



*Canada Warbler, Larose Forest, June 16, 2010.  
Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*



How to Find **250**  
**Bird Species**  
in the  
**OFNC Study Area**  
in a  
**Single Year**

**Part 2: April to June**

*Gregory Zbitnew*

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1977, a series of articles in *Trail and Landscape* described a strategy to see 200 bird species within the OFNC study area in a single year. This is the second of a series of four articles providing an update/rewrite of that original article, the first of which was published in the January-March 2018 issue of T&L.

The OFNC study area (also called the 50K) refers to the area within a circle of a 50-kilometre radius centred on the Peace Tower. See map on page 108-109.

All the introductory material in the first article is still relevant to this article, and if you haven't yet started your "big year" and plan to start, it is highly recommended that you read it.

However, I will repeat the key points from that article:

1. You should chase a rarity as soon as possible. The rarity *might* stay for weeks, but it is more likely to be gone the next day, or even the next hour.
2. Cover all the major habitats/areas at the prime time, if this is all you can do. Article #2 will describe the key habitats/times for April-June.
3. Focus your birding efforts on the uncommon-rare species, the "target" birds.
4. You should take full advantage of the very best birding tool available, which is an online database of bird sightings called eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)), to get the most up-to-date information on what is being seen and what is expected. Most of the OFNC's weekly report, issued every Thursday on [ofnc.ca](http://ofnc.ca), is based on information from eBird.
5. Take advantage of birding information on the OFNC website, such as birding areas and the seasonal checklist.
6. Take advantage, as appropriate, of local birding guides, free field trips, and friendly local birders you see in the field.



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## HOW HAS THE YEAR 2018 PROGRESSED SO FAR?

How has the birding year progressed in 2018, as of “press time” in late January? I gave a lot of suggestions in Part 1. Were they good, or have I been a false prophet?

There were a few disappointments. Severe cold starting in late December froze the Rideau River to an unprecedented extent until mid-January. As a result, BARROW’S GOLDENEYE has been hard to find. HARLEQUIN DUCK is not wintering this year. WINTER FINCHES have not lived up to the experts’ predictions of last fall. There has been one regular spot for small numbers of RED CROSSBILLS, but WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS, PINE SISKINS and COMMON REDPOLLS are scarce. There have been no reports of HOARY REDPOLL or PINE GROSBEAK. No TUFTED TITMOUSE has been reported either.

On the other hand, all five “regular” OWLS have been seen, and two of the scarcer ones as well: HAWK-OWL and SHORT-EARED OWL. Of the important target birds mentioned in Part 1, 13 of the 30 have been seen so far, plus seven of the ten owls. Six of these 30 will not likely be seen until March. About 70 species have been seen to date, but no real rarities yet. *(Photo, left: Short-eared Owl near Gatineau, January 18, 2018, by Jacques Bouvier.)*

## BIRDING FROM APRIL TO JUNE

### KEY ACTIVITIES DURING THIS PERIOD

(NOTE: The main text has details and an explanation of the terms and places)

1. If you have missed any of the January-March target birds, there may still be a few around in the areas mentioned until mid- to late April, but do not delay your search as they are disappearing quite rapidly.
2. Visit the Ottawa River regularly after it opens, most particularly between Britannia and Shirley’s Bay, and particularly during “fallout weather” in late May and early June.
3. Visit any suitable SHOREBIRD habitat: flooded fields, melting snow dumps, inland ponds including storm water outlets, particularly in mid-May and early June.
4. Visit migrant traps repeatedly, or at least any decent-sized woodland, especially during May; visit especially after a migrant “fallout” mid- to late May.
5. Visit extensive marshy/wetland areas, particularly starting late May.
6. Visit extensive areas of grassland, fields and other open areas from late May to end of June.
7. Visit certain special areas: Carp Ridge, Constance Creek, Torbolton Forest, and Mer Bleue from late May to end of June.
8. Visit inland ponds such as on Moodie Drive and Giroux Road.
9. Visit Britannia Point in late May-early June when insects emerge from the river.
10. In nesting season (June), consider visiting the larger tracts of forest outside the cities, or the smaller ones closer to town.

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## IMPORTANT TARGET BIRDS

These are the important birds to target during this period. “Target” birds are species that occur in our area every year during this time, but can be difficult to find because they are uncommon to rare, have a small area of suitable habitat, or are much harder to find later in the year. You *can* find them, though, and if you want to reach your goal to see 250 species in a year, you must find all or most of them. Although some occur reliably at specific locations (and these locations will be mentioned later on), others tend to show up somewhat unpredictably anywhere that there is suitable habitat, and in many cases there is a lot more habitat than there are birds. The more you are aware of a target bird’s habitat, habits and calls, the better you can be alert to the possibility of their presence whenever you are birding in suitable habitat.

It is a good idea to check eBird to find out where the species is being seen, or review the weekly OFNC report, as they will certainly be mentioned there. If you have time, continue to visit suitable habitat for a target species until you see it or until it has migrated out of the area.

As a rough guide to the seasonal status and usual habitat for these species, a few codes/words are put after the name. I have also included a single word to indicate the most usual habitat for this species.

It is recommended that you look at the seasonal checklist (available on our website) to find details on the time the species is most likely to be around and the usual habitat for it. Any good field guide would also have more details about the suitable habitat for each species.

### Legend

An (Su) after the name indicates that this species is also present in the summer and in most cases nests in the 50K.

An (Sp) after the name indicates that the species is normally found only in spring migration.

An (F) after the name indicates that this species is easier to find in the fall migration, and it will be discussed in subsequent articles. This means that you have another opportunity if you miss this species in the spring and summer.

Both (Sp) and (F) after the name means that the species is equally likely in both spring and fall migration.

A \* identifies that species as a particularly important bird to find.

Water: Rivers and Ponds

Shore: Shorebird habitat (see text for an explanation)

Marsh: Marshes or other wetland

Grass: Grassland and Open areas

Woods: Woodlands

Local: Found in very few areas. See text for details.



*Mourning Warbler; Larose Forest, June 14, 2010.*

*Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*

1. Redhead (Su) (F) (Water)
2. Ruddy Duck (Su) (Water)
3. Ruffed Grouse (Su) (Woods)
4. American Bittern (Su) (Marsh)
5. \*Least Bittern (Su) (Marsh)
6. Northern Harrier (Su) (Grass)
7. \*Northern Goshawk (Su) (Woods)
8. Broad-winged Hawk (Su) (Woods)
9. Virginia Rail (Su) (Marsh)
10. Sora (Su) (Marsh)
11. American Coot (Su) (F) (Water)
12. \*Upland Sandpiper (Su) (Grass)
13. \*Ruddy Turnstone (Sp) (F) (Shore)
14. Short-billed Dowitcher (F) (Shore)
15. American Woodcock (Su) (Woods)
16. Wilson's Phalarope (Sp) (Shore)
17. \*Little Gull (Sp) (Water) (Local)
18. Bonaparte's Gull (Su) (Water)
19. Black Tern (Su) (Marsh)
20. Common Tern (Su) (Water)
21. \*Arctic Tern (Sp) (Water) (Local)
22. \*Yellow-billed Cuckoo  
(Su) (Woods) (Local)
23. Black-billed Cuckoo (Su) (Woods)
24. Common Nighthawk  
(Su) (Woods) (Local)
25. Eastern Whip-poor-will  
(Su) (Woods)
26. \*Red-headed Woodpecker  
(Su) (Woods) (Local)
27. \*Olive-sided Flycatcher  
(Sp) (F) (Woods)
28. \*Yellow-bellied Flycatcher  
(Sp) (F) (Woods)
29. Willow Flycatcher (Su) (Marsh)
30. \*Yellow-throated Vireo (Su) (Woods)
31. Philadelphia Vireo (Su) (F) (Woods)
32. Northern Rough-winged Swallow (Su) (Water)
33. Bank Swallow (Su) (Water)
34. Cliff Swallow (Su) (Water)
35. \*Sedge Wren (Su) (Marsh) (Local)
36. Marsh Wren (Su) (Marsh)
37. \*Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (Su) (Woods)
38. Eastern Bluebird (Su) (Grass)
39. Gray-cheeked Thrush (F) (Woods)
40. Northern Waterthrush  
(Su) (Woods)
41. \*Golden-winged Warbler  
(Su) (Woods) (Local)
42. \*Orange-crowned Warbler (F) (Woods)
43. Mourning Warbler (Su) (Woods)
44. Canada Warbler (Su) (Woods)
45. Grasshopper Sparrow (Su) (Grass) (Local)
46. Clay-colored Sparrow (Su) (Grass) (Local)
47. Field Sparrow (Su) (Grass)
48. Fox Sparrow (Sp) (F) (Woods)
49. Vesper Sparrow (Su) (Grass)
50. Lincoln's Sparrow (Su) (Grass)
51. \*Eastern Towhee (Su) (Woods) (Local)
52. Indigo Bunting (Su) (Woods)
53. Rusty Blackbird (F) (Woods)



*Broad-winged Hawk,  
Larose Forest, May 26, 2016.  
Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*



*Northern Pintails near Bourget, April 25, 2013. Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*

## THE RIVERS OPEN

Sometime in mid-April, the great mass of ice covering the slower sections of the Ottawa River disappears, often, it seems, virtually overnight. About the same time, the large inland ponds such as on Moodie Drive and Giroux Road also open up, again virtually overnight. Don't forget Mud Lake in Britannia, for while it is not a particularly large lake, birds show up there, and you would often be in Britannia anyway, so it is not hard to check. Suddenly, suitable habitat for WATERBIRDS of all species has greatly multiplied.

Between now and early June, it is good to regularly check these areas because the river is a migration corridor. The best part of the Ottawa River is between Britannia and Shirley's Bay. Unfortunately, the river east of the Champlain Bridge is not as good.

Of the regulars, 10 species of PUDDLE DUCKS, 16 DIVING DUCKS, 3 GREBES, and 2 LOONS probably pass through every spring, but some are rare then. Regular visits to the river and large ponds are needed to see the common species. If you find any of the uncommon to rare species, it will eliminate your need to find them in the fall. However, virtually all the regular species passing through are considerably more common in the fall, and a number of them also nest here. Therefore I have not identified many of them as specific target birds for the spring. RUDDY DUCK and REDHEAD are two ducks to look for in the spring. Inland ponds like the one on Moodie Drive can be good for these.

Numbers of ducks in general diminish after the end of April, but scarcer ones and rarities are more likely to show up in late May-early June. This is also prime time for other uncommon-rare birds, which will be discussed in other sections.

## FALLOUTS

Now is the time to talk about **fallouts**, a greatly desired situation where weather conditions result in large numbers of migrants, which would otherwise continue to fly, being forced to land or to fly lower, and hence be visible. These would be in mid-May to early June, during the peak of migration. A drawback to this is that birders themselves may have to be out in bad, stormy weather.

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Most SONGBIRDS migrate at night, and the desired situation for birders is when a southerly flow at night (good migration weather) is followed by rain before dawn, hindering their further movement. For birds which tend to migrate during the day, like WATERFOWL and SHOREBIRDS, unsettled/stormy conditions during the day can result in some interesting birds landing on the water or the shore.

Ideal conditions for good fallouts are rare and may only last a few hours. So, you need to be tuned in to the birding world and be prepared to act rapidly should this happen. But if you cannot, there is no need to despair. You can still see a large number of birds in a year, as no list depends only on the events of a single day.

### THE EARLY PASSERINES

By “early” we are generally talking about April, when the snow has melted, the woods and fields are starting to show growth, and the insects are emerging. You should now start looking for songbirds, especially the non-breeding songbirds in their passage north. Although the bulk of them come later, a few are easier to find earlier in the season, such as FOX SPARROW (woods) and RUSTY BLACKBIRD (woods near water). The key point to take with you is that this is the time where it really pays off to be out regularly. From now until early June, birds are arriving almost every day.

It is important to understand the migration process a bit. While “birds” arrive every day, every species has its own schedule. While the precise time is variable, the order of arrival is fairly consistent. The time of peak migration or the time each species has reached its summer population levels varies from mid-March for RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD to late May for BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO.

Further, migration comes in waves, depending on the weather. A great push may come with a warm front, then there can be a halt for days. The typical pattern is that none of a particular species has yet been seen and then one day, there is one or handful here, followed by it being everywhere in numbers, maybe even the next day.



*Red-winged Blackbird, Petrie Island, April 15, 2015.  
Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*

*Really* rare birds (not expected every year) do not show up before April, although sometimes a rarity has been lingering all winter. In late April the odds of getting a real rarity start to rise, but of course they are still low. Oddly, in the spring, you get the phenomenon where the southern rarities sometimes show up earlier in the season than the common ones, as they have “overshot” and come too far north.



*Cape May Warbler,  
Larose Forest,  
June 10, 2012.  
Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*



*Black-and-white Warbler; Larose Forest, June 1, 2016. Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*

## HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY, OR THE SPRING FLOOD OF BIRDS

What was discussed in the earlier section continues unabated into the month of May, but the pace accelerates with the general peak usually sometime during the third week of May. This is what birders have been waiting for all winter. Pretty much everything is going full-bore starting the first week of May. Vegetation growth is extremely rapid, and so is the insect population growth, resulting in food for all. Increasing warmth also means that even the sensitive species can safely arrive.

Regular visits to good areas are necessary to catch all the migrants as they arrive. Good areas at this time of year are the **migrant traps**. Migrant traps are areas that concentrate migrants due to topography or by being the only suitable area within a much larger area.

Migrant songbirds generally travel at night, and land at dawn to rest and feed. Britannia is a good example: these are woods surrounded by water and urban area, so birds travelling would tend to prefer this spot over other nearby areas.

This does not mean that the other areas are poor. Any extensive area of habitat will have birds, and even your backyard will have migrants. But, for efficiency at this time, head for the migrant traps. It is generally acknowledged that the best area overall in the 50K is the Lac Deschênes Important Birding Area (IBA). You can even see a sign at one of the entrances to Britannia Woods. This area includes both sides of the Ottawa River, with the core covering approximately the space from Shirley's Bay to Britannia.

The premier part of this, at least in migration for songbirds, is the Britannia Conservation Area, which includes the woods, Mud Lake and the adjacent river area. This is an extremely popular area, and especially on nice days it can be swarming with birders and photographers. Rarities are regularly found there, and it is well known as an area for lingering birds. Some people only go to Britannia, and that is not a bad thing. You could get an excellent bird list during the year by sticking only to this area.

But it is not the best area for every bird, and it not always the best place to go for every birder. One sometimes gets the impression that this is the only worthwhile place to go, but that is not at all true. For people who do not live close to the area, especially those well to the east of the city, it can be an inefficient and onerous process to get there, especially during rush hour.

Almost every part of the 50K region has a good area to bird that is within a few kilometers or less from where you live. Where time and transportation are limited, birding in your local area for a short time, combined with something else like family outings or exercise,

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is something which may be feasible multiple times a week. One local birder, admittedly a person with good eyes and ears, does birding while running. There are small and medium woodlots close to the downtown core that can be surprisingly rich during migration. In fact, during the height of migration, migrants will be present all over the city, so don't forget to be on the alert in your own backyard!

Remember that rarities can show up anywhere, and so can generally good birds. While Britannia undoubtedly has seen more rarities than most places, it is also one of the most heavily birded areas. So are more rarities seen here just because it is so heavily birded? This is a difficult question to answer. One of the great unanswered questions in birding is, "What rarities have we missed because they were in a spot where nobody was looking?" As an example, one year, in late April, a HOODED WARBLER was found in an unpretentious small park on Steeple Hill, in an area not often birded, by someone who lived fairly close to the area.

To give another example, the modest woodlot east of the Rockcliffe Airport has, over the course of the last few years, seen 24 of the 25 regular WARBLERS, 4 VIREOS, all of the 9 regular FLYCATCHERS, and the occasional rarity. I would hazard a guess that any similar location would have similar results.

Britannia is a good spot, but you should know that some species are not often found there, partly because it is rather poor in field habitat and, especially, marsh habitat. Some relatively common nesters, even those nesting very close to Britannia, rarely show up there. Two examples are SWAMP SPARROW and INDIGO BUNTING. Also, during the nesting season, the variety of birds in Britannia is good but not exceptional.

So, to make my message crystal clear, during the migration period, avail yourself of birding opportunities in any reasonable-sized woodland or park in your neighbourhood,

*Northern Waterthrush, Larose Forest, June 23 2010. Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*



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especially one with a bit of water or field habitat, in addition to Britannia. There are far too many to list individually, but closer to the urban areas in Ottawa, consider bigger city parks like Rockcliffe Park, Vincent Massey, Hurdman, or any of the Greenbelt areas from east to west: Green's Creek, Mer Bleue, Pine Grove, Stony Swamp, Jack Pine, Watt's Creek and Shirley's Bay (Trail 10 being particularly good). There is of course the Fletcher Wildlife Garden and the Arboretum at the Central Experimental Farm. In Gatineau, consider Ferme Moore, the southern part of Gatineau Park, Parc du Lac Leamy and Parc du Lac Beauchamp. If Britannia is your local park, consider yourself lucky!

Visiting suitable areas on a regular basis is, as I have explained, important. If your time is extremely limited, the third and fourth weeks of May are the "best of the best", and within this period, particularly try to go out on the migrant "fallout" days, as discussed earlier.

During May, you can expect to see quite a few birds, from the common to the rare. Particularly good birds to see are OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER, YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER, BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER, and YELLOW-THROATED VIREO. GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH and PHILADELPHIA VIREO are good to get but are easier in the fall. Some of the WARBLERS are easier to find on their nesting grounds, such as CANADA WARBLER, MOURNING WARBLER, and NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH. ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER is rather uncommon in the spring; it is less uncommon, but still tough to see, in the fall.

RUFFED GROUSE is one final bird to mention. It is not rare, but needs larger areas of forest, and is much easier to find in the spring when it is drumming.

### SPECIAL AREAS TO VISIT

All the species discussed in this section are nesting, with the prime time to find them being late May to early June. Some of them, however, may be found as early as the end April.

The previous section really emphasized the woodland birds. But there are some extremely important areas of other special habitat which are "must" visits. The biggest of these are **marshes/wetlands** and **grasslands**. While there are woodlots everywhere, this is not the case with the marshes and grasslands.

There are small marshes here and there, but the best are the extensive ones on the Ottawa River, on both sides of the river east of Ottawa, and at Shirley's Bay. On the Ontario side,



*Virginia Rail in the Mer Bleue marsh along the boardwalk, May 21, 2011. Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*

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the marshes extend roughly from the end of Champlain Street to Petrie Island. The ones in Quebec are better and extend from about Parc de la Baie McLaurin to Park national de Plaisance and beyond the 50K region. If you travel east on Route 148 from Gatineau, you will see the Ottawa River on your right and a number of access roads that are not well marked. West of Ottawa, Shirley's Bay and Constance Creek are probably the best areas. Marshes, as you can guess, are much harder to access than woods, so you not only need good marshes to go to, but good access to them. If you are adventurous and like canoeing, you may well find other suitable areas, but all the areas I mentioned are accessible by foot/car. The marshes on the Ottawa River can be affected by spring water levels. Last spring's flooding was particularly bad, and obstructed access and delayed the emergence of suitable habitat for nearly four weeks.

In the marshes, the key bird to get is the elusive LEAST BITTERN, which is very secretive and has a very feeble call. In recent years, the marshes of Constance Creek where it crosses Thomas Dolan Parkway have been about as reliable as it ever gets for this species. Other much easier species to target are AMERICAN BITTERN, SORA, VIRGINIA RAIL, COMMON GALLINULE, and MARSH WREN. A special word here about BLACK TERN, a marsh nesting species. It can be seen on the Ottawa River and some inland ponds during migration, but its nesting sites recently have been restricted to the extensive marshes in Quebec east of Gatineau. It often wanders to the marshes from Champlain Street to Petrie Island. The last thing I want to mention is that even the "easier" (fairly common) marsh birds tend to be elusive and skulking, and that a lot of patience may be required to find them. Also, and this may be obvious, since we are usually confined to land, we cannot "track" down a marsh bird like we can a woodland bird.

The best grassland areas are south of the Ottawa International Airport and Burnt Lands Provincial Park near Almonte. The area south of the airport has access issues, but public roads/paths should be sufficient. Quebec is, unfortunately, lacking really good areas. The key birds to target are GRASSHOPPER SPARROW, CLAY-COLOURED SPARROW, VESPER SPARROW, and UPLAND SANDPIPER. The last two can be seen elsewhere, but are still uncommon. Other birds to target in open/field habitat are NORTHERN HARRIER, FIELD SPARROW, and EASTERN BLUEBIRD, but these have many more areas of suitable habitat.

*An American Woodcock searching for food on a dirty snow bank along Bertrand Road in Larose Forest, April 16, 2008. Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*



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Another very special area is the Carp Ridge, the part of Thomas Dolan Parkway between the agricultural areas. This is the best area to find EASTERN TOWHEE, which nests here. It has been one of the best spots for GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER, a species very rarely seen in migration, and unfortunately in decline in the region. If you can't find it here, then an area in and around the South March Highlands Conservation Forest has them too. In the evening, from late May to early September, it is one of the few reliable spots for COMMON NIGHTHAWK. Carp Ridge is also an excellent spot for EASTERN WHIP-POOR-WILL and AMERICAN WOODCOCK. This area is also good for BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO, but there are many other areas, such as near the Champlain Lookout and south of the Ottawa airport, where this bird can be seen.

A "must" visit is the Torbolton Forest in Constance Bay. That has recently been the only nesting spot for RED-HEADED WOODPECKER in the region, and unfortunately the numbers have been declining for years. If they stop nesting here, this species will enter the rare bird ranks.

The Champlain Lookout and the surrounding area are excellent starting the middle of May, and its main claim to fame is that it has been a nesting area for CERULEAN WARBLER, although over the last few years, this species has had only isolated sightings. PHILADELPHIA VIREO used to nest in the area.

The final "special" spot I will mention is the Mer Bleue bog, which is easily accessed via a boardwalk. LINCOLN'S SPARROW and PALM WARBLER nest there and probably nowhere else in the region. Both these species can be seen in migration, though, particularly in the fall.

### **IT TAKES MORE THAN ONE SWALLOW TO MAKE A SUMMER**

In fact it takes all six of the nesting species. While none of these are rare, they are not as common as they used to be decades ago. The quickest way to get them in the spring is to look for concentrations over water on cool spring days in late April-early May, such as Britannia and the Champlain Bridge. The Champlain Bridge is a reliable nesting spot for CLIFF SWALLOW. The ponds between Moodie Drive and Barnsdale Road is an excellent

*Whip-poor-will on Bertrand Road in Larose Forest at about 9:30 p.m., June 6, 2009.*

*Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*



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spot for nesting BANK SWALLOW. For NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW, small bridges seem to be the preferred nesting spot.

### THE SHOREBIRD BUBBLE

SHOREBIRDS are a problematic group in Ottawa, especially in the spring, due to the very limited and unreliable habitat. Fall shorebirding is different: it is generally much better and more drawn out, and this will be discussed in Part 3 of this series. However, due to the chancy nature of shorebird habitat, you should make an effort to find what you can in the spring. Also, this is a chance to see SHOREBIRDS in their spring plumage. Since suitable areas are rather widely separated, this is where reviewing the sightings on eBird and the weekly OFNC reports is particularly valuable.

The first significant influx of non-nesting SHOREBIRDS starts about mid-April. The Ottawa River is quite poor in the spring due to high water levels. Formerly, sewage lagoons were prime habitat, but water treatment technology has changed, and the remaining lagoons have access issues; in general, they have not been particularly good for years, so they really cannot be recommended. An observation tower at the Almonte Lagoon does give views, but it is not one of the better areas. The former lagoons in Richmond are now a conservation area, and are worth checking from time to time.



*Ruddy Turnstone, Embrun Sewage Lagoons, May 29, 2009. Photo by J. Bouvier.*

All this is said not to discourage you, but just to let you know that work will be required to build up your SHOREBIRD list. There are alternatives, however. In the spring, check flooded fields, melting snow dumps, and the edges of such inland ponds as are available, such as on Moodie Drive and Giroux Road. Something we did not have 40 years ago were the artificial wetlands/storm water management ponds and creeks that are springing up everywhere in new housing developments. Any in your neighbourhood should be checked. One excellent flooded field last spring was on Greenbank south of Hunt Club, although it had the serious drawback of being adjacent to a busy road. A snow dump on March Valley Road has been useful the last few years. A flooded/marshy area near Antrim had some

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good birds last spring. The Carp River floodplain often has flooded areas, although it is better in the fall. This is not an exhaustive list. As I have said before, look around your neighbourhood for suitable areas.



*Wilson's Phalarope, Embrun  
Sewage Lagoons, May 20, 2010.  
Photo by Jacques Bouvier.*

The “bubble” mentioned in the heading is a reference to the brief period in late May-early June when SHOREBIRDS are coming north in greatest volume, and you need to be ready to move when a flock is temporarily grounded, sometimes in less than ideal areas and conditions. Last June, a small flock of RUDDY TURNSTONES landed at Shirley's Bay during some blustery weather, one of the few sightings that year. Aside from rarities, other less common SHOREBIRDS to target in the spring are BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER, SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER, WHIMBREL, RED-NECKED PHALAROPE, and WILSON'S PHALAROPE.

At this point it is only fair to warn our Quebec residents that SHOREBIRDS are in even poorer supply there than in Ontario, and this is mostly due to the topography. The filtration plant at Masson has limited habitat that is visible from outside the plant gates, but that is not a particularly good spot. There are sometimes flooded fields in the agricultural areas outside of Gatineau. If anyone finds a really good spot on the Quebec side, I would love to know about it.

### **THE RIVER IS ALIVE WITH THE SOUND OF INSECTS**

Sometime around late May, for a week or two, hordes of insects emerge from the Ottawa River, which is a major attraction for GULLS. The key attraction for birders is the chance for rare ones. LITTLE GULL is virtually annual, but is often only seen for a day or two. The uncommon BONAPARTE'S GULL is there in small numbers, too. It is also about this time that ARCTIC TERNS fly up the Ottawa River. This ARCTIC TERN flight is an Ottawa specialty, and if you want to see them, the Ottawa River at Britannia Point (near the filtration plant), and the corresponding spot across the river in Aylmer, is the very best spot in the brief window they are seen. They can be seen farther upriver, and last year were seen at the Moodie Drive ponds. It takes some work and skill to separate the ARCTIC TERN from COMMON TERN, so beginners are advised to make sure some experts are nearby!

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## LATE MIGRANTS AND THE END OF MIGRATION

While migration of SONGBIRDS in general peaks by the end of May, some species peak early, others peak (or arrive) much later, and stragglers can be coming through into the middle of June. So don't give up searching too early. Last year, a first record for Ottawa, a BLUE GROSBEAK showed up in early June. On the other hand, do not expect many new birds after the middle of June. Technically, spring migrations ends June 30, but oddities and rarities can and have shown up at any season. Two very late species are extremely local nesters, and are often not found until June. These are YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO and SEDGE WREN. To locate them, unfortunately, you pretty much have to chase any sightings you hear about. WILLOW FLYCATCHER is local and late, but not quite as much as the other two.

## NESTING BIRDS

If you have not seen all the common/uncommon birds in May, you can catch up a bit before the fall by heading to their nesting grounds. June is the prime month, as they are most vocal and active then.

Birding during nesting season is quite different. Britannia is NOT the place to be for nesting bird variety. You need to head to the large tracts of forest, grassland, and marshes. We have already discussed the areas to find grassland and marsh birds; those areas will remain good throughout the month of June.

For forest birds, I can say without a doubt that north is better. The extensive forest is a place to look for the elusive NORTHERN GOSHAWK, if you have not yet seen it. The best areas not only have extensive forest, but also there need to be ways to enter the forest and a minimum of disturbance from things like road noise.

The Lac la Blanche area is the best. If you have never heard of this place, you are not alone. It is the closest we have to primeval forest in the 50K region, and for the purposes of this article, it refers to the areas north and east of Buckingham, generally accessible via route 315, to the edge of the 50K. Going off the main roads here you rapidly run out of roads entirely, and the forest beyond is almost unbroken.

All of Gatineau Park (east and west and including Lac Philippe) is good, but the areas in between (Wakefield, Low, Poltimore) are also quite good. In the southeast, Larose Forest is probably the best, with many trails and a few good gravel roads. In the southwest, the Marlborough Forest has an extensive trail network, some of it part of the Rideau Trail, with access points on Roger Stevens Drive and Dwyer Hill Road, as well as the end of Kettles Road south of Richmond. More to the south, Mountain Provincial Wildlife Area (Winchester Bog) is a large undeveloped tract. There is extensive woodland west of Almonte and Pakenham, but there is not a whole lot within the 50K, and little in the way of trails. There are a few provincial parks within the 50K region, so these can be checked, too.

However, most of the better areas seem to be rather under-birded, and if you do choose to go you may have a few surprises. Plus if you use eBird, you will contribute some useful information at the very least.

It is only fair to warn you that many of these areas are comparatively isolated and you may be very far from a public road if you wander the trails, and some spots are deficient in cell phone service.



Red-headed Woodpecker, Masson,  
May 19, 2015. Photo by J. Bouvier.

Furthermore, most of them if not all of them are horrifyingly infested with biting insects. As luck would have it, the better areas seem to have a lot of standing water and even more insects. So it is no surprise that rather few choose to go, but wait until fall migration to catch up.

If you are not so adventurous, or want to be closer to the city, try some of the areas mentioned in the “How green was my valley” section. There are others as well but they are too numerous to list individually.

### SOME CLOSING REMARKS

I will repeat some of what I said in Part 1. I have outlined the hot spots and times for these birds, but this does not mean that there are no other good places, or no other good times. It is just that these are the best areas and times, and if your time is limited, you should go there first. However, April to June is a great time to be out as there are a lot of birds everywhere, so don't neglect inspecting any suitable habitat that is near your home or near to where you often go.

One final note: Remember that access to Shirley's Bay, a premier spot in the Ottawa area, is vital starting about mid-April, and requires that your OFNC membership be up-to-date and that you specifically request that your name be placed on the access list for this area. 🐿

*The editor wishes to thank Jacques Bouvier, once again, for providing these beautiful bird pictures to complement the article. You can follow Jacques's work (Oiseaux EEO Birds) on his sites: <http://jacques-miroiseur.smugmug.com/> and <http://jacquesbouvier.blogspot.ca/>.*

**The OFNC Study Area  
(also called the 50K)**



