



Bird Wing  
Report  
April 2023

## Notices and Reminders

**Friends of Laurier Woods Bird Walks:** This coming **Saturday, May 6**, from 10:00 to noon, the annual Saturday morning Friends of Laurier Woods walks begin and continue through each Saturday morning until the end of the month. Dick Tafel will once again be leading these walks which are open to the public, although Bird Wing members can join in

and some usually do, helping Dick out if the group is large.

**Bird Wing Outing:** As of May and through to and including August, instead of meetings, Bird Wing will have outings. The outings tend to begin anywhere from 6:00 to 6:30 p.m. until dark. However, in May because Laurier Woods is such a good warbler location and May is the month most warblers arrive and are more easily seen and heard in the morning, this Bird Wing outing will take place in the **morning of May 23, starting at 10:00 a.m.** Meet in the Brule Street parking lot at Laurier Woods. Mark the date on your calendar, although a reminder will be sent.

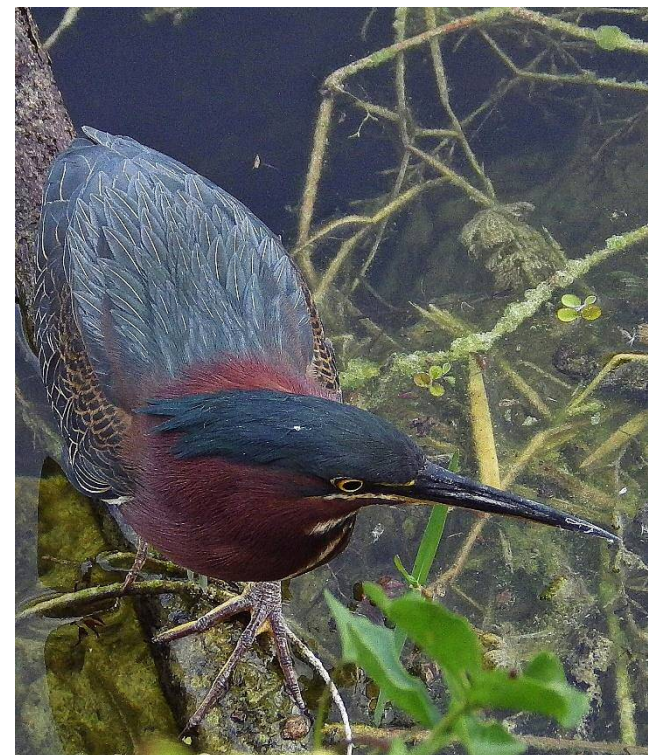
Last May on this outing, we saw, among many warblers, two Green Herons

(one seen at right), an American Bittern and a Sora! One other year, we saw a Black-crowned Night-Heron!

**Bird Bash:** Our May Bird Bash takes place on the **last weekend of May, May 27 and 28.** Except to see many more species, maybe the most of the year – to say nothing of blackflies! Mark the date on your calendar, although a reminder will be sent.



*A little birdie  
told me*



*Photos by Renee Levesque*

# A trip of a lifetime

## Part 3, From South Georgia Island to Antarctica

*By Renee Levesque; photos as indicated*

### Introduction

On Day 16 of Fred Pinto's odyssey, his reason for taking such an adventure in the first place is about to come true, worth all the effort and the planning and the time and the money. For on Day 16, Fred officially set foot on the Antarctic continent! I think the joy evident in his face in the photo below as he stands on top of the volcanic crater at Portal Point shows how much this journey has meant to him. I will now narrate Part 3 of Fred's journey from South Georgia Island to Antarctica based on his presentation at February's Bird Wing meeting, his itinerary and some online research. (Only those bird species not mentioned before in Parts 1 and 2 are highlighted.)



*Courtesy of Fred Pinto*

### From South Georgia Island to Antarctica

When we last left Fred, he and his fellow passengers aboard the *Hondius* were leaving South Georgia Island and heading southwest towards the South Orkney Islands and the Antarctic Peninsula. But the Southern Ocean was not welcoming with its “rolling swells and bow breaker waves.” Still, with the ship's stabilizing equipment and passengers with their sea sickness tablets and patches, the *Hondius* tracked further south, some passengers even on deck attempting to

identify the various prions flying close to the ship, and some seasick and highly unlikely on deck trying to identify birds. Fred reported that during this part of his journey he experienced the worst wind of the cruise. (Later he experienced worse on land in Tierra del Fuego where he said it felt for a couple of days as if he were constantly being hit in the face. He had never before experienced wind to that extent.)



Prions are small Antarctic seabirds found in the Southern Ocean where they breed on a number of sub-Antarctic islands. They have blue-grey upperparts and white underparts like the **Fairy Prion** at left. Other prions seen were the **Antarctic, the Blue and the Slender-billed**. With all of them looking so similar, they were not easy to identify. What were easier to identify were the **Snow Petrels** and Cape Petrels, the latter seen earlier in Fred's journey and mentioned in Part 2 of the narrative.

The Snow Petrel below is a small, entirely white bird, with coal-black eyes, a black bill, and blue-grey feet, often seen sitting on icebergs. It is only one of three birds seen at the South Pole, the other two being the Antarctic Petrel and the South Polar Skua.

*Photos by Lon Baurngardt*



As the ship tracked even further south, more and more icebergs came into view. But the wind continued and by nightfall, fog had descended, reducing visibility to a few hundred metres, leaving the crew to spend a long night navigating around the icebergs in dark and frigid conditions.

However, the *Hondius* continued on course towards the South Orkney Islands with magnificent tabular icebergs lining its approach. A tabular iceberg (below) is a large iceberg that has broken off from an ice shelf. Newly formed ones have vertical sides and flat tops, looking much like an ice plateau.



*Andrew Shiva*

The South Orkney Islands are named after the Orkney Islands in the north of Scotland. Britain and Argentina maintain bases on the islands, with the Argentine base, the oldest base, on Laurie Island, the second largest island, and the British base on Signy Island. Other than the personnel at each of these bases, there are no permanent inhabitants on the South Orkneys, comprised of four main islands, the two just mentioned, as well as Coronation Island, the largest of the islands, and Powell Island. There are three smaller islands and some inaccessible islands to the west that are considered part of the South Orkneys.

For Fred and the passengers, it must have been a wonderful experience seeing all the icebergs in different shapes and sizes, some even as big as the ship, and in their varying shades of blue and white, and in the distance, the snow-covered peaks of Laurie Island. And perhaps as wonderful

was seeing a single iceberg with three species of penguins on it, the Adelie, Chinstrap and Gentoo (photo below), to say nothing of seeing Humpback and Minke Whales.



Under current restrictions, ships cannot land at the Argentine base on Laurier Island, but as the *Hondius* passed by, passengers waved hello to the Argentine personnel.

The next day was a day at sea, a calm sea for a nice change, a day in which the ship cruised towards Elephant Island, an inhospitable island of ice and cliffs with steep slopes.

This is the island where Shackleton and his crew of 28 ended up after they lost their ship, *Endurance*, in 1915 in a pack of ice off the Weddell Sea. After months drifting on ice floes and crossing the open ocean in small lifeboats, the entire crew managed, despite very dim hopes, to reach Cape Valentine on Elephant Island. After two nights at Cape Valentine, they moved 11 km west to a small rocky spit they called Point Wild.

Knowing there was no chance of being rescued, Shackleton and some of his men, in a lifeboat, managed to get to South Georgia Island, 1300 km away. The rest of the crew stayed on Elephant



Photos from Wikipedia

Island, waiting for Shackleton to return with a rescue ship. (The photo at left of them setting off from Elephant Island was probably taken by the expedition's photographer, Frank Hurley.) Miraculously four and a half months later, Shackleton returned with a tug and rescued all his men, each and every one of them, all part of the original expedition. Just amazing!

As an aside, the *Endurance* (photo of it sinking at right, again probably taken by Frank Hurley) was discovered a year ago, on March 5, 2022, in the Weddell Sea at a depth of 9,869 feet and in remarkably good condition, with its name on the stern legible! No part of the wreck or contents were salvaged under the definition of a protected historic site. For more information, watch this short news report on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXZOckp6rEY>.

Because of mist and strong winds, the planned Zodiac cruise to Elephant Island had to be cancelled, but to compensate the *Hondius* anchored just in front of the island and passengers got a glimpse of Point Wild in the "mysterious misty hour of dusk." I trust they raised their cup of hot chocolate, whiskey or rum in honour of Sir Ernest Shackleton and his crew. They deserve as many raised cups as they can get!

The next day, with a strong wind picking up, the plan to land at Penguin Island, one of the smaller of the South Shetland Islands, was cancelled. The South Shetland Islands are a group of islands about 120 km from the Antarctic Peninsula. Penguin Island is an Important Birding Area (IBA) with its wide range of seabirds, including a large breeding colony of Southern Giant Petrels. Other birds nesting there include the Adelie and **Chinstrap Penguins**, Antarctic Terns and **Kelp Gulls**.



Andrew Shiva

The Kelp Gull (photo at left) resembles our Great Black-backed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, but it is a Southern gull, breeding on coasts and islands through much of the Southern Hemisphere. There are five sub-species of the Kelp Gull, and one of those sub-species, often called the Cape Gull, I saw in South Africa.

So with Penguin Island out of the question, it was onto Half Moon Island instead, another of the South Shetland Islands and also an IBA that supports a breeding colony

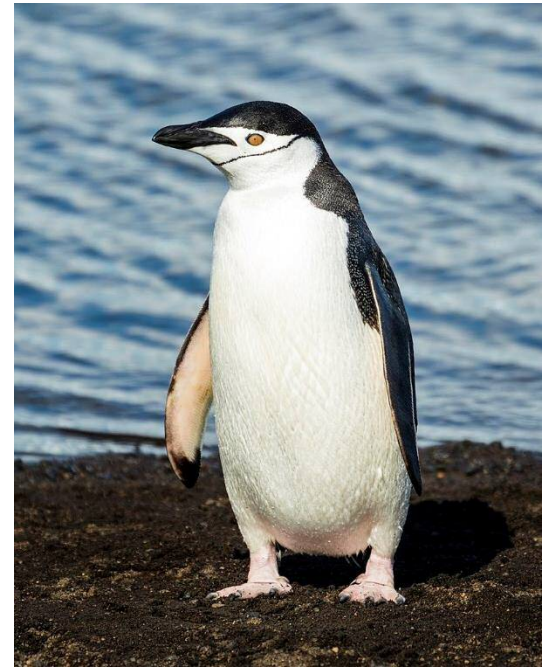
of South Polar Skuas, Chinstrap Penguins, Antarctic Terns, Kelp Gulls, Wilson's and Black-bellied Storm Petrels, Cape Petrels, Brown Skuas, Snowy Sheathbills and **Antarctic Shags**. Here too, various types of seal are seen along the beaches, with whales patrolling the shores. As the *Hondius* made its way south to this island, Fred and his fellow passengers were rewarded with sightings of Fin and Blue Whales! Considering there are only about 2,000 Blue Whales in the Southern Ocean, what a treat to see even one. But to see both these whales, the largest animals on earth, must have been amazing!

After taking the zodiacs to Half Moon Island, Fred and the others were entertained by their first view of the Chinstrap Penguins as they courted and built their nests. As you will see from the photo at right, the Chinstrap gets its name from the narrow black band just above its chin and this band combined with the Chinstrap's black cap, looks as if it is wearing a black helmet. Despite its cuteness, the Chinstrap is the most aggressive of all the penguin species.

Its nest is built with stones for its two eggs which are incubated by both the male and the female, each taking shifts of about 6 days. The chicks hatch after about 37 days and remain in the nest for 20 to 30 days before joining other chicks in a crèche. At around 50 to 60 days, they moult and gain their adult feathers. They are now ready to go to sea. And so life continues.

At sea, the Chinstrap's main predator is the Leopard Seal, and on land, the Brown Skua, the South Polar Skua and the Southern Giant Petrel, all three preying on the eggs and the young. Several Adelie Penguins were also spotted, with Fred and his fellow passengers getting a much better view of them than they did on South Georgia Island. Unfortunately, the weather quickly deteriorated and a hasty retreat was made to the *Hondius*!

After breakfast the next day, on Day 16 of the trip, Fred and passengers officially set foot on Antarctica, arriving at Portal Point, a narrow rocky point, on the Recluse Peninsula! Photo below, courtesy of Fred, shows passengers touring the area by Zodiac. (Because only 100 people



Andrew Shiva





are allowed on land at any one time, passengers take turns on land and on a Zodiac cruise.) It was a calm and sunny day, but the snow was deep and on land snowshoes were required. Some passengers had not ever had the need to snowshoe and required some practice, but we know this would not have been the case for Fred. There are some advantages to snowy winters here.

After the passengers became somewhat familiar with using snowshoes, they made their way up to Portal Point's peak using a marked route and were rewarded for their efforts by a spectacular, panorama view of the scenery below.



*Joseph W. Holliday, Wikipedia*

Fortunately, good weather continued and in the afternoon after an exciting morning, the ship and passengers arrived safely at Danco Island. It is a 2 km long island in the southern part of the Errera Channel. Again, Fred and the passengers donned snowshoes and made their way up Danco Hill on Penguin Highway. Halfway up this highway, they had a great view of a Gentoo Penguin colony, a colony of penguins that have absolute right of way, using their very own highway to slide down to the water.

At the top of the hill, another spectacular view (photo below) of snow-covered mountains, glaciers and icebergs and the Errera Channel. Later, some went for a polar plunge in the icy Antarctic, but the some did not include Fred. Can't blame him! Still, to be able to say you swam in Antarctic waters would be something.



*Fred Pinto*

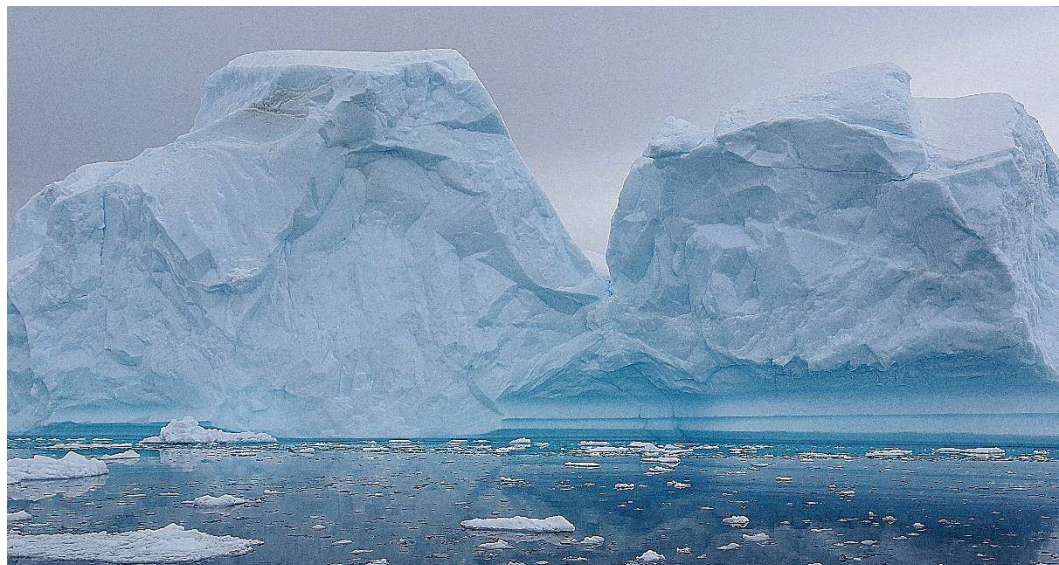
It was then on to Cuverville, a rocky island, 2 km by 2.5 km, in the Errera Channel and also another IBA with its breeding colony of about 6,500 Gentoo Penguins, as well as Southern Giant Petrels and Antarctic Shags. Because of strong wind gusts and lots of ice, it was not possible to land on Cuverville, but a Zodiac cruise despite the wind and the falling snow enabled Fred and other hardy passengers to explore a nearby bay where they watched Gentoo Penguins leaping in and out of the water. Towards the end of the cruise, they delightedly watched a Humpback Whale dive with its tail raised out of the water. (The two lobes of the whale's tail that are seen when the whale dives are called flukes. Humpback Whale flukes can be up to 18 feet wide.)



*Christopher Michel, Wikipedia*

In the continuing snow but in calm waters, the *Hondius* made its way to Almirante Brown Antarctic Base (or Brown Station) in Paradise Harbour, also known as Paradise Bay. (Photo above.) This is considered one of the most beautiful and pristine spots in Antarctica with its mountains and glaciers reflected in the calm harbour waters. Once the snow stopped and the sun came out through the clouds, the scenery was breathtaking, allowing passengers to take in the raw beauty of Antarctica with its varying shades of blue and white. As Charles Darwin wrote, "It is scarcely possible to imagine anything more beautiful than the beryl-like blue of these glaciers." The photo below was taken at Portal Point, but shows well what Darwin meant.

Brown Station was an Argentine research station named after Admiral William Brown, known as the father of the Argentine Navy although he was born in Ireland and grew up in the US. The base operated from 1951 to 1984 when it burned down. It was rebuilt and operated during the summer months until 2000



*Fred Pinto*

when it was abandoned. However, it has been operating sporadically in the summer months since 2007.

As the passengers made their way by Zodiac to their landing site, they spotted a Minke Whale and three species of seals - Leopard, Weddell and Crabeater - but because this is a bird report, the emphasis is on the Imperial or Antarctic Shags that were seen near the base carrying nesting materials.

An Imperial or Antarctic Shag (there are many sub-species) is a black and white cormorant, with a distinctive ring of blue skin around its eyes. It is also sometimes called a Blue-eyed Shag. It is a handsome cormorant as you can see by the photo at right.



Wikipedia

The last day in the Antarctica was at Cierva Cove, an icy wonderland known for its glacier calving – ice falling from the front of a glacier into the sea, creating icebergs of various shapes and sizes as well as brash ice. Unfortunately because of fog and snow, it was not a day to witness the icebergs in all their towering splendour. However, despite low visibility and a heavy swell, the Zodiacs with their passengers set off, and although not easy to spot wildlife, they saw Leopard Seals, Gentoo and Adelie Penguins, Antarctic Terns and a feeding group of Wilson’s Petrels.

The Antarctic Tern is a tern of the southern oceans and is found on small islands around Antarctica as well as on the shores of the mainland. It is very similar in appearance to the closely related Arctic Tern which is also found in the Antarctic. The Arctic Tern undertakes a very long migration, the longest of any animal in this world, of more than 70,000 km a year from the Arctic where it breeds to the Antarctic where the Antarctic Tern breeds. Therefore, when it is in the Antarctic, the Arctic Tern is in its non-breeding

plumage, while the Antarctic Tern is in its more colourful breeding plumage. That is the best way to tell the difference between the two, that is if you get to the Antarctic and see them.



The Antarctic Tern does not migrate after breeding, but usually remains close to its breeding islands all year round, although the more southern populations migrate slightly further north. Fred’s photo at left of the breeding Antarctic Tern was taken in South Georgia Island, hence the lack of snow.

Fred Pinto

I wish Fred's final day had been sunny for one last view of those magnificent icebergs, but he and his fellow passengers had a couple of other days to admire them and maybe it was quite special to be in a Zodiac surrounded by fog with icebergs and brash ice closing in and maybe hearing ice fall from the glaciers, giving their last Zodiac cruise a sort of ghostly flavour.

And so the passengers bid Antarctica goodbye as they make their return trip to Argentina. Most will probably not ever take the voyage again.

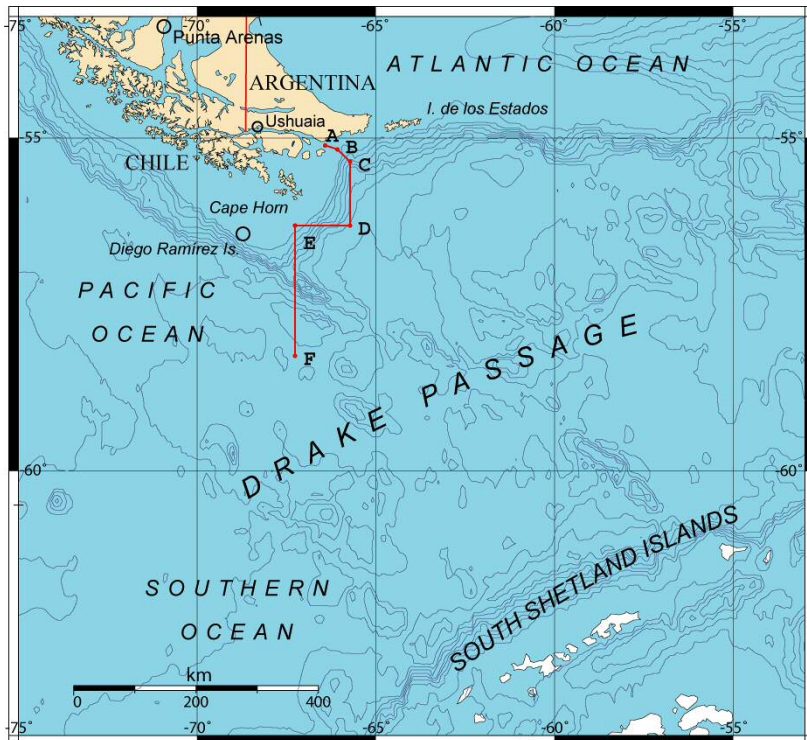
To return to Argentina, to the port of Ushuaia, the feared and treacherous Drake Passage, named after Sir Francis Drake, must first be navigated. Why is it so feared and treacherous? Because "currents at its latitude meet no resistance from any landmass", with waves at times topping 12 m or 40 feet. It is the body of water between Cape Horn, Chile and the South Shetland Islands that connects the southwestern part of the Atlantic Ocean with the southeastern part of the Pacific Ocean and into the Southern Ocean. See map at right. Before the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, the Drake Passage was an important trading route.

So with swells of 4 to 5 m and a consistent wind of 35 knots, sometimes gusting to 50 knots, the *Hondius* rolled along with waves breaking over its bows. Even with its stabilizing equipment and the availability seasickness pills and patches, some passengers must surely have been seasick yet again.

Thankfully during the last day of this remarkable voyage, the swells started to drop off to longer waves and, thus, a smoother voyage. Passengers on deck spotted the first signs of land, Tierra del Fuego and Cape Horn. And as the *Hondius* came once again onto the continental shelf, bird life exploded and new species were seen – **Northern Royal Albatross, Little Shearwater and Feugian Storm Petrel.**

In Part 1 of Fred's journey, I wrote about the Southern Royal Albatross that Fred saw. In 1998, the Northern was split from the closely related Southern, though not all scientists support that split and consider both species to be subspecies of the Royal Albatross. There are some physical differences between the two. The Southern is slightly larger and at sea shows white upper wings with black edges and tips, unlike the Northern's completely black upper wings.

Shearwaters are long-winged seabirds in the petrel family. They are called shearwaters because they dip from side to side on stiff wings with few wing beats, with their wings almost touching



the water. The Little Shearwater, as its name implies, is a small shearwater that is mainly sedentary, feeding further offshore than other shearwaters.

The Feugian Storm Petrel is the South American form of the Wilson's Storm Petrel which I also mentioned in Part 1 of Fred's journey. It is very identical to the Wilson's but smaller and with a narrow whitish stripe on its underwing coverts.



*Wikipedia*

With three new species and now through the Drake Passage, Fred and crew, on the last leg of their journey, entered the Beagle Channel (photo above), a strait in the Tierra del Fuego Archipelago on the extreme southern tip of South America between Chile and Argentina. It was named after the HMS *Beagle*, the ship on which Charles Darwin travelled as an amateur naturalist.

After the Captain's farewell cocktail party, followed by a slide show of the last 20 days and a final special dinner, early the next morning the *Hondius* reached its final port at Ushuaia, 1,100 km from the Antarctic Peninsula and one of five internationally recognized Antarctic gateway cities. It is the capital of Argentina's Tierra del Fuego and the world's most southern city with a population of about 80,000. (Photo of Ushuaia at right.)



*Lon Baurgardt*

Tierra del Fuego 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. Fred did some birding on Tierra del Fuego after his trip and some birding in Patagonia before his trip, but that is for another time.

It was a remarkable journey Fred took, and Dick Tafel before him 23 years ago in 2000. They are to my knowledge the only two Bird Wing members to have travelled to this very remote and sometimes inhospitable area of the world, a world with amazing scenery and wildlife, a world so different from our own, a world many of us will never see, a sea journey of 3,795 nautical miles (4,367.208 miles) from start to finish.

## Birds seen during April

This report would never get done if I listed all the birds mentioned at our first in-person meeting of the year held in the Board Room of the North Bay Public Library. Therefore, I will concentrate mainly on the migrants, starting with two rare ducks for our area, the female Canvasback and the male Ruddy Duck, first spotted by Grant McKercher and later seen by Renee Levesque and Dick Tafel, who was not able to attend, a very rare event indeed, except by photo that I passed around of him and Elsa on their trip to the Antarctica 23 years ago. April McCrum saw the Canvasback, but unfortunately not the Ruddy, a duck with which she is very familiar from her time working with birds in the prairies where they breed in dense vegetation of freshwater marshes and ponds.

The male Ruddy (seen at right) is very outstanding with its broad bright blue bill and two distinct white cheek patches. The Canvasback, also heading for the prairies, is a large, rather distinguished looking duck, the female with pale grayish brown upperparts, a brown chest and a pale rusty head and neck. It is recognizable among the many other ducks because of its length and long sloping head. It breeds in prairie marshes and subarctic river deltas.



*Dick Daniels, Wikipedia*

While standing at his window overlooking Callander Bay, Grant also happened upon three White-winged Scoters as they flew by his house, on their way north. Talk about luck! We don't often get to see these scoters except in the fall on their migration south.



*Grant McKercher*

The other duck that is of interest because we don't see it during the summer months was the Northern Pintail (photo at left) on its way north. Dick and I saw at least 40 in a flooded field on Rainville Road by the Elk Farm in West Nipissing, and Brittany Tartaglia saw as many in flight over Verner Lagoon on the same day. The Northern Pintail, a slender and elegant-looking duck with a long tail and long neck with a white stripe, is one of my favourite ducks.



**Garry Waldram**

Gadwall, Bufflehead, Wood Ducks (photo at left), Northern Shoveler and American Wigeon have returned and were seen by some, and Ring-necked Ducks and Lesser Scaup were out in full force, especially the Ringnecks which were seen by almost all members. Many also saw Green-winged Teal and a few, Blue-winged Teal,

including Garry Waldram, Grant, Renee, Lori Anderson and others. And, of course, more and more Hooded and Common Mergansers and Common Goldeneye have returned and were seen by most of us, including Dale Duncan who saw the Common Merganser and the Bufflehead in Sechelt, on the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia – as well as the Anna’s Hummingbird. (Because Dick wasn’t at the meeting, Dale had permission to mention whatever two birds she wanted no matter where she saw them – but only two, even though she got away with three!)

During most of April, ducks were seen in the lagoons and in flooded fields, as well as in any open water on Lake Nipissing and other lakes, Cache Bay in particular.

The only shorebirds seen and mentioned at the meeting were Greater Yellowlegs (photo below) seen by Lori, Garry, Grant, Dick, Renee and others, and Killdeer seen by Grant, Dick, Garry, Renee and others. Lori reported at least 25 Greater Yellowlegs in a flooded field at her farm, and Dick and I saw about the same number, if not more, in the flooded field on Rainville Road.



**Stephen O'Donnell**

Nice to have the Common Loons back. Birds Canada would like your help in keeping track of breeding loons this summer by visiting your lake at least three times – once in June to see if the loons are on territory; once in July to see if the chicks were hatched; and once in August to see if the chicks survived long enough to fledge. For more information see:

<https://www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/canadian-lakes-loon-survey>. **If you do decide to take part in this Canadian Lakes Loon Survey, please let me know.**

I saw a Pied-billed Grebe (photo at right) in South River and others saw one in Laurier Woods. No doubt there will be some seen or heard soon in their regular spot in Cache Bay. (Called pied because of its two-coloured bill.) I also saw a Red-necked Grebe in Cache Bay, boathouse side, as did Dick and April.



The Double-crested Cormorants were also back and seen by many of us, including Linda Stoner, Brittany and others. Curtis Irish, whom we haven't seen in a while because of Zoom meetings, saw Ring-billed Gulls, gulls all of us, but Faye Oie, had seen. (One day soon, Faye, the cast on your broken foot will be removed and you will be able to walk with ease!)

However, Faye saw Herring Gulls which most of us had also seen. But a gull not often seen and yet seen by Linda, Lori and me was a Lesser Black-backed Gull. Lori saw a juvenile at her farm and Linda and I saw an adult at Verner Lagoon. All three of us almost passed it over until we looked more closely and saw it was not a Ring-billed or a Herring. Taught us to always look carefully!



Curtis also saw Canada Geese, as have the rest of us. For a while there were at least 400 if not more holed up in Cache Bay waiting for the ice to give way.

And then there were the lovely Trumpeter Swans. Linda and I saw 6 of them on the ice at Cache Bay when there was just a small amount of open water. They were courting and preening and some did three fly-by circles over our heads. It was actually quite lovely. They have continued to be seen at Cache Bay, but were further out once the bay opened. I also saw an immature in South River with a yellow tag number Y53, at left.

Bev Kingdon, our sometimes local Swan Lady, was honoured at LaSalle Park on April 29 for her work in



helping bring the Trumpeters back from extirpation. More on this in the next Bird Wing Report.

The Grand ole Osprey are back! Ken Gowing and others saw them in their nest at the Lakeshore exit off Hwy 11 S. Their nest got destroyed somehow last year and we were wondering if they would return and rebuild. Well, they did. Grant saw them carrying twigs to rebuild it. The Cache Bay Ospreys are also back at the ballpark. A pair is also back on Hwy 11 N near the former beer sign close to the Lake Nobsbonging exit. They were spotted in their nest by Stephen O'Donnell on April 28. Still to be checked are the other local regular Osprey nests, one on Poirier Road near Lavigne and one on the Sturgeon River. Bill Fleming reported a new nest on top of a transmission tower on Pine Road near Waltonian Drive. This is the first he has seen a nest there, the first I believe any of us have seen a nest there. (A couple of days after the meeting, I checked out the nest and sure enough, there was an Osprey sitting in it! Great location in terms of height and distance to Lake Nipissing.)

Bald Eagles were once again seen at many locations by many of us, including the pair nesting in Callander. I used a photo by Garry in March's report to show they were back despite the construction that was going on last fall. For trivia lovers or if you hope to be on Jeopardy one day, here is something you should know: Hundreds of years ago, the English word for white was balde and the word piebalde meant mottled with white, so the eagles with white heads were called Balde Eagles.

But the most exciting raptor reported at the meeting was the Peregrine Falcon (photo at right) seen by Garry near his place in Rutherglen and by Lori on our meeting day near her house. I think it has forsaken the Cathedral, its winter spot until this past winter, to haunt farmers' fields. It was a lifer for Garry.

Some have seen the Rough-legged, Red-tailed, and Broad-winged Hawks, the latter seen by Angela Mills, Renee and Dick. Northern Harriers seem to be everywhere and seen by most. Some have seen the Merlin and everyone has surely seen the American Kestrel, a raptor that seemingly abounds this spring. The most interesting sighting of the kestrel was by Grant who saw a pair at the kestrel nest box on Cranberry Road, a nest box built and put up by Stephen a few years back. He also put one up on Purdon Line and

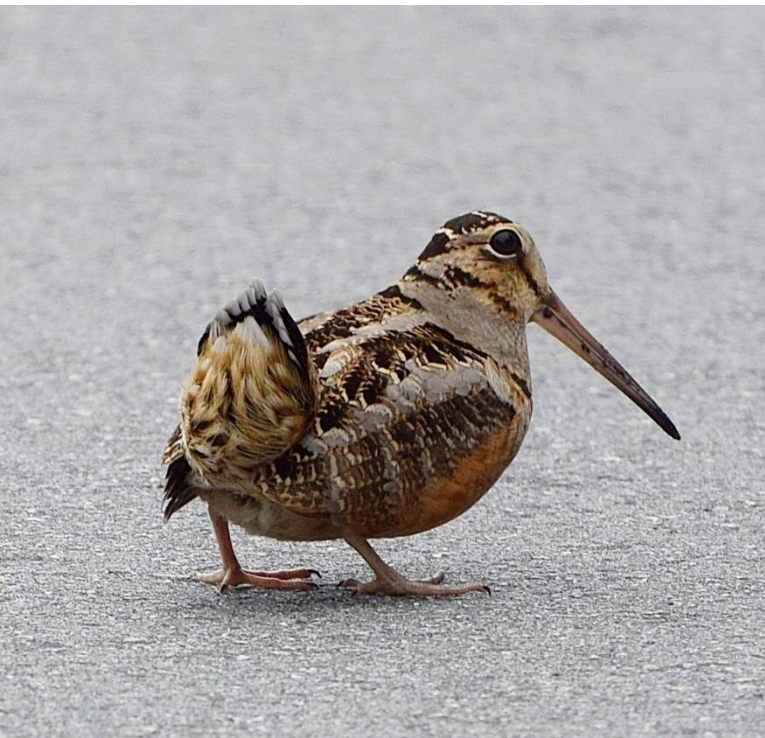


Garry Waldram

last time I was on Purdon Line there were three American Kestrels on this road, so perhaps a pair is making use of the nest box. **A photo of the American Kestrel graces this month's cover, a great photo of the male by Stephen.**

Sandhill Cranes have arrived and were seen by Angela and many other members, and if not seen, certainly heard!

Dick asked me to report that he saw a Pheasant, probably thinking he would be the only to have seen one. But no, Dick! Rick Tripp had one in his yard a few days before you saw yours on MacPherson Drive.



*Renee Levesque*

The American Woodcock (photo at left) is here *peenting* and doing its aerial dance in its attempt to attract a mate. You can hear and see it in the evening at Laurier Woods, in the Brule Street parking lot where Fred Pinto recently saw it. And a couple are back on Cedar Heights Road.

It has been a spring for Dark-eye Juncos, so many everywhere, as reported by Carol Fleming and others. And many American Tree Sparrows too, some of them already getting their more intensive breeding colours and some of them singing quite constantly. For Faye, this sparrow is a lifer, as is the Fox Sparrow that she also saw at her South River residence. The Fox is a handsome sparrow, with a lovely song, stopping over briefly on its way north.

Faye mentioned how one of the juncos in her yard kept puffing itself up and the next day, Shirley

McKercher noticed the same behavior at hers and Grant's home. Grant was able to get a couple of photos of it puffing itself up. I emailed Ron Pittaway and asked him about this behavior in juncos. He informed me that he believes the juncos are perhaps sick because they exhibit the same behavior as American Goldfinches and House Finches when they are sick.

Other sparrows seen were the Chipping, the Savannah, the Swamp, the Song and the White-throat. (No White-crowned Sparrows were yet reported.) Fred talked about the White-throats having four sexes whereby the white morph male mates with the tan morph female, and the white morph female mates with the tan morph male. This report is long enough, so more on this in the next report.

Garry and Faye were not the only members to see a lifer. Linda saw a lifer too, a Golden-crowned Kinglet at Sweetman's Gardens. They are around and have been seen by others, as has the lovely singer, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet (photo below), seen in Laurier Woods and elsewhere.



*Photos by Stephen O'Donnell*

Purple Finches were showing up in some numbers, and were seen by Sue Gratton and others. The male adds a dash of bright colour, as does the brilliant yellow of the male American Goldfinch, now in its breeding colours and mentioned by Rick. Both looked especially outstanding, colour-wise that is, among the many Dark-eyed Juncos, American Trees and other sparrows. The Purple Finches are wonderful singers, the male singing a rich, bubbling song. However, not to be outdone, the female will later sing her own song from the nest. It is a long, warbling 1 to 2 minute song!

Brown Creepers have been spotted in Laurier Woods, but I don't think many have seen them yet. And some have heard, if not seen, another wonderful singer, the Winter Wren (seen at right), a small stubby-tailed bird with a varied, vigorous song lasting several seconds. Denise Desmarais heard it frequently at her Cache Lake cottage and April heard it on the Nipissing/Canadore trails.

Sue also heard the lovely Blue-headed Vireo with its white spectacles. It is our first vireo to return. They have recently been reported on



eBird in Algonquin Park, and about a week after the meeting, I heard and saw one in my yard.

Rick continued to see his pair of Northern Cardinals in his yard and in his Callander area. He is determined this year to get breeding evidence – building their nest, carrying food or even finding the nest. Good luck, Rick, we are all counting on you!

The two spring woodpeckers that have returned are the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (at right), seen by Sue, and the Northern Flicker, seen by newcomer Greg Shunk. Both have been seen by most.

Lori had many Eastern Meadowlarks at her farm, although she was the only one at the meeting to have heard or seen them.

In the thrush family, we all had seen the American Robin and some had seen the Hermit Thrush. A robin is nesting in the spruce tree in my front yard. Unfortunately, the male thinks there is another male around because it is seeing its reflection in one of our dining room windows, just around the corner from the nesting tree, and was attacking the window. We hung up various deterrents on the outside of the panes, but to no avail, so now we keep the shutters shut tight and that has stopped it.



Tree Swallows (photo at left) have arrived. I saw a few at Cache Bay, but most in South River occupying Keith Thornborrow's nest boxes. I saw them on one of those three very warm days around Easter, but knew that one swallow does not a summer make – or 30 as was the case that day – and that the weather was bound to change and become cool and rainy, as it certainly did.

Lori had a Brown Thrasher at her farm. One had been at Mary Young's place off Centennial Road all winter and was reported on the Christmas Bird Count. Can hardly wait to hear it sing.

Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds have become very common and were seen by all, but not everyone had seen the Rusty Blackbird, although you may have heard its not-so-beautiful song, a song that sounds like the creak of rusty hinges. If you missed it this spring, you may see it in the fall in its more obvious rusty colors. Cowbirds have also returned and Dick and I recently saw three at the Elk Farm on Rainville Road, just the place you would expect them to be. I don't think they distinguish much between cows and elks or even horses and every time I see one, I think back to 2017 when one spent the winter on the back of Santana, the horse, at a farm on Wasi Road.

And finally warblers – some have seen the Yellow-rumped, like Kevin Telford, and the Pine Warbler (photo below), like Dick. In early spring, the Pine tends to make use of feeders and suet, giving us a good view of it. From *All About Birds*: When Yellow-rumped Warblers forage with other warblers, they tend to let Palm, Magnolia and Black-throated Green Warblers do as they wish. But when it comes to Pine and Blackburnian Warblers, they assert themselves!



*Kevan Cowcill*

Can hardly wait for more warblers to arrive, although it can become dizzying when they all arrive together and you no sooner spot one when another appears - a fun and challenging birding time!

- *Renee Levesque*

## Seeds and Cones

**Spring Migrants:** As is the case every spring, the birding world explodes and excitement among the birders begins. At first, we are excited to see an American Robin and a Red-winged Blackbird, both heralding the arrival of spring, until we say “just another robin” and until we almost completely ignore the redwings. Speaking of both, I like the message in Stephen O’Donnell’s photo below. In its humorous way, it shows how in the urgency of springtime one bird doesn’t always respect the other’s boundary.



Robins get their due much more than redwings, but here is a beautiful quote highlighting the redwings from John Steinbeck’s novella, *The Red Pony*: “On the fences the shiny blackbirds with red epaulets clicked their dry call. The meadowlarks sang like water, and the wild doves, concealed among the bursting leaves of the oaks, made a sound of restrained grieving.” Obviously spring was more advanced than here when Steinbeck wrote this, but it won’t be long now – I hope.

Our first in-person meeting of the year was quite an interesting and entertaining one with the many members present seeing well beyond their two birds as was to be expected during our busy migration season, and with Sue Gratton, member, presenting a slide show on the Birds of Cozumel. Sue will be writing a report based on her presentation for one of the summer reports.

**Forest Bird Monitoring Program:** Bird Wing member Angela Mills, and our new Treasurer, was one of the co-authors of a paper on species found in Tiffin Conservation Area, situated between Barrie and Angus. Sixty-four species were detected during the period from 2005 to 2018, four of which were species at risk – Canada Warbler, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Red-shouldered Hawk and Wood Thrush. For detailed information on the species Angela and co-authors detected and their conclusions and recommendations, see:

[https://www.nvca.on.ca/Shared%20Documents/Tiffin\\_Forest\\_Bird\\_Monitoring\\_Report\\_2018.pdf](https://www.nvca.on.ca/Shared%20Documents/Tiffin_Forest_Bird_Monitoring_Report_2018.pdf)

For more information on Tiffin Conservation Area and its network of trails, see: <https://www.nvca.on.ca/tiffin-centre>. Looks like a great place for a birding hike!

**Woodpeckers, The Hole Story:** After reading the article based on the video we watched at March's meeting, *Woodpeckers, The Hole Story*, Ed Rawley, sent me two photos of a hole made this spring by a Pileated Woodpecker on his and Katherine Byers' property on Birchgrove Road West where Bird Wingers had an outing last July. The photo on the left is dated March 19, and the one on the right, April 6.



**Project FeederWatch:** Project FeederWatch ended on April 30, which means April 29 was the last day for your two-day count. Usually I wonder where the time went, but this feeder watch year, the winter seemed endless. If you haven't submitted all your sightings, make sure you get them in as soon as possible after the season ends.

I found this piece of news from Project FeederWatch very interesting: "A team of researchers from Project FeederWatch, Virginia Tech, University of Georgia, and the Ohio State University received a grant from the National Science Foundation in the United States to investigate human-wildlife interactions through bird feeding." The regular birds that stay with me all winter become sort of like pets. They know me and I know them and I wonder if some survived a

blustery and cold night. This winter I waited patiently each morning to see two American Tree Sparrows that stayed with me all winter. For a period of time this March and April when there were at least 30 American Trees in my yard, I wondered if “my” two were among them.



**Breeding Bird Atlas-3:** On a rainy and coolish morning on April 22, a crowd of 13 gathered in the Brule Street parking lot of Laurier Woods to hear Grant McKercher explain the ins and outs of the Breeding Bird Atlas-3, now starting its third year, followed by a walk in Laurier Woods. Garry Waldram emailed me after the walk to tell me it was nice meeting members in person, members he had seen on Zoom but as a new member had not met before. He also mentioned he saw in Laurier Woods another lifer, the American Wigeon, one of the joys of being a relatively new birder. Kaye Edmonds sent me the photo above of some of the group and below is a message from birdsontario.org.

- *Renee Levesque*

**BIRDING?**

All your sightings are valuable!

Share them with the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3 project!

birdsontario.org

Atlas des oiseaux nicheurs Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas