Identification of fall raptors in Quebec

By Marcel Gahbauer

Raptor identification for many birders seems to be a challenge on par with the infamous and “confusing fall warblers”, at least once the easy species like Bald Eagle and Red-tailed Hawk are taken out of the mix. The good news is that if you approach it systematically, and are given a decent look, most of the species occurring in eastern Canada can be separated quite well. The bad news (can’t escape it, sorry!) is that the supposedly easy species can actually be among the trickier, due to their variability.

The situation can be made a bit less daunting by recognizing that there are really only 16 raptor species that occur regularly in our area. A couple of others (Swainson’s Hawk and Black Vulture) should be kept in mind: they do occur periodically, and knowing how to recognize them is key to documenting their occurrence. Fortunately, these two are reasonably distinct. The Swainson’s Hawk, similar in size to a Red-tailed Hawk, has markedly two-toned underwings, with the leading edge pale and the trailing edge dark, and it tends to soar with its wings in more of a dihedral (v-shaped cross-section) than other hawks of similar shape and size. One of the best ways to distinguish the two vultures is by their flight profile. The Black Vulture holds its wings flat and flaps them much more frequently and rapidly, whereas the Turkey Vulture is also known for its dihedral profile. The other key feature is uniformly dark underwings except for contrastingly pale gray “fingers” (i.e. outer primaries).

Continued: Page 3
Recently we had our September Board meeting. After the long hot summer the weather has thankfully cooled. This may have contributed to an outstanding turnout of directors. As usual there were plenty of items on the Agenda.

One of the most interesting was a discussion paper prepared and tabled by our first Vice-President, Richard Gregson. The paper outlined the benefits of amalgamating our Research and Support Grants Committees into one. We are in the fortunate position, largely based on the Kelly endowment, to be able to make these annual grants available. In recent years annual contributions have amounted to more than $10,000.

As the grant environment changes we need to move with it. Amalgamation would allow us to be more efficient and effective. One committee would review all requests for assistance and they would be compared and evaluated based on our overall mission and objectives. This will allow us to consider multiple year funding of projects which is currently difficult to do. Larger grants might also be possible although there are many more people and organizations in need of funding than we could possibly assist. I would anticipate that a final proposal will come forward for Board discussion and likely approval within the next few months.

Another area which will be of genuine interest to you is our land conservation activities. Over the years we have been able to acquire seven or eight properties from Île aux Perroquets in the St. Lawrence near Labrador, to Ghost Hill Farm near Eardley (or Breckenridge as it better known to members), up the Ottawa River from Gatineau. Most of these properties we own outright. Others in partnership with Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC). We have also provided seed money to assist NCC in the purchase of properties, and with the assistance of NCC, acquired various covenants to protect other important conservation lands.

While the general public is largely unaware of our conservation work this may soon change. We are always on the look-out for opportunities to save important conservation lands. We hope to be able to make an announcement in the next few months about a major new development in the protection of bird habitat in Quebec.

I expect that you will hear more about this initiative too before year-end.

Jeff Harrison
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But back to dealing with the species you are much more likely to encounter! Often the best way to narrow down the options is to determine the group to which the bird belongs — vulture, accipiter, buteo, harrier, osprey, eagle, or falcon. While there are a few well-known ID challenges that span groups, especially at a distance, (e.g. Red-shouldered Hawk vs. Northern Goshawk) for the most part the differences in shape and size are substantial between groups, and the real trick is to learn how to differentiate among species within each of them. Let’s explore each group, proceeding roughly from the largest and bulkiest to the smallest and sleekest.

Two eagles occur in Quebec, both in relatively low numbers: Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles. Although, when adult, Bald Eagles are unmistakeable, with their white heads and tails, it usually takes five or six years for them to reach full maturity, and until then, they can show a remarkable variety of mottled dark and pale plumage, and are often mistaken for Golden Eagles. However, even at a distance, the Bald Eagle is a heftier bird, especially the head - a Golden Eagle’s head and neck appear almost too dainty for the size of its body. The other key is to look for the distribution of white plumage ... on immature Bald Eagles it may be scattered widely across the body, underwings, and various patches on the tail, whereas on immature Golden Eagles it is typically limited to smaller patches on the underwing and to a band at the base of the tail. In Quebec, numbers are low enough that this is rarely helpful, but Bald Eagles are much more gregarious and may be seen in sizable groups especially along shorelines, whereas Golden Eagles are largely solitary.

The possibility of the aforementioned Black Vulture aside, the Turkey Vulture is the only member of its family that occurs regularly in Quebec. They are large and dark, potentially confused only with the two eagles. The strong dihedral of the Turkey Vulture (and its associated unstable flight), its tiny head relative to body size, and its tendency to migrate in groups should make it easy to identify.

The Osprey, unique enough to be classified in a family of its own, is also sufficiently large that generally it would be confused only with eagles. Again flight profile can be very useful, since the wings are often held in an “m” pattern, i.e. with the wrists above the head. At closer range, the striking dark/light plumage pattern is distinct and the fact that they are often near water can be a clue, though as noted previously, Bald Eagles tend to favor such habitat as well.

Also, though I have been the subject of some good-natured ribbing on this aspect, I maintain that the Sharp-shinned has a more cute face, while there tends to be a mean look to Cooper’s.
BIRDS PROTECTION QUEBEC

**Identifying Fall Raptors - continued**

Buteos are the most diverse group in Quebec, with four species occurring regularly in addition to the occasional Swainson’s Hawk. Generally these are relatively stout medium-sized raptors, with rather broad, long, and rounded wings, and relatively short and rounded tails. The Red-tailed Hawk is one of the best known raptors in North America, recognizable even to many non-birders. Of course, that is when it has a red tail, which is only the case for adults... immature Red-tails have a banded brown tail, and can be more easily confused with any of the other buteos. The most reliable feature is actually one that is less well known: Red-tailed Hawks are unique in having a dark patagium (leading edge of the underwing from the body to the wrist) contrasting with an otherwise pale underwing. This is not to be confused with the Rough-legged Hawk, which is most easily recognized by its dark carpal area (large patch spreading across the base of the primaries). Broad-winged vs. Red-shouldered Hawk is a sometimes under-appreciated identification challenge, especially when it comes to immature birds. In migration, behaviour provides great clues, as Broad-wings are gregarious and often circle at length on thermals, whereas Red-shoulders are more solitary and tend to fly more directly. At closer range, look for the distinct black trailing edge of the wings and equally wide dark/light tail bands on adult Broad-wings, or the relatively lightly marked underside of immature with a wide dark subterminal band on the tail. Compare this with the dark *fingertips* of the outer primaries, and somewhat more patterning on the underside of Red-shouldered Hawks, especially adults which feature a tail with broad black bars as well as rufous shoulders and underwing coverts. The pale crescent-shaped *windows* toward the outer primaries have long been suggested as a good field mark for Red-shouldered Hawk, but beware that other species can show a similar pattern, so don’t rely exclusively on this.

Harriers are similar in size to buteos, but quite different in structure, characterized by long and narrow wings, a long tail, and a relatively buoyant flight (though this tends to be less evident with high-flying migrants). Many field guides have emphasized using the white rump as a key feature, but it isn’t always visible, and a surprising number of other raptors can appear to have a white rump under certain angles and lighting, so don’t rely too much on this. Immature harriers are readily identified by their uniformly rusty underparts, while adult males are sometimes nicknamed “gray ghosts” because they are so pale: white below and light gray above. Both of these plumages are unique among eastern North American raptors, so unless they are very distant, only the adult females pose any challenge.

Accipiters are traditionally considered to pose the toughest identification challenge among the raptors, and indeed many experts agree that anyone who puts a name to each one they encounter is probably making some errors. As a group they are relatively distinct in that they all have relatively short and round wings and long tails, but telling apart the three North American species can be tricky since in all cases immature birds are brown above and streaked below. However, no need to despair! Northern Goshawks are generally the easiest to separate from the mix, as they are hefty birds, sometimes described by hawkwatchers as flying tanks, or as buteos trapped in an accipiter’s body. If seen at relatively close range, they have a more distinct white supercilium than other accipiters, and adults have a faintly barred gray breast, whereas adults of the other two species have red barring. The biggest debates tend to be over separating Sharp-shinned and Cooper’s Hawks, in part because large female Sharp-shins and small male Cooper’s can be nearly identical in size. Various tips have been proposed; here are the ones I find most useful, but bear in mind the advice of the experts who suggest that some tricky individuals are best left as unidentified accipiters. If you see the bird in flight, look at the shape: is it a Cooper’s cross (i.e. relatively large head projecting ahead of wings with the leading edge held straight), or a shrugging Sharpie (i.e. small head, the front of it lining up with the wrists that are pushed forward)? If perched, try to look at the legs, which tend to look impossibly thin on a Sharp-shinned, but more proportionally robust on a Cooper’s. Also, though I’ve been the subject of some good-natured ribbing on this aspect, I maintain that the Sharp-shinned tends to have a rather cute face, while there tends to be a mean look to Cooper’s.

Falcons as a group can be distinguished by their pointed wings, rapid flight, and small to medium size. For quite a while, American Kestrels were the only frequently seen falcon in southern Quebec, but in recent years they have declined while Merlins and Peregrine Falcons have greatly increased in abundance, especially in urban areas. Kestrels are small and have very distinctive plumage including a bold blue/orange/black/white facial pattern, a rusty orange back, and on males also blue-gray wings. Merlins are only marginally larger, but are streaked below and uniformly brown or gray above. At a distance these two species can appear similar and behaviour can provide useful clues. Notably, Kestrels often hover above prey, and flick their tails while perched; Merlins do neither, but can be seen pursuing prey in rapid flight for considerable distances. Both in terms of plumage and behaviour, the Peregrine can be thought of as a larger version of the Merlin; comparable in size to a small buteo but with the pointed wings and speed of a falcon, it is quite distinct. The only similar species is the Gyrfalcon, generally seen in southern Quebec only in winter, and a rare find even then. It is somewhat larger than a Peregrine, and some colour morphs (especially the striking white form) are unmistakable. However, gray Gyrfalcons can appear quite similar to Peregrines, and a close look may be required to tell them apart; try to check for a stockier body, less distinct facial markings, and heavier, more buteo-like wingbeats.
Identifying fall raptors

By necessity, this brief overview has skipped over various potentially useful details, including many additional notes regarding behaviour and variability within species, as well as the value of knowing seasonal patterns for some raptors. I believe that anyone seriously interested in improving their raptor identification skills should have a copy of one or both of Raptors of Eastern North America (Brian Wheeler, 2003) and Hawks from Every Angle (Jerry Liguori, 2005), both of which present a wealth of photos and tips specifically aimed at untangling some of the trickier identification challenges. But more than anything, like with most birding, the key is practice. The more individuals you see, and the more times you work through identification challenges, the better you’ll become at finding your own tricks for recognizing raptors quickly and easily. Fall is perhaps the best time of year to observe raptors due to fairly large numbers migrating over a prolonged period, so get out there and enjoy your practice!

Marcel Gahbauer took up birding as a youngster and managed to turn a fascinating hobby into a career. He co-founded the Migration Research Foundation and the McGill Bird Observatory, securing a job at Jacques-Whitford (now Stantec) in Calgary before even leaving McGill’s graduate school with a PhD. Currently, he is on the Steering Committee of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network and director of the Society of Canadian Ornithologists. He heads back to Montreal every chance he gets (the warblers are better out here).

Directors Wanted

The election of the new members to the BPQ Board of Directors (for 2010-2013) will take place at the Annual General Meeting on May 30, 2011. There will be spots for up to five new members, depending on how many seats become vacant. The Nominating Committee will be preparing a slate early in the New Year, and additional nominations may be proposed.

If you would like to submit your name, or if you know someone who might be interested in being on the Board, please contact us. The deadline for nominations, probably late April, will be announced in the next newsletter.

New Members

Welcome to returning and new members Alison Hackney, Senneville and Suzanne Tokarsky & Family, Montreal. We hope to see you on our field trips and at our monthly meetings. Introduce yourself to the greeter at the meeting; we want to get to know you.

Membership Renewals

Membership renewals for 2010-2011 were due October 1. Please send in your renewal today if you have not already done so. This will save us extra costs in sending out reminders. It also saves in time, giving us more opportunity to enjoy the birds! Thank you to members who have already renewed your membership. It is truly appreciated!
Membership also has a tangible side. Please use your membership card to ask for a discount at these fine nature stores: Centre de conservation de la faune ailée, Cabane d’Oiseaux a la Campagne, and Lire la nature.

Finally, the solution to last edition’s fiendish birding crossword …

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B A H A M A S W A L L O W
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Summer Series of Birding 2010
A report on the seventh annual series

By Sheldon Harvey

I’m pleased to report on the results of the seventh year of summer field trips held between June 26th and August 14th, 2010. We had eight trips, visiting Pointe de Yamachiche, Boucherville, Vaudreuil, the eastern shore of the Richelieu River, St-Lazare & points northwest to Pointe Fortune, Dundee, Île Bizard, and the ever popular eastern Ontario sewage lagoon trip. Once again the weather cooperated nicely with lots of sun, not overly hot and not a single drop of rain.

A total of 114 species were seen throughout the summer; an average of 49 species per trip, with an average of 10 participants per trip. Our most productive trip, species-wise, was our trip starting in St-Lazare and heading north-west along the Ontario/QC border to the Carillon Dam at Pointe Fortune, QC on July 24. We set a new record for a Summer Series field trip with 66 species, eclipsing our previous high of 63 in 2009 at Philipsburg. Five new species were added to our Summer Series master list of species which now stands at 166 over the seven years. They were Upland Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, Stilt Sandpiper, Eastern Towhee and Blue-headed Vireo. There were just 10 species that were seen on all eight field trips this summer. They were Mallard, Ring-billed Gull, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, American Robin, Yellow Warbler, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird and Common Grackle. Two species which had been seen in each of the previous six years of summer trips were not spotted this year. They were the Black Tern and the Black-and-white Warbler.

I’d like to thank Wayne Grubert who filled in as leader on Trip #7 to Île Bizard. I thank everyone who participated in the summer trips, contributing to another productive and fun season. I look forward to another great summer series in 2011.

24/07/10 Summer Series Trip #5 St. Lazare & Ontario/QC border to Pointe Fortune
Leader: Sheldon Harvey - Warm & partly cloudy. 9 birders; 66 species

31/07/10 Summer Series Trip #6 Lac St-Francois Reserve, Dundee
Leader: Sheldon Harvey - Sunny & warm. 8 birders; 45 species
Birds of the Day: Bald Eagles, Sandhill Cranes Other Birds of Note: Osprey, Alder Flycatcher, House Wren, Eastern Towhee, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Purple Finch

07/08/10 Summer Series Trip #7 Parc Nature, Île Bizard
Leader: Wayne Grubert - Sunny & cool. 3 birders; 43 species
Bird of the Day: Least Bittern Other Birds of Note: Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Merlin, Virginia Rail, Common Tern, Purple Martin, Bank Swallow, Marsh Wren

14/08/10 Summer Series Trip #8 Eastern Ontario Sewage Lagoons
Leader: Sheldon Harvey - Hot & partly cloudy. 14 birders; 56 species
Bird of the Day: Ruddy Duck Other Birds of Note: Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, American Bittern, Peregrine Falcon, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Common Raven, Purple Martin, Marsh Wren, Bobolink, Baltimore Oriole

28/08/10 Lac St-Francois Reserve-Dundee, Ste-Martine & Mercier
Leader: Wayne Grubert - Hot, windy & sunny. 15 birders; 60 species

Sheldon Harvey is a BPQ Board member, Chair of the Marketing Committee, and serves on the Field Trips Committee. His most recent endeavours include the production of the new BPQ brochure and having the logo redesigned. We are grateful to Sheldon for initiating and continuing to offer his successful Summer Series field trips.
Helping with Bird Censuses

There are many opportunities for birders to take part in the invaluable work of bird population censusing. For example:

The 75th Annual Montreal Christmas Bird Count

The date for the 2010 Montreal Christmas Bird Count (CBC) has been set for **Saturday December 18**. Mark the date on your calendar and plan on participating!

CBC’s are an important source of data for tracking local and national birding trends. Many long-time participants consider the Christmas Bird Count a highlight of their birding year.

An overview of the count, a map of the count circle, and the results from past counts, are all available on our website. The count circle is divided into areas which are covered by teams which regularly include beginners as well as experienced birders. Fair weather or foul, the Montreal CBC is a great excuse to get out with old friends and make new ones.

If you live in the count area and have a feeder, but can’t participate in the field, we welcome you to become a feeder-watcher. Our website has instructions for feeder-watchers which will explain how you can participate, and a downloadable feeder checklist.

If you participated last year your leader will be contacting you by early December. If you are new to the Christmas count and are interested in becoming either a field participant or a feeder-watcher please get in touch with me. There will be an informal social event and compilation of results immediately after the count. This event will take place at the Montreal West Curling Club, 17 Ainslie Road in Montreal West. Since almost all our birders participate, the after count social is the one event in our birding year where you have a chance to chat and swap birding stories.

Jeff Harrison - Compiler - Email: dha@videotron.ca - Tel: 514-486-4943

Jeff Harrison is in his second year as President of Bird Protection Quebec. He has been on the Board for nine years, during which he has contributed enormously to the work of the Society. His first ‘assignment’ was as head of the Monthly Meeting Committee where he used his contacts and knowledge of the environmental and ornithological community to find us consistently excellent speakers on widely diverse topics. He initiated the BPQ Awards system which recognizes members of the Society and of the wider Quebec birding and conservation community and he took over the organization of the Christmas Bird Count as well as the chairmanship of the Property Acquisition Committee. Jeff’s birding skills, his enthusiasm for birds and nature in general, and his personal qualities of energy, dedication and scholarship have made him an outstanding leader of BPQ.
The Hudson Christmas Bird Count

The Hudson Christmas Bird Count will take place on Sunday, December 26th, with the post count gathering held at the Bentley’s at 106 Selkirk in Hudson. Seventeen routes are covered in all ranging from Valleyfield in the south to across the Ottawa River in Oka to the north, while to the west folks count up Rigaud Mountain and to the east as far as Île Perrot.

There are many different habitats to be explored and always a good variety of species. A highlight for many of us who participated in last year’s Hudson CBC was spotting the red morph Eastern Screech-owl, seen above, in the Driscoll-Naylor Sanctuary. This sanctuary is owned by BPQ and is situated in the centre of Hudson.

If you can help on the count please call Alison Bentley at 1-866-438-4096 (Camp Tamaracouta) or on some weekends at home at 450-458-8076. She can also be reached by e-mail at alison.bentley@sympatico.ca.

Looking forward to having a great turn out on the count and some better weather this year!

The Mont Tremblant Spring Bird Census

Louise Cadieux, Chief Park Naturalist at Mont Tremblant Provincial Park, has been running a spring bird census at the park since 2003. The accumulated records from the census over the years have provided park interpreters and planners a much better understanding of birdlife and potential habitat protection zones in the park. The census takes place over Saturday and Sunday. It is usually held during the Victoria Day weekend or the last weekend in May.

Teams are allowed to choose where they go in the three park sectors: La Diable, La Pimbina or L’Assomption. While traditionally most people have preferred La Diable, as it is the most scenic and bird-rich, in recent years participants have been covering the sectors more equally. Indeed, all three sectors have enough variety of habitat, including excellent boreal forest, to make for a very interesting and productive outing. In my view Mont Tremblant Park is every bit as interesting for birdwatching as Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario which is much better known. It is also a lot closer to Montreal than Algonquin is to Toronto.

Prior to 2003 I included the park in the route that my team used in the Taverner Cup Birding Competition. In the early years I used to submit our records to Louise when the census and cup competition coincided on the same weekend. In recent years my love of the park and its relative wildness has led me to organize a team from Bird Protection Quebec to participate in the census. I deliberately chose La Pimbina and in particular L’Assomption which until recently always seemed to have the poorest coverage. As we get to know it better it is proving to be an increasingly interesting place to bird.

Here are some interesting historical statistics from the census:

Total number of species recorded (between 2003-2010) all sectors: 142
- La Diable: 125  La Pimbina: 119  L’Assomption: 105

Total yearly counts all sectors:

In 2005 the record count of 111 also coincided with the largest number of participants (43). In recent years the number of participants has fallen off to the low 20s however until 2010 the all-sector totals have averaged about 100. Unfortunately for the 2010 BPQ team, bird numbers this year were down considerably. Our team of Jane Cormack, Sylvia Wees, Bronwyn Rayfield and Dave Myburg still made a significant contribution to the census recording 51 species, mostly in L’Assomption.

In order to get a good start on the census they went up Friday evening and overnighted in St. Donat. That allowed for a 4:30 AM each day. They birded till mid-afternoon on Saturday and left to return to Montreal about noon on Sunday.

The Mont Tremblant census is a terrific way to spend a late May weekend with fellow BPQ birders. Why not consider signing up for next year? It will be either May 21-22 or May 28-29, 2011 but the selection of the weekend will probably not be known till sometime in April.

If you are interested please let me know.  - Jeff Harrison  dha@videotron.ca  514-486-4943
Project FeederWatch: Help Scientists Look for Changes in Backyard Bird Populations

The 24th season of Project FeederWatch, a joint program of Bird Studies Canada and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is approaching. Please join the Bird Studies Canada team of thousands of volunteers across North America. Your counts will help scientists monitor changes in winter feeder-bird populations from year to year. New participants receive a kit with a handbook, a bird-identification poster, a calendar, and an instruction booklet.

The 2010-11 season goes from Saturday, November 13 until Friday, April 8. For more information about Project FeederWatch or to sign up, please visit http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/ or call 1-888-448-2473. There is a $35 fee to defray program expenses (but note that participation is free for Bird Studies Canada members).

Mount Royal: Project FeederWatch:

Les Amis de la Montagne has participated in Project FeederWatch since 2005, setting up a series of feeders on the summit behind the Chalet. They are seeking volunteers to come out on Fridays or Saturdays during the winter (November 13 to April 8) and count the maximum number of birds of each species that show up during a set period of time (minimum ten minutes).

If you would like to help out, call 514-843-8240 ext. 242 or e-mail benevoles@lemontroyal.qc.ca

You can also take in a free guided tour of their bird feeders, every Saturday from January 8 to March 12, from 1 pm to 3 pm.
McGill Bird Observatory (MBO) is in the midst of its Fall Migration Monitoring Program (FMMP), which began 1 August and runs to 30 October. During this period, banding occurs daily, weather permitting, and standardized daily censuses are conducted, rain or shine. Data are submitted to the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network and help to contribute to the understanding of bird dispersal, migration and population trends.

Simon Duval, MBO’s Bander-in-Charge, summarizes the season to date, “An abundance of warblers - particularly Canada Warblers, Black-and-white Warblers, Cape May Warblers and Northern Waterthrush!” MBO surpassed the previous record highs for the fall season for those four species. Other highlights include an early push of migration on 9 September – 172 birds of 29 species banded, including 147 warblers of 17 species.

MBO relies heavily on volunteers to keep the station running smoothly. Depending on experience, skill and interest level, there are many roles that volunteers can fill – net assistant, scribe, observer, census leader, extractor and site maintenance. A complete description of the many roles may be found at www.migrationresearch.org/mbo/job_descriptions.html.

MBO provides basic training for all tasks; in-depth training is also available for long-term volunteers (e.g. bird handling and extracting). We are always short of censusers, a job that requires the ability to recognize the majority (>75%) of local birds by sight and sound. To volunteer at MBO, no matter the role, please email us at mbo@migrationresearch.org.

Our next column will focus on the mid-season results of our Northern Saw-whet Owl Migration Monitoring Program, which gets underway on or about the evening of September 25. Volunteers are also needed for this program. If you are interested, email Kristen Keyes at kristen@migrationresearch.org to reserve your night. Bring your own flashlight!

This year the FMMP and Owl Migration Program are partially funded by the Support Grant and Research Committees of Bird Protection Quebec. MBO is very grateful for the monetary support as well as the thousands of volunteer hours that BPQ volunteers have logged at MBO.

Gay Gruner is the Director of the McGill Bird Observatory (MBO) after having begun volunteering at the station in 2004 (the year of its inception). When she’s not out running MBO or birding with friends, she’s in the field with BPQ’s Education Committee teaching children to identify and appreciate birds and critters alike. She is also Chair of the BPQ Communications Committee and a long-standing member of the Board.
Ile Bizard

Felix Hilton

The island is approximately 12 x 5km and located off Ste-Geneviève, separated from Montreal island by only a narrow channel of Rivière des Prairies. It is home to three large golf courses and, in its south-west corner, some remaining farm land. In the north-east, is a nature park with an area of about 200 ha. created by the MUC over twenty years ago and now administered by the City of Montreal.

The park has very varied habitat: considerable areas of pond and marshland, mature forest and some - mostly overgrown - clearings. Two small sectors exist across the main road, one boasts a large parking lot, a chalet serving as an interpretive centre with toilet and minor refreshment services. This sector has a boat ramp, a beach primarily suitable for kiddies paddling and a certain amount of shoreline offering a view of the eastern end of Lake of two Mountains and some Laval shoreline. Another sector to the east faces the river just below the Allemand Rapids and has some parking. The park is also accessible from a third parking lot located at the western entrance on de l’Église.

The forest is composed mainly of beech, maple and cedar but there are also smaller numbers of pine, juniper, hickory, a few isolated oaks etc. Fern species abound, some like Maidenhair in large stands. – all in all, a large variety of plant life. Unfortunately, the paths are lined with Poison Ivy.

Resident mammals include deer, fox, raccoon, skunk, beaver, otter, mink and so on right down to shrew. The island has a coyote population and no doubt some find their way into the park at times.

As to reptiles and amphibians, in addition to Garter Snake, the Little Brown is present; a large number of Painted Turtles and a few Snappers inhabit the marsh and six species of frog and the American Toad make themselves heard in season.

The park is of interest to entomologists as, apart from the usual assortment there are also present some rarer kinds of butterfly and a great variety of other insects. Dragonflies and Damselflies provide nourishment for many a bird and frog.

The park is a great favourite for birders and bird photographers. Over 200 species of bird have been observed – this includes birds seen on the lake during migration.

The marsh can be viewed from the large and the small boardwalk as well as three separate observation platforms. It is largely covered by cattails. Two small areas of Phragmites near the entrance luckily have not spread. Probably the most numerous nester is the Marsh

Swamp Sparrow close to the boardwalk on Ile Bizard

(c) RG
Wren; right into the summer they sit on top of the cattails and loudly defend their territory. Though inhabited by goodly numbers of Sora and Virginia Rails, as evidenced by their calls in spring, only the Virginia are easy to observe. Scuttling through the cattails, they are later followed by their little black chicks.

The marsh is also home to numbers of Moorhen, Pied-billed Grebe and Swamp Sparrow. Several pairs of Canada Goose and Mallard nest, later to be joined by Hooded Merganser and Wood Duck, which are provided with boxes but seem to prefer tree nests in the woods – this spring there were two dozen pairs of Wood Duck; the population has been growing steadily over the years.

The favourite among the marsh birds is the Least Bittern – Île Bizard must be about the best place to observe this species. Another favourite is the Green Heron which breeds in the adjacent woods. Several pairs of American Bittern also breed and can be heard and seen early in the season. Great Blue and Black-crowned Night-heron visit the marsh and occasionally an Egret shows up. Raptors hunt the marsh in season – Sharp-shinned, Cooper’s and Red-shouldered Hawks nest regularly. Barred and Great Horned Owls also nest in the park and Screech Owl is known to have nested too.

As to the passerines, the Chalet sector around the parking lot is an easy place to observe them. A goodly number of Yellow Warblers, American Redstart and Common Yellowthroat as well as Catbird, vireos and sparrows nest there. That is not to say that the woods are devoid of birds: in spring they ring with the songs of Oriole, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager etc. Six species of Woodpecker occur in the park.

In winter the boardwalks are reserved as ski trails and not open to pedestrians but snowshoe trails exist. The pedestrian trail near the Chalet is worth birding. One finds the usual residents but there is the occasional surprise. Some years ago the invasion of Great Gray Owls brought about 18 of them to the island, mostly to the south-west section where there are open fields but they were also observed in the park. The astounding thing was that one or two showed up in the two succeeding years (two died of starvation as deep snow developed a crust).

The birds are not confined to the park. The previously mentioned south-west quarter of the island also has lots of habitat. In winter it is accessible on snowmobile trails.

When housing developments are going up continually, Montreal and all nature lovers are blessed to have this marvellous nature park set aside so close to a large urban centre. Île Bizard is well worth a visit.

Felix Hilton is a long-time BPQ member and former President of the society. He is currently an Honorary Vice President and serves on the Philipsburg Committee. He is an authority on Île Bizard where he can be seen most mornings out observing birds and inspiring birders.

The Morgan Arboretum

Betsy McFarlane

Fall birding in the Morgan Arboretum, as in many other places, can be feast or famine depending on the winds and weather. However, the 245-ha site, with its extensive natural hardwood and mixed forests, conifer plantations, tree collections and gardens, has an advantage in that it not only attracts passing fall migrants but hosts a healthy population of permanent residents and birds overwintering from the north, making it an ideal place to bird throughout the fall.

Although warm days in early fall in the Arbo may seem like a holdover from late summer, with vireos and pewees singing their desultory songs in the still-green foliage, early migrants such as warblers are already on the move. At this time, neotropical migrants often gather in mixed flocks with Black-capped Chickadees and other species. Finding a flock of chickadees and pishing will often lure in the shier migrants along with the bolder chickadees.

As the season progresses and the weather cools, areas where waning insect populations are concentrated become particularly important to birds. In the Arboretum, migrants such as warblers and sparrows seem to be drawn to multilayered, sun-exposed areas with a mixture of trees, shrubs, fruiting plants and weed seeds. Such sites include the area around the Conservation Centre and the parking lots, Blossom Corner, Chalet Pruche and Pullin’s Pasture, open spots along the Orange Trail (Main Road), the forested edges of fields and openings in the various walking trails. Water is also a draw and the pond in the northwestern corner of the Orange Trail is a good place to find lingering sparrows and warblers such as Common Yellowthroat. The Arboretum is
also near a major hawk migration route and migrating raptors can be viewed from open areas such as the Dog Parking Lot and the fields east of the Main Road. The racket from Canada Geese feeding in the nearby cornfields provides a constant accompaniment and Northern Shrikes can also be seen perched along the edges of the open areas. American Pipits, Snow Buntings and Horned Larks are also regularly found in the open fields at the entrance.

As early as mid-October, winter finches such as White-winged Crossbills, Evening and Pine Grosbeaks and Bohemian Waxwings begin to show up here, the first two species to feed on conifer cones in the evergreen plantations and the last two species, on the fruiting shrubs and trees found in such places as Blossom Corner. October is also the time to begin looking for northern woodpeckers (Black-backed and less frequently Three-toed) in areas with spruces, which include the evergreen plantations off the Red Trail and the area north of Chalet Pruche. Woodpeckers in general are abundant in the Arboretum.

In November, wintering hawks such as Northern Goshawk and Rough-legged and Red-tailed hawks become more common and Great Horned Owls may start to call regularly in the morning.

When the Arboretum feeders become operational in mid-fall (feeders are located at the Conservation Centre, Chalet Pruche, Blossom Corner and the gatehouse), they attract the usual feeder birds, winter finches such Pine Siskin and Common Redpoll and the occasional surprise such as an Evening Grosbeak or Red-bellied Woodpecker.

For more information, see the Arboretum website at [www.morganarboretum.org](http://www.morganarboretum.org).

On early morning walks in the Morgan Arboretum, Betsy McFarlane’s super keen ears locate birds many of us would miss. As a result she has made invaluable contributions to the Quebec and Ontario Breeding Bird Atlases and to numerous avian censuses, including those of BPQ. A current board member of Bird Studies Canada, and a past president of BPQ (2003-05), Betsy works as a translator when she is not out enjoying birds, dogs, and horses. Join Betsy November 6th and observe the birds of the Morgan Arboretum.

**Hawkwatching**

Bob Barnhurst

The Montreal West Island Hawkwatch was started 31 years ago and has been manned by volunteers every year since then, beginning in August and finishing in late fall. Much has been learned in that time about the migration of hawks through the Montreal region. Unlike many of the hawkwatches conducted throughout North America, there is no one site used exclusively for observing and counting the hawks; rather we use a number of different sites. These range from the western tip of Montreal Island at Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue to Baie-D’Urfé and Beaconsfield. Dependent on the weather, we may use two or more different sites on the same day.
For those of you interested in observing migrating hawks in the fall, head first for the Morgan Arboretum area in the West Island. Search out a good vista to the northeast and find a comfortable place to sit. The MDA company parking lot along Chemin Ste. Marie, just down from the Arboretum entrance, and the fields just across Highway 40 at Macdonald College are two places worth trying. While hawks can be seen with the unaided eye when they are flying at low altitude, it is always better to scan the sky from horizon-to-horizon with your binoculars. Pay particular attention to cumulus clouds where rising columns of warm air, known as thermals, are concentrated. The hawks are often high so are not necessarily easy to spot and a telescope can be useful. The wind and weather are critical factors. Hawks do not fly on rainy days and cloudy days typically produce only a few hawks. Partly sunny to sunny days with a north wind are best. Very windy days disperse the hawks and push them up against the Lac St. Louis or Lac des Deux Montagnes shorelines, depending on the direction. Hawks do not like to fly over water, so they funnel around, rather than cross, large expanses of water.

During September, Broad-winged Hawks can sometimes be seen in large groups, known as ‘kettles’. To conserve energy, these soaring hawks migrate by riding a thermal high into the sky, before gliding off to another thermal some distance away, and repeating the process again and again, hundreds, if not thousands, of times.

Joining them in smaller numbers are other soaring hawks, such as Red-tailed Hawks, as well as Sharp-shinned Hawks and, sometimes, eagles. Broad-winged Hawks travel the furthest of any hawk species, wintering up to 10,000 km away, in South America. Their journey can take 2-1/2 months. October is the time for Red-tailed Hawks. While they soar much like Broad-winged Hawks, their numbers are generally lower and large ‘kettles’ of Red-tailed Hawks are rare. However, their bigger size compensates to some degree for the lesser numbers.

Frequently, Red-tailed Hawks do a lot of flapping and gliding as they pass overhead. Late in the month, look for small numbers of Rough-legged Hawks mixed in with the Red-tailed Hawks. Even larger than Red-tailed Hawks, Rough-legged Hawks are easy to spot and identify. Northern Harriers are less frequent but a dozen or more can be seen on any one day in late October.

The “big four”, namely, Osprey, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle are the most spectacular. Look for Ospreys in small numbers during September and early October, Turkey Vultures in larger numbers in October, infrequent Bald Eagles in September and October and occasional Golden Eagles in October and November. American Kestrel counts are lower than they used to be, but some of these delightful falcons can still be spotted in September and early October. Cooper’s Hawks, Merlin and Peregrine Falcons are rarer still, but patient watching may produce one or two per week of each species. A corresponding spring hawkwatch is conducted every year, from early March to mid-May, near Valleyfield, alongside Lac St. Francois. More about that in a future article.

Bob Barnhurst came to Montreal from England in 1974 to work in the Department of Mining and Metallurgy at McGill University. In his "spare" time, he honed his skills as a bird observer, particularly hawks and raptors. He heads up the Montreal spring and fall Hawkwatch with Mabel McIntosh and also participates in the owling program at McGill Bird Observatory (MBO). He is a former editor of The Song Sparrow.
Parc National d’Oka

Wayne Grubert

Encompassing an area of 24 km², Parc National d’Oka is located on the north shore of the Lake of Two Mountains’ section of the Ottawa River less than 50 km from Montreal. As such it is one of the busiest parks in Quebec with over 600,000 visitors annually but the vast majority of these come during the summer months simply to enjoy the seven kilometre long sand beach or to beat the heat of summer by camping under the trees in one of several hundred sites in the large campground.

The wide variety of habitat found within park boundaries can make birding at Oka enjoyable at any time of year. As one heads inland from the beach, stands of oak and pine are encountered close to the shoreline. Silver maples dominate along the Rivière aux Serpents, fields at various stages of plant succession are found along the main park road and a mature mixed hardwood forest covers the slopes as one climbs into the Oka Hills towards the north. La Grande Baie is a large wetland enclosed by silver maple forest and is a must see for any birder visiting the park.

Although it is advisable for birders to avoid the beach area in summer, a trip in spring or especially fall may produce a variety of shorebirds and waterfowl depending on water levels and shoreline conditions. Loons, cormorants and diving ducks may be seen offshore and are often complemented by a variety of “puddle” ducks dabbling nearer to the beach. If conditions are favourable, several species of sandpiper and plover may be viewed feeding at the waterline storing up fat reserves for the rest of their migration. The whole idyllic scene may be disturbed by the occasional Merlin or Peregrine Falcon buzzing the beach. It is probably best to arrive early at the shore before the birds are dispersed by passing joggers.

Several walking trails of varying lengths pass through other areas of the park. One of the most popular for birders is the path leading down through a mature hardwood forest to la Grande Baie. A good “birding ear” and a strong neck are helpful here as one peers up into the high canopy to find Scarlet Tanagers, Great Crested Fycatchers and other forest birds. If your luck is good you may be rewarded with a sighting of one of several species of owls that are present. Arriving at la Grande Baie birders will find a viewing tower and a floating boardwalk. The latter takes some getting used to especially with scopes and a large group, but the bird variety is well worth the effort. Large numbers of waterfowl of many species may be viewed. Rails, moorhens and other marsh birds ply the areas near the cattails and sedges, and several species of heron and bittern hunt the shallows. A nearby Great Blue Heronry almost ensures sightings of this species. Ospreys may be seen soaring over the area and Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks often sit patiently on snags at the forest edge. In autumns with very low water the whole area may be transformed into a mudflat and shorebirds may replace other species.

Birding the park road areas, especially by bicycle, will produce many species of open country birds and better chances of viewing soaring raptors including Turkey Vultures. Bicycle paths also lead to other interior areas of the park. For those with more time on their hands the Calvaire d’Oka hiking trail (5.5km) leads to a panoramic viewpoint and La Sauvagine trail (12km) will lead to other varied habitats and bird species. If you enjoy winter birding and like to combine it with cross country skiing the park has a fine system of groomed trails.

Parc National d’Oka is certainly worth a visit with birding in mind and the close proximity of this jewel to Montreal may keep you coming back on a regular basis.

Wayne Grubert is a BPQ board member. He has co-Chaired the Field Trips Committee since 1996 and has served on the Nomination, Awards and Bluebird Trails Committees. He enjoys leading trips for the group and helping novices discover the joys of birding.

Great Blue Heron
Parc d’Oka

(c) RG
The Birds of Île-de-la-Visitation

Joel Coutu

When the people from Bird Protection Quebec first asked me if I would write a brief article about Île-de-la-Visitation Nature Park I wasn’t exactly sure where to begin. Beyond its present day use as a recreational park, this small but beautiful island has had a historic economic significance – the old mill being one of the rare artifacts left behind as a witness. The reasons for visiting l’Île de la Visitation are as numerous as the generations of people who have been attracted to walk its numerous paths every season. But for me it has a very particular significance; for the last 15 years, this gem has been my birding backyard where more than 240 species of birds have been observed and recorded.

The park itself was established back in the late 1980's by the City of Montreal and is composed of two islands: the first being Île-de-la-Visitation island and a second one called Cheval-de-Terre where the public has no access. This region is located on the north-central side of the island of Montreal along the banks of Rivière des Prairies river. In the late 19th century, this part of Montreal was very popular for family picnics, boating, fishing, etc. This urban park has dense brush, broadleaf woods and grassy open areas. Originally, Île-de-la-Visitation was twice its present day dimensions, and included two other smaller islands. But with the construction of the hydro dam down river to supply power to Montreal’s growing industrial base and bourgeoning population, these small islands disappeared under the raised water level of the reservoir. Although interesting, the history of the park is not what I really want to focus on in this article; what I wish to discuss is its different feathered inhabitants and seasonal visitors.

Île de la Visitation, is not recognized for its rare nesting species (approximately 45 species have nested in the park at one time or another), but it is fast becoming a popular migration stopover for our avian friends. (May 2009, 119 species observed, and August 2010, 92 species)

In spring and fall, birds use the park to feed and rest before continuing their incredible journey. These stopovers are just as important as their breeding and wintering grounds. This park has matured in the past 10 years. The variety of fruit and wild berry shrubs, flowers and plenty of open water, has made this a bird friendly park. I also believe with more and more development in Laval and Montreal green spaces are becoming harder to find for our migrating birds.

I first realized this park's importance back in 1993, when I was frequently observing the Peregrine Falcons, near the hydro dam. At the time this bird was much less common in the city region than today. Another bird, which has been feeding in this area for many years, is the park's little statesman or ambassador, the Black-crowned Night-Heron, which you can always find near the old wood/paper mill feeding on small fishes in the rapids or resting in the trees. During spring migration, May is the best time to see...
the greatest number of bird species, especially those delightful and colorful warblers. (28th of May 2005, 67 species observed and among them 19 species of warbler. Also 23rd of May 2007, 66 species/19 warblers)

In warm and humid summer months, July and August, the best area to observe interesting and certain species is in front of the hydro dam, located on the eastern part of the park. Gulls, ducks, cormorants, terns, and sometimes different shorebirds are found here. Many juvenile Great-blue Herons, Black-crowned Night Herons, also frequent this area of the park. One of the high-rise buildings, located by the river, has a nesting colony of Cliff Swallows. At dusk, different swallows as well as Chimney Swifts and the occasional Common Nighthawk will feed, while flying over the rocks facing the dam. While you are there don’t be surprised if our little blue corporal, the Merlin and his bigger cousin, the Peregrine Falcon show up to catch an innocent victim for dinner!

Fall migration begins in August in the park, with many species of songbirds passing through, especially from mid-August to mid-September. (August 28th 2006, 62 species/15 warblers and August 28th 2010, 52 species/15 warblers). Later in the fall, ducks, raptors and the occasional owl can be found.

During winter months, there are always fewer species, but there are always nice surprises. Crossbills, grosbeaks, redpolls, siskins and other wintering birds can be found at the feeders. The Eastern Screech-owl calls the park home and is often looking out of the nest boxes on cold sunny winter days. Glaucous and Iceland gulls are regular visitors.

In the past, this park has had some interesting guests. In the mid-80’s, a handsome Purple Gallinule was discovered on the island. Over the years we have had visitors like Gray Partridge, Golden Eagle, Summer Tanager, Cerulean Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse, Orchard Oriole, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Horned Lark, Townsend's Solitaire, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Snowy Owl, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Mute Swan, Red-necked Grebe and other species. And this past summer, a Least Bittern, was added to the list.

Île-de-la-Visitation Nature Park has been and continues to be an important birding area on the island of Montreal. Nature parks, in general, are great places to birdwatch.
TRUMPETED SWAN: singles in La Mauricie Park 5-25 June (R. Huxley et al.) and at Rémiy (Abitibi) 10 June-1 July (B. Bilodeau). This species has now been seen annually for the past 7 years. **Harlequin Duck:** enriching our knowledge of the distribution of this species was a female with ducklings 160 km NW of Baie-Comeau (M. Robert, O. Bardeen). **Buffehead:** a female with ducklings at Baie-Comeau probably furnished the easternmost breeding record for this species (D. Saint-Laurent). **Pied-billed Grebe:** an ad with 3 young at Longue-Pointe-de-Mingan 30 July was north of its summer range (C. Buidin, Y. Rochepault). **American White Pelican:** singles at Saint-Aimé-du-Lac (Laurentides) 4 July (ph. S. Hébert), at Montmagny 11 July (ph. G. Poisson) and at L’Ange-Gardien 14 July (M. Plante). **Great Egret:** one was well north of its range at L. Chibougamau 16 June (JF. Rousseau). **Snowy Egret:** one at Sainte-Foy 4 June (P. Lane, P. Martel et al.).

**Black Vulture:** one at Saint-Raphaël-de-Bellechasse 22 June (C. Deschênes). **Mississippi Kite:** a well-described adult seen in flight at Saint-Ulric 8 July represented our second record only (H. Deglaires). This species could possibly appear more often in the near future as it is spreading north by leaps and bounds in the neighbouring American states. **Swainson’s Hawk:** an ad light morph was photographed near Murdochville 8 June (N. Girard). **Golden Eagle:** an active nest on Anticosti I. 29 July was apparently the second found on the island (S. Dutrisac, D. Pigeon).

**Willet:** 3 ads, presumably of the semipalmata race, at Sainte-Catherine 23 June were quite unexpected (P. Bannon). **Bar-tailed Godwit:** a molting ad was thoroughly described at Barachois (Gaspésie) 22 July, providing our second provincial record (R. Gingras, J. Forgues). **Marbled Godwit:** one at Vaudreuil 6-10 July (M. Dennis, m.ob.). **Red Knot:** an ad (ssp islandica) banded 26 May 2009 at Porsangerfjord, Norway, was seen 13-14 July on Niapiskau I. in the Mingan archipelago (Y. Rochepault). **Laughing Gull:** seen in 3 localities, including 3 ads at Île aux Basques 3 July (F. Shaffer, C. Maurice). **Franklin’s Gull:** one at Pointe Yamachiche 29 June (R. Huxley). **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** a peak of 10 at Rivière-Saint-Jean 9 July was down compared to last year (C. Buidin, Y. Rochepault). **Roseate Tern:** one photographed at Grande-Entrée 22 June (A. Richard).

**Eurasian Collared-Dove:** a bird already present for over a week at Rivièr-au-Tonnerre (Lower North Shore) was identified 10 June providing our 8th record, all since 2004 (L. Roy, M. Poulin). **White-winged Dove:** one at Sherbrooke 5 July (L. Ouellette). **Yellow-billed Cuckoo:** reported in 12 localities, compared to 2 or 3 usually. **Black-billed Cuckoo:** the Saguenay- St. Jean area was invaded by this species, as evidenced by more than 60 sightings (fide G. Savard). **Barred Owl:** a singing bird east of Havre-Saint-Pierre 20 June was north of its known breeding range (Y. Rochepault). **Great Gray Owl:** an ad with 3 young at Lake Crémazie, south of Val d’Or 28 June provided a second breeding record this year (F. Gagnon, H. Brunoni). **Long-eared Owl:** the begging calls of the juveniles allowed observers to find 18 family groups in July (23 if including August) in the Saguenay-St. Jean area, an excellent year (B. Dumont). **Northern Saw-whet Owl:** one singing east of Havre-Saint-Pierre 18 June was north of its breeding range (Y. Rochepault, C. Buidin).

**Red-bellied Woodpecker:** 2 at Cap Tourmente 2 July (L. Dupont). **Loggerhead Shrike:** a pair successfully nested at Mayo (Outaouais), producing 3 young (J. Skevington, B. Laliberté et al.); this would represent the first breeding record in about 15 years. **Cliff Swallow:** a bird was found dead in the Pyramids Mountains (57.48N) 24 June, about 900 km north of its range (P. May, fide S. Denault). **Carolina Wren:** 2 at Cap Tourmente 31 July were interesting (L. Roy, A. Dery). **Eastern Bluebird:** one at Rivièr-Saint-Jean 16 June was at the limits of its range (M. Poulin, L. Roy). The species was apparently much more common in the Gaspé Pen, this summer (fide P. Poulin). **Bicknell’s Thrush:** atlassers located 25 individuals in 96 hours in June along the International Appalachian Trail, south of Matane (R. Guillette et al.). A bird was photographed on Montagne Noire, less than 100 km north of Montréal, 3 July (R. Guillette). Encouraging news for the observer who had noticed the species at this location 16 years ago. **Bohemian Waxwing:** the species was discovered nesting in the Otish Mountains in central Québec; 2 nests were discovered 20 June (V. Létoineau, G. D’Anjou), and 2 other pairs were seen carrying food a few days later (V. Létoineau). These findings provided the first confirmed nesting records for the province.
Golden-winged Warbler: 7 were banded in the Godmanchester area (L. D. Lang et al.). Worm-eating Warbler: one at Vinton (Outaouais) 15 June (R. Dubois). Connecticut Warbler: single males at Baie-Comeau 19-22 June (JP. Barry, JF. Poulin) and at Forestville 5-7 July (Y. Rochepault), east of their summer range. Clay-colored Sparrow: atlassers reported the species in 48 atlas squares, almost twice as many as for the whole first Atlas project (1984-1989). Field Sparrow: singles at Normandin 4-11 June (J. Ibarzabal, m. ob.) and at Saint-Raphaël 6-27 June (M. Robert, C. & R. Lepage) were out of their summer range. White-crowned Sparrow: one at La Prairie 15 June, well south of its summer range (R. Mailhot). Indigo Bunting: a pair was feeding 2 young at Val-Senneville 4 July, a first breeding record for Abitibi (C. Siano, R. Ladurantaye).

Yellow-headed Blackbird: singles were at Rimouski 10 July (D. Ruest) and at Sainte-Félicité 14 July (J. Deschênes). Orchard Oriole: a first-year male wandered to Île Bonaventure 23-26 June (P. Poulin et al.). Common Redpoll: as in 2007, juv. Common Redpolls appeared in the Rimouski and La Pocatière area (Lower St-Laurence) in July (G. Proulx, J. Boulva, C. Aucu, C. Girard); these birds were probably originating from the Appalachian region to the south where the species has nested sporadically in the past. European Goldfinch: a bird of the caniceps subspecies was at Chevery (North Shore) 10 June (D. Mauger).

Please report your interesting bird observations to: Pierre Bannon, 1517 Leprohon, Montréal, Qc H4E 1P1. Tel: 514-766-8767 after 7:00 p.m. or by E-mail at pbannon@videotron.ca

PARLONS D’OISEAUX  Juin-juillet 2010
Un bilan des observations intéressantes à Montréal
par Pierre Bannon

Cygne trompette: des indiv. au parc de La Mauricie 5-25 juin (R. Huxley et al.) et à Rémigny (Abitibi) 10 juin-1er juillet (B. Bilodeau). Cette espèce a maintenant été notée au cours des 7 dernières années. Arlequin plongeur: une femelle avec des canetons 160 km au NO de Baie-Comeau permet de mieux documenter la répartition de cette espèce (M. Robert, O. Barden).


**Paruline à ailes dorées**: 7 furent baguées dans la région de Godmanchester (L. D. Lang et al.). **Paruline vermivore**: une à Vinton (Outaouais) 15 juin (R. Dubois). **Paruline à gorge grise**: des mâles à Baie-Comeau 19-22 juin (J. Barry, JF. Poulin) et à Forestville 5-7 juillet (Y. Rochepault), à l’est de leur aire connue.


**Carouge à tête jaune**: des indiv. à Rimouski 10 juillet (D. Ruest) et à Sainte-Félicité 14 juillet (J. Deschênes). **Oriole des vergers**: un mâle de 1er été a erré jusqu’à l’île Bonaventure 25-26 juin (P. Poulin et al.). **Sizerin flamné**: comme en 2007, des Sizerins flammés juv. sont apparus à Rimouski et à La Pocatière (Bas Saint-Laurent) en juillet (G. Proulx, J. Boulva, C. Auchu, C. Girard); ces oiseaux provenaient probablement des Appalaches plus au sud où l’espèce a déjà niché sporadiquement. **Chardonneret élégant**: un oiseau de la race caniceps observé à Chevery (Côte Nord) 10 juin (D. Mauger).

Veuillez communiquer vos observations intéressantes à : Pierre Bannon, 1517 Leprohon, Montréal, Qc H4E 1P1. Tél : 514-766-8767 en soirée. Courriel : pbannon@videotron.ca

**BPQ Winter Lecture Series**

The BPQ Winter Lecture Series will take place on alternate Wednesdays at the Knox Crescent Kensington and First Presbyterian Church, 6225 Godfrey Avenue, NDG February 9 and 23 and March 9 and 23 March.

Time will be 7.30 pm. Details of the courses will be given in the next issue of The Song Sparrow.
Speaker’s Corner

Monthly Meetings 2010-2011

Meetings will be held on Mondays, November 1, December 6, 2010 and January 10, February 7, March 7, April 4, May 30, 2011 (AGM) at 7:30 pm.

Location: Knox Crescent Kensington and First Presbyterian Church, 6225 Godfrey Avenue, NDG (between Grand Boulevard & Kensington Ave, one and a half blocks north of Sherbrooke, bus #105).

The Great Diversity of Birds in the Neotropics

With Jean-Philippe Gagnon

November 1, 2010

You may have heard about tanagers, parrots and hummingbirds but what about manakins, antbirds or cotingas? Tropical birds amaze with their colourful plumage, extravagant behaviour and fascinating ecology. Many of you have discovered them through your travels, by looking through field guides or just dreaming about being in their presence.

The presentation will focus on tropical birds’ distribution, ecology and behaviour, using many species as examples of the great diversity encountered in the neotropics. Geographically, we will concentrate on the birds of South and Central America, Peru, Costa Rica and Bolivia in particular. Come and join us to learn more from someone who has been there and done that!

Jean-Philippe Gagnon is the tropical bird keeper at the Biodôme de Montréal, where he has been working for 14 years. He holds a BA in Biology and is currently working on his MA in Behavioural Ecology with his thesis on “Cooperative breeding in the Green Aracari.” He has given many presentations to bird clubs and guided birdwatching tours to Peru for Explorateur Voyage. You may even have seen him on the Radio-Canada TV show 1-888-oiseaux. Don’t miss him!

Citizen Scientists of BPQ

December 6, 2010

Focusing on our main goals of education, conservation and observation, we have asked three McGill University ornithology researchers to present their areas of study to us. Their oral presentations will be followed by a poster session — a format that is widely used at scientific conferences to communicate the names and work of the researchers, to link up with others and to exchange with citizen scientists.

You will have the opportunity to circulate among the various visual displays and talk one to one with all the researchers bringing their posters.

As part of our education dossier BPQ gives research grants to students. It is important for members to be aware of trends and current areas of interest as well as for students to know more about BPQ.
Our speakers and their subjects are:

**DEVELOPMENT OF APPLICATIONS FOR SMALL UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS (UAS) IN WILDLIFE RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT**

Dominique Chabot.

We have been using Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) since 2007 to investigate potential applications with our current focus on surveying bird aggregations and habitat studies. This technology has the advantage of low disturbance levels, convenient access to remote and secluded areas as well as rapid collection of large amounts of precise data which can be processed with the aid of image-analysis software at low cost. A newly released UAS platform is now being used to survey migrating Snow Geese (Cap Tourmente), Common Tern breeding colonies (Kouchibouguac NB) and in a study of the breeding habitat of the threatened Least Bittern (Baie-du-Febvre). Future applications involve the detection and census of bird nests in perilous locations (cliffs, canopies, tall buildings etc.).

Dominique Chabot is a PhD. student in Wildlife Biology working with David Bird at McGill. He received his B.Sc. at the Université Sainte-Anne, Nova Scotia and his M.Sc. at McGill. He is one of the first students in North America to study the use of UAS in wildlife research and management.

**EFFECTS OF TOXINS ON THE BREEDING SUCCESS OF TREE SWALLOWS**

Tiffany Gilchrist

The presentation will discuss the occurrence of emerging and current-use brominated flame retardant chemicals in the eggs of free-ranging Tree Swallows exposed wastewater treatment effluent and the possible related effects that this exposure may be having on their reproductive success.

Tiffany is working on her second MSc at McGill following research at the University of Kent in the UK on the effects of recreational kitesurfing on migrating and overwintering wading birds.

**BEHAVIOUR OF RED-BREASTED MERGANSERS IN NEW BRUNSWICK.**

David Fishman

David’s project concerns aspects of the nesting ecology of a colony of Red-breasted Mergansers (Mergus serrator) situated in Kouchibouguac National Park, NB. Using genetic information obtained from these birds, his team looked at whether there were any patterns of association or cooperation between related individuals. It was found that under dense nesting areas, relatives nested closer to one another than expected by chance. They also found that neighbouring females, regardless of their degree of kinship, began incubation in a synchronized fashion.

David was born and raised in Montreal. From a young age he has had an infatuation with birds, nature and anything to do with the outdoors. Currently, under the supervision of Dr. Rodger Titman and Dr. David Zadworny, he is completing his final semester as a Master’s student at McGill University.
Come with the students in your family and share this new initiative for B P Q ... but there’s more:
A little Christmas cheer will be provided, and as if you need another reason to come out and hear these very dynamic speakers, a draw will be held and three winners will receive a hard cover copy of Lone Pine’s newly-published field guide *The Birds of Canada*.

To celebrate the 451 bird species that are commonly seen across the country, Lone Pine publishers have created a full-colour field guide featuring the work of Canadian authors and avian experts Tyler L. Hoar, Ken de Smet, R.Wayne Campbell and George Kennedy, with contributions from Krista Kagume. For each species, a description, full-colour illustration, photograph and range map are presented along with identification keys that provide information on general characteristics, size, nesting, feeding, habitat, voice and similar species.

It is organized by bird group. Pages are colour-coded, making it easy navigate. A series of thumbnail sketches of each species at the beginning of guide provides another useful identification and navigation tool. The guide includes a checklist, birdwatching tips and information on best sites. It would be a welcome addition to any birdwatcher’s collection.


A review of this comprehensive full-colour guide will be published in the next edition of the Song Sparrow newsletter.

**Bird Paparazzi Sought! Submit Your Photos for the 2012 BPQ Calendar**

Jean De Marre’s Common Loon on Nest, winner of the People’s Choice for Photo of the Year, graces the cover of BPQ’s 2009 calendar.

Bird Protection Quebec intends to publish a 2012 calendar to mark the society’s 95th anniversary. **We invite members of BPQ to submit bird photographs** taken by them in Quebec for inclusion in that calendar. In June 2011 the Membership Services Committee will examine all submissions and select those to be published. The calendar itself will be available for purchase by the beginning of September. Information about how to order it will be available nearer the time.

**To submit pictures for consideration**, visit the “Community” section of the BPQ website and register. Once you have created your personal community page, click on the “Applications” tab and then on “Photos”, “Create One Now” and name the album something suitable such as: “BPQ Calendar Photos”. You will then be able to upload photos to it. Please limit the number of photos you wish to be considered to a maximum of 12. **Note** that files larger than 1Mb will be rejected by the system. If your photo is selected, you will be asked to identify the location and date of the picture, and may be asked for a higher quality file. BPQ will also seek formal permission for your photograph to be used.
FORTHCOMING FIELD TRIPS
November to early December 2010

Trip Advice - De rigueur pour les excursions

- Transportation: Contact the trip leader or the Songsparrow email group if you need or can offer a lift.
- Cancellations: Trips are rarely cancelled, but in case of extreme weather check with the leader.
- Clothing: Dress warmly and wear waterproof footwear, even if the day seems mild and dry.
- Food: Bring plenty to eat and drink, even on half-day trips.

Take nothing but photographs — leave nothing but footprints — kill nothing but time

- Transport : Téléphoner au responsable ou contacter le groupe Songsparrow pour faire du covoiturage.
- Annulations : En cas d'intempérie, vérifier la possibilité d'une annulation avec le responsable.
- Habillement : Vêtements chauds et bottes imperméables sont toujours de rigueur.
- Nourriture : Toujours prévoir une collation et quelque chose à boire.

Ne ramenez... que vos photos et souvenirs — Ne laissez... que vos empreintes — Ne tuez... que le temps

Saturday 6 November - samedi 6 novembre
Morgan Arboretum - Arboretum Morgan
Leader: Betsy McFarlane 514-457-9315  betsy.mcfarlane@sympatico.ca  http://www.morganarboretum.org/
8:00 AM $5.00 admission charge for non-Arboretum-members. Half day. 8 h 00  Frais d'entrée : 5,00 $ pour les non-membres. Demi-journée.

Saturday 13 November, 2010 - NEW VENUE
Beaudet Reservoir, Victoriaville, QC & Étang Burbank, Danville, QC
Leader: Sheldon Harvey 450-462-1459  ye2shw@yahoo.com
12:00 Noon Meet at the parking lot of Beaudet Reservoir in Victoriaville,
GPS or Google Map Coordinates: +46° 4'7.60", -71°58'38.60" Half day.
12:00 - Midi - Rendez-vous sur le stationnement du réservoir Beaudet à Victoriaville, Coordonnées GPS ou Google Map: +46° 4'7.60", -71°58'38.60" Demi-journée

Saturday 20 November - samedi 20 novembre
PARC-NATURE DE LA POINTE-AUX-PRAIRIES
Leader: Joel Coutu 514-324-5092  fauconbleu65@hotmail.com
8:00 AM The parking lot is located at the Pavillon des Marais section of the park, at 12,300 Gouin Blvd. East. Half day. 8h00
Le stationnement est situé au Pavillon des marais, 12 300 boulevard Gouin Est.. Demi-journée.

Saturday 27 November - samedi 27 novembre
Bois Papineau, Laval
Leader: Chuck Kling 514-277-2567  chuckk@videotron.ca
8:00 AM On the left are a police garage and a community centre. Take the lane between them to a parking area at the back.
Half day.8 h 00  À gauche se trouvent un garage de police et un centre communautaire. Prendre la ruelle entre les deux édifices et continuer jusqu'au stationnement situé à l'arrière. Demi-journée.

Saturday 4 December – samedi 4 décembre
Casselman and Ste=Rose-de-Prescott, Eastern Ontario
Leader : Jacques Bouvier 613-524-1154  bouvier@magma.ca
8:30 AM* Meet in the parking lot of Tim Hortons in Casselman, Ontario. This will be mostly a driving trip with the possibility of a couple of short walks. Looking for Snowy Owl, Horned Lark and other winter birds of open country as well as other winter residents. Half day. 8 h 30* Rassemblement au Tim Hortons à Casselman, Ontario. Excursion en voiture principalement, avec la possibilité de faire quelques courtes randonnées. Espèces recherchées : Harfang des neiges, Alouette hausse-col et autres oiseaux d'hiver se tenant dans des endroits à découvert en plus des résidents. Demi-journée.