



THE

# REDSTART

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE SPOTTED TURTLE NEWSLETTER

*Celebrating the Huron Fringe Birding Festival's 25th Year!*



25<sup>th</sup>

**Huron Fringe  
Birding Festival**



# SPOTTED TURTLE

SPECIAL EDITION



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## *Celebrating Birds*

Welcome to the second edition of 'The Redstart', a publication of the Friends of MacGregor Point Park 'Spotted Turtle Newsletter'. The first issue was prepared to celebrate the 20th Huron Fringe Birding Festival (HFBF); this issue is an update to celebrate the 25th Festival.

25 years/festivals is quite an accomplishment. There have been a number of talented and dedicated people who have put many hours and love into this festival. Most importantly, the HFBF is a place where a great group of people come together annually to share their passion for birds and nature.



If you enjoy this publication, the Friends of MacGregor Point Park produces the Spotted Turtle Newsletter that speaks to the work of the Friends of MacGregor Point Park, their events, activities, and also includes special nature related content. The Spotted Turtle Newsletter is one of the many benefits of becoming a Friends of MacGregor Point Park member. Please consider joining the Friends of MacGregor Point Park.

## Message from Norah Toth, Committee Chair

Am I really 25 years older? I don't feel like it, at least not every day! If I am, then we have held 25 birding festivals! I remember how it started - in the spring of 1997 a group of us were comparing birding notes at the newly built Ducks Unlimited (DU) Tower. We knew MacGregor Point was "the place to go" when we wanted to boost our numbers of warblers during the Baillie (now Ontario) Birdathon.

The building of this viewing tower was the first major project of the Friends, who were less than 5 years old at the time; but they took it on with gusto. Its presence was one of the motivators for the Festival and it continues to provide popular marsh-bird viewing opportunities 25 years later. And during our 25th Festival a pair of Osprey finally made use of the Osprey Tower erected in the DU pond!

The Festival was preceded by an event led by Doug Martin, organized by myself, as Park staff in the Spring of 1996 and 1997. It was titled 'Up with the Birds Hike and Pancake Breakfast' and was attended primarily by Friends members. The Festival itself started out as a 2 weekend event with mid-week extras in 1998. It was sponsored by the Friends who, along with an eager little committee of volunteers, hired Kathy Parker to organize the event.

The following year, the success of that initial event led to the Friends obtaining a substantial tourism grant and we again hired Kathy Parker to plan out a bigger and better event. Kathy and volunteers continued with two consecutive weekends of events. The Festival has never looked back and has continued to grow steadily from 26 events in the early years to the amazing 90 + events now offered annually. Attendance continues to grow along with the number of events and it is well known among repeat attendees that you have to get up early on the day that registration opens to sign up for your slate of events – many are full in the first hour! This is one popular Festival and we have to admit, we are very proud of it.

Our 25th Festival was as successful as ever. Each year we add new events, new leaders and new enthusiasm into our program as we build on the tried and true. This past year we welcomed back Wild Ontario and their birds of prey show, we offered new events with new leaders including some of the rising young stars of the birding world, we expanded our display area and named it "Nature Showcase". Attendees could take part in a Festival-special painting, which turned out beautifully and will be available as a silent auction item at the Festival this coming year. As a final event we enjoyed an evening of music with a talented local singer. Our Banquet was sold out and people were entertained by Steve Burrows, the author of the popular Birder Murder Mystery book series and this year our annual Norah Toth Award went to Martin and Kathy Parker for their contributions to the festival in its beginning.

I hope you will join us in 2024 and experience for yourself the fantastic birding and nature events we offer along the Huron Fringe.

Norah Toth  
Chair, Huron Fringe Birding Festival Committee





## OUR BEGINNINGS

In 1997 a group of local birders on their annual spring Birdathon made their usual stopover at MacGregor Point to pick up an always-reliable bonanza of birds for their day's list. This group covered most of Bruce County on their big day, but MacGregor was always one of the most productive stops along the way. Chatting with Norah Toth, then on Park staff, they remarked on the various conditions that made MacGregor such a birding hotspot. Birds naturally follow the south-north orientation of the forest-draped Lake Huron shoreline. Additionally, Bruce County has the highest number of breeding bird species of any area of Ontario. And then there was always a good chance of a rarity showing up. So, with migrants, residents and rarities combined to make up an abundance of birds, they were thinking that MacGregor would be an ideal location for a birding festival. The rest, as they say, is history.

The first festival was held the following year and yielded an amazing tally of 130 species over the two weekend event. From that point on, the Festival's popularity and programs increased each subsequent year.

As the Festival grew, so did the number of species on the Festival bird checklist. On average, each annual eight-day Festival finds 170+ species. On our 25<sup>th</sup> year, we observed 175 species. One magical year an incredible 199 species were found! Of course, that makes us want to find 200 species over one of our future Festivals. That's where our participants come in. Festival attendance rises each year, bringing lots of sharp eyes and ears to each event. With 90+ events, absolutely awesome top leaders, plus a slew of spotters on each event, we're sure to break that record soon!

Lynne Richardson  
HFBF Committee Member



Cedar Waxwing



Damsel Fly



Green Heron



## WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE

Our Festival is unique in that it isn't held during the mid-May peak of migration. The HFBB is held at the last of May and first of June. These dates catch the last blast of migration to be sure, but also capture the beginning of the breeding season. This timing ensures Festival-goers are virtually guaranteed sightings of birds that are regularly missed during migration alone. By the end of May, many migrants have settled in on territory in the Park and throughout the rich woodlands, wetlands, fields and forests of the surrounding Huron Fringe. Not only are they visible in the late blooming leaves, they are also actively singing which makes them relatively easy to find. Picture this: Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper and Clay-colored Sparrows on nesting territory in the fields; Piping Plover scurrying across the beach; Eastern Whip-poor-will calling from the darkness of the forest; Black Tern, American & Least Bitterns, Sora & Virginia Rail, Marsh & Sedge Wrens in the wetlands; Golden-winged & Blue-winged Warblers singing on territory. When have you ever seen this range of species reliably during mid-May migration? Not all that often! But you have the opportunity to see these and more at the Festival!



Great Crested Flycatcher



Over the now 25 years of the Festival an impressive total of 252 species of birds have been documented. A Bird Checklist, unique to the Festival, is updated yearly as new sightings are made. Almost every year a new species is added to the Checklist. And what birds they have been! Golden Eagle for our 25<sup>th</sup> year; Swainson's Hawk, Kirtland's Warbler, Mississippi Kite, Western Kingbird in recent years and; American White Pelican, Glossy Ibis and Little Blue Heron in past years. These are just some of the mega finds in the Festival's past.

You can see the complete list of birds on the Festival's Checklist of Birds, and a list of birds sighted at each Festival over the years, on the Festival website: [Huron Fringe Birding Festival](http://Huron Fringe Birding Festival) ([hfbf.ca](http://hfbf.ca) or [hurnfringebirdingfestival.ca](http://hurnfringebirdingfestival.ca))

We're looking forward to our 26<sup>th</sup> Festival in 2024. Perhaps it will be the year we reach 200 species in one Festival. And who knows what rare and wonderful new species will be added to our list. Join us and you could even be the one to spot it!

Lynne Richardson  
HFBB Committee Member



# 2023 HURON FRINGE BIRDING FESTIVAL TIDBITS



Red-headed Woodpecker



## Registration Day 1 Statistics 2023

1<sup>st</sup> submitted registration 6:02 am  
5 registrations by 6:04 am  
3 full events by 6:15 am  
17 full events by 6:40 am  
Day 1: 288 attendees registered /  
44 full events

## General Festival Statistics 2023

416 total attendees  
184 of those were new attendees  
49 amazing Leaders  
39 awesome event Coordinators  
89 events with subjects including:  
*Birds / botany / photography /  
boat tours / astronomy / natural  
history / bird banding*  
8 evening presentations  
Festival Banquet & presentation

## 25 Year Festival Statistics

Despite lacking records for five of our early years, a total of 3,462 individuals have registered and participated in the Huron Fringe Birding Festival. Using the same data, there have been 91 individuals who have participated in 10 or more years of the Festival. There are also a number of devoted attendees who haven't missed a single festival and have signed up for a full slate of events every year.

## New Leaders in the Last Five Years

The Huron Fringe Birding Festival is constantly on the lookout for new and exciting leaders to add variety to our events. In the last 5 years, we have added 40 new leaders to our roster. We think we can safely say the calibre of our leaders is constantly on the rise. We are being recognized in the province as one of the premier birding events and many talented leaders are actually approaching us to see if they can join in on the fun some of their peers are experiencing.

Recent years have also seen a major influx of young talent. We want to give these up and coming leaders the venue they deserve. You will see many of these hot shots on our events program. Their abilities are amazing.



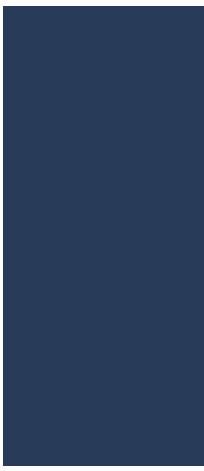
Tree Swallow



Blue-winged Warbler



Rose-breasted Grosbeak



American Robin



Canada Warbler

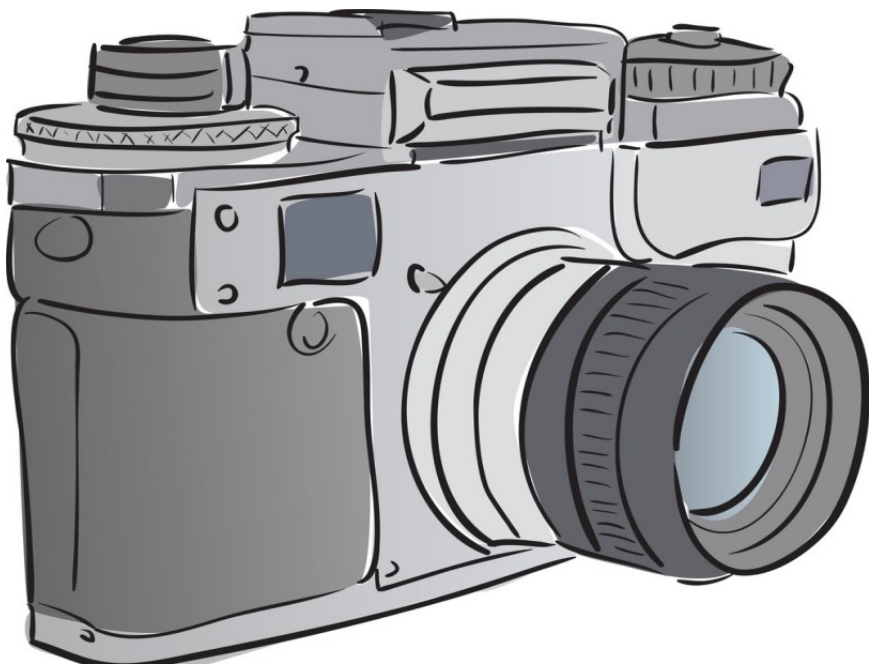
## The COVID-19 Pandemic

Despite everything being ready (leaders organized, event coordinators established, registration site ready to go, promotional documents printed, etc.) the Festival had to be cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19.

The COVID-19 threat continued into 2021 and the Festival Committee simply switched gears to provide a virtual Festival that was held on-line. A total of 7 evening events were planned on the following topics: Birding in Algonquin, Black Bears of the Bruce Peninsula, Big Day Birding, Ontario Piping Plovers, Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas 3 and Bird Banding at the Bruce Peninsula Birding Observatory. A total of 1,254 participants registered, of which 739 joined in on the live presentations. The peak single event participation number was 382 but the total number of people who participated live over the 7 events was 1,979. Since a single registrant could have more than one participant watching the screen, actual participant levels are no doubt under-estimated. The events were also broadcast on local Cable TV over the next 7 weeks, but unfortunately, no viewing statistics are available. We may not have been able to meet face to face, but the spirit of the Festival lived on.

We would like to thank Quest Nature Tours for hosting us on their website, setting up the online venue, managing the registration process and providing attendance statistics. Without their expertise in providing this type of programming we would not have been able to offer anything nearly as professional. We also thank many of the participants who chose to make a donation to the Festival even though it was advertised as a free program.





## American Redstart Photo Contest 2023



A photo contest, open to all, was held with the goal of updating the graphics of our printed HFBF documents. The winning entry selected in our juried competition was taken by Doug Martin of Port Elgin. The photo, taken in MacGregor Point Provincial Park, shows an American Redstart male singing proudly in the mixed forest habitat of the Huron Fringe

Look for this photo on our promotional materials and 2024 festival brochure!







## The 2023 Festival Committee

Behind every Festival there is a crew of dedicated volunteers. They are all birders themselves to varying degrees. Some are experts in the field, others enjoy birding simply for the social aspects and comradery of being with others. What drives their volunteer interests most though is making sure the festival is a success and that all involved, both leaders and participants, have a rewarding experience.

No one on the festival committee is paid for their efforts. It is true that in the first couple of years, grants were obtained that allowed us to hire an organizer to set up the initial festival structure but once that was in place, the work fell on volunteers alone.

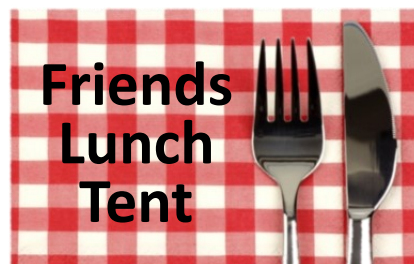
We thank the following individuals for the many hours of dedication they have provided for the 25th Festival.

### THE 2023 FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

NORAH TOTH	FRED JAZVAC
MARILYN OHLER	BRUCE EDMUNDS
BECKY GRIEVESON	LYNNE RICHARDSON
LIZ ADDISON	NANCY WHITE
BJ MARTIN	MARSHALL BYLE
MARGARET ANDERTON	SHIRLEY HARRISON

### SUPPORTING THE COMMITTEE

ANNE CATHRAE  
DOUG MARTIN  
BOB TAYLOR  
DOUG PEDWELL  
BILL HATTEN



The Friends of MacGregor Point Park once again assumed the responsibility of providing a BBQ this year. It was second to none and greatly appreciated.

We want to thank the volunteers for the time involved, hard work, and amazing creativity in providing another wonderful menu with daily specials and new items!

100% of the profits from this barbeque are returned to the Friends of MacGregor Point Park for their sponsorship of Park interpretive programs, park maintenance and other Park activities.



# MENTOR PROGRAM

Several years ago, recognizing the need to get young people involved to ensure the future of the Festival, the HFBF Committee introduced a mentoring program. This program allows keen birders who wanted to advance their already excellent birding skills with a first hand opportunity to accompany a seasoned birder leading a group.

- **Goal:** *To match youth who are interested in expanding their leadership skills in a birding situation with seasoned leaders.*
- **Intention:** *To give these young advanced birders the opportunity to observe the styles of several different leaders.*

This experience will hopefully expand their interpretive skills, and through time and experience, enable them to take on leadership roles of their own.

The positions were each chosen to give them diverse experiences. We are focusing on two of our early mentees, Kiah Jasper and Erik Van Den Kieboom, who took part in our first mentoring season.

Kiah was available both weekends and therefore managed to secure 4 positions:

- *Mark's Mystery Tour with Mark Wiercinski - all day*
- *The Bountiful Bruce with Jeremy Bensette*
- *The Bountiful Bruce Peninsula with Justin Peter*
- *A Bird in the Hand and The Bird Whisperer (for kids) with Dave Brewer*

Erik Van Den Kieboom's prior commitments prevented him from attending both weekends but he did manage to fill Saturday and Sunday of the first weekend with the following two events:

- *Grasslands and More with Todd Pepper*
- *Up With The Birds with Doug Martin*

Both Erik and Kiah are now leading hikes of their own, both with the Festival and with other birding groups, naturalists clubs and provincial birding organizations. We trust these brief introductions to leading a group have proven beneficial to both of them.



Golden-winged Warbler



Red-headed Woodpecker at nest cavity



Killdeer and chick



# KIAH JASPER'S **BIG YEAR**

The Bruce Birding Club (BBC) and the Huron Fringe Birding Festival look upon Kiah with pride. Kiah's mother would bring him to the BBC meeting place in Southampton when he was 14 years old. He was welcomed by all and it soon became obvious as his skills increased that his keen ears and birding skills put many of us older members to shame. We were excited for him when he got his driver's license. That drove home just how young he really was (no pun intended).

Kiah was part of the Huron Fringe Birding Festival's mentoring program. He would tag along on a few events learning the presentation skills required to be a good leader. His eagerness to learn was quite obvious as he quickly asked for and received mentors that were the cream of the crop. If he was going to learn, it had better be from the best. He quickly became a Festival event leader and was taking groups out on his own.

His identification skills continued to grow and amaze us all. When he announced he was going for a "Big Year" we were excited for him. We knew it would be challenging but our confidence in him was only exceeded by his own and I am sure that of his parents. While only a small part of the expenses he would incur that year, The Huron Fringe Birding Festival helped sponsor him. We also included a few clothing items with the HFBF logo that he could use in photo shoots. A little advertising never hurts!

Kiah's goal was to beat the previous record set by Jeremy Bensette, another one of the Festival's highly skilled younger leaders. COVID-19 had delayed the Big Year for many, Kiah included, so when more favourable conditions returned in 2022, there was a bit of a backlog of potential participants, so the competition was even more intense.

The long and short of it is that 20-year old Kiah succeeded. He not only beat Jeremy's record of 347 but did so with species to spare with a grand total of 359! As noted, the competition that year was fierce, but he managed to get the extra two species required to fend off his fellow birders in the total count. Not

by much as Ezra Campanelli and William Konze were experts in their own rights and should be very proud of their personal achievements.

Kiah's approach was meticulously planned. He knew which species would be difficult to find, determined the best time window and location for each and then after careful monitoring of approaching weather systems, knew where and when to be to maximize his chances of finding his target. Careful monitoring of posted sightings on the internet of rarities often quickly changed his plans as he headed off to other locations in the province, often quite a distance away. If he was going to maximize his numbers, he couldn't let any opportunities slip away.



I can't imagine the toll it would take on any of us to experience a full year of early mornings and long distance travel through varying weather conditions, many times in the dark. Even more challenging would be simple survival with nothing but what you can carry with you in the back of the car, and even sleeping in the car at -40 degrees Celsius. He overcame these perils all while keeping accurate records and even making regular postings of his findings so we could monitor his progress from the comfort of our own homes... Way to go Kiah!!

Doug Martin

thank you to our

# SPONSORS



## *Where Does the Money Come From?*

We are the recipients of grants from community support groups, corporate sponsors, and local businesses. While sponsorship is important, participant fees and personal donations still account for the vast majority of our total revenue. These combined funds pay our basic operating expenses such as web fees, advertising costs, printing expenses etc. Our largest single expense is leader fees but their expertise is invaluable to the success of our event. Leaders receive remuneration for their services which also includes accommodation, and mileage depending on distance travelled. Many of our leaders also spend additional personal time on travel, event planning and route scouting so we are very appreciative of the time they contribute to making our festival a wonderful experience for all participants.

A major sponsor of the festival that doesn't get enough recognition is Ontario Parks, and more specifically MacGregor Point Provincial Park. They support the Festival with significantly reduced group rate entry fees; by providing a number of complimentary campsites for our leaders; and they give us use of the Visitor Centre and all associated amenities.

The main focus is on keeping the participant fees for attending the events at a reasonable amount. Our primary goal is to give everyone a positive experience and not provide a function with the sole purpose of generating revenue. Even with these measures, we typically do end the year with a modest surplus. We operate as a sub-committee of the Friends of MacGregor Point Park so any surplus funds are used by them to further their work in supporting and enhancing educational, recreational and research opportunities at MacGregor Point Provincial Park.



**Bruce Peninsula National Park**  
**Mildmay Tent Rentals**  
**Brome Bird Care**

**OSIM Interactive**  
**Hill's Insurance**  
**Handy Andy Services**

**Holiday Inn Express & Suites**  
**Travelodge by Wyndham**  
**Super 8 by Wyndham**



Clay-colored Sparrow



Cedar Waxwing



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