



Bruce Trail
CONSERVANCY

An Introduction to Birds Along the Niagara Escarpment and the Bruce Trail

Thursday March 12, 2023



MISSION

**Preserving a ribbon of wilderness,
for everyone, forever.**

VISION

The Bruce Trail secured within a permanently protected natural corridor along the Niagara Escarpment.

VALUES

Commitment | Integrity | Stewardship | Collaboration | Respect



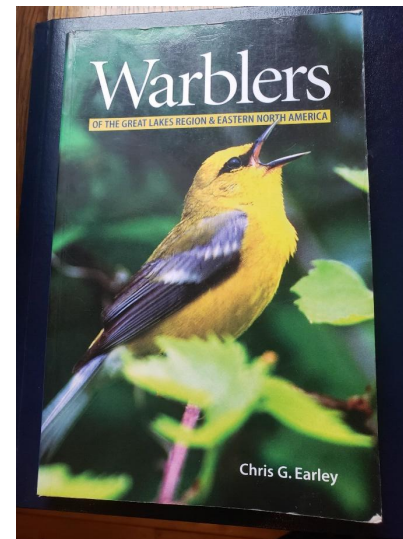
A Birding Paradise

- From Niagara – Tobermory the Escarpment provides many different habitats for hundreds of bird species.
- Escarpment itself is a benefit to raptors as it creates updrafts which aid in their soaring flight.
- Over 300 species recorded along the entire length.
- BTC ecologists have personally observed 188 species on BTC lands.



Bruce Trail CONSERVANCY

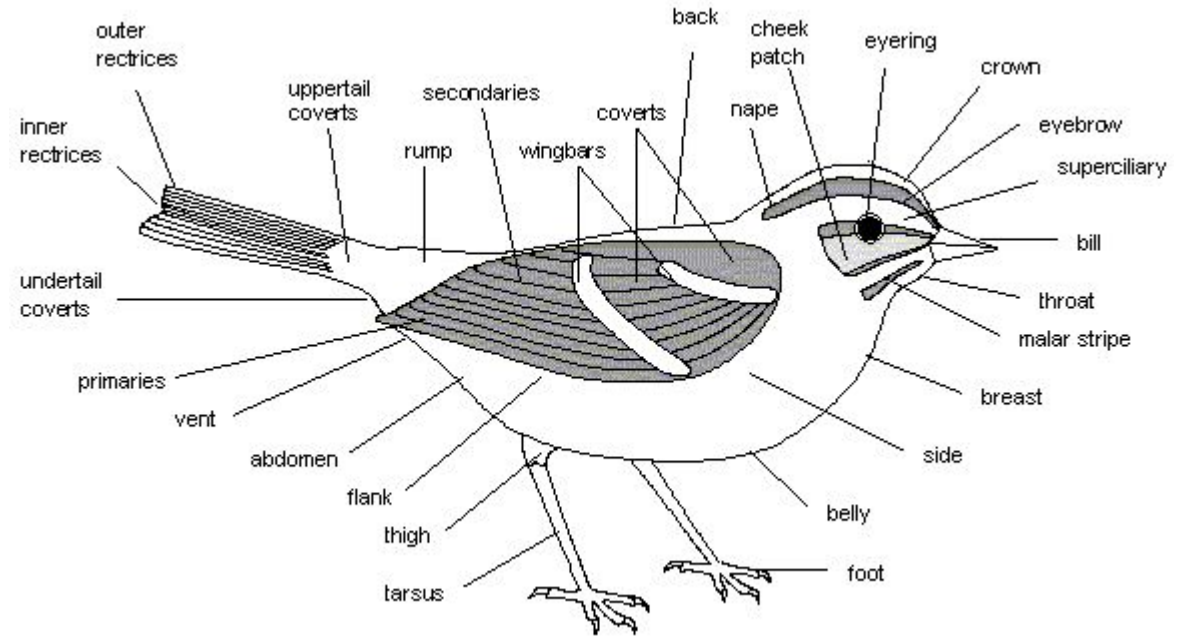
- We will focus on the more common species likely to be seen as you hike the trail.
- Many species have more than 1 song or call so we will be focusing on the most common sounds that they would make.
- Many birds have both songs and calls. Calls are much harder to identify so we will only include calls if they are easily identifiable.
- Mostly its only the male birds who sing to use their sounds to attract females. However some species such as with Cardinals, both sexes sing.
- The general rule is that birds sing more in the spring and summer during the breeding season but they do sing in the fall and winter months as well but not as frequent.
- Field equipment.





The five keys to bird identification:

- Size and Shape
- Color and Pattern
- Behavior/flight pattern
- Habitat and Distribution
- Sound



Winter visitors/ Year Round residents

- Not all birds migrate but some live here all year round. These tend to be common species which are fairly easy to identify. Blue Jays, Cardinals, etc.
- Some species visit southern Ontario just in the winter months such as Snow Buntings, Horned Larks and Snowy Owls.





Black Capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*)

Description:

- Small, plump little bird
- Black cap and throat with white cheeks. Gray back and wings with whitish underbelly

Song:

- Simple, pure 2 or 3-note whistle. “Cheeeese burger”
- The call is simply their name – “Chickadee –dee – dee – dee”.

Habitat:

- Found in deciduous and mixed forests, open woods, parks, willow thickets, forested edges, backyards.

One of the most common birds you will encounter along the trail. They are cavity nesters which means they nest in the holes in trees created by other species.



Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

Description:

- Larger bird with long tail, thick bill and crested head feathers
- Males are red with black mask and throat.
- Females are pale brown with reddish tinges in the feathers.

Song:

- Long string of 2-parted whistles. “Purdy-purdy-purdy”.
Song often speeds up at the end.

Habitat:

- Forest edges, overgrown fields, hedgerows, backyards, marshy thickets, regenerating forests.

One of the few species that has expanded its range with human development.





Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

Description:

- Males and females are similar with long tail and crested head feathers.
- Blue on top and white on bottom with black necklace and black barring on wings and tail as well as white wingbar.

Song:

- Difficult to say any vocalization is a song as they have a variety of sounds and calls with the most common being a loud “Jeer or Jay”

Habitat:

- All types of forests, forest edges, urban and residential areas, parks.

One call is almost identical to a Broad Winged Hawk or Red Shouldered Hawk. Very social birds that mate for life.





Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)

Description:

- Smaller bird that is mostly seen on the ground.
- Male and female appear similar during the fall and winter, with gray- and brown-streaked backs and white underbelly. During breeding season males backs turn black.

Song:

- Musical low warble.

Habitat:

- Spend winter in open fields, agricultural fields, shorelines and roadsides.

Breed in open rocky areas in the Tundra. Best place to find them is to drive down sideroads and look for large flocks along roadside or just off in the field.





Downy and Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens* and *Picoides villosus*)

Description:

- White underneath with black and white upper parts and red patch at back of head.
- Hairy woodpeckers are larger than the Downy. Also have longer beaks.
- Hairy woodpeckers outer tail feathers are completely white. While the downy woodpecker has black spots on its tail feathers.

Call:

- Downy: string of hoarse, high-pitched notes that descend in pitch toward the end.
- Hairy: similar to the Downy but does not descend in pitch at the end.

Habitat:

- All forest types, woodlands, parks, swamps, forest edges.

More than 75% of their diet is insects, especially larvae of wood borer insects. Studies have shown that although they may not wipe out the Emerald Ash Borer, they can slow the spread.

Downy



Hairy





Dark Eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*)

Description:

- Medium sized bird with gray upper parts and white underparts.
- Males and females similar in colour.

Song:

- Even, musical trill of 7-23 notes.

Habitat:

- Open woodlands, fields, roadsides, parks, and backyards.

During winter months they form large flocks and often join other species such as sparrows.





Red Bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

Description:

- Medium sized bird with red cap and back of neck.
- Have pale belly and black and white barring on the upper parts.
- Females similar to males but don't have the red cap.

Call:

- Loud "Kwirr" or "Churr".
- Other common call is "chuck-chuck-chuck" descending in pitch.
- Very similar to the Pileated Woodpecker.

Habitat:

- Deciduous and mixed forests, swamps, along rivers, urban areas with large trees, forest edges.

They can stick out their tongue almost 5cm past their beak. It is barbed and they have sticky spit which aids in grabbing prey deep within dead tree openings. Their name is derived from the slight tinge of red on its belly but because it often has its belly against a tree we often don't see it.





Migratory Birds

- Most birds in Ontario migrate south for the winter. They usually start to arrive in late April and stay to breed and raise their young before flying back south in late August/September.
- A lot of these birds also portray much brighter colours or breeding plumage during breeding season before molting to a much duller plumage for migration.





Black and White Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*)

Description:

- Small bird with black and white stripes all over and thin bill.
- Males have a black ear patch while females have a whiter throat and are a little duller in colour.

Song:

- Soft, quiet “weesy-weesy-weesy,weesy”. Similar to a squeaky wheel.

Habitat:

- Large continuous stands of mature or old second growth deciduous or mixed forest, cedar swamps or bogs, riparian habitat.
- Area sensitive and interior forest species which mean they requires large tracts of uninterrupted habitat, specifically forested land for this species.

They have an extra long hind claw and stronger legs then most warblers which helps them climb up and around the bark of a tree.



American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*)

Description:

- Medium sized bird with orange breast, dark head, yellow bill and grayish back.
- Males and females similar in appearance.

Song:

- String of clear whistles and notes, “cheerily, cheer up, cheer up, cheerily, cheer up”.

Habitat:

- Large continuous stands of mature or old second growth deciduous or mixed forest, cedar swamps or bogs, riparian habitat.
- Interior forest species which mean they requires large tracts of forested land.

One of the earliest birds to arrive in the spring. Because of this they can sometimes have up to 3 broods of chicks. As the climate warm they have been known to stay in southern Ontario all year long.





Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*)

Description:

- Small sized bird with bright yellow colouring, yellow-green back and orange streaks on breast. Distinct black eye.
- Females are duller in colour with no breast streaking.

Song:

- Melodic series of whistled notes, “sweet-sweet-sweet. I’m so sweet”.

Habitat:

- Swamp thickets, marshes, regenerating thickets, deciduous thickets, riparian areas.

These are one of the most widely distributed warblers in North America and one of the easiest to identify. Their bright yellow colour and sweet song are hard to miss as you hike past a scrubby thicket.





Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*)

Description:

- Medium sized bird with thick beak.
- Brown stripes on body with dark spot on chest.
- Males and females similar in appearance.

Song:

- Loud string of notes that end with a buzz or trill, “maids,maids,maids, put on the teaaaaa ketttttle”.

Habitat:

- Open habitats such as meadows, old fields, agricultural fields, parks. Sometimes in forests.

Sparrows are a hard group to identify but this species is one of the first to arrive back in the spring. If you see a brown streaked bird early in the spring flitting about low to the ground then letting out a loud clattering song then you can suspect a Song Sparrow.





Black Throated Green Warbler (*Setophaga virens*)

Description:

- Small sized bird with black throat, yellow cheeks and white wingbars .
- Has olive green back and top of head. Black streaking on pale underbelly.
- Main difference in female is they have a white throat.

Song:

- Buzzy series of notes, “zee,zee,zee,zoo,zee” or “trees, trees, trees, murmuring trees”.

Habitat:

- Deciduous, Coniferous and mixed forests, forest edges. Area sensitive and interior forest species.

The Black-throated Green Warbler sings alot. Like most warblers they are hard to see but you can track them down by their continuing singing. They are fast and nimble and just when you get a glance they have jumped up to another branch but the song and yellow cheeks make this one of the easier warblers to identify. Getting a good picture, well that’s another story.



Eastern Wood Pewee (*Contopus virens*)

Description:

- Medium sized flycatcher with a pale belly and an olive gray back and white wingbars.
- Males and females similar in appearance.

Song:

- Soft, slightly sad sounding, “peh-ah-wee”. One of the few birds whose song sounds like its name.

Habitat:

- Deciduous, Coniferous and mixed forests, forest edges.

Declines of this species are occurring throughout its range. The cause of the decrease is unknown but speculated to be attributed to the decline of the insect population as many aerial insectivores are experiencing population declines. Habitat loss and Cowbird parasitism are also affecting this species. Designated as Special Concern in Canada in November, 2012.





Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*)

Description:

- Medium sized bird with cinnamon brown colouring on upper back, neck and crown with a white belly with black spots.
- White eye ring.

Song:

- Loud, flute like, “ee-oh-lay”.

Habitat:

- Mature deciduous and mixed forests, most commonly those with American beech, red maple, eastern hemlock, Ironwood, oaks, or pines.

Similar concern for this bird as with the Eastern Wood Pewee and for similar reasons. It was designated as Threatened in Canada and Special Concern in Ontario in 2012.



Photo 211870722, (c) naturegirl99,iNaturalist



Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*)

Description:

- Medium sized bird with bright red body and black wings and tail. Hard to misidentify.
- Females are olive-yellow in colour with darker wings.

Song:

- Series of blurry notes. Birders say it sounds like a Robin with a sore throat.
- Call is a distinctive, “Chick-burrrr”.

Habitat:

- Mature, large mixed or deciduous forests. Area sensitive and interior forest species.

One of the most brilliantly coloured birds in the Ontario forest but also one of the most frustratingly hard to find as they love to stay high up in the forest canopy. Best time to see them is when they are just returning in May as they tend to come closer to the ground to forage for emerging caterpillars.





Rose Breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*)

Description:

- Medium sized bird with thick beak, black head and upper parts, bright red bib and white underparts and wing patches.
- Females are pale with brown streaks and white eyebrow.

Song:

- Long series of whistles and notes. Birders say it sounds like a Robin with opera training. More melodic than a Robin.
- Call is a distinctive, “chip”.

Habitat:

- Mixed or deciduous forests, riparian areas, parks, forest edges, woodlands.

Males aggressively defend their territory and are often seen chasing others away during breeding season. Their nest is loosely built from twigs, leaves and plant parts and is so flimsy that you can often see the eggs through the bottom.





Red Eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*)

Description:

- Small bird with thin beak, olive green upper parts with paler belly.
- Has a distinct red eye and pale eyebrow.
- Females similar in appearance.

Song:

- Series of slurred notes ending with downward note so it sounds like they are asking a question, “Here I am, where are you”.

Habitat:

- Mixed or deciduous forests, riparian areas, woodlands.

Very common bird along the trail. BTC ecologists often record 10-20 individuals in one forest plot during bird surveys. They are another bird who loves to sing so you can imagine the sound of many males singing all at once in one area.





Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*)

Description:

- Small bird with black mask and yellow throat and breast. Have olive-yellowish wings and back.
- Females are brownish above with yellow throat and breast.

Song:

- Loud series of notes, “witchity-witchity-witchity-witch”.

Habitat:

- Wetlands, riparian areas, swamp thickets, marshes, forest edges.

Yellowthroats are a favorite target of Brown-headed Cowbirds who lay their eggs in the nests of other species of bird. The host bird ends up raising the cowbird chick to the detriment of the host bird chick. This is called nest parasitism. Yellowthroats have developed a few defenses such as deserting a nest if it contains a cowbird egg and building a new one or if their own eggs have been removed or damaged by a visiting cow building a second or even a third nest on top of a parasitized nest.





Red Winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

Description:

- Medium bird with all black body and distinctive red on wings.
- Females are very mottled and streaked with browns and yellows.

Song:

- Loud musical, “o-kay-leeee”.

Habitat:

- Wetlands, riparian areas, swamp thickets, marshes, ditches.

Males have many female partners within their territory and can have up to 15 different nests with different females however not all broods are sired by the reigning male as other males tend to sneak in and mate with the females while he is distracted.



Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*)

Description:

- Medium bird with all blue body and thicker beak.
- Females are brownish with white throat. They may have slight tinges of blue on the tail and wings.

Song:

- Series of sharp, clear, high pitched notes often in couplets, “what! what! where? where? see it! see it”.

Habitat:

- Forest edges, abandoned fields, fencerows, woody thickets.

Like all other blue birds, Indigo Buntings lack blue pigment. Their colour comes instead from microscopic structures in the feathers that refract and reflect blue light.





Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)

Description:

- Medium bird with thick beak, black below, black and white above and a yellow patch on the back of the head.
- Females have a striped brown and yellow appearance.

Song:

- Metallic, bubbly, rambling song. Many compare it to the sound of R2D2 from the Star Wars movies.

Habitat:

- Grasslands including open fallow and agricultural fields and tallgrass prairies. Area sensitive species.

Bobolinks are Threatened in Canada and Ontario due to loss of high-quality habitat due to conversion of pasture and hay fields to cropland and natural succession on inactive grasslands, persecution in its wintering habitat and early hay cutting before the chicks have fledged.





Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*)

Description:

- Medium bird with short tail and long beak.
- Speckled black, white and brown on the upper parts. Bright yellow on the underparts with a black “V” on the chest.
- Females are similar to males.

Song:

- Series of flute-like whistles that gradually drop in pitch, “Oh sweet Rose Marie”.

Habitat:

- Grasslands including open fallow and agricultural fields and tallgrass prairies. Area sensitive species.

Also Threatened in Canada and Ontario for similar reasons as the Bobolink. They often sing from a perch such as a lone tree or shrub in an open area.





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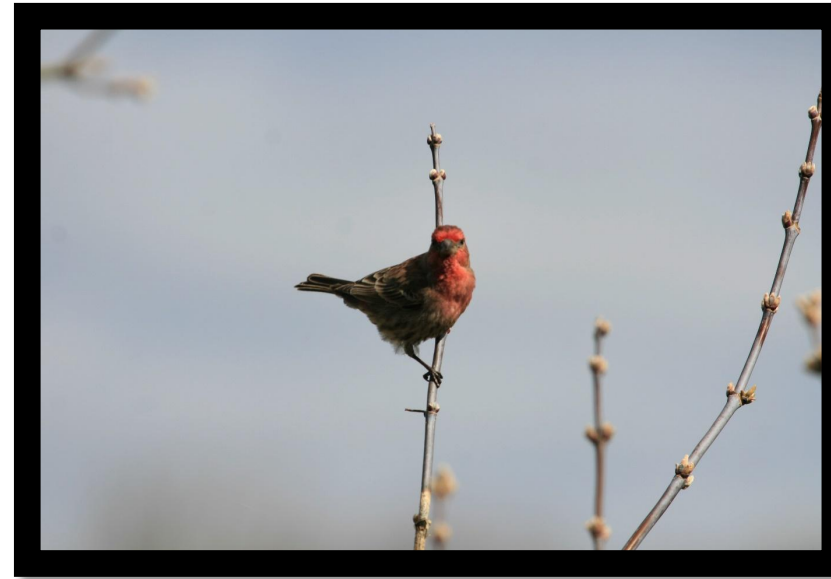
Non-Native Species



House Finch (Eurasia)



European Starling



House Finch (Western North America)



Species of Conservation Concern

BTC ecologists have recorded 21 species of bird that are considered rare in Canada and/or Ontario using BTC properties for breeding, migration or over wintering.





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Questions?



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brucetrail.org

 TheBruceTrailConservancy

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Rated top environmental
charity in Canada for 2020
by Maclean's