

Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds (BPQ)

**The Recent Past: an Update**  
**in Celebration of the Society's Centenary Year, 2017**

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**Preface :**

In the late autumn of 2016, BPQ President Sheldon Harvey asked if I would be willing to provide an update to the standard history of the Society, Margaret Pye Arnaudin's *A Bird in the Bush, The Story of the Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds, 1917-2002*, (published by the Society itself and Price-Patterson, Ltd., 2002). Sheldon had in mind the Society's hundredth anniversary year of 2017. He hoped that something could be produced to cover the Society's activities from 2002 to the present as part of the celebratory events of that year.

The idea seemed sound to me. ***A Bird in the Bush*** is an attractive and well researched institutional history of which any such group should be proud. But time does pass; groups and the contexts in which they operate move on as well. And it would only be fitting to chronicle such movements at reasonable intervals along the way. The 2017 anniversary year seemed a perfect time for such an update.

The initial conversation, carried on briefly and casually in the course of one of Sheldon's Saturday Field trips, did not immediately lead to more definitive conversations. In the meantime, Barb MacDuff replaced Sheldon as President, and I remained deeply involved in several other research projects of long-standing (and firm deadlines). Two three-week research sojourns in the UK on my own projects, followed by the temporary loss of my Concordia research office due to feared asbestos contamination, also ate up time, so that I was unable to begin my work until June of 2017. I was still at that time left to my

own devices regarding the format, length, and even content of what was expected.

The following is my own construction of Sheldon's initial idea, encouraged along the way by conversations with Barb and others. I began with a close reading of Arnaudin's ***A Bird in the Bush***. That gave me a sense of the Society's origins, its historic mission, its social traditions, and the nature of its formal activities through the years to 2000. Then I located the BPQ archives, most of which up to the year 2010 had been deposited in the McCord Museum. At the McCord, Dr. Heather McNabb (who, as it happens, is my former student) kindly and diligently helped me sort out that institution's re-cataloguing of the BPQ Archive and provided clear guidance to the location and use of particular items. More recent, post-2010, materials still rested with the Society's own archivist, Helen Meredith, who has kindly afforded me access to those which I required.

As my reading proceeded, an approach became clearer. I would take as my starting point the end of the twentieth century, which happily coincided with the end of Arnaudin's labours. I would then follow a number of themes as they unfolded in subsequent years to the present day. Following an Introduction, they are: The Organization of the Society; Community Outreach and Public Education; Membership and Participation; Birding; Property Acquisition and Management; Research; Interventions; Celebrations; and a Conclusion. I would rely chiefly on the minutes of the Board of Directors, the Society's periodic publications, and the minutes of its monthly and annual general meetings all since 2000. I would additionally tap the memories

of particular members on particular issues to fill in gaps in the written record.

I also wanted to try and describe what the Society has meant to its members, and to understand the social and even the political context of that membership. That would undoubtedly involve interviewing a sample of members so as to assess the 'human' element. In the end, it proved impractical to set up individual meetings with particular members of long-standing. Instead, I was very pleased that Barb MacDuff, Sheldon and Darlene Harvey, Wayne Grubert, and Averill Craig found time to gather at our home informally to reflect on their impressions and experiences over the years (Anne Tittler providing the tea and shortbreads). Along with Gay McDougall Gruner, Richard and Jean Harwood Gregson, and Betsy McFarlane, they have provided additional bits and pieces along the way. In addition to Barbara and Sheldon, other recent past BPQ presidents Betsy McFarlane (2003-05), Rodger Titman (2005-07), Eve Marshall (2007-09), Jeff Harrison (2009-11), and Richard Gregson (2011-14) provided written summaries of BPQ accomplishments during their terms in office. Barbara, Sheldon, Averill, Wayne and both Richard and Jean Gregson also very kindly took time to read and comment on an early draft, while Anne Tittler provided some editorial suggestions. I am grateful to all, though I take full responsibility for any errors or mis-impressions which may still lurk.

Finally, a writer always has to begin with a sense of audience: in other words, to ask the question 'to whom am I speaking??', and to proceed accordingly. I have assumed that I would 'speak' primarily to the Society's membership itself

rather than, e.g., any broader public or scholarly community. That meant avoiding the full load of conventional academic apparatus. And it meant that I could assume some familiarity with the Society and its activities on the part of the readers.

So I have set forth, hoping to meet expectations which had not, at the outset, been articulated in any specific manner. 'Full disclosure' requires me to note that my wife Anne and I are also a members of BPQ, and have been for some six or seven years. But my own membership has been largely as a participant in wonderful Saturday field trips, as a casual maker of suet logs and bird houses, and as a diligent consumer of coffee and cookies at monthly meetings, all while adroitly avoided any fuller role in governance. I had therefore not come to know some of those people about whom I was writing, and who are often still very much active members. That balance of familiarity and distance seemed to me about right for the task at hand. I hope it has been.

### **Introduction:**

Overall, I've been continually struck by the intensity of members' dedication and commitment over the years, some leaders serving in directorial or other executive positions for thirty or forty years or more. While this has sometimes raised concerns about the slow rate of directorial turnover and the need for new blood, it has also ensured the continuation of concerns and activities. It cannot be coincidental that programmes and projects like the annual Christmas Bird Count, or the annual Hawk Migration Watch, or the monthly lecture series,

to name just a few, continue to operate just as well, and just as vigorously, as ever.

I am also struck by the very useful balance on the Board and in the membership between science professionals on the one hand and people drawn from all walks of life on the other. I note that BPQ stands out as well for having been equally open (and at all levels of membership) to men and women and to members of all ethnic and linguistic communities for a very long time. None of this openness can be taken for granted in our ambient society in this day and age, and it has been a very attractive feature to many members over the years.

The group which Margaret Arnaudin knew had naturally evolved from its 1917 origins in a number of ways, just as birding itself had done. But there were still some very long-standing traditions and activities which were still in place when she wrote, and these have continued to the present. Many of these-- the Saturday field trips, the annual Christmas Bird Count, the monthly meetings with guest speakers-- were (and still are) central to the Society's mission and activities. They are just as central to the strong sense of friendship and community which marked, and still marks, the Society. But there were also things simmering on the back burner which had begun to cause concern, and which would shortly come to the fore.

Along with the continued loss of natural habitat, the consequent decline of numerous species once common to our region, and similar trends over which we had little or no control, there were concerns about the operation and activities of the Society itself.

By 2002, the Board of Directors, for one, had become very large, the Society's committees very numerous and occasionally moribund, and the turnover of leadership somewhat sluggish. Meeting spaces for the society, and for its library, would shortly become problematical as accustomed venues closed down or became otherwise inaccessible. Some influential members felt the need for a more vivid public presence, and began to explore the possibilities of greater outreach to the community at large. Some even saw the Society's traditional name, *The Province of Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds*, as too long and cumbersome to resonate easily with the public.

In addition, challenges of an altogether novel sort were beginning to make themselves felt. Technological change was already endangering some of the traditional print media upon which interest groups like BPQ depended for communication both internal and external. This changeover steadily eroded the ability to announce meetings and to raise public awareness in ways which had long served well. David Bird's once weekly newspaper column on birding, for example, became twice-monthly, and then occasional, and then disappeared altogether. Other efforts to engage the public became more difficult to achieve through traditional print media. Public listings of community events--e.g., *The Gazette's* 'Community Calendar' and 'Weekend Events'-- disappeared as well. Some of the daily and weekly newspapers themselves gave way to on-line production or stopped printing altogether.

In an even more profound manner, the Society's ambient society itself began rapidly to change in challenging ways. New

technologies like the smart phone and the internet were already creating a more introspective society, in which active participation in all sorts of interest groups began to decline across the board. The Society itself may not much have thought about these trends in 2002, but it would soon have to face them. A significant part of the Society's activities since that time might be seen as responses to such challenges; much of its continued strength stems from its impressive success in meeting them.

### **Organization of the Society:**

Concerns about the operation and structure of the Society came especially to the fore during the presidency of Betsy McFarlane (2003-2005). Under her leadership the Board of Directors acknowledged the need for new blood in its ranks, a firmer definition of directorial duties and responsibilities, and a limit to the number of committees. At the same time it was acknowledged that there also needed to be some considerable degree of continuity of the leadership.

All these considerations went into a restructured organizational format which is still in place. Between 2003 and 2005 the Board of Directors instituted term limits for its members. It developed a code of conduct for Directors which it brought into effect in January, 2005. That code established formal guidelines for what was and was not 'ethical' directorial activity. Questions of turnover and continuity in the Society's leadership continued to be discussed at Board meetings in subsequent years. But the problem was alleviated at intervals by a natural and larger than usual turnover of directors in 2007 and again in 2016/17. This produced a more satisfactory balance



in leadership positions between more experienced hands and newer members.

Over this same period the Board recognized the unwieldiness of its myriad committees: as many as twenty-five of them by 2004, all of them reporting directly to the Board's Executive. In several steps along the way, and especially following a Directors' retreat in October, 2011, the number of committees has been reduced through disbandment or consolidation to sixteen in number. These are grouped into three divisions, each coordinated by one division head. Those divisions are: *Administration* (including committees on Finance, Membership Services, Nominations and Elections, Archives, and *Tchébec*/Annual Report; *Conservation* (including committees on Conservation, the Christmas Bird Count, Research Grants, the Hawk Watch, Property Acquisitions, and Sanctuaries) and *Outreach/Education* (including committees on Education, Field Trips, Communications, Publicity/Marketing, and Outreach.). The Board itself has slimmed down to but sixteen members by June of 2017, ten or so fewer than it had when Arnaudin wrote.

Structural reorganization extended in these years even to the very name of the Society. Although the name *Province of Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds* was indeed (and still is) the group's legal name, it had come to seem a tad unwieldy to use on an informal basis. In 2004 the Board established a working group to re-think this, and gave Martin Bowman the task of chairing it. That group entered into a lengthy dialogue with the Board over alternative names. Those deliberations eventually settled on *Bird Protection Quebec*, or *BPQ*, as a viable alternative for informal use. It, too, was adopted early in

2005, as announced at the February meeting of that year. It continues to be the Society's every-day name.

The thinking behind this name change arose from a still broader concern. The Directors had come to realize in these years that the Society itself needed a more vivid public profile. There was a laudable sense of pride in all this, but also a concern that the public needed to know more about the Society if such long-standing goals as public education were to be attained.

In the event, at its February meeting of 2004, the Board established a Marketing Committee and invested it with the task of placing the Society more prominently in the public eye. It was asked to design an appropriate logo and other imagery, and generally to bring BPQ to greater public attention. Sheldon Harvey and Martin Bowman took the lead in this, and their ensuing efforts must be credited with the much more public image the Society has come to enjoy since. The BPQ logo has become a distinctive and familiar feature of its caps, badges, and other paraphernalia.

Another pressing concern of the 2000s arose when the closing of Bishop Whelan Elementary School deprived the Society of its library space and the venue for its Nature Adventure Centre. The 2007 closing of the Fraser Hickson Library meant that a new venue had also to be found for our monthly meetings. In the end, the Society could not find a new home for its Library, and the reluctant decision had to be made in 2010 to disband it by donation, auction, and sale to members. The final dispersal took place on the front lawn of Averill Craig's NDG home.

At the same time, various artefacts (including mounted specimens like the stuffed passenger pigeon) were also removed to the more secure venue of McGill's Redpath Museum. Meeting space was offered in the spring of 2007 by the Knox Crescent Presbyterian Church in NDG, just a few blocks from the Fraser Hickson site. The Society has met at Knox Crescent since the autumn of 2007. It has amply met our needs. In addition to a meeting room of just the right size, it allows Jean Demers and Clemence Soulard to set up their coffee pot and cookie tray, Averill Craig her sale items, and Gay McDonald Gruner and others to staff the membership table at the entrance to the room. The subsequent de-commissioning and sale of the church building itself, and the 2017 establishment of a theatre group in the sanctuary, seem not to threaten BPQ's use of the adjacent hall.

Over its century of operation, BPQ has left a very long paper trail of its activities, and its directors have proven very good at preserving them. But given the frequent turnover of presidents and secretaries, those holdings came to be scattered in several places and amongst many hands. One of the signal accomplishments of the late 2000's was the successful effort to collect them all in one place, catalogue them, and make them available for consultation.

The outcome was the deposit of a large, well-preserved, and fully catalogued lode of BPQ Archives—almost five metres long—deposited on the Society's behalf by Helen Meredith at the McCord Museum in 2010. The McCord has re-catalogued these to conform to its own system, making them available on application by anyone who wishes to see them. More recently, Board minutes were placed for storage in the Cloud, where Directors may access

them. One hopes that additional deposits of post-2010 material will continue to be made in the future, but that the temptation simply to place archives on-line without any paper version will be resisted.

### **Community Outreach and Public Education:**

As traditional print media continued to decline through the years, the value of electronic communication became increasingly obvious. This critical transition formed a central concern of the Society's leadership in the 2000s. Up to that time, virtually all the Society's internal communications had been on paper, and this was becoming more expensive and less effective by the year. When Gay McDougall Gruner took over editing the Society's newsletter in early in 2003 it was still on paper, and the Society had no website. But two years later she took the lead in launching an electronic version which ran parallel to the paper version. In 2008 the paper format went the way of the dodo. Between 2005 and 2007 Richard Gregson continued Eve Marshall's initiative in developing the BPQ Website. With his help it continued to expand and become more refined in subsequent years. In 2012-2013 BPQ opened accounts at Facebook and Twitter as well, both of which have now also proven effective media for public interaction.

Part of the Society's public identity has long been linked, at least informally, with McGill University. Various McGill faculty members have served in the Society's leadership since the 1920s, and in recent years Professors David Bird and Rodger Titman have served on BPQ's Board of Directors, guided bird

trips, and offered lectures. In recent years that relationship has become even stronger with several collaborative efforts.

Yet many of the Society's enhanced efforts toward public outreach have not had such deeply rooted foundations on which to build. And, it must be said, not all have been successful, though not for lack of effort on the parts of Harvey and Bowman and their Marketing Committee. In 2005, for example, the committee had proposed an arrangement with the pet food supplier J.E. Mondou to have BPQ information available at their retail outlets, but in the end Mondou backed out. Then the Society offered to establish an ambitious arrangement with *The Gazette newspaper*, which would have seen BPQ provide material for a multi-part series on birdwatching. It fell through when *The Gazette* backed out in 2008 and 2009.

One of the more successful outreach initiatives of recent years concerned the working language of the Society. BPQ had historically been an essentially English language group, its meetings and publications in that language alone. But the mid-2000s saw a rising acknowledgement that the Society's publications should come in both languages. Sheldon Harvey in particular asked at a Director's meeting if they could not also be translated into French. Richard Gregson noted the increasing number of e-mails which came in to the Society in French, and indeed, Francophone members in Quebec had begun to join the Society in greater numbers.

In response to this very welcome turn, Pierre Bannon, Gay McDougall Gruner, Averill Craig, Bob Barnhurst, and Mabel McIntosh produced a revised and bilingual checklist of birds

which was approved by the Society in 2006. Further mid-decade discussions of the language issue stalled for a while over concerns that translation could be expensive and was not part of the Society's initial mandate. Then, too, it was noted that there were other bird groups which were predominantly Francophone, making it seem unnecessary for BPQ to include French as a working language.

But an increasing number of Francophones were finding BPQ the more congenial society, and Francophone participation in BPQ increased at all levels. Responding to this trend, the Board revisited the issue with a more positive outcome. In 2011-12 *Tchébec*, BPQ's annual report, became bilingual for the first time. By the following year the BPQ website, which had become its most effective public face, was almost entirely bilingual as well.

Outreach efforts continued with radio broadcasts, school visits, bird fairs and 'feather fests', and representation at all sorts of appropriate public events. Some of these activities were well preceded; others were new initiatives. Programmes for children in schools and scout groups, for example, were well in place by 2002. These included 3 week long summer camp sessions at Camp Tamaracouta in the Laurentians and visits to local public schools. Such presentations would continue to be planned (especially by Christine Murphy, David Mulholland, Barbara MacDuff, and Gay McDougall Gruner), in subsequent years to numerous groups, and in several venues. As if to complement this effort, Sheldon Harvey has been offering courses in birding at Centennial College and McGill University.

Some of these student oriented activities bore their surprises. A group tour to L'Anse à l'Orme which Barb MacDuff and Gay McDougall Gruner put on for John Abbott students in 2009, celebrating the International Year of Biodiversity, included one student who brought a football along just in case, and another who tramped through the mud in spike heels. (It is not reported whether Barb and Gay joined in football, but they did wear sensible shoes!)

Bird and nature fairs were also well in place by 2001; the former held every November, with nearly 50 booths in c. 2000. But public interest--preoccupied by the threat of West Nile virus and discouraged when local governments suspended feeding programmes--waned substantially over the next few years. The Bird Fair was reluctantly suspended in 2005 due to declining participation and excessive demands on volunteers.

BPQ continues to be represented at the annual open house at the rescue and rehab centre Le Nichoir in Hudson. Though appealing mostly to a local and West End/West Island audience, these have been well attended (some 800 people attended the event in 2014) and they further BPQ's close ties with that important institution. In that same year BPQ agreed to work with Le Nichoir on a three year project to introduce school children to 'Birds and their Adaptations', contributing funding for the programme. In the autumn of 2017 the Society launched what might become a replacement for the former Bird Fair with a 'Feather Fest' held near the Lachine Rapids. One hopes that the positive public response to that event will lead to more of the same in future years.

### Membership and Participation:

In 2005 and again in 2010 the Board explicitly expressed its concern over declining membership, and that concern has been a frequent topic of discussion amongst Board members throughout the period. Some traditional ways of alerting the public to BPQ activities have disappeared, especially the Calendars of Events which used to be published weekly by newspapers like *The Gazette*. BPQ has taken ample opportunity to present at public events or venues and is often the only bird group to do so. But that doesn't necessarily attract new members. The website is a very effective means of describing its activities, but people have to find it before they can browse it. And finally, in this age in which most people spend much of their waking hours on-line, it may well be that many similar avocational groups and recreational activities have suffered as well. In 2010-2011 it was noted that the website, the links with Nature Conservancy of Canada, our field trips, and the sundry public media presentations have all worked in the Society's favour. By 2016 membership had begun substantially to work its way back to where it stood a decade ago.

Some new members come to us through the informal efforts of staff at Alain Goulet's *Nature Experts*, (where BPQ members can receive discounts on field glasses and other equipment). Some come by word of mouth from other members. Some learn of us through school and university programmes in which 'nature study' or even birding have a place. Some find us on Facebook (where BPQ had some 700 followers by the end of 2014 and 1200 by the end of 2016), on web-sites like 'Birding Pal', or the very



substantial content offered by the BPQ website. And some become enticed to membership simply by attending Saturday field trips.

Saturday field trips have long been the most publicly visible of all the Society's activities. Yet here too there are interesting developments, and challenges which have had to be faced. Once again the informal perception has been of declining participation. Some long-serving members had begun to find the physical demands of four hour field trips too strenuous. Potential birders with young families were seen to have had too many competing weekend activities. Some, especially students, have had difficulty finding transportation, though a group of younger members based at McGill's MacDonald Campus on the West Island has been active in recent years. Some drivers began to find gas prices too high for longer trips, while the early hours and more distant venues discourage the late sleepers. And then there is the undeniable trend towards the computer and smart phone screen and away from the great outdoors. People now much more often look down rather than up and out. The trend has cost BPQ, as it has cost almost all such interest groups, a significant drop in membership.

Yet just as membership numbers have significantly rebounded in the past year or so, the informal perception of declining turnout for field trips may not be as accurate as one feared. Traditional trips in autumn, winter, and spring continue to be held as before. But other trips and short series are held as well. Perhaps most significantly of all, Sheldon Harvey introduced a regular summer birding programme on a trial basis in 2004. This has now become a regular feature, and (allowing as

always for the variability of weather!) continues to attract a steady clientele.

Some of the more innovative junkets are species-specific, with warblers in particular receiving a lot of attention. Joël Coutu has established a series of fall warbler field trips. The Jim Houghton Spring Warbler Walks were held six times in 2016, while Jane Cormack leads warbler-oriented field trips on the Mountain in the Spring. Jane also organized 'The Warbler Weekend' in 2015, a lecture and field trip with Tom Stephenson and Scott Whittle, authors of *The Warbler Guide*.

Though the statistics on trip participation remain incomplete before 2005/6, and long spells of poor weather will have cut down participation in some years without necessarily reducing general interest, the following table offers a rough idea of recent trends.

**Table I. Field Trips and Participation per year, 2005/2006-2015/2016**  
(Statistics kindly provided by Wayne Grubert, to whom I am grateful)

	Regular Trips	Total Part'n. Regular trips	Avg. Part'n. Reg. Trips	Summer Trips	Total Part'n. Summer Trips	Avg. Part'n. Summer Trips	# yearly trips	Total Part'n per year
2005-2006	42	530	12.6	7	77	11	49	607
2006-2007	39	506	13.0	10	150	15	49	656
2007-2008	39	500	12.8	9	108	12	48	608
2008-2009	43	583	13.6	6	54	9	49	637
2009-2010	43	569	13.2	9	90	10	52	659
2010-2011	43	520	12.1	8	80	10	51	600
2011-2012	42	553	13.2	8	72	9	50	625
2012-2013	42	546	13.0	6	90	15	48	636
2013-2014	35	455	13.0	5	70	14	40	525
2014-2015	39	546	14.0	5	70	14	44	616
2015-2016	39	594	15.2	8	152	19	47	746

These figures suggest relatively low participation in 2005/6, 2007/8, 2010/11, and especially in 2013/14, and an overall dip in the number of Saturday trips themselves, from 42 or 43 between 2008/98 and 2012/13 to a range of 35-39 over the past three years. Despite these dips the average number of participants per trip remained fairly steady between 2005/6 and 2014/5 at between 12 and 13. Yet in the past two complete years, 2014/15 and 2015/16, and despite slightly fewer trips, the average number of participants zoomed upwards, to 14 in 2014/15 and 15.2 in 2015/16. Summer trips, launched in 2004, have varied considerably in their number, ranging from five to ten each summer. But on the whole they have brought in substantial numbers of participants: an average of 12.5 per trip, and reaching an average of 19 per trip (152 in all) in 2015/16. In all, the number of participants in all bird trips per year is now as high or higher than before, with the Summer Series making a big difference.

A major trend in the composition both of field trips and membership lies in the increasing frequency of Francophone participation, not only on Saturday field trips, but also on BPQ committees and the Board itself. The BPQ check-list of birds, updated in 2006 and again in 2013-14, is now bilingual. The annual newsletter is now published bilingually. Conversations along the way are now often in both languages, and one hopes that this present *Update* will be translated into French as well. This very welcome trend seems to have a future, in part because BPQ is larger, more pro-active, and offers more activities (and tax receipts!) than any of the predominantly Francophone groups.

That newer direction may also show up in the geographic basis of the membership. Traditionally, BPQ began with a largely Anglophone, 'Westmount to West Island' base, eventually extending off the Island to Hudson and points beyond. But the changing demography of the metropolitan region itself has now brought in more members, some of them Francophone, from the City centre, TMR, and the South Shore.

One of the curious indications of that greater public visibility has been the occasional appearance of foreign visitors on Saturday field trips. In just the last three years Saturday tours have been joined by visiting birders from Britain, France, and Germany as well as other parts of North America. These visitors were able to find out about BPQ activities on-line, and then work Saturday bird trips into their schedules while visiting Montreal. Though these visits have been occasional at best, they serve to indicate the growing reach of the Society's reputation. Overall, the Society's current reputation and level of public activity should provide an even firmer foundation for its activities in years to come.

### **Birding:**

Saturday field trips have long been the most publicly visible of all the Society's activities. Participants may not break for elaborate picnic lunches as in the Society's very early years, but such occasions continue much as they have done for the past several decades. Yet here too there are interesting developments, and challenges which have had to be faced.

One of those challenges concerns the ways in which birding activities have been affected by the changing environment of our home region. The transition from farmland to urban sprawl, particularly in these years to the south and west of Montreal Island, are not by any means new to the recent past, but they continue to advance at a steady pace. The unfortunate decision to bulldoze much of the wetland and forest area of the Technoparc, the demolition of over a thousand trees on Ile St Hélène so that an amphitheatre could be built, and the residential development of almost all of Nun's Island, are the sorts of ventures which have destroyed habitat and take some of the best birding sites off annual field trip schedule.

Natural calamities have also played their part. The infestation of emerald ash borer, and the decision to slow its advance by cutting down ash trees, will in the end destroy an estimated 20% of the City's trees. The intrusion of beech bark disease, already rampant in such sites as the Morgan Arboretum and Bois de Liesse, threatens to do the same to the region's beech trees, though no public action has been demanded or taken to preserve this less abundant species. Invasive plants like the nearly ubiquitous buckthorn and purple loosestrife, along with sporadic outbursts of, e.g., garlic mustard, knotweed, and the highly toxic wild parsnip, have changed the nature of sites otherwise undisturbed. Birders have long been used to poison ivy, but are now also well advised to check for disease carrying ticks which have become more common in our region.

Sites which have been destroyed or depleted have had to be replaced with new areas for the Society to explore. Newer trip sites include the Laval Cemetery, the Dorval Technoparc, the Lac

Fauvel site in Blainville, and (thanks to Jeff Harrison) even areas of Mt. Tremblant. (Curiously, the Technoparc, the largest remaining wetland on the Island of Montreal, came to the Society's attention only in October, 2013, when Barbara MacDuff received a query about it from a local employee and then brought that query to the attention of the Board.) One particularly innovative response to these trends has been Sheldon Harvey's 'Urban Birding' series of the past few years. This has turned up some surprising results, finding birds in unusual and rarely explored city sites: who'd have thought to look at warehouse roofs for perching peregrine falcons?!

On another positive note, birding itself has benefitted from technological innovations. The introduction of the digital camera has made photography an ever more important component of field trips. Whereas birders who took pictures have long been the norm, we now have some photographers who come birding. It's a nice mix, and a great boon. The superior technical ability of new cameras allows distant or obscured birds to be photographed, their images to be studied at leisure, and their identifications to be sorted out where none might otherwise be possible. In addition, bird song 'apps' on smart phones have facilitated identification even when birds cannot be seen. And, if David Bird's Centenary Year talk of October 2, 2017 is correct, we may soon be using drones for field observations of birds which have been inaccessible by traditional means.

Part of the success of the BPQ field trips must be credited to the way in which they are conducted. Wayne Grubert, Sheldon Harvey, and many others on the Bird Trip Committee continue to lead them in the most 'user friendly' possible manner. This

often involves considerable dedication along with the patience of a heron looking for lunch. Wayne Grubert 'fondly' remembers leading a 'group' consisting of Calvin Fong and himself hunting for snowy owls in a blinding, gusty February blizzard. The two of them wisely packed it in after an hour. But two was twice as many as were on hand on Wayne's trip in a driving rain to Oka the year before: not even Calvin ventured out!

In contrast to some other groups' policies, BPQ bird trips are free of cost. They begin in a circle so that everyone can introduce him or herself. Newcomers are specifically and warmly welcomed. Leaders make birders at all levels of expertise and all ages feel welcome and included. Having often scouted their trips just beforehand, they know their sites just as well as their birds. More than perhaps anything else it is these invariably friendly and welcoming experiences which draw new members to the Society across boundaries both geographic and linguistic. They are the Society's public face, and the front line of its public role.

#### **Property Acquisitions & Management:**

If the Saturday bird trips are the most publicly visible of BPQ's activities, the Society's acquisition and management of properties is probably the least visible. Yet in fulfilling one of the Society's original goals, the preservation of habitat, these activities may well be the most important over the long run. The oldest BPQ property is also its least accessible. That would be the puffin-rich site of Ile aux Perroquets off Blanc Sablon on Quebec's lower North Shore, which was acquired in 1937. But its two largest (and much more accessible) properties

have been substantially expanded and closely managed since 2002: the George Montgomery Sanctuary at Philipsburg, and the Alfred W. Kelly Nature Reserve north of Montreal.

The core of the Montgomery Sanctuary first came to the Society in 1955. Its expansion and improvements since 2003, guided and spurred by long-timer BPQ member Sandy Montgomery, have formed one of the Society's major projects of recent years. During Eve Marshall's administration (2007-2009) and in collaboration with Nature Conservancy of Canada, BPQ acquired a second, 122 acre addition after prolonged negotiations with the religious group known as *Les Frères de l'Instruction Chrétienne*. By that agreement costs of acquisition and management were shared between BPQ, Nature Conservancy, and the Quebec government, but the responsibility for management itself fell to BPQ.

The Montgomery property is a large and invaluable site of mixed habitat including wetlands, woodlands, and meadow. It lies just above our border with the U.S., conveniently bounded on its west side by Rte. 133 which provides easy access to the site. In 2011/12 the Society began a multi-year project, now largely completed, to improve access to the property so as to make it more welcoming to visitors. Improvements have included better trail marking, repair of bridges and boardwalks, construction of observation platforms, revised checklists, and a guide to local birds and other wildlife.

BPQ's other most substantial property is the Alfred W. Kelly Reserve: roughly a thousand acres of virgin forest and cliffs situated between Piedmont and Prevost about an hour's



drive north of Montreal. The initial bequest, given in trust to BPQ at the owner's death in 1981, consisted of the almost adjacent Piedmont property and \$55,000, plus the income on the estate for twenty-five years following. After this point, the Society would receive the full capital amount of the residue of the estate, all on the condition that it continued to manage and protect the property.

Aside from the its enormous value to the preservation of habitat, this acquisition has meant a very substantial source of income for BPQ. Income from the bequest has allowed it to purchase further properties, to fund research, and to carry out myriad other activities as never before. In 2011 the BPQ Board approved a grant of \$350,000 to enable the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Quebec government to purchase an additional 1000 acres adjacent to two of Kelly's original properties. The three tracts together were then merged to form the Alfred Kelly Reserve, formally designated by the Quebec Government, and co-managed by BPQ, the *Comité régional pour la protection des falaises*, and the Nature Conservancy of Canada. BPQ enjoys a conservation servitude over the whole area, and appoints representatives to the Sanctuary's managing committee.

Other, smaller properties fill out the BPQ holdings. A part of the Alderbrooke Marsh, consisting of two properties near Sutton, Quebec, had been held by BPQ for some time, but in 2007 half of its ownership was transferred to Nature Conservancy Canada so that the latter could facilitate a conservation servitude on the land. The small Driscoll-Naylor property in Hudson is a prime marsh area for nesting birds. Two small islands in the St. Lawrence, Ile aux Canards and Ile Verte, came

to the Society in 1984. The year 2003 brought the gift of a half share of the property of Ghost Hill Farm near Breckenridge, the other half belonging to the Nature Conservancy of Canada. BPQ also holds a small tract in Mont St Grégoire which is not part of the park area. Some of these properties are held conjointly with Nature Conservancy of Canada. Most recently, BPQ contributed \$30,000 in 2016 to assist in the purchase of *CRPF- Parc des Falaises* adjacent to the Kelly Reserve property, though this does not extend to ownership.

### **Research:**

The support of research was not one of BPQ's originally stated missions, though its activities through the years, especially in the methodical observation and recording of particular species over time, have provided invaluable research resources. Some such activities, including the Christmas Bird Count, go back a very long way, while newer projects have emerged steadily over the years. One of the most impressive and enduring of the long-standing projects is the annual Hawk Watch maintained by Mabel McIntosh and Bob Barnhurst. Inspired by her participation, as a BPQ representative, in the first North American Hawk Migration Conference in Syracuse, New York, in 1974, Mabel joined with Bob to carry out an annual migration watch in the following year. They keep it up to the present day, adding to an already remarkable data base for hawk research. Other projects of shorter duration have also been species specific. Over the past twenty years and sometimes in collaboration with other groups, BPQ has monitored the population of such threatened species as cerulean and golden-

winged warblers, grasshopper sparrows, bluebirds, bobolinks, chimney swifts, and loggerhead shrikes.

The Society has long provided a check-list of regional birds, and, as noted above, this has been revised as required by the changing profile of species distribution. The checklist is particularly valuable in providing a systematic way of recording the number of species, and the number of individuals within each species, observed on each field trip: statistics which are then added to long-term population studies.

But the most dramatic innovation in BPQ's ability to support research has come with the proceeds of the Kelly Bequest, which were vested to BPQ in October of 2006. In subsequent years, and especially in Richard Gregson's presidency between 2011 and 2014, this very substantial fund, amounting to a more than five-fold increase in BPQ's holdings, has allowed the Society dramatically to increase its research funding to third parties. Grants now total up to six figures a year, and are taken from an ear-marked research budget which has been separated from BPQ's general fund. Among its disbursements were substantial funds to sponsor a field research team working on the Quebec Breeding Bird Atlas in northern Quebec.

Many of these activities have been carried out in collaboration with other groups, either at BPQ's initiative or in response to invitations from others. In 2009 the Board resolved to have a representative and/or spokesperson sit in on meetings with groups with whom BPQ had formed an affiliation, or whose aims it supported. Those groups included the Nature Conservancy, the Green Coalition, *Les Amies de la Montagne*, the

McGill Bird Observatory, the City of Montreal, The Zoological Society, *Regroupment Québec Oiseaux*, the Morgan Arboretum, and Friends of Lac St François.

One of the most significant and active collaborations has been with the McGill Bird Observatory, to which BPQ has become a major funding partner. BPQ's Gay McDougall Gruner in particular has served both groups in important administrative capacities, including the Directorship of the MBO.

### **Interventions:**

The question of intervention in the cause of environmental protection has surfaced at Board meetings for some time. Such activities were amongst the original aims of the Society at its foundation a century ago. Certainly there has been no shortage of opportunities to express the Board's perspective in the development of major habitats in the Montreal region over the past many years. But while the Board has frequently sent letters to express its opinion on relevant issues, there long remained a lingering uncertainty regarding when, how, and to what extent BPQ should take such actions.

The Harper years were particularly discouraging for interventionist activities. Numerous charitable groups throughout Canada lost their charitable status when they were accused of excessive political activity, and this created a sense of caution throughout. The Board did nonetheless undertake some such activities during these years. In 2004 BPQ attended meetings geared to the protection of Angel Woods and also l'Anse à l'Orme. BPQ has kept what might be described as a 'watching

brief', including informal birding surveys, on the latter property ever since. In November, 2005, the Board approved a letter, drafted by Averill Craig, to be sent to the Minister of the Environment opposing the extension of Pierrefonds Blvd. into the woodlands at l'Anse à l'Orme. The Minister responded a few weeks later promising to give the Society's concerns due consideration.

At a Board meeting of November, 2007 Sheldon Harvey urged the Board towards a more pro-active stance on environmental issues, but most directors felt it would be more effective to engage with other groups towards that end rather than to go it alone. In that vein, the Board resolved in 2009 to support the effort of several groups, directed at the Ministry of Sustainable Development, to have its property on Mt. St. Grégoire designated as a nature reserve. And in the same year the issue of intervention came to something of a head when Director Patrick Asch, who was BPQ's observers in the deliberations of the City of Montreal on green space, recommended that the Society heighten its emphasis on political intervention. Others on the Board worried that this would jeopardize BPQ's charitable status, and favoured caution. At its next meeting Asch reported on the state of the City's planning for the Turcot Interchange, St. Jacques Falaise, and the Meadowbrook Golf Course, fearing the worst. He suggested that BPQ contact the World Wildlife Fund for advice and assistance.

Over the past three years the Board seems more frequently to have written letters to appropriate authorities regarding the protection of birds and habitats. In 2014 it designated Patrick Asch to write a letter opposing the creation of a beach in a

nesting area of the Heron Island Sanctuary. In just the past three years letters have gone out regarding the Province's discussion on creating a hunting season for mourning doves and wild turkeys, Hydro-Quebec's plans to cut trees in NDG and Cote St-Luc, and the practice of many regional municipalities of cutting down trees during nesting season in contravention of the Migratory Bird Act. Individual BPQ Directors have been interviewed by the *Gazette* regarding the newly created turkey hunt (Jane Cormack), and by CBC radio about owl-baiting (Sheldon Harvey).

An effort to rephrase a mission statement for BPQ in 2012 (drafted after extensive consultations by Nick Acheson and brought to the Board meeting of 30 December, 2012) omitted the Society's original mandate 'to further the protection by *competent laws* throughout the Province for all song and insectivorous birds' (as noted in Arnaudin pp. 28-29). That phrase does not appear on the current BPQ website. Whether or not this was in conscious response to the Harper years or simply an unconscious oversight remains unclear.

But with the passing of the Harper years, things began to loosen up. In 2016 the Board felt comfortable writing both the Federal and Provincial Ministers of the Environment to protest the destruction of the Technoparc wetlands. Many of its members turned out at a field trip and show of protest. The event, spearheaded and led by Joël Coutu and others, attracted several hundred people, representatives of the Green Party, and reporters from CTV news. Yet the Board still lacked a firm policy on the nature and limits of permissible intervention, especially when it might appear to be of a political nature.

That uncertainty was finally and definitively resolved by the Board in its meeting of November, 2016. At that time the Board considered and unanimously approved a landmark motion drafted by Paul Shay precisely to define such a policy. Amongst its sundry regulations, the policy situates the Society's charitable status in its appropriate legal context, and spells out what the Board may and may not do within that context. It distinguishes permissible political activity from the impermissible, and it prohibits anyone speaking for the Board without permission.

### **Celebrations:**

BPQ likes to celebrate anniversaries, as well it should. Such events recognize the Society's admirable longevity, they help bring its activities further into the public eye, and prove both informative and entertaining. The Society patted itself appropriately on the back at its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007 with a grand party hosted by past presidents Peter Mitchell and Bob Carswell.

The same frame of mind has included the remembering and honouring of past and departed leaders. Trees and benches have been named for departed leaders, and verses have been composed (sometimes by Averill Craig to the tune of *The Mikado!*) and published in the newsletter. These gestures reflect the *esprit d'corps* and sense of good fellowship which have long been hallmarks of the Society.

This current year of 2017 marks an even bigger anniversary: our centenary. The planning of celebratory events began well

beforehand, and a year-long series of events and speakers unfolded in the centennial year to mark the occasion. Highlights began at the very first monthly meeting of the year with a distinguished guest speaker (Steven Price, President of Bird Studies Canada), and the consumption of cake and sparkling wine. Other events included a raffle, a series of still more distinguished guest speakers, a sugaring-off party, a celebratory calendar, a Great Backyard Bird Count, a grand dinner on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017, (and the commissioning of this *Update!*).

### **Conclusion:**

The aims of the Province of Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds were initially stated in its very first publication, *The Message of the Rossignol*, which appeared in 1920. They were four in number: (1) to further 'the protection by competent laws throughout the Province for all song and insectivorous birds'; (2) 'To promote the use of nest boxes and feeders and the thoughtful planting of trees and shrubs' to enhance the habitat; (3) 'to educate the public to the importance of birds through lectures, meetings, and publications'; and (4) to encourage the teaching of ornithology in the public and private schools.

For better or worse, some of these goals have had to be re-defined through the years. The Society has fortunately broadened its concerns beyond 'song and insectivorous' birds to include those of all stripe and feather. On the other hand, the establishment of ornithology as a regular part of the public and private school curriculum has proven a tad too ambitious. The ability to speak out in favour of 'competent laws throughout the



Province' has sometimes been compromised by the legalities of charitable status, but has been encouraged by the statement of policy drafted in November, 2016 (see above). But by and large, BPQ has served these goals faithfully and well through its long history and it has more effectively added research to that long list. It has moved with the times even as those times brought unprecedented changes in the world around us. The current Society may take legitimate pride in having honoured its founding principles over the *longue durée* of a full century.

As it stands towards the end of its centenary year, BPQ enjoys a truly bilingual membership of 407, and seems just as vibrant and active as ever. During the last full year of 2016 it held seven monthly meetings, 37 regular Saturday field trips in addition to seven 'summer series' trips, six warbler field trips and two evening trips. Total participation in these trips exceeded seven hundred. Five issues of the *Song Sparrow* newsletter were published and 650 people a week were receiving BPQ's Weekly Update. The website is continually updated, and BPQ's Facebook page has over 1,000 followers. Its public events draw well, and are sometimes covered in the local media.

BPQ continues to pay close and active attention to the upkeep and management of its properties, while those properties are much more extensive than they were even two decades ago. The George Montgomery Sanctuary is in the midst of a major upgrade, with the installation of temporary posters and map, the management of Wood Duck nest boxes, and the creation of the American Goldfinch trail. Planning for an observation platform and a dam is well underway, pending permission from the Quebec Ministry for the Environment. New interpretive panels have been

added to BPQ's 80-year-old Ile aux Perroquets Sanctuary. With the input of Francine Marcoux, Barbara MacDuff and Marie-France Boudreault, a master plan has been designed for The Alfred Kelly Reserve.

In the area of research, \$54,500 in grants were awarded 2016 in addition to the \$24,140 in multi-year funding accorded for the year 2016-2017. In 2017 grants amounted to a total of \$74,421. Mabel McIntosh and Bob Barnhurst monitored spring and autumn hawk migration as they have done now for 41 consecutive years: an activity which reported an unprecedented 106 Golden Eagles during the spring of 2016. The 81<sup>st</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count took place in December 2016. 71 participants covered 20 territories for over 100 hours and saw 68 species and a total of 18,483 birds. Our outreach activities included a bird survey at the Royal Montreal Golf Course, while our Marketing and Outreach Committee staffed the BPQ kiosk and promoted the organization at various public events (e.g. Earth Hour in Westmount, CCFA - Nature Experts Bird Fest).

Throughout my reading into BPQ's recent past, I have regularly been impressed by the commitment and initiative of its members. It seems to me that the Society enters its second century on a level of energy, dedication, and enthusiasm which should sustain it for a very long time to come.