

Celebrate spring: get out, explore and watch for birds

By **Katharine Fletcher**

Finally. This long, cold winter is over. Warm temperatures have melted snow, and now the air is filled with a chorus of birdsong. Over there, a robin sings. Above, Vs of Canada geese do their flyovers and, if you're quiet, perhaps you'll even hear their wingbeats!



Regardless of whether or not you're a keen birdwatcher, there's no better way to fill your lungs with the season's fresh air and get some good exercise, than to head outside and watch for wildlife.

As ice recedes from lakes and watercourses, wading birds such as great blue herons can be found. Mallards, goldeneye, bufflehead and other ducks join the activity, paddling and dabbling. And, if we're lucky, we may hear loons flying overhead, returning to their home lakes and rivers.

Finally, songbirds arrive: Baltimore orioles, catbirds, indigo buntings. These and others such as woodcocks, snipes, and whip-poor-wills join resident birds, all competing for nesting territory and food.

Because of the Ottawa region's rich biodiversity, we are well-placed to find many areas to explore which offer us splendid sightings.

Tip? Take binoculars, sunhat, sunglasses, water and a daypack for treats, and a bird identification book. Why not plan a picnic?



Photo: Eric Fletcher

April is a great time to spread your wings and watch for wildlife, like this pileated woodpecker.

In the downtown core

Entrance Bay Locks: Rideau Canal

Head down the stairs immediately east of the East Block Parliament Buildings, from Wellington Street. Then descend to the Rideau Canal's first set of eight locks. Take the paved path northwest, which sweeps past the Bytown Museum, extending below the Hill. You'll possibly even see beavers swimming in the Ottawa River, along with

Ottawa-area venues and clubs are great for bird enthusiasts

mallard ducks and ducklings. Continue walking until you reconnect with Wellington Street at the Portage Bridge.

Info: www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lnh-nhs/on/rideau/index.aspx

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Arboretum: Dow's Lake

Park at the small lot at the Arboretum, which is located immediately east of the roundabout at Prince of Wales Drive. This living museum of trees becomes a hive of activity as birds start to build their nests. Look for cardinals (males are scarlet, females a delicate orange-buff) which will be singing to attract mates. As May approaches, look for warblers. Other birds: night herons and great blue herons (near the Rideau Canal).

Info: www.friendsofthefarm.ca/location.htm

Rockcliffe Park and Rockeries

Find the Rockeries between Acacia and Princess Avenues. Then stroll alongside narcissi which are so abundant they obscure the lawn! Baltimore orioles, cardinals and brown thrashers may be found here. Continue exploring this heritage neighbourhood whose "crowning glory" might be Rideau Hall, whose stately lawns and gardens are open to the public (check hours).

Info: www.ncc-ccn.gc.ca/places-to-visit/parks-paths/rockcliffe-park-rockeries

Mud Lake, Britannia

Park at the entrance to the filtration plant located on Cassels Road at the Britannia Conservation Area (Mud Lake parking area). This network of easy trails can be crowded with photographers and nature lovers, so be patient. Here I've found Baltimore orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks, and many other birds including owls. The great thing about this destination is its varied habitats: wetlands (not just the lake but also the backwaters of the Ottawa River). Watch not only for herons, geese and ducks but also turtles.

Map at NeilyWorld Birding: www.neilyworld.com/neilyworld/orwo10.htm

Spread your wings: join a club!

Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club (OFNC)

The club offers many talks and outings year-round and some are particularly

kid-friendly, so consider taking your young friends. Note members come first, so although some outings are open to non-members (*enquire*) membership isn't expensive. Super website and Facebook group.

Info: www.ofnc.ca

Macnamara Field Naturalists' Club (MFNC)

MFNC is based in Arnprior, offering both outings and lectures and an informative website. Although just beyond the City of Ottawa's western border, this club's outings provide an excellent complement to the OFNC's activities.

Info: www.mfnc.ca

Learning with a guide

Tony Beck and Nina Stavlund

Beck and his wife Stavlund have been offering guided birdwatching tours locally, nationally and abroad for years. Their website is jam-packed with glorious close-ups of birds, both native Canadian as well as many international species.

www.alwaysanadventure.ca

Bruce Di Labio, Tour Guide

Bruce Di Labio is another highly experienced birder and he offers a Birding 101 course, too. As well, he maintains a terrific website linking us to birding locations, and his informative blog.

www.dilabiobirding.ca

Essential, basic tips for responsible wildlife watching

The hiker's rule applies: take nothing; leave nothing but footprints. Be quiet: birds are nesting, mating, and raising chicks.

Don't throw things at birds to make them fly so as to get a good photo. Please respect them and don't risk harming them.

Katharine Fletcher is a freelance writer who is author of Capital Rambles: Exploring the National Capital Region.

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Take someone to your appointment with you:

- Taking somebody with a medical background would be ideal, but taking anybody you trust is better than going alone.
- Ask them to take notes so that you can review what was said after you leave your appointment.
- Having somebody with you can make the situation less stressful.

Have a plan in place before you leave your medical appointment:

- Are there changes in your treatment?
- Are there changes in your medications?
- Do you need a follow-up appointment? Who will book that appointment? When?

- If you are in the hospital and need to see a specialist, can you be seen before discharge?
- If you are being discharged from hospital do you need home care? Do you need special equipment?
- Having a plan in place keeps you informed and makes you an active participant in your health care.

Using these tips when faced with the challenges of navigating the health care system can alleviate some of the stress at an already difficult time. In turn hopefully you will have a more pleasant health care experience.

Michelle Lahey is the founder and owner of Help with Healthcare: Advocacy Services for Canadians Inc. www.helpwithhealthcare.ca



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