The Blue Bill

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Cover photo: White-breasted Nuthatch looking for a handout. (Peter Waycik)



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1 Kingston and Area Christmas Bird Counts

by Kathy Webb

Table 1. Overall statistics for the Kingston area 2025 Christinas bird Counts													
	ONKG	ONNA	ONWE	ONTI	ONPE	ONAI	ONDE	ONGQ	ONFR	ONMS			
	17-Dec	27-Dec	15-Dec	21-Dec	16-Dec	29-Dec	20-Dec	14-Dec	16-Dec	02-Jan			
Species	84	58	50	61	60	59	54	66	55	38			
Count week species	9	7	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	0			
Birds	37325	10588	5535	11773	8506	4496	5314	12885	4017	2522			
Participants: field + feeder	62 + 79	16 + 5	18 + 14	23 + 6	22 + 1	41 + 4	14 + 0	18 + 5	41 + 7	15 + 1			
Low °C	2	4	5	-7	2	3	-2	-6	0	-3			
High °C	8	6	11	-1	4	5	3	4	7	0			
Wind, km/hr	24-50	3-15	25-40	8-12	5-20	0.5-5	5-14	5-40	6-17	15-30			
Snow depth, cm	0	0	0	2-4	0	0	1	0	0	0			
Rain/Snow	None	Light rain	None	None	None	Light rain	None	None	None	None			
Sun/Cloud	Cloudy	Cloudy	Clear	Partly clear	Partly cloudy	Cloudy	Cloudy	Partly cloudy	Clear	Cloudy			
Still water	Partly frozen	Partly frozen	Open	Partly frozen	Open	Open	Partly frozen	Partly frozen	Partly frozen	Partly open			
Moving water	Open	Open	Partly frozen	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Partly open			

Table 1: Overall statistics for the Kingston area 2023 Christmas Bird Counts

Note: ONKG (Kingston), ONNA (Napanee), ONWE (Westport), ONTI (Thousand Islands), ONPE (Prince Edward Point), ONAI (Amherst Island), ONDE (Delta), ONGQ (Gananoque), ONFR (Frontenac), ONMS (Moscow)

The 124th Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) took place between December 14, 2023 and January 5, 2024 (https: //www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/christmas-bird-c ount/). Each CBC takes place on a single day within this time frame in a fixed 24 km diameter circle; there are ten CBC circles located within the KFN's 50 km birding circle.

The Kingston count typically falls on the first Sunday of the count period: the recent count took place on Sunday, December 17 and the next count will take place on Sunday, December 15, 2024. Kingston's first CBC was held in 1948 and has taken place every year since, except 2007 when it was cancelled due to bad weather. Other CBCs later established within the KFN's birding area include: Napanee (1962), Westport (1964), Moscow (1964, not run 1994-2015), Thousand Islands (1974), Prince Edward Point (1977), Amherst Island (1990), Delta (2000), Gananoque (2014) and Frontenac (2015). Thank you to the compilers of this year's local counts: Kathy Webb, Kingston (ONKG); Kurt Hennige, Napanee (ONNA) and Gananoque (ONGQ); Wendy Briggs-Jude, Westport (ONWE); Chris Ellingwood, Moscow (ONMS); Josh Van Wieren, Thousand Islands (ONTI); Dale Smith, Prince Edward Point (ONPE); Janet Scott and Bonnie Livingstone, Amherst Island (ONAI); Jim Thompson, Delta (ONDE); and Carolyn Bonta and Michael Johnson, Frontenac (ONFR). The efforts of everyone involved in the local counts are greatly appreciated.

Field surveys start with some early morning owling and often continue through until dusk, while feeder watchers spend variable amounts of time watching their yards/feeders during the day. This year, a total of 272 birders in the field and 122 feeder-watchers took part in the ten counts summarized within the KFN birding area. They contributed a cumulative total of 838 hours of birding, drove almost 3700 km and walked 377 km to tally 102 961 birds and 106 species. **Table 1** shows some statistics for the ten counts held within our area. Participation was highest for the Kingston, Amherst Island and Frontenac circles. Seventy-nine back-yard feeder watchers took part in the Kingston CBC this year-this count has had record numbers of feeder watchers in Ontario for several years now! Temperatures were generally warmer than usual and ran above zero for most of the counts. There was a general lack of precipitation except for some light rain experienced during the Napanee and Amherst Island counts, and there was little or no snow on the ground for the entire CBC season. Large or moving bodies of water were only partly frozen.

Table 2 provides species counts and averages over the last 20 years. On average across counts, the number of species seen this year was slightly above the average over the previous 20 years. Although the number of species seen in some counts was below average (Kingston, Prince Edward Point), several counts fared significantly better than in past years (Delta, Frontenac, Gananoque, Westport).

Table 3 contains a breakdown of species for each count as taken from the Audubon website (https://netapp.audub on.org/cbcobservation/). The abbreviation 'CW' indicates a species seen during 'count week,' consisting of the three days before and after the actual count day. This year, the combined total number of species across all counts within the KFN birding area was 106 species with an additional six count week species. This illustrates the great diversity of species that can be found during the winter in this area. As noted below, each count had highlights to report.

Kingston CBC

The number of species and the total number of birds seen in the large Kingston count were significantly below the 20 year averages of 95 and 45 635, respectively (**Figure 3**). This count had no new species on count day but did manage to record one during count week–Fish Crows have been seen regularly in downtown Kingston since taking up residence in early 2022. Although the large number of feeder watchers didn't add any additional species to the field list on count day this year, two participants managed to add count week species: a Pine Siskin visiting a bird bath and a Northern Mockingbird visiting a back yard. Similar to the past few years, the large number of feeder watchers resulted in the maintenance of good numbers for the bird species that come to feeders. Notable finds on count day included: Snow Goose, Cackling Goose, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Snowy Owl, Short-eared Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Hermit Thrush and Swamp Sparrow. Notable count week species included a Northern Mockingbird, a Chipping Sparrow and an Eastern Towhee.



Figure 1: Ruddy Duck. (Phil Harvey)

Napanee CBC

This was an average year for the Napanee count but several notable species were found: Cackling Goose, Great Blue Heron, Killdeer (CW), Iceland Gull (CW). Despite taking place on a somewhat dreary day, high counts were achieved for several species: Wild Turkey, Northern Flicker, Common Raven and Eastern Bluebird.

Westport CBC

The Westport count did well this year by tallying six species more than their 20 year average. One of their count highlights was the sighting of two Sandhill Cranes. The majority of Trumpeter Swans in the KFN birding area came from the Wesport CBC with a count of 196. Westport also boasted a high count of 25 for Red Crossbills across our area.

Thousand Islands CBC

The number of species seen in this count was fairly similar to what it has been over the past few years but they did manage to count a greater total number of birds. Notable count day species included: Northern Pintail, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Carolina Wren, Field Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow and Common Redpoll.

Prince Edward Point CBC

Despite the good weather, the number of species and total number of birds counted were well below the average. The markedly reduced number of Long-tailed Ducks and Greater Scaup contributed to the latter. Notable species tallied in this count included: Turkey Vulture, Double-crested Cormorant, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Gray Catbird, Chipping Sparrow (CW).

Amherst Island CBC

The Amherst Island count is always popular, not only because of the unique location and potential to see great birds but also because of the provision of nourishment–this year they kindly supplied beverages, chili and soup to participants. Notable species included: Horned Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Long-eared Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Mockingbird and Swamp Sparrow.

Delta CBC

The Delta count did very well this year and found 12 species more than their 20 year average. They also had a greater number of individual birds than in recent years. Notable finds included: White-winged Scoter, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Carolina Wren.

Gananoque CBC

The Gananoque count also did well this year and tallied seven species more than their 12 year average. Notable finds within this circle included: Cackling Goose, Greenwinged Teal, Double-crested Cormorant, Peregrine Falcon, Tufted Titmouse (a high count of five), Winter Wren, Carolina Wren, Hermit Thrush and Fox Sparrow.

Frontenac CBC

The Frontenac CBC tied their record for the most species seen since they started in 2015. Since a large portion of this circle is forested, it's not surprising that they had an abundance of birds such as White-breasted Nuthatches, Blackcapped Chickadees and Brown Creepers. Notable species found on their count day included a Great Blue Heron, a Peregrine Falcon and three Red-headed Woodpeckers. Also of note, Wintergreen Studios took part this year and introduced an additional ten participants to the count. The Frontenac count will be celebrating its 10th Anniversary in the next CBC season, so be sure to join the fun on Saturday, December 14, 2024.

Moscow CBC

This was a fairly average year for the Moscow count and nothing out of the ordinary was found. Despite being one of the smaller counts, they had a respectable showing of American Robins and the highest number of Cedar Waxwings across all of our local counts.



Figure 2: Chipping Sparrow. (Meghan Hatch)

Continuing high counts common to a few CBCs were found for Mute Swans (**Figure 4**), Bald Eagles, American Crows, Common Ravens, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Blue Jays and Northern Cardinals. Similar to the trend noted across North America in the past few decades (The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966–2019), a marked decline in the number of House Sparrows has taken place in our area; this year the Kingston count reported the lowest number since 1948 (**Figure 5**).

Species that typically migrate to our area in time for the Christmas count either did not appear, or appeared in very small numbers. This includes the winter finches, birds such as Snow Bunting, Lapland Longspur and Horned Lark, and Snowy Owls. This may be due to the mild weather leading up to the Christmas count season.

Amherst and Wolfe Islands are well known for their owl and hawk populations, however, sightings of owls were few and far between this year. Wolfe Island produced the only Snowy Owl of the count season, while the Amherst Island count had the only Long-eared Owl and a couple of Northern Sawwhet Owls. Short-eared Owls were seen on both Wolfe and Amherst Islands. As usual, most Rough-legged Hawk sightings came from the islands.

This year's Winter Finch Forecast (https://finchnetwork.o rg/winter-finch-forecast-2023-2024) suggested that this was going to be a flight (irruption) year for some species of winter finches. Although we saw a record number of Red Crossbills in Kingston and a good number in the more northern Westport and Frontenac counts, some of these now seem to be staying closer to our area to breed throughout the year. There were very few Purple Finches, Pine Siskins or Redpolls, and no Grosbeaks were seen in the area. As predicted, very few Red-breasted Nuthatches were seen this year as they seem to be staying close to their boreal forest homes further north where the cone crops are good.

Further information regarding count dates and locations can be found on the Birds Canada website (http://www.birdsc anada.org/volunteer/cbc/).

To view or download current or historical results from any location, please visit the Audubon website (http://netapp.a udubon.org/cbcobservation/).

Year	ONKG	ONNA	ONWE	ONTI	ONPE	ONAI	ONDE	ONGQ	ONFR	ONMS
2003	103	51	*	61	82	53	38	-	-	-
2004	104	58	*	57	71	36	43	-	-	-
2005	103	50	*	60	76	64	38	-	-	-
2006	104	56	52	64	71	54	48	-	-	-
2007	*	51	34	60	65	54	40	-	-	-
2008	106	57	36	55	63	57	42	-	-	-
2009	101	60	33	50	55	56	42	-	-	-
2010	102	59	37	63	55	57	40	-	-	-
2011	106	59	51	54	69	69	38	-	-	-
2012	108	58	47	55	70	61	44	-	-	-
2013	96	51	39	55	63	54	41	-	-	-
2014	104	66	42	55	74	74	41	56	-	-
2015	84	66	44	59	61	51	46	63	37	-
2016	96	59	39	64	64	50	44	74	37	36
2017	82	60	55	63	80	53	41	51	49	40
2018	86	53	52	63	69	63	36	55	49	*
2019	69	59	42	56	51	54	38	53	38	37
2020	79	65	44	66	63	63	47	66	55	36
2021	89	66	48	60	57	57	43	63	50	37
2022	84	74	50	62	65	55	49	51	45	45
2023	84	58	50	61	60	59	54	66	55	38
20-yr avg	95	59	44	59	66	57	42	59	45	39

Table 2: The number of species found since 2003, with the average over the previous 20 years

Note: * = count not held

	ONKG	ONNA	ONWE	ONTI	ONPE	ONAI	ONDE	ONGQ	ONFR	ONMS	TO- TAL
Snow Goose	1										1
Cackling Goose	1	1						1			3
Canada Goose	14473	4487	706	6312	2390	1226	1222	4739	533	447	36535
Mute Swan	1261	67	3	280	223	59	9	133	5	4	2044
Trumpeter Swan	10		196	83			22	22	57		390
Tundra Swan	463	200		177	216	6	4	58			1124
Tundra/Trumpeter Swan	1										1
swan sp.	8				93						101
Gadwall	213										213
American Wigeon	90										90
American Black Duck	510	14		9	12	17		20	4		586
Mallard	1973	375	84	871	329	72	82	697	43		4526
Northern Shoveler	4										4
Northern Pintail	11	CW		3		1					15
Green-winged Teal	6							1			7
Redhead	21	3			32						56
Ring-necked Duck	262			2			6				270
Greater Scaup	2065	2			1040	17	1				3125
Lesser Scaup				441				11			452
Greater/Lesser Scaup	250	40		1			2	25			318
Aytha sp.	1200										1200
White-winged Scoter	CW				37		1				38
Long-tailed Duck	209	8		1	1434	36	2				1690
Bufflehead	259	11	167	2	272	131		188	1		1031
Common Goldeneye	942	134	142	43	429	923	2	46	12		2673
Hooded Merganser	244	7	24	13	9	2	81	13	28		421
Common Merganser	620	414	2590	244		25	962	1470	706	4	7035
Red-breasted Merganser	771	46	11	60	150	135	3	140	36		1352
merganser sp.	7			5							12
Ruddy Duck	1										1
duck sp.	150	25		151	304	4	4	300	15		953
Ruffed Grouse	1	1	4		1		1	2	5	3	18
Wild Turkey	202	147	55	48	21	28		16	5	2	524
Common Loon	3	2	6			7	3	2	2		25

Table 3: KFN Area Christmas Bird Counts 2023

Table 3: (continued)

	ONKG	ONNA	ONWE	ONTI	ONPE	ONAI	ONDE	ONGQ	ONFR	ONMS	TO- TAL
Horned Grebe						6					6
Red-necked Grebe						1					1
Double-crested Cormorant	2			4	2			1			9
Great Blue Heron	2	1		1					1		5
Turkey Vulture	3				2						5
Northern Harrier	50	1				28		3			82
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4		1		1			2			8
Cooper's Hawk	8	1		2	1	1		2	1	1	17
Sharp-shinned/Cooper's Hawk	1										1
accipiter sp.					3						3
Bald Eagle	32	2	25	20	7	9	23	20	19	6	163
Red-tailed Hawk	32	15	6	20	4	29	10	20	8	7	151
Rough-legged Hawk	20			1		52		1	1	1	76
hawk sp.	2								2		4
buteo sp.						1					1
American Coot	35										35
Sandhill Crane			2								2
Killdeer		CW									CW
Ring-billed Gull	523	211	83	55	135	18	17	117	115		1274
Herring Gull	115	173	15	31	32	20	49	32	20	3	490
Iceland Gull		CW									CW
Glaucous Gull					2						2
Great Black-backed Gull	13	4		1	1	2		1			22
gull sp.	20	120		40	2			13	13		208
Rock Pigeon	962	513	181	132	77	65	196	199	13	262	2600
Mourning Dove	428	306	52	81	9	54	354	122	85	38	1529
Eastern Screech Owl	5	1		CW							6
Great Horned Owl	2	3				1		CW	2		8
Snowy Owl	1										1
Barred Owl	3	1	2		1	1	1	3	1		13
Long-eared Owl						1					1
Short-eared Owl	4					15					19
Northern Saw-whet Owl						2					2

Table 3: (continued)

	ONKG	ONNA	ONWE	ONTI	ONPE	ONAI	ONDE	ONGQ	ONFR	ONMS	TO- TAL
Belted Kingfisher	2	1	1	1	1		1	1	1		9
Red-headed Woodpecker									3		3
Red-bellied Woodpecker	24	3	10	12	11	7	23	19	7	4	120
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker					2		1				3
Downy Woodpecker	109	20	30	31	15	16	29	35	21	25	331
Hairy Woodpecker	21	3	27	9	8	5	27	11	24	4	139
Downy/Hairy Woodpecker									1		1
Northern Flicker	6	5			4	2	1	1			19
Pileated Woodpecker	9	2	5	7	2		6	6	14		51
woodpecker sp.									2		2
American Kestrel	14	7		1	3	3		1		1	30
Merlin	4	CW	1				1	2	1		9
Peregrine Falcon	1					1		1	1		4
dirunal raptor sp.	1								1		2
Northern Shrike	CW	CW	1	1	1	5	3	2		2	15
Blue Jay	233	189	175	226	178	135	367	210	273	102	2088
American Crow	2317	362	58	100	169	66	69	191	135	127	3594
Fish Crow	CW										CW
Common Raven	51	38	29	40	17	29	65	28	47	58	402
Horned Lark	CW										CW
Black-capped Chickadee	846	199	216	461	208	128	321	260	423	145	3207
Tufted Titmouse	3		2	3				5			13
Red-breasted Nuthatch	9	1	1	6			5	1	4	1	28
White-breasted Nuthatch	135	39	46	77	34	33	83	73	139	38	697
nuthatch sp.									1		1
Brown Creeper	19		5	10	2		5	4	15	2	62
Winter Wren	2				1		1	1	2		7
Carolina Wren	4			1			1	2			8
Golden-crowned Kinglet	36	7		12	8	1	3	10	7		84
Eastern Bluebird	2	23	3	9	10		2	5	7	15	76
Hermit Thrush	1							1			2
American Robin	308	69	15	20	85	45	66	10	53	183	854
Gray Catbird					2						2
Northern Mockingbird	CW					1					1

Table 3: (continued)

	ONKG	ONNA	ONWE	ONTI	ONPE	ONAI	ONDE	ONGQ	ONFR	ONMS	TO- TAL
European Starling	2907	1158	137	464	145	784	627	2852	428	344	9846
Cedar Waxwing	99	136	9	4	11	5	11	61	16	191	543
Snow Bunting	CW			6	2	4					12
Yellow-rumped Warbler					1						1
American Tree Sparrow	78	109	24	44	9	41	49	54	24	11	443
Chipping Sparrow	CW				CW						cw
Field Sparrow				1							1
Fox Sparrow								1			1
Dark-eyed Junco	470	257	121	574	163		232	226	268	202	2513
White-crowned Sparrow				1				CW			1
White-throated Sparrow	59	1			6		2	8		6	82
Song Sparrow	4	2		4	3	2	1	CW	1		17
Swamp Sparrow	3					1					4
Eastern Towhee	CW										CW
sparrow sp.	4								5		9
Northern Cardinal	175	34	24	25	24	11	35	42	30	7	407
Red-winged Blackbird	12	CW	5	2	2	1	1	24	22		69
Common Grackle	1	1		1		1				2	6
Brown-headed Cowbird		CW			1						1
House Finch	167	36	4	32	19	29		16	5	25	333
Purple Finch	11	18						3		6	38
Red Crossbill	19		25						13		57
crossbill sp.									1		1
Common Redpoll				4							4
Pine Siskin	CW		4				1		6	1	12
American Goldfinch	574	467	194	322	82	71	145	228	215	239	2537
finch sp.					6				53		59
House Sparrow	86	65	8	128		74	73	70	5	3	512
bird sp.									10		10
Total species	84	58	50	61	60	59	54	66	55	38	106
Count week species	9	7	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	0	6
Total individuals including 'sp.'	37325	10588	5535	11773	8506	4496	5314	12885	4017	2522	102961

Note: sp. (species); CW (count week)



Figure 4: The Kingston CBC data shows a steep upward trend in 'invasive' Mute Swan numbers over the past decade.



Figure 5: The Kingston CBC data shows a marked reduction in the number of House Sparrows since the high count seen in 1966.

2 Kingston Region Birds—Autumn 2023 (August 1 to November 30)

by N. Anthony Kaduck



Figure 6: Neotropic Cormorant in front of a Double-crested Cormorant. (Anthony Kaduck)

The KFN reporting area is centred on the datum point in MacDonald Park, Kingston and extends for a radial distance of 50 km. An interactive map showing the KFN circle is available on the website. If errors are noted or significant observations omitted, please contact me and I will update accordingly. We also encourage you to submit all sightings, so that a better understanding of our region's birdlife can be achieved. Members already using eBird are requested to share their sightings with the username 'Kingston FN.' Alternatively, please email or phone me directly with your sightings (kaduckintransit at googlemail.com / 613-331-1391).

In total, 243 species of bird were recorded in our region during the reporting period, down from last year's autumn total of 254. All observations were obtained from eBird (https://ebird.ca)-unfortunately, only a small percentage were shared with the KFN account. In total, 652 observers logged 6901 checklists, equating to 72 330 sightings, a slight decrease from last year's number. As usual, an impressive number of individual birds (680 115) were recorded, though many of these were, of course, the same birds seen on subsequent days. A huge thank you goes out to every observer, without whom our understanding of bird distribution would be far more limited. Observers with sightings in the current report are noted below.

Here are the highlights of autumn 2023:

Snow Goose: There were 23 sightings over the period, with

a high count of nine on Wolfe Island on 6 November (MiH).

Brant: Only eight sightings were reported, with a high count of 250 over Kingston on 6 October (NAK, RSL). The last sighting, two birds seen from Long Point Road, came on 19 November (VPM, JCG).

Cackling Goose: Thirteen records of single birds or pairs were submitted, ranging from 26 September on Cataraqui Bay (MiN) to 29 November at Cressy in Prince Edward County (PBJ).

Trumpeter Swan: Sightings of this once-rare bird continue to increase. There were 110 records with a high count of 25 seen from the Cataraqui Trail on 13 November (TAN).

Tundra Swan: The first arrivals were seen on 6 October at Amherstview (KJH), and a high count of 350 observed at Toad Hole in Jefferson County, NY (MiI).

Blue-winged Teal: 95 records were submitted. The first birds were recorded on 2 August, part of a small flock that spent the summer at Amherstview Sewage Lagoons (VPM, PKW). A high count of 22 was seen at the same location on 31 August (JET).

Eurasian Wigeon: A single example of this scarce vagrant was seen and photographed at Marshlands CA on 1 October (RAB, BDC).

Canvasback: Just two sightings of this declining species were recorded: singles at Lake Ontario Park on 4 November (NiM) and at Dexter Marsh in Jefferson County on 8 November (JSB).

Ring-necked Duck: A high count of 1300 came from Litte Cataraqui Creek CA on 5 November (PJH).

Greater Scaup: An impressive gathering of 3500 was reported at Cataraqui Bay on 3 November (VPM).

Harlequin Duck: One was found on Wolfe Island on 18 November (PRO).

Black Scoter: For the second year running there were good numbers of these scoters that are more normally found at the west end of the lake. There were 14 sightings with a high

count of 8 seen from Amherstview on 6 October (KJH).

Ruddy Duck: There were 35 sightings with a high count of 31 recorded on 23 October at the old Davis Tannery site (PJH).

Horned Grebe: It was a good year for Horned Grebe with 57 sightings, including a high of 31 on 13 November from the intersection of Long Point Road and Gravelly Bay Road (PBJ).

Red-necked Grebe: The first of twelve records came from Gananoque Lake on 23 August (BJO) and a high count of five came from the intersection of Long Point Road and Gravelly Bay Road on 11 September (PBJ).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: Twenty sightings were reported over the period, with the last on 3 October at Point Traverse Woods (AvM).

Black-billed Cuckoo: The last sighting was on 18 September at Robert Wehle State Park (JoA et al.).

Common Nighthawk: There were 15 records with a high count of 40 over Bur Brook Road on 21 August (PRM).

Sora: There were just three records, with a high count of two birds on 25 August along Graham Road near Harrowsmith (DGDR).

American Golden Plover: There were nine sightings totalling 17 birds, with the last on Amherst Island on 8 October (KJH).

Whimbrel: Single birds were observed on Swetman Island, 29 August (ChD, PBJ, MiN), and at Bay Breeze Golf Links in Jefferson County on 29 August (KrM).

Hudsonian Godwit: A single bird was sighted on 11 August at Sherwin Bay, Jefferson County (JSB).

Short-billed Dowitcher: There were four sightings, with the latest on 20 August at Prince Edward Point NWA (ShS).

Long-billed Dowitcher: One was reported on Reed's Bay, Wolfe Island, on 23 September (ErL).

American Woodcock: The last record was a single bird on 19 November at Tree Frog Farm (TAN).

Red-necked Phalarope: A single bird was photographed on 20 September in the Kingston area (KFN).

Parasitic Jaeger: A single bird was seen and photographed from Swetman Island on 29 August (ChD, PBJ, MiN).

Bonaparte's Gull: The largest flock reported during the autumn migration was 60, seen on 4 November at the Camden Lake Provincial Wildlife Area (TMW).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: A single bird was observed on 28 October at Prince Edward Point NWA (PBJ).

Caspian Tern: The last sighting of the year came from the channel between Kingston and Simcoe Island on 17 October (PJH).

Black Tern: The only report was a single bird spotted on Charleston Lake on 5 August (MVAB).

Red-throated Loon: 11 sightings were reported between 24 October and 21 November, with a high count of five birds coming from the Long Point Road lookout at Prince Edward Point NWA on 24 October (StH).

Neotropic Cormorant: The long-staying vagrant was last seen on Cataraqui Bay on 11 October (TAN).

American Bittern: The last record of the year came from Martin Edwards Reserve on 17 September (AlS, JuS).

Least Bittern: 16 sightings were reported across the region. The last was on 25 August at the K&P Trail at Graham Road (CHB, MAJ).

Black-crowned Night Heron: There were 45 records over the period, with a notable high count of 10 for Swetman Island on 14 August (PBJ).

Golden Eagle: 11 sightings were recorded, all but one being single birds. The last of the period came from Eel Lake on 26 November (BeB).

American Goshawk: (Note the name change: the AOS and IOC have split the former Northern Goshawk into Eurasian and American species, based on differences in vocalizations, morphology, and mitochondrial and genomic DNA divergence). There were 11 records, with the latest on 3 November at the Camden East Alvar (KAW).

Long-eared Owl: There were seven records over the period, with a high of three on Amherst Island on 26 November (JeB, NaB).

Short-eared Owl: These birds returned to Amherst Island in good numbers, with a high count of 18 on 14 November (TMW).

Red-headed Woodpecker: There were 15 autumn records, with a high count of four at Frontenac Provincial Park on 14 September (RAB, DBC).

Olive-sided Flycatcher: The last of 29 autumn sightings occurred on 14 September at Links Mills (KJH).

Western Kingbird: This vagrant was found at the Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory on 10 September and was last seen on 11 September (KFN).

Loggerhead Shrike: Birds were seen at the release site on the Napanee Alvar until 24 August.

Northern Shrike: It was a good autumn for these shrikes, with 30 sightings. The earliest was seen on Amherst Island on 23 October (JaN).

Fish Crow: There were six records over the period. Aside from one in Clayton, NY, all were in the vicinity of City Park, Kingston.

Tufted Titmouse: As usual, the majority of records came from Jefferson County, NY, but there were scattered reports of single birds or pairs on the Canadian side.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: The last sighting was on 12 October at Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory (PhM).

Sedge Wren: There were seven reports over the period, with the last being a single bird on 25 August at the K&P Trail near Harrowsmith (BJO).

Northern Mockingbird: Eighteen sightings were reported, with a pair again taking up winter residence at Portsmouth Olympic Harbour/KP (KFN).

Bohemian Waxwing: There were just three autumn records, with a high count of 21 on 31 October at the Prince Edward Point NWA (NMR).

Evening Grosbeak: Two sightings were reported: single birds at the intersection of Long Point Road and Gravelly Bay Road on 10 October (PBJ) and on Amherst Island on 29 October (JCG).

Common Redpoll: Single birds were seen at the Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory on 23 October (PhM) and at Point Traverse Woods on 23 November (PBJ).

Red Crossbill: Autumn 2023 marked the beginning of a large irruption of these crossbills, with 68 sightings.

Lapland Longspur: These birds are typically seen in the winter as single birds embedded in Snow Bunting flocks, so a flock of 30 on Amherst Island on 13 October was a good sighting (NiB, JMN).

Snow Bunting: The first arrivals were seen on Wolfe Island on 16 October (CAH).

Clay-colored Sparrow: There were two autumn records: a single bird at Martin Edwards Reserve on 18 September (SJC), and three on the Escott Rockport Road on 22 October (DaM).

Vesper Sparrow: There were six sightings of this oncecommon bird, all of single birds with the last on the Bath Townline Road on 15 October (KJH).

Orchard Oriole: There were two reports: three birds on Simcoe Island on 2 August (MiB), and a single on Swetman Island on 22 August (PBJ).

Observers: John Alexander (JoA), Michal Bardecki (MiB), Nick Bartok (NiB), Jean Bernier (JeB), Jeffrey S. Bolsinger (JSB), Carolyn H. Bonta (CHB), Nathalie Boucher (NaB), Richard A. Brault (RAB), Beth Breckenridge (BeB), Mike V.A. Burrell (MVAB), Steve J. Coates (SJC), Dianne B. Croteau (DBC), Chris Davidson (ChD), Janis C. Grant (JCG), Steven Hamel (StH), Michael Hart (MiH), Phil J. Harvey (PJH), Kurt J. Hennige (KJH), Christine A. Hough (CAH), Michael Inglis (MiI), Michael A. Johnson (MAJ), Paul B. Jones (PBJ), N. Anthony Kaduck (NAK), Eric Lamond (ErL), Richard S. Lott (RSL), V. Paul Mackenzie (VPM), Kristine Mangone (KrM), Paul R. Martin (PRM), Avery Meeker (AvM), Phillip Mercier (PhM), Nicholas Moreno (NiM), David Morin (DaM), Jake Nafziger (JaN), Mikaela Naumann (MiH), Jenny M. Newton (JMN), Todd A. Norris (TAN), Barbara J. O'Neill (BJO), Paul R. O'Toole (PRO), Darren G. D. Rayner (DGDR), Nicole M. Richardson (NMR), Alex Scott (AlS), Julie Scott (JuS), Sarah Sharp (ShS), James E. Thompson (JET), Peter K. Waycik (PKW), Kathy A. Webb (KAW), Tom M. Wheatley (TMW)

3 Articles

3.1 Recent Volunteer Efforts to Conserve Purple Martins in the Kingston Region

by Jack Staszak, Chris Grooms, Dale Kristensen and Kurt Hennige



Figure 7: A T14 box with a gourd rack on North Shore Amherst Island. The box can be lowered down the pole for nest checks and to protect it from wind in the off season. (Jack Staszak)

The Purple Martin is a cavity-nesting aerial insectivore and the largest North American swallow. Aerial insectivores, birds that catch insects on the wing, have been negatively impacted by climate change (manifested in Eastern Ontario through cooler, windier and wetter springs reducing the accessibility and supply of flying insects^{1,2}), pesticides, intensification of agriculture, draining of wetlands and nest site competition with introduced House Sparrows and European Starlings³. Ontario populations of Purple Martins have declined at a rate greater than 7% annually since 1970³. Eastern populations of Purple Martins are now fully dependent on human-provided nesting boxes.

A group of volunteers, including Kurt Hennige, Jack Staszak, Chris Grooms and Dale Kristensen, has been working over the past few years to increase breeding opportunities for this declining species. Our approach is to build and erect specially designed, Ontario Purple Martin Associationapproved nesting boxes in favourable but currently unused

nesting habitat (open waterfronts or meadows near water) and to improve nesting opportunities at existing colonies by increasing the number of boxes present or by replacing degraded structures. Working with private landowners, corporations, Nature Canada and the Kingston Field Naturalists, we have greatly expanded nesting opportunities in the region. Our efforts began in 2016 with the installation of two boxes at the Martin Edwards Nature Reserve, where existing nesting boxes, built decades ago, were badly in need of replacement. All of the old worn-out boxes have been replaced and we are now managing 12 boxes between there and the new Sylvester/Gallagher Reserve. Nature Canada provided some of the boxes through its Save Our Swallows Campaign's Purple Martin Project. A few boxes were built and donated by Jacob Byler, a carpenter from Stirling, but most were funded, built and installed by our group. As of 2023, our Purple Martin sites range from Inverary to Wolfe and Amherst Islands, Hay Bay and the Lennox Generating Station west of Bath.



Figure 8: Two of the new T14 boxes installed in Hay Bay, in lowered position. (Chris Grooms)

There are many different designs of nesting boxes available. We chose to focus on providing a couple of options that are proven to be the safest (in terms of reducing potential nesting mortality) and ensure the best nesting success rate. Made from wood (pine or cedar), each of our T14 boxes houses up to 14 nesting pairs. Another design that has proven exceptionally effective are hollow plastic nesting gourds (a commercial product) that have enough space for breeding martins while providing needed insulation during cold spells and hot summer days. Both designs are easily accessible and allow for easy cleaning, eviction of invasive species, and nest checks that are done a few times each nesting season. The nesting complex can be lowered vertically along its support pole and the nest doors can be opened (see figures 7 and 8). This also allows us to record egg and nestling count data, which is sent to the Ontario Purple Martin Association in partnership with Nature Canada.



Figure 9: A recently installed T14 box on the north shore of the Martin Edwards Nature Reserve. It replaces the old metal boxes installed there 20 years ago, which had deteriorated. (Chris Grooms)



Figure 10: Eggs in a gourd nest. Four to six eggs are typical for Purple Martins. (Jack Staszak)

The best measure of success of our efforts is obviously the number of fledged young produced annually. But also important is the number of nesting opportunities provided on quality sites and the number of breeding pairs and new colonies established. By the end of the 2022 breeding season, we were managing seven active colonies (one newly established), each with several occupied T14 boxes. We counted 215 breeding pairs that fledged about 900 young and observed increased activity at sites with newly installed nesting boxes–a good sign for the next season.



Figure 11: A gourd nest with nestling Martins at about day 2 after hatch. (Jack Staszak)



Figure 12: Nestlings, about 10 days old, in a T14 nest. (Jack Staszak)

The 2023 season proved that proper housing and site management is crucial to successful breeding of Purple Martins. The number of active colonies with at least one established nesting pair increased from seven to eleven. In total, these colonies had almost 300 nesting pairs, which fledged about 1250 young birds. Our nest checks identified the main cause of nest failures to be competition for cavities and destruction of eggs by House Sparrows. Only a few starlings presented problems as all boxes have starling-resistant entrance holes that make it difficult for them to enter. This reaffirms that nest checks are crucial to maximize the nesting success of Purple Martins, as the checks allow us to remove sparrow and starling nests. In total, we now manage 30 T14 apartment-style houses, many with four gourd racks, providing about 548 nesting cavities. Our latest installation was on the north shore of the Martin Edwards Nature Reserve

(figure 9). We plan to install additional housing for the 2024 season.

This ongoing conservation effort takes time, money and effort. The long-term success of Purple Martins across their breeding range depends on dedicated people volunteering to build, monitor, fund, host and maintain nest boxes. It is rewarding and very satisfying to be able physically to do something to help a species at risk and see positive results each year. If you are interested in getting involved in the conservation of Martins in the region, please contact the authors.

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3.2 Majesty of Love: Trees

by Jacqueline Bartnik

Many years ago, Maureen Addis took me to a presentation by the **Ontario Woodlots Association**. Over the years, I have gone to many presentations and learned a lot about the woods. This year I had the honour of helping the organization with the students at La Salle High School plant 100 trees. It was great fun as we said an indigenous prayer over the trees and gave each of them a name. On Saturday, October 21, 2023, we were invited to Bonnie and Terry Smith's 110 acre farm.

The Smith's farm is north of Belleville. I finally arrived and drove up the alley, majestic trees on both sides embraced us and we soon felt peace come over us. Bonnie welcomed all of us and organized parking areas for the participants. Terry is from Nova Scotia. He was familiar with problems of flooding and looked for farm land that had some higher ground. Bonnie and Terry explained what we were about to see. This 3. Nature Canada website, Save Our Swallows: The Purple Martin Project page https://naturecanada.ca/defend-nat ure/how-you-help-us-take-action/save-our-swallows/th e-purple-martin-project/.



Figure 13: Advanced young in a gourd nest. Fledging occurs 26–32 days after hatching. The fledged young are fed by their parents for an additional one to two weeks. (Jack Staszak)

farm has an areas of rolling hills, wetlands, a stream and open fields. Bonnie and Terry explained that they do not allow hunting on their farm as they want all wildlife to feel welcome. Bonnie said that even before they built their farm house, they began planting trees. Over the years, they have planted about 1000 trees with the help of students and conservation organizations.

Bonnie and Terry took us along the edge of the woods where we noticed several invasive species (European Buckthorn and Dog-strangling Vine) which needed to be removed. Bonnie spoke of the existing forest that had been along the fence rows which had been removed for building the house, barn and maintenance. Now young White Oak, Bur Oak, hickories, Basswood, Butternut, and maples have replaced them. Due to the high winds, they lost several Butternut trees in the 1980s, and several trees had fallen this year such

as Butternuts and maples.



Figure 14: Ontario Woodlot Association participants at the Smith's Farm. (Jacqueline Bartnik)

We finally entered the wooded area which had the first plantation of White Pine. Bonnie and Terry took us through this growth and we noticed that the trees had been planted six to eight feet apart; however, in the second plantation area, we noticed that the trees were planted closer together. Since no pruning had been done over the years, we noticed that these areas had become a nursery and young trees have arrived such as ash, maple and oak.

Bonnie and Terry took us through the woods to the wetlands

3.3 Quest to Save a Vagrant Lark Sparrow

by Sharon David

I have been lucky to have hosted several vagrants over my 31 years in Kingston, some for only one day such as a Blackheaded Grosbeak (Howe Island, August 23, 2005) and some overwintering, such as Tufted Titmouse in their early years where they have planted Black Walnut and Tamarack and we noticed several poplars. As we climbed the ridge to go back up to the higher ground, Bonnie asked us to be careful and not step on the baby Red Oak that have planted themselves on the ridge. Once on top of the ridge, we came out to the magnificent open fields and all the trees in full fall colours. It was stunning and Bonnie said this is a wonderful place in the summer to see the butterflies, dragonflies, bees, other insects and snakes. We then went through the field to the other side of the property, to the creek which was flowing, to see the grandfather willows.



Figure 15: Fall colours showing in the hardwoods. (Jacqueline Bartnik)

As we walked back to the farm house, a beautiful Turkey Vulture flew over the field. Bonnie said he was their usual visitor. At the end of our visit, our gracious hosts offered us cookies and water. Bonnie showed us her garden around the house. We thanked them for the wonderful morning. When Bonnie found out that I came all the way from Kingston and that I was a member of the Kingston Field Naturalists, she was so happy. She said that the naturalists are more than welcome to come on a ramble or field trip. I thanked her and said that I would discuss it with the team leaders as it is a long trip.

of range expansion. On January 15, 2024, I discovered a Lark Sparrow, *Chondestes grammacus*, in my yard which became my winter quest. When rarities show up, I always feel a strong sense of responsibility both to help the bird survive

but also to help the birders, some traveling great distances, to see it. The joy is knowing the bird survived, but also seeing a person's smile and a thumbs up, or their eBird report with the "lifer!" comment.



Figure 16: Lark Sparrow looking up at circling Mallard Ducks on January 23. (Sharon David)

What is a vagrant?

In simplest terms a vagrant is a bird away from its expected range¹. There are three main reasons a bird could be off course:

- extreme weather¹, such as American Flamingo in Wisconsin on September 23, 2024 blown off course by hurricane Idalia² and featured on Badgerland Birding's YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl7fkrnx KJ8;
- internal compass malfunction causing a bird to migrate west to east rather than north to south¹-possibly a cause for the Stellar's Sea-eagle's great adventure the past few years; or
- 3. humans affecting habitat and food availability (bird feeders), and a bird's range expansion or loss (via urbanization)^{1,3}.

In Ontario, if a bird has not been previously recorded in a region, is outside a previous date record (my Black-headed Grosbeak sighting was flagged for this reason), or is a first in Ontario a report must be submitted to the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC; http://www.ofo.ca/site/obrc) for review. This is an important step for a species to become part of the official provincial bird records.



Figure 17: Black-headed Grosbeak, Howe Island, August 23, 2005. Note from OBRC "This is the first fall record for the province and is considerably earlier than expected for western strays." (Sharon David)

Lark Sparrows were first observed in Ontario in 1861⁴ and have been found during winter eight times since 2007 (Todd Hagedorn, Ontario Winter Bird List 2023-2024: http://tiny url.com/myyulvs) and are not on the OBRC review for that reason. However, in looking at the eBird map for January-February 2024 you can see that most are in Texas, Arizona, California, or Mexico during the winter. A Lark Sparrow was observed by many October 24-25, 2020 in the Elevator Bay area of the Cataraqui River (ebird.org), so could this be the same bird? It is possible given their life span is about seven years⁴.



Figure 18: eBird map of Lark Sparrow sightings from January-February 2024. (Source: ebird.org)

Optimizing their chance for survival

There is much controversy about when, if we should, or how we intervene to help a vagrant survive. As a retired bird re-

habilitator, my first step, and the one that I feel is the most critical, is optimizing access to food. This can be as simple as bird feeders, but more complex to impossible for some birds such as aquatic feeders. As an example, this winter the Western Tanager present in Ottawa had a large group of dedicated people ensuring its feeding location was maintained. In contrast, the Limpkin at Wheatley Provincial Park was rescued and taken to a bird rehabilitation facility as its feeding location became frozen and it was starving. Unfortunately, most vagrants do not survive, or their fate is unknown.

When I have a vagrant, I start by determining what food I can provide it, where it normally feeds (ground versus feeder), and how I can ensure access to the food if there is competition from other bird species and squirrels. I know White Millet is a favorite food of sparrows, and a seed I often place out for sparrows and Mourning Doves in the winter (ducks also love it); on the other hand, squirrels aren't so fond of it unless they are very hungry. If you'd like to learn more about what seeds attract which birds check out my 1999 article on the KFN website at https://kingstonfieldnaturalists.org/wil dlife/part-1-attracting-winter-birds-and-bird-feeding/.

Watching the Lark Sparrow for a few days I learned that it did not go on my main caged bird feeder, unlike the Whitethroated Sparrow or Song Sparrow present at the same time. That meant exclusively feeding on the ground, which is problematic in Kingston due to a heavy rat population. I placed out bowls of millet for the Mourning Doves for sunrise breakfast then again for sunset dinner. This reduced the likelihood of a rat appearing, but this feeding scheme had to change now that the Lark Sparrow was here. Unfortunately, two rats did appear, and I saw a melanistic Grey Squirrel fight with one over a feeding spot, and the squirrel won. I witnessed a Cooper's Hawk dive, but unfortunately miss, one of those rats, so they are a natural predator, along with Barred Owls.



Figure 19: Lark Sparrow on February 10 during one of the few sunny days feeding both in the grass by the main feeders or in the walkway/driveway area. (Sharon David)

In watching the Lark Sparrow, I determined its feeding timeof-day cycle, and where it would feed which ensured I knew when to top up food and where to put it during both inclement weather or where birders might be able to see it better.

I noted it was very comfortable feeding among the larger doves, dodging them as they moved or staying in the periphery, and even around squirrels and a rabbit. That boldness would help ensure its access to a busy feeding area, or when squirrels were chasing birds or other squirrels away.



Figure 20: Lark Sparrow feeding among the Mourning Doves on January 22. (Sharon David)



Figure 21: Lark Sparrow feeding next to an Eastern Cottontail at 3:00 p.m. on February 3, just after food was added to its usual feeding area, but the rabbit got there first. (Sharon David)

I also learned the ground bird pecking order–Lark Sparrow would eat peacefully with American Tree Sparrow, peck at Dark-eyed Junco's that got too close to its feeding spot, then move away from the more dominant White-throated Sparrow which would peck at it.

Ensuring community support

There can be disadvantages of having a rare vagrant with many communities taking issue with the large number of camera laden birders arriving, particularly in a residential neighborhood. The Ontario Field Ornithologists has worked hard to mitigate impacts by having bird ambassadors work with the host and community to optimize bird viewing (http: //www.ofo.ca/content/ambassadors/).

I was proactive and posted about the Lark Sparrow on our local Facebook page (right after a Discord post!) to notify my community of the possible increase in people standing around and searching my area with large cameras. No large crowds since it isn't a rare vagrant–unlike Ottawa's Western Tanager–but a steady stream of visitors none-the-less. I posted videos and pictures to keep my community interested (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3ZscHkJ5rY). The result was only positive comments with this most memorable one: "I stopped my car on the way to work this morning to speak to the photographer [from Toronto] who was lying on your lawn trying to get a shot. When I asked if he was able to get a picture of the Lark Sparrow, he had the biggest grin I have ever seen on his face!" Even a non-birder could relate to this joyous sighting.

A formidable cold winter storm

The Lark Sparrow added sunshine to our dull winter, but I believe it did not survive after a cold winter storm. Its body behaviour February 16-18 indicated to me it wasn't well (posture, not eating vigorously, and sleeping out in the open), but it was still able to fly so there was nothing I could do. I believe it succumbed to the cold overnight temperatures February 18-19 since during sleep is often when most weakened birds will perish. I did not see it return on February 19. I've kept watch, hoping it would return, and that I was wrong, but after a week all hope had gone.



Figure 22: Lark Sparrow during the lake effect snowstorm on February 18 taking shelter under a car bumper where food was placed for it. (Sharon David)

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3.4 Enhancing Biodiversity at an Individual Level

by Christine Hough

I joined the Kingston Field Naturalists just over three years ago primarily because I wanted to participate in their field trips and get introduced to good places to go birding. As I got more involved and became a member of the executive board, I developed an interest in their conservation efforts. Last March, I attended Nature on the Hill 2023 which was a gathering in Ottawa of over 40 environment and nature groups from across Canada. I was only there for half a day, but in those few hours I learned so much. I knew that many species were at risk of extinction but I had no idea that the planet is currently experiencing the largest loss of wildlife since the extinction of the dinosaurs, and that one million plant and animal species could disappear. A primary objective for this meeting was to urge the federal government to honour the commitments it made at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference, COP15. Canada demonstrated real leadership in facilitating the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework with 195 other countries. One of the global targets in this agreement commits these counties to protect 30% of their land and water by 2030 (referred to as 30×30). Loss of habitat has contributed significantly to the loss of species, so protecting habitat is vital. In Canada, most of the biodiversity exists along the United States border in heavily developed areas with high human population growth and it is these areas that need to be protected.



Figure 23: Protected Areas in Canada. (Source: Canadian Protected and Conserved Database https://search.open.cana da.ca/openmap/6c343726-1e92-451a-876a-76e17d398a1c)

For an area in Canada to become protected, it must go through a screening process, and once accepted, its location is entered into the Canadian Protected and Conserved Database. This database is public and critical for conservation groups as it lets all of them know what areas are currently protected, so they can develop effective strategies to build corridors for nature. The map in Figure 23 shows lands that are protected in Canada. A summary of the protected areas for each province is also available. While only 13.6% of Canada's land area is currently conserved, there are provinces such as British Columbia that are well ahead of this and have close to 20% protected. Unfortunately, Ontario sits at a mere 11%, and very little of this is in the southern part where most of the biodiversity exists. Obviously, more land needs to be protected. The Kingston Field Naturalists owns three properties: Helen Quilliam Sanctuary, Martin Edwards Reserve and Sylvester-Gallagher Nature Reserve. We are currently going through the process to have these lands assessed for inclusion into the protected and conserved database so that they can contribute to 30×30 . This application process is not simple and would not have been possible without help from the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve. This organization has also completed the application process for all the lands of Cataraqui Conservation and the Rideau Waterway Land Trust. Efforts are also underway now to encourage the City of Kingston to have their lands assessed for inclusion into 30×30 .



Figure 24: Black-capped Chickadee. (Christine Hough)

While efforts to protect large areas of land are essential to preserve biodiversity, individuals can also play a vital role. Cities have lost natural habitat, and what persists is fragmented, has limited plant and animal diversity and lacks native species. In his book, Bringing Nature Home, the entomologist, Douglas Tallamy, offers a novel way that individuals can increase biodiversity in communities. His strategy encourages small efforts by many people to establish what he calls a Homegrown National Park, where native plants, shrubs and trees are grown on private and public lands. These individual efforts will support local insects and wildlife, and combined will ultimately build wildlife corridors. The David Suzuki Foundation is partnering with them and encouraging Canadians to join this movement to regenerate biodiversity. For more information, you can visit their website at https://davidsuzuki.org/press/people-in-canad a-invited-to-join-homegrown-national-park-movement/. This strategy is not unique, and increasingly, grass-roots movements all around the world are re-wilding urban landscapes with the aim of building pollinator and wildlife corridors that will ultimately support species biodiversity.

Most public parks and private lands are dominated by lawns that are ecologically unproductive and essentially deserts. Furthermore, these lands are decorated with non-invasive plants from other continents. These non-native plants now outnumber the native plants that are far better at supporting animals, particularly the insects that are so important to our ecosystems. For instance, the native White Oak supports over 400 species of caterpillar while the Ginko tree supports none. So, the strategy of having native plants on private and public lands will help support healthy bird populations and not just birds that are insectivores. Did you know that one Chickadee (Figure 24) brood will eat, on average, 6000 caterpillars until they fledge the nest? Baby birds cannot eat seeds, so putting out sunflower seeds in the summer has no benefit to them. However, where there are oak trees, there are caterpillars and these soft little creatures are full of nutrients and can easily be fed to baby birds. It is the same for pollinators. Native plants can support many more species of pollinators because pollinators have evolved to be particularly adapted to specific types of native flowers. Here is another piece of trivia. According to the Government of Canada, one in every three bites of food we eat is a result of pollination by animals, primarily bees. That is not so trivial with respect to our future food security when you consider that pollinators are in serious decline, and there is no known technology out there to replace the work done by pollinators.



Figure 25: Polyphemus Moth. (Christine Hough)

No one is suggesting that all lawns or non-native plants have to be removed. However, there are several things that can be done at an individual level to enhance biodiversity. First and foremost consider naturalizing part of your lawn with native plant species. A list of native plants for the Eastern Temperate Forest is available online (https://www.nwf.or g/Garden-for-Wildlife/About/Native-Plants/keystone-p lants-by-ecoregion). Start with a section that is not well suited for turfgrass, like a shady area. Replace this with native grasses, flowers, shrubs and even a native tree if possible. Plant things in clusters to attract insects, and if you want to attract specific butterflies or hummingbirds, you will need to provide their unique food along with water and shelter. Native plants require very little maintenance and have low water requirements. So overall, far less time will be spent tending your lawn. Consider doing this in your front yard along with a small sign that says "This area is reserved for nature." This lets people know this is intentional and can encourage others to do the same. Little Forests Kingston (https://littleforests.org/collections/all) and 1000 Islands Master Gardeners (https://1000islandsmastergardeners.c a/2023/03/18/biodiversity-starts-with-a-living-lawn/)are two local resources that are helpful in reimagining lawns to enhance biodiversity.



Figure 26: Red Trillium. (Christine Hough)

This is the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Kingston Field Naturalists and I've made a commitment that over this anniversary year, I will begin a long-term process to enhance biodiversity on my own property. I've lived on a nine-acre mixed hardwood and coniferous woodlot for 29 years, and over that time, I've witnessed significant losses in the richness of the biodiversity that used to be in our area. When we first moved in, I clearly remember waking up on spring mornings to noisy choruses of birds singing and often thinking, "Oh my gosh, I've moved to the Amazon!" I do not hear that anymore, and I also do not hear the duetting of the two Great-horned Owls in our area. In those early years, I frequently found large moths such as Luna or Polyphemus (Figure 25) on trees, and throughout the summer, it was easy to find all kinds of different butterflies. I have not seen a large moth on our property for years now. There used to be all sorts of wildflowers in the woodlot, but those are also not as abundant, and in particular, the number of red trilliums (Figure 26) has declined. Numbers of larger mammals such as fox, rabbit and deer are also less common. I am not sure if this loss of diversity results from the increased development in our area, or if we have contributed to it. I do know we

have increased the amount of lawn to a point where it now makes up more than an acre of the property, so this is where I will begin. Over time, the turfgrass will go and will be replaced with native grasses and flowering plants along with shrubs and fruit-bearing trees. I am familiar with growing vegetables from seeds; it has been difficult to find places that sell native seeds (https://www.nativeplantnurseries.ca/), and so far, I only know of one that has a large selection. Another challenge is finding places that sell native plants, and currently, I have only found two local nurseries. One is at Lemoine Point Conservation Area in Kingston, and the other is at Mac Johnson Wildlife Area in Brockville. Additionally, native plants and shrubs can be ordered online from Ontario Native Plants (https://onplants.ca/). The City of Kingston has a Neighbourhood Tree Planting Program (https://www.cityofkingston.ca/resident/trees-natur e/neighbourhood-tree-planting-program) and offers trees at a discounted rate to residents within the city to plant on their private property. One of the trees/shrubs they have is Serviceberry which blooms in early spring providing nectar for pollinators. Later in mid-summer the fruit is great for birds and mammals. I have quickly learned, however, that purchasing larger plants will be prohibitively expensive and even purchasing bare-root shrubs and fruit-bearing trees can also get costly. So, I am now learning how to grow shrubs and trees from seeds, but that is another story for a later date.

All of us share the responsibility of being good stewards of the land around us, and it should not be the responsibility of trained conservationists. The Kingston Field Naturalist has a large membership, somewhere in the order of 500 individuals, who enjoy exploring the outdoors. This group cares about nature, and most already know what is required to be good stewards of the land. Communities need individuals like this to get involved and start individual efforts to enhance biodiversity. So, it would be great if in this 75th anniversary year, even half of those members committed to small personal projects to enhance biodiversity where they live. Consider reducing the size of your lawn and adding native species to your gardens. Even if you do not have a yard, you can still regenerate biodiversity on a balcony, terrace or rooftop using containers filled with native plants. Nature has given a lot to us, and it is now time for us to give back to nature.



Figure 27: White-tailed Deer. (Christine Hough)

3.5 Things I Wish I Had Known When I Started Out —Wildlife Photography Tips #18

by Anthony Kaduck

I have been writing these articles for a few years, and I thought it might be useful to distill the key points from the first 17 articles. I originally imagined it as a top ten tips article but ended up with 15. I hope you will find them useful as you follow your own photographic journey.

For **context**, my personal aim is to get the best possible images while I'm are out walking around looking for wildlife. Someday, in pursuit of ever-better images, I may go over to the dark side and start using a tripod, a gimbal head and supplementary lighting. But that day has not yet arrived, so these articles continue to aim at the birder (or mammal lover, turtle fanatic, odonate-ophile, lepidopterist, or fungi fancier) with a camera.

To start with, the things that really matter in a wildlife photograph are subject, composition, sharpness, and exposure.

Great photos start with great **subjects**. The ideal situation is when a really desirable subject–a bird or animal that is some combination of attractive, uncommon, and charismatic–is visible in good light, doing something interesting, and not obscured by terrain of foliage. Know that your quarry will do its level best not to give you these optimal conditions. Aside from apex predators, most animals like to stay under cover; turtles and insects can be very skittish, and interesting plants and fungus love dark and gloomy spots. Birds in particular are extremely skilled at finding a strategically-placed twig that ruins an otherwise good image.



Figure 28: Olive-crowned Crescentchest with annoying twig. (Anthony Kaduck)

So you can't always win, but there are ways of shifting the odds in your favour. Knowing when and where the subject is likely to be at a given time and place helps, as does the ability to move quietly through the landscape. Moving nonchalantly while appearing to be interested in other things can reduce your chances of being classified as a threat and should allow you to get closer to the subject. I will expand on these techniques in a future article.



Figure 29: Red-tailed Hawk. Points for anticipation (fast enough shutter speed), but I failed to zoom out enough to get the whole bird in the image–more work required. (Anthony Kaduck)

Thinking about the position of the sun will help you to decide on the best way to approach the subject. And as you move towards a likely subject, **be ready for the moment**. Thinking about the image you want allows you to dial in the right settings in advance. This significantly increases your chances of getting the shot.

Composition is personal. Conventions like the rule of thirds or the featureless background are a good starting point, but ultimately you should (I think!) go beyond them and develop your own personal style. Towards that end, it is worth looking at really great images in magazines like National Geographic and in shows like the Wildlife Photographer of the Year (currently at the ROM, or check it out online at https://www.nhm.ac.uk/wpy/gallery). This will help develop your sense of what good looks like and allow you to think about the kind of images that you want to make.

Sharpness is achieved by having a sharp lens, using a sufficiently fast shutter speed, sufficient depth of field, and critical focus on the most important part of the image which is usually the bird or animal's eye.

Remember that it's not just the subject moving that you have to account for; you also need to allow for your own movement. Improving your camera handling skills will help; train yourself to stand in a stable position and to operate the shutter release smoothly. When in doubt, follow the old rule of thumb: shutter speed should be at least double the lens focal length, so for a 500mm lens you should optimally choose shutter speeds of 1/1000 or higher. If the subject is fairly stationary, you can cheat on his but it's a good starting point.



Figure 30: Canada Jay. Fast enough shutter speed and proper depth of field = a properly sharp image. (Anthony Kaduck)

Though I don't use one myself, I know several good photographers who routinely use monopods to get a steadier shot. Monopods provide much of the stability of a tripod but without the setup time and without getting in the way of your traveling companions.

Though it is possible to adjust **exposure** in post-processing, experience has led me to conclude that getting the exposure right in the first instance always leads to a better final image. In particular, resist the temptation to underexpose in low light hoping to boost the exposure in postprocessing. Adjusting exposure upwards in your photo software boosts the whole signal, including the noise. A properly exposed image, even at high ISO, can be very good, and even better with some judicious de-noising, but a boosted low-light image rarely turns out well.



Figure 31: This Black-throated Thistletail needed ISO 3600, but it was properly exposed so the noise level was low and easily managed in post-processing. (Anthony Kaduck)

There is an exception to this rule. In bright light, subjects with white plumage or fur or subjects that are wet can end up overexposed even though the overall exposure value is correct. This leads to the dreaded blown highlight where detail is irrecoverably lost because the photosites in your sensor are overloaded with light.

In these cases (I'm looking at you, gulls) it is best to underexpose slightly, knowing that when you bring up the exposure in post-processing, you will still have detail to work with.

This is one case where **exposure compensation** is your friend-to avoid blown highlights you apply negative exposure compensation. The other main use comes when a sub-

ject is backlit. Positive exposure compensation can be used to increase the exposure of the subject, changing it from a dark silhouette to a properly exposed creature–albeit at the cost of overexposing the sky behind it. In photography there is no free lunch!.



Figure 32: This Little Woodpecker was heavily backlit, requiring +3 stops of exposure compensation. (Anthony Kaduck)

Settings

The best images are those that most closely replicate the experience of seeing the live subject. Judicious post-processing is a critical step towards reaching that goal. And if you intend to do any post-processing, you really should **shoot in RAW format**. Making any change to a jpeg image, even just cropping it, leads to a loss of image quality that cannot be recovered.

If you want to take control of the process instead of letting your camera make its own choices, I recommend you experiment with **manual mode**. To give yourself a safety net, activate **auto ISO**, but keep an eye on the process lest your camera reaches for crazily high ISO figures. As a rule of thumb, ISO settings above 4000 are unlikely to lead to great images.

Use **back button focus**. For my money, this is one thing that you can do to significantly upgrade your wildlife images, and it is completely free. It's the best way of ensuring you can achieve sharp focus on a subject that is moving through vegetation or otherwise partially obscured, and it allows you to focus and reframe–focus on the desired point (the eye!), and without changing focus, reframe the image by moving the camera until you get the result you want.

#1	Exposure Compensation	Volume 66 number 3	September 2019	
#2	Shutter Speed	Volume 66 number 4	December 2019	
#3	Back Button Focus	Volume 67 number 1	March 2020	
#4	Image File Formats	Volume 67 number 2	June 2020	
#5	Post-processing	Volume 67 number 3	September 2020	
#6	Protecting Lenses	Volume 67 number 4	December 2020	
#7	Carrying Heavy Lenses	Volume 68 number 1	March 2021	
#8	Depth of Field	Volume 68 number 2	June 2021	
#9	Manual Mode	Volume 68 number 3	September 2021	
#10	Autofocus Modes	Volume 68 number 4	December 2021	
#11	Camera Settings for Birds	Volume 69 number 1	March 2022	
#12	Image Noise	Volume 69 number 2	June 2022	
#13	Travel Adventures Part 1	Volume 69 number 3	September 2022	
#14	Travel Adventures Part 2	Volume 69 number 4	December 2022	
#15	Pelagics	Volume 70 number 2	June 2023	
#16	Lenses for Wildlife	Volume 70 number 3	September 2023	
#17	Birds in Flight	Volume 70 number 4	December 2023	

Table 4: Previous Articles in this series in The Blue Bill



Figure 33: Focused on the eye and then reframed for the desired composition. (Anthony Kaduck)

The more you watch birds the more you will notice that their heads are in perpetual motion, flicking around to check for predators while they forage for food. If you try to time these movements, you might luck in and get everything right, but in practice you are more likely to get the timing slightly wrong and end up with a picture of the back of the bird's head (Figure 34). Storage is cheap. **Fire in bursts** and your "keeper" rate will improve.

Equipment

Learn to use the capabilities of your camera system (metering options, autofocus modes, etc). This means (a) read the manual, and (b) practice until new techniques become more automatic.

The best friend you can have is **good glass**. Given a choice between investing in a camera body and investing in lenses, know that a good lens and an okay camera body will consistently outperform an okay lens and even the best camera body.

When you look at your images, **be your best critic**. Work out how good images could have been better; then ruthlessly cull them. Storage space is cheap, but that does not mean you should fill up your drives with images that no one will ever see.

If you are on an expedition, whether to exotic lands or just to Point Pelee, bring the equipment you need to **back up your**

photos during the trip. And use it!

Protect your lens by using a **lens hood**. So-called protective filters are an unnecessary expense-the lens hood offers better protection. And protective filters for large objective lenses are annoyingly fragile.

And finally, accept that your friend with the superzoom camera will get long-range shots that you won't be able to get. Console yourself with the fact that when your subject is closer in the large sensor, faster and more accurate focus, and sharper lens on your DSLR or mirrorless rig will blow their best shots out of the water.

Good shooting!



Figure 34: I saw what turned out to be the only Varzea Thrush of the trip, but I failed to shoot a burst. Result... disappointment. (Anthony Kaduck)

4 KFN Outing Reports

4.1 Ramble to Invista Shoreline, December 5, 2023

by Carla Baetz

Fifteen brave souls arrived at Wartman/Patterson Park and Invista Shoreline on a crisp December morning to eagerly take part in the morning's Ramble. A third were "newbies," this being their first Ramble, which brought a fresh surge of energy to the group.

An enormous Sugar Maple greeted us, which we could identify by the arches in its fallen leaves that made a u-shape rather than a v-shape. This S'U'gar Maple was so massive that possibly three pairs of outstretched arms could encircle the trunk at once which led us to suspect that it was roughly 300 years of age.

As we continued our stroll, we discovered the wide expanse of flat limestone bedrock that projects out into Lake Ontario. This rock shelf provides a perfect summer swimming area as families, and even toddlers, can comfortably sit in the shallow water which is warmed by the sun. Parents and grandparents quietly noted that a return visit in July would provide a secret escape from Kingston's summer heat.

Also on the beach were massive amounts of Zebra Mussel shells that crackled beneath our hiking boots. A Rambler noted that he had used these shells as a slug inhibitor as the sharp broken shells keep the pesky slugs away from his garden. While Zebra Mussels are a notorious invasive species, at least this is one way they can be used in a beneficial manner.

As we ventured inland, we heard an excited cry from Jackie who had found a dead shrew on the roadway. The shrew was still very much intact, and we gathered around to look at its tiny toes and pointed nose. It was thought that perhaps a raptor had prematurely dropped its lunch, or perhaps, a lawnmower had struck the innocent beast. We gave it a proper burial by pitching it into the field and marched on.

Our final leg of the journey was perhaps the most exciting... waterfowl! And wow, we were not disappointed! As you can see by Janis Grant's bird list, there were literally hundreds of diving ducks, dabbling ducks, gulls and perhaps most majestic, Tundra Swans. As we donned our binoculars to identify the birds, it was difficult to overlook a cheery goldenrod blooming at our feet, seemingly jealous of all the attention that her feathered friends had garnered. Earlier, Anne had cut open a gall growing on a Goldenrod's stem. Despite her encouragement to nibble on the larva curled within, there were no adventurous Ramblers who took her up on her offer of a protein-rich snack.

Almost three hours and just over 5 km were covered.

Thank you to Anne Robertson again for your wisdom and patience as we ramblers can be dawdlers and distractors at times. Always so good to be out in the beauty of nature!

An eBird list submitted by Janis Grant counted 827 individuals of 24 species: Canada Goose, Tundra Swan, Gadwall, Mallard, Greater/Lesser Scaup, White-winged Scoter, Long-

4.2 Teen Christmas Bird Count, December 16, 2023

by Anne Robertson and Liam Rodgers

The 2023 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for the Teen Naturalists was held on Saturday 16 December at Elbow Lake Environmental Education Centre (ELEEC), part of the Frontenac Circle. Kathy Webb and Bill Depew accompanied us and kept an eBird account of our sightings–thank you Kathy and Bill. Sadly only one Teen was able to participate, but Liam and Anne very much enjoyed a lovely 5.7 km walk, with Bill and Kathy, in the woods on the blue and red trails, on a glorious sunny calm day with temperature rising from $2 \,^{\circ}$ C to $6 \,^{\circ}$ C.

Over a period of three hours, we recorded 16 bird species ending with lunch at the bird feeders. Bird species recorded were: six Canada Geese, one Bald Eagle, four Mourning Doves, two Downy Woodpeckers, one Hairy Woodpecker, two Blue Jays, one American Crow, two Common tailed Duck, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Common Loon, Double-crested Cormorant, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Common Raven, Crow/Raven sp., Black-capped Chickadee, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Whitebreasted Nuthatch, European Starling, American Robin, American Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal.

Ravens, 21 Black-capped Chickadees, six White-breasted Nuthatches, three Brown Creepers, three Golden-crowned Kinglets, eight American Robins, two Pine Siskins, 23 American Goldfinches, and one Red Crossbill (heard).

Liam and Anne identified several plant species which included Basswood buds, Wintergreen leaves, Wild Lily-ofthe-Valley berries, which Liam tasted for the first time. Early in the walk, we spotted a Bald Eagle, an American Crow, a few Golden-crowned Kinglets, many Chickadees and a Blue Jay. Just before mid-day, Liam found a Porcupine den amongst the rock outcrop. Also seen were a White-breasted Nuthatch, a Common Raven, as well as several American Goldfinches. Just before lunch, we spotted a Downy Woodpecker, a Hairy Woodpecker and an American Robin.

Another worthwhile community conservation project.

4.3 Ramble to Little Cataraqui Creek Conservation Area, January 2, 2024

by Judy Bierma



Figure 35: Red Oak leaves still on the branch. (Judy Bierma)

This Ramble took place on a beautiful sunny day. Anne had 11 people. We met at the Dalton Street Cinema and carpooled to Little Cataraqui Creek CA. We went in one group down trails 1, 2 and 4 with Anne as our leader. We were looking for early Pussy Willows but didn't find any in flower. I was a new learner and was very interested in the different types of lichen, moss, evergreen and deciduous trees, bushes, etc.

We saw evergreen trees that Scouts had planted in the 1980s. We saw Hemlock Trees and looked for the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, an invasive species approaching our area. We saw turkey tail fungus, and looked for imposters but didn't see them. We observed beaver cuttings, White Pines, native clematis, Red Oak, dogwood species, High Bush Cranberry, Common Buckthorn, Woody Nightshade berries. We tried hugging ash trees to determine their size. We noted White Birch and Yellow Birch, a witches broom, Hoof Fungus (a polypore), American Beech, and a Black Ash (an endangered species).

It was very educational for me as a beginner. We walked just

over four kilometres in just over two hours.

Bird species observed: Mourning Dove, Ring-billed Gull, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow, and Northern Cardinal.

4.4 Winter Birding on Amherst Island, January 6, 2024

by Gary Hillaby



Figure 36: American Kestrel perched on a fence post. (Sam Cheng)

The weather on our trip day was not ideal for spotting birds. It was overcast and windy but it was not a bitterly cold day. The usual winter weather conditions had not arrived in southern Ontario yet and the island was snow-free.

Our group of KFN members assembled at the island ferry docks for an 8:30 crossing. Before the crew boarded the ferry, a Bald Eagle was spotted as well as some waterfowl near the dock. We saw a lot of hawks (Northern Harriers and Roughlegged Hawk) and some waterfowl as we circumnavigated Amherst Island. The large waves on the south side of the island made it difficult to view any diving ducks as we drove along the shoreline. We broke for lunch at the new terminal building beside the ferry dock. All day, the winter birds (Snow Buntings, Horned Larks and others) eluded us. The highlight for myself was seeing a Northern Shrike sitting on top of a small tree; it even posed briefly for pictures.

I would like to thank all the members who participated in this outing and thank Andrew Miller and Sam Cheng for volunteering to be the carpool drivers. I appreciated Gaye Beckwith's excellent use of his scope. Although we did not see all the birds we wanted to, it is always a great day when Kingston Field Naturalist members can gather and share our love of nature.



Figure 37: Northern Shrike perched on the highest branch of a shrub. (Sam Cheng)

4.5 Teen Bird Collection Inventory, January 13, 2024

by Anne Robertson

The Bird collection inventory took place on 13 January this year with one Teen member participating and help from Shirley French. Since our permit needed to be renewed this year, we collected relevant information such as the number of new birds and the number of birds that needed to be destroyed due to irreparable damage or rotting skins. To complete the inventory, we first labelled birds received in the last year ready for freeze drying. Next, we bagged and labelled birds freeze dried last year and placed them in the appropriate group box. Finally, we checked the number of birds of each species.

4.6 Ramble to K&P Trail (from Invista Centre), January 16, 2024

by Sandy Moore

On January 16, nine enthusiastic souls met at the Invista Centre for a Ramble out of the industrial area across Centennial Drive to the K&P Trail south of Highway 401. Anne, our intrepid leader, tasked us with the continuing January objective of finding pussy willows-they would be our first flower of the new year. I won't keep you in suspense... we gave it the old college try but after a 3.45 km round trip (1 hour 40 min), no pussy willows were spotted.

It was -6 °C when we headed out in a light breeze with gently falling snow. Some of the paths had been cleared since the recent snow storm, but in other spots, we forged our own trail, post-holing (enthusiastically!) through 25 cm of snow. It was not very birdy due to the weather, and our group rambled together for the most part. It was, however, an excellent day to discuss the results of the 2023 Christmas Bird Count and study trees under winter conditions.

An urban location, such as behind the Invista Centre, provides a unique opportunity to see tree species that have been planted and are surviving outside their native range. We had a close look at two in particular: the Kentucky Coffeetree and the River Birch.

The Kentucky Coffeetree is classified as a Species at Risk in its native Canadian range, that being a few select pockets southwest of Brampton to Point Pelee. Anne impressed upon us that this was a rare chance to see this unique tree–it has leaves that are 60-90 cm long. What?! Anne always has our attention, and it is really true; the huge leaves of this tree are twice compound and the largest of any Canadian tree. Of course, there were no leaves to see in January, but there was a lot of fruit which was also impressive: dark bean-like pods, hard and leathery, and 15-25 cm long.

The River Birch is another species that can survive here, but is well north of its native range (Eastern United States north to New Hampshire). Anne pointed out one individual growing down over the edge of the path in a low-lying area. Mike Currently, there are 151 species and 637 birds. Birds from the collection were lent out for educational purposes 25 times in the last year. A full report and a list of birds held last year was published in the March 2023 *Blue Bill*. New species for the collection would be appreciated.

tested his plant ID app, PictureThis, to see if it would give us a correct identification..., and it did! The trunk was about 15 cm in diameter with pinkish-grey bark forming delicate papery curls. Because of its striking bark, it is a favoured ornamental. Like other birches we are familiar with, the River Birch (a.k.a. Water Birch, Black Birch) does well in poorly-drained and acidic soils. In its home range, it is often used for flood control and reclamation work (e.g. mine sites in West Virginia). Birds use it as an important food source, and Indigenous Peoples traditionally boiled the sweet sap to make birch syrup.

We stopped to examine two other trees of note that are local favorites: Bur Oak and Manitoba Maple. We found several Bur Oak growing in a line along the trail. Though they had obviously been planted, they are indeed a native species; in fact, the Bur Oak is the most common oak growing in Ontario. Its corky bark and deep roots make it resistant to fire and drought. Anne risked avalanche and personal upset to wade the deep snow to retrieve the one remaining dried leaf clinging to a twig. It was well worth the effort because she was able to show us a good example of the characteristic 'waist' where the Bur Oak leaf slims toward its midvein. Its acorns have bristles around the cup, hence its other common name, the descriptive: Mossy-cup Oak.

As the snowfall became heavier, it was interesting to be talking about the identifying features of leaves in January. Another tree on our ramble is also known for its distinctive leaves: the Manitoba Maple. It is our only native maple that has divided leaves. It is sometimes called the Ash-Leafed Maple or Box Elder but it is a true maple, *Acer negundo*, and it can even be used to make maple syrup. Because it is a fastgrowing tree, it is often used for landscaping. It is commonly considered a softwood and used commercially for pulpwood. Its range continues to expand and in much of its distribution, it is considered invasive. We continued north on the access path to the K&P Trail; we wanted to follow it south as far as the first wetland. In the reeds by the wetland, Sandy (your author) waded through the snow and reached for a tiny snow-covered bird nest. We found it was actually two nests, one stacked directly on top of another, each a delicate cup of woven grasses and cattail fluff. A double-decker nest-how wonderful and odd! Anne, of course, was able to clear up the mystery. A Brown-headed Cowbird will commonly lay its eggs in the tiny nest of a Yellow Warbler and the warbler will abandon that nest (and eggs) and build a new one directly on top of the old one. I have seen photos of as many as six (!) nests stacked upon each other.

By now the snow had turned to huge classic Charlie Brown Christmas flakes, and in the midst of this blustery swirl, Mike pulled up a photo of an egret that he had snapped at that same wetland in a different season. Fun to think of how every season and every ramble has its own special surprises.

Though it was not a birdy day, several people were carrying binoculars, and the sharp-eyed and sharp-eared among us did pick out eight species. Kathy recorded these and submitted them to eBird: Ring-billed Gull, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch,

4.7 Ramble to Lost Lake, February 6, 2024

by Steve Moore

On February 6, Anne Robertson led 13 KFN members on a 3.5 km hike into Lost Lake. The group parked along the edge of Taylor Kidd Boulevard just north of the Amherstview sewage lagoons. An opening in the fence provided access to the relatively recently designated Conservation Area surrounding Lost Lake and the start of our hike. The weather was brisk and accompanied with a cool breeze, but it was a non-issue once in the woods. As the morning progressed, the weather became sunny and warm. Regardless, the weather was not very favourable for birds, so this report will be more plant-centric. Although Lost Lake was our destination, the jewel-in-the-crown turned out to be the habitat and plant associations occurring around the lake itself.

Our hike started out along snowmobile trail #103, but it quickly departed northward through a white pine plantation. Ramblers estimated it to be about 40 years old based on the presence of circles of branches, one circle being proEuropean Starling, White-throated Sparrow, and Northern Cardinal.

Some of us were looking at the sky and thinking ahead to our long drive home, but we were won over by the lure of coffee, donuts, warmth and good company. The Ramblers adjourned to Tim Hortons.



Figure 38: Bur Oak (or Mossy-cup Oak) leaf encased in ice, showing the characteristic head and 'waist' shape. (Sandy Moore)

duced each year. Anne opened with a discussion of the plantation and the associated problems with planting one species of tree as a monoculture forest making it susceptible to disease. With plantings equally spaced, in straight lines and no understory, it reminds the observer that it is not truly a forest but a crop.

Based on reading sign, red squirrels appeared to have been enjoying the seeds from the white pine cones and clipping off the tips of branches. The formation of a midden (thick accumulation of pine cone scales) at the base of the pine revealed the squirrel's hermitage.

Black-capped Chickadees came in to observe the Ramblers and followed them out into a sunny opening among the pines where everyone basked in the warmth of the sun. Some of the participants had already noticed that chickadees have started to make their two-noted spring call. Here, within this opening, was a wet-seep where Anne noted the occurrence of the Wild Parsnip, *Pastinaca sativa*, and discussed its ecology. This species is poisonous to touch and it does affect the skin if touched and exposed to sunlight. Other similar looking species are poisonous such as Water Hemlock (*Cicuta maculate*) and, consequently, should be avoided. Anne is always on the lookout for opportunities to provide the group with unique clues for remembering our botany lessons–such as Wild Parsnip is part of the Apiaceae family, the celery, carrot and parsley family (also known as Umbelliferae), where they have compound umbel inflorescence, flowers spreading like umbrellas.

Another plant species of note occurring within the seep, and of interest to Steve (your author), was presence of Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*). Arrowgrass belongs to the Juncaginaceae family, predominately–moisture loving plants. Although it can grow up to 75 cm, it more commonly grows less than 30 cm and may resemble grass or sedges to the untrained eye. What is interesting about *Triglochin maritima* is that it is known as a cyanide producer and can manufacture cyanide under stress conditions such as drought or grazing by livestock, presumably a survival or defense mechanism.

Anne continued her commentary of all things plants and pointed out a small patch of Smooth Sumac (*Rhus glabra*, native to eastern North America). Most likely here, a hybrid of Smooth and Staghorn Sumac. Its delicate feather-like flowers distinguish it from its close relative, the Staghorn sumac. Sumac is often cultivated for its lustrous dark green foliage which turns a brilliant orange-red in fall and has beautiful mauve berries.

The air temperature the previous day had been warm, allowing snow conditions to soften and record the presence and activities of the forest denizens. As well as squirrels, Whitetailed Deer and Eastern Cottontail tracks were well represented along the plantation's edge.

Emerging out of the plantation and continuing on towards our destination, the trail led us downslope through shrubby habitat where Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) and American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) were growing. Buckthorn is an invasive species introduced from Europe in the 1880s as an ornamental shrub while bittersweet is native to central and eastern North America.

Bittersweet, like other vines, uses other structures for support, but it does not constrict the expansion of its support host, thus not usually killing it. Fruits (orange berries) are poisonous to humans if ingested, but they are readily eaten by many birds. Individual plants are either male or female, thus requiring both to set fruit. The group continued down contour into a mixed forest that had flooded with run-off, but fortunately it had frozen over which allowed us to continue towards Lost Lake. Although it was frozen, the ice was thin in some spots and a few people broke through, and at least one intrepid Rambler, Jackie, got a wet foot.



Figure 39: Quite a few clusters of Purple Pitcher Plants were found sticking up through snow. (Steve Moore)

As we approached Lost Lake, the plant species began to change to reflect the acidic nature of the waterbody and its surrounding habitat. The plant associations surrounding Lost Lake are indicators of fen and bog habitat (acidic and infertile soils), a feature uncommon in this region of limestone bedrock.

Lost Lake was once a larger lake; over millennia, the Lake has filled in, and it has become smaller and is now a small pond with low pH. The surrounding habitat is characteristic of a bog or fen with plants associated with wet, low-nutrient, acidic habitats. The surrounding forest zone did contain species associated with bog-like habitat, such as Black Spruce (*Picea mariana*), larch (*Larix laricina*), Threeleaf Goldthread (*Coptis trifolia*), sphagnum moss and a handful of ericaceous plants closer to the water's edge that included Labrador Tea (*Rhododendron groenlandicum*), Leatherleaf (*Chamaedaphne calyculata*), Northern Bog Rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia* var. *polifolia*), Sweet Gale (*Myrica gale*) and the crown jewel, the Purple Pitcher Plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*). Waterwillow, also known as Swamp Loosestrife (*Decodon verticillatus*) and Speckled Alder (*Alnus incana*) were also present though not strictly acid loving species.

The Purple Pitcher Plant is a carnivorous plant with leaves modified to hold water and digestive enzymes, aiding in the absorption of nutrients from the insects that become trapped inside the pitchers. Quite a few clusters of pitcher plants were located sticking up through the snow. Though the leathery "pitchers" now contain ice, they will survive the winter and continue to thrive next spring. For several Ramblers these were the first pitcher plants they had ever seen.

I, for one, will be returning to Lost Lake in June to view the flowering pitcher plants and to look for other carnivorous plants that I would expect to find there such as sundews and bladderworts. I also want to document the ericaceous species growing around the lake margin. Now I just have to find my hip-waders.

Although the weather was not very conducive for birding the following species were recorded: Black-capped Chickadee (16), Blue Jay (4), American Crow (3), White-breasted Nuthatch (2), American Robin (6).

4.8 Teen Trip to Meyer Woods for Wood Duck Nest Box Maintenance, February 10, 2024

by Anne Robertson



Figure 40: Janet cleaning out a wood duck box and assessing its contents. (Kathy Webb)

On February 10, 2024 two Kingston Teen Naturalists and two adults went in to the east side of the Meyer Woods property. Ice conditions were unusual with a warm winter, but two boxes were considered safe to approach. We walked in over old snow, carrying the gear needed, on a glorious sunny day with temperatures rising to $11 \,^{\circ}$ C.

The first box, #137 (near the Amphibian monitoring site), is very close to shore and although slippery, the ice was thick and safe. We had had a discussion about safety on the ice prior to setting off, and we were all carrying sticks.

The box lowered easily and was found to have several egg shells and one abandoned egg as well as a couple of Northern Flicker feathers (easily recognisable with their yellow shaft). The egg was measured using calipers to determine the species. It was 53×44 mm and, with pale grey down feathers, was determined to be a Hooded Merganser egg. The condition of the box and predator guard was good.

After some discussion we decided to trust the ice to the next box (#143). This involved crossing near a beaver dam onto a higher pond. Near the dam, the ice was thinner. Here we discovered some minnow traps and pulled them out to see what had been caught (Brown Bullhead, Golden Shiner and Finescale Dace).

The second box also held one abandoned Hooded Merganser egg and several broken shells. The box and predator guard were in good condition. Both of these boxes have been used by Hooded Mergansers for the last couple of years.

At this point it was decided that access to the third box was a little risky and we would forego checking that. We had good luck, under the conditions, to be able to get to the two boxes.

We returned to the cars for lunch. A species list of nine birds was recorded. The most exciting observations were: six Trumpeter Swans flying low overhead, a Red-tailed Hawk and an adult Bald Eagle. Also seen were Common Raven, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Blue Jay and Dark-eyed Junco. A number of old deer tracks were seen and two White-tailed Deer. Several spiders crawling on the snow were noted. A Forest Wolf Spider was identified.

Thank you participants!

Two days later, Kathy went to monitor the final two boxes with two others. Box #139 had been used by Hooded Merganser, determined by abandoned egg size. The box bottom was rotted and chewed and they did a temporary repair. Box #165 had also been used and had two abandoned eggs. One appeared to be Hooded Merganser and the other likely Wood Duck. As well, a Common Grackle nest was found on top of the duck nest and abandoned eggs. The box and predator guard were in good condition. The bird list for the second day included an immature Bald Eagle and a couple of Red Crossbills (a new species for this property) flying over. They also found the remains of a deer on the ice–a mass of hair.

In conclusion, all four boxes had been used by Hooded Mergansers, determined by the broken egg shells and the size of abandoned eggs found in each box. As well, a possible Wood Duck used box #165.

4.9 Family day trip to Wolfe Island, February 19, 2024

by Erwin Batalla



Figure 41: Horned Lark. (Jane Revell)





After meeting at a nearby parking lot, the sixteen participants took four cars onto the Wolfe Island ferry at 09:00. There was no ice sheet on the water during the crossing. The temperature was -10 °C and the sky was clear blue. We dis-

embarked at 09:30, drove through the village of Stella, proceeded further east and started looking for raptors while going south along the 4th line. We spotted several Northern Harriers hunting over the snow-covered fields and a small group of Horned Larks landed on the road.

We crossed Baseline Road, continued further south and stopped at a house with some active feeders. Dark-eyed Juncos and American Tree Sparrows were feeding on the ground and a small group of Snow Buntings arrived at that time. It was the firsts of several groups of buntings we would see in the morning.



Figure 43: Rough-legged Hawk. (Janis Grant)

We met Barb and Christine at that time. They informed us that Short-eared Owls had been seen nearby. Gaye Beckwith and Gary Hillaby had taken the 07:00 ferry and phoned us to report that the owls were on the 5th line. We made our way to that location encountering Horned Larks and buntings along the way. Some Rough-legged Hawks and Red-tailed Hawks were seen sitting in trees or hovering over fields. When we reached the corner of Baseline Road and 5th line, two Short-eared Owls were spotted. One of them landed on a telephone pole. We stopped and observed that, on two occasions, the Short-eared Owls would catch a rodent and a Northern Harrier would immediately force the owl to drop its prey. The harrier would then leave with the ill-gotten morsel. Even though the owls (about five of them) outnumbered the harriers (by one or two), they seemed unable to stop this poaching.



Figure 44: Short-eared Owl on utility pole. (Dianne Croteau)

Short-eared Owls usually hunt at night. The Short-eared Owls exploit the same food niche as the harriers but are free from their interference in the dark of night. If the prey is less abundant, the Short-eared Owl must hunt through the day. It was remarkable to observe the hawk stealing food from the owls.

We returned to the 4th line, going north and hoping for a Snowy Owl sighting. One or two had been seen in the previous week but they eluded us on that day. We drove again through the village, spotting a Bald Eagle flying and Mute Swans resting on the ice. We returned to Kingston on the 12:00 ferry. By then, the temperature had only risen a couple of degrees but the sun made it very comfortable to be outside.

Richard and Dianne with Lesley and Brad, Daniella and her husband with Susan and Janis, Christine and her three passengers, Jackie, Jane and Marlene took part in this outing.



Figure 45: Northern Harrier. (Gaye Beckwith)



Figure 46: Short-eared Owl in flight. (Dianne Croteau)

4.10 Ramble on Butternut Creek Trail, February 20, 2024

by Daniella Checchin

It was an ideal winter day for a ramble–fresh snow, recently cleared paths, and -4 °C with increasing sun. With 18 people gathered at the Innovation Drive parking lot, we set out to explore the Butternut Creek (aka Greenwood Park) Trail to Gore Road and back (4 km).

With a wide range of trees and shrubs, we paused often to investigate. There were several types of oaks, with their distinguishing terminal clusters of buds. Along with red oaks, we identified the Bur (Mossy-cup) Oak by the rounded lobes of adjacent leaves separated by a "cinched waist" pinching towards the stem. We also came across apple and pear trees, noting the short woody shoots (or spurs) from which the fruit grows and intricate vertical branches crowding the trees' middle–a poignant reminder of what was planted here before the area became more developed. In contrast to one another, we identified Witch Hazel, with a remaining flower from November (when it is often the only shrub flowering) (Figure 47) and a massive Pussy Willow, showing the first flowers of spring. Last, but not least, we admired a birch catkin with its overlapping series of bracts (which protect the seeds) creating an intricate cylindrical column (Figure 48), and the tiny oval seeds (or nutlets) with translucent "wings" to help them disperse (Figure 49). Playing "Eye Spy," we saw, in the seed shapes, fleurs-de-lis and soaring birds against the white snow.



Figure 47: Witch Hazel with a lingering flower. (Daniella Checchin)



Figure 48: Dissected birch catkin showing its overlapping series of bracts. (Daniella Checchin)

The birders in the group identified 16 species. Highlights were a male Eastern Towhee, who had not migrated, and one (possibly two) Northern Shrike. The other species were the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Blue Jay, Blackcapped Chickadee, House Finch, American Goldfinch, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, and American Crow.

Part way thru the ramble, as we paused to look over the valley, a light scattering of snowflakes could be seen as the sun's rays filtered through the clouds, creating an iridescent sparkle. It was such a breathtaking, ephemeral moment. One KFN member chose to leave a more lasting, but equally "heavenly" impression, by capping off the ramble with a snow angel (Figure 50).



Figure 49: Scattering of birch catkin debris brought to mind fleurs-de-lis and soaring birds. (Daniella Checchin)



Figure 50: Nancy's snow angel. (Daniella Checchin)

Kingston Field Naturalists 75th Anniversary

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Kingston Field Naturalists. If you would like to contribute ideas or volunteer to help, please email the committee at 75th@kingstonfieldnaturalists.org.



Figure 51: A thumbnail image of the massive (18 200 cm²) poster now in the KFN display case in the Biosciences Complex at Queen's University. It was created to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the KFN and includes 75 natural history photographs from members. Sadly, we didn't get photos from 75 members; luckily, many of the 36 contributors sent in more than one photo. The background is a view from Rock Dunder in the autumn.

History of the Kingston Field Naturalists 1949 to 1954 (Part II)

by Robert B. Stewart

continued from the last issue...

The first annual meeting of the club was held on April 26, 1950, at which time a motion was unanimously carried to affiliate with the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. The Kingston Nature Club has been affiliated with the F.O.N. since this time. Two club members have served on the board of directors of the Federation, Dr. H.W. Curran was elected a member of the Board at the F.O.N. annual meeting held in Kingston on March 17 and 18, 1951, and Dr. George M. Stirrett was elected a member at the 1954 annual meeting. Mr. K.S. Clarke, also a member of our club, served as President of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters for 1951 and 1952. Thus the Kingston Nature Club has been well represented in Conservation organizations.

The activities of the Kingston Nature Club viewed in the light of the purpose of the club as defined in the constitution indicate, I think, a definite progress. The acquisition and recording of knowledge of Natural history has been well served in a weekly publication in the Kingston

Whig-Standard, entitled "Local Notes on Natural History", edited by Dr. George M. Stirrett. This has since been increased to include a nature club bulletin which published its first number in March 1954. These two publications, we hope, will provide a permanent record of natural history in this area. The club meetings have always been held open to the public, and often attendance at these meetings has been double the club membership. The Club field activities have been limited to field trips including the Annual Christmas Bird Census, and assisting' in the mid-winter waterfowl inventory. Club members have participated in Chimney Swift and Gull banding and Wood Duck nesting boxes have been erected. The Club membership has increased from 16 in 1949-50 to about 50 in 1954, and it is sincerely to be hoped that, with over half of these members active in the field, more field projects can be successfully undertaken.

Read more histories of the Kingston Field Naturalists on the website: https://kingstonfieldnaturalists.org/categor y/history-of-the-kingston-field-naturalists/

Kingston Field Naturalists Objectives

The Kingston Field Naturalists (KFN) is a nature club and charitable organization, active since 1949. The objectives of the club are:

- to acquire, record and disseminate knowledge of natural history;
- to stimulate public interest in nature and in the protection and preservation of wildlife and natural habitats; and
- to acquire, receive and hold lands for the purpose of preserving their natural flora and fauna, and to encourage and assist other organizations and individuals to do likewise.

Nature Reserves

The Kingston Field Naturalists manages three nature reserves in order to protect important habitat and allow for connections with nature.

Helen Quilliam Sanctuary at Otter Lake

A 199-hectare (492-acre) property of mixed forest located in the Canadian Shield in the Township of South Frontenac. Members may access the property using any of the established trails.

Martin Edwards Nature Reserve

A 77-hectare (191-acre) property of fields and marshland located on the southeast shore of Amherst Island. Members may access the property through a single trail along the south shore.

Sylvester-Gallagher Nature Reserve

An 37-hectare (92-acre) parcel of forest and grassland that is adjacent to the Martin Edwards Nature Reserve. Access is restricted.

Conservation and Education

The KFN actively carries out conservation efforts of its own and supports those of other organizations. Issues such as parks creation, wildlife habitat protection, public environmental policy, and environmental welfare are of ongoing concern to the KFN. The Club takes public positions on local issues affecting the preservation of our natural heritage.

Be a Contributor!

This edition of *The Blue Bill* could have contained your article, photo, nature sketch, report, puzzle, quiz, co-nundrum, cartoon, or other contribution (if it did, many thanks)!

Submission Guidelines:

Submit the **text** of your article in Word, Open Document Format (.odt), or Plain Text. LaTeX markup may be used for text emphasis.

If your article includes a **table**, send it as a separate document in Excel, Open Document Format (.ods), or CSV even if it is contained in your text document.

Send images as separate files (e.g. png, jpg, gif) even if they are included in your text document. Please attach them to the email.

Crop images to show the subject and ensure they are a **minimum of 1000 px** wide for a column width photo and 2000 px wide for a page width photo.

Include a **caption and credit or attribution** for each image.

Verify common and scientific names with an upto-date curated resource such as iNaturalist.ca.

Use LaTeX for mathematical notation.

Send submissions to the editor: editor@thebluebill.ca by the first of the month of publication (i.e. March 1, June 1, September 1, or December 1).





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