

# TTPBRS newsletter

Vol.1

Issue 1

Spring 2006



## Inaugural Issue!

Toronto and Region Conservation is pleased to bring you the first issue of a tri-annual newsletter reporting on the activities of the Tommy Thompson Park Bird Research Station.

### 2003-2005 at TTPBRS: A Review

TTPBRS Coordinator  
Dan Derbyshire

The completion of fall monitoring on November 12, 2005 marked the end of a three-year pilot study on the suitability of Tommy Thompson Park for a bird research station. TRCA has now begun the process of establishing TTPBRS as a permanent centre for bird studies and education!



In three years at TTPBRS we have banded 17,661 birds, recaptured 3,018 and recovered 14 foreign-banded birds. Coverage has been excellent as the

cumulative effort includes 404 census surveys, 833 point count surveys, 33,361 net hours and 8,200 volunteer hours! All of these figures encompass a total of over 300,000 birds of 225 species recorded! More importantly, this data has been collected in a standardized and ethical manner in accordance with the North American Banding Council (NABC) and the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network (CMMN).

The Migration Monitoring Program (MMP) at TTPBRS will fill a key gap in the CMMN and therefore contribute significantly to the understanding and conservation of migratory bird populations. Data from the MMP is being applied to local conservation efforts and will continue to serve *The Living City*™ vision of TRCA. The program also forms the foundation of our other monitoring and education programs, which will now kick into full gear.

During the pilot phase of the TTPBRS, education became a clear directive of our objectives. The *Winged Migration* program was launched to provide an interactive and exploratory experience for youth in the natural world. This program has been very successful and we are pleased to report that *Winged Migration* will be offered again to Grades 4 to 7 in 2006. Staff and volunteers have also provided guidance and demonstrations to the general public during weekends and holidays at Tommy Thompson Park. The combination of *Winged Migration* and our programs and events for the general public will provide a unique environmental education outlet that is lacking in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Since 2003 we have collaborated with several researchers on bird-related projects including the University of Montreal, Queen's University and the Canadian Wildlife Service. We have also provided data and advice to several individuals for their ornithological research projects. We recognize that TTPBRS will be valuable to the academic community and, as such, we are working on establishing connections to post-secondary institutions.

Based on the first three years of work at TTPBRS it is clear that the effort has been worthwhile and this is due to the suitability of the site, the numbers and diversity of birds, and the passion and dedication of all the volunteers and staff. So what does the future hold?

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# Forecast for TTPBRS

By Dan Derbyshire

The year 2006 will prove to be formative in the history of the project because we will be establishing the research station as a permanent initiative of Toronto and Region Conservation and the Conservation Foundation of Greater Toronto (CFGT). A volunteer TTPBRS committee will also be established to steer and support the research station and its programs. To ensure a long and productive tenure at Tommy Thompson Park it is necessary to set forth a plan that will enable the research station to be self-sufficient. TRCA staff have been seeking grants that will provide core funding for the station. We also endeavour to start a TTPBRS membership and begin fundraising through the annual Baillie Birdathon operated by Bird Studies Canada (BSC). Through successful fundraising we will be able to continue operating our core programs, and also expand to include other new and vital research and monitoring programs for the GTA.

## New Projects

As mentioned earlier, we will be operating our core Migration Monitoring and educational programs as we have done in the past. In addition to these programs, we are expanding our work to include the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program, Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program, Breeding Birds of Tommy Thompson Park Project and an annual Nocturnal Owl Monitoring Program (NOMP).

### Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS)



Various bird monitoring schemes (e.g. Breeding Bird Survey, Migration Monitoring) can tell us which species are declining however these schemes can't tell us why. MAPS is a continent wide

program that can determine why species are declining. The installation of one or more MAPS stations in the GTA will fill a key gap in the MAPS network, and provide data at a level of detail that has never been collected on the health and productivity of local forest bird populations.

### Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program



The Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program (operated by Bird Studies Canada) was initiated to assess populations of marsh birds and amphibians in the Great Lakes. Like Migration Monitoring and MAPS, the Marsh

Monitoring Program is a network of stations collecting data with a shared protocol. Data on the health of local marsh communities can be collected, which can be of immediate use for conservation. This program will be operated by TTPBRS in 2006 at various wetlands in the GTA.

### Nocturnal Owl Monitoring



A Nocturnal Owl Monitoring Program (NOMP) was piloted at TTPBRS during select fall evenings in 2003-2005. The results indicate that despite the nocturnal hazards, Toronto is an important stopover area. A total of 275 owls were banded and eight were recaptured, having been banded elsewhere (e.g., Virginia, Georgia). In 2006 we will fully standardize our protocol for long-term monitoring and seek membership with Project OwlNet.

### Breeding Birds of Tommy Thompson Park



During summer 2005 staff and volunteers of TTPBRS began preliminary work on a monitoring project on breeding bird abundance and diversity at Tommy Thompson Park. Point count surveys and extensive nest searching resulted in the collection of baseline data that will monitor changes in nesting bird communities in response to habitat succession and restoration at the site.

These programs will be valuable as a systematic bird monitoring scheme for the GTA. They will also result in an increase in volunteer recruitment and educational opportunities for the general public.

As well, we will be implementing a new website and interpretive signs for TTPBRS in 2006. All of these exciting developments will go a long way toward the realization of our vision!



# Membership

The Tommy Thompson Park Bird Research Station (TTPBRS), an initiative of Toronto and Region Conservation, was established in 2003 to contribute to the understanding and conservation of birds and their environments through monitoring, research and education.

We will soon be launching a TTPBRS membership program, to allow bird enthusiasts to help support our important work.

With the help of our fundraising partner, The Conservation Foundation of Greater Toronto, we will be able to offer our members a charitable tax receipt for their contribution. The Conservation Foundation raises money for projects undertaken by TRCA. Since 1957, TRCA has monitored, protected and regenerated the nine watersheds that flow through the Toronto region into Lake Ontario. TRCA is the largest owner of greenspace in the Toronto region with over 38,000 acres, including Tommy Thompson Park.

Details on what the TTPBRS membership provides and how you can join will be released in the coming weeks!



**THE CONSERVATION  
FOUNDATION  
OF GREATER TORONTO**

The Conservation Foundation of Greater Toronto (CFGT) is an independently-governed charitable organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of the natural environment in the Toronto region. Since inception in 1961, the foundation has raised more than \$25 million for a wide variety of environmental and heritage projects. CFGT raises funds in support of programs administered by Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA). TRCA has nearly 50 years of experience in the planning and implementation of environmental protection and enhancement programs, as well as public stewardship and outdoor education.

Through the support of our many donors and other partners, in the past three years we have been able to:

- Secure more than 650 hectares of land
- Plant more than 600,000 trees and shrubs
- Engage nearly 50,000 residents in environmental projects in their communities
- Deliver education and outreach to over 400,000 students and youth
- Initiate The Living City Centre at the Kortright Centre for Conservation in Kleinburg as a centre of excellence in sustainable practices
- Identify 500 species of concern that may be lost as a result of traditional land use practices
- Publish report cards on the health of the Don and Humber rivers
- Launch The Mayors' Megawatt Challenge to reduce municipal energy use (led by Mayor Hazel McCallion)



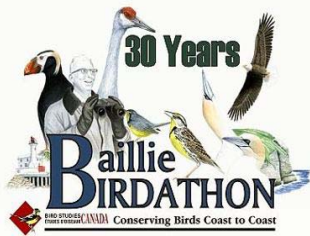
# The Baillie Birdathon



**Bushnell**  
OUTDOOR PRODUCTS

The Baillie Birdathon is a nation-wide, sponsored bird count established in 1976 and named after James L Baillie, a skilled birder who worked for 50 years as the assistant curator in the ornithology department of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). It is organized by Bird Studies Canada (BSC) and is the oldest such event currently running in North America.

Every year in May birders go out to try to tally as many species as possible in a 24-hour period. Birders are sponsored either at a flat rate or on a per-species basis (which is encouragement to work hard for a high tally!) by family, friends and the general public. Funds raised are usually split between BSC and local organizations, and help toward conservation and other initiatives. An average of 7,000 people are involved every year as either participants or sponsors!



The Baillie offers a great opportunity to organizations such as TTPBRS to raise funds to help with their operations. Last year, the top organization was the Norfolk Field Naturalists, raising almost \$15,000!

We're looking to incorporate the Birdathon as an annual part of our fundraising efforts and are excited to be participating this year as part of the International Migratory Bird Day events on May 13, 2006.

## How can I help?

There are two ways that you can be involved in our Baillie Birdathon for 2006. The first and simplest is to sponsor one of our Birdathoners. This year many of our staff and volunteers will be participating. Sponsorships can be made as either a flat rate or per species (we hope to find 90-100 species on the day, if conditions are favourable).

The second option is to do your own Birdathon. It's pretty easy to organize — pick a day in May to go out and contact your friends, family, coworkers, etc. to collect sponsorships. On the day of your Birdathon, you can spend as much or as little of the day birding, but the most important thing is to have fun! Following your Birdathon, let your sponsors know how you did and collect the donations.

Donations of more than \$10 will receive a tax-deductible receipt (through BSC). Sponsors contributing \$35 or more are considered Supporters of Bird Studies Canada and will receive their quarterly publication, BirdWatch Canada.

There's more reason to participate than just good feelings! All Birdathon participants receive a free 30th anniversary t-shirt and are entered into a draw with BSC for some amazing prizes. Through a generous donation by **Bushnell Canada** we are pleased to offer a pair of 8 x 43 Elite Binoculars as the top prize for the TTPBRS birdathon! The birdathoner who raises the most funds for TTPBRS will win these high quality binoculars (~retail value of \$1150.00). Mountain Equipment Coop has also offered some great prizes to TTPBRS Birdathoners including a Tarn 2 Tent (\$182) and two backpacks.

## Sign me up!

There are several ways to sign up as a sponsor for one of our staff. The simplest way is to contact the TTPBRS coordinator and indicate that you are interested in sponsoring, or you could drop by the station in April or early May to do so in person. Flat rate sponsorships may be paid in advance or following the event; per species sponsorships will be collected after the Birdathon (you will be asked to provide contact information where you can be reached).



If you are interested in doing a Birdathon in support of TTPBRS, contact the station coordinator who will provide you with information and materials you need to get set-up.

**Your Support of the TTPBRS Baillie Birdathon will allow us to continue working toward the conservation of birds and the environment!**

## Need more information?

Contact the TTPBRS coordinator:

dderbyshire@trca.on.ca  
(416) 318-2107

Or visit the Baillie Birdathon website at  
[www.bsc-eoc.org/organization/brdathon.html](http://www.bsc-eoc.org/organization/brdathon.html)

# Species in Focus:

## Black-throated Blue Warbler

By Seabrooke Leckie



The Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*) is perhaps one of the most striking of the *Dendroica* warblers and is, in fact, one of just a few truly blue warbler species. The species takes its name from the vibrant plumage of the male, whose sky-blue back, black face and throat, and white belly are unique. Females are much drabber in plumage, being a uniform olive. Almost all individuals show a distinctive white patch in their wing at the base of the primaries, which is a unique characteristic of this species.

Males have a buzzy song that is unlike almost all of the other warblers except for Black-throated Green. They have two phrases, often described as *zoo zoo zeee* and *zo zo zo zo zo zeee*. Although the species doesn't breed at TTPBRS, males can be heard singing around the station during the spring when they're passing through.

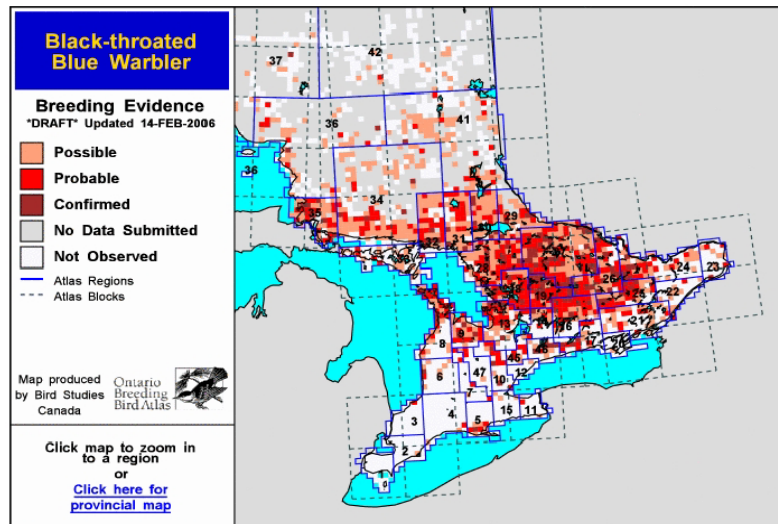
Black-throated Blue Warblers range throughout southeastern Canada and south into the Appalachians, though in Ontario they generally tend to breed further north than Toronto. Two were recorded in the Toronto region during the 2001-2005 Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Individuals have been recorded as far north as North Caribou Lake (about 500 kilometres north of Thunder Bay), but their main breeding range in the province, shown on the map to the right, is through central Ontario (from Lake Simcoe, north to Temagami and east to Ottawa). They prefer larger stands of deciduous and mixed woodlands, with a good understory.

They are a common warbler species at TTPBRS during migration. Between spring 2003 and fall 2005, a total of 162 individuals were banded. They are the 28th ranked species captured at the station, and the 10th ranked warbler. They pass through in the spring throughout May, reaching their peak around the middle of the month, and in the fall from late August through mid-October, peaking through late September. Individuals captured at the station have had a mean weight of 9.39 grams (minimum of 8.3 grams, maximum of 10.9 grams), which is about as much as two quarters. A total of 210 individuals (detected total) have been recorded at TTPBRS since spring 2003, on a total of 108 days.

Black-throated Blue warbler males are easily aged in the hand. Juvenile birds have olive-edged flight feathers. After-hatch year (birds that were parents this summer) birds moult all their feathers in the fall and will have uniformly blue-edged flight feathers. However, hatch-year birds (those that were born this year) only moult some of their flight feathers, which results in a noticeable difference in the colour of the edging between the larger greater coverts and the narrower primary coverts, as seen on the photo above.



When you're down at the station this May (perhaps while doing your own Birdathon), keep an eye out for these beautiful warblers foraging in the birch trees. If you happen to be visiting during the morning, drop in and ask the staff if they've caught any — it's a wonderful opportunity to see the birds in the hand and they're even more stunning up close!



Map used with permission from the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas.  
<http://www.birdsontario.org/>

# Identification Quiz

By Seabrooke Leckie and Dan Derbyshire



When trying to identify an unfamiliar bird, perhaps the first thing you should look at, even before noting colour patterns or plumage characteristics, is its shape. Your favourite field guide may list as many as 700 or more birds, depending on which one you have, which is an overwhelming number when you have no idea where to start. Determining where to start in order to narrow down your options is the key.

The idea is to be able to classify the bird into a family. Body shape is very useful for identifying the family a bird belongs to, often more than plumage. For instance, a Red-winged Blackbird is similar in shape to the related Baltimore Oriole, even though they have very different plumages. In most cases, the birds in a family will all look relatively similar to one another in shape and size. Once you have determined what family (or possibly even narrow it down to just a couple of potential families) a bird belongs to, it becomes a much more simple matter to identify it.

In this case, there are a few clues to indicate which family this bird belongs in. This bird is small with delicate features and a relatively long, narrow and gradually tapered bill. This bird also has a fairly long tail (relative to overall body length). Bill size and shape suggests an insectivore, which eliminates sparrows and finches. The bird is too big for kinglets, too small for thrushes. The tapered bill eliminates vireos. The head is too small and the tail too short for flycatchers. Indeed, all these characteristics indicate that the bird is a member of the warbler family.

Ah, warblers. Is there ever a group bemoaned as much by beginners? Sparrows and gulls, perhaps. But warblers aren't actually as difficult to learn as they originally appear.

The trick is to, once again, categorize them into different groups that further narrow down the possibilities, and then concentrate on plumage markings.

The presence of bold wing bars narrows the possible choices down from 51 to 22 species of warbler that occur in North America. The bird in this photo also shows white markings on the outer tail feathers. This combination is usually a characteristic of *Dendroica* warblers, although there are a few other species that also show it. We can further narrow down the possibilities by the bland grayish plumage of this bird. There are six warbler species that have white wing bars, tail spots and drab plumage: Cape May, Myrtle, Palm, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll and Pine Warblers.

The bird in the picture shows a couple of other notable features. The first is an indistinct dark stripe running through the eye that bisects a pale eyering. The second is a subtle line that creates a definition between the auriculars (cheek) and throat. The bird is lacking any streaking on the breast, belly or back, and it does not have a pale supercilium.

First year Cape May Warblers are mostly gray and have a dark cheek and broken eyering. However, Cape Mays have streaks down their sides and a paler nape which our bird doesn't. Myrtle Warblers also show the eye stripe and cheek patch, but likewise have streaks down their sides. They also show a yellow patch on their flanks, under the wing, though this can sometime be hidden.

The most unique characteristic of a Palm Warbler is its yellow undertail coverts. We can't see the undertail coverts on our bird, however we can rule out Palm by the lack of a bold pale supercilium and streaking on the sides. Bay-breasted Warblers in hatch-year plumage have the eye stripe and plain sides, but they lack the definition in the cheek, and are usually much more yellow than our bird. Blackpoll Warblers also show the eye stripe, but they show streaking in all plumages.

That leaves us with Pine Warbler. Pines usually show a fair bit of yellow in adult plumage (both males and females). However, in hatch-year/second-year plumage many females can be quite dull, showing little to no yellow colouring. Pines have eye stripes creating a broken eyering, and dark cheek patches that form definition between the auriculars and the throat. Adult Pine Warblers will usually show some pale streaking down the sides, but HY/SY birds show little to none.

Indeed, this is a second-year female **Pine Warbler**. Pine Warblers pass through at the station in small numbers every season. This female was captured at the station on April 19, 2004.

# Conservation Connections:

By Seabrooke Leckie

## Lights Out Toronto

On January 31, 2006, the City of Toronto took an unprecedented step toward migratory bird conservation. The city council voted unanimously in favour of a resolution that would require new building plans to incorporate the needs of migratory birds in terms of lighting, glass and other known bird hazards. In so doing, Toronto became the first city in the world to adopt such a clause. In conjunction with this, the city will begin an annual initiative titled "Lights Out Toronto."

Lights Out Toronto is a cooperative project initiated between the City of Toronto and the Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP), a Toronto-based organization begun in 1993 dedicated to increasing awareness of bird collisions with buildings, especially during migration. The partnership will run public awareness campaigns during the migration seasons, starting this spring, encouraging people to adopt bird-friendly habits, such as turning out lights at night, especially in buildings with high collision rates (such as the towers in the downtown core). Besides saving the lives of thousands of birds, these habits will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and save money. The target of the project is to reduce bird collisions by 50 per cent.

TTPBRS is an active stakeholder in the Lights Out Toronto program.

If you'd like more information on Lights Out Toronto, FLAP or how you can help, visit the websites below:

### FLAP:

[www.flap.org/](http://www.flap.org/)

### Official City of Toronto clause document:

[www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/council/cc060131/plt1rpt/cl005.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/council/cc060131/plt1rpt/cl005.pdf)

### Did you know?

FLAP estimates that some 10,000 birds are killed or injured every year in Toronto's downtown alone.

## TTPBRS Fall 2005 Summary

Fall 2005 was an unusual season at the station. Migrants began to pass through early in August, with record numbers of many migrants such as Myrtle warbler, and record early dates for many others. Then in late fall we witnessed a major irruption of Black-Capped Chickadees into southern Ontario, with record numbers passing through the station. Six new species were added to the TTPBRS checklist, including such notable birds as American White Pelican, Golden Eagle and Thayer's Gull.

In addition to the birds, fall 2005 saw the full-scale implementation of TRCA's *Winged Migration* education program. Between that and demonstrations for weekend visitors, approximately 900 people were reached directly this season.

Once again volunteers were the mainstay of the migration monitoring program, contributing over 2,000 person-hours to the station. Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time this season!

### Top ten species banded, fall 2005:

1. Golden-crowned Kinglet – 685
2. Ruby-crowned Kinglet – 536
3. Black-capped Chickadee – 484
4. Myrtle Warbler – 285
5. White-throated Sparrow – 265
6. Hermit Thrush – 208
7. Swainson's Thrush – 152
8. Magnolia Warbler – 126
9. Slate-colored Junco – 108
10. Nashville Warbler – 99

To request an electronic copy of the fall report, email the TTPBRS coordinator at [dderbyshire@trca.on.ca](mailto:dderbyshire@trca.on.ca)



# Contact Information



In 1946, the Province of Ontario enacted the *Conservation Authorities Act*, permitting municipalities in a watershed (or watersheds) to form a conservation authority to conserve and manage natural resources. In 1957, the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (MTRCA) was formed, replacing four smaller authorities. In December of 1997, Bill 148 amended the *Conservation Authorities Act* changing the name of the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), reflecting the amalgamation of the former cities and borough within Metropolitan Toronto.

Since its formation, TRCA has prepared and delivered programs for the management of the renewable natural resources within its watersheds. Thanks to the support of all levels of government and the valuable partnerships we have established, TRCA provides:

- Protection, enhancement and regeneration of natural resources on a watershed basis
- Sound environmental information and advice to promote good land management practices
- Community action on environmental projects
- Outdoor recreation opportunities on 13,000 hectares of open space, forest lands and conservation areas
- Conservation education and heritage programs through our outreach education programs, residential and day-use outdoor education centres, and Black Creek Pioneer Village



**Coordinator**.....Dan Derbyshire  
**TRCA Representatives**.....Tamara Chipperfield  
Ralph Toninger  
Greg Sadowski  
**Volunteer Committee**.....Andrew Jano  
Don Johnston  
Teresa Carlin  
Norma Vanderzon  
Bert Vanderzon  
Seabrooke Leckie

## General Inquiries

### Mail:

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### Email:

[dderbyshire@trca.on.ca](mailto:dderbyshire@trca.on.ca)

### Phone:

TRCA: (416) 661-6600  
TTPBRS Coordinator: (416) 318-2107

## Memberships and Donations:

### TTPBRS

c/o Conservation Foundation  
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Downsview, ON M3N 1S4  
(416) 661-6600, ext. 5276

## Winged Migration program:

For 'Winged Migration' bookings or enquiries, please call 416-667-6295, ext. 4. For more information visit: <http://www.trca-education.ca>

### Did you know?

The largest bird ever caught at TTPBRS was a hatch-year red-tailed hawk. Weighing in at around 1,000 grams, the bird was too big to be weighed on our scale!