

# THE PARKLAND NATURALIST



JANUARY-APRIL 2019

A PUBLICATION OF THE  
EDMONTON NATURE CLUB

<http://www.edmontonnatureclub.ca>

## *Edmonton Nature Club 2019 Award Recipients*



**Ann Carter**  
Robert Turner Volunteer  
Appreciation Award

**Alan Hingston**  
Great Grey Owl Service Award

**Dr. Gordon Court**  
Edgar T. Jones Conservation Award

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**ENC Banquet: Door-prize winners**

Marnie Evans



Geoff Holroyd



Chuck Priestley and daughter



Betty Fisher

## Edmonton Nature Club Banquet



Janice Hurlburt, emcee

Our 2019 annual banquet was another resounding success, with an excellent turnout of about 116 folks, scrumptious food, and an excellent talk by our guest speaker, Steven Price, President of Bird Studies Canada (see Alan Hingston's report on his talk).

Congratulations to the winners of this year's ENC awards. Ann Carter was the recipient of the Robert Turner Appreciation Award, Gordon Court was honoured with the Edgar T. Jones Conservation Award, and the Great Gray Owl Outstanding Service Award was presented to deserving nominee Alan Hingston. The long-term contributions of these highly deserving award recipients are greatly appreciated (see their nominations below).



Emily Gorda (right) accepts her prize from Donna McKen

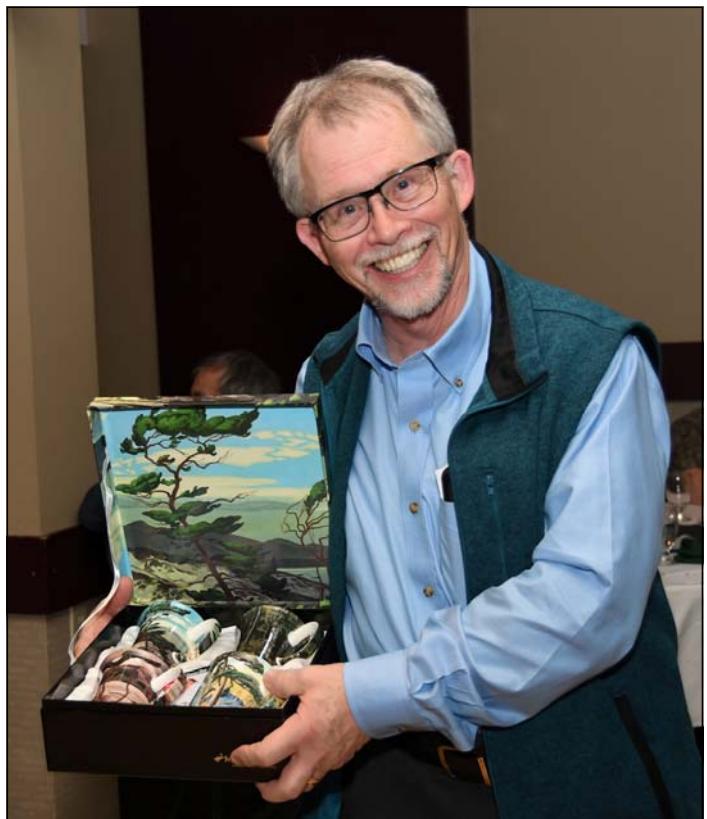
Anticipation and excitement rose as the White-faced Ibis was crowned Bird of the Year, selected by votes of ENC members. Artworks featuring the BOTY, created by three member artists (Emily Gorda, Terri Susan Zurbrigg, and Jordan Lange), were among the evening's door prizes.

So many other door prizes were donated this year (including books, prints, hoodies, and mugs) that they were doled out in two sessions. Thanks to Craig Newman, Janos and Joanie Kovacs, Janice Hurlburt, Michael Cooley and Terri Susan Zurbrigg, Meika's Birdhouse, Monique Raymond, The Wild Bird General Store, and Gerald Romanchuk for their contributions.

Many thanks to Toby-Anne Reimer for organizing the banquet.

### Janice Hurlburt

*More photos on page 31*



Dave Ealey

## 2019 Award Recipients

### **Robert Turner Appreciation Award: Ann Carter**



We're very pleased to present an extremely hard-working ENC member the 2019 Robert Turner Appreciation Award.

This person has done a ton of the boring background work to help keep our club running smoothly. From dealing with finances, budgets, policies, and procedures to meetings,

minutes, and by-laws – she's handled it all. She is also involved in the fun club activities as a field trip leader!

When someone comes up with bright ideas for new club activities, she's usually the one who ends up with extra tasks, but no glory. The Nature Appreciation Weekend is one example of this. She books the group site, takes reservations, organizes activities, and writes up reports – but her name doesn't show up in the credits.

Our club website is a work of art, and it's entirely because of her skills and efforts. When compared with the sites of other nature organizations, ours rocks! All because of her amazing talents.

## Congratulations

She's also worked on the Edmonton Christmas Bird Count site and has done a lot to make data collection and participant involvement much easier for the zone captains, all while co-captaining her own zone.

The ENC has been involved with the Edmonton and Area Land Trust since its inception, and this lady has worked on the endowment fund and organized work parties to install and maintain nest boxes on their properties.

Throughout her time on the club executive, she's been great at recruiting volunteers and getting new folks involved. The only catch is that you always need to be wary if you see her approach at club events!

Our award recipient started out on the club executive as the Field Trip Coordinator, putting together a schedule of awesome trips to keep us busy. Bird Study Group Leader and Executive Director were then added to her resume. Always an influential and engaging voice at meetings, she spent the last 4 years in the Club's top job as President, guiding us through difficult but important changes and challenges. She has always been a positive presence at any club gathering.

We are very happy to present the Robert Turner Appreciation Award to Ann Carter!

**Nomination by Colleen Raymond, Gerald Romanchuk, and Brian Stephens**



### **Great Gray Owl Outstanding Service Award: Alan Hingston**



An incredible amount of work is done by our club volunteers. It's easy to be unaware of the effort that goes into every aspect of this club unless you're involved in it.

Some dedicated volunteers continue to share their time and talents over the long term. These are people we admire and trust. We recognize their wisdom and turn to them for advice and support in guiding the club forward. The 2019 Great Gray Owl Outstanding Service Award acknowledges the contributions of these exceptional individuals.

As many of you know, the Edmonton Nature Club came

into being in 2004 with the amalgamation of the Edmonton Bird Club and the Edmonton Natural History Club. Our award recipient was first recognised for his efforts 25 years ago, when he received the Edmonton Bird Club's Appreciation Award. This club member continues to be an active volunteer today.

For years this gentleman has attended board meetings, where he has provided thoughtful insights on the workings of the club. As a field trip leader, he guided us on birding excursions such as Snowy Owl prowls. And, back when paper was a "thing," he supported ENC activities by promoting indoor programs: designing, printing, and distributing information and providing announcements for publication in print media. He is currently acting as a financial auditor for the club, giving us peace of mind that all is in good order.

For our Christmas Bird Count, this volunteer captains Zone 11, which is mostly an industrial area. We think this

means he holds the record for the most pigeons counted!

Since 2011, Alan Hingston has skilfully filled the role of Indoor Program Director which, on the surface, looks like a job of introducing speakers. In reality, this position involves scheduling, finding, and supporting speakers; dealing with venues and associated services such as audio/video support; providing content to promote the events; and keeping a close eye on the budget. Additionally, he writes many presentation summaries for publication in our *Parkland Naturalist* magazine.



### **Edgar T. Jones Conservation Award: Dr. Gordon Court**



We wish to nominate Dr. Gordon Court for the 2019 ENC Edgar. T. Jones Conservation Award. He has been instrumental in many conservation achievements in the Edmonton region and beyond. Dr. Court, better known as Gord, began his early career as a high school student who cycled from his home in Sherwood Park to the Longman Building in Edmonton to

watch the recently released Peregrine Falcons that had been captive bred at the Canadian Wildlife Service facility at DND Camp Wainwright. Under the tutelage of Richard Fyfe, Gord developed a lifelong fascination with raptors, especially Peregrine Falcons.

Gord went on to study peregrines at Rankin Inlet, on the shore of Hudson Bay, for his MSc at the University of Saskatchewan with Dr. Lynn Oliphant. After completing a PhD study of Antarctic birds, Gord became the provincial Wildlife Status Biologist with Alberta Fish and Wildlife. In that capacity he continues to monitor the Peregrine Falcon population in Alberta and supplement its numbers. Due to his efforts the number of breeding pairs continues to increase, particularly in central Alberta. The management of urban peregrines and the public illustrates Gord's ability to integrate his work and personal friendships to accomplish more than what the government alone can do, including the reporting, banding, care, and release of injured peregrines.

Every five years Gord has conducted and coordinated a provincial survey of nesting peregrines, including those at Wood Buffalo National Park. Again, he has rallied the expertise outside government to get the job done. He has provided expert testimony to provincial courts concern-

Thanks to Alan, we've been offered a diverse, entertaining, and educational speaker program for many years. He also carries out some of these organizational tasks for study group sessions and for the banquet. The club greatly benefits from his attention to detail!

### **Nomination by Janice Hurlburt, Steve Knight, and Ann Carter**

ing the poaching of wildlife and is the provincial representative to COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada). He has published several scientific and popular articles about peregrines and toxicology. He has used his skill as an exceptional photographer to contribute to the appreciation of Alberta wildlife, generously providing photos as gifts and for fund-raising events.

Gord is one of the best known biologists in Alberta and if someone doesn't know him, they know his birds. Gord's feathered ambassadors for 14 years have been Colonel Slade, a Barred Owl with a sight impairment that resulted from a car strike, and Vinny, a non-releasable Peregrine. Gord houses and cares for his educational birds, as well as rehab raptors, year-round in his backyard. Gord's enthusiasm is contagious as he displays on his fist a raptor "with beautiful plumage" (as he would say) to raise observers' awareness of the importance of raptor conservation. He has shared his exceptional knowledge and passion about raptors with researchers, bird banders, and falconers, helping them in whatever capacity he can. In this role he has talked to thousands of people, taking every opportunity to travel around the province attending public and media events with Colonel Slade or Vinny, often in evenings and weekends, outside normal work hours. Notably, they attended the Snow Goose Chase for over a decade. Both raptors were also loaned to other biologists, particularly those from the Beaverhill Bird Observatory, for events and talks to school classes.

This award is particularly timely after the passing of Colonel Slade in November 2018, at the age of 16 years, due to complications from a stroke. Gord announced that he will find a replacement so their important public awareness and conservation activities can continue. It is with great respect that we nominate Dr. Gordon Court for the 2019 Edgar T. Jones Conservation Award.

### **Nomination by Dr. Geoff Holroyd, Phil Trefry, Helen Trefry, Gerald Romanchuk, and Art Hughes**

## President's Message, Spring 2019



***Our President, Brian Stephens***

We have had a busy time in spite of the weather. Chris Reese kept the city nature walks going except for two times when the conditions were most severe. Gerry Fox tallied up our December 2018 to February 2019 birds in the Edmonton area Winter Count list. And Connor Charchuk continued the Dead of Spring tally – that time in March when we are all sure spring is here, but the birds are not so sure.

Our annual banquet was held March 30 at a new location, with 117 participants and the Sawmill's excellent food. Steven Price from Bird Studies Canada gave an interesting presentation on activities designed to monitor and protect declining bird species. He highlighted the role of citizen science (such as eBird and Breeding Bird Surveys) in providing the kind of data that enables trends and patterns to be identified. For species with greatest declines (such as shorebirds and aerial insectivores, including nighthawks and swallows), new initiatives are in the works. Experience shows that when a species or group is targeted based on new information about where and when they move, declines can be reversed.

At the banquet we also presented our three major awards: The Robert Turner Volunteer Appreciation award to Ann Carter, the Edgar T. Jones Conservation award to Dr. Gordon Court, and the Great Grey Owl award to Alan Hingston. Congratulations to the recipients.

We are close to Nature Alberta's new Nature Kids Celebrating Wild Nature event on April 27, which this year replaces the Snow Goose Chase.

We have had numerous Bird Studies, Plant Studies, and Bug and Spider events at King's College, as well as the monthly indoor meeting presentations.

I am sure we are all looking forward to warmer weather so we can get out looking for bugs, studying plants, and finding birds.

**Brian Stephens**



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**The Parkland Naturalist**  
 is published by the Edmonton Nature Club.  
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## Membership

Download applications from the  
**ENC website or contact us at our  
 mailing address.**

### Membership Rates for 2017/18

<b>Household:</b>	<b>\$40.00/year</b>
<b>Students:</b>	<b>\$20.00/year</b>

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**taubeha@shaw.ca**

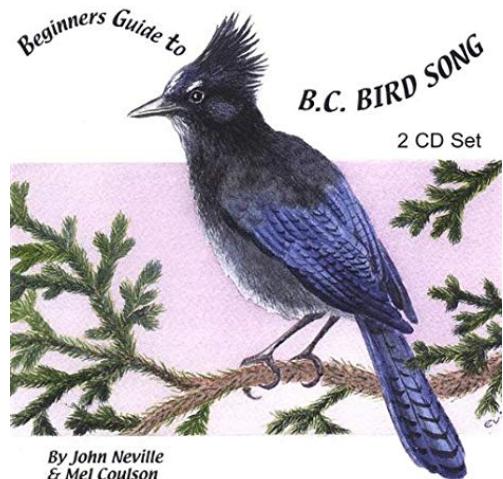
Edmonton and Area Land Trust – **Hendrik Kruger**  
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Nature Alberta – **Len Shrimpton**  
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## The Armchair Naturalist

The place where club members review books about natural history they found particularly rewarding. Some of the recommended books may be borrowed from the Edmonton Public Library. To check their availability, go to [epl.ca](http://epl.ca) and click on "Search." To suggest additional books of interest to our members, submit a brief review to Karen Lindsay via the ENC website, [edmontonnatureclub.org](http://edmontonnatureclub.org). Click on "Birding," "Bird Studies," and "Contact" to send Karen your review.

<b>BEGINNERS GUIDE TO BRITISH COLUMBIA BIRD SONG</b>		
AN EIGHT LESSON GUIDE FEATURING THE FOLLOWING BIRDS:		
Common Loon	Willow Flycatcher	Orange-crowned Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Least Flycatcher	Yellow Warbler
Canada Goose	Dusky Flycatcher	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Trumpeter Swan	Hammond's Flycatcher	Townsend's Warbler
Mallard	Cassin's Vireo (Solitary)	Northern Waterthrush
Bald Eagle	Warbling Vireo	MacGillivray's Warbler
Red-tailed Hawk	Red-eyed Vireo	Common Yellowthroat
Ruffed Grouse	Steller's Jay	Wilson's Warbler
Blue Grouse	Clark's Nutcracker	Western Tanager
White-tailed Ptarmigan	American Crow	Spotted Towhee
Sora	Common Raven	Chipping Sparrow
Killdeer	Horned Lark	Savannah Sparrow
Wilson's Snipe (Common)	Black-capped Chickadee	Fox Sparrow
Great Horned Owl	Mountain Chickadee	Song Sparrow
Northern Pygmy-Owl	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	Lincoln's Sparrow
Barred Owl	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Golden-crowned Sparrow
Northern Saw-whet Owl	Winter Wren	White-crowned Sparrow
Western Screech Owl	Marsh Wren	Dark-eyed Junco
Common Nighthawk	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Red-winged Blackbird
Rufous Hummingbird	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Western Meadowlark
Belted Kingfisher	Swainson's Thrush	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Sapsucker Trio	Hermit Thrush	Brown-headed Cowbird
Hairy Woodpecker	American Robin	Purple Finch
Northern Flicker	Varied Thrush	House Finch
Olive-sided Flycatcher	European Starling	Red Crossbill
Western Wood-Pewee	American Pipit	Pine Siskin
Alder Flycatcher	Cedar Waxwing	Evening Grosbeak



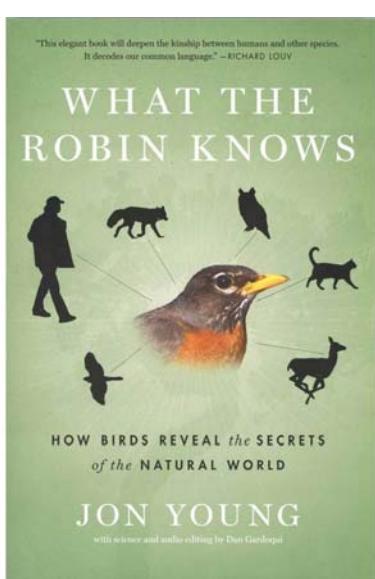
Time to get ready for Spring! This is an **excellent** CD set for learning bird songs. Many of the species featured occur in Alberta. The tracks are divided into songs of birds found in a specific habitat: backyard, forest, marsh, and grasslands. The habitat and birds are identified, along with a word phrase to help you remember the song, followed by bird song recordings.

Examples of regional dialects are given for birds such as Song Sparrows and Golden-crowned Sparrows. A short quiz at the end of each lesson supports the learning process, with answers in the inner jacket.

I have listened to many recordings of this type, but found this one particularly helpful, especially since the songs are recorded in Canada.

John Neville's website offers a number of other selections which can be ordered as CDs or digital downloads. You can use PayPal as well. Go to [http://nevillerecording.com/nr\\_catalogue.php](http://nevillerecording.com/nr_catalogue.php), or phone 1-250-537-4121. The Wildbird General Store sometimes carries his CDs.

*Recommended by Karen Lindsay*



### Kirkus Review

The book is about how to understand the language of birds.

Young believes that native and scientific knowledge about nature are complementary, and that animal communication is "never just the robins communicating with other robins" – they transmit information to other species, which follow their calls.

Young teaches students how to listen and understand these communications. However, he notes, it's a skill that can be practiced by anyone in the backyard or a local park, by choosing a "sit spot" and quietly observing what is happening in the same area every day. Young stresses the need to sit quietly, allowing the birds to accept our presence; after first flying away in alarm, they will return to their territory. "If we learn to read the birds...we can read the world at large," he writes. "The types of birds seen or heard, their numbers and behaviors and vocalizations, will reveal the locations of running water or still water, dead trees, ripe fruit, a carcass, predators, fish runs, insect hatches, and so much more." This information, shared by all the birds and animals living in a habitat, was crucial to the survival of hunter-gatherer societies. A trained tracker can learn to recognize how the variations in birdcalls and their behavior when alarmed can identify different predators such as hawks, crows and cats. A sophisticated guide for amateur bird watchers and a door-opener for newbies.

*Recommended by Nathan Binnema*

## Profile of a Prairie Icon

The tragedy of the extinction of a species is that a unique genotype is lost, one that has been fashioned by evolution over millennia to adapt that organism to life in its particular environment.

Our local plant icon of spring, the prairie crocus, shows a number of obvious adaptations.

The new flower shoots emerge from the ground about mid-April in Alberta. Arising from a thick, underground root-stock, they look like little brown bobbins covered with hairs. Each quickly elongates into a short stem bearing a stalk-less leaf and a single large flower. The flowers are saucer-shaped, formed of 5–7 blue, mauve, or white tepals that form a parabolic disk. The tepals concentrate and reflect the rays of the sun onto the central ring of yellow stamens and the cluster of pistils (pistil = stigma, style, and ovary). On a sunny day the temperature inside the flower disk can be up to 10 °C higher than the ambient temperature, accelerating the development of the stamens and ovules. The disk also moves to track the course of the sun, increasing maximum exposure. Visiting insects enjoy basking in the warmth.

The low height of the flower at this point helps protect it against drying, cooling winds, and the whole plant, including the undersides of the tepals, is encased in long white hairs which insulate it against the early spring cold. Early flowering gives the plant a competitive advantage, as it can monopolize the pollinating insects that are around at this time, mainly small bees, flies, and ants. A disadvantage can be that the flowers are sometimes lost to severe late frosts.

Later on, the leaves emerge from the rootstock and expand. They are long-stalked, providing clearance of the surrounding leaf litter, and are divided into narrow segments, possibly an adaptation to water conservation in drought conditions later in the summer. The flowering stalks also elongate as the seeds develop, a strategy that holds the seed-heads aloft and exposes the seeds to wind dispersal.

Each fruit (achene) in the seed-head encloses a single, spear-shaped seed and is attached at its pointed end to the centre of the flower. At its outer end is a long, feathery style, a “tail” or awn, that is equipped with backward-pointing hairs. The tail consists of strands of fibres which soak up water in different amounts; on wetting and drying the strands twist, so that the tail acts like a screw to push the achene towards and into the ground. This same self-planting method is found in other prairie plants, most notably the spear grasses and needle-and-thread and porcupine grasses.

By late June most of the seeds have scattered, and where there were once attractive flowers is now a patch of green, relatively hairless leaves. These will remain until mid or late summer, carrying on the important work of photosynthesis, storing food in the underground rootstock, and allowing the plant to flourish another year.

In our area prairie crocus is found most often in sandy soils, such as those of the provincial sandhill Natural Areas north of Edmonton, and at Fort Saskatchewan and Nisku Prairies. Populations once grew in parts of the Devon sand dunes in southwest Edmonton, but most have been lost to residential expansion. Prairie crocus could be a suitable introduction at Bunchberry Meadows. They do best in open areas with sparse, low vegetation.

It is possible to grow prairie crocus from wild-collected seed. Collect a few seeds and sow them immediately. Alternatively, if you keep them dry over winter you will need to cold-stratify them to overcome dormancy by placing them in damp sand in a plastic bag and leaving them in the fridge for 4–8 weeks prior to sowing. You can also plant them in pots in the fall and leave them outside for nature to do the stratifying for you. Plants will likely take three years to flower (in the meantime they will be growing a strong root system), so you will need to keep careful track of them.

**Taxonomic note:** Of course, the prairie crocus isn’t a true crocus at all, but is a type of anemone in the buttercup family, Ranunculaceae. For a long time it has been called *Anemone patens*, but recently it was transferred into the genus *Pulsatilla*, first as *Pulsatilla patens* and currently as *Pulsatilla nuttalliana*.

### Patsy Cotterill

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Moss, E. H. 1983. *Flora of Alberta* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by J. G. Packer). Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

*NatureNorth*, Manitoba’s online nature magazine.  
[www.naturenorth.com/spring/flora/crocus/  
 Prairie\\_Crocus2.html](http://www.naturenorth.com/spring/flora/crocus/Prairie_Crocus2.html)



Flowers unfolding on short stems, Fort Saskatchewan Prairie, April 21, 2006

**Photo by Patsy Cotterill**

## Conservation Corner

**Not all our relationships with nature are pleasurable or admirable: Records show a 60% decline in vertebrate species worldwide over the last 40 years due to habitat loss and other human activities.**

"I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order."

*John Burroughs, American naturalist, nature writer, and conservationist*

Our relationship with nature is multi-faceted. Most of us go to nature to be entertained and/or educated: as naturalists we find watching, identifying, and photographing birds, bugs, and plants an equal mix of challenge and pleasurable reward. And we go to nature and the outdoors for physical, mental, and emotional inspiration and renewal, often expressed in poetry and prose as a romantic view of nature. As scientists, we work to elucidate the secrets of nature in the field and laboratory, using tools such as technology and statistics, and thereby gain insights that are the source of great joy and often utility.

Not all aspects of nature give pleasure. To the refined sensitivities of modern Man, the way nature functions may be tolerable intellectually as fact, but difficult to embrace emotionally. Take the predator-prey relationship, for instance, often in the past referred to as "nature red in tooth and claw." Wildlife biologists, looking at the bigger picture, can be sanguine regarding nature's methods of population control, but many of us find them hard to stomach. I'm thinking of that poor caterpillar being eaten alive by the larva of a parasitoid wasp! Or of a poor female mouse, pregnant all her life with offspring that will swell the biomass of other species! The starving predator! The suffering that parasites cause! We find nature's ways of operating distasteful in part because as a long-lived species, we make a cult of the (human) individual, of the individual's importance, to the point where we can hardly bear to contemplate death. (Some people, impassioned with life, and with no knowledge of biology, even believe death is not inevitable!) In contrast, nature roots for the individual only as the agent of the species. And in practice as a species we spend a good deal of effort thwarting the forces of nature, arming ourselves with shelter, vast amounts of food production, modern technology, medicine, and birth control.

In fact, we have been so successful in understanding and bending nature to our will, using it to advance the fortunes of our species, that we risk undermining our own ends, along with the rest of earth's living things. According to Cristiana Pașca Palmer, executive secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, "there is growing

concern that loss of plants, animals and pollinating insects now poses as much of a threat to human life as climate change." And this relationship with nature, our ability to exploit it to the detriment of a functioning planetary ecosystem, we should find the most unsavoury of all. During a winter of skulking indoors (avoiding nature's brutal winter temperatures in Canada), I've had ample time to read the reports, newsletters, and emails of a great variety of conservation organizations. All tell the same story of decline and loss of species, of dysfunctional and dying ecosystems.

Take World Wildlife Fund's *Living Planet Report*, released November 2018. It states that global wildlife populations (mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians) have fallen by 60% in the 40-plus years between 1970 and 2014. (This is an astonishing, literally earth-shattering statistic, yet I heard only one report on CBC radio and saw no mention of it at all in the *Edmonton Journal*.) Pollution, deforestation, climate change, and other human-caused factors are fingered as culprits. Species extinction rates are up to 1000 times higher than before human influence. Ninety percent of seabirds have plastics in their stomachs compared to 5% in 1960. Approximately half the world's shallow corals have been lost in the last 30 years. Most declines have occurred in tropical areas of Latin America and the Caribbean, and in freshwater habitat. Not surprisingly, the future looks bleaker than the present. The amount of planetary land free from human impact is expected to fall from the present 25% to 10% by 2050.

A February 10, 2019, article in *The Guardian* newspaper, quoting an article by Sanchez-Bayo and Wyckhuys in the journal *Biological Conservation*, was headlined "Plummeting insect numbers threaten collapse of nature" and reported that 41% of global insect populations have declined over the past decade, while one-third of known species are endangered. (The current 2.5% annual rate of loss, if sustained, would mean that in 100 years no species will remain, yet insects represent 80% of the world's biomass.) The decline of insects, important in the planetary scheme of things as food for many species, pollinators, and recyclers of nutrients, is attributed to habitat loss due to intensive agriculture, heavy use of pesticides, urbanization, and climate change. Admittedly, some adaptable species will rise to prominence; for example, in the U.S. the common eastern bumblebee is increasing because of its tolerance of pesticides; but such replacements will not be enough to take over the ecosystem services of those that are lost. The losses in decreasing order are of caddisflies (68%), butterflies (55%), beetles (49%), bees

(46%), and dragonflies and mayflies (37%). For vertebrate species the decline is 22%, including a 26% decline in birds.

So, is anything being done to reverse these trends? There is obviously good reason to do so on the basis of human self-interest. There is also a tacit acceptance by some of a more ethical reason: that non-human biota deserve the right to share the planet with us.

The 196 parties who have signed on to the Convention on Biological Diversity treaty propose to develop future conservation targets that they hope will be similar in importance to the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Smaller national organizations, such as CPAWS, are working hard to achieve the 2010 international Aichi Biodiversity targets agreed on – 17% land and 10% of oceans set aside for nature by 2020 – in their own countries, pushing for a 30% set-aside by 2030, and even more ambitious goals into the future.

For those of us who consider ourselves realists, it is hard to believe that these goals can be achieved; Canada's record with climate targets hardly gives cause for optimism. Quotidian experience doesn't help. Looking around locally we see only urban expansion, the annual spring rite of razing tree stands, and continuing social trends in our city such as the building of ever bigger houses with smaller yards. In an election year, the electorate is obsessed with the economy (i.e., implying greater use of resources, more pollution), to the exclusion of the environment.

What can we do as individuals? As naturalists we are well placed to understand the need for conservation/preservation, and we have a special obligation to preserve our hobby for future generations. Firstly, we should be scandalized at the statistics of decline and extinction, and encourage others to feel the same way. Then, obviously, we can give money – to any and many of the various conservation organizations doing the hard work of environmental preservation and protection. There is no shortage of them to choose from: Ecojustice, Alberta Wilderness Association, Wilderness Committee, CPAWS, WWF, David Suzuki Foundation, Greenpeace, EALT, The Nature Conservancy, Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, to name a few.

We can volunteer. We can help with stewardship and restoration of natural areas. As the new Interim National Executive Director of CPAWS (formerly Executive Director of CPAWS Northern Alberta chapter here in Edmonton), Alison Ronson, says, we have not only to preserve land in parks and protected areas, we have to manage them for ecological integrity, balancing this against harmful effects of over-tourism and commercialism.

We can speak out, express our opinions, and convey our expertise to governments on local and national environmental issues. Since human overpopulation is the underlying cause of all environmental degradation (as well as social inequality and conflict), perhaps the best thing we can do for nature, worldwide, is to press for substantial funding for birth control both at home and abroad. Individually, we can donate to the International Federation for Planned Parenthood (which supports women's health as well as contraception). We need to ignore cultural sensitivities about family size. I note that only Paul Ehrlich, author of *The Population Bomb*, (1968), long-time outspoken advocate of world population control, is still brave enough to speak out about this elephant in the room; the WWF in its Living Planet report only dared refer to "over-consumption in wealthy countries." It isn't racist to advocate a reduction in numbers of *Homo sapiens*; as far as other species are concerned there is just one race, the abominable human race! Given the recent change in government in Alberta, and the upcoming federal election, it is more important than ever to support our environmental organizations in their fight for wildlife and habitat, and to use our expertise and protest our values in favour of conservation.

**"We use nature as if we were the hunters and gatherers of 20,000 years ago, with technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Marco Lambertini, WWF director general. The failure to protect nature will be a failure of the human species to adapt.**

A couple of other snippets. Apparently, in the U.K., the number of widespread (as opposed to already rare) butterfly species fell by 58% on farmed land between 2000 and 2009. Put that in your pipe and smoke it, Chris Thomas! (Thomas is the British "new conservationist" and entomologist who wrote *Inheritors of the Earth: How Nature is Thriving in an Age of Extinction* and rejoiced because with climate warming more butterflies were moving northwards into his Yorkshire property. See review by Patsy Cotterill in "Conservation Corner," *The Parkland Naturalist*, September–December 2017.)

The *Million Trees* blog, so good for raising my blood pressure, has ceased publishing, on the grounds that local conservation authorities never listened to its rants. Great! I suspect the blog was written by one woman in California who had a bunch of followers: they were denialists, refusing to admit that invasive species cause harm to natural communities, lacking any understanding of natural vegetation distributions, cherry-picking scientific facts to suit their ideology, and bad-mouthing native plant ad-

vocates as “nativists” and “Nazis.” Why is it that people will accept what physicists say about the universe, but feel they know better than ecologists? Presumably because the universe is remote enough to be unimportant, but ecologists have the power to change the environments in which people live.

### Patsy Cotterill

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**Photo by Patsy Cotterill**



Most natural plant communities in settled Canada are now restricted to protected areas. Elk Island National Park, May 20, 2011.

### Editorial Notes

Congratulations to the ENC 2019 award recipients; Ann Carter, Alan Hingston, and Dr. Gordon Court. We are grateful for your many contributions to the ENC and to the conservation of our natural environment.

Field trip reports from the weekday city field trips were omitted due to lack of space. All the field trip reports and photos can be seen on the ENC webpage. Check the back page outside cover for two excellent photos by Bob Gehlert of a Ruffed Grouse drumming.

Thank you to all who contributed photos and articles to *The Parkland Naturalist*. The deadline for submissions for the May–August issue is July 31, 2019.

**Dawne Colwell, Editor**

## Chasing Birds: 2019 BOTY (Bird of the Year)

The ballots are closed and the results are in. Dum, de dum, dummm....This year's BOTY is the White-faced Ibis!

We got lots of votes this year, and some gull lovers are grumbling about ballot stuffing. But I think so many people remembered the great views of Ibis this spring that there was no way they could vote for a scruffy old gull.

When I started birding in 1999, White-faced Ibis was a pretty rare sighting in Alberta. You had to go down to Pakowki Lake in the extreme southeast corner of Alberta to get one. A few years later they colonized Frank Lake near High River. They became pretty easy to see in the south, and began sneaking up here on occasion. An article in the *Alberta Naturalist* by Jason Duxbury, Charles Priestley, and Jeff Adamyk describes an exciting sighting of 2 Ibis at Beaverhill Lake in May 1999. Google that article for a great history of Ibis sightings in Alberta.

Personally, my lifer was also near Beaverhills Lake. In May 2004 I got a call from Dave Nadeau. He and Terry Thormin had spotted a single Ibis at Kallal Meadow. I went out and easily saw the bird poking through the wet grasses.

I wouldn't do it now, but I immediately put on rubber boots and waded out closer to the bird. The water almost went over the top of my boots, but I did keep my feet dry, and the bird was very tame and approachable. The big-

gest issue I had was with a stupid Willet that was hanging around with the Ibis. Every time I got close to decent photo range, the Willet went crazy with alarm calls, the Ibis looked up, and both birds flew off a short distance. Usually I don't wish ill of any bird, but that Willet got a good cussing out!

In the fall of 2007, Jack Park found a juvenile Ibis by the Amisk Creek Bridge. Afterwards, things slowed down for local Ibis sightings, though they seemed to be increasing in number at Frank Lake and the Calgary area. In the past 5 years or so they've become more and more regular closer to home – at Buffalo Lake, then Bittern Lake and the Camrose area, and even as far north as Big Lake, and last year, the flock at Beaverhills.

The Ibises remained for several weeks by the big bends on Highway 626 or at Kallal Meadow. We saw them on a couple of club field trips, and the big busloads of people out on Snow Goose Chase got great looks as well. The somewhat prehistoric-looking bird that can change from black to dazzling with a rainbow of iridescence makes a great Bird of the Year!

**Gerald Romanchuk**

**White-faced Ibis, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk**



## Bee-eaters, Lotus Flowers, and Elephants: The Tropical Island Paradise of Sri Lanka

*Dr. Godo Stoyke spoke at our Indoor Meeting on February 15, 2019.*

The tropical island country of Sri Lanka is one tenth the size of Alberta, but features 492 bird species, 131 dragonfly species, and 704 common species of trees and shrubs alone. From humid rainforest jungles, Serengeti-like dry zones, and cool mountains to tropical beaches, “splendid isolation” has produced a large number of endemic species: 29% of its flowering plants, 60% of its reptiles, and 100% of its freshwater crabs are only found here. Since the late 1980s, 20 fish, 45 amphibians, 25 reptiles, and 2 mammal species have been discovered, all of them found only in Sri Lanka.

In the summer of 2018, I was lucky enough to be able to undertake a 5-week journey there with my family, my first venture into Asia, visiting many of Sri Lanka’s most famous national parks, rainforests, wetlands, and bird reserves. This article chronicles a few of the highlights of the biological diversity anyone can encounter even during a short trip to Sri Lanka.

### 1. Colombo – Talangama Wetland



Indian Ocean beach at Mount Lavinia, near Colombo, Sri Lanka.

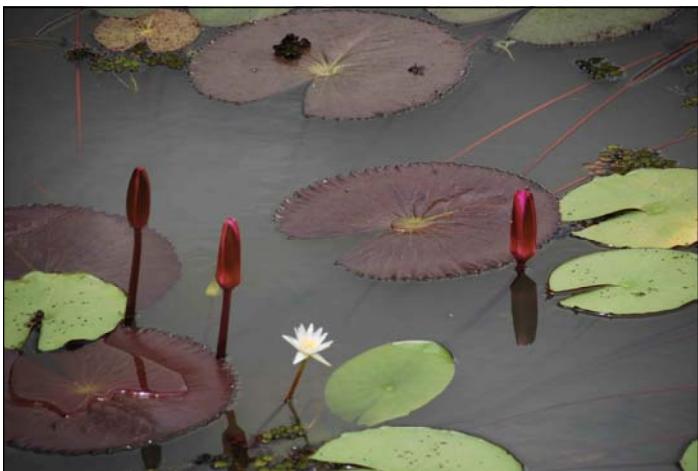
Being a relatively small island, Sri Lanka is famous for its beaches – it has lots of them, often as underpopulated as they are stunning. Arriving by air, you are most likely to encounter Colombo first, Sri Lanka’s economic and de facto political capital, which is situated just inside Sri Lanka’s wet zone with an average rainfall of 2.5 m, compared to Edmonton’s less than 0.5 m. An irrigation reservoir a few minutes east of Colombo, Talangama Wetland was built during the era of King Parakramabahu VI (1551–1547 CE) and has become a biodiversity spot of international renown. The 4 hours I spent slowly walking along its shores are one of my favourite times on the whole trip. I encountered a Water Monitor (*Varanus salvator*) slowly moving among the vegetation. This animal developed an astounding burst of speed when a White-breasted Water-hen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) came within lunging range (the hen escaped).



Water Monitors (*Varanus salvator*) can grow to 2 m (6.7 feet) in length, and are also found in Thailand and Indonesia. They feed on animals ranging from insects and fish to water birds and carrion.

I was able to see dozens of bird and dragonfly species here, including the gorgeous Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) stalking from lotus leaf to lotus leaf with its huge feet; a colony of Asian Openbills (*Anastomus oscitans*), a species of stork; the Lesser Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*), the only duck species I encountered on the whole trip; as well as the Variegated Flutterer (*Rhyothemis variegata variegata*), a striking dragonfly whose flight pattern resembles a butterfly’s at first glance. Emergent vegetation included the Blue Lotus (*Nymphaea noucuali*), the national flower of Sri Lanka, a water lily whose flower colour ranges from white to purple, though some scientists now believe this species is a hybrid of *N. micrantha* and *N. caerulea*,

based on molecular sequence data (Yakandawala et al., 2017).



The Blue Lotus (*Nymphaea nouchali*), a water lily, provides a lake surface “highway” for the Pheasant-tailed Jacana, who seems to want to avoid flying at all costs.

## 2. Unawatuna

The next stop was Unawatuna, a Californiaesque beach resort, where we encountered a blue-banded bee (*Amegilla* sp., family Apidae, possibly *A. zonata*). These solitary bees have an unusual method, otherwise found only in bumblebees and possibly some large carpenter bees, of collecting pollen: they firmly grasp the flower being visited with their large jaws, and vibrate their flight muscles at up to 350 times per second without moving their wings. This vibration, also known as sonication, causes pollen to be displaced from the flower and to stick to the bee, particularly in plants whose pollen is hard to dislodge from the anther. (A related species, *A. cingulata*, is important for pollination of Australian crops.) Another method is grasping the flower petals with its legs, and banging its head against the anther. For a video of the



Blue-banded bees (*Amegilla* spp.) use sonication to liberate pollen. Males have five bands, females four. Length about 1 cm.

process check out [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SmJdVxZ\\_Lw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SmJdVxZ_Lw), “High-speed head banging bees,” RMIT University.

## 3. Sinharaja Forest Reserve

Eighty percent of Sri Lanka’s native forest cover has disappeared, replaced largely by tea, rice, and coconut plantations. The Sinharaja Forest Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is one of the largest remnants of virgin rainforest in Sri Lanka; 64% of all tree species found here are found nowhere else. I was especially excited as a naturalist and biologist, as this represented my first visit to a tropical rainforest. Our 4-hour hike did not disappoint. From the mildly venomous Green Vine Snake (*Ahaetulla nasuta*, which my partner Shanthu fearlessly wrapped around her arms), to the venomous Sri Lankan Green Pit Viper (*Trimeresurus trigonocephalus*, which nobody wrapped around their arms), and the Sri Lanka Kangaroo Lizard (*Otocryptis wiegmanni*) and the Hump-nosed Lizard (*Lyriocephalus scutatus*), lots of reptiles were on display. Other species included the Southern Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys (*Trachypithecus vetulus*), the Rhino Bug (*Pyrops maculatus*, a gigantic leafhopper), giant millipedes and giant scorpions, and the delightful damselfly Shining Gossamerwing (*Euphaea splendens*), which looks a bit like our River Jewelwing (*Calopteryx aequabilis*), but when the male takes to wing, displays a startling band of bright iridescent green on the dorsal area of the hindwing. Bird-watching turned out to be difficult, as birds would flit quickly through the leafy canopy, and we did not get to see the elusive Sri Lanka Blue Magpie. We DID find a Giant Wood Spider (*Nephila pilipes*, the world’s second largest orb-web spider, with a body

length of 3–5 cm and an overall length of 20 cm (8 inches). The males of this species are relatively small at 0.5 cm body length (male dwarfism). Of terrestrial leeches I saw only one, vainly attempting to crawl up my pant legs, as my pants were tucked into my socks.



Female Giant Wood Spider  
(*Nephila pilipes*)

## 4. Yala National Park

Yala National Park, located in Sri Lanka's southeast extends across both the large semi-arid and one of the two small arid zones of Sri Lanka. Its red earth, thorn-covered vegetation, termite mounds, and large mammalian wildlife (Sri Lankan elephant, *Elephas maximus maximus*; Sri Lanka Sloth Bear, *Melursus ursinus inornatus*; and Sri Lankan Leopard, *Panthera pardus kotiya*) immediately invites comparison to the African savanna. Due to the sparse tree cover, both bird and mammal species are relatively easy to spot, and we saw Black-headed Ibises (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*), and Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*). Also, seeing a Sri Lankan Jungle Fowl (*Gallus lafayetti*) wandering around is surprising; it looks exactly like our chicken, though *Gallus gallus domesticus* probably originates from the Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) in southern China. For me, one of the highlights was the frequent presence of bee-eaters. Every since I was a child, I had hoped to see the colourful birds in central Europe. Seeing Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*) at Yala Park finally made this wish come true.



Green Bee-eater

How expensive is it to travel in Sri Lanka? A nice hotel can be found for about \$40 in smaller towns (though you may have to bring your own toilet paper), depending on the season; restaurants are not costly, and if you are willing to eat like the locals (spicy!), you can get a good meal for as little as \$1.50. A large van with driver is about \$90 per day.

Should you drive in Sri Lanka? We met one brave young Dutch couple who had rented a Tuk-Tuk (three-wheeler “auto”) to explore the island. I admired them, though wouldn’t necessarily want to replicate their bravery. Wandering cows, sleeping dogs, elephants, and numerous vehicles madly careening towards you on the wrong side of the road just to pass, sometimes with inches to spare,

are just a few of the interesting things you will encounter when travelling Sri Lanka’s roads. When our driver, Kajan Mahadavan, first told me it would take 2 hours to travel 70 km from Unawatuna to the Sinharaja Forest Reserve, I was incredulous, but his estimate turned out to be accurate.

For a small travel group, Sri Lanka offers access to an amazing diversity of wildlife and, apart from the heat and humidity, is comfortable, safe, and relatively inexpensive.

### Dr. Godo Stoyke

#### About the Author

An award-winning speaker and best-selling book author, Dr. Godo Stoyke has a B.A. in Zoology, an M.A. in Botany/Mycology, and a Ph.D. in Environmental Design. He has worked as naturalist and director of the University of Alberta Botanic Garden Nature Interpretation Program ([botanicgarden.ualberta.ca](http://botanicgarden.ualberta.ca)), and currently, as president of Carbon Busters ([carbonbusters.org](http://carbonbusters.org)), is getting ready to build net zero homes in Edmonton’s Blatchford zero carbon redevelopment.

**Acknowledgments:** Thanks to Shanthu Mano, Calan Mano-Stoyke, and Indra Manoharan for supporting my naturalist endeavours, and for the excellent national park guides for pointing out numerous species which I would have missed.

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## Getting Owl-y

It happens on those dreary winter days when a bone-chilling wind soughs through the trees, creating unpleasant temperatures. We stay inside in the comfort of our warm homes. Then I start looking at computer images of times gone by.

This time I stopped at the section with my owl images. Why is it that we human beings are so intrigued by owls? Is it because they are nocturnal and we are usually not out at night (although some species can be seen during daytime), or is it because they are difficult to find? Whatever the case may be, I am very interested in finding and photographing owls wherever I can.

This is a whole different kind of birdwatching, with its own challenges and many disappointments. In Alberta we are fortunate to have the owl species described below, some of which, such as the Great Horned Owl, can be found nesting in close proximity to and even within our cities.

**Great Horned Owl** It is exciting to go out at dusk and listen for the hooting of a Great Horned Owl. If you find one, its large silhouette with the ear tufts is unmistakable. Seeing its call is something else. The body is almost horizontal, the white throat feathers are all puffed out, and its tail is up at an 45° angle. Great Horned Owls are easier to spot than the much smaller Northern Saw-whet Owls, which frequent the same habitat but nest in natural cavities, old woodpecker holes, and nest boxes specifically put up for them.



**Snowy Owl** By the time Fall arrives we are starting to look forward to the arrival of Snowy Owls. Finding a Snowy usually requires driving the country roads, where they are often found perching on top of power-line poles, When it gets too windy they find more sheltered spots atop hay bales or on the ground. The more appreciated photos show them perched on rustic fence posts, preferably at eye level or lower.



**Great Grey Owl** Finding a Great Grey Owl is a wonderful experience, as they can be very accommodating. I recall a sighting a few years ago in Lac St. Anne County. This particular owl was banded and did not mind being surrounded by photographers as it flew from fencepost to fencepost along a range road. When it heard a vole under the snow, it caught it in front of our eyes. When it flew to a tree-stump in the forest and became basically the extension of the stump, it blended in perfectly to this habitat; driving by, you would never see it.

I recall one incident when several vehicles were parked along a country road. A passing local resident (I assume) decided to call the RCMP to have a look at what the fuss was all about. The situation was explained to the officer and soon after, the owl flew back into the forest.

This banded owl was (re)captured on January 5, 2017, and turned out to be the same owl banded by Richard Chamberland, a licensed owl bander, on January 25, 2014, near Slave Lake, 300 km from here. It was determined to be a male over 6 years old.

### **Barred Owl** “Who cooks for you, who cooks for you?”

I heard that call for the first time in the seventies from the back yard of the late Edgar T. Jones's residence while on a social gathering with “bird-club people.” The Joneses



lived in Edmonton very close to the edge of the North Saskatchewan river bank, and the owls nested there.

When my wife and I did a volunteer trip to Trinidad and Tobago in 1993 in connection with the Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO), the late Peter DeMulder took care of our Labrador Retriever. Peter often

took the dog for a walk in the Spruce Lot, where its keen nose alerted him to a dead Barred Owl. Sad, but things happen. He saved it so I could do some postmortem studies of it.

Years later I saw my first live Barred Owl at Hawrelak Park in Edmonton and eventually photographed them in Whitemud Park, where they nested.

**Northern Hawk Owl** Another occasional winter visitor is the Northern Hawk Owl. This owl hunts during the day and can be very approachable. Usually perched on the highest branch of a tree or telephone wire, it scans the surrounding fields. If it sees prey on top of the snow, it dives from its perch and tries to snatch it with its talons. If successful, the owl eats its catch on the spot or carries it into the forest to stash on a branch for later use. This food stashing is interesting. The mouse or vole will

freeze solid. When the owl returns to feed, it uses its body heat to thaw the prey by sitting on it. If a raven or magpie happens to find this stashed prey, it is of course gladly devoured.

**Long-eared Owl** Over the course of several years, nesting Long-eared Owls have occasionally been discovered in Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park, usually in old crows' nests. Discovery usually happens by chance when a keen observer spots fledged owlets sitting close together on a branch near the nest site. Observant people

are everywhere, and the majority are respectful with regard to the whereabouts of the fledglings. Long-eared Owls start to incubate soon after the first egg is laid, so the owlets hatch over a period of time and thus differ in age. Of the four young ones I found out of the nest last

year, the oldest two were already good flyers, while the two younger owlets sat tight and looked at me in utter surprise. Trying to find them in consecutive days, I was alerted by the alarm calls of an adult Long-eared perched close by. Zeroing in to the sound, I located the owl in a tangle of willow branches but managed to find a gap through which I could get a shot before it flew off.

**Short-eared Owl** In the fall of 2018 we were treated with an influx of several Short-eared Owls in Sturgeon County near Manawan (Egg) Lake. On their southward migration they found the marshy shores teeming with voles, a good enough reason to linger for a while. Becoming active in late afternoon, they cruised the marsh and adjacent stubble fields in search of prey, hovering briefly, then diving into the vegetation and out of sight. Within seconds they reappeared, sometimes with a catch. Flying to a fencepost they swallowed it whole in true owl fashion. It was great to be able to observe these owls, at times up to 5 or 6 in the air at the same time. Over the course of a few weeks their numbers diminished to a single owl and eventually none. The vole population must



have been drastically reduced and the Shorties moved on. After all, in Nature, it's all about the availability of food!

### **Northern Saw-whet Owl**

At the beginning of this write-up I mentioned the Northern Saw-whet Owl. This small woodland owl is a nocturnal hunter that takes small rodents such as voles and deer mice. Finding one during the winter months is possible but not very common. They do migrate south. If one is discovered, it most likely is a male that stayed in its territory and hopes to attract a female early. I have seen Saw-whet fledglings as early as mid-April, but others have records of fledglings in June, so there is quite a stretch in their breeding biology. Like Hawk Owls, Saw-whets also stash prey for later consumption. Once a friend and I were photographing one. It sat there nicely at eye level, tucked away on a branch of a spruce tree close to the trunk. When it realized we were no threat, it reached down and started to pull the entrails from a dead deer-mouse it was actually sitting on. We had not seen that when we found it. After a few minutes it took the mouse from its talons and started to swallow it. It took a lot of effort to get it down. I concluded that it must have been thawing the frozen mouse until it was time to eat it, no matter who was looking. I never forgot that moment, it was so special.



**Northern Pygmy Owl** Many years ago I was moose hunting in the Carrot Creek area west of Edmonton. I sat along a cutline watching for any sign of big game when my peripheral vision detected movement. A tiny roundish shape had perched on a spruce bough above me. When I looked up, it flew away! This bugged me for decades. Could it have been a Pygmy Owl? In 2016, when a group of



birders were at the Edmonton grain terminals enjoying the Gyrfalcons, I discussed Pygmy Owls with Dr. Gord Court, whom I know well, and he provided me with information about possible sightings. We drove to the described area, but no luck. A year later, Don Delaney, also a well-known member of our birding community, told me about "fresh" Pygmy Owl sightings north of Drayton Valley.

Driving down to the approximate area resulted in another no show and, believe me, we looked. The saying "looking for a needle in a haystack" is very appropriate in this case. We made another trip to the same area in February that year. While my travel companion was looking at his bird app, I walked down another cutline and spotted a little "blob" on the top branch of an aspen tree. The binoculars revealed a Northern Pygmy Owl about 200 m away, too far for photography. It was definitely in "hunting" mode, judging by how it kept looking down, left, right, and behind, then flying to another tree a bit farther away. We slowly moved forward until we stood right below it and looked at that stern face. Our nearly frozen fingers manipulated the shutters, after which we left it alone, only to see it again exactly where we had started. A very rewarding trip – it was -18 °C, but the sun was shining! Seeing this owl was high on my wish list; getting the images was a bonus.

**Ludo Bogaert**

## Zim, Zan, and Tan: Backroads of Africa, Part 1



*Photo by Bill Reynolds*

Attendees at the ENC indoor meeting on January 18, 2019, met the weird and wonderful residents of little-known parks and reserves in the three countries of Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania, thanks to Bill and Marion Reynolds. Bill's interactive narrative took us on a rollicking natural history journey comprising the last three weeks of their three-month trip. The first part of their trip was with a group of 15 adventurous souls travelling in a semi-self-contained overland vehicle carrying folding tables and chairs, pots, pans, etc. The last segment they did on their own, following Bill's itinerary, by hiring a driver and jeep out of Dar-es-Salaam, capitol of Tanzania. A show of hands indicated very few people to none had ventured into either of these off-the-beaten-track locations, namely Selous game reserve and Ruaha National Park.

Bill made a point of saying that they enjoy birding on their own, in new environs, revelling in the excitement of discovery by figuring out species themselves without the aid of a paid expert. The race for numbers and gathering

too many new birds at once, he felt, can create too much of a blur. Bill's advice: better to pace yourself, get to know new families of birds and absorb the nuances of each species.

Familiarizing yourself with the relevant African regional bird guide before you go lets you in on some peculiarities different from North American bird naming. Bill's observations indicated that African guidebooks use **Latin genera** somewhat frequently, as in using bird names such as *parisomas*, *hyliotas*, *eremomelas*, and *cisticolas* instead of "warblers." The last group – *cisticolas* – is the biggest warbler family in east Africa, consisting of 43 species. Did early naturalists suffer from descriptive boredom? Lack of imagination? They resorted to an approach we are not familiar with – they used bird vocal diversity as the nomenclature differentiator. Bill rattled off a litany of examples that had the crowd in mild stitches. He challenged the crowd to differentiate a croaking *cisticola* from a rattling one, or a churring from a zitting or siffling individual. Naming notes were not over yet as he alluded to a Seussian approach, with the result being birds known as crombecs, gonoleks, brubrus, and tchagras.

Further laughter ensued when our speaker referred to the guide's quick descent into the land of the **hyphenated unimaginative** bird name and asked us to picture what a swallow-plover, grosbeak-canary, cuckoo-hawk, shrike-flycatcher, flycatcher-warbler, sparrow-lark, robin-chat, oriole-finch, quail-finch, and cuckoo-finch might look like.

We started our journey in Victoria Falls Park, which a few club members had visited. Bill's trick question caught many people off guard, when he inquired what family of plants did the striking Zimbabwe state flower or African Flame Lily belong to – of course the obvious was stated and the edification was delivered: crocus family.

Images of bushbucks, vervet monkeys, Saturn moths, and hornbills flashed across the screen. The latter, we found out, chooses a hollow tree for a nest and the female seals herself in with mud and feces. She doesn't lay eggs for one to two weeks, which means she stores sperm, then fertilizes eggs. She stays cooped up until the chicks are grown. One male was estimated to have delivered 24,000 fruits during confinement. The average feeding of 10–20 times a day over 3 months will keep daddy busy.



**African Flame Lily, Photo by Bill Reynolds**

An early morning slow cruise down the Zambezi river was highly recommended and our speaker was quite surprised how so few of the thousands of visitors seem to take advantage of this. Spotting a rail with long toes known as African Jacana was also a glimpse into the world of polyandry- a female with a harem of males. Jacana dads look after their young and they have a unique habit of carrying the young under their wing. At this point Bill foreshadowed that later that evening we were

going to visit with a bird that carries something else under its feathers.

A huge nest, rivalling a multigeneration eagle or osprey nest, was sighted from the river cruise, in the vicinity of 1.5 m (5 ft.) across, comprising in the order of 10,000 sticks. This was the result of a compulsive nest builder who constructs 3-5 nests a year even if not breeding. Bill let on (tongue-in-cheek) that one must listen for a muttering sound in the bush somewhat reminiscent of "gotta find sticks, gotta find sticks" and you might locate this dome nest builder. This dull brown gadwall-sized bird enters its nest through a tunnel up to 60 cm (24 in.) long terminating in a nesting chamber. This was the first African continent endemic to be presented – a solo member of his family – known as a hammerkop or hammerhead due to his profile.



**Hammerhead, Photo by Marion Reynolds**

In Zambesi National Park we were treated to Marion's video of a matriarchal family of 7-ton polyphyodonts (with baby) as they sauntered around their jeep within a few feet. Which polyphyodont has 6 sets of chewing teeth in their lifetime? Why elephants, of course. Teeth are not replaced by new ones emerging from the jaws vertically as in most mammals. Instead, new teeth grow in at the back of the mouth and move forward to push out the old ones.

Elephants communicate by using their trunk and feet through the detection of seismic waveforms at an infrasonic frequency level. These seismic waveforms are produced in two ways: stomach rumbles and through the weight of their feet by walking. Stomach vocalization can travel 16 km (10 miles) and the sound of locomotion vibrations moving through the earth appears to travel distances of up to 32 km (20 miles). I presume that juveniles are taught to keep their trunk to the ground.

**Bill Reynolds**

*This article will continue in the next issue.*

## Field Trip Reports

### Sherwood Park and Chipman, April 13, 2019

We had really nice weather for a morning walk at Heritage Wetlands Park. Nineteen people showed up, and we made our way around the trails at a leisurely pace. We started out from the bridge, which is my favourite vantage point as there is open water on one side and the ducks and geese always splash down after a low approach. A Tree Sparrow could be heard from shrubs nearby and a Merlin sneaked in to perch in the tall snags behind us.

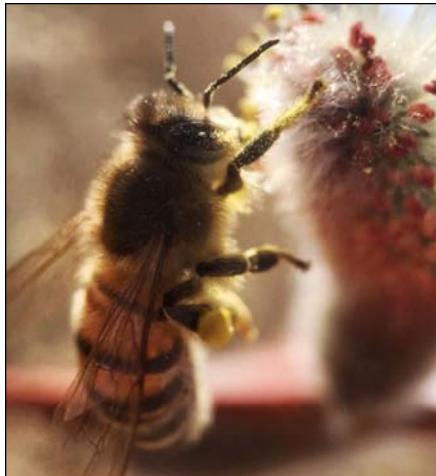
Along the trails we picked up a few Song Sparrows, Blue Jays, Robins, and Black-capped Chickadees. Nuthatches were absent, presumably nesting already. A Bald Eagle soared overhead and for a moment seemed like it would come in closer or land nearby, but it had other places to be and passed through.

I had a mild heart attack when I caught a glimpse of a “Northen Goshawk” flying parallel to us, but it turned out to be a Cooper’s Hawk. The Heritage Wetlands has the best maintained eBird illustrated checklist in the world, and a Goshawk photo would have been a nice addition. A photo would also have been a good diagnostic tool, but we didn’t even get a sketchy photo to work with. In the days following the walk, it became apparent the hawk was a Cooper’s. The NOGO photo will have to wait for now.

A short distance later Janice Hurlburt heard a Red-winged Blackbird, which was a first-of-season bird for most. It was among some European Starlings, which made it difficult to determine if it was the “real deal” or an imposter. Rounding up the walk we checked a lot of crayfish remnants around the shore of the pond. Presumably they were trying to get out of



Crayfish and Honey Bee, Photos by Emily Gorda



the water for oxygen in mid-winter.

Spring was well on its way, as evidenced by this honeybee and willow bud. (We saw a few butterflies as well, but since I am not a Guild member, I can’t really comment.)

After the walk we met for pizza and those able to con-

tinue headed east for a few more birds. We started at Chipman and made our way to Beaverhills in search of Snow Geese. We found several nesting Great Horned Owls, a Merlin, and a lone Mountain Bluebird.

A lot of Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks were in the area. We only stopped for ducks and geese, however, so most



Rough-legged Hawk, Photo by Sean Evans

of the views looked like this.

We scoped the odd pond that had distant ducks, but saw only Northern Pintails and American Wigeons 99.999% of the time. The Snow Geese were finally visible flying in loose flocks above us, but they never really landed. When a group did touch down, it was only for a few minutes and they took off again before we could even set up a scope. At least Emily could hear a Killdeer in our general vicinity, which eventually flew past us. The last interesting bird (for this time of year) was a group of “bobbers” – some Greater Yellowlegs were seen east of Beaverhills Lake. With that last first-of-year bird, we made our way back home.

**Sean Evans**

## Bittern to Beaverhills, March 24, 2019

*For a refreshing change, we've got an awesome report from a new club member - Peter Kuchar. I'll add a few notes for clarification. Our trip went down to Coal Lake, around Bittern Lake, and through Round Hill, Ryley, and Tofield.*

An all-day birding tour in rural Alberta southeast of Edmonton managed to pull a silk purse out of a sow's ear: more than 30 species including some prized wintering birds. Very unpromising weather, cold and windy, a pre-spring day in which the spring melt had been halted in its tracks by temperature hovering round zero. It was heavily overcast and a cold fog threatened but did not actually envelop us. Also an unpromising landscape lacking in diversity, endless partly snow-freed fields with scattered clumps of aspen and occasional wind-breaks. No conifer forest except small stands of mostly planted spruce or pin, no gully thickets, no rivers.

We met at 8:30 a.m. at a parking lot behind a Tim Horton's at the east end of Sherwood Park, and by 9:00 we were off. There were about 20 of us, a mix of young and old, men and women, some armed with giant telephoto lenses, some with spotting scopes, all with binocs. We were in a convoy of 7 SUVs which had diminished to 4 by the time we returned after 6:00 pm., as some participants had to beg off for other commitments. We kept in contact with walkie-talkies that sometimes crackled and screeched, but no one got separated or lost. Our team leader was Gerald Romanchuk, who seemed to know all the back roads, and Colleen Raymond was given the thankless task of preparing, on the fly, about a dozen eBird listings at various localities.

The landscape looked bleak and barren, but we had experts (especially our team leader) who knew where to look, combined with a crisscross pattern of gravel township and range roads, by now clear of snow. Occasional wet patches did not thwart us, though there was talk of some roads at some times of year becoming impassably flooded. We mostly stuck to these back roads, because "You can't stop on a highway." Surely the pride of rural Alberta is the network of excellently maintained rural roads.

Pride of place goes to five species of big raptors. A couple of Bald Eagles at a distance, one immature and one adult. A couple of Rough-legged Hawks. A Great Horned Owl on a nest, the head just peeking over the rim, as we were en route to a pit stop in Camrose. A Northern Goshawk, rapidly flying in fairly open country, then flushed from a tree by the road and finally disappearing. And, leader of the pack, a white Gyrfalcon, spotted on a tall power pole in an area known from the past to harbor this raptor. [Although this Gyr looked very white when

facing us, the upper parts were gray and she would be called a gray morph. GR] There was talk of the distended crop; evidently she (apparently a female) had had breakfast. Why was the locality a secret on eBird? The answer was that there's a catalog of sensitive species for which policy is not to reveal the location, and the Gyrfalcon is on it. We all had a good look from a couple of poles down until she decided to retreat to a farther pole. Gyrfalcons' value in falconry, especially for the Saudis, was brought up, though apparently most of those birds come from Eurasia.



*Photo by Ann Carter*

The Gyrfalcon winters here but returns to the Canadian Arctic, like some other birds you see in Alberta this time of year. One of these is the Snowy Owl, the only significant bird missing from our final list. This bird was probably around, but we didn't spot any, likely camouflaged in snow patches dotting the landscape. There was reminiscing of years past when you might see an owl on each patch of snow, though you couldn't be blamed for comparing this to some fishing tales. [As a newer member, Peter hasn't gotten a full dose of all the "fishing tales" one can hear on our trips! GR]

Other winter visitors are Snow Buntings and finally, by mid-afternoon, we came across a large loose assemblage, tumbling over the frozen ground and snow. Some were singing, as were some Horned Larks accompanying them. Our leader sounded almost apologetic that we weren't seeing more larks. Apparently they tend to be confined to the roads but when the fields start losing their snow the larks spread out and are much harder to spot. Another visitor was the Northern Shrike, one bird spotted at a distance and eventually disappearing behind aspen patches. The comment was that this bird doesn't stay still, it keeps moving. We did not see winter visitors such as redpolls, waxwings, and crossbills, likely because there was very little forest or woodland on our itinerary. Conifers were particularly scarce, only as planted lines in some homesteads and small patches in gullies which we did not explore. However, it was predicted by our knowledgeable driver that Eurasian Collared-Doves prefer a

mix of spruce and deciduous trees in towns, and hey, at one hamlet (Round Hill) we saw a couple of doves.

Corvids were ubiquitous, particularly Common Ravens and Black-billed Magpies. Early arrivals of American Crows were fairly common, mostly in pairs, and we also recorded Blue Jays. House Sparrows and pigeons could be seen at most farms, and squadrons of presumably newly-arriving Starlings. Only one plant species was in flower: by Coal Lake were a few mud patches with thriving stinkweed (a.k.a. field pennycress, *Thlaspi arvense*), a “gift” from Europe like the house sparrows and starlings.

Another very common species, this one solidly indigenous, was Canada Goose, in pairs and small flocks on the ice or open water of ponds. Often a couple of Mallards and very rarely some other duck would be hanging around with the geese.

A crowd favourite, in addition to the raptors, was a lone Mountain Bluebird flitting about at the edge of Coal Lake, and even landing on the ice.

As on most birding trips, questions of a particular bird’s presence or identity come up. At a dump (Ryley Landfill) where several hundred California Gulls had congregated, finding other gulls mixed in with them seemed to be onerous, especially in the cold wind. We had a bit of a to-do when a car reported a Red-winged Blackbird and an American Tree Sparrow in a patch of cattail marsh. We all had a look-see but these birds did not reappear (though Tree Sparrows did later in the day). But you can’t expect the bird to raise his wing and say “Present.” The ultimate problem of such partial sightings is the fretting on whether to include such a bird on the day list.

Was this a great day or was it ho-hum? An old hand might say it was average, and list “the ones that got away,” such as grosbeaks, redpolls, waxwings, Snowy Owl, and rumors of a Wood Duck that didn’t materialize. But a novice would see it as a triumph, a remarkable day in a patently hostile and unpromising environment. Five species of big raptors, endless groups of Canada geese, local flocks of songbirds tarrying before heading to Arctic or Subarctic lands, and some ubiquitous year-round residents.

### Peter Kuchar

*I’d like to thank Peter for his excellent report, Colleen for all her awesome eBirding, Ann and Sean for their photos, and all the participants for coming out.*

### Gerald Romanchuk

### Rundle and Hermitage Parks, March 9, 2019

Five of us enjoyed the first warm, sunny morning in a while by birding our way along Edmonton’s North Saskatchewan River trail starting at Rundle Park.

We were treated to nice views of a female Common Merganser sitting on the river’s icy edge after she was spotted by one of the two newcomers to ENC field trips among us. Trudging uphill along the snowy path was warmer and more strenuous than one of our facilitators anticipated, and the experience had him requesting the trail “shuttle” sooner than usual on a regular field trip. Common Redpoll, American Robin, and Dark-eyed Junco were among the species seen along the way.

We arrived at the busy Hermitage Park feeders and found lots of birds, including a lovely male Pileated Woodpecker that flew in on cue after a couple of us guessed which species was drumming a tree nearby.



The walk back on a different, plowed path seemed easier. After stopping when one of us heard the sound of cones rustling, we found a gang of foraging White-winged Crossbills at the source.



*Photos by Jiri Novak*

We wrapped up our 10 km hike back at Rundle Park, where we spotted our 22<sup>nd</sup> species for the trip – a majestic Bald Eagle circling overhead. Thanks to everyone who came out, Jiri for sharing his photos, and Gerald for keeping our eBird list.

**Gerald Romanchuk and Colleen Raymond**

### Kinnard Ravine, February 23, 2019

It was a cold and windy morning, and the participants just managed to outnumber the leaders at 3–2. We walked down the ravine accompanied by Chickadees singing “Spring’s Here.” Not sure what they’ve been drinking! Large flocks of Bohemian Waxwings trilled overhead all morning.

Otherwise, the birding was pretty routine. We picked up a couple of robins near the Capilano Bridge and added juncos to the numerous house sparrows and finches at feeders in the neighbourhoods north of the ravine. It’s always more fun to look at some of these common birds with some newer birders along to give a fresh perspective!



*Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

**Gerald Romanchuk and Colleen Raymond**

### Natural Area Birding with Nature Kids, February 16, 2019

The morning walk with Nature Kids was a tad on the cool side at about -16 °C. An improvement over the past two weeks when it was mostly at -30ish!

The 15 participants included 6 children. The disposable hand warmers brought along by Wayne Oakes, our intrepid ENC leader, quickly came in handy. The group didn’t get very far before the families with young children had to pack it in due to the cold. The adults carried on and had some really good sightings, including Boreal Chickadee, Great Horned Owl (female), and American Three-toed Woodpecker (male), along with a number of the more usual ones; Black-capped Chickadees, both nuthatches, magpies, ravens, Pine Siskins, White-winged Crossbills, and Downy Woodpeckers. We finished up right at the pre-determined finish time of 11:30.

Many thanks to everyone who participated!

**Wayne Oakes**



Boreal Chickadee  
Whitemud Creek -16c  
Feb 16, 2019  
WayneOakes



Great Horned Owl (left)  
American Three-toed Woodpecker (right)  
Photos by Wayne Oakes

### Sherwood Park Natural Area, February 10, 2019

The walk today was pretty quiet. I was the lone member able to overcome cabin fever and brave the cold. You are all getting soft! It was -29 °C, but felt like -27 °C with the sun shining.

There was not a lot of species variety, which is normal for this area – mostly Black-capped Chickadees and White-breasted Nuthatches, with high numbers of both. Luckily for them I brought along a bunch of sunflower seeds and distributed them along the way. These birds were really happy to see me. I would have liked to have used my phone to get a few pictures, but it was frozen solid. It was hard to get pictures due to their proximity.

There was a lot of meeping. I recorded 20 White-breasted Nuthatches, but there were many more than that without a doubt.



*White-breasted Nuthatch, Photo by Sean Evans*

The chickadees were no less chatty, and at one time there was an frantic explosion of noise. I was immediately thinking “owl” or “shrike,” but it was only two rival chickadee gangs fighting with each other, about 10 on each side. It was quite the tiny dust-up.

Eventually I heard some Redpolls. I could see evidence of their feeding patterns throughout the walk, and finally I even saw a few of them.

One of the highlights was watching a Hairy Woodpecker’s rapid drumming. It was really loud in the frozen air. It made some test taps, I am assuming for sound quality, before letting rip with the full drum roll.

I saw or heard only 6 species in 2 hours, but it was a nice walk nonetheless.

**Sean Evans**

### Goldbar Park, January 26, 2019

Saturday’s walk at Goldbar was unusually warm for January. I think we hit a high of 6 °C, although it was still overcast. It was wisely suggested that we stick to the riverside trail, as the unseasonal weather had brought out a very large number of cross-country skiers using the groomed pathways.

On our way towards the bridge dividing Rundle and Goldbar Park we saw some robins and a Blue Jay as highlights. From the bridge, in the distance there was a Lesser Scaup, although it was a bit hard to make out among the many Common Goldeneyes.



*Common Goldeneye, Photo by Sean Evans*

There were not many ducks in the river compared to other years; perhaps because it was open and there were other locations to choose from. The Wastewater Treatment Plant was devoid of ducks, and desperate fisherman for once as well. We were hoping to see a Townsend’s Solitaire that is sometimes seen around Capilano Park, but it did not turn up. Some distant White-winged Crossbills could be heard, however, as well as a Brown Creeper!



I believe we had 17 people out for the walk, including some late arrivals. No coyotes this year, unfortunately.

**Sean Evans**

*Brown Creeper, Photo by Jiri Novik*

## Genesee, Keephills, and Seba Beach, January 20, 2019

After a few cool days last week, things warmed up reasonably for some winter waterfowling when 11 of us headed west to scan the cooling ponds at Genesee and Keephills.

Starting at Genesee we were relieved to see relatively calm water and no ice fog. At the first stop on the south side we were treated to a Trumpeter Swan fly-by with trumpets blaring! We picked through all the ducks and found highlights including Ruddy Duck and Red-breasted and Hooded Mergansers. Saw a few Bald Eagles flying and perched, but no other raptors.

Over near Keephills, we stopped for lunch at the little woodlot where a good bird was seen 12 years ago, but things were quiet on Sunday. At the northeast end of the Keephills pond we picked up Red-necked Grebe and a couple of Northern Pintails. Further west at the duck feeder access we spotted Barrow's Goldeneye and finally got Coot on the winter list. A tight little raft of 28 was hiding around the bend.

The lead vehicle managed to miss a Shrike on the Sundance Road. We turned around once, only to be told it was gone. Just got going the right way again, and heard that it was being seen again. Guess it might've been, but by the time we got turned around AGAIN we were so dizzy we couldn't see it!

Feeders at Sundance Village were busy with the usual crowd of chickadees and the like. We did hear a Brown Creeper, but couldn't get a visual.

Pushing on towards Seba Beach, we went to visit the Greaneys, where we saw lots of chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers and got to listen to Mike's stories. We especially liked the one about the critter they caught on a trail-cam – it was a great big Fisher.

A bunch of us went for a hike through the back 40. We got a look at a goshawk and a couple more creepers. Those that stayed in the yard got a Pine Grosbeak and some Canada Jays.

It was looking like we might be able to get away and back to the city at a reasonable time, but we had some vehicular trouble with the lead car. It didn't seem to want to stay in the middle of the road and ended up getting sucked into the ditch.



Those of us in the car were kinda worried it might tip over. But as Mr. Kovac pointed out, Brian Stephens wisely put a certain trip leader in the shotgun seat for ballast!

Then serendipity hit. While Brian was on hold with AMA, and we were probably looking at a long wait for a tow, we saw some vehicles coming up the road. One of them was a tow truck. He winched us out and we were on our way without much more than a half-hour delay.



**Photos by Gerald Romanchuk**

Thanks to all the field trippers and to Colleen for eBirding!

**Gerald Romanchuk**



*MacKinnon Ravine, Photo by Colleen Raymond*

## MacKinnon Ravine, January 12, 2019

Twenty-two keen and seemingly competitive birders managed to follow the map, decipher convoluted written directions, maneuver around roadblocks and construction equipment, slip past a trusted and reliable gatekeeper (a.k.a. Janos Kovaks) and arrive at the meeting spot for the ENC MacKinnon Ravine walk. We thought everyone must have been really motivated to cash in on the Big Prize that was promised for those who got there successfully, but nobody asked so the prize went unclaimed.

We enjoyed a leisurely start with four species: Black-capped Chickadee, Black-billed Magpie, White-breasted Nuthatch, and an alleged Common Raven that somebody (a.k.a. the gatekeeper) said he saw. The action heated up a bit when we listened for a while to a single Red Crossbill that a couple of folks saw as it flew away. It was a great new addition to the Winter Bird list!

Walking in the Glenora neighbourhood along a lovely stretch on St. George's Crescent, we stopped to read about and admire a beautiful historical home. Two ladies exited the home's gate and one of them asked if we'd seen any good birds. We mentioned the Red Crossbill, which is one bird she reportedly had never seen before but would "look for in John Acorn's bird book!"

Taking the stairs down to MacKinnon Ravine gave us an opportunity to record a paperless sign-in sheet (minus 2 who left early and 1 who arrived late).

We were surprised by a sizable flock of robins in the ravine.

Then we were even more surprised by a Black-backed...oops... Back-lit Woodpecker.



*Photo by Vivek Dabral*

The only raptor found on the trip was a Merlin that zipped by and landed in a tree across the river. Just in case there was any doubt about who spotted the bird, one of our facilitators enthusiastically proclaimed whose bird it was. Don't ask me how I know.

It was a warm sunny day of good birding with a great group of people. Thanks to everyone who joined us and to Brian Stephens for eBirding!

**Colleen Raymond and Gerald Romanchuk**



*American Robin, Photo by Janice Hurlburt*

## Banquet Speaker: Steven Price

Steven Price, President of Bird Studies Canada (BSC), gave an overview of the status of North American birds one hundred years after the signing of the first Migratory Bird Convention Act in 1917. This was to protect migratory waterfowl and shorebirds from uncontrolled hunting, as certain birds like the Eskimo Curlew were being killed in their millions.

Steven drew heavily upon the findings of two reports, *State of Canada's Birds* (2012) and *State of North America's Birds* (2016). He noted that in Canada, only 22% of bird species are resident and 78% are migratory, meaning their survival is also dependent on conservation efforts in other countries. For example, the Canada Warbler breeds in Canada but migrates through the United States and winters on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. He showed a number of abundance animation maps to show the power of citizen science and computer modelling in understanding the timing and flyways of different migratory species – a tool to understanding the life cycle of each species.

Of 1,154 species recorded in North America, only 14% had a conservation status of low concern; 49 % had moderate concern and 37 % (432 species) were of high concern. Certain bird species are at greatest risk: for example, 57% of ocean bird species, 56 % of bird species of tropical and subtropical rain forests, and 28% of bird species inhabiting arid and grassland habitats are of high concern. Results of breeding bird surveys indicate aerial insectivores such as swallows and nighthawks are the worst affected, with their numbers down 70% since the 1970s.

Steven provided some background of a number of initiatives that BSC is working on, often with the help of citizen scientists, and he thanked the many ENC members who contribute to BSC studies and report their sightings on eBird.

In closing Steven reviewed the five goals identified by BSC that would help Canadian birds the most in 2018. In order of priority, they are:

1. To have 50 species tracked across their life cycle using Motus stations.
2. To increase the number of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and the number of caretaker groups.
3. To deal with various threats to bird populations, e.g., pesticides, habitat loss, and rats.
4. To increase the number of citizen scientists from forty thousand to sixty thousand.
5. To foster an appreciation for birds among the urban population (90% of Canadians).



**Steven Price, Photo by Chris Rees**

### Alan Hingston

#### *Further Information*

Bird Studies Canada: <https://www.birdscanada.org/>

Important Bird Areas: <https://www.ibacanada.org/index.jsp?lang=en>

Motus Wildlife Tracking System: <https://www.birdscanada.org/research/motus/> and <https://motus.org/>

#### *Banquet photos (page 31) by Chris Rees*

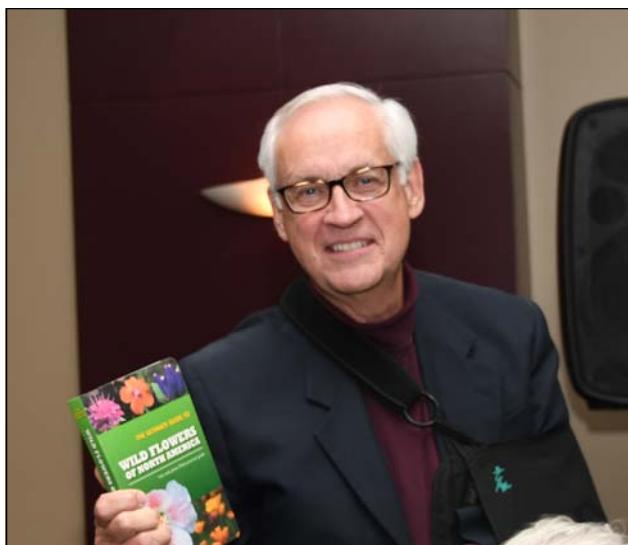
#### **Clockwise: Door prize winner Len Shrimpton**

**Donna McKen presenting door prize to Vincent Cottrell**

**Emily Gorda, Sean Evans, and Marnie Evans**

**Joanie and Janos Kovaks, Colleen Raymond, and Gerald Romanchuk**

## Edmonton Nature Club 2019 Banquet Photos



## Springtime in Alberta



*Ruffed Grouse drumming, Photos by Bob Gehlert*

