

The Aquila

Issue #16 September 2020



Female Red-winged Blackbird
Agelaius phoeniceus
(Mike McEvoy)

THIS ISSUE

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The Birds of Thickson's Woods

by Margaret Bain



CUCKOOS

The cuckoos most of us are familiar with are the Old World cuckoos, with their distinctive, repetitive two-tone call and their bad reputation for laying eggs in other birds' nests. But these Old World birds are in a different family from our New World cuckoos. Ontario's two species, the Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* and the Black-billed Cuckoo *C. erythrophthalmus*, are intensely secretive, extremely interesting birds, often very hard to find or photograph as they are usually solitary, sitting alone, silently, well hidden for long periods in their favourite damp woods and dense undergrowth.

Both of our cuckoos are slender brown birds, white beneath, with long, white-spotted tails. The Yellow-billed is the slightly larger of the two with bright rufous in its brown wings, much larger white spots in its tail, and a heavier yellow bill, while the Black-billed is much smaller but has a distinctive bright red eye.

Both species are heard much more often than they are seen, with far-carrying hard, knocking calls often in descending patterns, as well as more varied rolling, almost dovelike cooing sounds. Even though many calls are distinctive for each species, sometimes they can be so similar that in the second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas cuckoos that were heard but not seen were recorded as unidentified cuckoos.

Black-billed Cuckoo
Coccyzus erythrophthalmus
(Mike McEvoy)

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Black-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus erythrophthalmus* (Mike McEvoy)



Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* (Ed McAskill)

The two cuckoo species both prefer eating the hairy, spiny caterpillars most other birds avoid, so outbreaks of Fall Webworm or Forest Tent Caterpillars can often increase the numbers of cuckoos in the affected areas. The abundance of these prey items often even affects where and when these birds will nest. Nesting habitat can vary from old fields and hedgerows to deciduous and mixed forests, and nesting dates from mid-May to early August.

Both these cuckoos build their rather flimsy nests close to the ground, and rarely parasitize the nests of smaller birds like the Old World cuckoos so famously do – leaving that to Brown-headed Cowbirds in our province. However, each of the two species will sometimes lay its own eggs in the nest of the other.

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Yellow-billed Cuckoos are less common than Black-billed in Ontario and also a more southerly species, recorded more often in the Carolinian region of the south-west of the province than farther north, and breeding as far south as northern Mexico and the Caribbean. Both species winter in Central and South America: Black-billed chiefly in the west of South America as far as the north of Peru, while the Yellow-billed ventures to Uruguay and Argentina.

Both Cuckoos are uncommon migrants to Thickson's Woods although a Black-billed Cuckoo was heard calling in the Meadow several times during this summer.

Listen to the Cuckoos

Click on the speaker logo and you will hear cuckoos calling. Use the back arrow to return to the Newsletter
May not work on mobile devices.



Old World - Common Cuckoo
Cuculus canorus.
Huw Lloyd, XC560303.
Accessible at www.xeno-canto.org/560303.



Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Coccyzus americanus
Jelmer Poelstra, XC83558.
Accessible at www.xeno-canto.org/83558.



Black-billed Cuckoo
Coccyzus erythrophthalmus
Dan Lane, XC179829.
Accessible at www.xeno-canto.org/179829



Milksnakes

We have had several reports of Milksnakes and Garter Snakes in the Reserve this year.

The very small population of snakes seems to be surviving, despite the losses we find every year on the Waterfront Trail caused by irresponsible idiots who deliberately run over basking snakes with their bikes.

This healthy-looking adult Milk-snake was photographed this Spring by Ed McAskill in the northwest part of the woods.

The head pattern looks very similar to a young snake photographed by Nigel Parr three years ago - a very good sign.

Phill Holder

Milksnake
Lampropeltis triangulum
(Ed McAskill)

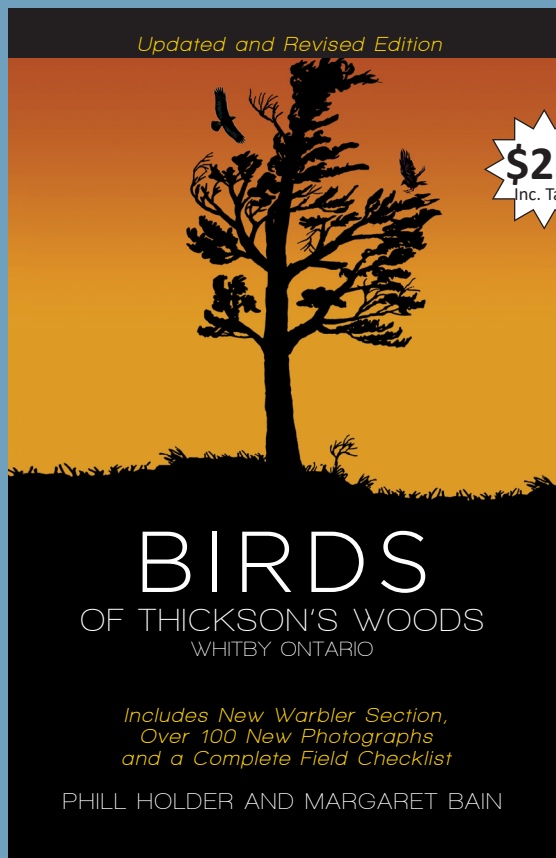
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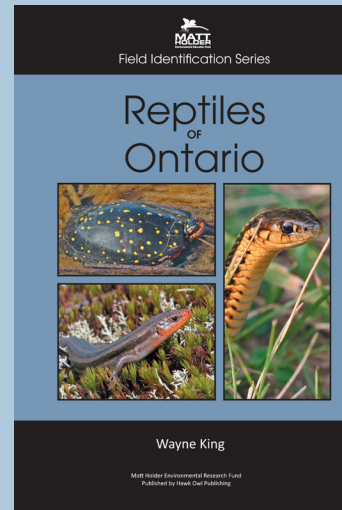
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Includes a Field Checklist and Trail Map.

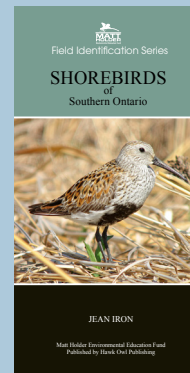
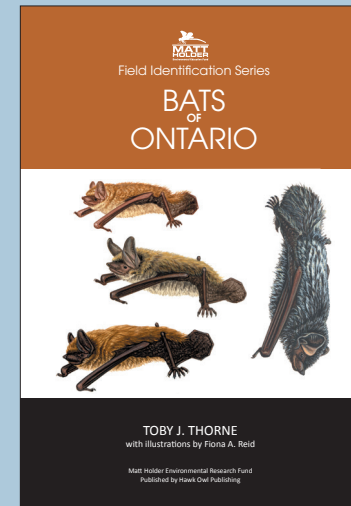


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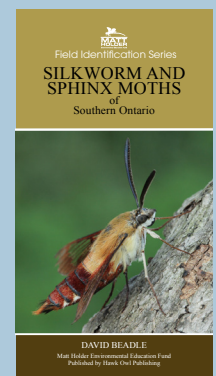
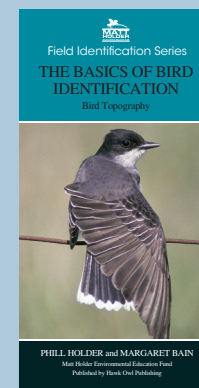
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This completely revised second edition, designed for use in the field, documents 323 species of birds that have been seen so far in the Reserve. Illustrated with exceptional full colour photographs of each species, including status and the specific dates of the rarities seen, this is a must have book for all birdwatchers.

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SPOTTED SANDPIPER POSTER



Growing up Spotty

Ed McAskill has studied and documented many bird species and spends hours and hours to ensure his subjects are photographed as they go about their everyday life making sure they are not disturbed.

He has put together a series of brilliant photographs onto a poster documenting the growth stages of a Spotted Sandpiper from egg to immature plumage.

Ed has kindly made his poster available for free download.

Click on the poster to download

Right click to save onto your computer

← Use the back arrow to return to the Newsletter
(may not work on mobile devices)

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* (Ed McAskill)

From the past



Thickson's Woods resident Warren Brailsford gave me some 35mm transparencies of Thickson's Woods and Corbett Creek Marsh taken in 1982. Among them were these photographs of breeding Black Terns *Chlidonias niger*. Now considered an uncommon visitor, these birds once bred in large numbers in all the lakeside marshes in Durham Region. The last breeding pair recorded in Corbett Creek Marsh was in 1984 (Glenn Coady *pers.comm*). Phill Holder

Butterflies of Thickson's Woods

Red-spotted Purple



Red-spotted Purple *Limenitis arthemis astyanax* (Mike King).



White Admiral *Limenitis arthemis arthemis* (Phill Holder).

The White Admiral butterfly is a common summer sight around the Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve, especially around the residents' garden flowers. Less seen and considered rare at Thickson's Woods is the Red-spotted Purple butterfly. These very different looking butterflies are in fact both the same species *Limenitis arthemis*.

The White Admiral *L. arthemis arthemis*, has a white band where the Red-spotted Purple subspecies *L. arthemis astyanax* lacks the white band and has evolved to mimic the poisonous Pipevine Swallowtail *Battus philenor*

Because of the differences, these butterflies were once considered separate species. The Red-spotted Purple is a more southerly butterfly and is replaced by the White Admiral moving progressively north of Lake Erie although in recent years numbers of Red-spotted Purples have been increasing in our area.

Hybridization occurs where the two populations overlap. Thickson's Woods residents have reported several of these beautiful Red-spotted Purples among their flowers this summer.

Phill Holder

Mourning Cloak

Dennis Barry

On Wednesday July 15th, while we were sitting on our front porch, a very large butterfly flew over the garden. By its size I suspected it was the first Giant Swallowtail *Papilio cresphantes* of the year. It then perched head-down on a fencepost a few feet away. Rather than a Giant Swallowtail, it was a Mourning Cloak *Nymphalis antiopa*, by far the largest individual I have ever seen. It was quite fresh, a dark, satiny brown in colour with a beautiful ornate lace border.

It remained perched for several minutes while my wife, Margaret Carney, and I watched it, but when I moved to go get a camera, it flew off and disappeared. Margaret wondered what the food plant of the larva was. So I consulted with *The ROM Field Guide to Butterflies of Ontario* to investigate, I noticed a comment referring to a larger southern form, *lintnerii*, that sometimes appears in southern Ontario.

We live in Thickson's Woods on the north shore of Lake Ontario in Whitby and during moth research conducted by the Matt Holder Research Group over the past several years in Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve, southern moth species, rare in Ontario, have been recorded on several occasions.

This Mourning Cloak sighting occurred after an extended period of warm, sunny weather with persistent southerly winds. I believe it's possible that this individual could have been of the *lintnerii* race.

Dennis Barry

Butterfly Expert, Peter Hall Comments: The Mourning Cloak does indeed have the two forms, with the larger, darker *litnerii* being a migrant into Ontario from the eastern U.S. Size is one of the key factors, but there will be some overlap with the northern *hyperborea*. I had a very fresh, bright maroon *hyperborea* near Ottawa yesterday. While this is not a good year for U.S. migrant species into Ontario, these might pick up as the summer proceeds. The *litnerii* photo in the ROM butterfly guide is one I took in a good migrant year a number of years ago near Ottawa. Like yours, it was the dark colour and large size that caught my attention. Thanks for your note and good butterflying.

Peter Hall

NOTE: On the morning of Saturday September 12th, when opening a moth trap at Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve, I was surprised to find a Mourning Cloak towards the bottom of the trap. It was a cool 11°C and the butterfly was very still allowing me to take it from the trap and place it on a branch. The trap was located overnight on the lakeshore, where we often catch vagrant moths. I was struck by the large size and dark colour. Aware of the previous sighting in the note above, I suspect this butterfly was possibly of the southern *litnerii* subspecies. It was only still for a couple of minutes, before flying high into the trees.

Phill Holder



Mourning Cloak *Nymphalis antiopa hyperborea* (Ed McAskill).



Mourning Cloak, September 12, 2020 *Nymphalis antiopa* possibly *litnerii* (Phill Holder).

Mothing Update



Canadian petrophila *Petrophila canadensis* (Phill Holder)



American Bird's-wing *Dypterygia rozmani* (Phill Holder)



Clover Hayworm *Hypsopygia costalis* (Phill Holder)



Black-tailed Diver *Bellura vulnifica* (Phill Holder)

It was a late start to the mothing year due to the Pandemic lockdown, but it was quite easy to social distance, when mothing at Thickson's Woods during June, and restrictions on travel were lifted. We had good weather and were able to add several new moths to the checklist.

TWO NEW SPHINX MOTHS ADDED TO THE THICKSON'S WOODS CHECKLIST

Five-spotted Hawkmoth



Five-spotted Hawkmoth *Manduca quinquemaculatus* (Mike McEvoy)



Five-spotted Hawkmoth *Manduca quinquemaculatus* (Phil Reyenga)



Carolina Sphinx

This Carolina Sphinx caterpillar was one of four that was bought to our attention by Thickson's Woods residents Karen Schilling and Tina Killough.

They were discovered in their gardens tomato patch on September 18th. Unfortunately they were all covered in braconid wasp cocoons, probably *Cotesia congregata*. These are larval parasitic wasps which deposit eggs into the caterpillar. As the larvae develop they feed inside the caterpillar's body. When the larvae are ready to pupate they eat their way out of the caterpillar and spin silk cocoons, attached to the caterpillar, before becoming adult wasps. The caterpillars do not survive but die slowly.

Carolina Sphinx is added to our moth checklist but we have not yet caught the adult moth

Phill Holder.

Carolina Sphinx caterpillar *Manduca sexta* with braconid wasp cocoons.
(Phill Holder)

MOTH OF THE YEAR



Great Tiger Moth *Arctia caja* (Phill Holder)

Further afield, we have been mothing at other Ontario locations and found many new moths that do not occur at Thicksen's Woods.

We caught this beauty at a site in Haliburton Hills on August 8, 2020. It is a Great Tiger Moth *Arctia caja* and we voted it our "moth of the year". At 35mm in length it really is a stunning moth.

Although we are not expecting this moth to occur at Thicksen's Woods it has been fairly common in Haliburton Hills this year.

Thicksen's Woods Moth Group.

NEW PUBLICATION

Ontario Moths

A Checklist

David Beadle Michael King Phill Holder

As more and more naturalists discover the enjoyment of identifying and appreciating moths, comes the inevitable urge to put together a personal list, but first there has to be a definitive provincial list.

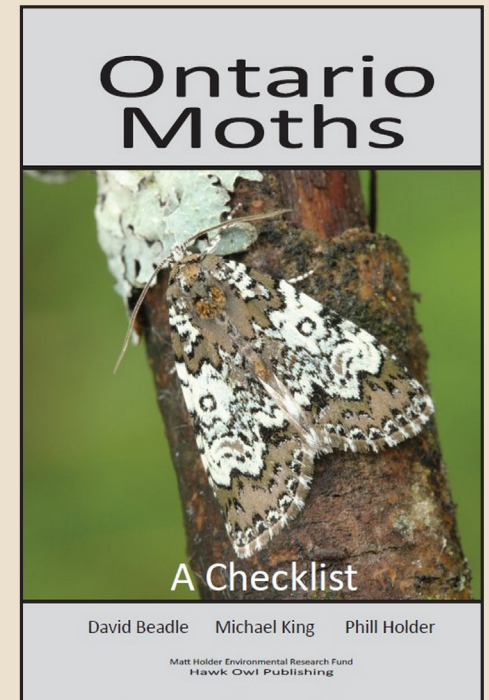
The authors have researched all published records and private collections to publish the first complete, and most up to date checklist of the 3187 verified moth species recorded in Ontario.

The main checklist includes photographic plates with examples of the family of each species. Separate sections include photographic additions to the list and a few records awaiting verification. All these records include dates, locations, and finders' names.

With more than 230 photographs, we believe this checklist will be invaluable to all moth enthusiasts from beginner to expert and is spiral bound for easy use.

Order your copy from: www.mattholderfund.com/shop

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Not just Moths....

We find many different insect species in the light traps. Two are shown here. A Robber Fly *Efferia* sp. (below) and one of our largest Scarab Beetles (right). At 30mm this is a Grapevine Beetle *Pelidnota punctata*.



(Phill Holder)

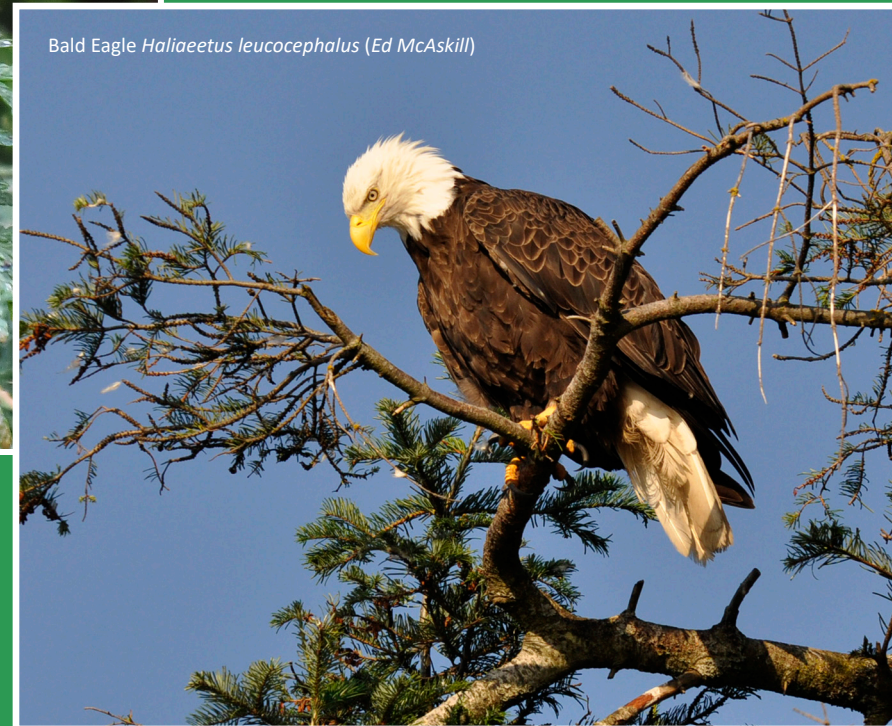


(Phill Holder)



Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorum* (Ed McAskill)

THE BIRDS



Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* (Ed McAskill)

Rarity of the Spring was a Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorum* photographed in the woods on May 4th. Seen by many birders, frustrated by this awful pandemic, who decided to venture out.

An adult Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* has been “hanging” around the woods during the late summer. There are rumours that Bald Eagles nested nearby this year. If confirmed this would be the first nesting record for Durham Region.

Great Horned Owls *Bubo virginianus* successfully raised one young owl this year, which unfortunately resulted in trail damage as the many birders / photographers left the trails to find the often hidden young.

NUMBER 324

Glenn Coady, saw a Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* fly from west to east along the Thickson’s Woods lakeshore on September 1st. This incredible record will be number 324 on the bird checklist.

NUMBER 325

A first basic Harris’s Sparrow *Zonotrichia querula* was found amongst a migrating flock of White-throated Sparrows *Z. albicollis* on September 24th by Glenn Coady.

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Red-legged Grasshopper *Melanoplus femurrubrum* (Phill Holder)



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