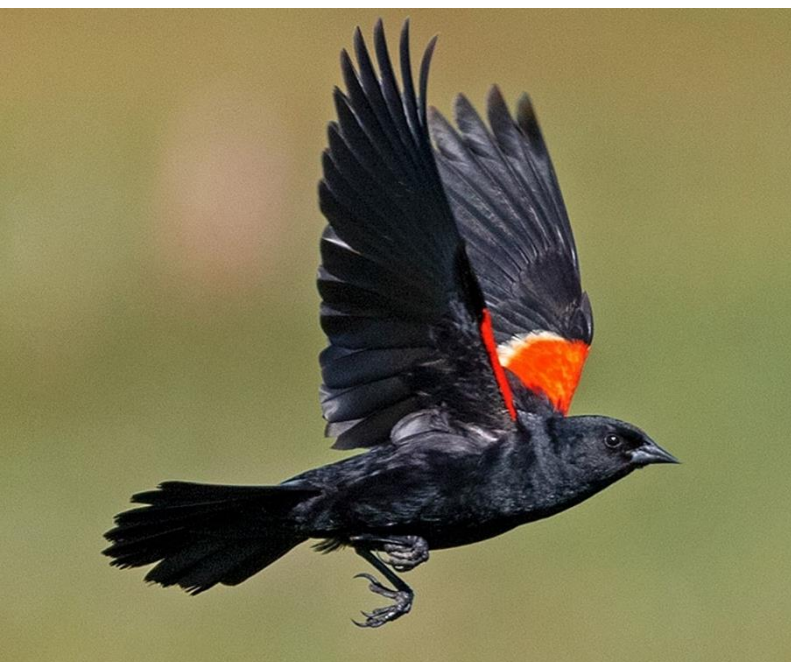
*Renee Levesque*

Zoom does not lend itself well to allowing everyone to chip in and name birds they have seen beyond their two birds, but I believe Fred had seen the Swamp Sparrow, as had Chris Sukha, and on the day of the meeting, a Chipping Sparrow showed up in my yard. Many also saw Dark-eyed Juncos. (Lots of Swamp Sparrows are now singing in Laurier Woods.)

A bird I love because of its song is the Brown Thrasher, seen recently by Kaye, again in Laurier Woods. Kaye reports she arrived for her walk one morning and there it was, singing its heart out. What a nice find on the dull, coolish day Kaye went for her walk.

There are lots of Red-winged Blackbirds (seen at left), Common Grackles and European Starlings around, especially in Marc Buchanan's area and other areas, but only a few Brown-headed Cowbirds were seen. Rose McClelland saw some on Alsace Road, Lori saw them in Chisholm Township, and I saw one in West Nipissing.

Rose also saw Tree Swallows, as did some others, and there are now some Barn Swallows around. Buddy Myles saw some at Cache Bay; like Rose, Dick saw one or two in the Alsace Road area; and Lori and Ken saw some at



*Stephen O'Donnell*

Lori's. Sheldon McGregor has seen them in his southern area.

Like Mary Marrs, many of us saw the American Goldfinch and Mary, like some of us, saw the raspberry-coloured Purple Finch. Gary Sturge, also like many of us, saw the pretty little Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets (at left).

Sheldon also saw a bird we don't usually get here, a Tufted Titmouse. But we have the Black-capped Chickadee as seen by Alex Gomm and the rest of us, it being our ever-faithful bird from January through to December. Katherine McLeod saw a Brown Creeper, as some others did, and although not mentioned, many of us no doubt saw the Red-breasted Nuthatch, with some, maybe only Grant and Dick, seeing the White-breasted.



*Kaye Edmonds*



*Stephen O'Donnell*

And some of us – Stephen, Gary Sturge, Dick, Grant and I – have seen or heard the Winter Wren, its nice, long and somewhat bubbly song giving its location away. It's not often we get to see it well and certainly not as well as Stephen did in his photo at left.

For a few weeks now on my early morning walks, I hear the woodpeckers, like the Hairy, seen by Sarah Wheelan, drumming madly. And recently the Hairy and the Downy were joined by the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (top of next page), seen by some of us, the male with his brilliant red head and throat, and the Northern Flicker with its maniacal call, seen by Linda Stoner and others.

Linda also saw a Ruffed Grouse, as had others, and if they didn't see one, they certainly heard one. No one reported seeing the Spruce Grouse, but Connie saw Wild Turkeys.

Pigeons did not get mentioned, but some have decided to come to my yard this year and two did their mating dance, involving what might be called kissing. Mourning Doves were seen by Katherine and some of us.

Early in April, Dick saw about 20 Tundra Swans on the ice at the end of the Sturgeon River, just waiting for the lake to become ice-free, which it did on April 26. Chris Sukha also saw them in the Field area, flying overhead.

Some of us – Dick, Therez Violette, Buddy and I – saw two Trumpeter Swans at Cache Bay, one with a yellow tag. Unfortunately we were not been able to make out the tag number. Because this is her usual location, I can't help wondering if one is Ava, L95. (For those who don't know the story of Ava, see the October 2017 issue of *The Woodland Observer*, <https://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>.) Others, like Kaye and Jackie Manella, saw one in the pond at Laurier Woods, apparently a first for Laurier Woods.



*Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Renee Levesque*



*Buddy Myles*

Sandhill Cranes (at left) have returned and were seen by many of us.

The American Robin was widely distributed and seen by most. A few like James Abbott saw the Hermit Thrush. Some even heard its haunting song. James in his southern neighbourhood also saw a Northern Cardinal, a bird sometimes seen here, but usually in the winter.

Some of us, like Grant, Pam and I, saw Cedar Waxwings in our yards. I had many, about 25 or so in March, but only five in late April.

Belted Kingfishers were seen by some at various locations, including Laurier Woods.



*Renee Levesque*

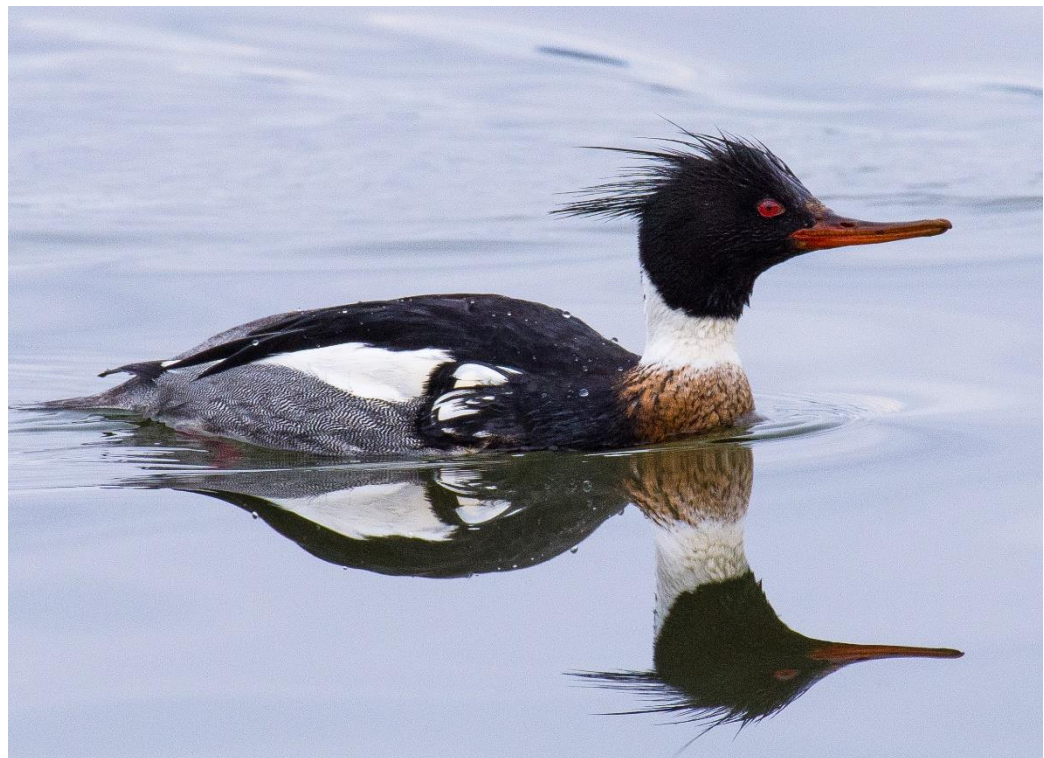
Not many shorebirds were seen, but I saw a Greater Yellowlegs (at left) at Cache Bay and two in a pond in the Powassan area. Gary Sturge saw a couple of Killdeer near his place in the Powassan area and Dick saw one at Cache Bay. Wilson's Snipe was seen by Therez, Ken, Lori, Chris and Steve Pitt.

American Woodcocks were seen or heard by some of us – Lori, Ken, Dick, me, Pam and Jackie.

Now for the ducks and there were lots of them: Gary Chowns saw Ring-necked Ducks. There were many of them around in large numbers, especially at Cache Bay. Gary also saw the small but beautiful Hooded Merganser, as did some of us. Marc saw

Buffleheads and his favourite duck, the Wood Duck. Alex, and no doubt most of us, saw Mallards. Other ducks that were seen included Common Mergansers (right), Gadwalls, American Wigeons (at least 22 close to the shore in Cache Bay), Green-winged Teals, Lesser Scaup and Northern Shovelers (pictured at the start of this report). Most of the ducks I saw were at Cache Bay where they numbered in the hundreds.

The Common Loon has returned and was seen by Grant, Dick and me, and no doubt others. Recently I also heard its mournful call, almost as good as seeing it.



*Buddy Myles*



*Stephen O'Donnell*

Stephen was fortunate to see Horned Grebes (above) in Lake Bernard in their striking breeding colours. Others saw the Pied-billed Grebe, including one in the pond at Laurier Woods.

In the world of raptors, most of us had seen the American Kestrel, including the Sparks by Wolfe Lake, and some of us, like Sarah, saw the Merlin. The one in my yard (below) caught and ate a pigeon. Many had also seen the Northern Harrier. Only Kevan Cowcill reported seeing a Peregrine Falcon recently, on April 21.



*Renee Levesque*

Grant, like some of us, saw the pair of Osprey back in their nest at the Lakeshore exit off Hwy. 11 South. Ospreys have also returned to the Cache Bay ballpark, as well as to the nest in the tree on Hwy 11 North by the beer sign just before North Bay. Buddy saw one at the Poirier Road nest in West Nipissing, but no one reported whether the pair had returned to their nest along the Sturgeon River. What is interesting is that Kaye reported seeing one in a nest at the concrete plant at Birch's Road. It can be seen from the highway, but not easily as it is on a lower structure. (The Osprey used to nest at this plant regularly, but then didn't for a few years.)

Probably the most exciting raptors seen were two owls, seen by Lori and Ken – the Great Horned Owl in Chisholm Township, and the Short-eared Owl in the Powassan area. A pair of Short-eared Owls was also seen in Calvin Township (at right). And in the southern tier of our province, Greg saw a Northern Saw-whet Owl, seen by some of us here during the winter, and more recently during April’s Bird Bash, heard by Chris in the Field area.



*Courtesy of Ernie Frayle*

### **FLAP Canada:**

For birds, glass can be deadly, a fact especially apparent to James Abbot, an assistant professor at Nipissing University and a volunteer in Toronto with FLAP Canada. FLAP is an acronym for Fatal Light Awareness Program, a program that began in 1993 by Michael Mesure, FLAP Canada Executive Director.

As a volunteer, James’s main role is to drive injured birds to the Toronto Wildlife Centre, but he also does some patrols, picking up dead and injured birds in the downtown core of Toronto, birds that have died or been injured as a result of collisions with human structures. These collisions are particularly prominent during spring (March through May) and fall (August through October) migrations. Sometimes James is called upon to release birds, birds that have recovered from their injuries, and this is by far James’s most rewarding task.

“FLAP volunteers conduct regular patrols in the early mornings, checking the perimeter of buildings. If an injured bird is found, the volunteer does a quick assessment. Sometimes all the bird needs is a bit of time to recover in the dark, protected from predators like squirrels and gulls. If the injury is more severe, birds are then taken to the Toronto Wildlife Centre for treatment. Dead birds are also collected, and all data, including species and location, are entered into a database, which is then used to analyze trends in collisions. Dead birds are also kept and used by researchers for studies ranging from genetics to diet.”



*Courtesy of FLAP Canada*



Birds have no concept of glass. They see a reflection of trees and sky and plants and think they can fly through that reflection. As a result, a billion or more birds die annually in North America when they collide with windows on low, mid and high-rise buildings. In Canada alone, an estimated 25 million die.

Neck injuries are rarely a cause of bird mortality because of the high flexibility of a bird's neck. Instead, head trauma and internal injuries are the most frequent causes of death. So what can be done to reduce mortality and injury in birds, to reduce window collisions?

Visual markers can be placed on windows, but on the outside, not the inside. If they are placed on the inside, the markers get masked by reflection. And these visual markers must be spaced properly. One decal on a window will not do the trick. It also helps if there is extreme contrast between the outside and the window to make it obvious that the window is a surface and not a fly-through. For more information and more ways to keep birds safe see: <https://birdsafeca.com/homes-safe-for-birds/>.

Other measures include light reduction at night, particularly during migration periods, and Toronto has taken a lead on doing so. Thanks to FLAP Canada, over time and through advocacy, federal and provincial guidelines and bird-friendly developments have occurred.

Although James spoke primarily about Toronto's large structures with walls of windows, our homes have windows too and result in bird collisions. Maybe we don't go out in the morning and see many dead and injured birds on our lawns and flower beds, driveways and walkways, but we have all experienced the thud of a bird against one of our windows, experienced the heartbreaking death or injury of a bird, a death or injury we could have done something to prevent. Multiply that thud, that death or that injury against the thousands and millions and billions of homes in our community, in our province, in our country, and around the world.

For more information on FLAP Canada, see: <https://flap.org/> .



*Courtesy of FLAP Canada*

To thank James for his excellent presentation, Bird Wing will donate \$50.00 to FLAP Canada.

## Window Treatments:

As a follow-up on James's presentation, one of our members, Rose McClelland, has been using paracord to deter birds from colliding with her several large windows. Because the cords are not fastened at the bottom, only at the top, they can move freely in the wind. Rose reports, "We barely notice the cords unless I want to take a photo through the glass - then one will inevitably swing right in front of the lens just as I click the shutter." (See Rose's photo at right.)

From Paloma Plant, Program Coordinator, FLAP Canada: "Paracord, when applied properly, can be quite effective. The trick is to get the right contrast (there are numerous colour options for the product) and to make sure the spacing is no greater than 4 inches between the cords. Paracord is on our website under the name *Acopian Bird Savers*.

"It always helps to offer readers/members as many options as possible when it comes to effective window treatments, and to make sure they are aware of what does not work.

**All too often, people like to push decals as treatments, but, unfortunately, in many cases, they are never used in an effective way, and give a false sense to homeowners that they have solved their problem."**

For more information on paracords, see: <https://www.birdsavers.com/>.

This is but one window treatment method that helps prevent bird collisions. There are others. FLAP Canada currently has a contest on decorating our windows to make them bird friendly. For more information and contest rules, see:



Rose McClelland

[https://twitter.com/FLAPCanada/status/1253331953060704256?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Etweet](https://twitter.com/FLAPCanada/status/1253331953060704256?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Etweet)

These days, we have plenty of time on our hands to make our windows safe for birds.

## Self-isolator Bird Chart

Many of you responded to the self-isolator bird chart (shown at right, zoom in to read) sent to me by Gary Sturge which I then forwarded to Bird Wing members. Of those who responded, most said they are either the Belted Kingfisher or a combination of the Belted Kingfisher and the Great Gray Owl. One reports being most like a Great Gray Owl and a couple have some Killdeer mixed in with the kingfisher and the owl. Two are of the opinion they are the Canada Goose!

## Blue Jay Caption:

In March's Bird Wing report, I asked for captions for the photo of the two Blue Jays sent to me by Steve Pitt (shown below). I had some responses, most related to Covid-19:

## Which self-isolator are you?



**Gray Partridge**

- already destroyed stash of Costco snacks
- exclusively wearing sweat pants
- might try an online yoga class if this lasts any longer



**Clark's Nutcracker**

- fires up the wood stove
- "got an elk this year, we should be good"
- all that work in the garden is paying off



**Killdeer**

- insufferable alarmist
- read a really good article
- knows all the facts that support their position



**Townsend's Solitaire**

- studies proper social distancing protocols
- corrects a lot of people online
- still goes out with friends if good food is available



**American Robin**

- literally every millennial mom
- "homeschooling is really enriching our daily life!"
- suddenly an Instagram blogger



**Bohemian Waxwing**

- ignored all risks to crowd into Target three weeks ago
- currently has 4 years' supply of toilet paper
- has not been heard from since



**Great Gray Owl**

- hasn't seen a soul in weeks
- doesn't hang out with anyone anyways
- maybe check in on them



**Belted Kingfisher**

- well-informed and very ethical
- still enjoys a healthy amount of outdoor activity
- protects themselves and those around them



**Canada Goose**

- has some theories
- has never been wrong
- "SHELTER IN PLACE???"
- What's next, OUR GUNS???"



*Ernie Frayle:* Hey Buddy, get six feet away, NOW!

*Steve Pitt:* First they blame their viruses on us birds. Now they're blaming bats. Who's next, butterflies?

*Gary Sturge:* Covid-19 from bats ...humph! Next thing you know they'll be blaming us again for Bird Flu.

*Renee Levesque:* It's not Corvid-19, it's Covid-19. You're fine!

There were two entries not Covid-related. One is from *Pam Handley:* Don't turn around but I think someone is watching us.

The other is from *Dick Tafel:* Seriously, you want me to let you eat first?

## This and That:

*Stephen O'Donnell* sent me a photo of this poor little Red-breasted Nuthatch (at right) with a mandible problem. Reminds me of two other birds, one Dick and I saw last winter, a Common Grackle, and my winter Chipping Sparrow of a couple of years ago. Both had the same problem as Stephen's nuthatch.

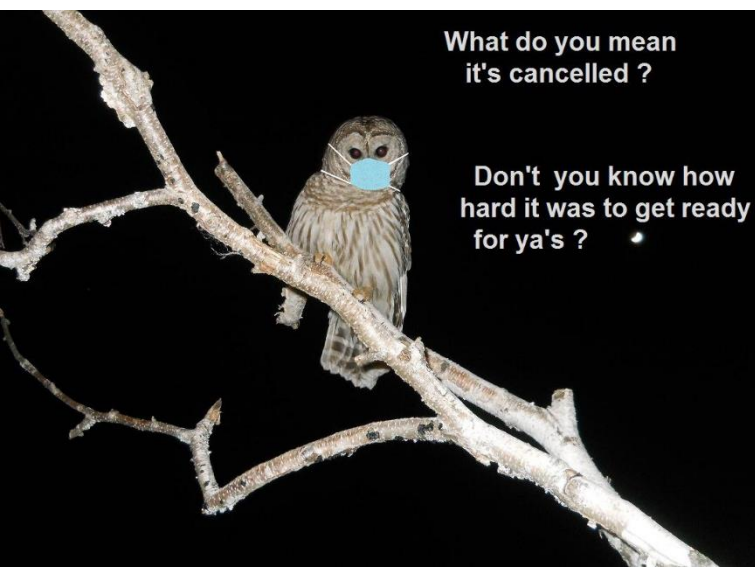
You may recall from a Bird Wing report last summer that *Steve Pitt's* robins insisted on making nests in his carport, resulting in



*Steve Pitt*

Common in these Covid days are bad hair days. Birds are no exception - witness this Pileated Woodpecker (right).

The Nocturnal Owl Survey was cancelled this April, and although many were disappointed, some kept their sense of humour as you can see from



*Ken Gowing's* depiction on his photo of Bart the Barred Owl (at left).



*John Levesque*

long white deposits on his car and Steve and his wife getting dive bombed every time they went into the carport once the young had reached their fledging stage. So to discourage the robins from nesting in the carport, Steve removed an old nest to an outside ledge, a ledge nicely protected by a roof overhang and put up a sign on the nest, one that is sure to attract a robin's attention.

I sent this social distancing poster (right) to all when I reminded everyone of March's Bird Bash, but wanted to get it into a report with all the other Covid-related information, so that years from now when others look back and read the reports, they will know just how tough it was for 2020 birders. Thanks to *Steve Pitt* for sending it to me.

### Links:

For those who want to sharpen their listening skills prior to the arrival of our beautiful wood warblers, Paul Smylie sent along this great refresher video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afJhWuqWhG4>. The first few warblers we don't commonly see here, but before long in the video, you will recognize those warblers we do see and hear in our area.



For a welcome change from listening to the news, Marc Buchanan and Pam Handley sent along this link to an opera performed by our feathered friends: <https://vimeo.com/243312820>. You can also listen to it on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ShakeUpMusic/>.

### Global Big Day:

For those who submit their bird sightings on eBird or for those wanting to/thinking about submitting their sightings on eBird, Global Big Day takes place on **Saturday, May 9**, International Migratory Bird Day.

“Global Big Day is an annual celebration of the birds around you, and this year is no different. While not everyone may be able to leave home to bird this year, Global Big Day is still an opportunity to check in with the birds in and around where you live.”

You can submit your observations from wherever you are that day and for as short or as long a period as you like.

This year, Global Big Day will focus on the number of checklists submitted. Last year there were 92,284 checklists submitted by 35,209 eBirders from 174 countries!

For more information, see: <https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-9-may-2020>

## **Birding at Home Challenge:**

Ontario Federation of Ornithologists (OFO) is holding a Birding at Home Challenge effective from **April 26 to May 31**. It is open to all, not just OFO members, and is an initiative that provides bird watchers with an opportunity to do their part by staying at home.

To participate, you must first register on the OFO website and then, for those who are not already on eBird, register your yard on eBird. You then record on eBird those birds you see from your yard, your balcony or your window.

Participants have a chance to win weekly prizes as well as grand prizes.

For more information and to register, go to: <http://www.ofo.ca/birdingathome/content/birding-at-home-overview>.

## **Bird Bash:**

The next Bird Bash will take place the last weekend of May, **May 30 and 31**.

## **Bird Wing Outing:**

Starting in May, we begin our Bird Wing outings. For the past three years or so, the May outing has taken place in Laurier Woods during the morning – a good time and place to find warblers. However, it is not likely one will take place this May as per provincial restrictions. However, if some members, by keeping their social distance, want to go to **Laurier Woods at any time of the day on Tuesday, May 26**, they could report to me what birds they saw there.

Perhaps by June 23, regular outings will be able to take place once again. We will have to see.